

## Professional development of EFL teachers through constructivist-oriented training programs

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### ABSTRACT

Despite increasing policy endorsement of constructivist-oriented (CO) teacher training, limited empirical evidence has clarified how such programs reshape English as a foreign language (EFL) teachers' beliefs and classroom enactment under curriculum reform. This study examines the influence of CO teacher training programs on the professional development (PD) of secondary English teachers in Vietnamese general education. A sequential explanatory mixed-methods design was adopted to capture both general patterns and nuanced forms of change. Quantitative data were collected from 192 secondary English teachers through a questionnaire survey to identify patterns in teachers' beliefs, reported practices, and perceived contextual constraints, while qualitative data were obtained from 22 teachers through semi-structured interviews, classroom observations, lesson plan analysis, and reflective journals to provide triangulated classroom-based evidence. Findings reveal that belief-level endorsement was more consistent than sustained pedagogical restructuring, particularly in assessment for learning (AfL) practices. Teachers increasingly reconceptualized their roles as facilitators and demonstrated greater attention to learning task design, classroom interaction, and competency-aligned assessment. However, the enactment of constructivist teaching (CT) remained uneven and was shaped by contextual constraints such as large class sizes, limited instructional time, and curriculum-related pressures. The study conceptualizes PD as a non-linear and contextually mediated process. By integrating large-scale survey data with sustained classroom-based qualitative documentation, this research offers triangulated and context-sensitive empirical evidence from a reform-driven EFL system, contributing nuanced insight to international scholarship on teacher PD.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

In the context of many education systems implementing curriculum reforms oriented towards competency development, the role of teachers is increasingly recognized not only in conveying content but also in their ability to organize meaningful learning activities for students. In Vietnam, the implementation of the 2018 General Education Program (GEP) has reshaped expectations for English teachers, particularly in relation to classroom organization and learner engagement. Many studies indicate that teacher professional development (PD) is a key factor determining the success of educational reforms; however, not all training

programs produce sustainable changes in teaching practices [1], [2]. This tension between policy expectations and classroom enactment highlights the need to examine how reform-oriented training influences teachers' professional learning in practice.

In practice, traditional teacher training programs often focus on transmission of knowledge, with little connection to the specific classroom context, leading to a gap between teachers' understanding and actions [3], [4]. In this context, teacher training oriented towards constructivist teaching (CT), with a focus on experiential learning, professional reflection, and professional learning communities, is considered a potentially effective approach to help teachers translate the requirements of the new curriculum into concrete teaching practices. However, there is still a lack of empirical research clarifying the impact of these constructivist-oriented (CO) training programs on the PD and teaching practices of English teachers in the context of educational reform in Vietnam.

While prior research has highlighted the potential of CO PD, few studies have systematically examined how belief change is translated into enacted classroom practices under large-scale curriculum reform in developing English as a foreign language (EFL) settings. Moreover, much of the existing evidence relies predominantly on self-reported data, providing limited insight into classroom-level enactment. By integrating survey trends with classroom observations, lesson plan analysis, interviews, and reflective journals, the present study offers triangulated evidence of belief-practice dynamics in context. Such comprehensive integration remains relatively under-explored in reform-oriented EFL systems, particularly within developing educational environments. Addressing these gaps, this study adopts a mixed-methods approach to examine both cognitive reorientation and enacted pedagogical transformation among English teachers in Vietnam.

Unlike earlier studies that conceptualize PD as a linear progression from training to instructional change, this research advances an ecological and non-linear understanding of teacher development under curriculum reform. Its novelty lies in combining large-scale survey evidence with sustained classroom-based qualitative documentation to reveal how belief reorientation, selective enactment, and contextual mediation interact within a reform-driven EFL system. By providing empirically grounded and triangulated evidence from Vietnam, the study contributes context-sensitive insight to international scholarship on teacher PD. In light of the reform context and the identified gaps in the literature, this study focuses on answering the following questions:

- i) How do English teacher training programs oriented towards CT affect teachers' beliefs?
- ii) What changes are reflected in teachers' teaching practices after participating in these training programs?
- iii) What factors support or hinder teachers in applying CT to classroom practice?

## **2. THEORETICAL AND EMPIRICAL FRAMEWORK**

### **2.1. Teacher PD in the context of educational reform**

Recent scholarship increasingly frames teacher PD as an ongoing, practice-embedded process instead of isolated short-term training events. Effective PD engages teachers as active learners, supports classroom-based experimentation, and promotes ongoing reflection on instructional practice [1], [2]. Instructional change is therefore understood as gradual and cumulative, shaped by teachers' beliefs, prior experiences, and professional contexts.

During periods of curriculum reform, PD becomes particularly significant, as teachers are expected to translate policy principles into classroom practice. However, traditional training models that emphasize transmission of techniques without contextual support often produce limited pedagogical transformation [3], [5]. These findings suggest that the effectiveness of reform-oriented PD depends not only on content but also on how learning is enacted within teachers' everyday professional environments.

