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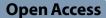
Exploring the implementation and perception of competency-based assessment practices among Vietnamese EFL instructors

Phuong Hoang Yen[1] and Le Thanh Thao[1*]

*Correspondence:
lethanhthao110294@gmail.com

[1] Can Tho University, Can Tho, Vietnam

Abstract

This qualitative study explored the perspectives of Vietnamese English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teachers on the implementation of competency-based assessment (CBA) within the higher education context. Amidst the global shift towards competency-based education, this research aimed to understand how instructors in Vietnam navigate the challenges and opportunities presented by CBA, focusing on its impact on teaching practices and student learning. The objective of this study was to examine the adaptations and responses of EFL teachers to the implementation of CBA, identifying how these adaptations influence teaching effectiveness and student learning experiences. Employing semi-structured interviews with 10 EFL teachers from two institutions, the study was grounded in constructivist and social constructivist theoretical frameworks, facilitating a nuanced exploration of the participants' experiences. The findings revealed several key themes: significant challenges in transitioning to CBA, including adapting to new methodologies and a lack of resources; the transformative potential of CBA for enhancing student engagement and learning outcomes; the need for targeted professional development to bridge the gap between theoretical knowledge and practical implementation skills; and the role of CBA in fostering critical thinking, problem-solving skills, student autonomy, and inclusivity. Additionally, the study highlighted the complexities of providing effective, individualized feedback within CBA frameworks. The discussion underscores the importance of these findings in informing the development of more effective competency-based educational strategies and highlights recommendations for enhancing teacher training and assessment design to better support competency development. These insights contribute to the discourse on competency-based language education, suggesting implications for policy, practice, and future research. By highlighting the specific challenges and strategies employed by Vietnamese EFL teachers, this study offers valuable perspectives for instructors, policymakers, and researchers aiming to advance the implementation of competency-based assessment in language education globally.

Keywords: Competency-based assessment, EFL teachers, Perspectives, Vietnamese higher education

Introduction

The landscape of language education has been undergoing a significant transformation, especially with the increasing adoption of competency-based approaches (Chappell et al. 2020; Griffith and Lim, 2014). These approaches emphasize the development of specific competencies or skills in learners, rather than the mere acquisition of knowledge (Patrick, 2021; Wong, 2020). In the realm of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) education, this shift is pivotal, particularly in countries like Vietnam, where English proficiency is increasingly seen as a crucial skill for global integration and economic development (Tran and Tanemura, 2020). In response to these educational demands, Vietnam's Ministry of Education and Training has increasingly advocated for the integration of competency-based approaches into the national curriculum, aiming to align educational outcomes with the demands of the twenty-first-century global workforce (Thao and Mai, 2022). This policy-driven shift has prompted universities and other educational institutions to adopt and implement competency-based assessment (CBA) practices across various disciplines, including EFL. Against this backdrop, our study focuses on the alignment of assessment practices with competency-based language education (CBLE) from the perspectives of Vietnamese EFL instructors. To address this dual focus, we detailed how EFL teachers in Vietnam specifically implement CBA practices, identifying and describing the competencies emphasized within this context, and exploring how these practices were perceived and aligned with broader educational goals.

Competency-based language education represents a paradigm shift from traditional teacher-centered methodologies to more learner-centered, outcome-based approaches (Tarmo and Kimaro, 2021; Yen et al. 2023). This framework necessitates that assessment practices not only evaluate what learners know but also what they can do with that knowledge in real-world contexts (Mirza et al. 2023; Poth et al. 2020). In Vietnam, where traditional rote learning and examination-oriented education systems have predominated (Tran, 2024), adapting to this competency-based framework poses both challenges and opportunities for EFL instructors. The national policy's focus on CBA reflects an evolving educational paradigm that seeks to better prepare students for both local and international professional landscapes, thereby increasing their employability and adaptability.

Our research was motivated by the need to understand how EFL instructors in Vietnam perceive and implement competency-based assessment (CBA) practices. Despite the growing body of literature on CBLE globally (Chappell et al. 2020; Holubnycha et al. 2022; Msamba et al. 2023), there is a notable gap in context-specific studies that explore the intricacies of implementing such educational innovations in Vietnamese higher education settings. Addressing this gap is crucial for informing policy and practice, ensuring that EFL education aligns with international standards and meets the demands of the global labor market. By investigating how these policies are translated into practice, our study provided insights into the practical challenges and innovations introduced by Vietnamese instructors.

The study sought to answer the research question: "How do Vietnamese EFL instructors implement and perceive the effectiveness of competency-based assessment practices in their teaching?" By exploring instructors' perspectives, the study aimed to uncover the challenges they face, the strategies they employ to overcome these challenges, and the

opportunities they identify in the context of competency-based language assessment. Through this investigation, we aimed to contribute valuable insights into the alignment of assessment practices with CBLE, offering implications for instructors, policymakers, and researchers interested in enhancing the quality and relevance of language education in Vietnam and similar contexts.

Literature review

CBLE

CBLE marks a significant departure from traditional language teaching methodologies, prioritizing the acquisition of real-world skills and competencies over theoretical knowledge alone. Rooted in the broader competency-based education (CBE) movement, CBLE focuses on learner outcomes, adaptability, and the practical application of language skills in diverse contexts. Dooly (2012) and Griffith and Lim (2014) defined CBLE as an approach that systematically integrates language learning with specific competencies, such as critical thinking, intercultural communication, and digital literacy, essential for success in the twenty-first-century global marketplace. This educational model emphasizes transparency in learning outcomes (Johnstone and Soares, 2014), personalized learning paths (Long et al. 2020), and assessment practices that are directly linked to the demonstration of competencies (Henri et al. 2017).

Assessment in CBLE

In CBLE, assessment practices are crucial for both steering the learning process and certifying the acquisition of competencies. Unlike traditional assessment methods, which often rely on summative evaluations, CBA is formative, ongoing, and aligned with specific learning outcomes. Examples of CBA tasks include performance-based assessments, where students demonstrate their skills through real-world tasks, such as presentations, projects, or community-based activities. These tasks require students to apply knowledge in practical settings, thereby assessing their ability to perform under realistic conditions. Our review extends to include pivotal studies from both international and Vietnamese contexts. Notably, Dragoo and Barrows (2016) provided insights into the effective integration of CBA in diverse educational settings, emphasizing its scalability and adaptability. Thurab-Nkhosi et al. (2018) and Sotiriadou et al. (2020) highlighted the shift towards more authentic assessment tasks that mirror real-life language use, including portfolios, simulations, and self-assessment, which provide a more holistic view of learner proficiency.

In Asia, for instance, studies such as those by Lenz et al. (2015) have explored the use of integrated project-based assessments in education systems, which combine multiple competencies like critical thinking, problem-solving, and teamwork in a single evaluative exercise. CBA is designed to offer immediate feedback (Kickmeier-Rust et al. 2014), support personalized learning (Dillon, 2019), and measure learners' ability to apply their knowledge in practical situations (Nguyen, 2021). In the local Vietnamese context, Cao et al. (2022) discussed how tailored CBA practices are being effectively incorporated into language programs to enhance communicative competencies and cultural understanding, reinforcing the relevance of this methodology in improving language education outcomes. This inclusion of CBA has been studied extensively within Vietnam, where

some institutions have implemented scenario-based language tasks that mimic negotiations and business meetings to assess students' applied linguistic and cultural negotiation skills.

