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A Comparative Analysis of Competency-Based and Traditional English Language Teaching Models in Vietnamese Universities

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Abstract

This study presents a comparative analysis of Competency-Based Language Teaching (CBLT) and traditional English teaching models in the context of Vietnamese regional universities. Drawing on national reforms such as the 2018 General Education Program and the National Foreign Language Project, the research aims to evaluate the pedagogical effectiveness, curriculum orientation, assessment practices, and learning outcomes associated with both models. A mixed-methods design was employed, including surveys with 250 students and 30 instructors across five local universities, supplemented by curriculum document analysis and semi-structured interviews. Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics and ANOVA, while qualitative data were thematically coded to uncover key perceptions and implementation challenges. Findings reveal that while traditional models offer structural clarity and familiarity, CBLT demonstrates stronger alignment with 21st-century skills, communicative competence, and learner autonomy. However, challenges such as inadequate infrastructure and limited teacher training hinder full implementation. The study concludes with practical recommendations for phased adoption of CBLT through localized curriculum reforms, faculty development programs, and integration of digital tools.

Keywords: competency-based language teaching (CBLT), traditional teaching models, English language teaching, Vietnamese universities

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1. Introduction

The accelerating pace of globalization and digital transformation has placed increasing demands on foreign language competence, particularly in English, across various sectors in Vietnam. As English is gradually being positioned as a second language in national policy agendas, there is a pressing need for educational institutions to revisit and realign their English language teaching (ELT) approaches to meet contemporary requirements.

Recent national policies, including Conclusion No. 91/KL-TTg (2023) issued by the Prime Minister, highlight the importance of enhancing teacher capacity and fostering the adoption of innovative pedagogical practices at all educational levels. Concurrently, the 2018 General Education Curriculum (Chương trình GDPT, 2018) represents a paradigm shift from traditional knowledge transmission to competency-based learning, to develop students' communicative competence, creativity, and critical thinking skills, aligning with the educational goals of the 21st century (MOET, 2018). In addition, the ongoing implementation of the National Foreign Language Project (NFLP) and recent proposals to designate English as a second language underscore the nation's commitment to improving English proficiency as a cornerstone of integration and innovation (Pham & Nguyen, 2022).

Despite these positive developments, English language instruction at the tertiary level in Vietnam, particularly in local and under-resourced universities, remains fragmented and inconsistent. While some institutions are experimenting with Competency-Based Language Teaching (CBLT), others continue to adhere to traditional models such as grammar-translation, content-based instruction, or the Presentation-Practice-Production (PPP) method. In many cases, these models are adopted without sufficient adaptation to the learners' needs or institutional context, leading to ineffective outcomes (Do & Le, 2021).

A significant gap in the literature is the lack of comparative studies that rigorously evaluate these models within Vietnam's current socio-educational landscape. Although CBLT has gained traction in policy and global practice, few empirical studies examine its actual implementation and comparative effectiveness in Vietnamese universities, especially under the constraints of localization, digitalization, and employability demands.

This study aims to:

1) Compare the theoretical underpinnings and pedagogical practices of Competency-Based Language Teaching (CBLT) and traditional English language teaching models in Vietnamese regional universities.

2) Analyze key differences in curriculum goals, instructional strategies, assessment methods, and student learning outcomes between the two models.

3) Identify contextual factors that facilitate or hinder the implementation of CBLT at the institutional level.

4) Provide policy and pedagogical recommendations for effective integration of CBLT into English language programs in under-resourced university settings.

Therefore, the shift toward competency-based education reflects Vietnam's evolving educational vision. However, the diversity in implementation and the lack of contextual analysis hinder the effective translation of policy into practice. As the researcher, I contend that a comparative analysis between CBLT and traditional models is crucial for informing tailored pedagogical reforms. This study offers a timely contribution to the discourse on ELT transformation in local Vietnamese universities navigating the intersection of innovation, tradition, and constraint.

1.1 Statement of the Problem

Despite significant policy reforms aimed at promoting communicative and competency-based English language teaching (ELT) in Vietnam, the actual implementation of these innovations remains uneven, particularly in regional and under-resourced universities. Many institutions continue to rely on traditional teaching models, such as Grammar Translation and the Presentation-Practice-Production (PPP) approach, which focus more on knowledge transmission than the development of real-world communicative competencies. This disconnect between national educational goals and institutional practices poses serious challenges for improving English proficiency among university graduates.

