VIETNAMESE INSTRUCTORS' PROGRESS IN TEACHING CONCEPTIONS TOWARDS STUDENT- CENTEREDNESS

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ARTICLE INFO		ABSTRACT
Received:	12/03/2025	University instructors' conceptions of teaching have long been a significant focus of educational research. However, the majority of previous studies have concentrated on two opposing extremes: a completely teacher-centered or a fully learner-centered model. Very few studies have explored the transitional process between these two paradigms. To address this gap, the present study adopts Kember's theoretical framework on intermediate conceptions of teaching to examine the shifting perceptions of a group of Vietnamese university instructors regarding the nature of teaching. Drawing on data collected from a survey (n = 310), semi-structured interviews (n = 27), and classroom observations (n = 7), the study reveals that lecturers have begun to move away from a purely teacher-centered teaching model as they demonstrate an increasing awareness of the principles underlying learner-centeredness, namely defining learning objectives in alignment with student needs; selecting teaching content in accordance with student prior accumulation; employing interactive teaching methods; implementing technology-based teaching activities; promoting students knowledge transfer ability and implementing formative assessment practices. However, this learner-centered transformation remains incomplete due to a range of contextual factors including administrative pressures and rigid curricula. This indicates a transitional phase in teaching conceptions.
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SỰ TIẾN BỘ TRONG QUAN NIỆM GIẢNG DẠY HƯỚNG ĐẾN LẤY NGƯỜI HỌC LÀM TRUNG TÂM CỦA GIẢNG VIÊN VIỆT NAM

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THÔNG TIN BÀI BÁO		TÓM TẮT
Ngày nhận bài:	12/03/2025	Quan niệm giảng dạy của giảng viên đã từ lâu là trọng tâm của nhiều nghiên cứu giáo dục. Tuy nhiên, phần lớn các nghiên cứu chỉ tập trung vào hai cực đối lập: giảng dạy hoàn toàn lấy giáo viên làm trung tâm hoặc hoàn toàn lấy người học làm trung tâm, trong khi giai đoạn chuyển tiếp giữa hai mô hình này vẫn chưa được khám phá đầy đủ. Nhằm khắc phục những hạn chế còn tồn tại đó, nghiên cứu này vận dụng khung lý thuyết của Kember về các quan niệm giảng dạy trung gian để khảo sát sự thay đổi nhận thức của một nhóm giảng viên đại học Việt Nam về bản chất của giảng dạy. Dữ liệu thu thập từ khảo sát (n = 310), phỏng vấn bán cấu trúc (n = 27) và quan sát lớp học (n = 7) cho thấy nhiều giảng viên đã bắt đầu rời bỏ mô hình dạy học thuần túy lấy giáo viên làm trung tâm vì đã nhận thức được các nguyên lý dạy học lấy người học làm trung tâm, bao gồm việc xác định mục tiêu học tập gắn với nhu cầu của người học; lựa chọn nội dung phù hợp với kiến thức và kinh nghiệm của các em; sử dụng phương pháp dạy học tương tác; ứng dụng công nghệ thông tin; áp dụng kiến thức để giải quyết các vấn đề mới lạ ngoài thực tế và triển khai đánh giá dựa trên quá trình. Tuy nhiên, việc chuyển đổi này vẫn chưa hoàn thiện do giáo viên còn chịu ảnh hưởng từ các rào cản như áp lực hành chính và chương trình đào tạo cứng nhắc. Kết quả nghiên cứu phản ánh sự tồn tại của một giai đoạn chuyển tiếp trong quan niệm giảng dạy.
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1. Introduction

Phenomenography argues that people experience the world differently because their experiences are always partial [1]. At any given time and context, people notice and focus on different aspects of the same phenomenon. This means that the way a person experiences something depends on which aspects of the phenomenon they discerned, and not discerned, in their awareness of it. Awareness of an aspect is indicated by the perception of the potential for variation in that aspect.

