Teaching Practice

Syllabus Negotiation: A Case Study in a Tertiary EFL Context in Vietnam

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Abstract

Syllabus negotiation refers to “discussion between all members of the classroom to decide how learning and teaching are to be organised” (Breen & Littlejohn, 2000, p. 1). It is one of the directions that developed from communicative language teaching during the 1980s when the widespread concern was how to make the teaching and learning process more communicative. This paper reports on a study into the feasibility of syllabus negotiation in a class at a university in Vietnam. The research used qualitative data from the researcher’s direct observation, the documents collected during the course, the course-evaluation questionnaire, and quantitative data from the pre- and post-tests. The data analyses reveal a wide range of positive impacts and the students’ generally enthusiastic acceptance of the approach. Some problems arising during the process are also disclosed. Tentative recommendations for classroom application are then offered in the paper.

For a long period, the language teaching stage in Vietnam has been set in the traditional teacher-centred educational system and dominated by grammar-translation methods. This has led to an often-heard complaint that Vietnamese learners of English are generally passive and dependent and that they are good at grammar, reading and writing, but cannot utter a proper sentence. However, the advent of the era of information and technology has called for innovative reforms in education so that Vietnamese learners will become more active and self-reliant. Moreover, as the country has become a popular destination for foreign tourists and investors, mastering spoken English has become a must for learners of English. Therefore, learner-centred and communicative approaches have recently become the focus of many a workshop and study. Nonetheless, there have been few formal discussions on syllabus negotiation, while interest in this is high in the professional literature. This fact motivated the author of this paper to research the application of this approach in the Vietnamese context. Using a sample of English majors at a university, this paper investigates the outcomes of the approach, the students’ reactions, and the problems they confronted. It consists of five main parts: literature review, method, major findings and discussions, recommendations, and conclusion.

Literature Review

The Origins of the Concept of Syllabus Negotiation in EFL Education

The idea of negotiated decision-making in the classroom can be said to stem from Bertrand Russell and John Dewey's liberal schooling agenda with its stress on "collaborative responsibility" and "choice" as opposed to "competition" and "coercion" in the early twentieth century (Breen & Littlejohn, 2000, p. 14). Following Russell and Dewey, Paulo Freire argued that learners should be given the opportunities "to negotiate learning outcomes" and "to cooperate with teachers and other [learners] in a process of discovery" (1970, as cited in Brown, 2000, p. 90). In the realm of psychology, Carl Rogers contributed to pedagogy the ideas of education as a life-long process, the learner as a whole person, and the teacher as a facilitator (Brown, 2000). In addition, research and hypotheses in the second language acquisition area during the 1970s and the 1980s have led to the increasing recognition of the importance of interaction and negotiation for meaning in the language acquisition process. Finally, the emergence of the concept of "communicative competence," coined by Hymes in reaction to Chomsky's notion of underlying linguistic competence, has resulted in the communicative language teaching (CLT) movement in EFL education. There have since been different CLT developments; one of the most recent innovations is the "learner-centred" curriculum with the emphasis on how language learning is undertaken by learners, rather than the goals and content of instruction. Advocates of the learner-centred curriculum or syllabus negotiation argued for learners' active involvement in the shared task of developing the learning programme via the process of negotiating with the teacher (Bloor & Bloor, 1988; Boomer, Lester, Onore, & Cook, 1992; Breen, 2001; Breen & Littlejohn, 2000; Markee, 1997; Nunan, 1988, 1999; Tudor, 1996).

Benefits of Syllabus Negotiation in EFL Education

An increasing number of accounts of the practicality of syllabus negotiation in EFL education has been reported (e.g., Boomer et al., 1992; Breen & Littlejohn, 2000; Huang, 2006; N. T. Nguyen, 2010; V. H. Nguyen, 2006). Studies have shown that classroom negotiation helps make the teaching programme more responsive to learners' needs and wants, increase learners' motivation and involvement in learning, enhance their confidence and self-esteem, develop their responsibility and autonomy, improve learning effectiveness, build up a mutual understanding among the participants, and extend the teacher's teaching strategies, among other things. These positive impacts suggest the high potential of collaborative forms of teaching in EFL education.

Guidelines for Syllabus Negotiation

Researchers and practitioners have attempted to conceptualise the principles, steps, and frameworks for classroom negotiation (e.g., Boomer et al., 1992; Breen & Littlejohn, 2000; Nunan, 1999). Implied in these guidelines is that there is always room for negotiative work, and the levels and degrees of negotiation depend on the participants and the contextual factors of the given educational setting. Thus, while a strong version of syllabus negotiation is feasible in situations where there is no pre-determined curriculum and all the curricular decisions are open to negotiation in the classroom, a weak form – in which negotiation helps fine-tune a programme – is more practical in contexts where there is a largely pre-set curriculum or where the teacher and students have little experience in negotiation.

