From Student-Centered to Competency-Based Reform:
Exploring Teachers' Perspective of Meaningful Participation

Bich-Hang Duong and Joan DeJaeghere

Abstract

Student-centered pedagogy has been widely advocated in many contexts with student active participation in learning being a central element. Vietnam has adopted innovative pedagogies including child-centered and competency-based teaching to further active learning and develop students' full potential. This study explores Vietnamese teachers' views about student participation and teaching roles as they implement these progressive reforms. It also examines pedagogical practices that teachers planned to use and actually employed to support student learning through meaningful participation. Drawing on qualitative analysis of interviews and classroom observations conducted over three years with 47 secondary-level literature teachers throughout Vietnam, we found that student participation as expected by teachers broadly falls into three categories: participation as attention; participation as contribution and collaboration; and participation as autonomy and engagement. Each of these modes characterizes what teachers' envision of students' overall engagement, but these modes coexisted in the data in classroom practices. Our analysis shows how 'hybrid pedagogy,' a mix of teacher-directed and student-centered approaches, was most used to support students' active contribution and collaboration. This research contributes to the literature on student-centered learning and student participation in transitional contexts, highlighting the complex processes of how teachers perceive and enact these pedagogical reforms.

From Student-Centered to Competency-Based Reform: Exploring Teachers' Perspective of Meaningful Participation

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Introduction

Meaningful engagement in learning activities is regarded as an important dimension of quality learning (UNESCO 2016a). With a renewed focus on teaching as critical for quality education in Goal 4 of the Sustainable Development Goals, many innovative approaches to quality teaching have been promoted. Learner-centered education also emphasizes the important role of active student participation and has become an influential education movement adopted in many countries. In a recent meta-analysis of the international literature on learner-centered learning, Bremner (2020) found that 'active participation' is the most mentioned element when it comes to conceptualizing 'learner-centered or student-centered education.'[1] Taking features of learner-centered practices, the recent competency-based education reforms in different settings have also connected to the ideas of student ownership of learning and participation in and beyond classrooms (e.g., Clement 2021; Egodawatte 2014; Evans et al. 2019).

In Vietnam, enhancing student participation or active learning is regarded as a starting point, if not the central focus, of education changes that followed the major economic reform in 1986 (*Doi Moi*). Child-centered learning was introduced to Vietnam as early as the late 1970s, and was later conflated with 'active learning' during the 2002 curriculum reform (Tanaka 2020). In the last decade, Vietnam has adopted competency-based education with a focus on developing the cross-cutting competencies of (i) student autonomy and self-study, (ii) communication and collaboration, and (iii) problem solving and creative competence. To develop these competencies, public discourse surrounding competency-based reform underscores 'active student participation' as one of the most central dimensions of quality teaching and learning. Accordingly, teachers are trained and encouraged to adopt pedagogical practices that "promote students' activeness and create a friendly learning environment [...], with teachers taking the role of organizing and guiding learning activities" (Ministry of Education and Training [MOET] 2018, 32). While the term 'student-centered learning' receives less policy attention than before, perhaps because of more recently adopted pedagogical reforms, progressive approaches related to active participation and learner autonomy continue to underpin Vietnam's new competency-based curriculum. Despite the assumptions that active participation is core to competency-based learning, empirical studies, particularly in Vietnam, are limited in examining teachers' expectations and roles in fostering active participation through their pedagogical practices.

In many contexts, policy agendas related to progressive education reform, such as student-centered learning, typically characterize student participation as either passive or active. In a sense, this is because student-centered learning is often defined in opposition to traditional teacher-centered or teacher-directed learning (Alexander 2001; Barrett 2007; Bremner 2020). Additionally, quantified indicators used to measure teaching quality tend to create a binary of 'active' teaching methods and rote learning (e.g., Bruns et al. 2011; Sankar and Linden 2014). As a result, critics of conventional teaching often attend less to the complex processes of classroom change in their specific cultural contexts.

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[1] Other terms used interchangeably with 'student-centered' include learner-centered, and child-centered with little conceptual distinction, except for 'child-centered' which tends to appear in early childhood education.

Some researchers and theorists have argued for a 'continuum' of teaching styles or practice (Alexander 2001; Guthrie 2011; Schweisfurth 2011; 2013; Lattimer 2015) and called for the adaptability of progressive approaches using a flexible framework (Bremner 2019; also see Vavrus's 2009, idea of 'contingent constructivism'). Recent empirical evidence reveals complex processes of change in teachers' beliefs and practices in various developing countries that adopt student-centered education, suggesting a 'hybrid pedagogy' or a mix of teacher-directed and student-centered approaches (Barrett 2007; Lattimer 2015; McAleavy et al. 2018; Bremner 2019; del Valle 2019). Relatedly, Anderson-Levitt and Gardinier (2021) also point to hybrid forms of policy discourse and implementation associated with competency-based approaches that have been applied in diverse contexts.