### **2.2. Theoretical framework**

This study draws on constructivist learning theory, experiential learning theory, and reflective practice to conceptualize teacher PD as a situated and dynamic process [6]–[8]. These perspectives foreground active engagement, social interaction, and reflection as central mechanisms of professional learning. From a constructivist perspective, knowledge is constructed through interaction and experience rather than passively transmitted [6], [9]. Applied to PD, this implies that teachers develop professionally through collaborative inquiry and reflective reinterpretation of practice. Experiential learning further conceptualizes professional growth as cyclical movement between action and reflection, enabling gradual pedagogical adjustment [7]. Reflective practice allows teachers to identify discrepancies between beliefs and classroom enactment, supporting incremental professional change [8].

Taken together, these perspectives frame CO teacher training as influencing professional awareness, which may, in turn, shape classroom practice. However, this process is unlikely to be linear and is often mediated by contextual conditions such as class size, instructional time, and curriculum demands [10].

Within this framework, competency-based assessment aligns with formative assessment principles but may be selectively enacted under structural constraints. Figure 1 illustrates the hypothesized relationships among beliefs, practices, and contextual mediation.

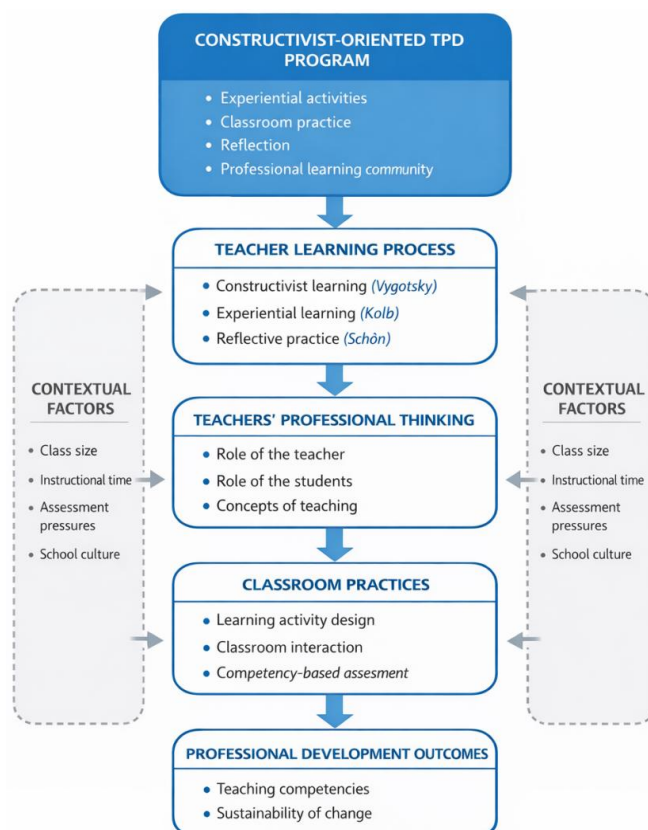


Figure 1. Theoretical framework of the study

### 2.3. Prior research and identified gaps

International research on CO teacher training reports generally positive effects on teacher learning and pedagogical innovation. Experiential and reflective PD activities have been associated with greater pedagogical flexibility and willingness to experiment with new instructional strategies [5], [11]. However, reported outcomes appear rarely uniform and tend to vary across institutional contexts.

In English language education, PD has been shown to enhance teachers' professional awareness and learner-centered orientations [12], [13]. Nevertheless, a persistent gap remains between increased pedagogical awareness and sustained classroom enactment. EFL teachers frequently report constraints related to curriculum pressure, examination systems, and large class sizes [14], [15].

Despite this growing literature, important gaps remain. Much of the existing empirical evidence derives from developed educational systems and relies heavily on self-reported data, thereby offering relatively limited classroom-based insight into how belief development translates into practice. Moreover, relatively few studies adopt mixed-methods approaches capable of capturing both general trends and nuanced enactment processes in reform-oriented contexts. Addressing these gaps, the present study investigates the impact of CO English teacher training programs on both professional beliefs and classroom practices within Vietnam's 2018 GEP reform.

### 2.4. From professional beliefs to classroom practices in teacher PD

Research consistently indicates that changes in teachers' beliefs do not automatically translate into corresponding changes in classroom practice, a tension that has been widely documented in teacher cognition research [3], [16]. Teaching is situated action shaped by contextual realities. Teachers may endorse learner-centered principles at a conceptual level yet encounter challenges operationalizing these principles in practice.

The belief-practice relationship challenges linear models that assume direct progression from training to transformation. Instead, PD is better understood as recursive and iterative, involving cycles of reflection and adjustment. For EFL teachers, subject-specific constraints such as examination-oriented assessment further intensify the complexity of enactment. Consequently, investigating PD requires attention to both articulated beliefs and observed practices.