*Challen*ges of implementing *CBLE and CBA in Vietnam*

The transition to CBLE and CBA poses specific challenges in the Vietnamese context, characterized by a strong tradition of examination-oriented education and rote learning. Van Canh (2020) identified several barriers, including instructors' lack of familiarity with CBLE principles, resistance to change from traditional teaching methods, and the absence of a supportive policy framework for competency-based reforms. Additionally, the lack of resources and training to design and implement authentic assessment tasks further complicates this transition (Akbari et al. 2022; Nghia, 2018). To address these challenges, some EFL teachers are implementing CBA practices through the use of tailored assessment tools that measure communicative competence, problem-solving skills, and intercultural understanding. These practices involve performance-based assessments and continuous feedback mechanisms that are aligned with real-world language use scenarios.

Opportunities for CBLE and CBA in Vietnam

Despite these challenges, the shift towards CBLE and CBA in Vietnam offers numerous opportunities. Nghia et al. (2019) and Pham (2021) argued that integrating competencies into language education can enhance learners' employability and adaptability in a rapidly changing global job market. Furthermore, this approach can foster a more learner-centered educational environment, encouraging active learning, critical thinking, and learner autonomy (Nguyen, 2023). The development of a competency-based curriculum aligned with international standards can also promote educational equity, ensuring that all learners acquire the skills necessary for success (Vinh and Hanh, 2022). Within this framework, competencies specific to the Vietnamese context, such as linguistic agility in bilingual or multicultural settings, have been identified and are being progressively incorporated into the curriculum.

This literature review underscores the relevance and potential of CBLE and CBA in transforming language education, particularly in contexts like Vietnam, where adapting to global educational trends is crucial. While challenges exist, the opportunities for enhancing language education through competency-based approaches are significant. This review sets the foundation for our study, which aims to explore Vietnamese EFL instructors' perspectives on aligning assessment practices with CBLE, contributing to the discourse on educational reform in the EFL context.

Methods

Research design

This study adopted a qualitative research design, specifically employing grounded theory methodology, to explore Vietnamese EFL instructors' perspectives on assessment practices aligning with CBLE. Grounded theory, pioneered by Glaser and Strauss (2017), is chosen for its strength in generating or discovering theory from data systematically gathered and analyzed. Contrary to typical applications, where no predefined theories guide

the research, this study initially referenced theoretical frameworks to contextualize and enhance the understanding of our findings within the established educational theories. However, it must be clarified that the study did not start with a predefined hypothesis but allowed theories to emerge from the data through a bottom-up approach, reflecting true grounded theory principles. This approach was particularly suitable for our research, as it allowed for the emergence of a theory that explains how EFL instructors perceive, adapt to, and implement CBA within the Vietnamese higher education context.

The theoretical frameworks that formed the foundation of this study, constructivism, and social constructivism, though related, catered to different aspects of learning processes and were both pivotal in analyzing the shift towards CBLE. Constructivism emphasizes the individual's active role in the learning process, where knowledge is constructed through personal experiences and interactions with the environment (Cobern, 1993; Larochelle et al. 1998). This perspective is crucial for understanding the individualized aspects of CBLE, such as how students interpret and engage with learning materials independently. While these frameworks serve to scaffold initial understanding, they do not dictate the outcomes of the research; rather, they assist in refining the emergent theory from the collected data, ensuring that any theoretical development is grounded firmly in empirical evidence. This perspective is crucial for understanding CBLE, as it underscores the shift from traditional lecture-based, memorization-focused teaching methods to more dynamic, learner-centered approaches where students actively engage with the material, construct meaning, and apply knowledge in practical contexts.

Social constructivism, on the other hand, extends the principles of constructivism by incorporating the social aspects of learning. It highlights how knowledge is constructed through social interactions and shared within cultural contexts (Vygotsky, 1978). This theory is particularly relevant to CBLE when considering collaborative projects and peer feedback mechanisms that rely on communal learning experiences. Social constructivism emphasizes the role of the educational community in supporting individual learning, thus addressing how competencies like communication, teamwork, and intercultural sensitivity are developed through collaborative efforts. In line with grounded theory methodology, any theoretical assertions resulting from this study would be derived from the data collected from participants, ensuring that our conclusions accurately reflect the insights and experiences of Vietnamese EFL instructors rather than preconceived notions.

By grounding the study in these theoretical frameworks, the aim was to explore and understand how Vietnamese EFL instructors navigated the significant pedagogical shift that CBLE represents. This included investigating how instructors designed and implemented assessments that reflected competency-based principles, fostered active and collaborative learning environments and supported students in applying language skills in practical, real-world situations. The integration of constructivist and social constructivist perspectives provided a comprehensive theoretical backdrop for examining the nuanced challenges and strategies instructors employed in transitioning from traditional, teacher-centered methods to more learner-focused, interactive, and competency-oriented teaching and assessment practices. This approach allowed for a comprehensive understanding of the pedagogical transformations occurring within Vietnamese EFL

education in response to global trends and the increasing emphasis on competencies in language learning.

Participants

In this qualitative study, the focus was on a carefully selected group of 10 Vietnamese EFL teachers. The selection process, known as purposive sampling, was meticulously designed to capture a wide array of experiences, teaching practices, and insights related to the adoption of CBA within the Vietnamese higher educational landscape. The selection criteria included not only gender balance but also varied levels of experience with CBA and different types of educational institutions (one public university and one private university). These criteria were intended to provide a comprehensive view of the impact of institutional policies and educational cultures on the implementation of CBA. The rationale behind choosing participants from two distinct educational institutions was to ensure that the study benefited from a broad spectrum of teaching contexts, encompassing different approaches to EFL teaching, variations in student populations, and diverse institutional cultures and priorities.

The composition of the participant group was intentionally designed to be gender-balanced, with an equal number of male (An, Binh, Dung, Hieu, and Lam) and female (Chau, Em, Nga, Thao, and Nhu) teachers. This balance was sought to explore the nuanced ways in which gender might influence teachers' perceptions, implementation strategies, and experiences with competency-based language education and assessment practices. By considering gender as a variable, the study aimed to uncover any distinct perspectives or commonalities that could emerge from the participants' experiences, potentially offering deeper insights into the dynamics at play in the adoption of CBA in Vietnam. Additionally, participants were selected based on their familiarity and practical experience with CBA, ranging from novice (Chau, Thao, Hieu, and Lam) to expert (An, Binh, Dung, Em, Nga, and Nhu), to assess how depth of knowledge impacts perception and practice of CBA. Furthermore, the inclusion of teachers from different school contexts (Chau, Thao, Hieu, Lam, and Em were working for the public university) and with varied exposure to local and national educational policies regarding CBA was crucial to understanding the broader systemic factors that influence the adoption and effectiveness of such educational strategies.

To ensure the ethical integrity of the research and protect the participants' privacy, pseudonyms were assigned to all individuals involved in the study. These pseudonyms served to safeguard the identity of the participants, allowing them to express their views and share their experiences freely without concern for personal or professional repercussions. This measure was part of a broader commitment to maintaining high ethical standards throughout the research process, emphasizing the importance of confidentiality, informed consent, and the respectful treatment of all participants. By adhering to these ethical principles, the study aimed to foster a trustful environment that would encourage open and honest dialogue, thereby enriching the quality and authenticity of the data collected. These ethical considerations, coupled with the strategic selection of participants, reinforced the validity and reliability of the findings, contributing significantly to the study's credibility and overall impact.