The current paper continues our previous analysis of a larger research project (supported by RISE) to understand quality teaching and learning in Vietnam, especially in the context of global education reform and the country's newly adopted competency-based curriculum. We examine 47 secondary school teachers' views on student participation and their pedagogical practices that illustrate how they involved students in the learning processes. The study centers on these questions:

1. What kinds of participation do teachers expect from students?

2. What roles do teachers take in supporting student participation in their learning?

3. How do teachers' pedagogical practices foster student participation for competency development?

Understanding what teachers expect and how they translate their expectations to foster student participation can reveal how teachers position themselves in their roles and how they view the nature of learning and knowledge construction. This study's insights into teachers' perspectives and practices related to student participation help illuminate the process of classroom practices regarding teacher-student relationships, power-sharing and knowledge acquisition that underlie the competency-based curriculum reform. Furthermore, the analysis helps explain incoherencies and hybridity in individual teachers' understandings and actions, from which policy-related implications can be drawn to best support teachers' adaptations of innovative pedagogies. The next section reviews the related literature on teachers' expectations and practices to foster student participation in learning. The Methods section provides information about the study context including descriptions of data collection and analysis. The paper will discuss key findings related to teachers' expectations about student participation, teachers' roles, and teachers' practices to encourage student learning and engagement. Relevant implications for policy and research will be offered in the Discussion and Conclusion sections.

Teachers' expectations and practices for student participation

An extensive body of literature discusses student participation, including student involvement or engagement in various domains of the school life and in learning modalities. For this paper, we focus on the international literature around pedagogical reforms, particularly from the Global South, that addresses teachers' role in developing students' participation at the classroom level. Academic scholarship about student-centered learning often draws on a constructivist approach to learning

that centers active participation and student agency in an effort to increase their control over learning and their belonging in relation to school (Starkey 2019). In both frameworks that Bremner (2020) proposed in conceptualizing student-centered learning, 'active participation' emerged as the first and central category. From his synthesis, students' active participation involves *learners being actively involved in learning* (e.g., learning by doing, hands-on learning), and *learners interacting with themselves and the teacher* (e.g., through pair and group work). His definition also includes real-life skills, learners actively 'doing' the work, both in and out of class, and dialogue between the teacher and students (Bremner 2019, 14). While this description of active participation is all-encompassing, its operationalization varies according to the curricular priorities and education conditions of local contexts. For example, the current education reform in Vietnam generally conceptualizes active participation as a way for (and a manifestation of) students in becoming autonomous and self-regulated learners with communication, collaboration, and creative problem solving skills (see MOET, 2018).

Theoretically, teachers' expectations of student participation are consistent with teachers' perceptions of their own classroom role and practice. The literature on student-centered learning and competency-based education shares the view that the role of the teacher should be a supporter and facilitator who provides students with opportunities to be actively involved in the learning process (Weimer 2002; Egodawatte 2014; Huynh 2015). In the actual classroom settings, however, the roles that teachers adopt might not dovetail with policy expectations and/or teachers' perceived roles. Two key factors affect how teachers take on new roles and teaching styles. First, in terms of teacher-student relationships, teachers are in the position of authority and power. No matter what kind of classroom activity, teacher-directed or student-led, teachers always hold the most important organizational multi-role, including controlling time, settling disputes, preparing learning materials, and particularly, evaluating students' performance (Guthrie 2011). Second, studies on classroom realities have shown that various institutional and cultural factors, including crowded classes, exam-oriented curriculum, and undemocratic school culture, prevent teachers from implementing progressive pedagogies or from being able to innovate their own practices (Nguyen 2008; Vavrus 2009; Egodawatte 2014; Kaymakamo 2018). As such, teachers need to negotiate constraints and adjust their teaching methods and styles to align with their professional and cultural contexts.

Several empirical studies focusing on classroom practices in these contexts report that teachers in effect worked with a "mixed palette" of pedagogies (Barrett 2007, 273) or hybridized teaching practices. In fact, hybridity is not a new phenomenon in education policy and practice. For example, in noting the combination of pedagogical techniques as a way to accommodate specific needs of students and community, educational ethnographers have pointed to the process of adaptability, one that Vavrus (2009) refers to as 'contingent constructivism.' The idea 'hybridity' has gained more prominence in scholarship on education reforms in low- and middle-income countries where teachers were stated to combine conventional or formalistic teaching and progressive practices (Bremner 2019; Tan and Reyes 2016; del Valle 2019; Guthrie 2018; 2021a, b).