According to the Ministry of Education and Training (MOET, 2018), the 2018 General Education Curriculum emphasizes learner autonomy, critical thinking, and communicative competence as core objectives of English language education. However, local research suggests that most regional universities struggle to translate these goals into practice due to limited infrastructure, teacher preparedness, and institutional inertia (Le & Vu, 2019). Internationally, similar issues have been observed in developing countries where competency-based education is promoted at the policy level but poorly supported by systemic implementation mechanisms (Puteh, Jamil, & Noh, 2021). Without a clear understanding of how these different teaching models operate in local Vietnamese contexts, efforts to modernize English language teaching may fall short of expectations.

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Thus, there is a critical need to examine the comparative effectiveness of Competency-Based Language Teaching (CBLT) and traditional English teaching models within the specific realities of Vietnamese regional universities. This analysis is essential for informing future pedagogical decisions and aligning national reform agendas with feasible, context-sensitive strategies.

1.2 Research Questions

In line with the study's objectives and contextual challenges identified, the research is guided by the following questions:

1. What are the major pedagogical and structural differences between Competency-Based Language Teaching (CBLT) and traditional English teaching models in Vietnamese regional universities?
2. How do students and instructors perceive the effectiveness of each model in enhancing language competence and learning engagement?
3. What challenges and enabling conditions affect the implementation of CBLT in local university contexts?
4. What institutional strategies can support the sustainable adoption of CBLT across diverse regional settings?

These questions aim to uncover both the theoretical and practical dimensions of English teaching reform and generate insights into localized policy and instructional development.

2. Literature Review

To establish a solid foundation for comparing Competency-Based Language Teaching (CBLT) and traditional teaching models, it is essential to first explore the key concepts and features of each approach. Understanding these models is crucial for evaluating their applicability and effectiveness in the context of Vietnamese universities. The following section delves into the characteristics and principles of CBLT, as well as the traditional English language teaching models such as Grammar-based, PPP, Content-based, and Task-based approaches, providing a comprehensive framework for the comparative analysis that follows.

2.1 Concepts and Features of English Language Teaching Models

Competency-Based Language Teaching (CBLT). Competency-Based Language Teaching (CBLT) is an approach that emphasizes the development of students' competencies rather than merely transmitting knowledge. CBLT focuses on developing specific skills that learners can apply in real-life situations. This approach involves identifying core competencies to be achieved and assessing students based on their ability to perform real-life tasks.

Key features of CBLT include:

- *Outcome-oriented learning:* CBLT focuses primarily on achieving clear competency criteria.

- *Competency-based assessment***:** Assessment is based not only on tests but also on the ability to perform in real-world situations and improvements throughout the learning process.

- *Customizable learning methods:* CBLT allows learners to progress according to their pace and needs, creating a flexible, student-centered learning environment.

According to Richards and Rodgers (2014), CBLT is a "learner-centered" approach, promoting autonomous learning and responsiveness in communication.

Traditional Grammar-based/PPP/Content-based/Task-based Teaching Models. Traditional English teaching models, including Grammar-based, PPP (Presentation, Practice, Production), Content-based, and Task-based, differ significantly from CBLT. However, they all share the common focus on knowledge transmission through lectures and theoretical explanations, rather than real-world competencies development.

- *Grammar-based Teaching:* This traditional model mainly focuses on learning grammar through rules, aiming to help learners understand and correctly apply grammar in communication.

- *PPP Model:* The PPP approach focuses on presenting knowledge, practicing through exercises, and finally using the knowledge in real-life products. This model is widely used in traditional classrooms.

- *Content-based Instruction (CBI):* This approach teaches English through specific subject areas, where grammar and vocabulary are taught in the context of academic topics.

- *Task-based Language Teaching (TBLT):* This model emphasizes learning through real-life tasks, where learners perform communicative activities such as group projects or discussions.

2.2 Overview of Previous Studies

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Studies on Competency-Based Language Teaching. Recent literature has emphasized the relevance of Competency-Based Language Teaching (CBLT) in developing communicative competence and transferable skills. For instance, Pham and Nguyen (2022) found that students exposed to CBLT demonstrated significantly higher self-regulation and oral proficiency compared to those in traditional programs. Similarly, Phuong and Thao (2024) highlighted that CBLT fosters learner autonomy and engagement when integrated with digital tools, yet emphasized the need for sustained teacher training to maintain instructional consistency. Nguyen et al. (2025) further showed that professional development programs focusing on CBLT assessment literacy led to improved student learning outcomes and more diversified evaluation practices.