Data collection

The data collection process for this study was meticulously designed around semi-structured interviews, enabling a deep exploration of Vietnamese EFL teachers' perspectives on competency-based assessment practices. To refine the interview guide and ensure its appropriateness and effectiveness, a pilot study was conducted with two EFL teachers who did not participate in the main study. Feedback from this pilot study was instrumental in revising the interview questions, ensuring they were clear, relevant, and capable of eliciting in-depth responses from participants. This iterative process ensured that the final set of interview questions was both comprehensive and focused, facilitating a nuanced exploration of the study's themes.

Post-revision, the interview questions included inquiries such as "Can you describe how you integrate competency-based assessments in your language teaching?" and "What challenges have you faced in implementing these assessments, and how have you addressed them?" These questions were designed to prompt detailed reflections on the participants' experiences with competency-based education, including their strategies, successes, and obstacles.

Interviews typically lasted between 45 to 60 min, providing ample time for participants to share their insights and experiences. Conducted in settings chosen by the participants for their convenience and comfort, most interviews took place in quiet, private spaces within their institutions or via online platforms, depending on the preference of the participants and the logistical considerations imposed by their schedules and locations. The use of Vietnamese in all interviews ensured that participants could express their thoughts and experiences freely and in detail, contributing to the richness and depth of the data collected. This choice also facilitated a more accurate interpretation of the participants' meanings and nuances, crucial for the integrity of the qualitative analysis. To supplement the primary data collected through interviews, additional materials such as teaching syllabi, assessment rubrics, and reflective teaching journals were also gathered, where available and with the consent of the participants, to provide further context to their practices and perspectives on competency-based language assessment.

Data analysis

The data collected through semi-structured interviews underwent a rigorous thematic analysis to identify, analyze, and report patterns (themes) within the data. This analysis followed Braun and Clarke's (2023) six-phase process, beginning with a meticulous process of familiarization with the data. Each interview was transcribed verbatim, and the research team read and reread the transcripts to immerse themselves in the details and overall context of the participants' experiences. This immersion phase was crucial for developing an intuitive understanding of the data as a whole.

Following familiarization, the research team generated initial codes, systematically coding the data set in a detailed and inclusive manner. This coding process involved identifying significant or interesting features of the data that related to the research question and objectives and organizing these features into meaningful groups. The initial codes were then collated into potential themes, carefully considering the relationship between codes, themes, and different levels of themes, to form a coherent and organized map of the data.

The next phase involved reviewing themes, and refining and defining them. This included checking if the themes worked in relation to the coded extracts and the entire data set, ensuring that they accurately represented the participants' perspectives and experiences. This iterative process sometimes led to the merging, splitting, or discarding of themes to better capture the essence of the data.

The final step of the thematic analysis was the production of the report, where the research team selected vivid and compelling extract examples, analyzed and interpreted these in relation to the research question, and tied the analysis back to the existing literature and theoretical frameworks underpinning the study. Throughout this process, the analysis was rooted in the constructivist paradigm, acknowledging that the findings were constructed through the interactions between the researchers and the participants, and influenced by the researchers' interpretations.

By employing thematic analysis, the study aimed to uncover the nuanced complexities of Vietnamese EFL teachers' perceptions and practices regarding competency-based assessment, providing rich, detailed, and complex accounts of their experiences. This method allowed for flexibility and depth, accommodating the diverse and intricate nature of the qualitative data collected, and enabling a comprehensive understanding of the study's central phenomena.

Results

Navigating challenges in implementing competency-based assessment

A central finding of this study is the complex challenge Vietnamese EFL teachers face when transitioning to CBA practices. This theme emerged uniformly across interviews, indicating a universal struggle among the participants, regardless of gender, with five males and five females highlighting similar issues. These challenges were primarily centered around adapting to new assessment methodologies, the scarcity of resources, and insufficient institutional support, which necessitated innovative, self-driven efforts to align teaching practices with competency-based principles. To strengthen our analysis, we utilized additional materials such as teaching syllabi, assessment rubrics, and reflective teaching journals. These documents were coded alongside interview data, providing a richer, multi-dimensional view of how instructors engage with and perceive CBA. For example, assessment rubrics revealed variations in how competencies were prioritized and evaluated, while reflective journals offered deeper insights into instructors' personal experiences and challenges over time.

An, one of the male participants, described his journey toward implementing CBA as "charting unknown territory," emphasizing the lack of guidance and resources. He remarked, "Adapting to CBA was like charting unknown territory. We had little guidance and even fewer resources. I had to rely on trial and error, which was time-consuming and, at times, frustrating." Similarly, Lam, another male participant, noted, "Each class became a laboratory where I tested and adjusted my approaches based on real-time student feedback and results." From a constructivist perspective, An's and Lam's narratives reflect the theory's emphasis on learning as an active, experiential process. Their approach—characterized by personal experimentation and discovery—illustrates how instructors construct knowledge through direct interaction with new challenges. The constructivist view suggests that An's and Lam's learning was deeply personal,

shaped by their attempts to navigate the complexities of CBA with minimal external support. Simultaneously, social constructivism offers a lens to understand the potential for collaborative problem-solving and shared learning experiences that An's and Lam's situation implies. Although An and Lam speak from a position of isolation, the theory underscores the missed opportunities for knowledge construction that could have occurred through social interactions and collaborative engagement with peers. Their struggle also highlights the role of the educational community in facilitating or hindering the social construction of knowledge, suggesting that a more collaborative environment might have eased his transition. Excerpts from An's reflective teaching journal further emphasize his iterative learning process, capturing his evolving understanding and adaptation to CBA methods over several semesters. For instance, in a journal entry dated September 15th, An wrote, "Today's attempt at integrating real-world problem-solving into my assessment showed promising engagement from students, yet highlighted my need to refine the grading rubric to better capture critical thinking skills." This entry reflects a key moment in An's adaptation process, showcasing his responsiveness to student interaction and his commitment to refining assessment methods based on practical outcomes.

Chau, representing the female participants, highlighted the value of collaboration, stating, "Collaborating with colleagues helped me navigate through the complexities of CBA. We shared insights, resources, and support, making the journey less isolating." Nga, reflecting on similar experiences, added, "Our group discussions have become essential. They allow us to develop and refine our methods collaboratively, which enriches our teaching and benefits our students immensely." Constructivism in Chau's and Nga's context illustrates how individual experiences within a community setting can lead to personal growth and adaptation. Their engagement in collaborative practices reflects constructivism's assertion that learning involves active engagement with the environment. Chau's and Nga's stories show how individual efforts are enhanced through the application of shared knowledge and resources, embodying the constructivist idea that knowledge is constructed through engaging with one's environment, in this case, the supportive network of colleagues. From a social constructivist standpoint, Chau's and Nga's experience underscores the theory's emphasis on learning as a communal activity, where knowledge is co-constructed through social interaction. The support and shared understanding within their community of practice facilitated their navigation of CBA challenges, exemplifying social constructivism's focus on the importance of cultural and social contexts in the learning process. Their ability to draw on collective resources and experiences highlights the communal aspect of knowledge construction, where learning is inherently linked to the social environment and mediated by interactions with others. Content analysis of collaborative discussions captured in Chau's and Nga's teaching journal illustrates how these interactions directly influenced their assessment practices, providing empirical evidence of social constructivist dynamics at work. In one particularly revealing entry from November 22nd, Chau noted, "The feedback from my colleague on the new group project rubric was invaluable. She suggested incorporating a peer review component, which I implemented. The result was a deeper, more meaningful learning experience for the students, as observed in their reflective essays." This journal excerpt not only shows Chau's application of peer suggestions but also her active modification of

assessment strategies to enhance student learning, thus demonstrating practical applications of social constructivist principles.