Many studies on teaching and learning in Vietnam argue that teachers still teach in traditional ways though various progressive teaching methods have been in introduced (e.g., Saito, Tsukui, and Tanaka 2008; Le 2018). Yet a small body of empirical research suggests the changing role and practices of Vietnamese teachers (e.g., Huynh 2015; Nguyen and Hall 2016; McAleavy et al. 2018; UNESCO 2016b). For example, Nielsen et al. (2019) found that Vietnamese educators

became acutely aware of their changing roles and functions. Educators commented that while before the 2000s, teachers' primary role was to impart knowledge, they now considered themselves to be facilitators who assist students in developing their full potential and capacities (Nielsen et al. 2019). Importantly, this scholarship challenges a common critique that many teachers resist improvement of their traditional classrooms by showing how they supported and engaged in innovative ideas to improve their instructional practices. These innovations not only involve the use of technology but also a mix of traditional and new teaching or hybrid practices for students' meaningful engagement (e.g., McAleavy et al. 2018; Duong et al. 2021; UNESCO 2016b). Although some forms of hybridity have been explored in Vietnam's higher education (Tran et al. 2017; Pham 2010), empirical evidence on hybrid teaching at the secondary level remain limited.

Presenting a case of a lower middle-income country, this study aims to examine new cultural formations, including teachers' understandings and classroom changes. It explores the ways in which hybridity potentially results from shifting conceptions and practices related to what it means to learn and the nature of teacher-student relations. More importantly, by unpacking the dynamics of student participation as one aspect of quality teaching, we point to instances where hybrid possibilities contribute to creating good learning at the secondary level.

The study and methods

This qualitative longitudinal classroom study was part of a larger mixed-method research project (supported by RISE) conducted with primary and secondary teachers and students between 2017 and 2021 in Vietnam. This research project aims to understand Vietnam's education performance particularly during the time when Vietnam has been implementing the 'Fundamental and Comprehensive' education reform with the adoption of the competency-based curriculum in 2020. For the qualitative classroom study, data were gathered in 10 provinces across the northern, central and southern regions of Vietnam. Mathematics and Vietnamese (literature) teachers from 20 secondary schools, usually two schools per province, were selected to participate in this study. Teachers consented to participate in the interviews and video recordings each year; parents whose child(ren) participated in the study were informed and children consented to being recorded. All interviews with teachers were organized in a private room where conversations were not interrupted or overheard. Teachers were also assured that their video recordings would not be shared outside the research team, such as with their supervisors or district officials.

We used the methodology of video-cued reflection that drew on data collection methods used in the TIMSS (1999) video study and the World Bank Vietnam Escuela Nueva (VNEN[2]) study (Parandekar et al. 2017). We used two cameras, one focused exclusively on the teacher and whole classroom, the other on students, including groups of students. The videos captured detailed data of classroom interactions and discourses and show the complex and interactive nature of teaching as a social-cultural practice (Stigler et al. 2000; Alexander 2001). Two to three lessons (usually 45 minutes each) of each teacher were recorded over a few days during a week-long visit to the

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[2] Vietnam Escuela Nueva is the World Bank-supported project piloted in many primary schools in Vietnam between 2013 and 2016 to improve students' active learning and soft skills such as communication, collaboration, and critical thinking etc. Though VNEN is no longer officially supported, some teachers continue to use the methods and some classes are designated as such, partly because students from primary school using VNEN curriculum are grouped together in these classes.

schools. In addition, the pre-lesson interviews with individual teachers gathered data about teachers' typical teaching approach, their beliefs, and their plan for the recorded lessons. A post-lesson interview asked the teacher to view sections of the video-recorded lesson and reflect on her/his teaching practices. While the recorded lessons did not occur throughout the school year, which limits our understanding of teachers' practices, we returned to the schools over three years and saw similar teaching patterns.

This paper focuses on themes related to teachers' expectations, roles, and actions around student participation. Using NVIVO, we qualitatively analyzed a sub-set of pre- and post-lesson interviews and classroom observations of 47 literature teachers. We first coded the data to the categories that we asked the teachers in the interviews, for example, teachers' teaching styles, lesson preparations, understanding of competencies, general teaching methods, specific practices to teach the target competencies, and students' progress and learning in their classes, etc. From these initial categories, we conducted inductive analysis, discerning emergent patterns of themes related to teachers' roles and views related to student participation. For example, when teachers expected students to pay full attention to the lesson and dutifully follow teachers' directions, and considered themselves as a role model of being a traditional teacher, we would assign the code of 'participation as attention.' Meanwhile, the category of 'participation as collaboration' would entail expectations pertaining to students' active contribution, a dynamic learning environment, and a flexible teaching style. Also, we referred to supplementary data to explore the extent of student participation and learning progress, including data of student work/assignments and student learning assessments.