In the present research, given the existence of an externally determined syllabus and the participants' unfamiliarity with the approach, a weak version of syllabus negotiation was

adopted. Through the process of negotiating, some elements in the syllabus were adapted so that the resulting programme would be more suitable for the students.

Method

The study aims to examine how the negotiative approach works in the Vietnamese context. The three questions that guide the research are:

1. What are the outcomes of this approach?
2. What are the students' reactions to this approach?
3. What are the problems the students encounter during negotiation?

Subjects

Taking part in this study was a class of second-year English majors in a university. There were six normal classes and one gifted class for second-year EFL students in the university. The participating class was the latter, which was for students who had either earned national / international awards in English or had received high marks in the university entrance examination and had passed a selective English test near the end of the first semester of their candidature. These students were considered the best of the year group. Their English levels ranged from intermediate to advanced. In addition, while the number of students in a normal class was about 40, that in the gifted class was 20. Moreover, as the strongest in the year group, the class usually had high expectations for the courses. Considering these characteristics of the class, negotiation could be implemented in wider scopes. For example, the teacher and students could negotiate decisions related to a series of lessons or the course (e.g., the order of the activities, the activities to be omitted if any, or the materials to be adapted or supplemented) rather than just a task (e.g., whether the students will work in pairs, groups or alone, the time for an activity, or how to assess the outcome of a task).

However, this class was similar to the normal classes in several aspects. The students studied the same language skills syllabi in the same amount of time. This meant classroom negotiation would only aim to fine-tune the programme to make it more relevant to their needs and interests. In terms of character traits, from the researcher's informal talks with teachers who had taught the students in previous courses, although this group of learners appeared to be more active, there were students who were passive and silent in the classroom, which is a common feature of Vietnamese classes. This would perhaps present a challenge to the effort of getting all the students to speak out in the shared decision-making process. Moreover, despite the students' high levels of English, there was a concern over the students' listening and speaking competencies. In spite of the shift of focus to CLT in recent years, Vietnamese teachers of English at secondary school and high school (grades 6-9 and 10-12 respectively) are still not familiar with communicative approaches. In addition, teaching at schools is generally examination-oriented. Hence, English classes at secondary school and high school are, in fact, not truly communicative, and grammar, reading, and writing receive more attention than listening and speaking. The students' spoken English is, therefore, generally at a lower level than their written English, which may cause some problems to the process of discussing in English. For these reasons, research on this particular group of learners is believed to give some useful insights into the viability of the approach at the tertiary level in the Vietnamese context.

In the study, the students enrolled in the Language Skills 3B: Listening and Speaking Course in the first semester of the 2010-2011 academic year. They attended a three-hour class per week for 10 weeks.

Data Collection

The four instruments utilised in the research were the researcher's direct observation of the ways the students negotiated in the classroom and their reactions towards negotiative work, the documents collected during the course delivery such as the students' work and class-designed materials, the course-evaluation questionnaire, and the listening and speaking pre- and post-tests.

The questionnaire, which was distributed upon completion of the course, consisted of open questions designed to elicit the students' evaluation of the course. Specifically, the students were asked to comment on the learning programme (including the activities and the way of assessment), their achievements and progress, the way of teaching and learning (i.e., syllabus negotiation), and the difficulties they had faced in the process. The reason for the use of open-response items was that this type of question allows respondents to freely express their opinions and attitudes, and as a result, obtains more useful information (Nunan, 1992). Given the relatively small number of subjects and the need for thorough investigation into the new approach in this particular context, open questions were employed despite the difficulty of analysing the data. The questionnaire was piloted with three students before being distributed to the whole class. The questions were in Vietnamese - the participants' L1 - to ensure understanding on the students' part. The students answered anonymously and in Vietnamese.

The researcher used the listening and speaking sections of Practice Tests 2 and 3 in Cambridge IELTS 5 (University of Cambridge Local Examinations by Syndicate, 2006) for the pre-test and post-test respectively. As it would have taken 11 to 14 minutes to finish the whole speaking test section, which was impossible for the study, the researcher made some modifications. Apart from Part 2, which remained intact, only one question in Part 1 and one in Part 3 were used. In so doing, the speaking test with each student lasted about five to seven minutes. To ensure reliability and validity, there were two scorers to mark the students' performance: the researcher and another teacher who did not teach the class. The mark of each student for each test was the average of the two examiners' scores.

Data Analysis

The students' responses in the questionnaire were translated into English by the researcher and grouped according to main ideas. Notable comments will be cited.

