

# CBLT programs for non-English majors at universities in Vietnam: Management of some input and output factors

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**Abstract:** *Competency-based language teaching (CBLT) is not a new trend in language education. However, there have not been many studies related to CBLT management in higher education in Vietnam. The researcher has, therefore, conducted an investigation into CBLT practical and managerial situations at 4 universities in Vietnam to find out how well CBLT has been managed, with focus on input and output elements. 385 participants answered the survey questionnaires. Some problems have been discovered in the management practices. Recommendations to improve CBLT management are drawn accordingly.*

**Keywords:** *CBLT, input management, output management*

## 1. Introduction

The goal of competency-based language teaching as pointed out by Paul (2008), Richards&Rodgers (2001) that it requires learners to demonstrate that they can USE the language to communicate effectively, specially in various professional or occupational situations. Language teaching in Vietnam seems to be going in the same direction but the ‘speed’ would be different at different universities.

In fact, the results of language teaching and learning of non-language-majors in Vietnamese universities are limited. Lecturers, lack of CBLT literacy, do not fully understand their importance of equipping students with workplace-required knowledge and language skills. Students themselves are not fully aware of the role and importance of foreign languages, especially what are essential for their future professional activities, which even reduces their already-low motivation and autonomy. Consequently, both language teachers and learners would fail to achieve outcomes required by the society and employers.

Teachers and students are defined as part of the input and output factors of management, following context-input-process-output approach (Loan&Thuc, 2018). This article focuses on these two factors of management of CBLT programs for non-language-majors at universities in Vietnam to find out how well CBLT has been managed. As business management majors are quite popular and chosen at many universities, the author investigate business English teaching and learning at some universities in Hanoi, Vietnam.

## 2. Literature review

### 2.1. Competency-based language teaching

According to Tran Khanh Duc (2015), competency is “ the ability to acquire knowledge and apply holistically one’s potentials (knowledge, skills, attitude, physical strength, belief...) to complete a task effectively and efficiently, or deal with a situation at work within specific conditions upto specified standards”

CBLT is designed not around the notion of subject knowledge but around the notion of competency. The focus moves from what students know about language to what they can do with it. The focus on competencies or learning outcomes underpins the curriculum framework and syllabus specification, teaching strategies, assessment and reporting. Instead of norm-referencing assessment, criterion-based assessment procedures are used in which learners are assessed according to how well they can perform on specific learning tasks (Richards & Rogers, 2001).

CBLT can be featured as output-oriented. CBLT program/course must identify the competencies that learners need to achieve based on workplace standards; they are considered as results, outputs of the training process. These competencies is made explicit to learners at the beginning of the program/course (Paul, 2008). Another feature is in the management. Competency-based teaching focuses on solving problems, on forming competence for learners rather than focusing on solving program content. The assessment of student learning outcomes is based on performance standards. Performance standards are determined primarily from occupational standards;

Only when learners have “met” all the standards set will they be recognized as having completed the training program. (Griffith & Lim, 2010; Richards & Rogers, 2001).

**2.2. Input and output factor in management of CBLT programs**

Input includes admission process, training programs, teachers, learners, facilities and equipment while output refers to graduates, learners’ needs, job compatibility (the ability to adapt), employability (the ability to meet workplace requirements) (Loan&Thuc, 2018). As mentioned in the introduction, this paper focuses on the management of students and teachers-related factors.

**Students: entry level and autonomy**

In the CBLT approach, students also have a role to play in deciding which competency is right for them. In other words, students need to take an active role in the skills to be taken. Students learn about these competencies across multiple public channels and also understand the intended use of the competencies. Students will repeat a program until they meet the output requirements (Richards & Rodgers, 2001).

Students are at the center of the teaching process. However, in fact, foreign language learning results are not achieved as expected because “students do not actively explore and study materials before and after class, although teachers have always tried to make the most of the instruction for students to self-study, and practise outside of class”. If students do not actively self-study outside of class, they will not be able to meet the language skills requirements. Lacking basic English will greatly hinder the acquisition of knowledge as well as language skills for students in English for occupational purpose modules. Thus, at the end of the English program, many students fail to apply English in the professional working environment.

Students are expected not to rely solely on teachers but on their own autonomy. They act more like an apprentice in the class, trying to mastering from a competency to another. Students must be willing to challenge, to question, and to initiate in the CBLT classroom (Marcellino, 2005).

**Management of students input and output information**

Management of the output of CBLT process requires feedback from alumni and employers, including: i) Analysis of foreign language assessment results, ii) Collection of student feedback if they can

meet job requirements in general, iii) Collection of feedback from graduates if they can meet job requirements in terms of language skills, and iv) Collection of feedback from employers if they can meet job requirements in terms of language skills (Loan&Thuc, 2018).