Alongside interview analysis, our analysis of video data and memo writing of themes were guided by the following questions: *What does the teacher do to foster students' participation in learning (in terms of curriculum content, teaching methods, and support)? Does the teacher listen to students carefully, ask them to think deeply, or just check the answer? What teaching style/role does the teacher take? How are students involved in the learning process? How do they participate in the lesson, listen to teacher and friends, raise/initiate questions, and work on the task with excitement/boredom? How is the classroom's atmosphere? How are students engaged in the discussion, interact with peers and the teacher? How do they come up with the answers?* Our main interest was in capturing and interpreting high-inference level interactions, classroom discourses, and teaching processes in their socio-cultural contexts rather than the frequency or number of teachers who talked about or engaged in a particular style (Klette 2009). In our findings, we present analysis and quotes from the transcriptions of teacher interviews and classroom videos.

Findings

Teachers' expectations of student participation were analyzed to group into three categories, (1) participation as attention; (2) participation as active contribution and collaboration; and (3) participation as autonomy and engagement. There is much overlap between these participation modes; yet overall, they correspond to the three types of the roles that teachers perceived of themselves in the school context, i.e. teachers as a role model, a supporter, and a mentor of students.

1. Participation as attention

Student participation for some teachers generally means being *present, attentive and obedient*. For example, students were expected to go to class regularly, pay attention to the lesson, diligently take notes without being asked to do so, and dutifully follow teachers' directions. Class observations shows that it is the popular routine that students were 'quiet and orderly' (instead of 'noisy and chaotic') even in group discussions. While no interviewed teacher expressed support for 'passive learning,' students in some classrooms showed limited interactions with the teachers and friends. In these classes, when a student presented the answers, s/he would look nervous; and the atmosphere became tense when the answer provided was 'wrong.' Students who got the 'wrong answer' were often regarded as 'not paying enough attention to the lesson.' However, the observed teachers generally did not ask a follow-up question to understand why students came up with such an answer.

Teachers who expected students to be in such a full attention mode tended to describe themselves as *role models* with a 'formalistic, standard' teaching style. Analysis of class observations shows that some of them appeared close and caring to students; but the hierarchical relation between the teacher and students is manifested, for example, by the way the teacher typically stood in the classroom podium, provided commands, and rarely gave concrete, extended feedback to students' work or answers. Classroom activities and formalities including roll-calls and greetings took place with a high sense of discipline. The learning atmosphere in these classrooms felt generally solemn and formal during the whole period.

The literature subject of the current secondary-level curriculum consists of three crisscrossing foci, including *literary texts, the Vietnamese language,* and *writing skills*. These foci may draw on the same learning materials but often be taught in a separate period. Teachers explained that their teaching approach would depend on which focus of the syllabus they were teaching, and many preferred *traditional methods* for classes on literary texts. By 'traditional,' they would mean two things. First, it referred to the standard, structured way of teaching, mostly emphasizing content knowledge, for which teachers had been trained and enacted in their own classrooms with little modification. In Vietnam's centralized education system, traditional formalistic teaching ensures complying with 'the right procedure,' and therefore, it is safe for most teachers to proceed in accordance with the approved syllabus. In addition to transmitting subject knowledge and teaching language skills, especially for ethnic minority students who were 'not competent in the official language,' teachers of literature saw themselves in the position of instilling socialist and moral values in the next generations, which was also what we observed in many classrooms. For example, Mr. Ha, a grade 9 teacher, said:

> My teaching is described [by colleagues and supervisors] as standard and follows the teaching procedures as required. As a [literature] teacher, I focus on teaching subject knowledge and [...] also orient students to official ideologies such as love for the country and socialism, and following the moral example of Ho Chi Minh. (Mr. Ha, pre-lesson interview, grade 9)

Second, 'traditional' teaching may involve methods that were led by a teacher with a focus on whole-class teaching even if individual students might be called to check understanding. Traditional approaches include lecturing, giving extended oral literary commentaries, or analyzing in-depth literary devices, all of which involve dominant teacher talking time. Many teachers emphasized that extended commentary or discussion of the literary work provided by a teacher was an essential part of a literature class. This is illustrated in a response of a teacher who explained

why lectured-based teaching should be the best teaching method, particularly in teaching about literary texts.

> [W]hen learning literature, students, just like anyone of us as learners, want to listen to those who talk fluently and discuss the text expressively for a certain amount of time rather than jumping to other tasks. If we lecture beautifully, we can attract students' full attention, and therefore they can absorb [the beauty of] the text. (Ms. Phuong, pre-lesson interview, grade 8)

This perspective shows that students would be unable to have a profound appreciation of the literary text or a deep understanding of the literary devices without teachers' lecturing.