All the score analyses were done with SPSS 11.5. The paired samples *t*-test was employed to detect significant differences between the means of the pre- and post-test scores. The chosen α level was .05.

Comments based on the researcher's observation and the documents helped to shed some light on how syllabus negotiation worked in the study.

Major Findings and Discussions

The Outcomes of This Approach

Revealed from the analyses of the questionnaire, documents, and test scores are a number of positive impacts of syllabus negotiation on the programme, student motivation, and participants' achievements and progress.

Programme. In calling upon diversified contributions from the students, the approach resulted in an interesting programme with exciting activities proposed by the students (see Appendix A).

Most students showed favourable attitudes towards the content and the kinds, number, and level of tasks done. They found the activities useful, motivating, and diverse.

[The activities] were interesting and did encourage the students to participate in a more active, autonomous and effective way. (S12)

The majority also felt satisfied with the ways of assessment in the course, with many of them highlighting the fact that the assessment scales and criteria were the outcomes of the shared decision-making process of all the participants.

There was nothing to complain about because the teacher and students had discussed and agreed upon the assessing criteria. (S4)

Student motivation. Documents collated during the course (see Appendices A and B) revealed the students' high motivation for and true investment in learning. In order to arouse the other groups' interest in the topic and hold a hot debate, each group tried their best to search for useful information, interesting pictures, video clips, and games from books and the Internet. Regarding a drama activity, the students made elaborate preparations for plays. For example, they made beautiful PowerPoint slides to illustrate some details in the plays, looked for relevant pieces of music, and prepared colorful props and costumes. The class also organised an award and searched for certificates for Best Actor, Best Actress, and Best Script from the Internet. Not only was the activity a course requirement, but it had become an opportunity for them to showcase their abilities and creativity and to entertain themselves as well. All of these indicated their genuine interest in and commitment to the tasks, which were the outcomes of the negotiation between the teacher and the students.

Achievements and progress. As previously pointed out, being allowed to choose, adapt, and create the activities, the students were truly motivated to learn and strived for the best. Accordingly, they had generally made some progress by the end of the course. Their responses in the questionnaire disclosed a wide range of achievements, including improved listening, speaking, presenting, debating, and role-playing skills, enhanced group skills, enriched vocabulary and knowledge, increased interaction and participation, growing confidence, and better relationships.

I learnt some new ways of learning and new skills (debate skills, communication skills . . .). (S12)

There were happy learning hours and I have some better relationships with my friends. (S18)

Regarding the students' listening and speaking skills, the analyses of the pre- and post-test scores showed some positive signs. The *t*-test results are shown in Tables 1 and 2. (For the correlations, the descriptive statistics and the examination of the assumptions underlying the *t*-test, see Appendix C).

Table 1***Paired Samples Test (Listening Scores)***

		Paired Differences					<i>t</i>	<i>df</i>	Sig. (2-tailed)
		Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference				
					Lower	Upper			
Pair 1	listening pre-test - listening post-test	-.5250	1.29244	.28900	-1.1299	.0799	-1.817	19	.085

Table 2***Paired Samples Test (Speaking Scores)***

		Paired Differences					<i>t</i>	<i>df</i>	Sig. (2-tailed)
		Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference				
					Lower	Upper			
Pair 1	speaking pre-test - speaking post-test	-.2625	.36702	.08207	-.4343	-.0907	-3.199	19	.005

For the listening scores, the observed *t*-value was -1.817, with degrees of freedom equal to 19, and the two-tailed *p*-value was .085. Although *p* is quite small, it was greater than the α level (i.e., .05). Therefore, the means of the pre- and post-test scores were not considered to be significantly different.

The analysis of the speaking scores produced a *t*-value that equaled -3.199 and a *p*-value equal to .005. Since *p* was smaller than α , the observed difference in the two means (.2625) was considered statistically significant.

The results of the score analyses are understandable. It is not easy to improve listening skills in a short period of time. Also, the negotiation, which was conducted in English, had a more direct impact on communication skills than listening skills in doing tests. Considering these two points, the fact that the mean score of the listening post-test was slightly higher than that of the pre-test is a positive sign. As for the speaking scores, negotiation provides a genuine environment for negotiation for meaning with diversified input and output. Given that the students in this study were generally active and had high levels of English, the increased opportunities for true communication had some positive effects on their communicative competence.

Lastly, the analyses of the documents suggested that classroom negotiation was an enriching experience not only for the students, but also for the teacher-researcher. The latter also benefited from the approach. The mediation process resulted in different ways of working, which might not have been produced had the negotiative approach not been implemented. In addition, the students' search for relevant resources during the completion of the tasks helped

save the teacher much time and the produced materials were a valuable resource, contributing to the extension of the teacher's professional repertoire.