Transformative potential of CBA for student engagement and learning

This theme was highlighted by a majority of the participants, with 7 out of 10 (4 males and 3 females) discussing how CBA practices, when effectively implemented, have the potential to significantly enhance student engagement and improve learning outcomes. These instructors observed notable shifts in how students approached learning tasks, demonstrating deeper involvement and a more active role in their own learning processes. To substantiate these observations, the analysis includes evidence from teaching syllabi and assessment rubrics. For example, changes in syllabi pre- and post-CBA implementation indicate a shift towards more integrative and interactive assessment tasks. Rubrics for these tasks are increasingly focused on critical thinking and problem-solving, demonstrating a structured approach to embedding these skills in the curriculum.

Binh, a male participant, shared, "Since adopting CBA, I have seen a change in my students. They are more engaged, asking questions, and actively seeking out learning opportunities beyond the classroom." Similarly, Lam, another male teacher, noted the collaborative dynamics within his classroom, saying, "The group activities under CBA have not only increased student interaction but have also improved their problem-solving skills as they learn from each other's perspectives and feedback." Constructivist theory sheds light on Binh's and Lam's observations by emphasizing the active role of learners in constructing their own knowledge. This theory posits that meaningful learning occurs when students are engaged in tasks that require them to apply concepts in practical contexts, mirroring the real-world applicability central to CBA. Binh's and Lam's experiences suggest that CBA encourages students to take ownership of their learning, fostering an environment where students are motivated to explore, question, and connect classroom learning to real-life situations. From a social constructivist perspective, Binh's and Lam's reflections highlight the importance of social interactions in the learning process. The increase in student questions and discussions points to a learning environment rich in dialogue and collaboration, crucial components of social constructivism. This theory suggests that through collaborative learning activities inherent in CBA, students construct knowledge collectively, leveraging social interactions to deepen their understanding and apply language skills in meaningful ways. Reflective journal entries from Binh illustrate specific instances where students engaged in structured debate sessions, enhancing their communicative competencies and critical thinking skills as outlined in the revised assessment rubrics. For example, a journal entry from March 12th details a debate on environmental policies where Binh noted, "Students utilized research to back their arguments effectively, showing improved analytical skills. They were actively involved, with even the typically quieter students participating enthusiastically." This entry highlights the direct impact of CBA on student engagement and skill development.

Em, one of the female participants, noted, "My students have become more reflective of their learning. They regularly assess their own progress and set goals for improvement, which was not the case before we introduced CBA." Thao, another female participant, reinforced this view by describing how CBA facilitated a nurturing environment

for self-guided learning, stating, "The students are not just learning; they are learning how to learn, which prepares them better for lifelong education." Constructivism provides a framework for understanding the reflective practices Em and Thao describe. This theory advocates for reflection as a key element of the learning process, where learners assess their understanding and strategies, leading to deeper learning and self-regulation. Em's and Thao's observations that students are now more self-reflective and goal-oriented aligns with the constructivist view that learners benefit from engaging in meta-cognitive activities, such as self-assessment and goal setting, enhancing their capacity to learn independently and efficiently. Social constructivism also offers insights into Em's and Thao's experiences, particularly regarding the communal aspects of reflection and goal-setting. This perspective suggests that the classroom's social environment, enriched by CBA, supports students in sharing their reflections and learning goals, thereby fostering a community of practice. This communal reflection and goal-setting, facilitated by CBA, not only contribute to individual learning but also builds a culture of shared learning objectives and collaborative growth. Analysis of Em's teaching journal further reveals how she integrated peer reviews and group reflections into her lessons, which allowed students to vocalize their learning challenges and successes, creating a supportive learning community that mirrors the goals of social constructivism. In a detailed entry from October 5th, Em wrote, "Today's session involved peer assessments on their project proposals. Students were keen to give constructive feedback and were open to receiving suggestions, which they later used to refine their projects. This not only fostered a collaborative spirit but also deepened their understanding of the subject matter." These reflections demonstrate how CBA practices, particularly peer review and reflection, facilitate active learning and community building in the classroom.

Professional development and preparedness for CBA implementation

This theme emerged strongly from the data, with eight out of 10 participants (four males and four females) expressing concerns about the adequacy of their training and professional development opportunities related to CBA. Many participants highlighted a gap between the theoretical understanding of CBA principles and the practical skills needed for effective implementation in the classroom. To further analyze these gaps, we incorporated an examination of teaching syllabi and assessment rubrics that participants currently use. This analysis revealed that while syllabi are gradually integrating CBA principles, the actual assessment rubrics often lack specific criteria that reflect these competencies, indicating a disconnect between curriculum design and assessment practices.

Lam, a male participant, remarked, "While I understand the value of CBA, I often find myself struggling to design assessments that truly measure competency. There is a gap in my training that theoretical knowledge alone cannot fill." Hieu, another male participant, echoed this sentiment, stating, "The collaborative sessions we have had have been invaluable for exchanging practical CBA techniques, which have significantly improved my instructional methods." Constructivism can elucidate Lam's and Hieu's struggle by emphasizing the importance of experiential learning in acquiring practical skills. According to this theory, knowledge is constructed through direct engagement with tasks and challenges. Lam's and Hieu's acknowledgment of a gap in

their training suggests a need for more hands-on, experiential learning opportunities that would allow them to apply theoretical knowledge of CBA in practical, real-world teaching scenarios. This hands-on experience is crucial for developing the competencies needed to design and implement effective competency-based assessments. Social constructivism further explains Lam's and Hieu's experiences by highlighting the role of social interaction and collaboration in professional learning. The theory suggests that instructors, like their students, benefit from collaborative learning environments where they can share experiences, challenges, and solutions related to CBA. By engaging with peers in a community of practice, Lam, Hieu, and their colleagues could co-construct practical knowledge and strategies for CBA, bridging the gap between theory and practice through shared learning and support. Reflective journals from Lam detail specific instances where peer workshops and collaborative sessions led to practical insights into designing and refining CBA tools, showing the application of theory in practice. For instance, Lam's journal entry from April 3rd noted, "During today's workshop, a colleague suggested integrating a self-assessment component into our rubrics, which I had not considered before. Testing this in my next class helped clarify students' understanding of the criteria, leading to more targeted learning goals." This example illustrates how peer suggestions directly influenced the evolution of Lam's assessment practices.