2. Participation as active contribution and collaboration

Being *active, dynamic and proactive* are the most mentioned qualities that teacher participants expected from their students. In their classes, many teachers wanted to see their students actively contributing to the lesson, for example, by raising hands and answering the questions as prompted by the teacher, giving feedback, and explicitly collaborating with other students in group work. Indeed, most teachers perceived collaboration as the most important general competency that students needed to develop. Some teachers, as the one quoted below, also added that they understood that students were youngsters who should be encouraged to be animated, excited, interactive, or even laid back in collaborative work because those times are when they could learn well.

> I am often joyful and friendly to let students feel relaxed [...] I don't create a heavy learning environment so that they can do work together [interactively] which can be very noisy. But I'm experienced in controlling such situations and know they should be like that [to study effectively]. (Ms. Nga, pre-lesson interview, grade 9)

Teachers expecting students to be active would consider themselves as *supporters* of students. They described themselves as 'friendly,' 'gentle,' and 'trustworthy' in their teaching. Among these qualities, being thoughtful and understanding were seen as important in maintaining a positive teacher-student relationship. Interviews with these teachers showed that they demonstrated a quite thorough understanding of individual students' learning competence and even family situations of some students. Observations of those teachers' classrooms showed a level of relationship that is less hierarchical than the formalistic classrooms. This is evidenced in the way teachers moved around the classrooms, used (friendly or 'teen') language, and interacted with individual students (e.g. looking at students in their eyes, nudging, picking the dropped pens, making jokes, etc.). Equal and respectful teacher-student relationships contributed to nurturing students' confidence, which was also believed as an important teaching goal of many interviewed teachers.

Some teachers stated that they took the role of a facilitator who "guided students to acquire knowledge themselves" (pre-lesson interview, grade 8). But in practice, the post-lesson interviews and class recordings showed that teacher-talk dominated class time and that students had a slim chance to initiate their ideas and think for themselves. Similarly, some teachers described their teaching style as involving students through various learning activities but still emphasized their power in classroom processes. The transmissive role was also pronounced in cases when some teachers taught ethnic minority students who were expected to participate actively but were

believed to be "too slow and weak in understanding the standard knowledge," and thereby teachers needed to "lecture with guiding questions" and "hold the students' hands to do the work" (post-lesson interview, grade 8). These expectation-action discrepancies will be addressed further in the Discussion section.

Many teachers expecting students to actively contribute to the lesson often described themselves as flexible in their teaching approaches. Teachers tended not to name a specific pedagogical approach, but instead they listed teaching techniques/strategies, such as group work or game activities, and talked about 'the ultimate aim' of their strategies, that of increasing students' activeness and self-learning. Some teachers clarified that their teaching method is contingent according to the type of students they worked with; but whatever methods were used, they strove to "make students understand the lesson and love the subject" (Mr. Trong, pre-lesson interview, grade 8).

An example of a classroom with hybrid practices for meaningful participation

Classroom observations show that flexibility in teaching was not as present as teachers had described and valued. This is partly because of the prescriptive top-down curriculum in which teachers and students found themselves to be compliant with the pre-approved textbooks and lesson plans. However, there are classrooms in which teachers flexibly used both teacher-directed and student-centered activities. These teachers mostly belong to the second type, *participation as active contribution and collaboration*. The following example illustrates how a teacher adeptly combined varied strategies to foster such type of participation as manifested in students' active contribution and collaboration in class learning.

The selected literature classroom consisting of 40 grade 7 students is from a high performing secondary school. Observations of this class focus on two periods when they studied the poem *Chicken Sounds at Noon*.[3] As described by the teacher, Ms. Lan, the lesson's objectives include developing students' skills and competencies in expressive and comprehension reading; aesthetic appreciation; communication and collaboration; and self-learning (see the Appendix for a specific description of classroom practices in two recorded lessons)

Like some other teachers in this category, Ms. Lan did not use a 'super model' of teaching but taught in ways that "encouraged students study and enjoy learning" (pre-lesson interview, grade 7). In a typical highly structured lesson, she introduced the lesson's topic, the poem, the author's biodata, and then assisted the class in analyzing the literary tools used in the poem. She gave extended whole-class instruction and clearly demonstrated how the literary devices were applied and their intended impacts on the reader. Her presentation was reasonably blended with purposeful, well-designed queries, ranging from simple comprehension to advanced evaluation, most of which were open questions. Sometimes, the teacher linked to the knowledge that students learned in previous years, for example, by asking: *"Do you remember any other poems of the similar genre that we learned in grade 6?"* Notably, Ms. Lan attempted to reduce power relations which has long viewed as inherent in a hierarchical classroom in Vietnam. Rather than merely lecturing and moving through the exercises, Ms. Lan gave students time to respond and opportunities to ponder