### **2.5. Contextual constraints and teacher agency in curriculum reform**

Recent scholarship emphasizes the mediating role of context in shaping PD outcomes [4], [9]. Rather than viewing contextual factors solely as barriers, ecological perspectives invite a reconceptualization of teacher agency as emerging through the interaction between professional intentions and structural conditions. Factors such as class size, instructional time, curriculum pacing, and assessment requirements significantly influence instructional decision-making. In reform-oriented environments, teachers often adapt pedagogical principles pragmatically rather than fully adopting prescribed innovations. Teacher agency, therefore, operates as negotiated practice within institutional constraints. In Vietnam's reform context, expectations for learner-centered teaching coexist with persistent structural limitations, underscoring the importance of examining PD as a situated process.

### **2.6. Summary of literature review and conceptual positioning of the study**

The reviewed literature highlights three key insights. First, teacher PD is a long-term, practice-oriented process shaped by belief development and contextual conditions. Second, CO training can foster reflective and learner-centered orientations, yet classroom enactment is often partial. Third, belief development and practice are mediated by contextual constraints and teacher agency. Despite these insights, empirical studies connecting CO training, belief change, classroom enactment, and contextual mediation in reform-driven EFL contexts remain limited. Positioned within these identified gaps, the present study deliberately adopts a mixed-methods design integrating survey data with classroom-based qualitative evidence to provide a triangulated and context-sensitive analysis of teacher PD under curriculum reform.

## **3. RESEARCH METHOD**

### **3.1. Research design**

A sequential explanatory mixed-methods approach was adopted to first identify statistical patterns and subsequently interpret them through qualitative inquiry [17]. Quantitative data were first collected to identify patterns in teachers' beliefs, reported practices, and perceived contextual constraints. Qualitative inquiry was subsequently conducted to explain and contextualize these trends through classroom-based evidence and professional reasoning. Given that teacher PD is widely conceptualized as situated and interpretive [11], [12], qualitative data were central to understanding how CO training influenced the translation of professional awareness into enacted practice. Integration occurred at the interpretation stage, where qualitative themes were used to clarify and refine quantitative patterns.

### **3.2. Participants and sampling**

Participants were recruited using purposive sampling to ensure relevance to the research objectives. Teachers were eligible to participate if they: i) were currently teaching English at lower or upper secondary level; ii) had participated in at least one CO teacher training program within the past two years; and iii) voluntarily consented to take part in the study. Teachers who had not attended such training programs or who did not complete the questionnaire were excluded from the sample. For the qualitative phase, purposive sampling was used to select 22 teachers to ensure variation in experience and reported constructivist orientation [18]. This strategy was intended to capture a wide range of perspectives and classroom enactment patterns related to CO training.

### **3.3. Description of teacher training programs**

The training programs emphasized experiential learning, collaborative reflection, competency-based lesson design, and classroom experimentation. Teachers engaged in lesson planning, peer discussion, reflective dialogue, and context-sensitive adaptation of constructivist principles, consistent with experiential and reflective learning frameworks [7], [8]. The programs were delivered through a series of structured workshops combined with school-based experimentation phases, typically conducted over several months.

### **3.4. Research instruments**

All instruments were aligned with the conceptual framework linking professional beliefs, classroom enactment, and contextual mediation. First, the questionnaire examined teachers' professional beliefs, reported constructivist practices, and perceived contextual constraints. Items were developed based on

established constructs in teacher cognition and PD research [1], [12] and refined through expert review and pilot testing. Second, semi-structured interviews explored belief reorientation, classroom enactment, and contextual negotiation. Interviews (30-45 minutes) were audio-recorded with consent and translated with attention to semantic equivalence. Third, classroom observations were conducted by two trained observers using a structured rubric covering four dimensions: learning task design, teacher-student roles, classroom interaction, and assessment for learning (AfL). Each teacher was observed for one to two lessons. Minor scoring discrepancies were resolved through discussion to enhance interpretive consistency.

Fourth, lesson plans were analyzed using a rubric assessing competency alignment, constructivist task sequencing, role distribution, and assessment integration, allowing comparison between intended and enacted practice. Finally, reflective journals were examined to capture teachers' experiential reasoning, instructional adjustments, and contextual awareness. Together, these instruments enabled triangulated examination of belief articulation, instructional intention, enacted practice, and professional reasoning within the reform context.

### 3.5. Procedure

Data collection occurred sequentially. First, survey data were gathered from 192 teachers. Second, 22 teachers were selected for qualitative inquiry. Classroom observations, lesson plans, reflective journals, and interviews were collected within a defined time frame to capture consistent instructional contexts. The data collection process was conducted in sequential phases, as summarized in Table 1. As shown in Table 1, the sequential structure ensured logical progression from broad quantitative pattern identification to in-depth qualitative exploration. This staged design strengthened the coherence and integration of mixed-method findings.