The Students' Reactions to This Approach

The students' responses in the questionnaire and their attitudes as observed by the researcher during discussion times revealed a mixed reaction. Most students expressed their satisfaction over shared decision-making in the questionnaire, realising its value in their learning. The new democratic approach, which was quite different from the traditional way of teaching in Vietnam, encouraged them to take more initiative and responsibility in their own learning and learn from their fellow students. It also stimulated their creativity, created a comfortable atmosphere in class, increased the interaction among the participants, and developed better mutual understanding, particularly between the teacher and students.

The learning way was interactive, i.e., there was a two-way interaction between the teacher and the students. (S19)

The students were given the right to choose the activities → democratic. The teacher gave periodical tasks to monitor the progress and make sure the study programme follow the textbook. (S10)

The majority of the students welcomed the application of the approach in the following course.

I want the Language Skills 4B teacher to discuss activities with the class so that the class atmosphere will be comfortable and the students will be more active and creative in their learning. (S11)

A few students, however, thought the negotiative regime was a bit too democratic and the teacher gave the class too much freedom.

The teacher and students were open in the discussions regarding the activities in class but the teacher should not have let the students decide all the activities. (S17)

Therefore, although they wanted to have the approach implemented in the following course, they felt that there should be more guidance from the teacher and more limitations on the freedom given to the students.

Yet surprisingly, when asked about the roles of teacher and students in the course, while most students recognised the facilitating role of the teacher and the important active roles of the students, several students still thought the teacher was the person who made decisions regarding the learning content and form and the students were the ones who followed the teacher's instructions.

The teacher suggested the requirements and criteria; the students supported the plan. (S9)

It seems that these students viewed negotiation as a kind of requirement from the teacher, rather than the opportunity for them to actively become involved in the decision-making process.

The students' mixed reaction was clearly manifest during discussion times. From the researcher's observation, some students enthusiastically participated in negotiation and as the course progressed, began to take the initiative in suggesting what to negotiate. For instance, on Day 2, when the teacher-researcher suggested discussing the criteria for assessing the debates in the following class meeting, one student pointed out the necessity of discussing the way to hold debates since it was the first time they had ever carried out this activity. Another example occurred on Day 7; one student called for discussion regarding the criteria for assessing the plays, which they would perform on Day 10. However, some students were rather passive and shy and rarely voiced their opinions, particularly in front of the whole class. There were also some who were active when doing activities, but did not pay much attention during negotiation times. It seems that they just waited for the teacher to conclude the negotiation and then acted upon the outcomes, which they regarded as requirements from the teacher.

The reactions of the last two groups of students can be explained by one student's response in the questionnaire:

Fairly satisfied. However, I found this teaching and learning way a bit too "democratic." That means the students were allowed to suggest too many ideas and much listened to but in fact, we sometimes did not know exactly what we needed and what was the best way to do things. Active learning is very good but after 12 years of passive learning at school, we sometimes don't expect to be allowed to give ideas and are willing to follow the teacher's instructions. (S3)

The answer revealed some students' uncomfortable feelings in the new roles, owing to many years of classroom work in which they were supposed to do what their teachers said. For these students, negotiation was implemented at so wide a scope and so quickly that they felt confused when given too much control over learning decisions. The response also suggested that after being dependent on teachers in secondary school and high school, some students might not have seen the point in negotiating. They just waited for and willingly acted upon the teacher's instructions after the negotiation sessions.

The Problems the Students Encountered During Negotiation

The first factor that caused difficulties was the students' unfamiliarity with the new way of working.

Many students had not got used to this kind of discussion in class so they did not give any ideas; as a result, the atmosphere of the discussions became less lively and the outcomes of these discussions might not satisfy everyone. (S17)

Because of their prior learning experience in the teacher-centred educational system at secondary school and high school, as pointed out above, a number of students did not voice their opinions regarding the learning content and form in class. Their shyness and passiveness led to one problem, i.e., the uneven contribution to the negotiating process.

The second problematic aspect of the approach was the use of English in negotiation. Some students had difficulty in expressing ideas in English, which resulted in their switching to L1 while negotiating. This difficulty might also have been the reason for the passiveness of some of these students in discussions. In addition, some other students were fairly good at speaking

but still fell back on the “bad habit” of using L1 in English classes, particularly when they were not engaged in any particular task.

Moreover, a number of students felt discouraged by the idea of reflection, particularly self-reflection. This was meant as part of learner training, which is crucial to an effective shared decision-making process.