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[3] The poem, written by Xuan Quynh in 1965, is a narrative of a soldier on the way marching to his military unit. He heard the sounds of chickens from the backyard of a villager's house where the soldier rested. The sounds were evocative of fond memories of his grandmother and his childhood in a peaceful rural life.

on an alternative answer. The teacher's actions and language, including non-verbal language such as her smile and eye expressions, appeared affectionate and friendly to her students in all of her classrooms that we observed. In the lessons recorded for analysis, students also had four times for group work and two pair discussions. Intended to "develop students' collaboration and collaboration competencies" (post-lesson interview, grade 7), these activities encouraged students to reflect deeply on the meaning and beauty of the poem. In parallel, they helped students communicate their original ideas and contribute actively to the lesson with a positive learning attitude.

In fact, nearly half of all teacher participants (18/47) confirmed that there was *no best teaching method*. Their approaches involved both traditional and progressive practices as illustrated by these teachers' comments:

> I never think that conventional teaching is not good or that progressive is the best. It is essential to have both of them. For example, [in terms of conventional teaching,] learning a literary work needs to have (teacher's) commentary without which there is no deep understanding and contemplation, otherwise it's *no longer literature*. (Ms. Ly, post-lesson interview, grade 9, emphasis in the original)

> I integrate various suggesting questions into my lecture for students to get prepared by self-learning [in advance]. These questions develop their thinking, especially problem-raised questions that stimulate students thinking and problem-solving skills. (Mr. Sinh, pre-lesson interview, grade 8)

> We were trained in the new teaching methods including VNEN. But after some years of copying the approaches, our school realized that it is *not that effective* [as expected]. So we, together with the school district, thought that we need to hybridize flexibly [the methods]. And as you see in the observations, we don't arrange students' tables in the VNEN style, [but] teachers continue to promote active participation by forms of flexible combination. The general ultimate goal is to develop competencies [...] or holistic development for the students. (Ms. Hong, pre-lesson interview, grade 8, emphasis in the original)

These comments shows that many of the interviewed teachers valued approaches that develop students' active contribution and collaboration and did apply some new teaching methods in their classroom. Our analysis suggests that effective application of hybrid practices requires both teachers' flexibility and careful curricular design. The example presented above indicates that despite further areas for improvement, the teacher was able to support students' deep learning and competency development through meaningful participation by blending traditional formalistic with progressive approaches. Hybrid pedagogical practices that teachers planned to use to develop students' competencies, and that they actually applied in their classrooms, include explicit whole-class lecturing with well-designed queries; appropriate use of technology; individual consolidation/practice; pair/group discussions; assistance/interactions with individual students; connecting with students emotionally; and group/pair discussions.

3. Participation as autonomy and engagement

Analysis of teacher interviews suggests that some teachers regarded active participation as student autonomy and deep engagement. While many referred to 'self-study' as one of the key target competencies, a few teachers connected self-study with student participation through the ideas of student autonomy, engagement, and self-management. Teachers in this category viewed student participation as the logical result of engagement and autonomous learning. This is because, as a

teacher explained, when students take charge of their learning and engaged with self-exploration of knowledge, they become "proactive agents" who, with teachers' minimal guidance, actively engage in the learning process (Ms. Lai, pre-lesson interview, grade 9).

In practice, student autonomy was observed more clearly in classes where students had more opportunities to work in groups, debate an issue, or do a project-based assignment. These classes, also reflecting elements of hybridity, integrated some degree of the VNEN curriculum which, as many teachers mentioned, did support students (oral) communication skills, autonomy, and confidence. Students who attended VNEN primary classes tended to take the initiative, ask questions, proactively involve themselves in class activities, or confidently lead a team or an activity for an assigned task. In some teachers' views, student autonomy is also associated with self-management or self-discipline, which involves little teacher intervention, particularly in group work.

Many teachers in this group viewed their role as *mentors* who guide students to be responsible for their own learning. Some considered the tasks of a teacher as those of a moderator who coordinates the class activities and ensures that the lesson runs smoothly as planned. For example, a teacher compared herself with a master of ceremonies who played the role of a 'guide on the side':

> I'm just like an MC helping students [perform or] express themselves. They're at the center and not dominated by the teacher [...] Also, as an MC, you must be joyous, and you know, humor is very important in learning. If the lesson is too intense and heavy, students are not happy, their brains can't function, and [therefore] students can't express themselves. (Ms. Yen, post-lesson interview, grade 9)

In addition to more autonomous engagement in the classroom, a few teachers discussed student participation as outside-classroom engagement. They noted the importance of gaining learning experiences that extend beyond the classroom context where students should have opportunities to be involved in extra-curricular or community activities. Several examples of such activities mentioned in teacher interviews include:

- Project-based learning: for example, a grade 8 group worked in teams for an 8-week project to study their local community. The teacher provided guidance and suggested topics, such as local special dishes and local history or literature, for the students to collect relevant original documents and do research on. Students chose to write a paper, create an artwork, or make a presentation or a video clip about the selected topic.