Table 1. Sequential data collection and integration procedures

Phase	Main purpose	Participants	Data source	Analytical role
Phase 1	Identify overall belief and practice patterns	192 teachers	Survey questionnaire	Descriptive trend analysis
Phase 2	Select diverse qualitative cases	192 → 22 teachers	Survey profiles	Maximum variation sampling
Phase 3	Document enacted classroom practice	22 teachers	Classroom observations	Enacted practice analysis
Phase 4	Examine planned instructional design	22 teachers	Lesson plans	Intended pedagogy analysis
Phase 5	Capture reflective reasoning	22 teachers	Reflective journals	Experiential and adaptive reasoning
Phase 6	Explore belief interpretation and contextual negotiation	22 teachers	Semi-structured interviews	Interpretive depth and contextual mediation
Phase 7	Integrate findings across data sources		All datasets	Triangulated interpretation

### 3.6. Data analysis

Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics to identify overall patterns in teachers' beliefs, reported practices, and perceived contextual constraints. Given the exploratory focus of the study, the analysis emphasized trend identification rather than predictive modeling. The questionnaire was developed based on established constructs in teacher PD and CT literature and was reviewed by two specialists to ensure content validity. Minor revisions were made to enhance clarity and contextual appropriateness.

Qualitative data were analyzed using reflexive thematic analysis [19]. Coding was conducted iteratively across interviews, classroom observations, lesson plans, and reflective journals to capture both articulated beliefs and enacted practices. Initial codes were generated inductively and subsequently organized into broader themes informed by the study's conceptual framework, including reflective reorientation, selective enactment of constructivist practices, assessment-related tensions, and contextual mediation.

To enhance analytic rigor, a coding framework was progressively refined during analysis. The primary researcher conducted the initial coding, and a second researcher reviewed a subset of data to ensure category clarity and thematic coherence. Discrepancies were resolved through discussion. Constant comparison was employed to examine convergence and divergence across data sources, supported by MAXQDA for systematic data management. Methodological triangulation across surveys, interviews, classroom observations, lesson plans, and reflective journals strengthened credibility. An audit trail and reflexive memos were maintained to document analytic decisions and support dependability and confirmability [20].

Selected coding samples are presented in Figures 2 and 3. Figure 2 shows excerpts from classroom observations, while Figure 3 presents an excerpt from interview coding. Throughout these analyses, reflexive memos were maintained to document analytic decisions and reduce potential researcher bias. The

hierarchical structure of themes presented in Figure 4 illustrates the systematic derivation of sub-themes and codes from raw data, reflecting the layered and recursive nature of qualitative interpretation. Figure 4 depicts the hierarchical structure of themes, sub-themes, and codes derived from the qualitative analysis.