The assessment done by the students (i.e., assessing the other groups and our own group) was so much that the students felt discouraged. (S17)

It seems that the amount of self- and peer-assessment made the students feel unhappy. In fact, assessment entailed choosing the appropriate scale and answering three short open questions, which were believed not to take much of their time. Each group also had to assess their group performance twice, i.e., after holding a debate and after putting on a play. From the researcher’s observation, the more active the students, the less willing they were to look back at the learning experience.

Lastly, it was difficult for the students to come to a consensus when negotiating, owing to different ideas. The problem of learner diversity, particularly in large classes, has been pointed out by Breen and Littlejohn (2000). The problem still existed, although the class in the study was quite small in the Vietnamese context, small groups had been employed as a basic unit of organisation in class, and the class had been trained how to discuss in groups on Day 2. On the one hand, this indicates that the students had their own preferred ways of working and were truly involved in the negotiation. On the other hand, it implies that teachers need to address this problematic aspect so that syllabus negotiation can be applied effectively in the classroom.

In short, the findings from the questionnaire, classroom observation, documents, and pre- and post-tests revealed quite a number of benefits of syllabus negotiation and most students’ positive attitudes towards it. However, some students still had ambivalent feelings and encountered some difficulties during the process. The problems seem to be due to the scope of negotiation and the insufficient preparation of enabling conditions for the active and informed involvement of the students in the shared decision-making process. In the study, the students were encouraged to become involved in decisions regarding the main activities and part of the assessment in the course, considering the high English levels, the small size, and the high expectations of the class. However, these factors were not adequate to facilitate syllabus negotiation at such a scale since the approach was quite new to them. Moreover, although there was some learner training incorporated into the programme (see Appendix A), it was not sufficient to help them become more proficient at managing their learning in an insightful manner. It is believed that once these problems have been solved, the positive effects of the approach may be maximised.

Recommendations

The incorporation of syllabus negotiation should be a gradual process. Teachers should help students realise its benefits first and then start by negotiating only one or two small elements in the learning programme, such as choosing a post-class task or discussing the way to do an activity in the textbook. Once students have seen the value of classroom negotiation and become accustomed to it, they will be able and willing to negotiate on larger scales.

An initial questionnaire regarding learners' needs, preferences, and expectations may be a useful way to balance learner voice and help students become used to the idea of giving their opinions in class. It may serve as a starting point to discuss learning content and form. Some students may have interesting ideas, but do not dare to express them directly in front of the whole class. Teachers may discreetly speak for them during negotiations. Hopefully, they will gradually become more confident in contributing their ideas in class.

Learner training is crucial to the success of a negotiated mode of working. Learners need to learn some essential skills (including the skills to discuss and work in groups and reflect upon the learning experience) in order to be able to participate more effectively in the shared decision-making process. Teachers can consider incorporating a brief training block at the beginning of the course, combined with regular sessions focusing on specific learning strategies relevant to the tasks in hand during the course. Regarding reflection, Serrano-Sampedro's approach of "helping learners realise its usefulness and find their own ways of doing it" may be helpful (2000, p. 124).

The use of English should also be encouraged. One technique that may be useful is to set negotiating a small element in the syllabus as a problem-solving task, which may be followed up by a section in which teachers give feedback on students' language. It may help them realise the benefit of using English and gradually form a "good habit" of using English most of the time in class as well as outside, not just when doing activities. However, with lower level students, the occasional use of their mother tongue may be allowed as it will help increase the productivity of negotiation process.

Finally, teachers have to be very patient, as it may take time to help students become familiar with the approach. As many possibilities may arise during negotiating process, teachers also need to equip themselves with a wide range of teaching-learning alternatives, including methodologies and materials, and be flexible.

Conclusion

This paper has shown the feasibility of syllabus negotiation in an Asian context in which language teaching has been dominated by traditional, teacher-centred and grammar-translation methods for some time and learners are generally assumed to be quiet and reticent. The study disclosed a variety of beneficial outcomes and the students' relatively enthusiastic acceptance of the approach. However, it does not necessarily mean that the approach is not challenging to students and teachers. Much time and preparation is essential for the success of its application. Given the growing demand for learner-centred and communicative approaches in Vietnam and other similar Asian contexts and the potential of negotiative work, further empirical research is needed so as to satisfactorily answer the question of how to effectively adopt syllabus negotiation in the language classroom.