Studies on Traditional English Teaching Models. Despite growing interest in CBLT, traditional English teaching approaches remain prevalent in many Vietnamese universities. Le and Vu (2019) found that the PPP and grammar-translation methods persist due to their alignment with standardized testing and teacher familiarity. However, recent studies have begun to question their effectiveness. For example, Vu and Nguyen (2020) reported that students in traditional classrooms displayed lower engagement levels and weaker communicative competence, particularly in speaking and listening skills. Harris and Leeming (2022), in a longitudinal study, compared PPP and Task-Based Learning (TBLT), concluding that traditional models yielded slower growth in L2 proficiency and self-efficacy.

Comparative Studies of the Models. Comparative studies have started to emerge, offering valuable insights into pedagogical impacts. Tran and Bui (2023) conducted a cross-sectional analysis of CBLT and CLT models in tertiary EFL contexts and found that competency-based approaches better supported critical thinking and collaborative learning. Likewise, Ha (2021) compared curriculum implementation across three local universities and identified that CBLT students outperformed peers in soft skills development but faced challenges due to limited technological resources. These findings point to a growing consensus that while CBLT holds pedagogical promise, its sustainability depends on institutional support, teacher readiness, and student preparedness.

Table 1. Overview of English teaching models used in Vietnamese universities

Teaching Model	Key Features	Benefits	Limitations
CBLT	Focuses on developing practical competencies	Enhances self-learning, improves practical skills	Requires infrastructure and extensive teacher training
Grammar-based	Teaches grammar through rules	Simple, easy to apply	Lacks flexibility, does not develop communicative competence
PPP	Presentation, Practice, Production	Structured approach	Focuses only on grammar and basic skills
CBI	Teaches English through specific subject areas	Connects language to real-world contexts	Requires specialized curriculum and materials

*(**Source:** Adapted from the author's survey data, 2025)*

Competency-Based Language Teaching (CBLT): CBLT is perceived as highly effective in enhancing learners' communication skills and practical competencies. However, its implementation in local universities faces challenges such as the need for well-prepared teachers and adequate learning infrastructure. While it provides a more flexible and student-centered approach, it requires significant changes in both teaching methods and curriculum design.

Traditional Models (Grammar-based, PPP, CBI, TBLT): Traditional models, while easier to implement, are often criticized for their lack of focus on developing real-world communicative competence. Grammar-based teaching and the PPP model, though structured, may not fully engage students in practical language use. CBI and TBLT offer more context-based learning, but they still face difficulties in adapting to the needs of local universities due to the lack of resources and teacher training.

***Technology and AI Integration*:** Both CBLT and traditional models have the potential to benefit from technology integration, especially through AI tools that can enhance learning personalization and provide real-time feedback. However, the use of technology should be carefully controlled to ensure it supports rather than replaces the critical human element in language teaching.

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3. Methodology

This study adopted a rigorous mixed-methods approach to provide a comprehensive comparative analysis of Competency-Based Language Teaching (CBLT) and traditional English language teaching models in Vietnamese regional universities. The methodology was designed to align with the study's theoretical underpinnings and to ensure empirical robustness by integrating both quantitative and qualitative data sources. This section outlines the research design, participant selection, data collection procedures, analytical strategies, and measures for ensuring validity, reliability, and ethical compliance.

3.1 Research Design

A convergent mixed-methods research design (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018) was employed to investigate the pedagogical effectiveness and contextual applicability of CBLT compared to traditional models. This design allowed for the concurrent collection and integration of both quantitative and qualitative data to enhance the depth and breadth of analysis. Quantitative data were gathered through structured surveys to identify general patterns, while qualitative data from interviews and document analysis provided rich, contextualized insights into participant experiences and institutional practices. The integration of data sources facilitated *methodological triangulation,* thereby enhancing the credibility of findings.

3.2 Research Sites and Participants

The study was conducted at five public regional universities in Vietnam, selected through purposive sampling to reflect geographical diversity, varied institutional capacities, and differing levels of exposure to CBLT. These included: ***Tan Trao University*** (Tuyen Quang Province); ***Hung Vuong University*** (Phu Tho Province); ***Tay Bac University*** (Son La Province); ***Trung Bo University*** (pseudonym, Central Region); ***Nam Son University*** (pseudonym, Central Region).

