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Stimulating learner autonomy in English language education : a curriculum innovation study in a Vietnamese context

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Publication date
2005

[Link to publication](#)

Citation for published version (APA):

Quoc Lap, T. (2005). *Stimulating learner autonomy in English language education : a curriculum innovation study in a Vietnamese context*. [Thesis, fully internal, Universiteit van Amsterdam]. unpublished thesis.

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CHAPTER 8

THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE TASK-BASED COMPONENT IN THE ADAPTED CURRICULUM

In chapter 7, I reported the results of monitoring the implementation of the intended curriculum. The results showed that the curriculum was operationalized as intended. The teachers and students perceived the operationalized curriculum positively. The implementation of the intended curriculum created the opportunity for the curriculum developers at my department to adapt the design parameters to their educational philosophy. The two design parameters, *choice* and *interaction*, have been used to develop the task-based component as one of the two components in the adapted curriculum. In this chapter, I describe the adapted curriculum as Fullan's (1991) the second phase of the curriculum innovation model (i.e., adaptation). Then I present how the task-based component was operationalized at the classroom level. The overall purpose of describing and analyzing the operationalization of the task-based component is to find out whether it was operationalized as intended: (1) Providing students with choices of learning content and learning strategies to do their learning tasks in order to learn the target language, and (2) making interaction in the target language. At the end of the chapter, I present the students' perception of the task-based component via their self-evaluation of their task performance and the teachers' perception of the operationalization of the task-based component in the adapted curriculum.

1. CONTEXT

Some time after the end of experiment 1, the management team at my department changed. This implies a coming-along perspective on foreign language education of the managers as change agents. The managers responsible for curriculum development at my department perceived that the students should be taught to use target the language and the implementation of the presentation, practice and production would probably fit learning to use the language the best. For this reason, the curriculum developers at my department agreed to replace the textbook series "Interactions" by the Lifelines series which was used as the core material in language skills courses in the program. In semester 2, academic year 2002-2003, Lifelines¹ (pre-intermediate) was implemented in the students of cohort 1.

The teachers' summative evaluation of the operationalization of the intended curriculum indicated an important issue: "Education for today and/or for tomorrow". The discussion of the teachers who were involved in teaching the students in cohort 1 in semester 2, academic year 2002-2003 revealed two proposals toward curriculum

¹ Lifelines (Hutchinson, 1997. Spain: Oxford University Press) is a three-level general English course at elementary, pre-intermediate, and intermediate level.

development. First, the curriculum should prepare the students to teach English in secondary schools well. Second, in addition to preparing the students to teach in secondary schools, the curriculum should also prepare the students to live in an ever-changing society. It means that the curriculum should aim at stimulating the development of learner autonomy. The second proposal was taken into consideration. As a result, the curriculum consisting of two components, the *task-based* and the *language development*^{*}, was developed by the two curriculum developers at my department with my cooperation. The design parameters operationalized in the intended curriculum were used to design the task-based component in the curriculum (referred to as the adapted curriculum). In the task-based component, tasks were designed for students to work on in order to learn the language. In the language development component, the book *Lifelines* (pre-intermediate level) was used as the core material. The PPP paradigm was implemented to teach *Lifelines*.

2. THE ADAPTED CURRICULUM

2.1 *The curriculum*

The adapted curriculum was implemented on the first-year students of TEFL in semester 1, academic year 2003-2004. The curriculum was composed of the PPP paradigm and the task-based component. In the PPP component, during the semester (15 weeks) students are expected to study the first seven units of the *Lifelines*, the pre-intermediate book. In the task-based component, during the whole semester, students will spend four weeks doing three main tasks (e.g., project work). The four weeks were spread over the second half of the semester. Table 8.1 presents the distribution of the two components of the adapted curriculum within the semester.

As shown in table 8.1, week 1 was labeled as the *orientation week*. In this orientation week, the second-year students who participated in experiment 1 (cohort 1) were scheduled to work as the university campus tour-guides to the students who participated in experiment 2 (cohort 2) by using their knowledge of working on project work 1 "making a student guide" together with their personal experiences living in CT city and studying at CTU. The second-year students shared their experiences learning with the intended curriculum in their first semester, academic year 2002-2003 with the students of cohort 2. After the campus tour, students in cohort 2 took part in the orientation session in which they were introduced to the course policy, teaching, learning and assessment.

In all weeks excepting 8, 9 and 12, students studied with the *Lifelines* lessons in which the five teachers were assigned to teach the three classes. There were eleven contact hours a week, corresponding to the five lessons: Grammar, vocabulary, reading, listening and speaking, and writing in the *Lifelines*. Each teacher taught a class on a fixed day and fixed time with the lesson assigned in the syllabus. Therefore, a teacher who taught grammar in unit 1 this week could teach reading in unit 2 in the week following. They all shared the similar lesson plans prepared by the teachers who used to work with the *Lifelines* (pre-intermediate) book in semester 2 for cohort

* labeled by the manager as the curriculum developer at the researcher's department

1, academic year 2002-2003. The managers responsible for curriculum development who designed the syllabus of the adapted curriculum assumed that first-year students should initially become accustomed to the way of learning and teaching English in a university setting and that their language proficiency should then be developed to a desirable level to prepare for doing the project work. For these two reasons, students were scheduled to start the projects from week 6.

Table 8.1. The distribution of the two components within the semester

<i>Weeks</i>	<i>Academic activities</i>
1	<i>Orientation week + Campus tour</i>
2	<i>Lifelines – Unit 1</i>
3	<i>Lifelines – Unit 2</i>
4	<i>Lifelines – Unit 2 (continued.)</i>
5	<i>Lifelines – Unit 3</i>
6	<i>Project 1+ Tutorials</i>
7	<i>Lifelines – Unit 3 (continued.) + Unit 4</i>
8	<i>Lifelines – Unit 4 (continued.)</i>
9	<i>Presentation of project 1 and starting project 2 + Tutorials</i>
10	<i>Lifelines – Unit 5</i>
11	<i>Lifelines – Unit 5 (continued.) + Unit 6</i>
12	<i>Presentation of project 2 and starting project 3 + Tutorials</i>
13	<i>Lifelines – Unit 6 (continued.) + Unit 7</i>
14	<i>Lifelines – Unit 7</i>
15	<i>Presentation of project 3</i>

2.2 The task-based component

From week 6 until the end of the semester, three projects were scheduled. The first project was titled "Studying at Can Tho University". For the second and the third project, students were provided with the choice of two of the following topics, "Time", "Food and Drink", "Environment", "The Media", "Activities", "Jobs" and "Family and happiness". These topics were related to the contents in the Lifelines, pre-intermediate book.

3. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The overall aim of monitoring the implementation of the task-based component in the two-component curriculum is *to find out whether the task-based component was operationalized as intended*. Monitoring the implementation of the task-based component in the adapted curriculum aims to answer the question,

- 1) Did the operationalization of the task-based component, via the teachers' pedagogical actions, provide students with *choices* of learning content and of learning methodology and with *interactions* in the target language for them to execute unit projects?

The two-component curriculum was operationalized in three groups of students. For this reason, the description and analysis of the task-based component aims to answer the question,

- 2) Was the project-work component operationalized in the same degree in the three groups?

In addition to monitoring the operationalization of the task-based component, I documented the students' and teachers' perception of learning and teaching in the task-based component aims to answer the question,

- 3) What did the students and teachers perceive positively about the operationalization of the task-based component and according to the students and teachers, what needs to be improved?

4. METHOD

4.1 Participants

Teachers. Five teachers participated in teaching the three classes. One of them, from the Division of Teaching Methodology, with 17 years of teaching experience, earned her MA in TESOL in Australia, and the other four are younger teachers with 8, 7, 5 and 3 years teaching experience respectively. The teacher with 17 years teaching experience worked as a teacher trainer in the workshop "Methodology on Teaching the Skills" organized and led by the two managers at my department (February, 2003). The other four teachers were workshop participants who were evaluated by the trainers as those who, in micro-teaching during the workshops, presented the lessons in the most desirable way in the light of using the model Presentation-Practice-Production (PPP) in grammar and vocabulary lessons and the pre-activities, while-activities and post-activities model in language skills lessons.

Students. All first year students of TEFL participated in this study: 40 Students (30 females and 10 males). One participant won the national prize for a contest in English, so she was unconditionally accepted into the program. The other 39 participants were admitted into the program because of their performance in the national entrance examination in the academic year 2003-2004. For more information about the national entrance exam, refer to section 3.2 in chapter 6 of this book. Participants' average age is 18.5 ($SD = 0.75$). The mean admission score in English is just average ($M = 5.01$). Their knowledge of English grammar, vocabulary and their reading skills were better than their skills in listening, speaking and writing in English.

4.2 Instruments

Observation framework. Classroom observations were aimed at measuring the implementation of choice and interactions in the task-based component. To monitor whether choices and interactions in the target language were operationalized at the classroom level, classroom observations documented *teacher-student(s) interactions* and *student-student(s) interactions* regarding offering choices to students.

Classroom observation framework was adjusted and aimed to document the following information.

- 1) What did the teacher do to make students aware of choices of what to learn and how to learn?
- 2) What did the teacher do to assist students in making choices?
- 3) Did the teacher let students decide what and how to do their work?
- 4) Did students choose for themselves what to do and how to do their project work?

Students' and teachers' perception of learning and teaching with the task-based component. The students' evaluation of learning with the task-based component was investigated by asking questions when they reported their project execution in class.

- 1) How did you feel about your project work execution?
- 2) Did you have the opportunities to use English communicatively?
- 3) What was your evaluation of your project presentation?
- 4) Did you have the choices of learning content and learning methodology to do your project work?

Teachers' perception of the project-work component was investigated by an informal interview with each of the five teachers who supervised the students to do the project work. Questions used in the interview include

- 1) How did you feel about supervising students to do the project work?
- 2) What are the benefits to students when they do project work?
- 3) How could the task-based component be improved to help students become more autonomous in learning so that they become better language learners and users?

The task-based component was operationalized in the adapted curriculum for less than half a semester and just one task (i.e., unit project) was done. For these reasons, the questions used in the interview were different from the questions in the questionnaire handed out to the teachers participating in experiment 1.

4.3 Procedure

As showed in table 8.1 of this chapter, students were expected to do three main tasks (project work) during the first semester. However, in view of time constraints and additional workload, the manager at the department modified the syllabus. Just one project work was operationalized in the semester. The project work started from week 6 and ended in week 12, so the students had seven weeks to do this project.

The three classes were divided into ten groups and each teacher was responsible for tutoring two groups of four students.

To find out whether the task-based component was operationalized as intended, the first tutorial was observed because in this first tutorial, the teachers introduced the topic of the task to the students and the teachers' pedagogical actions concerning the provision of choices would be most demonstrated. Two groups each of the teachers supervised were combined into one for the first tutorial. After this tutorial, each group of four students worked together and made appointments to meet their supervising teachers for assistance as much as students wished. The observations of these tutorials were tape-recorded or video-recorded, transcribed and then analyzed.

At the end of the task-based component, the students' self-evaluations (i.e., their perception of learning with the task-based component) of their task execution and language learning were collected. An informal interview with the five teachers was conducted to investigate how they perceived the task-based component. Table 8.2 presents the procedure of the study on monitoring the implementation of the task-based component in the adapted curriculum.