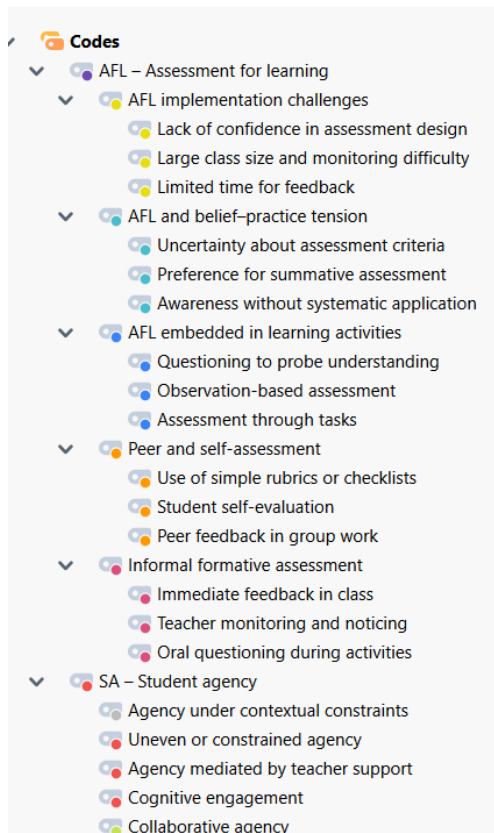


Figure 2. A coding excerpt from classroom observation

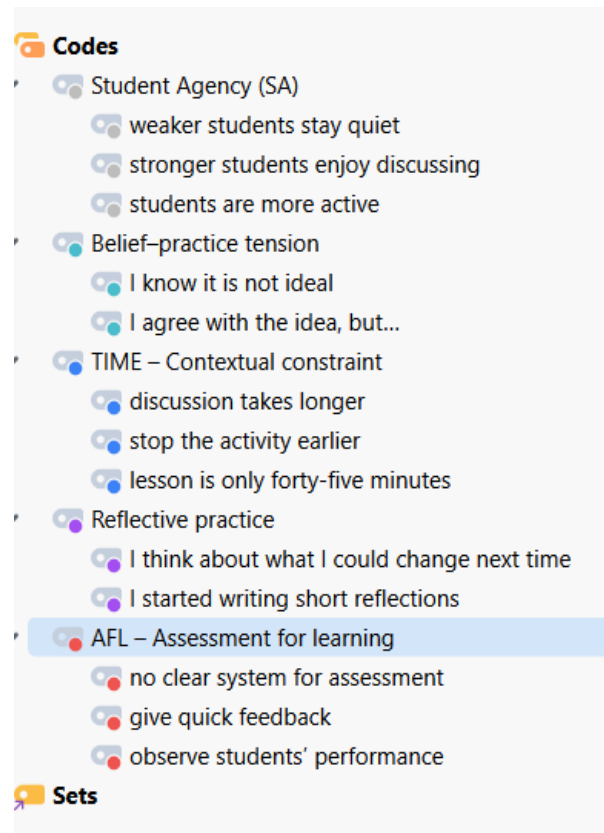


Figure 3. A coding excerpt from semi-structured interview

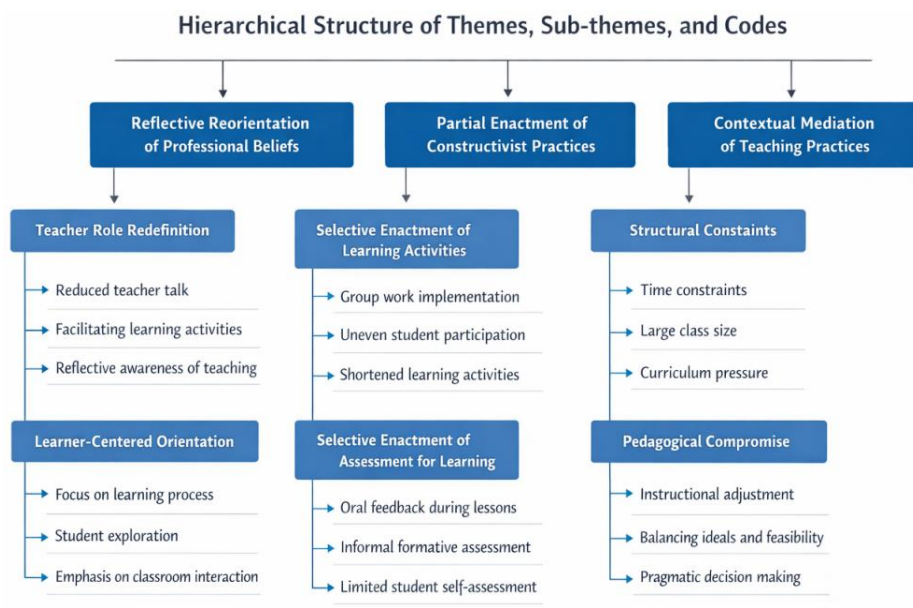


Figure 4. Hierarchical structure of themes, sub-themes, and codes

## 4. RESULTS

### 4.1. Overview of mixed-methods findings

This chapter reports the results of the study in relation to the three research questions. Quantitative survey data are presented first to identify overall patterns in teachers' beliefs and practices. Qualitative evidence from interviews, classroom observations, lesson plans, and reflective journals is then used to illustrate and substantiate these patterns. The integration of multiple data sources allows for a comprehensive examination of teachers' PD through CO training programs. The integration of survey trends with classroom-based qualitative evidence enables a triangulated examination of belief-practice relationships under curriculum reform.

### 4.2. Quantitative findings

Overall, the quantitative patterns indicate strong endorsement of CO beliefs at the declarative level. However, such endorsement alone does not necessarily imply sustained pedagogical transformation, thereby warranting closer examination through classroom-based evidence.

#### 4.2.1. Teachers' professional beliefs

Table 2 shows teachers' beliefs about CT. As presented in Table 2, teachers demonstrated consistently high endorsement of constructivist beliefs, particularly regarding their facilitative role and the importance of classroom interaction. Mean scores for items related to reflective practice were slightly lower and showed greater variability, suggesting differences in the extent to which reflective orientations had been internalized across participants. Overall, the findings indicate strong declarative alignment with constructivist principles at the belief level.

Table 2. Teachers' beliefs about CT (n=192)

Item	Statement (abbreviated)	Mean	SD
B1	Teacher as facilitator	4.32	0.54
B3	Importance of interaction	4.28	0.57
B7	Value of collaboration	4.25	0.59
B8	Reflecting on teaching	4.01	0.68
B9	Evaluating lesson effectiveness	3.97	0.72
B10	Reflection as professional practice	3.94	0.75

#### 4.2.2. Classroom teaching practices

Table 3 depicts teachers' self-reported using interactive and activity-based practices. The table indicates that interactive instructional strategies, such as group work and activity-based learning, were frequently reported. In contrast, assessment-related practices, particularly student self-assessment and systematic formative assessment, received comparatively lower mean scores. These patterns suggest that while interaction-oriented strategies were more readily enacted, structurally demanding components of CT were implemented less consistently.