Nga, a female participant, shared, "There are few professional development programs available that focus specifically on CBA. Most of what I have learned has come from my own research and experimentation." Nhu, another female teacher, reinforced this approach by adding, "I have had to rely heavily on online forums and networks of CBA practitioners to supplement the minimal formal training provided." From a constructivist viewpoint, Nga's and Nhu's self-directed learning and experimentation are vital processes for constructing personal knowledge and competency in CBA. This theory acknowledges the learner's active role in seeking out information and creating meaning from experiences. Nga's and Nhu's initiatives to research and experiment with CBA practices illustrate the constructivist idea that individuals construct knowledge through engagement with their environment, even in the absence of formal training programs. Social constructivism offers insight into how Nga's and Nhu's professional growth could be enhanced through more structured collaborative learning opportunities. The theory underscores the importance of social contexts and interactions in learning processes. Nga's and Nhu's situations suggest a potential for professional development that leverages the collective knowledge and experiences of a community of instructors. Such a collaborative approach could facilitate the sharing of resources, strategies, and insights, enhancing the practical understanding and implementation of CBA across the instructor community. Nga's reflections in her teaching journal show how she adapted peer feedback on her trial assessments into her teaching strategy, which underscores the social constructivist model of learning through community engagement and shared experiences. In a journal entry dated May 10th, Nga wrote, "Feedback from today's session highlighted the need for clearer performance indicators in my assessments. Based on suggestions, I revised the rubric to include explicit communication skills metrics, which significantly enhanced the assessment's effectiveness as observed in subsequent student performances." This

entry demonstrates how Nga utilized community feedback to refine her teaching approach, effectively applying her peers' insights to improve educational outcomes.

Fostering critical thinking and problem-solving skills through CBA

This theme was evident in the responses of 6 out of 10 participants, equally divided among genders (three males and three females), who reported observing an enhancement in students' critical thinking and problem-solving skills as a direct result of integrating CBA into their teaching practices. These instructors highlighted how CBA's emphasis on real-world applications and active learning strategies encouraged students to engage more deeply with content, thereby developing essential higher-order thinking skills. To substantiate these claims, we analyzed specific instances from teaching syllabi and assessment rubrics that show the integration of complex problem-solving tasks and critical analysis prompts that align with the CBA approach. This analysis provides concrete evidence of how curricular changes support the development of critical thinking and problem-solving competencies among students.

Dung, a male participant, observed, "CBA has transformed how my students approach learning. They no longer seek the 'right answer' but rather explore various solutions, demonstrating a deeper level of critical thinking." To further support Dung's observation about the transformative impact of CBA on fostering critical thinking, Lam, another male participant, provided insights from his experience, emphasizing the enhanced analytical skills among his students. Lam explained, "With CBA, my students have become adept at dissecting complex scenarios to identify underlying issues and potential solutions. They often engage in group projects where they must analyze case studies, which promotes a practical and collaborative approach to problem-solving." Constructivism provides a valuable framework for understanding Dung's and Lam's observations by emphasizing learning as an active, constructive process. This perspective suggests that CBA, by requiring students to engage with tasks that mimic real-world challenges, encourages them to construct knowledge through exploration and inquiry. Dung's and Lam's remark that students are moving beyond seeking the "right answer" to exploring multiple solutions reflects the constructivist idea that learning involves generating hypotheses, testing them, and refining understanding based on the outcomes, thereby fostering critical thinking. In Dung's reflective teaching journal, he notes specific classroom activities where students debated solutions to social issues, illustrating how these discussions encouraged critical thinking and diverse problem-solving strategies. One entry dated March 18th described a debate on climate change policies: "Students were tasked to represent different countries' perspectives. The quality of discourse and the depth of analysis they presented were beyond what our usual lectures could achieve. This activity clearly fostered a critical approach to global issues, as students had to research deeply and argue their positions convincingly." This entry highlights the effectiveness of using real-world contexts to stimulate critical thinking. Social constructivism adds depth to this analysis by considering the collaborative aspects of learning emphasized in CBA. The theory posits that knowledge is constructed within a social context, through interactions that involve sharing ideas, challenging assumptions, and collectively solving problems. The shift Dung notes toward students exploring various solutions can also be seen as an outcome of social constructivist processes, where learning is enhanced

through discussions, peer feedback, and collaborative exploration, facilitating the development of problem-solving skills alongside critical thinking.

Thao, a female participant, noted, "Introducing CBA encouraged my students to take a more active role in their learning, engaging with problems more critically and collaboratively." Moreover, Em, another female participant, shared a similar sentiment, noting, "The project-based assignments under CBA have notably improved students' abilities to independently evaluate complex issues and devise innovative solutions." Through a constructivist lens, Thao's and Em's experiences highlight the role of active engagement and personal involvement in the learning process. This theory suggests that by taking an active role in their learning, students are more likely to engage in deep thinking and meaningful reflection on the problems at hand, processes that are essential for the development of critical thinking skills. CBA's emphasis on active, learner-centered tasks supports the construction of knowledge through direct interaction with learning materials and challenges, aligning with constructivist principles. Thao's and Em's assessment rubrics, shared in the study, detail criteria that evaluate students' ability to articulate various problem-solving approaches and their rationales, demonstrating how assessment tools are tailored to measure these competencies. For instance, one rubric component for a project on community health challenges, provided by Thao, includes criteria such as "Identification of key health issues," "Analysis of potential solutions," and "Justification of chosen solutions." Thao noted in her journal, "The rubric helped students focus not just on finding a solution but on the reasoning behind it, which is crucial for developing their analytical skills." This specific example from the rubric shows how structured evaluation criteria can guide students in their critical thinking and problem-solving efforts. Social constructivism also illuminates Thao's findings, especially the collaborative dimension of critical thinking and problem-solving. The theory emphasizes that learning occurs in a social milieu that values and promotes interaction, negotiation, and collaboration among learners. Thao's mention of students engaging collaboratively with problems indicates that CBA facilitates a social constructivist learning environment, where the shared experience of tackling challenges not only enhances individual critical thinking skills but also fosters a collective problem-solving capacity.

Enhancing student autonomy and responsibility through CBA

This theme was articulated by 9 out of 10 participants, with a balanced representation of 5 males and 4 females, underscoring a significant shift towards greater student autonomy and responsibility in learning as facilitated by the adoption of CBA practices. These instructors observed that CBA's learner-centered approach not only empowered students to take charge of their learning journey but also instilled a sense of responsibility for their own progress and outcomes. To validate these observations, we analyzed related teaching materials including syllabi and assessment rubrics which explicitly incorporate elements promoting student autonomy, such as self-directed projects and peer-assessment components. This analysis confirmed a strong alignment between the educational materials and the CBA practices promoting autonomy and responsibility as described by the participants.

Dung, a male participant, highlighted, "With CBA, I have noticed students taking more initiative in their learning, setting their own goals, and seeking feedback actively.

It is like they are navigating their own learning paths." Similarly, An, another male participant, reported, "My students have started to develop their own learning activities, choosing topics that interest them and devising ways to explore these topics through group projects and independent research. This proactive approach has been a direct result of our CBA-oriented teaching strategies." Constructivism sheds light on Dung's and An's observations by emphasizing the learner's active role in the knowledge construction process. This theory posits that learning is most effective when learners are engaged in activities that require them to explore, question, and reflect upon their learning experiences. Dung's and An's remarks about students taking initiative and setting their own goals align with the constructivist view that autonomy and self-directed learning are crucial for deep and meaningful learning. CBA, by encouraging such autonomy, allows students to engage deeply with the material, actively construct their understanding, and take ownership of their learning process. Reflective entries from Dung's journal support this, where he describes specific instances of students initiating research groups or leading class discussions, clearly illustrating the practical application of CBA in fostering student-led learning. For instance, in a journal entry dated February 14th, Dung wrote, "Today, a group of students organized a mini-conference to discuss the implications of economic policies on environmental sustainability. They prepared all the materials, moderated the discussion, and provided a platform for debate. This initiative not only showcased their grasp of the subject but also their ability to apply knowledge in a real-world context." This detailed example underscores how CBA practices encourage students to take active roles in their learning environments. Social constructivism complements this understanding by highlighting the importance of social interactions in supporting autonomous learning. According to this theory, learning is a socially mediated process, and the role of feedback and collaborative goal-setting, as mentioned by Dung, is pivotal. The active seeking of feedback and the negotiation of learning goals within a community of learners and instructors exemplify how CBA fosters an environment where student autonomy is supported and nurtured through social interactions and shared responsibilities.