A total of *280 participants* were selected based on *maximum variation sampling* to ensure diverse perspectives across institutions and teaching models. ***Students (N = 250)****:* Undergraduate English majors from years 2 to 4, with direct experience in either traditional or CBLT-oriented English programs. ***Lecturers (N = 30)****:* English language instructors with 2–20 years of teaching experience, representing varied specializations in ELT, linguistics, and language pedagogy. All participants received a briefing about the study's aims and voluntarily consented to participate.

3.3 Data Collection Instruments and Procedure

The study utilized three complementary data sources to enhance triangulation and reliability:

a) Survey Questionnaire. A structured questionnaire was developed based on prior research (e.g., Nguyen & Dao, 2019; Richards, 2017) and consisted of *30 Likert-scale items* examining participants' perceptions of instructional strategies, assessment formats, learner engagement, and language skill development, and *4 open-ended items* for elaborating on personal experiences and suggestions. A pilot test with 20 students yielded a ***Cronbach's alpha of 0.87****,* indicating high internal consistency. Minor revisions were made for clarity before full deployment.

b) Semi-Structured Interviews. A subset of *10 lecturers and 15 students* was invited for in-depth interviews, selected from different institutions and teaching contexts to ensure variation. Interviews explored participants' perspectives on the effectiveness, practicality, and limitations of both teaching models. Each session lasted 35–45 minutes, was conducted in Vietnamese, audio-recorded with consent, and later transcribed and translated for analysis.

c) Curriculum Document Analysis. Institutional syllabi, course outlines, lesson plans, and assessment rubrics were collected from all five universities. These materials were examined to determine: The extent of alignment with CBLT or traditional models**; the** Presence of student-centered or outcome-based features; and Integration of digital tools, soft skills, or communicative tasks**.**

3.4 Data Analysis

a*) Quantitative Analysis.* Survey data were processed using **SPSS version 25**. Descriptive statistics (means, frequencies) were used to identify patterns across student and teacher groups. ***Inferential tests****,* including ANOVA and Chi-square, were applied to examine correlations between teaching model type and participant perceptions or reported outcomes.

b*) Qualitative Analysis.* Interview transcripts and curricular documents were analyzed using **thematic analysis** (Braun & Clarke, 2006) through **NVivo software**. An inductive coding approach was employed to identify recurring themes related to teaching effectiveness, challenges, student engagement, and assessment practices. To ensure coding reliability, two researchers independently coded 25% of the data, with discrepancies discussed and resolved.

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3.5 Ethical Considerations and Trustworthiness

The study received ethical clearance from the ***Research Ethics Committee of Tan Trao*** **University**. Participants were assured of confidentiality, anonymity, and the voluntary nature of their involvement. Institutional names were anonymized for privacy where requested.

To enhance **trustworthiness**, the study employed:

- Triangulation across data types and sources

- Member checking with selected participants to verify key interpretations

- An **audit trail** documenting decisions throughout the research process

- Peer debriefing during coding to ensure interpretive validity

3.6 Current Implementation and Challenges

Despite national efforts to reform English language teaching (ELT), the actual implementation of Competency-Based Language Teaching (CBLT) in Vietnamese regional universities remains limited and inconsistent. This section analyzes the current state of teaching models across selected institutions, focusing on four major dimensions: institutional capacity, faculty readiness, learner preparedness, and technology integration. It also presents supporting data from field surveys and institutional documents to highlight the systemic challenges and emerging reform trends.

Institutional Capacity and Policy Alignment. At the institutional level, disparities in infrastructure, funding, and policy alignment significantly influence the adoption of CBLT. Many regional universities still operate within traditional, textbook-driven curricula, shaped by centralized policies that leave little room for pedagogical experimentation. Although the 2018 General Education Curriculum and National Foreign Language Project advocate for competency-based and communicative approaches, their practical translation into university-level programs has been fragmented.

For instance, only two out of five surveyed universities have officially piloted CBLT-based courses. The others continue to rely on Grammar-Translation or PPP (Presentation, Practice, Production) models due to resource limitations and administrative rigidity.

