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Factors influencing competency-based literature teaching in lower secondary schools: Evidence from Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam

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Abstract

The rapid transformation of education in the 21st century, particularly under the influence of Industry 4.0 and the 2018 General Education Curriculum of Vietnam, requires a fundamental shift from knowledge transmission to competency-based teaching. This study investigates the factors influencing the implementation of competency-oriented Literature instruction in lower secondary schools in Ho Chi Minh City, a major educational hub of Vietnam. Adopting a sequential explanatory mixed-methods design, the research surveyed 455 respondents and complemented quantitative findings with qualitative content analysis. Reliability testing confirmed strong consistency of the measurement scales (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.946$). Results indicate that three factor groups significantly predict teaching effectiveness: teaching methods and assessment ($\beta = 0.415$), teachers' pedagogical competence ($\beta = 0.320$), and institutional environment and support ($\beta = 0.188$). Curriculum content and student characteristics, although important, were not direct predictors but operated indirectly through teachers' competence and classroom practices. A notable perceptual gap emerged between administrators, who generally evaluated reform implementation more optimistically, and teachers, who expressed greater concern over practical challenges such as professional support activities, diverse teaching forms, and students' access to new textbooks. These findings highlight the systemic and interrelated nature of competency-based teaching, where improvement in one factor reinforces others. The study concludes that the success of Vietnam's educational reform hinges on substantive investment in teachers' professional development and the creation of supportive school environments. The implications extend beyond Vietnam, offering insights into how emerging educational systems can effectively bridge the gap between policy aspirations and classroom realities.

Keywords: Competency-based teaching, Educational reform, Literature instruction, Teacher competence, Vietnam.

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1. Introduction

The 21st century has assigned education a historic mission: to move beyond the traditional transmission of knowledge toward the holistic development of learners' competencies. This transformation is no longer an option but an inevitable response to the profound challenges of the Fourth Industrial Revolution [1, 2]. In an era when automation and artificial intelligence are reshaping the labor market, leading nations and educational institutions have recognized that the sustainability of educational quality and the adaptability of future generations constitute top strategic priorities [3]. The rapid emergence of Generative AI further intensifies the urgency of redefining the teacher's role and the objectives of schooling, directing education toward cultivating higher-order competencies that cannot be replicated by machines [4].

In alignment with this global trend, Vietnam has placed fundamental and comprehensive reform of education and training at the center of national policy. Resolution No. 29-NQ/TW of the Party Central Committee clearly articulates the core goal of shifting from a knowledge-focused model to one that fosters both competencies and qualities in learners [5]. The introduction of the 2018 General Education Curriculum marked a decisive turning point, demanding not only new content but also synchronized innovations in teaching methods, assessment practices, and school management [6, 7].

Within this reform agenda, the subject of Literature at the lower secondary level assumes a particularly important role. Beyond its traditional mission of transmitting literary knowledge, Literature is now expected to contribute directly to the development of essential competencies, including language proficiency, critical and creative thinking, and aesthetic appreciation [8]. At the same time, Literature education carries deep humanistic value, enabling young learners to explore the complexities of human existence [9, 10]. By engaging with artistic language, students undergo a process of "defamiliarization" that allows them to break away from habitual perceptions, thereby achieving fresh and multi-dimensional insights into life [11].

Yet, the path from reform policy to effective classroom practice is neither straightforward nor guaranteed. International scholarship highlights multiple constraints on the teaching and learning of Literature, ranging from structural challenges within curricula to subjective factors linked to teachers' and students' capacities [12]. Even committed educators may retain misconceptions about core literary concepts, undermining instructional quality [13]. In this context, the teacher's pedagogical competence particularly the ability to design learning activities, employ diverse teaching strategies [14] and address heterogeneous learner groups [15] emerges as the decisive factor. Teachers are thus viewed not only as professionals but also as pedagogical artists, whose success depends on ongoing professional development, self-assessment [16] and training [17].

Ho Chi Minh City, as Vietnam's most dynamic social and educational hub, offers both opportunities and challenges for implementing the 2018 General Education Curriculum. Local initiatives have ranged from technology integration [18] to the promotion of students' practical competencies [19]. However, the sustainability of these innovations requires a more systematic and evidence-based understanding of the real factors shaping teaching practice. Such an understanding is essential for policymakers, school leaders, and teachers to make informed and contextually appropriate adjustments. Against this backdrop, the present study seeks to answer three central research questions:

1. What factors influence the implementation of competency-based Literature teaching in lower secondary schools in Ho Chi Minh City?
2. How does the level of impact of each factor group manifest in teaching effectiveness?
3. What similarities and differences exist between teachers' and administrators' perceptions of these factors?

2. Literature Review

To obtain a systematic and in-depth perspective on the factors influencing Literature teaching under a competency-development orientation, reviewing related studies is a foundational step. Domestic and international research has illuminated many aspects of this complex educational process.