At the same time, each way of experiencing may be understood as part of a larger whole, the collective sum of ways of experiencing. These different experiences are interconnected, as people share awareness of certain aspects while differing in others. Thus, the different ways of experiencing that emerge are not constituted independently, but in relation to each other. These different ways of experiencing are commonly ordered in terms of inclusivity of awareness, where more inclusive ways also represent more complex ways of experiencing the phenomenon. As such, during phenomenographic data analysis for educational research, teaching conceptions held by teachers are categorized in a structurally related hierarchy of inclusiveness.

Developed from a review on 1990's educational studies, the model of multiple–level categorization model of teaching conceptions [2], as shown in Figure 1, is the excellent reflection of the inclusivity of awareness. In particular, the teaching views in the intermediate category: *teacher-student interaction* are more advanced than those in the *teachers-centered category* at the one end of the continuum. Indeed, instructors-participants in the mediating category assist students in actively integrating new textbook content into their existing knowledge. In contrast, those in latter tend to disregard this tutorial support because they focus mainly on students memorizing factual information rather than engaging in deeper learning [2].

As also manifested at the outset, teaching views are categorized based on teachers' awareness of key aspects. This awareness is reflected in their ability to recognize different potential variations in those aspects. Hence, the intermediate category is still less advanced than the learner-centered category at the opposite end of the continuum. In fact, instructors in both categories understand the importance of cognitive engagement but those in the truly learner-centered category also recognize the humanistic aspects associated with this cognitive integration. This deeper understanding is evidenced in how they empowered students to freely criticize the input as they build their own knowledge [2]. In this context, the instructors in the intermediate category have moved beyond traditional teaching owing to their recognition of aspects of teaching that are overlooked by their strictly teaching-centered counterparts. At the same time, the former still has yet to grasp the key principles needed to become truly student-centered teachers; hence, they merely stand at the threshold of a more progressive orientation. To simply put, the intermediate category marks the transitional shift from a purely teacher-centered toward a genuinely learner- oriented approach.

Learner–oriented teaching is increasingly recognized a vital strategy for educational reform globally and recently has been imported into the Eastern from the Western context as a reform model for higher education (HE) [3]. The push for shifting to this learning even gets stronger in Vietnam [4] as Vietnamese HE is undergoing a comprehensive and profound reform process to meet the demands of industrialization, modernization, and international integration. Indeed, Resolution No. 29-NQ/TW issued in 2013 laid the foundation for a fundamental and comprehensive renovation of education, aiming to develop a high-quality human resource to support the country's sustainable development [5]. In this context, Vietnamese HE institutions are facing various challenges, such as the quality of training, traditional teaching methods, and the need to innovate curricula and teaching practices. In response to these challenges, universities in Vietnam have been implementing reform measures, one of which is the adoption of learner-oriented teaching approaches [6], [7].

Vietnamese university instructors as its practitioners are vulnerable due to encountering socio-cultural factors hampering their understanding of that teaching concept [8] - [10]. As such, this current research assumes that it is important to apply Kember's concept of intermediate teaching

conceptions (ITC) to a search for indicators that signal instructors' transitional shift from a purely teacher-centered approach toward a genuinely learner- oriented model. This is worthy of discussion because of the insights it can uncover on the study participants' perceptions of the potential for variation in teaching aspects not yet discerned before. Those data could inform the design of professional support strategies and administrative interventions aimed at their greater accommodation towards student–centered teaching. Due to the considerable paucity of in–depth research on ITC in HE context, this current study seeks to contribute to the existing literature. In particular, it aims to answer the following research question: *What indicators signify the transition of Vietnamese university instructors' shift from a purely teacher-centered to a more student-centered approach?*
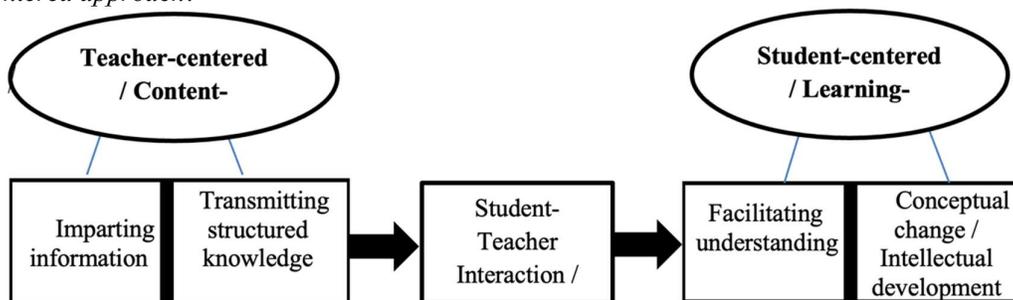

