

## ALIGNING TEACHING METHODS WITH LEARNING OUTCOMES: LECTURERS' PERCEPTIONS AND PRACTICES IN A VIETNAMESE UNIVERSITY CONTEXT

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ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
<b>Received:</b> 19/5/2025	This study investigates the extent to which teaching methods are aligned with learning outcomes in a Vietnamese public university, focusing on lecturers' understanding and implementation of constructive alignment. Using a mixed-methods approach, the study analyzed 340 course syllabi through content analysis and surveyed 264 lecturers using a structured Likert-scale questionnaire. Results show that while lecturers demonstrate general awareness of learning outcomes, many lack the pedagogical training necessary to operationalize them effectively. Teaching methods were often selected based on convenience or institutional norms rather than alignment with outcome levels. More active or constructivist methods, such as project-based learning or inquiry-based strategies, were used infrequently, and alignment planning tools were often absent. Structural challenges such as large class sizes and high workloads further constrained innovation. The study concludes by recommending targeted training modules, alignment mapping tools, and institutional incentives to foster more meaningful outcome-based practices across departments.
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## GẮN KẾT PHƯƠNG PHÁP GIẢNG DẠY VỚI CHUẨN ĐẦU RA: NHẬN THỨC VÀ THỰC TIỄN CỦA GIÁNG VIÊN TẠI MỘT TRƯỜNG ĐẠI HỌC VIỆT NAM

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THÔNG TIN BÀI BÁO	TÓM TẮT
<b>Ngày nhận bài:</b> 19/5/2025	Nghiên cứu này khảo sát mức độ gắn kết giữa các phương pháp giảng dạy với chuẩn đầu ra học phần tại một trường đại học công lập ở Việt Nam, tập trung vào nhận thức và thực hành của giảng viên trong bối cảnh giáo dục định hướng chuẩn đầu ra. Với thiết kế phương pháp hỗn hợp, nghiên cứu đã phân tích 340 đề cương học phần và khảo sát 264 giảng viên thông qua bảng hỏi theo thang đo Likert có cấu trúc. Kết quả cho thấy rằng mặc dù nhiều giảng viên thể hiện nhận thức chung về chuẩn đầu ra, họ thường thiếu kiến thức sự phạm cần thiết để vận dụng hiệu quả trong thiết kế và triển khai giảng dạy. Các phương pháp giảng dạy thường được lựa chọn dựa trên thói quen hoặc tính khả thi trong lớp học, thay vì dựa trên sự phù hợp với các cấp độ nhận thức của chuẩn đầu ra. Các phương pháp chủ động như học tập dự án, học tập theo hướng tìm tòi, hay trò chơi hóa hầu như ít được áp dụng, trong khi đó gần như thiếu các công cụ hỗ trợ liên kết như ma trận đối chiếu chuẩn đầu ra. Những hạn chế lớn bao gồm quy mô lớp học đông, khối lượng giảng dạy nặng nề, và sự hỗ trợ hạn chế từ phía nhà trường đối với đổi mới sự phạm. Nghiên cứu nhấn mạnh khoảng cách lớn giữa kỳ vọng chính sách và thực tiễn lớp học, qua đó cho thấy sự cần thiết cấp bách của việc đào tạo chuyên biệt, cung cấp công cụ thực hành, và cơ chế khuyến khích để đảm bảo thực hiện hiệu quả giáo dục định hướng chuẩn đầu ra.
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## 1. Introduction

In recent decades, the reform of higher education in Vietnam has emphasized a shift from content-based to competency-based teaching. Central to this transformation is the concept of constructive alignment, which calls for a close connection between learning outcomes (LOs), teaching methods (TMs), and assessment strategies [1]. This approach, first introduced by Biggs [1], requires instructors to design learning activities that directly support the achievement of intended LOs, thereby ensuring coherence throughout the curriculum and pedagogical process.

The importance of aligning TMs with LOs has been widely recognized in international education reforms, such as the Bologna Process in Europe [2] and outcome-based education frameworks in Asia [3]. In Vietnam, recent policy documents, including the National Qualifications Framework [4] and Circular No. 17/2021/TT-BGDĐT [5], have mandated that all higher education programs clearly define and implement LOs in both teaching and assessment practices. However, despite policy efforts, there remains a significant gap between intended outcomes and actual classroom practices. While many course syllabi may list LOs formally, the extent to which teaching practices are truly aligned with these outcomes remains questionable [6], particularly from the perspectives of lecturers who design and deliver instruction.