2.1. Teachers' Awareness, Competence, and Professional Development

In every educational model, teachers are the decisive agents who transform goals on paper into the living reality of the classroom. Scholars unanimously agree that a teacher's competence, awareness, and methodology exert the most direct and powerful influence on educational quality. Teachers' beliefs serve as the starting point that governs all their pedagogical actions. Their views on the purpose of Literature instruction [20] approaches to text analysis [21] or teaching within particular contexts [22] shape how they design lessons and interact with students. Studies have shown that even experienced teachers can hold misconceptions about core literary concepts, which negatively affect instructional effectiveness [23]. Therefore, understanding and, where necessary, reshaping teachers' beliefs is crucial. Only with accurate awareness can effective pedagogical competence be formed. This competence is a complex combination of subject-matter knowledge and soft skills. Numerous works have clarified various facets of teacher competence, from planning instruction along a progressive learning trajectory for students [24, 25] to mastering diverse teaching methods [26, 27]. A competent teacher must know how to select and flexibly apply different approaches [28, 29] to suit each student group, especially those with limited ability [30]. However, competence is not static; it requires ongoing professional growth and lifelong learning. Effective school models always emphasize the importance of creating professional learning communities, where teachers can continuously upskill, update their knowledge [31] and self-assess using rigorous tools [32]. This process is not only the individual teacher's responsibility but also demands strategic leadership and support from administrators [33].

2.2. Learners' Characteristics, Needs, and Attitudes

Shifting to a competency-development model also means placing learners at the center of the teaching-learning process. All pedagogical activities must be designed based on a deep understanding of students' characteristics, needs, and attitudes. First, students' cognitive profiles and attitudes are critical inputs. Reading comprehension is not a singular skill but a complex interactive process requiring active engagement and appropriate strategies [34]. Learners' attitudes toward the subject heavily influenced by their teachers also serve as important predictors of academic outcomes [35]. The ultimate goal of Literature instruction is to develop students' literary competence, a multifaceted construct that goes beyond analyzing literary devices. Scandinavian research defines this competence as the ability to engage meaningfully in literary dialogues [36] to interpret and reflect, and to transcend conventional frameworks to achieve one's own aesthetic experience [37]. Portraits of literate readers reveal diversity in how they approach, appreciate, and construct meaning from texts [38]. Therefore, teachers should not aim to produce uniform "replicas" of perception but rather cultivate independent, deep-thinking readers. To achieve this, fostering students' capacity for self-directed learning is also vital, enabling them to become lifelong learners capable of continually enriching their own knowledge and competencies long after leaving school [39].

2.3. Curriculum, Content, and Instructional Resources

The curriculum and its accompanying resources serve as the structural "scaffolding" and material foundation for teaching and learning. A strong curriculum must balance rigor and coherence with space for teacher creativity. Comparative studies of literature curricula in European countries [40] and the Nordic region [41] have highlighted different cultural models for defining the subject's role and objectives. Selecting texts for instruction is a deeply cultural act, reflecting conceptions of heritage and identity [42]. Consequently, the role of literary texts in the classroom and their intended uses has merited special scholarly attention [43]. While textbooks remain important, they should be viewed as only one resource. In the modern context, teachers' ability to develop and curate their own text collections tailored to their objectives and student needs constitutes a high-level professional skill [44]. Thematic, interdisciplinary units that integrate language and social content also effectively enrich materials and develop students' integrative competencies [45].

2.4. Teaching Methods, Organizational Forms, and Assessment Practices

This dimension most clearly reflects teachers' pedagogical competence and has the most direct impact on learners' experiences. An effective method must spark interest, stimulate thinking, and build competence. Educational theory offers a wide spectrum of methods, techniques, and strategies. Research has systematized general teaching principles [46] specialized approaches [47] and specific techniques [48] for teachers' use. Student-centered strategies [49] and innovative models [50] such as contract learning [51] and experiential learning theory [52] have demonstrated positive effects in fostering learner autonomy. The digital revolution has profoundly transformed education [53]. Effective technology integration not only enlivens lessons but also develops digital competencies in both teachers and students [54]. Tools such as educational videos [55] specialized instructional software [56] and AI-driven feedback platforms [57] are unlocking great potential for personalized learning. Alongside pedagogical innovation, assessment must also evolve. Competency-oriented evaluation goes beyond testing knowledge recall: it requires a shift in managerial thinking [58] and teachers' practices. Assessment systems must be diversified covering both formative and summative evaluations and establish clear criteria for assessing practical skills such as speaking and listening [59].

2.5. Educational Environment and Institutional Support

An individual teacher's efforts cannot go far without a supportive and coherent educational environment. School effectiveness is a composite concept shaped by many interacting factors [60]. The role of school leaders is vital in crafting a reformative vision, planning strategic initiatives [61] and fostering an organizational culture that encourages creativity and risk-taking. Macro-level education policies, as codified in national legal documents [62] provide the legal framework and necessary investment for reform. Beyond top-down support, professional communities where teachers observe each other's classes, share experiences, collaborate on lesson design, and solve problems together are among the strongest drivers of professional growth [63].

The foregoing review shows that the factors influencing competency-oriented Literature teaching are highly diverse and dialectically interrelated. However, existing studies often focus on individual aspects in isolation. A comprehensive study that systematically examines the interactions among all these factor groups and, in particular, compares the perspectives of the two core stakeholders, teachers and administrators, within the specific context of a major, dynamic educational center like Ho Chi Minh City remains necessary. This study seeks to contribute to clarifying that real-world portrait.

3. Research Methodology

3.1. Research Design

To explore and clarify the "Factors affecting the competency-based teaching of Literature in lower secondary schools in Ho Chi Minh City," this study employed a Mixed Methods Research Design. This design was chosen for its ability to leverage the strengths of both quantitative and qualitative methods, providing a comprehensive and in-depth perspective on the research problem [64]. Specifically, the study adopted a sequential explanatory design, where quantitative data was collected and analyzed first, followed by a qualitative analysis to further illuminate and interpret the quantitative results [65].