Figure 1. *Multiple–level categorization model of teaching conceptions [2]*

2. Research Method

2.1. Research design

Aware of the complexities involved in authentically identifying the participants' conceptual teaching development, this study employed a mixed–methods approach [11]. Indeed, the interviews can provide nuanced insights into the participants' scale of beliefs of and plans on teaching, allowing for comparisons between the qualitative and quantitative self–reports. Additionally, classroom observations reveal discrepancies as well as insights from real–time practice that often remain hidden when relying solely on scaled data and interviews.

2.2. Sample

A total of 310 participants aged from under 25 to over 45 (64.6% male and 35.4% female) from various disciplines including natural science (mathematics, physics, chemistry, agriculture), and social science (economics, languages) volunteered to participate. Ultimately, 307 surveys were completed, in addition to 27 interviews and 7 classroom observations of interviewees.

2.3. Instruments

2.3.1. Questionnaires

This study adopted the Cognitivist Constructivist-Oriented Teaching Conception (CCOTC) questionnaire by [9]. It assesses teaching beliefs and teaching intentions that do not fit strictly within teacher- or student-centered paradigms through a 21-item survey (5-point Likert scale: 1 = total disagreement; 5 = total agreement) for the former and another 21-item survey for the latter (1 = almost never; 5 = usually). The result of Cronbach alpha(α) for the dimensions of teachers' beliefs and teachers' intentions scale was as follows: Teaching (α = 0.79; 0.81); Teacher (α = 0.94; 0.90); Students (α = 0.96, 0.95) in the scale of teaching beliefs and that of intentions, respectively.

2.3.2. Interview and observations

A set of interview questions was adapted from relevant literature [12]. The first question, "What does teaching mean to you?" aimed to capture the interviewees' personal definitions of teaching,

thereby eliciting a general conceptual understanding of teaching among participants. A series of follow-up questions were used to obtain a comprehensive description of their conceptual views, intentional strategies, and actual practices related to the teaching phenomenon (e.g., "What are the foundations of effective teaching?"; "What constitutes effective teaching and learning assessment?"; "What are your intentions for achieving teaching objectives?"; "Please describe your teaching practices in recent lessons"). Additionally, probing questions (e.g., "What makes you say that?") were incorporated to elicit deeper and more expanded insights on the same issues. The objectives of the classroom observations included aspects of how teachers pedagogically addressed various teaching aspects such as instruction (the roles of teachers and learners, teaching activities…), learning assessments, (feedback provision…) among others.

2.4. Data administration

Questionnaires were distributed physically. The survey was conducted over a period of three weeks to ensure sufficient time for 310 instructors to complete the questionnaire fully. Upon completing the survey, respondents indicated their willingness to participate in interviews and classroom observations by providing their contact information on the questionnaire. In the qualitative phase, participants selected for interviews were contacted two days prior to the interview. Interviews were conducted in a private room to ensure confidentiality, were audio–recorded, and lasted between 46 and 58 minutes. Observed participants were contacted one week before the observation sessions.

2.5. Data analysis

The CCOTC assessed participants' teaching beliefs and intentions. T-tests were conducted to examine gender differences whereas ANOVA was used for age and teaching experience discrepancies. Qualitative data from interview transcripts were analyzed using ATLAS.ti. A third-party lecturer of Vietnamese literature assisted in coding, and inductive analysis identified patterns in teaching awareness, plans, and practices.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1. Questionnaires

3.1.1. Instructors' views of teaching

The research findings indicate that the majority of lecturers have a positive perception of learner-centeredness, particularly in exhibiting their stronger support for the construct of Teaching and Teacher than that of Student, with the highest level of agreement on aligning learning objectives with students' needs as well as their prior accumulation and adopting interactive teaching for student critical thinking ability respectively. With respect to the Student factor, the strongest endorsement is on student viewing their teachers as tutors rather than knowledge transmitters.