Table 8.2. Procedure of the study on the implementation of the task-based component

<i>Time</i>	<i>Activities</i>	<i>Purposes</i>
During the operationalization of the task-based component	Intensively observing the first tutorial	Documenting teachers' pedagogical actions concerning provision of choices to students to indicate if the task-based component was operationalized as it had been intended and the degree of operationalization in the three groups
At the end of the operationalization of the task-based component	Documenting students' self-evaluation of their task execution and language learning	Documenting students' perception of their learning
	Informally interviewing the five teaching staff	Documenting teachers' evaluation of the paradigm using to learn and to learn how to learn the language

4.4 Results

4.4.1 Provision of choices of learning content and learning strategies

Planning session. In week 5, one week before the project work started, one of the managers responsible for curriculum development of the Department organized a planning session in which four teachers, the manager and the researcher were present to discuss how to operationalize the task-based component. In particular, how to supervise students during the project work was discussed. Before the meeting, the manager and the researcher planned the meeting and prepared the handouts. The teachers' summative evaluations of the intended curriculum (experiment 1) were highlighted in the planning session meeting with the teachers who are going to supervise students to do the project work in the adapted curriculum. *Choices* of learn-

ing content and of learning methodology and *the use of the target language in tutorials* would be shared and discussed with the teachers. The handouts including the description of project 1, three "model" questionnaires on learning styles, learning environment, learner needs and the internet article, "Hints to design effective questionnaires" were delivered to the teachers two days before the planning session meeting. Following are highlights in the planning session meeting.

The manager began with the introduction on the project, the aims and objectives of the project. The project titled *Studying at CTU* aims to create the opportunities for first-year students to learn about studying in Cantho University, to help students practice speaking and listening to real English in real situations by interviewing senior students of English, and to help students to design a questionnaire and to write a report about what they learn from their interviews. The objectives of the project were formulated as at the end of the project students will be able to (1) design a questionnaire, (2) conduct an interview and/or administer a questionnaire, and (3) write a report about the result of their project work.

The teachers agreed on the aims and objectives of project 1. The meeting then focused on learner choice, learning strategies, teacher guidance, and the use of English or Vietnamese as the main medium in tutorials.

In terms of *choices*, one of the teachers raised the question whether the teachers would allow students to choose the specific topic among the general topic *Studying in CTU* and choose the interview and/or the questionnaire to complete the project. The other teacher said that students could choose *what* topic to do and *how* to work on that topic. This implied that students may choose their learning strategies they find suit them best. All four teachers showed awareness of choices and agreed on giving students the choices of *the what* and of *the how* to do the project. Another teacher stated that it would be a good idea to let students decide what and how to complete their unit project first and if they have difficulties in choosing the topic and the procedures to do the project, the teachers will support them. The manager of the department replied, "That's why we prepared the questionnaires as *models* and the article *Hints to design effective questionnaires* to assist the students who have problems with designing questionnaires."

In terms of the teachers' guidance, the teachers discussed and agreed upon the topics and questions they could use as suggestions to assist students to complete the project. Possible topics the teacher may use to suggest to students include *Advantages and Disadvantages of Housing, Transportation, Food, Teaching Methods, Materials, Learning Environment, Learner Needs, Relationship, Learning Styles*. Possible questions the teacher may ask students to raise their awareness of how to design a questionnaire are (1) what they do when they conduct an interview or administer a questionnaire, (2) what they would like to know from the senior students of English about studying at Can Tho University, (3) what needs to be done when they design a questionnaire, and (4) what needs to be avoided when they design a questionnaire.

The teachers, the manager and the researcher agreed that the teachers may decide whether they use the model questionnaires and the article to help students to have insights into making an effective questionnaire or not.

In terms of *using the target language* in tutorials, a teacher said that doing the first unit project was a new experience for students; therefore, the teachers had to think how much target language use was possible. The teachers agreed that they were the ones to decide pedagogical actions appropriate to the group they supervise. The planning session also raised an important issue of cooperation among the teachers, in terms of sharing experiences of supervising students doing project work. The manager advised the teachers to discuss their questions or concerns relating to supervising students to do the project work with the researcher. After the planning session, the manager had a conversation with the teacher who did not attend the planning session meeting to make sure that she was kept informed and equipped with the guidelines to implement the task-based component.

Tutorial observations: General remarks. In terms of the provision of choices to students, the researcher had positive evaluations on the tutorials the five teachers conducted. One difference observed in the way the teachers tutored the students was the degree of English used. Teacher 4 used English 100% in her tutorial while the other four teachers used Vietnamese most of the time (a rough estimate of 90%). These four teachers were quite aware that English should be used as the main medium in teacher-student(s) interactions and in student(s)-student(s) interactions. However, these teachers assumed that doing the very first project would be a new experience and a challenge for these first-year students, so it was a good idea to conduct the tutorial in Vietnamese most of the time.

Three striking similarities in the way the five teachers tutored could be observed. *First*, all five teachers raised the students' awareness of the *what* and the *how* of the task by asking the students stimulating questions. These questions showed to help students orient what to focus on when and how they do the task. Decisions on the content of the task and the appropriate strategies to do it were jointly made by students and when necessary with the assistance of the teachers. *Second*, the teachers raised the students' awareness of planning the work by asking the question of the number of weeks students had for completing the task. The teachers' questions might help students plan properly how much, in terms of content, they would include in their project so that they would set proper working methods. *Third*, a reasonable degree of challenge and support facilitated students' making choices of content and strategies to do the task. In the situations where the teachers thought it was challenging for students, which implies that it might be hard for the students to make choices, support came in two ways. The teacher made the questions more specific so that students could think about the answer and/or the teacher used realia (e.g., questionnaires) as models as support. Students' reflections and experiences from the models help them solve their problems (in order to the task better). The following sections describe in detail each individual teacher's tutorials concerning the provision of choices to students and interactions between the teacher-students and student(s)-student(s).

Teacher 1. Teacher 1 is a female teacher with nine years of teaching experience. At the start of the tutorial, she told me that she would tutor the students in Vietnamese

almost all the time (a rough estimate of 95%). To her, doing project work was a new experience to students. Therefore, with the use of Vietnamese, she thought the students mastered better what to do and how to do their first task. She sometimes used some English words (e.g., *interview* or *questionnaire*) or asked her students some questions in English (e.g., *Do you have the topic now? What would you like to do for your project?*).

The analysis of the interactions between the teacher and the student(s) and between/among students revealed that teacher 1 worked as a genuine supervisor. She guided the students gradually to do the project work. She raised the questions for the students to work together to solve the problems she posed. Above all, students' awareness of *choices* of learning content and learning strategies was praised. The following is the snapshot of the interactions between her and her students in the group she supervised. Teacher 1's responses and questions are in *italics*. The majority of the whole text was originally in Vietnamese.