In the first phase, the quantitative method played a primary role through a large-scale survey. The purpose of this phase was to measure the perceptions and assessments of teachers (Te) and educational managers (Ma) regarding the 5 factor groups identified in the literature review. The use of quantitative data allowed for testing hypotheses about perceptual differences between the two groups and provided a generalizable overview of the situation in the area.

In the second phase, a qualitative analysis was conducted based on the quantitative results. Instead of merely presenting statistical figures, the study proceeded with a deeper analysis of the rankings of mean scores and the disparities in those rankings between the (Te) and (Ma) groups. This approach, sometimes referred to as "qualitizing quantitative data," enables the exploration of trends, priorities, and the "underlying narratives" behind the numbers, helping to explain why similarities or differences in perception exist [66]. The integration of these two methods helps the study overcome the limitations of a single-method approach, yielding a more comprehensive and meaningful outcome [67]. The foundation of this entire design is based on the principles of scientific inference in social research, ensuring that the conclusions drawn are supported by solid empirical evidence [68].

3.2. Data Collection Tools and Procedures

3.2.1. Data Collection Tool

The primary instrument used in this study was a structured questionnaire, an effective method for collecting standardized data from a large number of subjects. The questionnaire was developed through a rigorous process, beginning with the establishment of a theoretical basis, where the content of the items was directly derived from the 5 factor groups reviewed in the theoretical section, thereby ensuring content validity.

Structurally, the questionnaire consisted of two main parts: Part 1 collected basic demographic information (position, gender, age, qualifications, experience) to outline the sample's characteristics; Part 2 included statements designed to measure perceptions and assessments of the 5 influencing factor groups, using a 5-point Likert scale (from 1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree). Finally, to validate and refine the instrument, the questionnaire was reviewed by educational experts and underwent a pilot test with a small group of teachers and managers. This process helped to clarify and ensure the accuracy of the wording, while also testing the reliability of the scales using the Cronbach's Alpha coefficient, ensuring the measurement tool was consistent and dependable before official deployment.

3.2.2. Data Collection Procedure

The data collection was conducted in an organized manner. The questionnaire was administered in both paper-based and online formats (Google Forms) to provide maximum convenience for participants. Data was collected over a specified period. All collected information was kept confidential and used solely for the purposes of this study.

3.3. Research Population and Sample

3.3.1. Target Population

The target population of this study comprised all teachers currently teaching Literature and educational managers (Principals, Vice-Principals, Heads of Subject Departments) at public lower secondary schools in Ho Chi Minh City.

Table 1.
Demographic Characteristics of the Survey Sample (N=455).

Characteristic	Group	Teacher (Te)	Manager (Ma)	Total
Gender	Female	219	25	244
	Male	178	33	211
Age Group	Under 30	135	16	151
	31-40	135	24	159
	41-50	88	16	104
	Over 50	20	2	22
Professional Qualification	College Diploma	23	5	28
	Bachelor's Degree	299	46	345
	Master's Degree	61	5	66
	Doctorate (PhD)	14	2	16
Years of Experience	Under 5 years	92	8	100
	5-10 years	237	34	271
	Over 10 years	68	16	84
Attended competency-based teaching training	Yes	368	56	424
	No	29	2	31
Level of interest in innovating Literature teaching	Very High	224	36	260
	High	157	20	177
	Medium	71	2	73
	Low	14	0	14

3.3.2. Sampling Method and Sample Size

Due to time and resource constraints, the study used convenience sampling. Researchers approached schools and

individuals who were willing and conveniently available to participate in the survey. Although this method may have limitations regarding representativeness compared to random sampling, it is suitable for the objectives of an initial exploratory and descriptive study. A total of 455 valid questionnaires were collected, including 397 from teachers (Te) (87.3%) and 58 from educational managers (Ma) (12.7%). This sample size is considered large enough to perform the necessary statistical analyses and to draw reliable conclusions. The detailed characteristics of the sample are presented in Table 1 in the Results section.

3.4. Data Analysis Methods

After collection, the data was cleaned, coded, and processed using the specialized statistical analysis software SPSS 26. The analysis process was divided into clear steps corresponding to the mixed-methods design.

3.4.1. Descriptive Statistical Analysis

This foundational analysis aimed to summarize and describe the basic characteristics of the collected data. For nominal data in the demographic section, such as gender and professional qualifications, frequency and percentage (%) analysis was used to outline the overall profile of the sample. For data measured on the Likert scale, the study employed analysis of the mean (M) and standard deviation (SD). The mean indicates the general perceptual trend of the participants (leaning towards agreement or disagreement), while the standard deviation reflects the degree of dispersion or consensus of opinions a smaller standard deviation indicates a higher level of consensus within the group.

3.4.2. Inferential Statistical Analysis

To ensure the scientific rigor and quality of the data, the study conducted a stringent two-step statistical analysis process. First, the reliability of the survey instrument was tested to verify the internal consistency of the scales. The Cronbach's Alpha analysis showed "Good" reliability for all 5 factor scales (with α coefficients ranging from 0.852 to 0.893) and "Excellent" reliability for the entire 35-item scale ($\alpha = 0.946$). These results confirm that the collected data is highly reliable for further in-depth analysis.