These positive findings can be attributed to several interrelated factors. First, national educational reforms emphasizing outcome-based and competency-oriented curricula have encouraged university instructors to align learning objectives with students' real-world needs [13]. Second, professional development programs have equipped lecturers with the knowledge to design interactive and integrative learning experiences, as stipulated in the Ministry of Education and Training's Decision No. 1079/QĐ-BGDĐT [10].

t-test analysis revealed statistically significant mean differences in levels of agreement based on respondents' genders ($p < 0.05$). Specifically, the findings suggest that the female's mean is 0.81 (SD = 1.02) while 0.83 is that of their counterpart (SD = 1.32), t = 2.65, and p = 0.01. The average of all male scale participants' beliefs is slightly stronger than that of female's (M_{male} = 4.33, SD = 0.55, M_{female} = 4.26, and SD = 0.45). The current findings reinforce the notion that perception plays a crucial role in shifting from traditional teaching to a learner-centered approach. ANOVA

analysis revealed statistically insignificant mean differences in levels of agreement influenced by age, and teaching experience ($p > 0.05$).

3.1.2. Instructors' planning on teaching practice

Statistical analysis of the item responses shows a direct connection between what respondents profess to believe and what they intend to enact. This alignment is most evident in areas of the use of interactive teaching methods where many respondents reported frequently using small group discussions to foster student engagement. The belief-practice relationship is also demonstrated with the scale respondents' selection of syllabus content appropriate with students' development of cognitive level. Likewise, the use of diversified formative assessment methods such as peer evaluations aimed at evaluating students based on competencies manifests that relationship. The findings regarding the awareness-performance alignment are in keeping with the results of the studies in the same fields [12]. The t-test revealed significant mean differences in instructional intentions based on the respondents' gender ($M_{male} = 0.85$, SD = 1.47, $M_{female} = 0.89$, and SD = 1.02), t = 2.35, and p = 0.01, whereas ANOVA analysis revealed statistically insignificant mean differences in agreement in term of age and experience of teaching ($p > 0.05$).

In short, the scale data reveal that respondents recognize progressive aspects of teaching overlooked in the teacher-centered model, arguing [5]'s argument. The scale findings show the studied participants' conceptual development and reflect emerging progress in Vietnamese HE. Practically, the results illuminate the professional development and stronger institutional support. They also report intentions to implement the teaching practices they value, challenging the finding of [12]. Regarding methodological contribution, the results emphasize the need to employ both scales to increase the reliability of the survey results.

3.2. Interview analysis

This study aims to assess Vietnamese university instructors' progress in understanding and practicing teaching. Thematic analysis of interviews with 27 participants identified three key themes: (1) content, (2) methods, and (3) assessments in teaching and learning.

3.2.1. Teaching and learning content

Subthemes within this category include the balance between theory and practice, the selection of learning content, and the relationship between teaching materials and learners' prior accumulation.

Contrary to [3]'s claim that Vietnamese instructors prioritize theory-heavy curricula, none of the interviewees associated teaching with increasing the practicality of materials. Instead, throughout the interviews, participants consistently associated their views of teaching with the syllabus's connection to learners' prior experiences and knowledge. A young male skills instructor from Faculty B noted:

"If teaching content isn't grounded in what students have previously learned, they lack the necessary background to understand new input."

Consistent with research on progressive teaching, which emphasizes the importance of meaningful learning, 22.5% of interviewed instructors reported allowing students to choose content they find essential. However, they also expressed a preference for restricting these choices to "a carefully studied list of topics" to ensure syllabus coverage.

3.2.2 Teaching and learning methods

The predominant subthemes identified included (1) encouraging active learning, (2) employing traditional lecturing methods, (3) promoting classroom interactions, (4) employing technology-based teaching, (5) enhancing cognitive integration, and (6) fostering transfer knowledge.