The teacher started the tutorial by introducing the project title, "*You are going to do a project on studying English in Cantho University. Let's recall the steps to do a project. I think you have learned in the orientation week.*" Students worked individually and then they worked together as a group of four. After about 10 minutes, a male student expressed the ideas of the group as the representative of the group. ... Then the teacher asked, "*What do you do after you interview or deliver the questionnaires?*"

Provision of choice of content. In the first part of the excerpt, it was observed that the teacher reminded the students the procedure to do project work; the students worked together to reformulate the steps. It was time for the teacher to provide the students the *choice of what* to do in their task.

The teacher then asked the students, "*Do you have the topic now?*" The students said, "Yes". The teacher said, "*If you have the topic now, think about whether it is general or specific*". One student said that it's still general. Then the teacher asked them, "*What do you do to make it more specific?*" One student replied, "Limit it." "*So think about what to do in this project.*" The teacher suggested the students negotiate and pick out the topic.

The teacher has so far shown to let the students have complete authority to choose the topic for their project. She proposed the students *think about what to do in this project* and suggested they *negotiate with each other to pick out the topic* for their group's project work. Let us follow the excerpt of her tutorial.

Students worked in groups. Some minutes later, they said, "The difficulties and advantages that students of English in CTU have", "Their experiences in studying in Cantho University." and "How to overcome the difficulties in learning English."

After the students came up with three possible topics for their project, the teacher again provided the choice of the topic.

The teacher asked, "*So what would you like to do for your project?*" Students said that they are interested in the difficulties of learning and how to solve the associated problems.

Provision of choice of strategies. We have observed from the first sections of the excerpt of teacher 1's tutorial that the choice of *what* to do was jointly made by the students and that the teacher was there to guide the students and to offer them such a

choice. It is time to go on to find out whether she let go of the decision on how to complete the task which students chose to do.

The teacher asked, "OK, you have the topic now. What should be done next?"

Students said that they would interview the senior students of English to answer the questions.

The teacher said, "Good. You have to make the questions to interview, right? So how many students are you going to ask about difficulties in studying in CTU?"

One of them said 50, another 25-30, another 40 and another 25-30.

Do you have enough time to interview 40 or 50 students?

"No", one student said.

Which is better for you: Conducting an interview or delivering questionnaires?

Questionnaire

Are you going to use English or Vietnamese?

English as much as we can because we can practice English.

Students decided how to complete the task. When the students' work plan (e.g., interviewing 40 or 50 students to collect the information for their project) showed to be impractical, the teacher asked them the question "Do you have enough time to interview 40 or 50 students?" to raise their awareness of the unfeasibility of that plan. After that, she offered the students the opportunity to make another choice which seemed to be more practical than the one they had picked. The last section of the excerpt also revealed that the teacher raised students' awareness of using *English* as the medium of communication in the interview. After that, the teacher asked the students to design one question. When the students showed the teacher a model of a question, she responded to the question by asking the students,

What happens if you deliver this question to the one who does not think that speaking English slowly is a difficulty to him/her?

The students kept silent. Some time later, one of them said, "We have to ask their idea whether something is a difficulty and if it is a difficulty for him or her, we ask for his/her solutions".

As far as the teacher thought that the students needed support to design the questionnaire, she proposed the students, "Read the handout "Hints to design effective questionnaire". The article may help you to design your questionnaire. When will we meet to discuss your questionnaire? Next week?" The students agreed.

It was seen from the excerpt that teacher 1 asked the students guiding and stimulating questions (e.g., *What would you like to do for your project? OK, you have the topic now. What to do next? Do you have enough time to interview 40 or 50 students?*). These questions helped orient the students to *what content* to focus on and *how* to do the project. Though the teacher showed to be the initiator of the interactions between her and her students, the students made all decisions concerning the execution of the project work. The teacher facilitated the process of raising students' awareness of the planning and would-be execution of the project work. At the level of operationalization, the teacher implemented the lesson in the way it was intended. After the tutorial, teacher 1 told me that in subsequent tutorials for the next project work, she will introduce the project work and students would be given more opportunities to discuss with their group members what to do and how to complete the

project work. What teacher 1 shared with me showed that she was quite aware of the provision of choices for students to do their task.

Teacher 2. Teacher 2 had six years of teaching experience. The tutorial was in Vietnamese most of the time (a rough estimate of 90%). At times teacher 2 used English for Vietnamese equivalents. In a personal communication with the researcher, teacher 2 shared the reasons he used Vietnamese as the main medium of communication in his tutorial,

... Project work is completely new to the first year students. They haven't done it before, so they don't know what it is and how it is done to the end. Also their English speaking proficiency is quite low then. Therefore, to make them less stressful and worried, Vietnamese should be used most of the time. I believe that students should be encouraged to use English in the later projects in tutorial, getting data (interview, for example), sharing ideas in their group.

Like teacher 1, teacher 2 guided students step by step by asking students questions whose answers would orient students to the "what" and "how" of the project work. Let us examine the following excerpt; questions and responses to students of teacher 2 are in *italics*.

After saying hello to the students, the teacher began the tutorial by talking directly to the students and asked them a question, "*You are going to do a project on studying in Cantho University. What are you going to do?*"

About what I have learned about the university environment

Which topic?

Problems in university and solutions

Which problems?

For example daily life, difficulties of learning and financial problems or the relationship between teacher and students.

Why did you choose that topic?

To draw the lessons for personal life and overcome problems.

The teacher directly introduced the topic and then asked the students "the content" they liked to focus on. He reconciled the degree of challenge and support. When he gave his students some hints to facilitate them to arrive at the *what* and the *how* of doing the project work, he gave the students the freedom to choose what to do and how to do the project. Let us examine the next section of the tutorial. The teacher's questions and responses are in *italics*.

How are you going to get the information?

Interview, talk to other students.

Good. You have to talk or interview students about something. Again, what do you like to interview them? Be specific. Some time to think about this...

The students kept silent.