After validating the scales, the study used the Independent Samples T-test to compare the perceptions between the teacher and manager groups. This procedure is based on testing the null hypothesis (H_0) which assumes no real difference between the two groups by comparing the p-value (Sig.) with an alpha level (α) of 0.05. Accordingly, a difference is considered statistically significant if $p \leq 0.05$; conversely, the difference is attributed to chance if $p > 0.05$. This two-step approach ensures that the study's conclusions are built upon a solid methodological foundation.

Table 2.
Results of Scale Reliability Test using Cronbach's Alpha.

Factor	No. of Items	Cronbach's Alpha (α)	Reliability Assessment
Factor 1. Perception, pedagogical competence	7	0.875	Good
Factor 2. Student characteristics & attitude	7	0.861	Good
Factor 3. Curriculum, materials	7	0.893	Good
Factor 4. Methods, assessment	7	0.884	Good
Factor 5. Facilities, support	7	0.852	Good
Overall Scale	35	0.946	Excellent

3.4.3. Qualitative Content Analysis

As mentioned in the research design, a key finding was that all p-values were greater than 0.05. However, this does not mean there are no differences worthy of analysis; it only indicates a similarity at the statistical surface. To delve deeper, the study conducted a secondary analysis using the technique of qualitative analysis of quantitative data, a prominent method in mixed-methods research [68]. Specifically, Mayring's qualitative content analysis method [69, 70] was applied by interpreting and comparing the rankings of the mean scores for each group. This approach allowed the study to identify which factors each group considered most important or best implemented (via the highest-scoring criteria), as well as the biggest challenges or weaknesses (via the lowest-scoring criteria). Most importantly, comparing the rankings between the teacher (T) and manager (M) groups helped to uncover subtle discrepancies and differences in perspectives and priorities that the p-values alone could not reveal. This method thus helps transform relatively dry statistical data into in-depth, meaningful interpretations that are closely aligned with the educational reality in Ho Chi Minh City.

3.5. Limitations of the Study

Despite maximum efforts to ensure scientific rigor, the study has certain limitations. First, the use of convenience sampling may affect the generalizability of the results to the entire population. Second, data collected from self-reported questionnaires may be subject to self-report bias. Future research could address these limitations by using random sampling methods and incorporating more in-depth qualitative methods such as interviews or classroom observations.

4. Research Results

Table 3.
Teachers' perception and pedagogical competence.

Criteria	M (Ma)	SD (Ma)	M (Te)	SD (Te)	Sig. (p-value)
Clearly understands competency-based teaching	4.267	0.753	4.138	0.873	0.5123
Ability to design competency-based lesson plans	4.067	0.816	4.119	0.831	0.8456
Flexibly uses active teaching methods	4.000	0.707	4.048	0.912	0.7891
Knows how to assess student competence based on criteria	3.933	0.996	4.214	0.856	0.3248
Updates professional knowledge and new methods	4.267	0.707	4.214	0.835	0.8852
Managers create conditions for teachers' professional development	4.533	0.516	4.143	0.949	0.0654
Participates in training and professional development	4.400	0.548	4.119	0.783	0.1782
Average	4.209	0.781	4.141	0.875	

The analysis of Table 3 shows a high degree of similarity in the perceptions of the educational manager (Ma) and teacher (Te) groups regarding the constituent factors of pedagogical competence. This is evidenced by p-values > 0.05 in the T-test, confirming no statistically significant difference between the two groups. Both teachers (Te) and managers (Ma) highly value the importance of professional development and competency-based teaching, with overall average scores above 4.1. However, a deeper analysis of the mean scores (M) reveals notable discrepancies in their perspectives. A typical example is the difference in assessing the support role: while managers (Ma) rate their role in creating conditions for teachers' professional development very highly ($M = 4.533$), the perceived level from teachers (Te) is considerably lower ($M = 4.143$). This difference, though not reaching statistical significance ($p = 0.0654$), suggests a certain gap between policy and practice. Conversely, teachers (Te) are more confident in their ability to assess student competence ($M = 4.214$) compared to the managers' (Ma) assessment of this ability ($M = 3.933$). These perceptual differences indicate the need to strengthen professional dialogue to create synergy and optimize the effectiveness of staff capacity development.