Table 2. Implementation levels of English teaching models in selected regional universities

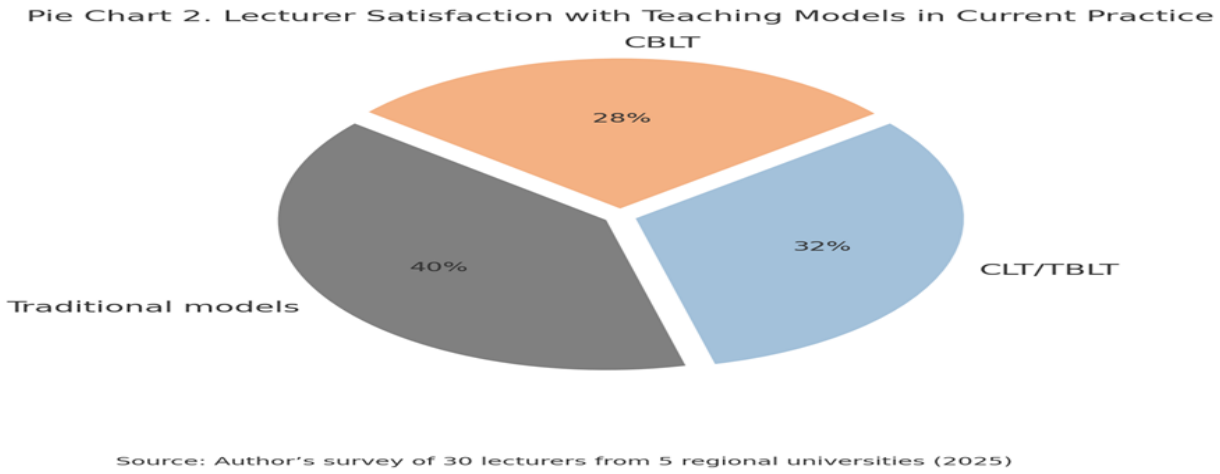
Teaching Model	Tây Bắc University	Hùng Vương University	Tân Trào University	Trung Bộ University	Nam Sơn University
Grammar-Based/PPP	High	Moderate	High	High	High
Content-Based Instruction	Moderate	Low	Moderate	Low	Moderate
Task-Based Learning (TBLT)	Low	Moderate	Moderate	Low	Moderate
Communicative Language Teaching	Moderate	Moderate	Moderate	Low	Low
Competency-Based Language Teaching (CBLT)	Low	Low	Moderate	Low	Low

Source: *Data adapted from internal reports and survey responses, 2024–2025*

Faculty Readiness and Professional Development. Faculty readiness is a key determinant of successful pedagogical reform. While many instructors acknowledge the potential of learner-centered models, they often lack training in implementing CBLT, particularly in areas such as performance-based assessment, curriculum mapping, and use of digital platforms.

According to survey results, **68%** of lecturers support shifting toward CBLT or CLT models, and only **34%** feel confident applying these approaches in daily teaching. Lecturers cite barriers such as high teaching loads, lack of structured training, and unclear institutional support. Although some have benefited from exposure to international workshops (e.g., RELO programs, Erasmus+), these opportunities are often one-off and unevenly distributed.

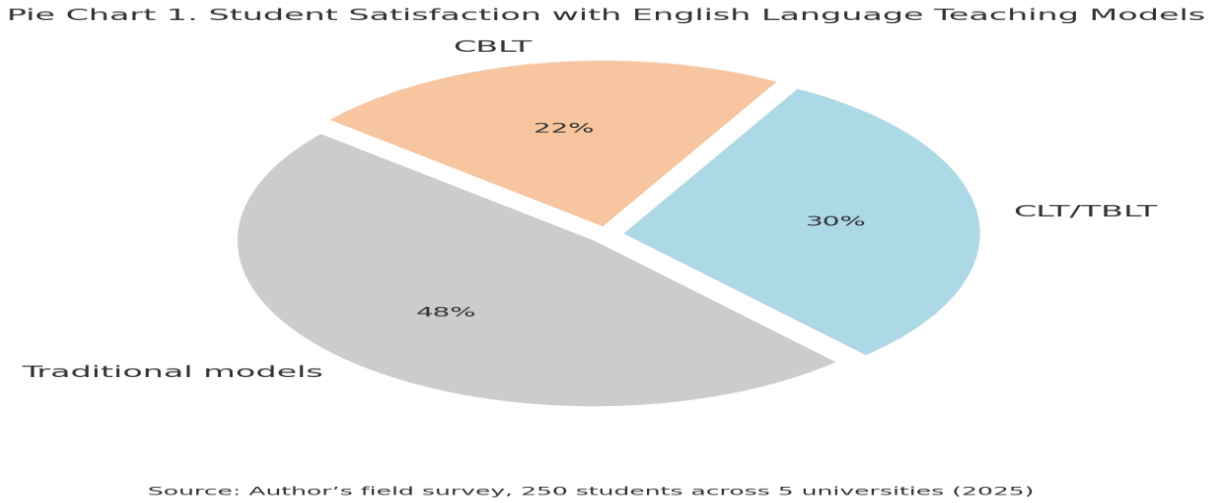
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Pie Chart 2. Lecturer satisfaction with teaching models in current practice