Provision choice of content. The teacher waited for about two minutes and then continued, "This is your first project, so you have difficulties in choosing the topic. To assist you to do this project, we have three suggested topics: Learner's needs, learning styles, and classroom learning environment". The teacher then had the students brainstorm each topic, "What does each topic mean?" After that, the teacher asked

them to work in group to decide the topic for their project. After working in groups in some minutes, students decided on the topic "Learning styles".

Provision of strategies to do the project. Let us examine the next section of the excerpt to find out whether the teacher offered the students the *choice of how* to do the task.

Good. If you need more ideas to make the questions, what do you do?

We read books.

Good. What kinds of books?

Students keep silent.

Is it a good idea to read some books on ESL teaching methodology?

Let's say you have finished the questionnaire, what to do next?

To whom and to how many?

50 students.

Do you think that you have enough time to do that? How many weeks do you have for this project?

The teacher showed to be a good supervisor, helping the students to orient themselves to do the project, starting from providing them with "what" and then to the "how" of the task. It was clear from teacher 2's tutorial that the students were the ones who decided the content and the working method to complete the project. The teacher was there in the role of the advisor to raise possible problems the students could face as the result of their planning, so that they would have a proper working plan. The interactions between the teacher and students in the tutorial revealed that the students got involved in making choice of the topic for their project work and in this case, learning styles and the number of the respondents to the questionnaire. It was observed that teacher 2 raised the question and the students thought for themselves with his assistance.

Teacher 3. Teacher 3 is a senior teacher with 17 years of teaching experience. The tutorial was conducted in Vietnamese almost all the time (a rough estimate of 95%), except when the teacher used English words or phrases or translated the Vietnamese words or phrases into English. The students also spoke Vietnamese to the teacher. She reasoned that she liked to make sure that students did not feel too worried about the project work because of (1) their level of English and (2) their new experience in doing project work; therefore, she used Vietnamese.

Teacher 3 demonstrated that she is a patient and stimulating teacher. Like teacher 1 and teacher 2, teacher 3 guided the students to be aware of *what* and *how* to do the project work by asking them stimulating questions. The choices of what to focus on and how to do the project were made by the cooperative decisions of the students. What was different to see from teacher 3's tutorial was the time she set her students to brainstorm the answer to her questions. The following snapshot shows teacher 3 at her tutorials. Her questions and responses to students are in italics.

Provision of choice of content

The teacher started her tutorial by writing the word, "Project 1: Studying in Canto University" and then ask students the question, "*What do we talk about when mentioning studying in Canto University? You have 5 minutes to brainstorm the question.*" After some minutes, a student, on behalf of the group, says "self-study, group work, learning

problems, the way students learn." The teacher feeds in students the phrase "learning styles" for "the way students learn. Another student keeps going on with these ideas, "the teaching methods used in the university, learning environment, friends, and teachers."

The teacher showed to leave the decision on the topic for the students to make.

Good, so a general topic like studying in CTU, we have many ideas to talk about, which one would you like to focus on? After some minute of discussion, one student answered, "Learning styles".

Provision of choice of strategies to learn. It was observed that the teacher guided the students step by step to come to the "what" of the project. The following excerpt revealed how she guided them to the "how" of the project.

The teacher kept going on, "*Good, whose learning styles?*". Students answered, "Students". Then the teacher asked "which students and why?" Students said that students from the English Department because they like to speak English with them so that they can improve their English. The teacher kept asking the questions, "*So you will work on learning styles of English students. Good. How can you know their learning styles?*"
Make friends and ask them.
Yes, interview them. What else?...

The teacher empowered the students by respecting their choices of both conducting the interview and administering the questionnaire.

OK, you will interview and deliver questionnaires to the students. Is it too much work for you to do?

Students keep silent.

Do you have enough time to make interviews and deliver questionnaires to students as well?

Yes.

OK. For this interview, which questions would you like to ask? And for the questionnaire, which questions do you want to include?

After about 15 minutes, students answered,

- about how many hours do you study a day?
- besides the teacher, whom do you study with?
- how do you practice listening and speaking?
- which topics do you usually talk about in English?
- do you usually work in pairs/ groups?

The teacher guided the students to complete the project work by making them aware of the *what* and the *how* to do the project. She also helped them in how to work together. In addition to the text plan (i.e., the content of the questionnaire), she raised the students' awareness of working in a period, which would help students enhance their planning skills.

How do you organize group study? Now, please limit the sub-topics in your questions in the interview and in the questionnaire.

Students summarized the ideas:

- Time for study
- Learning materials
- Pair work/ Group work
- How to improve language skills

Good. What do you do next?

Make a list of questions to interview and to make the questionnaire

We do not have time for that now, think about the form of the questionnaire as well.

Students think about the form of the questionnaire and the teacher shows them one as a model.

When will we meet to discuss the questions?

Students hesitate to answer the teacher's question.

As soon as possible. When you finish, let me know, but no later than a week. Then you have to plan what to do next.

OK.

How many weeks do we have for this project?

Four weeks.

So plan your time well.

Students were quite aware of choices by the fact that they took part in making choices of *what* and *how* to complete the project. The students created the learning tasks for themselves. The excerpt revealed that teacher 3 facilitated the students to do the task, rather than "taught" the students to do the task.

Teacher 4. Teacher 4 is a young teacher with three years teaching experience. The analysis of her tutorial revealed that hers is similar to the tutorial conducted by teacher 3. She raised the students' awareness of the steps to do the project work, the *what* and the *how* by asking them stimulating questions. After each question, she set the time for students to discuss and raised students' awareness of the time budget so as students can plan the work properly. The decisions on the *what* and the *how* of the project were made by students together, not by the teacher. One difference is that she conducted this tutorial in English 100%. Teacher 4's tutorial showed that she is a patient teacher. When students showed some signs of not being able to follow what she said in English, she slowed down the speech. The following excerpt described teacher 4 at her tutorial. Her questions and responses to the students are in *italics*.