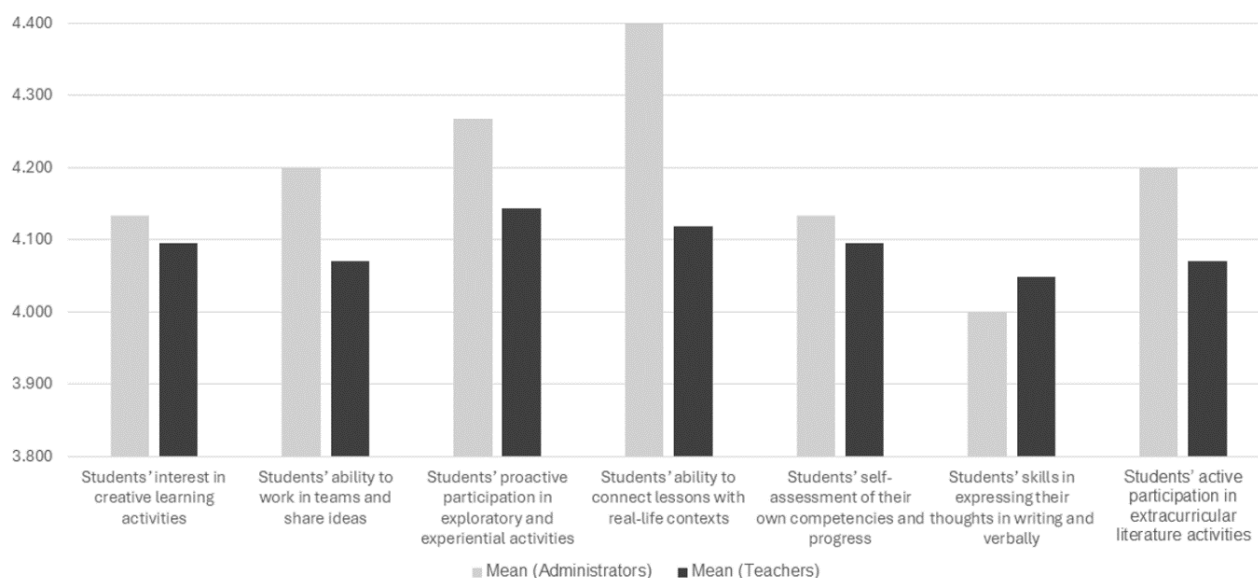


Figure 1.
Students' characteristics, needs and learning attitudes.

Figure 1 shows a high consensus between educational managers (Ma) and teachers (Te) in assessing the characteristics, needs, and learning attitudes of students, with all p-values > 0.05 , confirming no statistically significant difference. Both groups have a relatively positive view of the learners, reflected in overall average scores above 4.0. However, the data also reveals a consistent trend: managers (Ma) tend to assess students' competencies and attitudes more optimistically than teachers (Te) do. This perceptual difference is most evident in the criterion "Students connect lessons to real life," where the managers' (Ma) score ($M = 4.400$) is significantly higher than the teachers' (Te) ($M = 4.119$). Similarly, managers (Ma) also rate students' ability to work in groups and their proactivity in participating in learning activities higher. Notably, both groups rate the competency of "expressing thoughts in writing and speech" the lowest, indicating this is seen as a common challenge. The perceptual gap between the managers' overview and the teachers' direct experience implies the necessity for channels of dialogue, lesson observation, and deeper feedback to unify perspectives, thereby devising the most effective support measures for students.

Table 4.
Curriculum, content, and teaching materials.

Criteria	M (Ma)	SD (Ma)	M (Te)	SD (Te)	Sig. (p-value)
The 2018 GEP content focuses on competency development	4.200	0.632	4.095	0.907	0.7124
Textbooks facilitate critical and creative thinking	4.133	0.835	4.095	0.907	0.8790
Supplementary and digital materials suit competency goals	4.267	0.707	4.143	0.864	0.6358
Teachers adjust content to suit students	4.000	0.707	4.048	0.912	0.7891
Students easily access and effectively use new textbooks	4.400	0.548	4.119	0.913	0.2761
Interdisciplinary content supports student competence	4.133	0.835	4.095	0.907	0.8790
The program is flexible, allowing for classroom adjustments	4.200	0.632	4.071	0.891	0.7124
Average	4.162	0.722	4.103	0.897	

The analysis of Table 4 continues to show a high consensus between educational managers (Ma) and teachers (Te) regarding factors related to curriculum and teaching materials, with all p-values > 0.05. Both groups positively assess that the 2018 General Education Program (GEP) and the new system of textbooks and materials have fundamentally met the objectives of competency development. However, similar to the previous factors, the data reveals a perceptual gap between the managerial perspective and practical experience. The trend of managers (Ma) assessing more optimistically than teachers (Te) continues, most clearly demonstrated in the criterion "Students easily access and effectively use new textbooks." While managers (Ma) strongly believe in this ability (M = 4.400), the teachers' (Te) assessment is considerably more reserved (M = 4.119). This implies a discrepancy between the intended design of the curriculum developers and the practical usability of the textbooks in diverse classroom environments. This difference shows that, although the curriculum and materials are recognized as having the right orientation, listening to feedback from teachers about implementation difficulties is crucial for making timely adjustments and providing support, ensuring the effectiveness and sustainability of the reform.