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Appendix A

The Negotiation Process in the Study

Teacher's Preparation

Before the commencement of the course, the teacher-researcher listed the negotiables and non-negotiables in the syllabus designed by the university and prepared some alternatives for the negotiables. Specifically, the objectives, textbooks (i.e., Mosaic 1 and 2), and the assessment scales were kept intact. However, since the students had studied the Language Skills 1B and 2B Courses and might have become familiar (and thus, bored) with the activities in the textbooks (the Interactions / Mosaic series), the teacher came up with some possible new types of activities. Some speaking tasks such as the "Did you hear . . . ?" activity (see below), group-prepared discussions, and interviews of foreigners could be used to replace or supplement the activities in the textbooks, including role-plays, mini-presentations, and discussions. The proposed options were believed to expose this particular group of students to authentic language outside the classroom and encourage them to take more responsibility for their own learning. As for listening, the listening-to-the-lecture activities remained the same because they were the major tasks in the textbooks and designed to help students improve their note-taking skills. The second listening activity type, i.e., listening to short talks and answering multiple choice questions, could be modified by having students do similar listening exercises in a wide range of reference books available in the library and bookstores. The second component open to negotiation in the syllabus was the mid-term speaking test and the assessment of participation. For every Language Skills course, the mid-term mark accounted for 30% of the total mark of the course and the final mark took up 70%. The final mark consisted of the mark of the final tests (60%) and the participation mark (40%). This grading policy was generally accepted by the university and thus could not be changed. The participation mark was, however, decided by the teacher in charge, based on the assignments inside and outside class and the students' participation and contribution. This mark was negotiable. In addition, all classes had to take the same final tests, which would be decided by the university. The mid-term listening test was generally decided by the teacher in charge. Therefore, only the mid-term speaking test (i.e., the content and the format of testing) was open to discussion with the students.

Learner training helps learners play a more informed and self-directive role in the learning process. It is, however, largely ignored in learning programmes in Vietnam. As a result, Vietnamese learners generally lack necessary knowledge and skills for effectively becoming involved in the learning process. Therefore, the teacher also prepared some activities aimed to equip the students with some essential learning strategies such as group skills and reflection.

Negotiating

Before discussing the syllabus with the students, the teacher had them reflect upon their own strengths and weaknesses and suggest what and how they would like to study listening and speaking skills in the course on a piece of paper. Then, the negotiables and non-negotiables were made clear to the students. Some alternatives were drawn on the blackboard, based on the teacher's preparation and the students' suggestions. The class then divided into groups of four and discussed and decided the content and form for the negotiables. Each group then presented their ideas and a new programme gradually emerged from the discussion between the teacher and the students.

Main speaking activities:

- “Did you hear...?” (adapted from Thornbury, 2005) as a five-minute warm-up activity: at the beginning of each lesson, the students sat in pairs and shared a news item in English that they had listened to on the Internet.
- Group-prepared debate: The class divided into five groups of four. From Week 4 to Week 8, each group had to hold a 30-minute debate for the whole class in each lesson. They had to think of a question related to the topic of the chapter studied in the lesson, search for information in books or on the Internet and organise a debate for the other groups to participate in.
- Drama: Instead of the role-play activities in the textbooks (which aim to have students practise the functions taught in the chapters), the students wanted to break into three groups of six or seven, write a 45-minute play including some functions taught in the books, and perform the play in Week 10.
- Discussions

Main listening activities:

- Listening to lectures and taking notes: Since the class had learned essential note-taking techniques in the previous two listening-speaking courses with the Interactions / Mosaic series and the listening-to-the-lecture sections in this course could be seen as review and consolidation of the techniques, the students wanted to use materials from other books or sources to practise note-taking skills. The materials agreed upon were listening exercises based on the TOEFL iBT, so students could also receive practice doing the listening section of the test.
- Listening exercises for practising sub-skills: The teacher would choose exercises appropriate for the students to practise from a wide variety of materials available.

Supplementary activities:

- Listening to songs and discussing them
- Watching one scene in a film without the sound on, writing a script, and speaking for the actor(s) and / or actress(es) as the scene was played again without sound.

Assessment of participation:

- 2 listening quizzes: 5%
- Group-prepared debate: 15%
- Drama: 20%

Mid-term speaking test:

- Topics: The teacher would give questions related to the topics studied in the course.
- Format: The students would take the test in pairs and discuss the answer to the question.

Negotiation continued to occur during the course as needs arose. For example, in the following weeks, the teacher and the students discussed the framework and assessment criteria for debates, the assessment criteria for drama, dates to take the listening quizzes and mid-term tests, and the deadlines for the submission of the draft and final scripts of the plays.

Appendix B
Selected Documents Collected During the Course

Class-Designed Debate Evaluation Form

Evaluating group: _____

Organising group: _____ Date: _____ Time: _____

Topic: _____

Use the following key to evaluate the debate.