After saying hello to the students, the teacher introduced the project, "*You are going to do the project titled Studying English in CTU. In this project, you are going to make a questionnaire, collect information and then use the information to write the report about your project. How many parts are you going to do?*" Students said, "Three parts". The teacher then required the students to state the three parts. One student said, "Interview or ask students about studying in CTU." The teacher stimulated the student, "Is that all?"

When the students could not answer her questions, she supported them. Let us follow the excerpt.

The students kept silent. To support them, the teacher explained, "*I think I have to make it clearer. Now, you interview the 4th year students of English about their studying English and use their answers to write a report and finally to present orally the results to your class. So what do you do?*" The students answered, "Interview students, deliver questionnaires, collect information, write the report".

The teacher made the students aware of the participants they would interview for information for their project by asking them stimulating questions, and sometimes she had the students work together on the answer to her question.

Can you interview any student?

No, only students of English.

Well, if you want to interview someone, what do you need to do? I would like you to work together.

After working together, the students answered the teacher's question. Based on the students' answer, the teacher kept asking questions. The decision to choose how to collect information for the project was done by the students.

We make the questions. Interview the students.

Interview? What do you mean? How do you interview?

If you want to get information for a topic, do you use the same questions for the same people?

I think, just the same questions.

If you ask them directly, you come to this person, ask the questions and then another with the same questions, does it take you much time?

Yes.

Much time. Can you think of other ways to save time instead of asking them directly?

We will use the questionnaire.

So you agree to use the questionnaire to save time? Good.

Provision of choice of content. When students decided on using the questionnaire to collect information, the teacher asked them about the content of the questionnaire. The teacher used questions to elicit students the "what" of the project. She just raised the questions. Observations showed that she did not interfere in the students' choice of content for their project.

How about the content of the questionnaire?

Their feeling about studying English in CTU, especially the difficulties studying English in CTU.

So now you would like to get information about difficulties studying English and as I remember, you would like to interview year 4 students. What do you want to know about them?

Difficulties, learning activities, what do they have to do to prepare for the graduation exam, standards of learning.

What else?

A girl said, "I don't know."

You should agree on a topic for your project. They are 4th year students of English, so do you think that they are more knowledgeable than you are? You would like to deliver them a questionnaire to learn from them.

Oh, yes,

There are some disadvantages and advantages of interviewing students of English or students of other majors, what are they?

Practice listening and speaking.

Yes, by interviewing them, you will practice listening and speaking. Can you talk to students of other majors in English and know about how they learn English?

Students kept silent.

You mention you want to improve your listening and, speaking, so why don't you ask non-major students about that interesting topic. If you want to ask them about listening and speaking skills, what do you want to ask them about?

Studying methods.

Are you interested in that topic?

I like studying methods and others like the topic studying English well.

If you want to study English well, what do you need to know?

How to study.

"How to study". Is it the method of studying?

Yes.

So do you agree on the topic, "The way to study"?

Provision of the how to do the project. The students agreed on the topic. The teacher turned to the how of the project by asking the students questions.

You agreed on the topic. What next steps are you going to do?

Students keep silent.

What do you do to get that information?

Ask them about teaching methods.

So you have to....

Make a conversation.

What do you use? A questionnaire? So what is there in the questionnaire? How many questions?

10 questions.

Is it too many? The more questions you get, the more information you will have. Do you use all the information and put it all into your project.

No, we have to analyze it.

The teacher raised the students' awareness of the time budget they had for the project so that students would plan their work properly.

How many weeks do you have for this project?

3 weeks.

We have 3 weeks for all things together. If you have much information, you will not finish it in time. Think about the number of questions now. Discuss and agree on the number.

5 questions.

Finally, you agree on 5 questions. Now just write the questions down.

The students worked together to write down some questions. When they finished, the teacher asked them to share their questions with their friends. The teacher asked the students to evaluate the questions they wrote. Then she supported them with the handouts.

Here are the handouts. Read the handouts to improve your questions. Tell me what you should and should not do in making the questionnaire.

Students read the handout and asked the teachers to explain some vocabulary or ideas.

Well, read your questions again and design the questionnaire at home. come to see me for feedback next week. OK?

The description and analysis of teacher 4's tutorial showed that she is a stimulating teacher. She encouraged the students to think and answer her questions, to communicate with her and with each other in English. The excerpt of her tutorial revealed that she provided students with *choices of learning content* and *learning strategies*. The students jointly decided on what and how to complete their project work with the assistance of the teacher's stimulating questions.

Teacher 5. Teacher 5 did this tutorial in Vietnamese most of the time (a rough estimate of 90%). He is a teacher with eight years teaching experience. The analysis of teacher 5's tutorial revealed that he asked the students many questions to make them aware of how to complete the project by specifying the content and the methodology. Like teacher 1 and teacher 3 who demonstrated in their tutorials that the students should be challenged first before the teacher would support them with the con-

tent and the format of the questionnaire, teacher 5 did not provide students with the questionnaires as models at the start. Like teacher 2, teacher 5 distributed the questionnaires when the students were in trouble with the content of the questionnaire. Then he had students reflect on the content and the format of the questionnaire. The following is a snapshot of the first part of teacher 5's tutorial. Teacher 5's questions and responses to students are in *italics*.

The teacher started the tutorial by directly introducing the project, "*You are going to do a project titled Studying in Cantho University. When we talk about doing this project, what difficulties and advantages do you see?*" The students answered, "Difficulties about writing, references and the subjects." The teacher then asked, "*The subjects. What did you mean?*" The students said that the ones they would interview about studying in Cantho University. The teacher asked, "*If you want to interview people, what should you have?*" Students said that they should prepare the questions. "*What kinds of questions?*".... Students kept silent and seemed that they could not answer the teacher's question. The teacher then gave them the three models of questionnaires and then asked them to view the questionnaires and to tell what the questionnaires are about, what kinds of questions and about the format of the questionnaire (e.g., look at the form or the organization of the questionnaires, how they look like? Are they yes-no questions?). The students had some minutes to examine the three questionnaires and then they presented their evaluations of the questionnaire.

Provision of choice of content. After getting the students exposed to the three models of the questionnaires, the teacher guided them to be back to *what* they like to do for their project. The students had the power to decide what and how to do it. Let us examine the next section of the tutorial.