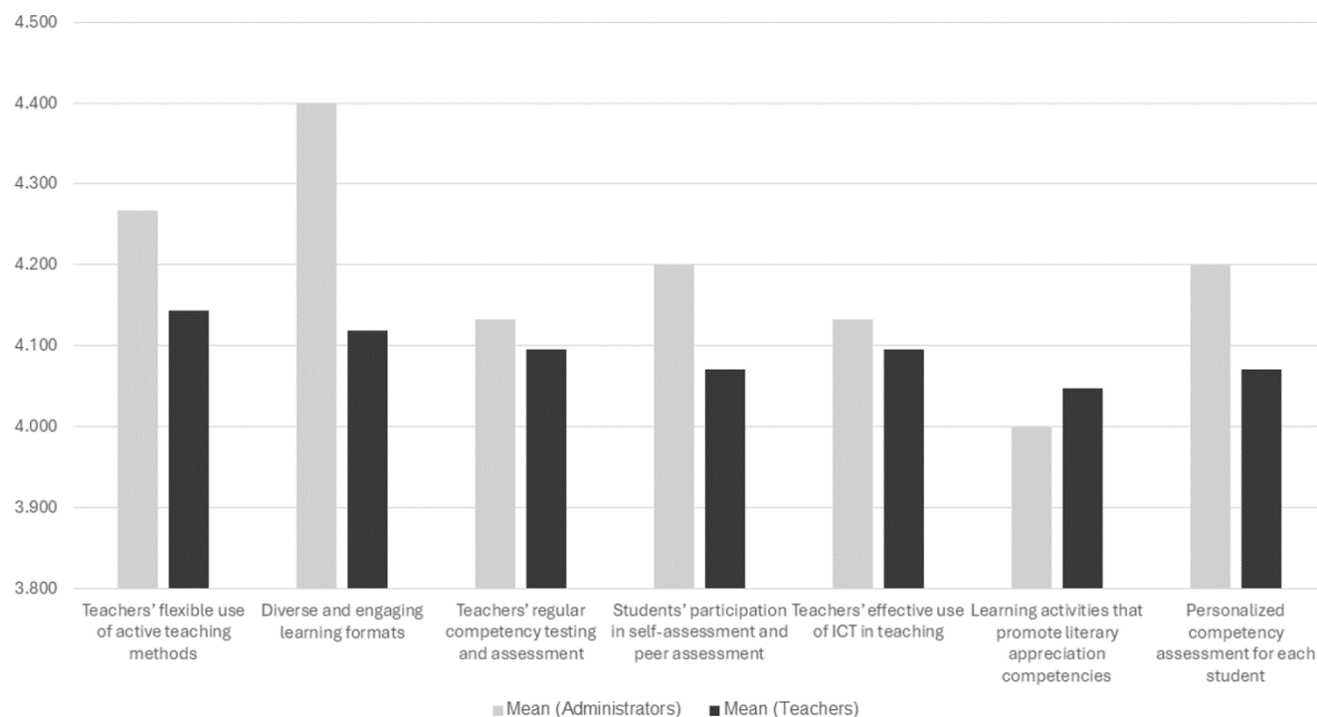


Figure 2.
Methods, forms of teaching organization, and assessment.

Figure 2 is of particular importance; the results show a high consensus between educational managers (Ma) and teachers (Te) on the importance of innovating methods and assessment ($p > 0.05$). Both groups clearly recognize this as the "backbone" of competency-based teaching. However, the "perceptual gap" between the two groups reappears and is most evident at the implementation level. Managers (Ma) have a very optimistic assessment of the organization of "Diverse and engaging learning forms" (M = 4.400), but the perceived level from teachers (Te) is much more modest (M = 4.119). This gap suggests a possible difference between the orientation and plans of managers and the practical implementation capacity under classroom conditions for teachers. A noteworthy point is that the criterion "Learning activities that develop literary appreciation competence" was rated lowest by managers (Ma) (M = 4.000). This implies that, while technical methods are emphasized, nurturing the "soul" of the Literature subject the competence for aesthetic appreciation remains a major challenge, requiring more profound and sophisticated pedagogical solutions.

Table 5.

Environment, facilities, and support

Criteria	M (Ma)	SD (Ma)	M (Te)	SD (Te)	Sig. (p-value)
The school has a plan to innovate teaching methods	4.133	0.835	4.095	0.907	0.8790
Classrooms, equipment, and digital resources meet needs	4.267	0.707	4.143	0.864	0.6358
Teachers attend lessons and share experiences for innovation	4.400	0.548	4.119	0.913	0.2761
Managers provide timely support, supervision, and feedback	4.200	0.632	4.071	0.891	0.7124
Students have a friendly environment that encourages opinions	4.000	0.707	4.048	0.912	0.7891
Parents and the community support competency development	4.267	0.707	4.143	0.864	0.6358
The school organizes extracurriculars to foster competence	4.133	0.835	4.095	0.907	0.8790
Average	4.163	0.736	4.105	0.892	

Analysis of Table 5 shows that, although there is no statistically significant difference in perception between educational managers (Ma) and teachers (Te) ($p > 0.05$), the gaps in assessing the environment and support continue to be a clear trend. This is an important factor, identified as the third strongest predictor of teaching effectiveness in the study's regression model. Once again, managers (Ma) have a more optimistic view, especially regarding activities that support professional development. The biggest discrepancy lies in the criterion "Teachers attend lessons and share experiences for innovation," with a very high rating from managers (Ma) ($M = 4.400$), while the perceived level from teachers (Te) is considerably lower ($M = 4.119$). This may imply a difference between activities being organized on paper and their actual effectiveness for teachers. Notably, the criterion "A friendly environment that encourages opinions" was rated lowest by managers (Ma) ($M = 4.000$). This indicates that, even if factors like facilities or plans are ensured, building an open and creative school culture remains a major challenge. The difference in perception between managers and teachers underscores the importance of building substantive support mechanisms that not only exist in policy but are also truly effective and responsive to the needs of the teachers.

Table 6.Correlation matrix of factors (Pearson's r).

Factor	Y1	Y2	Y3	Y4	Y5
Y1. Perception, pedagogical competence	1				
Y2. Student characteristics, attitude	0.521**	1			
Y3. Curriculum, materials	0.633**	0.489**	1		
Y4. Methods, assessment	0.712**	0.584**	0.675**	1	
Y5. Facilities, support	0.598**	0.456**	0.602**	0.651**	1

Note: Y1...Y5 are Factors 1-5 respectively. * $p < 0.01$.