Source: Author's field survey, 250 students across 5 universities (2025)

Learner Preparedness and Classroom Realities. Students' linguistic readiness presents another major constraint on CBLT implementation. Many regional universities admit students with limited English proficiency, especially in productive skills such as speaking and writing. This presents challenges for performance-based and collaborative learning strategies. Survey results from 250 students reveal: Only **22%** are enrolled in courses using CBLT methods; **48%** expressed satisfaction with traditional models, mainly due to familiarity and clarity. However, a significant portion expressed interest in more interactive, real-life learning tasks.



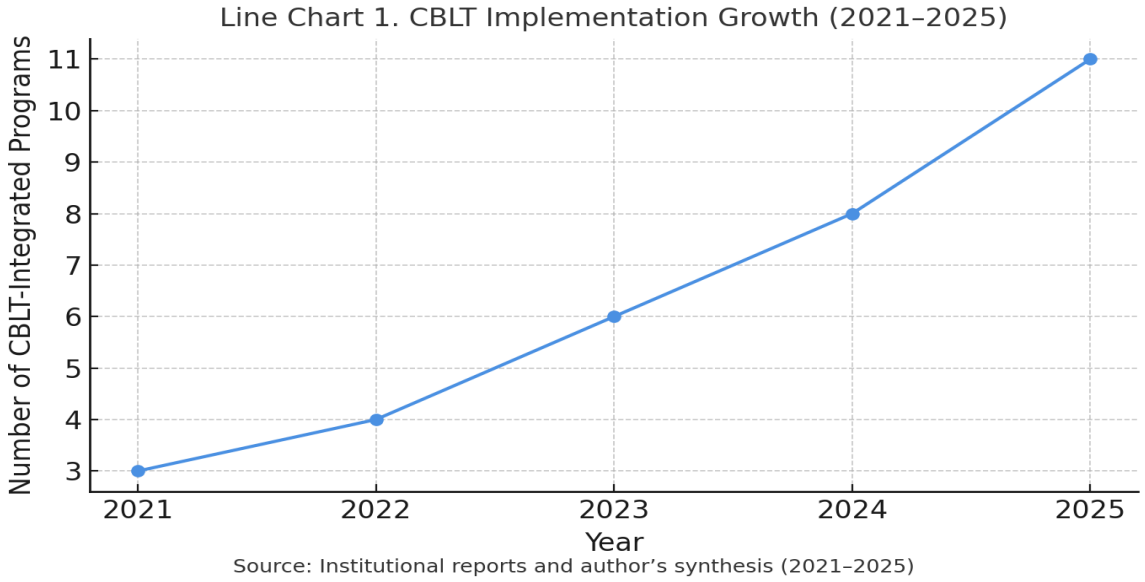
Pie Chart 1: Student satisfaction with English language teaching models

Source: Author's field survey, 250 students across 5 universities (2025)

Technology Integration and External Support. While digital tools and artificial intelligence (AI) offer promising support for CBLT, actual implementation varies greatly. Some universities have experimented with: ***AI-powered writing feedback systems*** (e.g., Grammarly, Write & Improve); ***Virtual learning platforms*** (e.g., Google Classroom,

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Zoom, Zalo); and ***Online assessments*** *and* ***e-portfolios.*** However, uptake remains uneven due to a lack of training, outdated infrastructure, and inconsistent digital literacy. Only two of the five surveyed universities have integrated AI-based tools in a structured and curriculum-aligned manner. Encouragingly, several institutions have received support through international collaborations. For example, Tan Trao University and Tay Bac University have joined Erasmus+ and digital transformation projects focusing on outcome-based curriculum development and teacher upskilling.