Table 3. Self-reported CT practices (n=192)

Item group	Focus	Mean	SD
C1-C3	Group work and interaction	4.10	0.61
C4-C6	Activity design and adjustment	3.98	0.66
C7-11	Use of formative assessment	3.62	0.71
C12-13	Student self-assessment	3.41	0.78
C14-15	Using assessment to adjust teaching	3.55	0.74

#### 4.2.3. Contextual factors

As presented in Table 4, teachers perceived contextual factors as significant constraints on classroom practice, with large class size and limited instructional time reported as the most influential. As shown in Table 4, teachers perceived contextual constraints as highly influential, particularly large class size and limited instructional time. These elevated mean scores highlight the structural pressures shaping classroom implementation under curriculum reform.

Table 4. Teachers' beliefs about contextual constraints (N=192)

Item	Contextual factor	Mean	SD
D1	Limited instructional time	4.26	0.58
D2	Large class size	4.31	0.55
D3	Curriculum pressure	4.08	0.63

### 4.3. Quantitative-qualitative connection

Quantitative findings identified broad patterns of belief endorsement and reported constructivist practices. However, qualitative evidence provided deeper insight into how these orientations were negotiated in classroom contexts. Rather than merely confirming survey trends, qualitative data revealed variation in enactment across different dimensions of CT, particularly in AfL.

Across data sources, belief reorientation appeared more consistently than sustained pedagogical restructuring. Observational and lesson plan analyses indicated stronger alignment at the level of instructional intention than in fully realized classroom practice. Reflective journals further illustrated teachers' awareness of this partial enactment, often framed as pragmatic adaptation rather than resistance.

To synthesize quantitative and qualitative findings, Table 5 summarizes the relationship between statistical patterns and classroom-based evidence. As illustrated in Table 5, quantitative trends correspond closely with qualitative themes, reinforcing the interpretation that belief endorsement is more stable than comprehensive pedagogical restructuring. The convergence observed across datasets lends additional credibility to the mixed-method interpretation of the findings. These findings suggest that CO training contributed to a shift in professional self-conception, particularly in how teachers articulated their instructional roles. These shifts were more visible at the level of pedagogical orientation than in structural classroom reorganization.

Table 5. Linking quantitative patterns with qualitative evidence

Quantitative pattern	Survey evidence	Qualitative focus
High belief endorsement	High means (B1, B3, B7)	Reflective reorientation
Uneven practice	Lower means (C11–C14)	Partial enactment
Strong constraints	High means (D1–D3)	Contextual mediation

### 4.4. Qualitative results

Qualitative analysis drew upon interviews, classroom observations, lesson plans, and reflective journals to examine enacted practice, instructional intention, and professional reasoning across cases. Themes were organized according to the study's conceptual dimensions of reflective reorientation, partial enactment, and contextual mediation.

#### 4.4.1. Reflective reorientation

The first qualitative theme reflects a gradual reorientation of teachers' professional beliefs through reflection rather than a complete replacement of existing pedagogical views. Across interviews, teachers described becoming more aware of how their instructional choices affected students' learning processes. One teacher explained:

*“After the training, I realized that explaining too much does not necessarily help students learn better.”* (Interview, T07)

This reflective awareness was also evident in teachers' journals, where participants critically evaluated their lessons. One journal entry noted:

*“I felt that students were more engaged when I let them explore ideas instead of giving detailed explanations.”* (Reflective journal, J07)

Classroom observations supported these accounts. In several observed lessons, teachers reduced extended explanations and facilitated group discussions, indicating that reflective changes in belief were beginning to shape instructional behavior. These findings suggest that CO training contributed to a shift in professional self-conception, particularly in how teachers articulated their instructional roles. The observed changes appear more pronounced at the level of pedagogical orientation than at the level of structural classroom reorganization.

Reflective journals consistently demonstrated teachers' growing awareness of belief-practice tensions. Entries frequently documented instructional adjustments, time-related compromises, and pragmatic decision-making. Rather than expressing resistance to constructivist principles, teachers' reflections suggested adaptive reasoning shaped by contextual constraints.

#### 4.4.2. Partial enactment of constructivist practices

A second theme concerns the partial enactment of CT practices. While teachers expressed strong intentions to apply learner-centered methods, the implementation of these practices was often selective and uneven. Interview data indicate that group work was widely adopted but frequently constrained. One teacher commented:

*"I try to use group discussion, but sometimes I have to stop early because of time."* (Interview, T12)

Classroom observations revealed that group activities were often shortened, with limited opportunities for student reflection or whole-class sharing. Reflective journals echoed these findings, as teachers reported difficulties in completing planned activities:

*"I could not finish the activity as designed, so I summarized the key ideas for students."* (Reflective journal, J12)

These patterns suggest that constructivist practices were enacted selectively rather than comprehensively.