Chau, a female participant, shared, "CBA has shifted the classroom dynamic. Students now take responsibility for their learning outcomes, engaging more deeply with the content and with each other." This is echoed by Em, who observed similar patterns of increased student agency, noting, "Students are more eager to take on challenges and make decisions about their learning processes, which has profoundly impacted their engagement and success." From a constructivist viewpoint, Chau's and Em's experiences underline the importance of engaging learners in processes that make them active participants in their education. This engagement, a core principle of constructivism, suggests that when students are responsible for their learning outcomes, they engage more deeply with the content, leading to a more personal and meaningful learning experience. CBA's role in encouraging students to take such responsibility aligns with constructivist principles, which advocate for learner autonomy as a pathway to deeper understanding and engagement. Chau's teaching journal entries further illustrate this shift, noting how the implementation of student-directed projects and collaborative assessments has increased student engagement and responsibility. In an entry from April 9th, Chau documented, "My class completed a group project where they were tasked with

proposing solutions to reduce local traffic congestion. Each student was responsible for researching and presenting different aspects of the project. This method motivated them to delve deeper into the problem and critically evaluate various solutions together. The responsibility they took for their parts of the project and their active participation in the discussion sessions demonstrated a significant increase in their engagement and autonomy." These observations from Chau provide concrete evidence of how CBA facilitates a deeper connection between students and their learning tasks, fostering both individual and collaborative skills. Social constructivism further elucidates Chau's findings by focusing on the communal aspects of learning and responsibility. The enhanced engagement with content and peers Chau observes can be understood as a manifestation of the social constructivist view that knowledge is co-constructed through interaction. The shift towards a more dynamic classroom environment, where students engage with one another and take collective responsibility for learning, illustrates how CBA creates opportunities for social learning, thereby enriching the individual's learning experience through the collective wisdom and support of the learning community.

Fostering inclusivity and equity through CBA

This theme was reflected in the accounts of eight participants, evenly divided between genders (four males and four females), who emphasized the role of CBA in creating a more inclusive and equitable classroom environment. These instructors highlighted how CBA's emphasis on diverse competencies and personalized learning paths accommodates varied learning styles and needs, thereby promoting equity and inclusivity in language education. To support these observations, we analyzed additional materials such as teaching syllabi and assessment rubrics which demonstrated the integration of inclusive practices. For example, the syllabi modifications included differentiated instruction strategies tailored to diverse student backgrounds, and rubrics were adjusted to assess a range of competencies beyond traditional academic skills, such as teamwork and cultural awareness.

Hieu, a male participant, noted, "CBA allows me to design assessments that cater to different learning styles and strengths, making the learning process more accessible and equitable for all students." Additionally, An, another male participant, described how CBA facilitated adaptations for students with disabilities, stating, "Incorporating technology that assists learning, like speech-to-text for students with writing difficulties, has made education more inclusive and fair for everyone." Constructivism offers insight into Hieu's and An's approach by suggesting that learning is an individualized process where learners construct knowledge based on their experiences, abilities, and perspectives. Hieu's and An's practices of designing assessments to match different learning styles align with the constructivist emphasis on personalizing the learning experience to support each learner's unique path to knowledge construction. This personalization is key to creating an inclusive learning environment that recognizes and values diversity in learning processes. In his reflective journal, Hieu detailed a case where he adapted a project to include visual, auditory, and kinesthetic learning options, which allowed students to choose the method that best suited their learning style, thereby enhancing their engagement and performance. He wrote, "For the unit on ecosystems, I provided students the choice to create a visual map, participate in a discussion group, or engage in a hands-on

activity to demonstrate their understanding. The result was remarkable; students not only enjoyed the learning process more but also performed better in assessments. This approach has proven essential in addressing the diverse needs of my classroom." This entry clearly illustrates how Hieu's adaptive strategies actively engage various learning modalities, fostering a more inclusive classroom environment. Social constructivism adds a layer of understanding by emphasizing the role of social interactions and cultural tools in learning. Hieu's adaptation of assessments to accommodate various learning styles not only supports individual learning needs but also fosters a classroom culture that values diversity and collaboration. According to social constructivism, learning is enhanced in environments where diverse perspectives are shared and respected, promoting an inclusive atmosphere where all students feel valued and supported.

Em, a female participant, shared, "Implementing CBA has made me more mindful of the diverse needs of my students, leading to a more supportive and inclusive classroom dynamic." Nhu, adding to the discussion of linguistic inclusivity, noted "It is important to recognize and integrate students' cultural references in CBA tasks, enhancing their relevance and accessibility." From a constructivist viewpoint, Em's and Nhu's mindfulness about their students' diverse needs and their adjustments to accommodate these needs reflect the theory's advocacy for active, learner-centered education. This approach to teaching and assessment, as Em and Nhu describe, recognizes the individual learner's context, preferences, and challenges, facilitating a learning environment where each student can construct knowledge in the most supportive setting possible. In Em's teaching journal, she writes about how she incorporated multi-lingual resources and varied assessment formats to better cater to her students' diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds, clearly demonstrating her application of inclusive teaching strategies. Her entry from March 29th stated, "Today, I used assessment questions written in both English and Vietnamese to accommodate my students, which helped reduce language barriers significantly. Additionally, I allowed students to submit their responses in different formats—written, oral, or as a digital presentation. The feedback was overwhelmingly positive, with students feeling more confident and involved in their learning." These detailed examples from Em's journal showcase her commitment to creating an equitable learning space that respects and utilizes the cultural and linguistic diversity of her students. Social constructivism provides further insights into Em's experience by highlighting the communal aspects of creating an inclusive learning environment. Her efforts to understand and address the varied needs of her students enhance the classroom's social dynamic, making it more supportive and inclusive. This change is reflective of social constructivism's principle that learning is a collaborative process that thrives on diversity and mutual support, suggesting that the equitable practices facilitated by CBA contribute to a richer, more inclusive community of learners.

Challenges and strategies in feedback provision within CBA

This theme emerged prominently from the discussions with seven participants, comprising three males and four females, who illuminated the complex landscape of providing effective, timely, and constructive feedback in the context of CBA. These instructors highlighted the heightened importance of feedback in competency-based learning environments and discussed the nuanced challenges they face, including balancing the

need for individualized feedback with the constraints of time and resources. They also shared various strategies they employed to enhance the efficacy of feedback provision. To better understand these strategies, we analyzed supplementary materials like assessment rubrics and reflective teaching journals, which provided insights into how feedback practices were adapted and implemented. This analysis revealed consistent themes across the materials, such as the use of detailed comment banks in rubrics that allow for quicker, yet personalized feedback, and journal entries that describe the evolving effectiveness of these strategies.