In terms of the topic, what would you like to do?

We would like to do a project on experiences in learning.

Do you think that experiences in learning are like the ways of learning, and so you would like to do a project on "learning experiences"?

Yes.

So tell me how you get information about learning experiences.

We can interview students or we can give them the questionnaires to answer.

....Then a student asked the teacher, "Can we use the questions in the questionnaire to interview students to get information?"

Whatever, give me a question. You can look at the model questionnaires to help you with some ideas.

In terms of making the students aware of the time budget they had for their task execution, the teacher raised the questions so that the students discussed and thought about the time so that they may plan their work properly.

How much time do you have for this project?

.....

Can we spend next week making the questionnaire?

....

It's your job, but make sure that you plan your time well to finish the job.

.....

So you have to plan to meet each other to make the questionnaire and the answers to the questions in your questionnaire. Here is my phone number... If you finish the questionnaire, call me and we will meet for the feedback to the questionnaire.

In terms of communication, the teacher is very clear and well-organized. Before he started to raise the students' awareness in another respect, he asked them to restate the steps to do the project work.

"So, what are the steps you follow when you do this project?"

First, we make the questionnaire, get information and then write the report.

Very good. First, design the questionnaire. How to make a good questionnaire?

When the students seemed not to be able to answer his question at once, he "showed" them a way, "OK, this handout will help you to make a good questionnaire, what you "do" and what you "don't do". Any questions, you can ask me.

The teacher asked the students their ideas about the tutorial, "*How do you feel after this tutorial?*", indicating that he worked as a real supervisor to the students rather than a teacher who transmits knowledge and places imperatives on students.

Before closing the tutorial, the teacher and students arranged for an appointment the following week. In the appointment, the students and the teacher will analyze the questionnaire the students design. Teacher 5, besides assisting students to plan the what and the how to complete the project, he also raised the students' awareness of the time budget they had to help them develop their planning skills. The students are ones who chose what and how to complete the project with the supervision of the teacher (raising awareness of why students should do this and not that). Teacher 5 also did a good job in introducing the students to the models of questionnaires which not only aimed to help them to achieve a short-term purpose (e.g., being able to answer the teacher's question and completing the project work) but also a long-term educational purpose (e.g., the skills of evaluating input they have to have to execute their own work in a better way and also develop skills of evaluating, which helps the students develop their critical skills).

Tutorial observations – Concluding remarks. The excerpts of the five teachers' tutorials revealed that the teachers guided students gradually to get insight into doing the main task. Students were made aware of choices of learning content and learning strategies by the teachers' questions such as "*What would you like to focus on?*", "*How are you going to do that?*" When necessary, the teacher displayed the options for students to choose from, "*Do you want to do this or that?*" In whatever degree of support or challenge, the teachers "let go" the decisions of the *content* (in the framework of the topic *Studying in Can Tho University*) and of the *strategies* to complete the project work to students. At the operationalization level, even with the difference of using Vietnamese or English as the main medium in the tutorials, choice of *learning content* and *learning strategies* was implemented as intended in the task-based component.

To conclude, the description and analysis of the five teachers' tutorials indicated a positive answer to the research question whether the project-work component provided students with choices of learning content and learning strategies for them to do the learning tasks. The description of the tutorials of the five teachers showed that the curriculum was operationalized in a slightly different manner in each group. The difference manifests in the degree of interactions in the target language was conducted in each class. Teacher 4 was the one who always used the target language

to communicate with students in the tutorial and the other teachers used Vietnamese most of the time as the main medium of communication in their tutorials. These four teachers were quite aware that the target language should be used as the main medium of interactions; however, according to them, it was the very first project for the students to work on, so the majority use of Vietnamese would make the students feel more comfortable. To them, in the following projects, English should be used more and as the main means of communication. Given the teachers' awareness of interactions in the target language as the main medium of communication, the intended curriculum was operationalized as intended.

5. THE TASK-BASED COMPONENT: THE STUDENTS AND TEACHERS' PERCEPTION

Following these tutorials in week 6 came the weeks students studied with the units in Lifelines. Students were then somewhat busy. Yet, they came and made appointments to meet with the teachers for feedback on the questionnaire. Most groups finished the first draft of the questionnaire, but some groups could not and they expected an extension of another week. The teachers of these groups reminded the students to let them know whether they needed the teachers' help. The teachers also reminded the students of the period they had for the completion of the main task.

After the first draft, the students revised their questionnaires and came for teachers' feedback. Another revision was done. The students made appointments to see their supervising teachers and the researcher to ask for help and feedback on questions on their questionnaires. Then students conducted the interview and/or administered the questionnaire. Upon finishing collecting the information, the groups made appointments with the teachers for advice on how to code and to display the data, analyze it and write the reports.

In the presentation week (week 12), students prepared their presentation well by rehearsing and using technology to assist their presentation. At the end of each presentation, each group explicitly self-evaluated their task performance, their experiences in learning English, and their presentation of the project work and their ideas on being provided with the opportunity to choose the learning content and learning strategies when doing the task. In the following section, I will present the students' self-evaluation (i.e., their perception of the operationalization of the task-based component) of their task performance, language learning task, their project presentation and the choice they had for doing the task.

5.1 *Students' evaluations*

Task performance. The majority of students (8 out of 10 groups) reported that they felt happy with the result of their task performance. They reported that they learned how to design a questionnaire or questions for an interview, how to do simple statistics to show the results of their investigation, and how to write a report about their counterparts' experiences of studying in CTU.

...For this project, we learned to make questions in a questionnaire. After we received the questionnaires back, we worked together to calculate the percentage of people who responded to each answer for each question in the questionnaire. We learned to understand what these percentages mean.... Finally, we wrote the results of the questionnaire... We have learned a lot.... (Group 2, class 1)

Most groups reported that they learned much useful information about their senior counterparts' learning styles, learning strategies, difficulties of learning English, from which they could gain insight into the task of learning English. It is clear that the aims and objectives of the project work were achieved.

