
THE DIVERGENCE BETWEEN TRADITIONAL INSTRUCTION AND COMPETENCY-BASED LEARNING: A PEDAGOGICAL COMPARISON

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ABSTRACT

This paper investigates the core differences between two fundamental educational paradigms: content-oriented traditional instruction and learner-centered competency-based training. Traditional teaching methodologies predominantly focus on unilateral knowledge transmission from instructors, rendering learners passive recipients and thereby limiting their independent thinking and real-world problem-solving capacities. Conversely, competency-based instruction centers on the learner, fostering cognitive engagement, autonomy, and emphasizing the integration of knowledge, skills, and behavioral motives within dynamic, real-life contexts. Utilizing a combination of theoretical synthesis and empirical situational analysis, this study elucidates the distinct criteria regarding objectives, curricular content, organizational modalities, and evaluative mechanisms separating the two models. The findings confirm that transitioning to a competency-based paradigm represents an imperative trajectory for enhancing contemporary educational quality.

KEYWORDS: Traditional instruction; Competency development; Teaching methodology; Learner-centered approach; Contemporary education.

1. INTRODUCTION

In the contemporary milieu of globalization and rapid technological advancement, modern education demands a fundamental paradigm shift in instructional philosophy and methodology to optimize learner potential. The traditional pedagogical model, despite its advantages in structural systematization and high logical coherence derived from linear academic design, manifests profound limitations by overemphasizing the instructor's role.

This unilateral, prescriptive mode of transmission frequently renders classroom sessions monotonous, overly theoretical, and diminishes learners' creative application skills when confronting dynamic real-world situations (Nguyễn Văn Cường & Meier, 2012). To mitigate these deficiencies, global and domestic educational frameworks are aggressively pivoting toward a competency-based paradigm. According to Hồ Thị Hồng Cúc (2018), methodological innovation does not entail a radical repudiation of historical instructional merits; rather, it represents an optimization of underperforming practices and the flexible integration of modern strategies to transform instructional training into active self-education. A learner's competency is not merely an innate predisposition, but the cumulative product of deliberate practice, self-cultivation, and the harmonious integration of knowledge, skills, and internal motivation through practical activities (Trần Xuân Phú, 2012). Consequently, this study comprehensively analyzes the ontological differences between these two instructional archetypes, thereby proposing a synchronized framework that empowers educators to deliberately engineer active learning sequences aligned with contemporary educational quality mandates.

2. MATERIALS AND METHODS

This study was executed utilizing a synchronized combination of theoretical and empirical research methodologies to ensure scientific comprehensiveness and depth.

Regarding materials and the theoretical framework, a systematic collection, analysis, and classification of legal documents, political resolutions on educational reform, specialized monographs, and doctoral dissertations were conducted, with specific reference to the foundational work of Hồ Thị Hồng Cúc (2018) on competency-driven pedagogical innovation. The educational philosophy dictating that "theory must cultivate praxis" to avert dogmatic instructional modes served as the primary methodological foundation (Hồ Chí Minh, 2011). Concurrently, modern pedagogical theories, including Vygotsky's (1978) "Zone of Proximal Development"—which stimulates independent meta-cognition—and integrated instructional guidelines for performance-based modular training by Đinh Công Thuyến (2015), were cross-examined to elucidate the criteria differentiating the two models.

For the empirical phase, pedagogical observation was deployed via direct classroom auditing, field notes, and instructional sequence analysis within selected institutions. This procedure aimed to accurately map time allocation ratios between unilateral lecturing and interactive student engagement. Simultaneously, a large-scale sociological survey using questionnaires was administered to a sample size of 300 learners and 200 educators. The survey instruments

were designed to evaluate participants' perceptions regarding the urgency of methodological innovation, proficiency levels in modern pedagogical skills, and psychological friction stemming from historical passive learning habits (Nguyễn Văn Phán, 2014). Additionally, the Delphi method was utilized to incorporate expert consultation from seasoned educational theorists to refine the evaluative criteria.

To empirically validate the feasibility and efficacy of the competency-based instructional model, a structured pedagogical experiment was implemented. Traditional linear lesson plans were systematically re-engineered into horizontal matrices, embedding collaborative problem-solving and authentic case studies. Ultimately, quantitative data derived from the surveys and experimental metrics were processed via mathematical statistics using SPSS and Excel software. This statistical verification provides an objective, empirical demonstration of the superior pedagogical yields generated by the competency paradigm compared to traditional instructional delivery (Phan Văn Ty, 2010).

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1. Ontological Differentiation Between Traditional Instruction and Competency-Based Learning

The convergence of theoretical triangulation and empirical pedagogical experimentation demonstrates an ontological divergence between content-oriented traditional instruction and the learner-centered competency-based paradigm. Situational diagnostics within targeted educational institutions reveal that traditional instruction operates predominantly on a linear structural axis, wherein the instructor functions as an "epistemic authority," delivering unilateral lectures and prescriptive informational monologues. Conversely, the competency-based approach dynamically shifts the pedagogical gravity toward autonomous learner activity sequences. Competency is not an innate, static attribute; rather, it manifests as a dynamic construct, developed and optimized through the active synthesis of professional knowledge, procedural action skills, and vocational attitudes/motives within authentic, real-world contexts (Hò Thị Hồng Cúc, 2018).

To systemic clarify this instructional paradigm shift, the core differentiating criteria between the two educational models are systematically cross-examined in Table 1:

Table 1: Matrix of Core Differentiating Criteria Between Instructional Models.