- Extra-curricular activities: teachers talked about opportunities for students to bolster expected competencies (communication, creativity etc.) through participation in field trips, games, and student contests. Some schools made these activities compulsory. Yet in some rural areas, many (especially ethnic minority) students could not attend because of family responsibilities.

- Experiential learning: this type of learning was mentioned by several teachers who were trained in professional development programs related to the competency-based curriculum. Some activities aimed to develop hands-on experience, student ownership of

learning, creativity, confidence, and life skills. These activities include role-play, presentation, and do-it-yourself projects.

Despite students' meaningful participation and learning, these learning approaches were not officially assessed in the current curriculum, and therefore, not observed in all schools participating in our study. Given teachers' increasing awareness of the benefits of these approaches in cultivating students' transferable competencies, additional evidence is needed regarding the use of these learning approaches in the new curriculum.

Discussion

In general, it is evident from our analysis that almost all teachers mentioned 'active learning' (or 'active teaching') in the interviews pertaining to student participation and teachers' positions in teaching. We found that teachers expected students to engage in learning in three overlapping ways: *participation as attention, participation as contribution and collaboration*, and *participation as autonomy and engagement;* and teachers believed that they assumed the role of a *role model, a facilitator, or a mentor,* respectively. There is much overlap between the categories, demonstrating layers of discrepancy and hybridity in terms of teachers' practices and views about their roles and how quality teaching and learning should occur in classroom process. The analysis suggests two main layers of discrepancies: within-teacher and among-teacher.

(i) Within-teacher discrepancies: differences exist within individual teachers who demonstrated shifting views and practices over the three-year course of the study, *or* as the gap between a teacher's expectations and actions. The paragraphs below discuss the expectation-action gap, leaving the first kind of discrepancies (over the years) to our next paper to explore in-depth.

(ii) Among-teacher incoherencies: different groups of teachers demonstrate a certain 'teaching style' in their understandings/expectations and practice. A majority of teachers swing between the first and second categories with the later demonstrating more hybrid pedagogies.

With regard to the gap between individual teachers' expectations and actions, this may be explained by several reasons. For example, many teachers in our study discussed how they struggled applying new teaching methods because of workloads, students' backgrounds, the exam-oriented curriculum, and classroom conditions. Related to this issue, previous research notes that despite their shifting understandings of learning and the roles of learners, teachers are not able to commit to new practices as they wished or expected (Huynh 2015; Nguyen and Hall 2016; Ngo 2020). The current analysis also adds detail to our previous research by showing that although some teachers did mention 'active learning' and 'competency-based approaches,' their differential beliefs about ethnic minority students remained deep-rooted (see DeJaeghere et al. 2021a). In other words, some teachers might have an understanding of the nature of learning and teacher-student relationships as more participatory and less hierarchical, which leads to new expectations about student participation. However, they continued their formalistic role and practices in their teaching because they believed certain students learned best this way, especially in relation to producing higher learning outcomes.

This study's findings extend earlier categorizations regarding teachers' roles and teaching styles in relation to the overall curriculum approach or student learning style, for example, Miller and Seller's (1990) classifications (transmission or transaction roles of teachers) and Guthrie's (2011) classroom teaching styles (authoritarian, formalistic, flexible, liberal, and democratic). Evidence in this study concurrently challenges the argument that progressive educational values are incompatible for some cultural contexts, and that the developing countries should not "attempt to follow Western, predominantly Anglo-American, educational paths" (Guthrie 2018, 17; also see Guthrie 2011; 2021a, b; Nguyen 2008; Tabulawa 2013). While we need additional evidence, this study shows that most teachers tended towards active, autonomous student participation and viewed the more equal teacher-student relationship as contributing to quality learning. Given that culture is never static and closed (Anderson-Levitt 2012), we regard pedagogy as entailing socio-cultural practices that are subject to change. These practices, while never embodying a neutral and uniform process across cultural sites (Rizvi 2005; Crossley and Watson 2003), invariably take up new (global) pedagogical ideas to be responsive to local conditions of teaching and learning.