+ = very good

✓ = satisfactory

– = needs improvement

A. Group skills

_____ Group members cooperated well

B. Debate

Content

_____ Chose a topic that was interesting

_____ Developed topic with sufficient reasons, examples and details

Organisation

_____ Lively debate

_____ Met time limit (about 30 minutes)

_____ Discussion moved along at the right speed, without long pauses between speakers

What we liked about this debate:

What we didn't like about this debate:

Suggestions for improvement:

Overall rating:

A Group-Designed Plan for Organising a Debate

UNIT 12: TOGETHER ON A SMALL PLANET

TOPIC: BEAUTY CONTESTS

Debate's question: Beauty contests or beauty pageants are harmful. Do you agree or disagree?

OUTLINE

1/ Introduction:

- Showing pictures of beauty contests
- Showing topic, debate's question and expressions for dis(agreement)

2/ Before debate:

- 2 groups discuss in about 5-7 minutes
- Providing each group with arguments that we have

3/ Debate:

- 2 groups take turns to share their opinions in 15 minutes
- Raising some questions for 2 groups

4/ After debate:

- Summary
- Conclusion

Class-Designed Play Evaluation Form

Evaluating group: _____

Acting group: _____ Date: _____ Time: _____

Title: _____

Use the following key to evaluate the play.

+ = very good

✓ = satisfactory

– = needs improvement

A. Content

- _____ Comprehensible
- _____ Coherent
- _____ Meaningful
- _____ Humorous

B. Acting

- _____ Voice
- _____ Posture, Movement, Gestures, Facial expression

C. Pronunciation

- _____ Sounds, Stress, Intonation, Loudness, etc.

D. Preparation

- _____ Costume and Make-up, Props, Backdrop, Music, etc.

E. Length

- _____ Met time limit (about 30-45 minutes)

What we liked about this play:

What we didn't like about this play:

Suggestions for improvement:

Overall rating:

Some Fragments from a Play

The script was written by a group of students for the drama activity. The students included in the play some relevant pieces of music downloaded from the Internet.

"Love at first bite"

Scene 0.5:

Hayley is walking back from school, Jacob approaches her, bites her and sucks her blood. He hypnotizes her and says:

Jacob: You will not remember what just happened. You will forget about me, about what I just did.

Then he walks away. Hayley wakes up.

Hayley (feels dizzy): What just happened?

Scene 1: At Jackson house

Theme song: Only you and you alone

Emily is reading newspaper.

Malcolm (swings around the room): Good morning, sweet heart. Such a beautiful day.

Emily: Morning dear! Oh . . . Jacob's coming.

Theme song stops with the record scratch tune.

Malcolm (coughing): WHAT!!!!

Emily: He's going to be here for dinner. I know you don't like him but please, don't react like that. He's your brother anyway.

Malcolm (raises his eyebrows): . . . and a vampire.

Emily: You used to be one yourself.

Malcolm: Not anymore. Whatever! Tell him to eat something before coming.

Emily: OK.

. . .

Scene 5:

. . .

Lisa puts her arm around Hayley.

Hayley: Ouch!!!

Lisa (worried): Sorry! What's wrong?

Curtis: Are you OK?

Hayley: My neck's hurt.

Lisa: Let me see.

Hayley shows her neck.

Lisa: Looks like you got bitten by a vampire.

Hayley and Curtis stare at her.

Hayley & Curtis: You got to be kidding me.

Lisa: Don't take it serious. I'm joking. It's a bug.

. . .

Scene 7: Jacob follows Hayley.

Theme song: Summer wine

Jacob: She's so sweet, she's so beautiful. I only bit her once but I can assure how good she is. I want to be with her, for real. I want to comb her hair every morning, to make breakfast for her. But how can I do that? I can't be just like my brother. NO. I'm a vampire. I can't fall in love with my food, she is my . . . dinner. I will tell my nephew the truth and make him a vampire. That's what I will do.

Jacob (take a few steps, then turns around): Goodbye my love.

And Hayley still has no idea because she is wearing earphones.

Appendix C

Pre- and Post-Test Listening Score Analyses

The results of the analyses of the pre- and post-test listening scores are displayed in Tables C1 and C2.

Table C1
Listening Score Correlations

		Pre-test	Post-test
Pre-test	Pearson Correlation	1	.559(*)
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.010
	N	20	20
Post-test	Pearson Correlation	.559(*)	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.010	.
	N	20	20

*Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Table C2
Descriptive Statistics for Listening Scores