Line Chart 1. CBLT implementation growth (2021–2025)

Overall, the integration of CBLT in Vietnamese regional universities remains in its early stages. Institutional inertia, faculty limitations, and learner readiness all pose formidable challenges. Nevertheless, growing interest from both educators and students, coupled with the emergence of digital tools and international support, points toward a slow but promising transformation. Addressing the identified challenges through sustained policy coordination, faculty training, and infrastructure investment will be key to scaling CBLT in a sustainable and contextually relevant manner.

4. Comparative Findings

This section presents a thematic comparison between Competency-Based Language Teaching (CBLT) and traditional English teaching models, based on triangulated data from surveys, interviews, and curriculum documents. The comparison focuses on four critical dimensions: curriculum goals, instructional strategies, assessment practices, and student learning outcomes. The findings reflect the voices of both lecturers and students, supported by descriptive statistics and institutional materials.

Curriculum Goals. CBLT programs prioritize the development of functional, transferable competencies, such as communicative ability, critical thinking, and collaboration. Course objectives are explicitly linked to real-life tasks and workplace demands. In contrast, traditional models emphasize linguistic accuracy, rule memorization, and exam preparation.

Table 3. Comparison of curriculum goals: CBLT vs. traditional models

Criteria	Competency-Based (CBLT)	Traditional (PPP/Grammar-focused)
Primary Goal	Development of communicative competencies	Mastery of linguistic forms
Focus	Performance in real-life tasks	Accuracy in grammar and vocabulary
Curriculum Design	Outcomes-based, flexible, contextualized	Content-based, rigid, textbook-driven
Link to Employability	Strong focus on soft and professional skills	Weak connection to real-world contexts

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Relevance to Learners' Contexts	Contextualized, localized	Standardized, less responsive

Source: Adapted from the author's survey and curriculum document analysis (2025)

Interview data from instructors further confirm that CBLT syllabi are more flexible and modular, allowing for local contextualization, whereas traditional curricula are uniform, often prescribed by the Ministry or textbook publishers.

***Instructional Strategies*.** Findings reveal a significant divergence in teaching practices. CBLT classrooms are characterized by interactive, learner-centered methods such as project-based learning, group work, and role-playing. Conversely, traditional classrooms rely heavily on grammar drills, teacher explanations, and repetition.

Table 4. Frequency of instructional Strategies Used in CBLT vs. traditional classes

Instructional Strategy	CBLT Classes (%)	Traditional Classes (%)
Project-based learning	72	26
Pair/group work	81	43
Role-playing & simulations	69	21
Teacher-centered lectures	34	85
Grammar drills	38	91

***Source**: Author's field survey, Regional Universities in Vietnam (2025)*

Lecturers noted that while communicative and collaborative activities were time-consuming, they fostered higher engagement and learner autonomy. However, in resource-constrained contexts, many reverted to traditional lecturing methods due to class size and time pressure.

***Assessment Practices*.** CBLT emphasizes formative, performance-based assessment, including portfolios, peer reviews, and task completion. Students are evaluated not only on correctness but also on fluency, strategy use, and problem-solving. Traditional approaches, by contrast, prioritize summative written exams focused on discrete-point grammar and vocabulary. Students in CBLT classes reported greater clarity in feedback and opportunities for self-reflection. Lecturers agreed that while performance-based assessment is more valid, it requires rubrics, time, and training, resources often lacking in local institutions.

***Learning Outcomes and Skill Acquisition*.** Students exposed to CBLT demonstrated stronger skills in oral communication, teamwork, and self-directed learning, as captured through both surveys and interviews. Meanwhile, students in traditional classrooms performed better in grammar-based tests and structured writing tasks.

Table 5. Student-reported learning outcomes under CBLT and traditional models

Skills/Outcomes	CBLT (%)	Traditional (%)
Communicative competence	68%	29%
Collaborative learning skills	61%	35%
Critical thinking and creativity	48%	27%
Self-directed/autonomous learning	57%	22%
Grammar and structural accuracy	44%	72%
Exam-taking strategies	38%	66%

***Source**: Synthesized from student responses in five regional universities (2025)*

Lecturers corroborated this trend, noting that CBLT students showed more confidence during oral presentations and group discussions. However, students in traditional settings expressed higher test-taking confidence due to familiarity with exam formats.