**Teachers’ capacity in CBLT programs**

The role of teachers in teaching CBLT courses has no specific definition. Teachers need to give positive and constructive feedback to help learners progress. Teachers also need to understand the needs of learners so that they feel welcomed every time they come to class. Teachers do not need to urge students because the instructions do not follow the time requirements. In addition, teachers are assigned with designing activities and developing content in accordance with the competencies. Teachers would be favour in the role of a facilitator and material developers (Richards & Rogers, 2001)

Management of teachers includes quality assurance (in terms of number and capacity), organising professional development activities, communication of strategies, leading innovations in teaching methods and modes, encouraging life-long learning among teachers (Loan & Thuc, 2018).

**2.3. Method of the study**

Collection instruments are survey questionnaires for students and for teachers. The 385 participants are 93 English teachers, 11 middle managers (subject leaders and deans) in the faculties of languages and 281 non-english majored students from four Hanoi-based universities: Hoa Binh University (HBU), Hanoi University of Industry (HaUI), National Economic University (NEU) and Thanh Do University (TDU) (see table 1)

*Table 1. Participants in the survey*

university	Managers (%)	Teachers (%)	Students (%)
HaUI	46	39	49
HBU	27	14	12
NEU	9	32	23
TDU	18	15	16

Questionnaire for teachers and managers, adapted from Tran Trung Dung (2015), consists of 2 questions for literacy of CBLT, 1 for CBLT practices and 9 for management of CBLT program. Questionnaire for students are adapted from Dinh Thi Hong Tham (2018), with 1 question for autonomy, and the rest for practices and management of CBLT program. 5-scale Likert is applied in the questionnaire with 1 is the lowest and 5 is the highest.

## 2.4. Findings and discussion

### 2.4.1. Students related factors

Entry information management

Table 2 shows average scores from teachers and manager’s questionnaire shows average scores from students’.

Table 2. Entry information management: teacher’s and student’s perception

Participants	Teacher’s			Students’	
	P test	Extra class	P. test used	P test	Extra class
NEU	3.43	3.40	2.30	3.98	3.89
HaUI	3.42	3.42	2.17	4	3.96
HBU	3.15	2.00	2.00	2.94	2.48
TDU	3.23	2.08	2.08	3.26	3.04
Managers	3.30	2.90	2.50		

All institutions conduct placement test (Ptest). While two bigger bodies have good scores, HBU and TDU are assessed as Satisfactory. ‘Satisfactory’ is explained that ‘for the admission of small number of students at different time, some late registers join English classes without placement test. Similarly, small numbers of students make it impossible (due to management cost) to organise extra classes, especially with certain number of major whose enrolment is low. However, all four universities have not used placement test results to form classes of student with similar English proficiency.

Graduate information management

Students are not fully confident in their English ability in the working environment. Students’ perceptions do share similar points with teachers’ about graduation information. shown in Table 3.

Table 3. Graduation information management: teacher’s perception

Parti- pants	Number/Scale					Average
	5	4	3	2	1	
NEU	8	0	3	1	18	2.21
HaUI	5	6	2	0	23	2.17
HBU	0	0	1	3	7	2
TDU	0	2	4	2	6	2.08
Managers	0	0	6	5	0	2.55

The averages of all 5 groups of participants (ranging from 2 to 2.55, not upto satisfactory level with all the averages lower than 2.6) show that 4 universities have fair collection of graduates’ information. Actually, all universities have surveyed annually if graduates are employed or not within 6-12 months after graduation. However, the survey does not ask graduates any items on the application of language at their workplace.

Therefore, managers lack evidence about the real success of the language program they have provided.

Students’ autonomy

Year 1 and 2 students have very low level of autonomy, agreeing that they can not learn without teachers’ supervision or learn well without depending on teachers. Seeking support from other learners or teachers is not a regular move for students, they can quit easily when meeting hard questions.

### 2.4.2. Teachers’ related factors

Teachers’ resource is diverse, young and old, new and experienced, full-time and part-time. However, the majority are fulltime and have master degree. The marjority of the teachers do not have any degree related to the content of students’ majors.

Teachers’ awareness might be of concern as over 50% of the participant are not sure or wrong when answering CBLT-literacy questions. Teachers from HaUI and NEU are highly aware the importance of CBLT practice whereas HBU and TDU show low percentage, which would be an obstacle for the two in implementing CBLT programs.

## 3. Conclusion

CBLT has been being practised at various scales in the management of students and teachers-related input and output factors at some universities in Vietnam. HaUI and NEU show better CBLT management in terms of organising placement tests and extra classes, teachers’ awareness of importance of CBLT programs. Poor management practices are shown in forming results-based classes, collection of language capability at workplaces, Students’ low entry level and autonomy is another problem for school managers.

It is recommended that increasing teacher’s awareness might be the start of teacher training programs at universities. Collection of language capability at workplaces should be added for better information management.

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