Moreover, lesson plan analysis revealed a consistent alignment between teachers' stated constructivist intentions and their planned instructional sequences. Most lesson plans incorporated collaborative tasks, student interaction phases, and competency-aligned objectives. However, formative assessment components were frequently limited to brief feedback stages rather than embedded reflective cycles. This discrepancy between intended and enacted practice further supports the interpretation of selective pedagogical restructuring.

#### 4.4.3. Selective enactment of assessment for learning

Across observational and lesson plan data, AfL was the least consistently enacted dimension of CT. While teachers frequently articulated awareness of formative assessment principles during interviews, classroom observations indicated that assessment cycles often remained limited to immediate corrective feedback rather than sustained formative scaffolding. Reflective journals revealed that time constraints and curriculum pacing pressures were frequently cited as reasons for limiting more elaborate assessment practices. One interview participant stated:

*"I usually give feedback during activities, but doing formative assessment properly is difficult."* (Interview, T09)

Classroom observations confirmed that feedback was commonly provided in brief oral form, while opportunities for student self-assessment or reflection were limited. Reflective journals further highlighted time-related challenges:

*"There was not enough time for students to reflect on the feedback."* (Reflective journal, J09)

These findings indicate that AfL was present in practice but implemented in a limited and selective manner.

#### 4.4.4. Contextual mediation of teaching practices

The third overarching theme highlights the mediating role of contextual factors in shaping teachers' practices. Teachers consistently identified large class size, limited instructional time, and curriculum pressure as key influences on their instructional decisions. One teacher noted:

*"With more than 40 students, it is very hard to manage group discussion."* (Interview, T14)

Observations corroborated these accounts, documenting frequent teacher interventions to manage classroom behavior and maintain lesson pacing. Reflective journals further illustrated how contextual pressures influenced teaching choices:

*"Time pressure forced me to shorten activities and focus on finishing the lesson."* (Reflective journal, J02)

The evidence indicates selective rather than comprehensive enactment of constructivist practices. Teachers appeared to adapt certain learner-centered strategies while maintaining conventional structures in areas constrained by time, curriculum pacing, or assessment demands.

#### **4.5. Summary of integrated results**

Taken together, the findings indicate that professional belief change preceded but did not automatically ensure comprehensive pedagogical transformation. Triangulated evidence across data sources demonstrates that enactment unfolded as negotiated professionalism shaped by contextual mediation rather than linear reform compliance.

### **5. DISCUSSION**

This study examined the impact of CO teacher training programs on the PD of secondary English teachers in Vietnam. By integrating quantitative and qualitative findings, this discussion interprets the results in relation to previous research and addresses the three research questions.

#### **5.1. Changes in teachers' professional beliefs**

The findings indicate that CO training was associated with strong endorsement of learner-centered beliefs and a reconceptualization of the teacher's role as facilitator. This pattern aligns with research suggesting that CO PD can promote positive shifts in teachers' pedagogical orientations [1], [3]. Similar trends have been reported in English language education, where PD enhances teachers' awareness of learner-centered principles [12], [13].

However, the present study extends this literature by showing that belief development occurred primarily as reflective reorientation rather than abrupt transformation. Teachers gradually reconsidered their instructional roles through reflection on classroom experiences, supporting experiential and cumulative models of professional learning [2], [7]. In the Vietnamese reform context, such incremental belief adjustment appears more realistic than immediate pedagogical overhaul. This pattern is consistent with research identifying active learning and coherence as core features of effective PD [21].

#### **5.2. Partial enactment of teaching practices**

Although survey results suggested frequent use of interactive strategies, qualitative evidence revealed selective enactment of constructivist practices. This divergence echoes prior research documenting belief-practice gaps in both general and language education [5], [14]. Teachers adopted visible strategies such as group work more readily than structurally demanding practices like formative assessment. Similar inconsistencies between articulated beliefs and enacted practices have been documented in language teaching contexts [22].

This pattern appears consistent with the argument advanced in Sims and Fletcher-Wood [11] that surface-level instructional adjustments are often implemented before deeper pedagogical restructuring. Rather than indicating resistance, selective enactment may reflect pragmatic professional judgment in contextually constrained environments, consistent with ecological perspectives on teacher agency [9]. Although reported frequencies suggested regular use of interactive strategies, qualitative evidence indicates that the depth and systematic integration of constructivist principles varied across instructional dimensions, reinforcing the distinction between surface-level adoption and sustained pedagogical restructuring.