Criteria	Traditional Instruction (Content-Oriented)	Competency-Based Learning (Competency-Based)
Educational Objectives	Emphasizes the transmission of abstract, academic, and hyper-theoretical knowledge systems.	Fosters performance capabilities, seamlessly integrating knowledge, skills, and attitudes.
Curricular Content	Modeled after the internal logic of academic disciplines; highly theoretical and insular.	Explicitly aligned with learning outcomes, authentic scenarios, and vocational modules.
Organizational Modalities	Monological lecturing, unilateral discourse delivery; passive learner posture.	Execution of active learning sequences, collaborative problem-solving, and peer-to-peer dialogue.
Instructor Role	Primary transmitter of information; exercises absolute control over classroom discourse.	Instructional designer, facilitator, learning scaffold, and objective mediator.
Evaluative Mechanisms	Summative-heavy; prioritizes the cognitive reproduction of memorized content.	Integrated formative and summative evaluation; measures behavioral and practical proficiency.

3.2. Empirical Pedagogical Evaluation and Multidimensional Classroom Interaction

Quantitative metrics derived from the pedagogical experimentation—achieved by re-engineering linear lesson plans into horizontal instructional matrices and integrating active methodologies such as authentic case studies and project-based learning—indicate a statistically significant increase in both cognitive and behavioral performance indexes of learners. As educators minimize monological lecture durations and maximize autonomous learning spaces, learners are compelled to activate critical meta-cognitive strategies to resolve localized practical problems. The essence of this methodological transition lies in the pragmatic operationalization of the pedagogical philosophy that "theory must cultivate praxis," thereby transforming external training into autonomous self-education and preventing learners from falling into dogmatic, rote-learning theoretical structures (Hồ Chí Minh, 2011).

Interaction within the competency-based classroom matrix ceases to be a unilateral line, evolving into a multidimensional networked topography: Instructor ↔ Learner, and Learner

↔ Learner. Data collected via sociological survey instruments indicate that classrooms utilizing the competency model generate substantially higher levels of intrinsic learner motivation and self-regulation. This empirical reality correlates precisely with Vygotsky's (1978) "Zone of Proximal Development," which dictates that when the educator acts as an instructional scaffold, independent meta-cognition and autonomous learning habits are stimulated, empowering learners to internalize complex knowledge systems at an elevated cognitive tier.

3.3. Methodological Discursive Review on Evaluative Innovation and Systemic Barriers

Among the critical insights extracted from the empirical status-quo analysis is the organic, symbiotic codependence between instructional methodology and assessment frameworks. Traditional models routinely over-rely on end-of-term summative essays or objective multiple-choice instruments, which inherently restrict assessment to short-term cognitive retention capacities (Trần Xuân Phú, 2012). In stark contrast, competency-based pedagogy demands a fundamental epistemic shift in evaluative philosophy: a deliberate migration from the *assessment of learning* to *assessment for learning* and *assessment as learning*. The implementation of modern, performance-based evaluative tools—including criteria-referenced rubrics, procedural checklists, and holistic student portfolios—enables instructors to closely track and document the incremental evolution of core learner competencies across the entire instructional timeline.

Nevertheless, discursive consultations with educational experts and survey data highlight persistent systemic barriers impeding this pedagogical migration. A considerable proportion of educators remain anchored to traditional lecturing habits due to behavioral inertia, institutional resistance to change, or a lack of fluency in applying modern pedagogical skills (Nguyễn Văn Phán, 2014). Furthermore, the granular design of learning materials and syllabi modeled after performance-based competency units requires an extensive investment of temporal resources, cognitive labor, and robust technological infrastructure (Đinh Công Thuyền, 2015). Consequently, to guarantee a successful paradigm transition, higher education institutions must deploy a synchronized operational roadmap, encompassing cognitive awareness campaigns, continuous professional development for faculty, comprehensive curricular restructuring, and the standardization of instructional resources aligned with performance-based training frameworks.

4. CONCLUSION

This study has executed a systematic and comprehensive analysis to elucidate the ontological divergence between the content-oriented traditional instruction paradigm and the learner-centered competency-based educational framework. The empirical and theoretical findings confirm that while traditional instruction predominantly emphasizes the linear transmission of abstract, academic knowledge systems—thereby rendering learners passive recipients—the competency-based paradigm centers directly on the learner, fostering cognitive autonomy and active engagement through the dialectical synthesis of knowledge, procedural skills, and behavioral motives within dynamic, authentic contexts (Hồ Thị Hồng Cúc, 2018). This methodological migration represents far more than a technical instructional adjustment; it constitutes a profound educational philosophy revolution: transitioning from an epistemic culture of dogmatic, rote-learning theoretical structures to a praxis-driven philosophy where "theory must cultivate praxis," thereby transforming external training into autonomous self-education to stimulate independent meta-cognition (Hồ Chí Minh, 2011).

The quantitative and qualitative metrics derived from pedagogical experimentation objectively validate the superior yields generated by the competency paradigm. Re-engineering linear lesson plans into horizontal instructional matrices and executing multidimensional interactive sequences produced statistically significant advancements in learners' real-world problem-solving capacities and intrinsic motivation. Nevertheless, situational diagnostics also underscore substantial systemic barriers, most notably behavioral inertia within faculty teaching habits and a lack of instructional resources modeled after performance-based modular units (Nguyễn Văn Phán, 2014). To fully actualize educational innovation, institutions must deploy a synchronized operational roadmap, encompassing continuous professional development for faculty and a fundamental epistemic shift in evaluative philosophy—deliberately migrating from summative metrics to integrated formative assessment for learning (Trần Xuân Phú, 2012). Transitioning to competency-based training is no longer an optional, transitory pedagogical alternative, but an imperative strategic vector for optimizing human capital quality in the contemporary global era.

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