Previous studies have examined students' perceptions of LOs and their attainment [7], [8]. Yet little empirical work has been conducted to explore how lecturers themselves understand and implement the alignment of TMs with intended LOs. This lack of insight is problematic, as lecturers are key actors in operationalizing educational reforms. Their perceptions, beliefs, and institutional constraints directly affect the feasibility and fidelity of constructive alignment in practice [8]-[10]. Moreover, alignment challenges are not confined to Vietnam: recent research [11] highlights similar tensions in European higher education, showing that while learning outcomes and assessment are expected to be coherently linked, in practice they often remain disconnected unless practical tools and institutional support are provided. This study, therefore, aims to investigate lecturers' perspectives on the alignment between TMs and LOs in the context of a Vietnamese public university. It seeks to answer the following research questions:

- How do lecturers understand the concept and role of LOs in curriculum design and teaching?
- What TMs are currently used, and to what extent are they perceived as aligned with intended LOs?
- What challenges and supports affect lecturers' efforts to implement constructive alignment?

To address these questions, the study employs a mixed-methods approach, combining content analysis of course syllabi with a quantitative survey of university lecturers. This design responds to prior calls for more empirical evidence on the operationalization of learning outcomes beyond student perspectives [7] and extends existing discussions on aligning teaching methods with outcome-based frameworks [12]. By situating the findings within established research on effective instructional strategies [13], the study contributes to current debates on pedagogical alignment in higher education and offers practical insights for institutional training, curriculum development, and policy implementation. The remainder of this article is structured as follows: Section 2 presents the research methodology, including design, participants, and instruments. Section 3 reports and discusses the findings from both phases of the study. Section 4 concludes with implications for practice and directions for future research.

## 2. Materials and Methods

### 2.1. Design and Context

This study employed a two-phase mixed-methods design to explore the alignment between TMs and LOs from the perspective of university lecturers. In Phase 1, a content analysis of course syllabi was conducted to examine how LOs were articulated and whether TMs listed in the syllabi corresponded to those outcomes. In Phase 2, a quantitative survey was administered to university lecturers in order to gain deeper insights into their understanding, application, and perceived challenges in implementing constructive alignment in their teaching practices.

The research was conducted at a large multidisciplinary public university in southern Vietnam, where outcome-based education has been formally adopted since 2015. The institution mandates the use of standardized course syllabi that include clearly defined LOs, corresponding TMs, and assessment strategies. However, the degree to which alignment is realized in practice remains unclear, particularly when comparing across different academic faculties and undergraduate program levels.

## **2.2. Sample and Participants**

In Phase 1, the study collected and analyzed a total of 340 course syllabi from 15 academic faculties at a large public university in southern Vietnam, representing a wide range of disciplines including natural sciences, social sciences, engineering, and education. These syllabi were selected through purposive sampling to ensure representation across faculties. In Phase 2, the survey was distributed to a stratified sample of 264 lecturers from 13 faculties of the university, all of whom were actively involved in undergraduate and/or postgraduate teaching. Participants were invited via email and internal institutional networks. Participation was voluntary and anonymous. The final sample included lecturers from diverse academic ranks (assistant lecturers to professors), teaching experience levels, and disciplinary backgrounds.

## **2.3. Instrumentation**

Two main instruments were developed and employed in this study. First, a content analysis coding matrix was created to assess the alignment between TMs and LOs in each syllabus. The matrix was adapted from frameworks proposed by Biggs [1] and further informed by the AUN-QA model [14]. The coding focused on three key dimensions: (1) clarity and measurability of LOs; (2) diversity of TMs listed; and (3) alignment between methods and intended outcomes, especially at different cognitive levels. Second, a structured questionnaire was developed to explore lecturers' perceptions and experiences. The questionnaire included four parts: (1) demographic information, (2) awareness and understanding of LOs, (3) frequency and purpose of using various TMs, (4) perceived challenges and institutional supports. Most items were measured using a five-point Likert scale (from 1 = Strongly disagree to 5 = Strongly agree), with several open-ended items to capture additional commentary.

The questionnaire was administered online using a secure institutional platform. A pilot test with 15 lecturers confirmed the instrument's clarity and internal consistency. Based on feedback from the pilot, minor adjustments were made to the wording of two Likert items for clarity. The overall Cronbach's alpha coefficient for the Likert-scale items was 0.91, indicating high reliability.

## **2.4. Data Analysis**

For the content analysis of syllabi, data were coded manually using the developed matrix and entered into Excel for frequency analysis. The coding process was guided by principles from Krippendorff's content analysis methodology [15] to ensure validity and inter-coder reliability. Descriptive statistics such as frequency counts and percentages were used to summarize the presence or absence of alignment features.