#### **5.3. Contextual constraints**

The findings confirm that contextual factors-particularly class size, instructional time, and curriculum pressure - substantially mediated classroom enactment. This resonates with research emphasizing the structural mediation of professional learning [3], [9], [23]. Similar constraints have been documented in Vietnamese secondary education, where examination-oriented systems limit opportunities for sustained learner-centered implementation [14], [15].

Importantly, the qualitative evidence suggests that contextual conditions did not merely restrict innovation but actively shaped teachers' pedagogical decisions. This interpretation aligns with ecological models of agency, which conceptualize practice as the outcome of ongoing negotiation between professional intentions and structural affordances [9]. Reform implementation is inherently complex and shaped by systemic factors beyond individual teacher intention [24].

#### **5.4. Assessment for learning as a persistent challenge**

Although formative assessment is widely acknowledged as central to learning improvement [25]. However, they remain among the most difficult dimensions of pedagogical reform to institutionalize. In the present study, AfL emerged as the most constrained component of constructivist implementation.

This finding aligns with international evidence indicating that formative assessment is particularly difficult to sustain in examination-driven systems [26], [27]. Although teachers expressed strong conceptual support for AfL, observed practices were frequently informal and episodic rather than systematically embedded within instructional cycles. This discrepancy suggests that while interactive instructional strategies may be adopted incrementally, formative assessment requires deeper structural coherence, including sufficient instructional time, assessment literacy, and alignment with curriculum pacing [26], [28].

Compared with research conducted in more flexible policy contexts, the present findings highlight the structural vulnerability of assessment reform within tightly regulated curricular environments. These results underscore that PD initiatives must move beyond strategy-focused workshops to address systemic alignment if sustained assessment reform is to be realized. The tension observed here reflects the broader complexity of translating constructivist principles into assessment practice, where reflective cycles and experiential adaptation depend on supportive institutional conditions.

### 5.5. Contribution to the literature

This study contributes empirical evidence from a reform-oriented EFL context that remains underrepresented in the literature. While prior research has documented the potential of CO PD, much of it has relied primarily on self-reported belief change in developed educational systems [5], [12]. By integrating survey data with classroom observations, lesson plan analysis, and reflective documentation, the present study provides triangulated evidence of how professional awareness is selectively enacted under contextual constraints. This positioning aligns with scholarship that conceptualizes teacher learning as situated within broader policy-practice ecologies [29].

Conceptually, the findings extend existing models of teacher PD by demonstrating that belief change does not automatically culminate in comprehensive pedagogical transformation. Rather than a linear progression from cognition to practice, professional growth is conceptualized here as a negotiated and contextually mediated process characterized by reflective reorientation, selective enactment, and structural constraint. This ecological framing challenges linear reform assumptions and reinforces understandings of professional practice as dynamically shaped by systemic conditions [9]. By incorporating classroom-based evidence, the study responds to longstanding calls for research that moves beyond reliance on self-reported data and captures enacted professional learning in context [29].

## 6. CONCLUSION

This study examined the influence of CO teacher training on EFL teachers' PD under curriculum reform in Vietnam. The findings indicate that belief-level reorientation was more consistent than sustained classroom restructuring, with AfL emerging as the most structurally constrained dimension of implementation. PD was therefore conceptualized as a non-linear, selectively enacted, and contextually mediated process. Taken together, these findings indicate that PD initiatives may benefit from prioritizing sustained classroom-based mentoring and assessment literacy rather than relying solely on short-term workshop-based training. The findings collectively address the three research questions by demonstrating: i) reflective belief reorientation; ii) selective and uneven enactment of constructivist practices; and iii) strong contextual mediation shaped by structural constraints. While the study was conducted within a specific national reform context, its triangulated design provides conceptual transferability to similar reform-oriented EFL settings.

Despite its contributions, the study has several limitations. The sample was confined to teachers who had participated in CO training within a specific national reform context, which may limit generalizability. In addition, quantitative findings relied on self-reported measures, and qualitative observation was conducted within a limited time frame. Future longitudinal research may provide deeper insight into sustained pedagogical transformation.

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C : Conceptualization

M : Methodology

So : Software

Va : Validation

Fo : Formal analysis

I : Investigation

R : Resources

D : Data Curation

O : Writing - Original Draft

E : Writing - Review & Editing

Vi : Visualization

Su : Supervision

P : Project administration

Fu : Funding acquisition

### CONFLICT OF INTEREST STATEMENT

The authors declare no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this manuscript.

### INFORMED CONSENT

Informed consent was obtained from all participants prior to their participation in the study.

### ETHICAL APPROVAL

Ethical approval for this study was obtained in accordance with institutional research guidelines. Participation in the study was voluntary, and ethical principles regarding confidentiality and anonymity were strictly observed.

### DATA AVAILABILITY

The data supporting the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author, [PTKO], upon reasonable request.




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