The analysis of the Pearson correlation matrix (Table 6) reveals a significant finding: all five factor groups have a positive and statistically significant correlation at a high level ($p < 0.01$). This confirms that the factors do not act independently but exist within a tight-knit system, having a reciprocal and synergistic relationship. An improvement in one factor tends to lead to improvements in others. The strongest correlation was recorded between Teachers' pedagogical competence (Y1) and Methods & Assessment (Y4), with a coefficient of $r = 0.712$. This is a very strong relationship, implying that a teacher's competence is expressed most directly and powerfully through the pedagogical methods they employ. Conversely, mastering effective methods is both a measure and a pathway to enhancing competence. Overall, the Methods & Assessment factor (Y4) acts as a "central hub," having high correlation coefficients with all other factors. This finding emphasizes that any reform effort requires a holistic, synergistic approach, rather than isolated solutions, as a change in one factor will spread and impact the entire system.

Table 7.

Multiple linear regression results predicting 'teaching effectiveness'.

Independent Variable	Beta (β)	SE	t	p	VIF
(Constant)		0.152	1.88	.061	
Y4. Methods, assessment	0.415	0.058	7.16	<.001	2.45
Y1. Perception, pedagogical competence	0.320	0.061	5.25	<.001	2.51
Y5. Facilities, support	0.188	0.049	3.84	<.001	2.13
Y3. Curriculum, materials	0.095	0.055	1.73	.085	2.26
Y2. Student characteristics, attitude	0.041	0.047	0.87	.384	1.77
R-squared (R^2)	0.675				
F (5, 449)	185.31			<.001	

The multiple linear regression results (Table 7) provide the most convincing quantitative evidence of the study. The analysis shows that Methods, forms of teaching organization, and assessment (Y4) is the factor with the strongest impact ($\beta = 0.415$), confirming that the way teachers organize classroom activities is the decisive lever. This is followed by Teachers' pedagogical competence (Y1) ($\beta = 0.320$) and Environment, facilities, and support (Y5) ($\beta = 0.188$). Notably, curriculum

and student characteristics are not direct predictors, suggesting their influence is mediated through the competence and actions of the teacher. A consistent and important finding is that although there is a high consensus in perception between educational managers (Ma) and teachers (Te) (no statistically significant difference), a significant "gap" exists between the managerial perspective and practical experience. Managers (Ma) always tend to assess factors regarding implementation level and effectiveness more optimistically than teachers (Te). This discrepancy is most evident in aspects such as the effectiveness of lesson observation and experience-sharing activities; the appeal of diverse teaching forms; or the accessibility of new textbooks for students. Finally, the correlation matrix confirms that these factors do not exist in isolation but have an organic and close relationship, especially the strong link between teacher competence and the methods they use ($r = 0.712$). This strongly implies that for reform efforts to succeed, a holistic and synergistic approach is needed. Solutions cannot stop at policy but must focus on providing substantive support so that teachers have sufficient conditions and competence to implement effective teaching methods, as this is the most direct and shortest path to improving educational quality.

5. Discussion

The results of this study have provided a comprehensive, evidence-based picture of the factors affecting the competency-based teaching of Literature in lower secondary schools in Ho Chi Minh City. The findings not only confirm several assumptions in modern pedagogical theory but also unveil deeper layers of meaning when placed within the specific context of Vietnam's educational reforms.

5.1. Discussion of Research Findings

5.1.1. The Importance of Pedagogical Methods and Teacher Competence

The most significant and impactful finding of this research is the affirmation of the paramount role of methods, forms of teaching organization, and assessment (Y4), and the perception & pedagogical competence of teachers (Y1). The regression analysis results show that these two factors are the strongest predictors, far surpassing the others. This is not surprising but serves as a powerful validation of core educational principles. Educational theories worldwide have long emphasized that in any reform, the teacher is the decisive agent of its success or failure [30, 71]. The transition to a competency-based model is, in essence, a revolution in pedagogical methodology. It demands a shift from "lecturing knowledge" to "organizing learning activities," and from "testing memory" to "assessing application skills" [7, 58]. Therefore, it is a logical necessity that the methods factor (Y4) has the highest Beta coefficient (0.415).

The strongest correlation in the entire matrix ($r = 0.712$) is between teacher competence (Y1) and methods (Y4). This is not a parallel relationship but a bidirectional causal one. A competent teacher (Y1) is defined by their very ability to master and flexibly apply active teaching methods (Y4). Conversely, the process of diligently exploring and applying new methods is the most effective path to cultivate and enhance a teacher's competence. Thus, this study has quantified a truth in pedagogy: competence and method are two sides of the same coin the inseparable "hardware" and "software" of a professional teacher in the 21st century.

5.1.2. The Perceptual Gap Between Policy and Practice

One of the most subtle and meaningful findings of the study is the "perceptual gap" between the educational manager (Ma) and teacher (Te) groups. Although the T-test results indicated a high statistical consensus (no significant difference), a deeper analysis of the mean scores uncovered a different narrative. On almost all criteria related to the level of implementation and the effectiveness of support activities, managers consistently held a significantly more optimistic view than teachers.