For survey data, the SPSS 26.0 software was employed. Descriptive statistics including means, standard deviations, and percentages were calculated to explore patterns in lecturers' responses. Tables were used to illustrate findings across faculties and teaching experience levels. No inferential statistics were conducted, since the study aimed primarily to describe trends and perceptions rather than test causal relationships.

## **3. Results and Discussion**

### **3.1. Overview of TMs in Course Syllabi**

The content analysis of 340 course syllabi revealed a wide range of TMs employed across academic departments. As shown in Table 1, the traditional lecture-based approach remained

dominant, appearing in 298 syllabi (approximately 88%). This was followed by group discussion (212 syllabi). Meanwhile, active learning methods such as problem-based learning (PBL), project-based learning, and case study were less frequently integrated.

By contrast, innovative methods like flipped classrooms, field trips, and simulation/game-based learning appeared in fewer than 50 syllabi, indicating limited adoption of contemporary pedagogical models despite their alignment with higher-order LOs.

**Table 1.** *TMs and their corresponding LOs*

Teaching Method	Frequency in Syllabi	Typical Corresponding LOs
Lecture	298	Knowledge comprehension
Group Discussion	212	Communication skills
Problem-Based Learning	94	Problem-solving
Project-Based Learning	86	Teamwork and application
Case Study	77	Critical thinking
Flipped Classroom	45	Self-directed learning
Field Trip	28	Real-world connection
Simulation/Game-Based Learning	17	Creative thinking

*(n = 340 syllabi from 15 departments)*

Despite the institutional push for outcome-based education, the dominance of lecture-based teaching suggests a potential misalignment between TMs and the diversity of LOs expected in contemporary curricula [1]. While lower-order outcomes such as knowledge recall are well-served by lectures, higher-order competencies, including collaboration, creativity, and problem-solving, require more interactive methods [2], [14].

The limited use of project-based, inquiry-driven, or experiential methods may reflect systemic constraints such as large class sizes, lack of pedagogical training, or rigid assessment formats. These findings therefore echo prior research in the Vietnamese context, which has noted a gap between the policy discourse on active learning and the realities of classroom implementation [3].

### 3.2. Lecturers' Understanding of LOs

The survey results revealed significant variation in lecturers' understanding and perceptions of LOs. While a majority of respondents indicated basic familiarity with the concept, deeper understanding, particularly regarding the formulation, application, and alignment of LOs, was often limited.

As shown in Table 2, when asked whether they fully understood the definition and pedagogical function of LOs, only 42.4% of lecturers agreed or strongly agreed. Meanwhile, 36.7% selected "neutral," and 20.9% expressed disagreement or strong disagreement. These figures suggest that although outcome-based education has been institutionally mandated, a large portion of academic staff remain uncertain about how to operationalize the concept in practice.

Regarding the ability to differentiate between cognitive, affective, and psychomotor LOs, only 29.5% reported confidence in making such distinctions. This lack of clarity may result in the frequent use of ambiguous or overly general outcome statements (e.g., "understand," "know," "apply well"), which are common across the course syllabi analyzed in Phase 1. As noted by Biggs [1] and Kennedy et al. [14], the measurability and specificity of LOs are essential for enabling alignment with teaching strategies and assessment practices.

Lecturers were also asked whether they refer to national qualification frameworks or institutional guidelines when writing or reviewing course LOs. While 58.3% acknowledged doing so, many indicated that such practices were "more for formal compliance" than for informing actual instructional design. This aligns with previous research indicating a disconnect between policy-level reforms and grassroots implementation [6].

**Table 2.** Lecturers' responses on understanding LOs ( $n = 264$ )

Survey Statement	Agree/Strongly Agree (%)	Neutral (%)	Disagree/Strongly Disagree (%)
I fully understand the meaning and purpose of LOs.	42.4	36.7	20.9
I can distinguish cognitive, affective, and psychomotor types of outcomes.	29.5	40.2	30.3
I often refer to institutional or national frameworks when writing LOs.	58.3	22.1	19.6

Overall, the data suggests that while lecturers generally recognize the theoretical importance of LOs, many lack the conceptual clarity and practical support needed to apply them meaningfully in course planning. This finding underscores the need for targeted professional development programs, including workshops on writing measurable LOs and constructing alignment matrices that map learning objectives to TMs and assessments.