In contrast to the findings of [2], [3] which characterized instructors as mere communicators of correct answers to students, the interviewees strongly agreed on thinking of themselves as guides

who assist students in actively discovering answers on their own based on provided input in the form of hints, clues, or principles. While their use of traditional methods like lecturing and drilling aligns with [3], they emphasized employing these techniques not just for factual knowledge delivery but as a foundation for more complex teaching goals.

Consistent with the endorsement of using information and technology to improve the quality of teaching and learning, as argued by [14], the majorities of interviewed instructors (84.1%) placed significant importance on the role of artificial intelligence in facilitating the quality of teaching and learning. Indeed, a senior instructor from Faculty C noted that the use of technology has really changed the way they think about teaching: *Before, I focused mostly on explaining the content clearly. I used to be the one answer all of student questions. But now I see myself more as a supporter because I encourage student to use ChatGPT or Deepseek to explore the issues themselves.* Sharing a similar perspective on the role of technologies, a junior instructor opined: *"With tools like ChatGPT, students are now more engaged, and they can receive personalized feedback much more quickly".*

In sharp contrast to [2]'s assertion that instructors' conceptions are context-dependent, the 27 interviewed participants demonstrated a remarkable consensus on the importance of classroom interactions framed by questions–answers to "*get students merged in their own thought process.*" Surprisingly, all discipline instructors, along with more than 75% of skills instructors, reported their exercise of constraining students' discussions to that day's teaching objectives, "*otherwise chaos will occur due to not sufficiently covering syllabus content*".

Consistent with the principles of cognitive constructivism, which posit learning as dependent on a learner's cognitive development stage [15] approximately 67.5% of the instructors reported their efforts in "triggering students' thinking abilities and cognition". A senior and a junior instructor from Faculty A shared their perspectives:

"By having students explain new material in their own words or rephrase concepts using their existing vocabulary, we facilitate the integration of new knowledge with prior learning."

Similarly, the interviewees consistently linked their teaching perspectives to the importance of aiding students' ability to apply classroom knowledge in new situations. One instructor noted:

"Regardless of how well disciplinary concepts are presented, students may not grasp the associated meanings. So, I engage them with those concepts in specific contexts where nature is somewhat distorted by subtle differences."

3.2.3. Teaching and learning assessments

All 27 Vietnamese instructors participating in the interviews shared their views on assessment through two main subthemes: (1) student engagement in self–assessment and (2) provision of feedback.

Despite aligning with [13]'s assertion that students' involvement in setting criteria for evaluating their own learning should be widely considered, the interviewees qualitatively demonstrated their administration of such formative assessments. One instructor noted: *"I discuss the percentage breakdown for course evaluation with students before starting my teaching. Then, modified if they wanted certain changes."*

Nearly half of the interviewees emphasized their use of feedback to enable students to navigate new cognitive challenges, aligning with [13]'s suggestion regarding formative assessment. A junior discipline instructor from Faculty A and a senior skills instructor from Faculty B shared a similar view: *"When observing students making mistakes, teachers should first discuss where and how they went wrong and then provide them with opportunities to re–test their performances."*

In short, the interviewed participants tend to shift from knowledge transmission to fostering learners' ability to construct their own understanding basing on the evidences such as design objectives aligned with students' needs and value their prior knowledge, and adopt interactive methods, using information technology and artificial intelligence, value formative and competency-based assessment. However, their practices remain limited due to institutional constraints such as rigid curricula and administrative pressures.

3.3. Observation

The observed teacher was a senior teacher of English, and the students were majors in English. After an introduction, the instructor initiated the class by prompting students to share their last summer vacation. This ice–breaking activity served as a gateway to the reading lesson. Before reading, the instructor encouraged students to define key terms from the passage in their own words, aiming to foster their initial engagement and comprehension of the text. Students were instructed to apply previously taught rules of prefixes and suffixes to deduce the meanings of those key terms that would appear in the text. The instructor employed lectures and drill techniques to help them memorize pronunciation and meaning of the identified terminologies. During the reading activity, the instructor provided students with a set of guiding questions to help them track the content of the passage. After completing the reading task, students participated in solving real–life problems to encourage them to derive practical meaning from the text. The instructor invited some students to share their thoughts about the situation until the class ended.