This perceptual discrepancy is most evident in three areas: (1) the effectiveness of professional support activities such as lesson observations and experience sharing; (2) the diversity and appeal of teaching organization forms; and (3) students' ability to access and utilize new textbooks. This phenomenon can be explained from the perspectives of organizational psychology and management science. Managers, in their role as planners and organizers, often evaluate based on whether a policy has been issued or an activity has been launched. Meanwhile, teachers, as the direct implementers, perceive and evaluate based on the difficulties, challenges, and actual effectiveness within their specific classroom contexts.

This gap does not necessarily reflect a weakness on either side but rather indicates a lack of effective bottom-up dialogue and feedback channels within the school system [60, 61]. It serves as a warning that the success of reform lies not only in enacting the right policies but also depends on how those policies are "absorbed" and "transformed" at the micro-level of each classroom.

5.1.3. The Mediating Role of Curriculum, Materials, and Learners

A result that might initially be surprising is that the factors of Curriculum & Materials (Y3) and Student Characteristics & Attitudes (Y2) were not statistically significant predictors in the regression model. However, this does not mean they are unimportant. Instead, it suggests that their influence is indirect and mediated by other factors, primarily the competence and methods of the teacher.

A curriculum or a textbook, no matter how well-designed, is merely an "inert" tool. It can only realize its value when a competent teacher breathes life into it with creative teaching methods [43, 44]. Similarly, a student with a positive learning attitude will struggle to develop competencies if not engaged in appropriately designed learning activities [34]. Thus, this study strongly supports the view of the teacher as the "conductor" of the learning process, one who can connect and optimize input factors (curriculum, students) to produce the output of learner competencies and qualities.

5.2. Research Implications

From the above analyses and discussion, the study offers several important theoretical and practical implications, aimed at promoting the effectiveness of teaching Literature in particular and the educational reform movement in general.

5.2.1. Theoretical Implications

First, this study enriches the body of theoretical literature on education in Vietnam by providing a quantitative, multi-factor analysis model for a contemporary issue. It goes beyond studies that often focus on a single aspect to offer a systemic, holistic perspective on the forces shaping the teaching process in the context of reform.

Second, the study validates and quantifies the relative importance of the factor groups, emphasizing the central role of pedagogical methods and teacher competence. This result provides a solid scientific basis for researchers and policymakers to build intervention and educational development models in the future.

Third, the detection and analysis of the "perceptual gap" between managers and teachers opens up a potential research direction in the field of educational management. Deeper investigation into the causes and solutions to narrow this gap will be key to improving school governance effectiveness and promoting the success of reform policies.

5.2.2. Practical implications

For policymakers and educational authorities, the focus of policies and resource investment needs to shift more decisively from developing curricula and compiling materials to providing training and professional development on teaching and assessment methods for teachers. Flexible monitoring and feedback mechanisms should be established to capture difficulties from the field, rather than relying solely on administrative reports.

For school leaders, the role of the principal needs to be redefined as that of a pedagogical leader. Their top priority should be to build a substantive support environment (Y5) that creates the most favorable conditions for teachers to innovate their methods (Y4). This includes providing adequate resources, reducing unnecessary administrative burdens, and, most importantly, fostering a school culture that encourages creativity, experimentation, and is not afraid of failure. To narrow the perceptual gap, school leaders need to increase lesson observations and engage in sincere, constructive professional dialogue with teachers.

For teachers, they need to be deeply aware of their central role in determining educational quality. Lifelong learning and professional development, especially honing skills in designing learning activities, using technology, and applying diverse assessment methods, must become an intrinsic need. Furthermore, teachers should proactively participate in and build professional learning communities (PLCs) at their schools to share, learn, and solve practical problems together, as peer support is one of the most sustainable drivers of development.

For teacher training institutions, teacher training and professional development programs need to be drastically reformed towards a practical orientation. The time allocated to practicing pedagogical skills, applying active teaching methods, and designing competency assessment tools should constitute a large proportion of the curriculum. The strong link between competence (Y1) and method (Y4) must be the core philosophy guiding all training activities.

In conclusion, the journey of transformation toward competency-based teaching is a challenging but inevitable path. This study affirms that for this journey to reach its destination, there is no other way than to invest strategically, profoundly, and substantively in teachers those who hold the key to innovation.

6. Conclusion

This study examined the key factors influencing the implementation of competency-based Literature teaching in lower secondary schools in Ho Chi Minh City. The findings highlight three decisive factors that determine teaching effectiveness, ranked in order of impact: (1) methods, forms of teaching organization, and assessment; (2) teachers' perceptions and pedagogical competence; and (3) the educational environment, facilities, and institutional support.

Beyond these core results, the research also uncovered deeper dynamics: a notable "perceptual gap" between administrators who tend to view reform implementation more optimistically and teachers, who directly confront classroom challenges. Moreover, the strong intercorrelation among all factor groups underscores the systemic and holistic nature of the teaching process, where improvements in one domain inevitably reinforce others.

From these insights, it can be concluded that the success of competency-based Literature teaching does not rest on isolated initiatives but rather on a synergistic interplay of factors, with teachers at the center. The classroom remains the decisive arena of reform, and teachers' professional competence is the pivotal lever for change. Therefore, sustainable innovation in Vietnam's educational reform requires strategic, profound, and substantive investment in teachers—empowering them with the skills, resources, and supportive environments necessary to transform policy aspirations into meaningful classroom practice.

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