### 3.3. TMs and their perceived alignment

The survey results reveal a strong reliance on conventional TMs, with lectures, group discussion, and team-based learning being the most frequently employed strategies (see Table 3). These methods generally align with lower to mid-level LOs such as comprehension, communication, and application [1], [14]. While certain active learning approaches, like problem-based learning and presentations, are also used regularly, they are often embedded within traditional formats rather than constituting a shift in pedagogy. In contrast, more constructivist or experiential methods such as project-based learning, task-based instruction, inquiry-based learning, and gamification were used only occasionally, whereas techniques like role-play, blended learning, and learning contracts being rarely applied [8], [10].

**Table 3.** Frequency of TMs used by lecturers in course delivery ( $n = 264$ )

Teaching Method	Mean $\pm$ SD	Interpretation
Lecture	4.42 $\pm$ 0.75	Frequently
Group Discussion	3.94 $\pm$ 0.93	Frequently
Problem-Based Learning	3.77 $\pm$ 0.94	Frequently
Team-Based Learning	4.05 $\pm$ 0.81	Frequently
Project-Based Learning	3.12 $\pm$ 1.14	Occasionally
Case-Based Learning	3.59 $\pm$ 1.05	Frequently
Task-Based Learning	3.13 $\pm$ 1.13	Occasionally
Inquiry-Based Learning	3.16 $\pm$ 1.18	Occasionally
Practice	3.88 $\pm$ 1.05	Frequently
Field Trips	3.50 $\pm$ 1.22	Frequently
Simulation/Game-Based Learning	2.91 $\pm$ 1.23	Occasionally
Role Play/Drama	2.57 $\pm$ 1.36	Occasionally
Presentation/Seminar	4.09 $\pm$ 0.98	Frequently
Laboratory	3.20 $\pm$ 1.51	Occasionally
Demonstration	2.80 $\pm$ 1.39	Occasionally
Service Learning	2.77 $\pm$ 1.23	Occasionally
Learning Contract	2.49 $\pm$ 1.23	Rarely
WebQuest	2.47 $\pm$ 1.35	Rarely
Blended Learning	2.13 $\pm$ 1.27	Rarely
Hands-On/Inquiry Science	2.78 $\pm$ 1.35	Occasionally
Narrative Pedagogy	2.84 $\pm$ 1.22	Occasionally

This limited diversity in pedagogical strategies suggests that many lecturers continue to operate within familiar instructional zones, selecting methods based primarily on practicality and content delivery rather than explicit alignment with cognitive complexity or outcome specificity [12]. Although the mean frequency across all methods was moderate ( $M = 3.15$ ), the underutilization of

methods supporting higher-order thinking, such as evaluation, synthesis, and metacognition, raises concerns about the depth of engagement and competency development in the curriculum [13].

These findings underscore a key tension in outcome-based education: the disconnect between well-intentioned LOs and actual classroom practice. As highlighted in Section 3.2, this gap may be symptomatic of broader systemic limitations, including lack of pedagogical training on alignment, insufficient instructional support, and an absence of formalized planning tools such as outcome-method matrices [9]. If institutions do not provide mechanisms to foster intentional alignment, teaching methods may remain disconnected from the learning outcomes they are supposed to support. In such cases, constructive alignment risks becoming a procedural ideal rather than a pedagogical reality.

Beyond instructional practices, the study also examined the underlying considerations which lecturers rely on when designing course-level LOs. As shown in Table 4, survey responses indicate a high degree of consensus across seven key factors, with labor market demands ( $M = 4.41$ ) and professional standards ( $M = 4.35$ ) ranking highest. This underscores a growing alignment between curriculum development and employability concerns, which is consistent with broader trends in outcome-based education that prioritize workforce relevance [2], [3].

Other commonly cited influences included course content ( $M = 4.28$ ), program-level outcome descriptions ( $M = 4.31$ ), and learner needs ( $M = 4.26$ ) [6], [9]. These findings suggest that most lecturers draw on a blend of institutional guidelines, teaching experience, and contextual knowledge when constructing outcomes, rather than viewing LOs development as a top-down or purely formalistic exercise [5]. Interestingly, prior teaching experience ( $M = 3.97$ ) and LOs from similar courses ( $M = 4.03$ ), though still important, received relatively lower emphasis, which possibly reflects the absence of collaborative curricular design across departments [10].

Taken together, the average agreement across all items ( $M = 4.23$ ) and a strong internal consistency (Cronbach's  $\alpha = 0.870$ ) point to a thoughtful and multifaceted approach to outcome formulation. However, this solid conceptual foundation does not necessarily translate into practice. As discussed in Section 3.3, many TMs remain disconnected from these well-intentioned outcomes. Without institutional mechanisms such as alignment matrices or team-based outcome-method planning, lecturers may struggle to fully operationalize the learning goals they design, leaving a critical gap between curriculum intention and classroom delivery [8], [12].