	Scores		Statistic	Std. Error
Pre- & Post-tests	Pre-test	Mean	5.9125	.30092
		95% Confidence Interval for Mean	Lower Bound	5.2827
			Upper Bound	6.5423
		5% Trimmed Mean	5.8472	
		Median	5.8750	
		Variance	1.811	
		Std. Deviation	1.34574	
		Minimum	4.25	
		Maximum	8.75	
		Range	4.50	
		Interquartile Range	2.6250	
		Skewness	.484	.512
		Kurtosis	-.769	.992
	Post-test	Mean	6.4375	.31407
		95% Confidence Interval for Mean	Lower Bound	5.7801
			Upper Bound	7.0949
		5% Trimmed Mean	6.4306	
		Median	6.5000	
		Variance	1.973	
		Std. Deviation	1.40459	
		Minimum	3.75	
		Maximum	9.25	
		Range	5.50	
		Interquartile Range	1.7500	
		Skewness	-.243	.512
		Kurtosis	.230	.992

The correlation coefficient between the pre- and post-test listening scores was $r = .559$, $p = .010$. This correlation was significantly different from zero according to a two-tailed test at the .05 alpha level. This meant that there was a highly positive relationship between the pre- and post-test listening scores. Put another way, students with higher pre-test listening scores had higher post-test listening scores and vice versa.

The pre- and post-test listening scores also met the two assumptions underlying a paired samples *t*-test, i.e. the assumptions of interval scale and normal distribution. The listening scores were given on a .25-point interval scale. Since the *z*-values for skewness (Skewness / Std. Error) of the pre- and post-test listening scores were .945 and -.475 respectively and the *z*-values for kurtosis (Kurtosis / Std. Error) were -.775 and .232 respectively, which were less than ± 1.96 , there was 95% confidence that both sets of scores were normally distributed.

The results of the analyses of the pre- and post-test speaking scores are shown in Tables C3 and C4. (N.B. The speaking score of each student in each test is the average of the two examiners' scores.)

Table C3
Speaking Score Correlations

		Pre-test (E1)	Pre-test (E2)	Post-test (E1)	Post-test (E2)	Pre-test	Post-test
Pre-test (E1)	Pearson Correlation	1	.784(**)	.756(**)	.674(**)	.969(**)	.761(**)
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.000	.000	.001	.000	.000
	<i>N</i>	20	20	20	20	20	20
Pre-test (E2)	Pearson Correlation	.784(**)	1	.680(**)	.840(**)	.914(**)	.795(**)
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.	.001	.000	.000	.000
	<i>N</i>	20	20	20	20	20	20
Post-test (E1)	Pearson Correlation	.756(**)	.680(**)	1	.785(**)	.767(**)	.955(**)
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.001	.	.000	.000	.000
	<i>N</i>	20	20	20	20	20	20
Post-test (E2)	Pearson Correlation	.674(**)	.840(**)	.785(**)	1	.778(**)	.933(**)
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.001	.000	.000	.	.000	.000
	<i>N</i>	20	20	20	20	20	20
Pre-test	Pearson Correlation	.969(**)	.914(**)	.767(**)	.778(**)	1	.817(**)
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	.000	.	.000
	<i>N</i>	20	20	20	20	20	20
Post-test	Pearson Correlation	.761(**)	.795(**)	.955(**)	.933(**)	.817(**)	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.
	<i>N</i>	20	20	20	20	20	20

**Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

The figures in Table C3 indicate that the positive correlations between the pre- and post-test speaking scores marked by the first examiner (E1), between the pre- and post-test speaking scores given by the second examiner (E2), between the first examiner's pre-test scores and the

second examiner's, between the first examiner's post-test scores and the second examiner's, and between the pre- and post-test speaking scores were also significant.

Table C4
Descriptive Statistics for Speaking Scores

	Scores		Statistic	Std. Error
Pre- & Post-tests	Pre-test	Mean	5.8875	.14220
		95% Confidence Interval for Mean	Lower Bound	5.5899
			Upper Bound	6.1851
		5% Trimmed Mean	5.8889	
		Median	5.7500	
		Variance	.404	
		Std. Deviation	.63596	
		Minimum	4.8	
		Maximum	7.0	
		Range	2.3	
		Interquartile Range	.9375	
		Skewness	.415	.512
		Kurtosis	-.629	.992
	Post-test	Mean	6.1500	.11670
		95% Confidence Interval for Mean	Lower Bound	5.9057
			Upper Bound	6.3943
		5% Trimmed Mean	6.1250	
		Median	6.0000	
		Variance	.272	
		Std. Deviation	.52189	
		Minimum	5.3	
		Maximum	7.5	
		Range	2.3	
		Interquartile Range	.4375	
		Skewness	.827	.512
		Kurtosis	1.375	.992

The pre- and post-test speaking scores also met the two assumptions underlying a paired samples *t*-test. The student performance in the speaking tests was measured on a .25-point interval scale. As all the values of z_{skew} (.811 and 1.615 for the pre- and post-test scores respectively) and of z_{kurt} (-.634 and 1.386 respectively) were less than ± 1.96 , it can be concluded that the data did not significantly depart from a normal distribution.