Lam, a male participant, expressed, "Providing personalized feedback in a CBA setting is crucial but time-consuming. I have had to explore various methods, like peer feedback and digital tools, to ensure all students receive the guidance they need." This approach is supported by Binh, who said "I utilize digital tools, particularly for asynchronous feedback, allowing my students to access and reflect on feedback at their own pace, thus enhancing their learning autonomy and effectiveness." Constructivism sheds light on Lam's and Binh's approaches by emphasizing the importance of feedback in the learning process. According to constructivist principles, feedback is not just a method of evaluation but a vital component of the learning cycle that helps students reflect on their understanding, identify gaps, and adjust their learning strategies. Lam's and Binh's explorations of diverse feedback mechanisms, including peer feedback and digital tools, reflect a constructivist approach to supporting individual learning paths and facilitating the active construction of knowledge through feedback. Lam's journal entries further detail how digital feedback tools have enabled timely and ongoing feedback, illustrating specific instances where such tools have markedly improved student engagement and understanding. In one entry dated May 5th, Lam wrote, "Utilized our new digital platform for real-time feedback during today's lab session. I could comment on each student's work as they progressed, and the immediate input helped correct misunderstandings quickly. The students were visibly more engaged, and their final submissions reflected a deeper understanding of the material." This entry highlights the direct impact of integrating technology in feedback processes, demonstrating how instant feedback can enhance learning outcomes. Social constructivism further contextualizes Lam's strategies by highlighting the communal aspects of learning and feedback. Peer feedback, as Lam mentions, leverages the social environment of the classroom to enhance the learning process. This method aligns with social constructivist views that knowledge is co-constructed through social interactions, suggesting that peer feedback can serve as a powerful tool for collaborative learning and reflection, enriching the feedback process by incorporating multiple perspectives and fostering a supportive learning community.

Nga, a female participant, shared, "Balancing detailed feedback with the demands of a large class is challenging. I have started using rubrics to streamline the process, which helps students understand the competencies they are being assessed on and how they can improve." Em, further enhancing the feedback process, introduced audio feedback for her students, noting that "It helps my students who struggle with reading to better grasp the nuances of the feedback provided." From a constructivist viewpoint, Nga's and Em's use of rubrics as a feedback tool aligns with the theory's emphasis on guiding learners through their construction of knowledge. Rubrics can clarify expectations and criteria for success, offering students a structured framework to self-assess and reflect on

their progress. This structured approach supports constructivist learning by providing clear benchmarks and goals, facilitating self-directed learning and personal engagement with the material. In her teaching journal, Nga discusses how the introduction of visual rubrics, which include symbols and color-coding for different skill levels, has helped students with diverse learning preferences to better understand and act on feedback. She noted in a journal entry from March 15th, "Today I introduced the new rubric with color codes and symbols for assessment criteria. The visual aids seemed to resonate especially well with visual learners, as evidenced by their more focused and effective revisions in their assignments. Several students mentioned that the colors and symbols made the expectations clearer and easier to remember." Nga's entry provides a concrete example of how customized feedback tools can cater to individual learning styles and improve comprehension and application of feedback among students. Social constructivism offers insights into the broader implications of using rubrics for feedback in a CBA context. By establishing clear criteria and expectations, rubrics not only facilitate individual understanding and self-assessment but also foster a shared language for discussing competencies and performance within the learning community. This shared understanding enhances the social dynamics of the classroom, promoting open dialogue, peer support, and collective growth, in line with social constructivist principles that value collaboration and community in the learning process.

Discussion

The findings of this study on the perspectives of Vietnamese EFL teachers regarding the implementation of CBA offer valuable insights into the complexities and potential of CBA in language education. These findings resonate with and diverge from, previous research in several key areas, thereby contributing new knowledge to the field.

Similar to existing literature, this study found that EFL teachers face significant challenges in transitioning to CBA, including adapting to new methodologies, resource scarcity, and lack of institutional support (Mirza et al. 2023; Nguyen et al. 2023). Previous studies have identified similar barriers across various educational contexts (Anderson-Levitt and Gardinier, 2021; Henri et al. 2017), highlighting the global nature of these challenges. However, this study uniquely emphasizes the proactive and innovative efforts of Vietnamese EFL teachers to overcome these obstacles, highlighting a high degree of resilience and adaptability that is less documented in the existing literature. This contribution enriches our understanding of how instructors in resource-constrained environments can still effectively navigate the shift to CBA.

The observation that CBA can enhance student engagement and learning outcomes aligns with previous findings (e.g., Dunning, 2014; Dooly, 2012; Henri et al. 2017). However, this study offers a nuanced view of how such engagement is manifested in the Vietnamese EFL context, demonstrating deeper involvement and active learning processes among students. The detailed accounts of changes in student behavior provide empirical support to theoretical assertions about the benefits of CBA, offering a concrete illustration of its impact on learner engagement not extensively covered in prior studies (Griffith and Lim, 2014).

The gap between theoretical knowledge of CBA principles and the practical skills required for their implementation, as reported in this study, echoes concerns highlighted

in earlier research (e.g., Johnstone and Soares, 2014; Rogers, 2021). However, this study's emphasis on the specific needs for professional development within the Vietnamese educational context contributes to a more detailed understanding of how such gaps can be addressed in similar educational environments. This focus on localized solutions to professional development challenges adds a valuable dimension to the discourse on instructor preparedness for CBA.

The enhancement of critical thinking and problem-solving skills through CBA, as observed in this study, corroborates the findings of previous research advocating for the pedagogical benefits of CBA (Brilingaite et al. 2018; Dooly, 2012). The specific examples of how these skills are developed in the EFL classroom extend the current knowledge base by providing concrete illustrations of CBA's pedagogical impact, offering insights into the mechanisms through which CBA fosters these essential higher-order thinking skills.

This study's finding that CBA promotes greater student autonomy and responsibility contributes to an emerging area of research interest. While the literature has noted the potential of CBA to empower learners (Dooly, 2012; Henri et al. 2017), the detailed exploration of how autonomy and responsibility are cultivated in the Vietnamese EFL context provides a richer, contextualized understanding of these processes, highlighting the practical aspects of fostering learner independence through CBA.

The role of CBA in creating more inclusive and equitable learning environments, as highlighted in this study, adds to a growing body of evidence on the social benefits of CBA. This study's focus on how CBA accommodates diverse learning styles and needs within the specific cultural and educational context of Vietnam offers valuable insights into the practical implementation of inclusive teaching practices, expanding the conversation around equity in education (Ainscow, 2020; Whitley and Hollweck, 2020).

Finally, the complex landscape of feedback provision within CBA contexts, as discussed in this study, addresses an underexplored area in the literature. By detailing the specific challenges faced by Vietnamese EFL teachers and the strategies they employ to provide effective feedback, this study contributes new perspectives on the critical role of feedback in competency-based learning environments, highlighting innovative approaches to feedback that can inform practice in similar contexts.

Conclusion

This study embarked on an exploration of Vietnamese EFL teachers' perspectives on the implementation of CBA, against a backdrop of growing interest in enhancing language education to meet the demands of global competence. Recognizing the shift towards more learner-centered, skill-focused educational frameworks, this research sought to understand how instructors navigate the challenges and opportunities presented by CBA within the context of Vietnamese higher education.