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The comparative findings underscore the pedagogical superiority of CBLT in fostering 21st-century competencies, while also highlighting the resilience of traditional models in meeting standardized testing demands. The data suggest that while CBLT aligns more closely with national educational reform goals, its success is highly dependent on teacher training, institutional commitment, and contextual adaptability.

5. Discussion

This section discusses the key findings of the study in direct relation to the four research questions, drawing upon both empirical data and relevant literature to contextualize and interpret the results.

RQ1: What are the major pedagogical and structural differences between CBLT and traditional English teaching models in Vietnamese regional universities? The data revealed significant contrasts between CBLT and traditional models in terms of curriculum orientation, instructional strategies, and outcome focus. CBLT programs emphasized learner autonomy, real-life task performance, and competency development, aligning closely with recent educational reforms (MOET, 2018; Pham & Nguyen, 2022). In contrast, traditional models focused on linguistic accuracy and textbook-driven instruction, echoing findings from Le and Vu (2019) and Vu and Nguyen (2020), who noted that conventional approaches dominate due to systemic inertia and exam-oriented culture.

RQ2: How do students and instructors perceive the effectiveness of each model in enhancing language competence and learning engagement? Student and teacher feedback confirmed that CBLT was more engaging and relevant to real-life communication needs. Over 68% of CBLT students reported improved speaking and collaborative learning skills, supported by interview data from lecturers. These perceptions are consistent with findings by Phuong and Thao (2024), who documented increased learner motivation in CBLT environments using digital tools. Conversely, many instructors expressed reluctance due to insufficient training, mirroring concerns raised in Harris and Leeming's (2022) study on teacher readiness in implementing new models.

RQ3: What challenges and enabling conditions affect the implementation of CBLT in local university contexts? Implementation barriers include limited digital infrastructure, lack of assessment literacy, and uneven English proficiency. As shown in Table 2 and survey results, only two of five universities had piloted CBLT officially. These challenges are echoed by Nguyen et al. (2025), who emphasized that institutional inertia and lack of policy clarity hinder widespread adoption. However, external support from programs such as Erasmus+ and RELO was seen as an enabling factors that could promote gradual transformation.

RQ4: What institutional strategies can support the sustainable adoption of CBLT across diverse regional settings? Institutional reforms must focus on faculty development, curriculum localization, and digital innovation. As suggested by Tran and Bui (2023), successful integration of CBLT depends on context-sensitive planning and sustained professional development. The study highlights the importance of assessment alignment, modular syllabi, and peer mentoring systems to bridge policy-practice gaps. These strategies are consistent with recommendations from the National Foreign Language Project and recent MOET initiatives (MOET, 2023).

6. Conclusion

This study has provided a comprehensive comparison between Competency-Based Language Teaching (CBLT) and traditional English language teaching models in Vietnamese regional universities. Grounded in a convergent mixed-methods design, the research drew upon survey data, interviews, and curriculum analysis from five public institutions to explore how each model performs across four critical dimensions: curriculum goals, instructional strategies, assessment practices, and learning outcomes.

The findings confirm that while traditional models remain dominant due to structural familiarity and assessment alignment, CBLT offers superior potential for developing 21st-century competencies such as communication, collaboration, and learner autonomy. However, its implementation remains constrained by systemic challenges, including limited faculty training, institutional inertia, and resource shortages.

This study contributes to the literature by contextualizing the CBLT, traditional dichotomy within under-resourced higher education settings, a relatively underexplored area in existing ELT research. It also offers concrete implications for national policymakers, university leaders, and classroom practitioners seeking to bridge the gap between educational policy and classroom realities.

Nevertheless, the study has limitations. The sample, while diverse, was limited to five institutions, and the cross-sectional nature of the data may not fully capture longitudinal dynamics in reform adoption. Future research could adopt a longitudinal or experimental design to examine the sustained impact of CBLT over time or explore student identity formation, motivation, and digital engagement within CBLT frameworks.

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In conclusion, meaningful integration of CBLT into English language programs in regional Vietnamese universities will require sustained institutional commitment, targeted capacity-building, and context-sensitive reform strategies. Only through such multi-level coordination can the promise of competency-based English education be fully realized in Vietnam's diverse higher education landscape.

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