In summary, the observed instructor combined traditional methods like lecturing and drilling with non-conventional approaches, including supporting cognitive integration through prior knowledge, allowing students to choose learning resources, and applying lessons to real-life contexts.

3.4. Discussion

This mixed–methods study aimed to identify the development of a group of Vietnamese instructors' understanding of the teaching phenomenon. The findings of this study indicate that the study participants have begun to gradually shift from of Vietnamese university lecturers from the traditional teacher-centered teaching model to a more learner-centered approach.

In particular, most participants demonstrated a strong understanding of key components of student-centered curriculum design, including clearly defined learning objectives aligned with learners' needs. These findings are sharply contrast to the assertions of [16]. In addition, unlike traditional instructors who overlook learners' existing schemata [2], studied instructors recognized the role of students' prior knowledge and experience, and made effort into modifying teaching content in accordance to what they previously accumulated. This is keeping with the student-centered literature [3]. Furthermore, the study participants showed their discernment of the value of dialogic teaching, one of the means to help instructors effectively and efficiently approach students' cognitive integration and critical thinking. This finding is in accordance with what described in the study of [15]. Likewise, the employment of the technology-based teaching methods aimed at promoting students learning autonomy help consistently differentiate them from purely teaching-centric instructors [12]. Similarly, studied instructors demonstrated their recognition of teaching aims as fostering students' knowledge transferring ability. This is keeping with the student-centered literature [17]. In the same vein, most participants also demonstrated a strong awareness of key components of student-centered assessment strategies.

Nevertheless, a deeper qualitative analysis uncovers that their transformation to student-centered paradigm remains incomplete. Accordingly, on one hand, students are encouraged to identify topics they believe are essential for their learning, but on the other hand, those instructor–participants simultaneously impose restrictions by disallowing students' selection of topics that have not been pre–approved by them. Similarly, the students were encouraged to conduct classroom discussion for their learning discovery but their classroom discussions were limited to their teachers' predetermined teaching outline. Observations in the classroom further reveal instances where instructors discourage students from freely expressing their thoughts, leading to the inference that students lack true autonomy in selecting what they consider necessary for their learning. These practices starkly contrast with the expectations of a genuinely student–oriented practitioner, as delineated in the definition of student–centered learning by [16]. The study also identifies several practical barriers to this transformation, including rigid curricula, administrative pressures. This situation also reflects another broader issue

within Vietnam's socio-cultural tradition, which is characterized by centralized management practices where decisions about learning are predominantly made by authorities such as teachers. That leads to teachers perceiving themselves as more knowledgeable and wiser than students about what is truly really necessary for students' learning [3], [4].

In sum, unlike studies that primarily emphasized the resistance to change or the persistence of teacher-centered approaches [3], the findings of this research reveal a gradual shift in lecturers' abandon of the truly teacher-centric model. The findings also show the study participants' awareness toward learner-centered pedagogy but the shift toward such student-centeredness is not yet complete. Hence, the study's key contribution lies in identifying that the transformation in teaching conceptions is occurring at an intermediate level. The findings support the result of [13] and challenge [18] that there is no such transitional stage in their context.

4. Conclusion

One of the central findings of this study is the identification of a nuanced, transitional teaching position. While instructors are not entirely teacher-centered, given their emphasis on promoting students' cognitive integration and autonomy, they also have not fully embraced student-centered pedagogy. This finding reflects a hybrid conception of teaching and confirms the existence of an intermediate stage in the shift toward student-centered education. Based on this, while the study participants held the recognition of teaching with the features of student-centeredness, the translation of these principles into their classroom reality remains incomplete. The study findings not only add to the theoretical discourse but also provide practical implications for policymaking and the strategic planning of teaching reform initiatives at Vietnamese HE institutions.

Future research should also delve deeper into the factors that impede the translation of instructors teaching' beliefs into practice, thereby enhancing the feasibility of successful reform movements in this area. Furthermore, future studies should seek to understand how institutional leaders can better support teachers in their efforts toward student–oriented teaching.

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