... We asked and learned about other students' learning habits, learning styles and their difficulties learning English... From what we hear, we will take them as experiences for ourselves..... (Group 1, class 3)

Language learning task. In terms of language learning task, most groups reported that they had opportunities to use English with their group members and with the interviewees or questionnaire-respondents. This kind of English language use was authentic and genuinely communicative. Some groups learned to evaluate their interlocutors' English. However, though they knew they should have used more English, some groups reported that they did not use much English within their group and they were nervous when speaking English to their senior counterparts. They were hindered by their nervousness and shyness. Some other students in other groups suggested that if they use English more often, they would overcome these psychological problems.

... We used as much English as we could. We talked about learning in Cantho University.... We used English to ask other students to answer our questions in the interview.
... We also had a good chance to listen to their English. Some of them are good, but some of them were not good... Some had much vocabulary... Some have bad pronunciation.... (Group 2, class 2)

... Though we know that when we use English often, we will speak better, but we did not speak much English when we talked with other students in the interview... We are nervous and shy... (Group 3, class 3)

Main task presentation. All groups stated that they prepared for their project presentation very well, rehearsing and making OHP slides to assist their oral presentation. However, a few groups were not happy with their presentation because they mispronounced some words and could not answer some of their friends' questions in a desirable manner because of their lack of proficiency in English. When teachers 2, 4 and 5 asked them how to improve this, students of these groups answered they would study more by using English as often as possible. It indicates that students have become aware that one learns the target language by using it.

The provision of choice. All groups reported that it was new for them to choose what to do for a project within the framework of a broad topic proposed in the program. To students of all groups, it was good that they could work on what they liked and the way they found worked for them best. From students' oral self-evaluation, it was

clear that choice that was implemented in the component was guaranteed: Students got involved in making choices.

...The teachers helped us to do the project. We decided the content and the steps to do the project...

All groups mentioned their "big failure" (as they called it) was their working plan. They thought that they could finish the project work sooner but because of time constraints and their new experiences with doing project work, they were much behind their initial plan. They believed that they could do better planning in executing subsequent project work. Therefore, it was seen that students were able to self-evaluate their own tasks execution and activated self-regulation:

This is our first time doing a project. We did not how much time was needed for each activity... so we were late... The next time we will do better.

5.2 Teachers' perception

At the end of the semester, the researcher conducted the interviews with the five teachers by talking and sharing teaching and learning with the task-based approach. The interviews were conducted in an informal atmosphere in which the researcher and each teacher discussed and shared ideas about what measures should be taken to improve the quality of teaching and learning English at CTU. Then the researcher raised the questions concerning the operationalization of the task-based component at CTU. The interviews revealed encouraging information. The researcher collected the teachers' evaluation on the three issues:

- 1) The teachers' inferences from their observations and experiences teaching with the task-based approach
- 2) The benefits to students when they do the tasks
- 3) The measures needed to be taken to improve the implementation of the task-based component.

All five teachers expressed their interest in supervising students to do the project. They reported that they had thought along with and learned from the students. Four of them said that supervising students to do mini-research projects like the project work students had done, created opportunities for the teachers to review and/or to learn how to do research as well. It was beneficial for them to experience how to display, analyze, and interpret the data and to write the report. Supervising students to do project work is a time-consuming work, especially students who are new to doing projects; however, when students become more experienced with doing project work, teachers would be less busy. One young teacher perceived,

...Supervising students to do projects like this is time-consuming. But when students get used to it, this problem will be overcome. Students worked hard and they tried their best to complete the project well. They become more independent and more confident. I am happy that in their presentation, they spoke English rather fluently. As a teacher, I learned how to do a mini-research project. I thought along with students when they did their project...

Students had the opportunities to work independently of the teachers in learning and to learn to work cooperatively. The teachers believed that when students were fully

aware of their crucial role in succeeding in learning a language, they would become independent and better language learners. Three teaching staff stated that whether students are autonomous or not depends much on the learning tasks and the assigned role the teacher gives to students. It was clear that teachers were aware that creating a learning environment which supports the students' choices would make students become more independent of the teachers and more responsible for their learning. One young male teacher expressed,

.... Students learned their important role in their learning... Students become independent when we create opportunities for them to be independent. Doing project work is a way.

The informants participating in this project were Vietnamese students of English majors. Some students did not create the opportunities to use English with these informants when working on the project. This could be improved by making students aware of the effects of using the language on language learning. Another suggestion from the teachers is that in future tasks, as much as we can, we may ask students to choose English speaking foreigners working or traveling in Cantho as the participants in their task so that the students will use English. With such a perception, the teachers showed to propose using the target language as the medium of communication.

6. CONCLUSION

With reference to the issues relating to learner choice (content and strategies) and the use of the target language, the teachers working with the task-based component in the adapted curriculum were quite aware of these issues and took pedagogical actions rationally. *Choices* of learning content and learning strategies were offered in all five groups. The degree of *English use* as a main medium in communication in the teachers' tutorials showed that the degree to which the task-based component was operationalized was *slightly different* among the three classes. Teacher 4 used English all the time. The other four teachers used Vietnamese most of the time in a rational manner. Therefore, a "yes" answer was given to the research question, (1) Did the operationalization of the task-based component, via teachers' pedagogical actions, provide students with *choice* of learning content and learning methodology and *interactions* for them to execute unit projects?

The different degree of English use in tutorials among the sub-groups confirmed a "no" answer to the research question, (2) Was the project-work component operationalized in the same degree in the three groups?

At the level of perception, monitoring the implementation of the task-based component also aims to answer the question, (3) What did the students and teachers perceive positively about the operationalization of the task-based component and what needs to be improved? Most groups of students reported that they had the opportunities to use English authentically when they plan, do and evaluate their task per-

formance. The students also perceived that they decided on what to focus on when they did their task and how to do it. The teachers perceived that the students had the opportunities to work independently of the teacher and to work cooperatively.

Some students confessed that they did not deploy the opportunities to use English in their task execution. The teachers suggested that more focus should be placed on making the students aware of the importance of using the target language as the main medium of communications and that the design of tasks may take on the requirement of the students to communicate with English-speaking people into consideration.