**Table 4.** Lecturers' agreement on foundations for constructing course-level LOs ( $n = 264$ )

Factor Considered	Mean $\pm$ SD	Level of Agreement
Labor market demands	4.41 $\pm$ 0.75	Agree
Learners' needs	4.26 $\pm$ 0.78	Agree
Teaching experience	3.97 $\pm$ 0.93	Agree
Program-level LOs	4.31 $\pm$ 0.79	Agree
Course content	4.28 $\pm$ 0.79	Agree
LOs from similar courses	4.03 $\pm$ 0.86	Agree
Professional standards / occupational norms	4.35 $\pm$ 0.77	Agree

### 3.4. Constraints and recommendations

Despite growing policy emphasis on outcome-based education, this study identified several persistent constraints that impede effective alignment between TMs and LOs. Chief among these is the lack of pedagogical training: although lecturers acknowledge the importance of LOs, over 64% reported not receiving adequate guidance on how to translate them into concrete teaching strategies (see Table 5). Workshops often emphasize formal compliance over meaningful instructional planning, leaving many lecturers uncertain about how to operationalize alignment in practice [1], [11], [14].

Structural challenges also play a significant role. With 71.2% of respondents citing large class sizes, high teaching loads, and inflexible course structures as limiting factors, the feasibility of

implementing active or learner-centered methods remains constrained [9], [10]. Additionally, nearly 60% of lecturers pointed to the absence of alignment tools, such as planning matrices or structured syllabus templates, as a barrier, forcing them to default to familiar methods like lectures regardless of their compatibility with intended outcomes [8].

**Table 5.** *Reported constraints in implementing constructive alignment*

<b>Constraint</b>	<b>Reported by (%)</b>
Lack of training on aligning TMs with LOs	64.4
Large class sizes and high teaching load	71.2
Lack of alignment templates/tools	59.8
Perception that alignment is bureaucratic rather than pedagogical	52.5
Limited institutional incentives for pedagogical innovation	46.1

According to Biggs' theory of constructive alignment, effective teaching requires a coherent relationship between intended learning outcomes, the teaching methods employed, and the assessment strategies used to evaluate achievement. This coherence is central to ensuring that instructional practices not only transmit content but also foster the specific cognitive, affective, or psychomotor competencies intended by the curriculum. However, findings from this study suggest that such coherence is often fragmented in practice. The lack of alignment tools, such as matrices that map outcomes to methods, and limited pedagogical training mean that lecturers may design learning outcomes without having the strategies or structures in place to activate them effectively in the classroom. This breakdown in alignment undermines the core premise of outcome-based education and reduces the framework to a procedural requirement rather than a meaningful pedagogical approach.

To bridge these gaps, universities should invest in sustained professional development that emphasizes practical alignment techniques, including how to select methods based on cognitive levels of LOs [1], [12]. Course design templates should be updated to include alignment components, and departments could implement peer review mechanisms to support reflective planning. Finally, institutional incentives, such as teaching awards or flexible workload policies, can motivate lecturers to innovate beyond procedural conformity and engage more meaningfully with the goals of outcome-based education [8].

#### **4. Conclusion**

Grounded in Biggs' theory of constructive alignment, this study examined how TMs align with LOs in a Vietnamese university and revealed a consistent gap between policy ideals and instructional realities. While lecturers demonstrated general awareness of LOs, many lacked confidence in designing or operationalizing them pedagogically. TMs were often chosen out of habit or logistical convenience rather than in alignment with intended goals. Active learning remained underutilized, and institutional supports for pedagogical innovation were limited, reflecting structural and training deficits that hinder the implementation of outcome-based education.

To address these challenges, higher education institutions should prioritize the development of practical training modules on constructive alignment and embed alignment matrices into curriculum design processes. Such strategies would help lecturers map learning outcomes to appropriate teaching methods more intentionally, ensuring that the principles of outcome-based education are not only understood but also effectively enacted in the classroom. At the same time, the findings reveal a persistent gap between formal policy requirements and actual teaching practices, where lecturers often lack the pedagogical tools and institutional support needed to implement alignment. Bridging this gap requires institutional reforms, including revising teaching evaluation policies to recognize alignment efforts and introducing incentives for pedagogical innovation. These measures can enhance compliance with national policies while promoting sustainable integration of outcome-based practices across faculties.

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