Employing a qualitative research design grounded in constructivist and social constructivist theories, the study utilized semi-structured interviews with 10 EFL teachers from two distinct institutions in Vietnam. The participants, comprising an equal number of males and females, were selected through purposive sampling to ensure a rich diversity of insights. The interviews, complemented by a thorough thematic analysis,

illuminated the experiences, challenges, strategies, and perceptions of instructors as they integrate CBA into their teaching practices.

The findings revealed several key themes: the challenges of transitioning to CBA, including resource limitations and insufficient institutional support; the transformative potential of CBA for enhancing student engagement and learning outcomes; the critical need for professional development tailored to effective CBA implementation; the role of CBA in fostering critical thinking and problem-solving skills, student autonomy, and responsibility; the contribution of CBA to creating more inclusive and equitable learning environments; and the nuanced challenges and strategies related to providing effective feedback within CBA frameworks. These themes underscore the complex interplay between educational innovation and the practical realities of classroom implementation, highlighting the nuanced ways in which instructors and students engage with CBA.

The implications of this study are manifold. Firstly, it underscores the importance of providing adequate professional development and resources for instructors to navigate the shift toward CBA effectively. For instance, developing targeted workshops and online training modules that focus on the specific competencies relevant to EFL, such as linguistic adaptability and intercultural communication, can provide educators with the necessary tools to apply CBA methodologies in their classrooms. This training should also include case studies and scenarios from real classroom settings to illustrate practical implementation strategies. Tailored training programs that address both the theoretical underpinnings and practical applications of CBA can bridge the gap between knowledge and practice, empowering teachers to implement CBA strategies more confidently and effectively. Secondly, the study highlights the need for institutional support in facilitating the transition to CBA, including policy frameworks, resources, and a culture of continuous improvement that supports innovation in assessment practices. Specifically, institutions could establish dedicated teams or departments focused on CBA development, which could assist teachers with resources, advice, and feedback on their assessment strategies. Additionally, regular review meetings could be instituted to refine these practices based on feedback from both educators and students, fostering a proactive culture of pedagogical innovation.

Furthermore, the findings suggest that CBA has significant potential to enhance the quality of language education by fostering critical thinking, problem-solving skills, student autonomy, and a sense of responsibility for learning. For example, implementing CBA in language education could involve tasks that require students to solve real-world problems through foreign language use, thereby directly applying their language skills in practical, communicative contexts. Such tasks not only reinforce the practical utility of language skills but also engage students more deeply in their learning process. This aligns with global educational trends emphasizing the importance of preparing students with the skills necessary for success in the twenty-first century. However, achieving these outcomes requires thoughtful implementation, ongoing support, and adaptation to the specific needs and contexts of students and teachers alike.

Lastly, the study contributes to the broader discourse on competency-based education by providing insights into the specific challenges and opportunities faced by Vietnamese EFL teachers. The detailed examination of how these teachers navigate regulatory environments, institutional constraints, and limited resources to implement CBA reveals

adaptive strategies that can inform similar initiatives in other educational contexts. By highlighting the context-specific strategies employed by these instructors to overcome obstacles and enhance learning, this research offers valuable perspectives for instructors, policymakers, and researchers in similar contexts, encouraging a collaborative approach to advancing competency-based language education globally. This can spur further research into how CBA approaches can be optimized across different cultural and institutional frameworks, potentially leading to more universally applicable guidelines and practices.

Limitations and recommendations for further studies

This study, while providing valuable insights into the implementation of CBA in Vietnamese EFL contexts, has several limitations that warrant consideration. Firstly, the sample size, consisting of ten EFL teachers from only two institutions, while sufficient for a qualitative inquiry, limits the generalizability of the findings. The experiences and perspectives of these participants may not fully represent the diversity of challenges and strategies across the broader landscape of Vietnamese higher education. Additionally, the focus on EFL teachers' perspectives, without directly incorporating the experiences and outcomes of students, presents a partial view of the impact of CBA practices. The study's reliance on self-reported data also raises the possibility of biases in how participants perceive and report their experiences with CBA.

To address the limitations identified in the current study and to build a more robust understanding of CBA within the field of EFL education, particularly in the Vietnamese context, future research directions are proposed with a focus on expanding the empirical and theoretical scope of inquiry. Firstly, it is recommended that subsequent studies engage a larger and more diverse cohort of instructors. By including teachers from a broader range of educational institutions, including both public and private sectors across multiple regions of Vietnam, researchers can capture a wider array of experiences and practices, thus enhancing the representativeness and generalizability of their findings. Such an approach would allow for the identification of patterns and variations in the implementation of CBA, offering richer insights into the factors that influence its success or challenges across various teaching and learning environments.

In addition to diversifying the sample, adopting a mixed-methods research design would significantly deepen the understanding of CBA's impact. By integrating quantitative measures of student outcomes and engagement with qualitative data on teacher and student experiences, researchers can provide a more nuanced and comprehensive picture of how CBA influences language learning. This methodological approach would facilitate a multifaceted analysis of CBA, encompassing both the effectiveness of pedagogical strategies and their tangible outcomes on learner achievement and motivation.

Furthermore, incorporating the perspectives of students directly affected by CBA practices is crucial for gaining a holistic view of its efficacy. Investigating students' experiences, perceptions, and feedback regarding CBA can unveil valuable insights into the learner-centered aspects of competency-based approaches, illuminating how these practices influence student motivation, engagement, and learning progress from the learners' standpoint.

Lastly, there is a need for longitudinal studies that track the implementation of CBA over time to assess its long-term effects on teaching practices and student learning. Such research could reveal how instructors adapt and refine their approaches to CBA with experience and how sustained use of competency-based strategies affects educational outcomes and culture within institutions. These longitudinal insights would be invaluable for understanding the evolution of teaching and learning practices under the CBA framework, contributing to the development of effective policies, professional development programs, and pedagogical innovations.

Abbreviations
CBE   Competency-based education
EFL   English as a Foreign Language
CBLE   Competency-based language education
CBA   Competency-based assessment

Authors' contributions
Each author has contributed equally to this research project. Both authors read and approved the final manuscript.

Authors' information
Phuong Hoang Yen is currently an associate professor at the School of Foreign Languages, at Can Tho University, Vietnam. She carries studies on language teaching approaches, students' learning autonomy, self-regulated learning strategies, and teachers' professional development. She published articles in different journals and is the editor of one Scopus-indexed book on alternative assessment in language teaching.
Le Thanh Thao has been working as an official lecturer at Can Tho University. He is responsible for teaching language skills there. He has worked as an invited editor of two international journals entitled "Jurnal Komunikasi Pendidikan," managed by Universitas Veteran Bangun Nusantara, and "Erudita: Journal of English Language Teaching," under the Faculty of Education and Teacher Training, Universitas Islam Negeri K.H. Abdurrahman Wahid Pekalongan. Furthermore, Thao is an editor for the section on "Literature and Linguistics" of the Literature Forum journal. Thao is very interested in classroom-based research and educational change-related issues.

Availability of data and materials
The authors have retained all data and materials produced during this study and are dedicated to ensuring their availability to support transparency and advancement in the scientific community. Researchers seeking access to these resources are encouraged to reach out to the corresponding author to begin the access process.

Declarations

Competing interests
The authors declare that they have no competing interests.

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