In this regard, findings related to hybrid pedagogies, or the ability of some teachers to move between traditional and new ways of teaching, indicate a promising groundwork for Vietnam to shift towards the competency-based curriculum. As the above example shows, hybrid teaching include the use of teacher-directed and student-centered approaches, such as lecturing, whole-class instruction with purposeful queries, and group/pair discussions. There is a range of hybridity manifest in our study, meaning that teachers more or less engage in hybridity at different moments in their teaching. It is true that some hybrid practices simply involve teachers' mechanical, rigid combination, for example, of extended lecturing[4] and poorly-designed group work, leaving little space for deep learning and engagement. Yet our previous and current analyses of teachers' understanding and practices collectively suggest that good teaching involves intentional choice of practices that emphasize learning processes. These pedagogical practices foster both deep learning[5] and meaningful engagement rather than a mere focus on subject content and cramming for high learning outcomes. Additionally, those who successfully hybridized their teaching strived to diminish their inherent power by showing sincere care for students and maintaining a close, equal teacher-student relationship. With appropriate professional training and improved teaching conditions,[6] they might have applied more thoughtful and purposeful classroom strategies that enhance learning and teaching experiences.

To transition to the competency-based curriculum, we therefore believe that adaptive change is a relevant pathway for Vietnam's schools to ensure high levels of learning as well as meaningful participation. With it, hybridization--both in classroom practice and across the system--can be embraced as an opportunity to "look beyond the binaries of acceptance/rejection to recontextualization, reframing and resilience" (Schweisfurth and Elliott 2019, 4). Perhaps, this is because selective borrowing and flexible adaption of foreign practices and/or hegemonic values--a typical feature of the Vietnamese history (see Tran et al. 2017)--should not only be viewed as a

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[4] Dubbed as the 'teacher dictates-students copy' method in Vietnamese.
[5] Such as learning how to learn, purposeful reflection, and higher-order thinking skills.
[6] For example, in many classrooms we observed, the noise from outside of the classroom greatly influenced teaching and learning. In addition, although most teachers in our study used technology such as projectors or computer labs, further training is needed on the effective use of technology in teaching literature.

"site of counter-hegemonic resistance" (Raffin 2008, 331) but also "a useful antidote to cultural essentialism" (Rizvi 2005, 338).

Conclusion and Implications

This study is concerned with student participation as expected by Vietnamese teachers and teachers' associated roles and practices in fostering student participation for competency development. In brief, each mode of student participation identified in this paper characterizes what teachers' envision of a class's overall engagement. The paper also shows that the coexisting forms are present in the study's data, illustrating hybridity in teachers' conceptions and pedagogical practices, particularly in support of students' active contribution and collaboration. In addition, while teachers' understandings of their facilitative role generally correspond with their expectations of student participation, discrepancies exist between teachers' expectations, understandings, and their actual teaching practices.

Building on the related literature and our previous analysis (DeJaeghere et al. 2021b), this study suggests that cultural shifts pertaining to classroom practice and dynamics are occurring, though arguably in a gradual and surface manner. Such a process of reculturalization (Fullan 1993) is a response to the updated curricular goals, local conditions of teaching and learning. Focused on the perspectives and teaching practices of secondary-level literature teachers as Vietnam was preparing to implement the new competency-based curriculum, the research's findings may be limited in generalizing to the broader context. Nevertheless, the study enriches current debates on the adoption of progressive education approaches in transitional contexts like Vietnam. Since some findings suggest significant insights into the processes of transformation among teachers, out next analysis will explore teacher agency in adapting the competency model of education. This study also provides a useful conceptual map of domains related to student participation for future (quantitative) research. Other research directions may examine the extent to which specific hybrid practices help develop students' competencies in subjects other than literature, or how hybrid teaching could contribute to quality learning in other similar contexts.

Taken together, this study suggests that stakeholders in education need to be aware of the complicated and multidimensional processes associated with teachers' changing perceptions and practices. Policy makers, international donors, and education leaders should work more closely with teachers and schools to build on, rather than attempting to replace, the existing relevant teaching practices. In so doing, the in-depth analysis of recorded classroom practices in this study can serve as a helpful resource for teacher coaches or teacher educators for competency teaching training. Despite the critical role of teachers, it is important to note that consistent reform should take place across the sector, including areas that cause deep-rooted, chronic hindrances to classroom change such as education governance and ideological control. On this premise, school leaders play a paramount role in transforming school culture and providing teachers with assistance, agency, and school-based professional development. These should be essential foundations for teachers to narrow the expectation-practice gap and apply critical hybridity of pedagogical practices for quality learning.

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A literature classroom with hybrid pedagogies

The left column describes the classroom's main activities chronologically with a focus on teaching practices and some noted classroom dialogues. The right column summarizes related field notes and analysis memos of the lessons.

Period 1 (45 min.)

Classroom's main activities	Comments
Introduction of the lesson	
To begin the period, the teacher asked the class to sing a familiar song to uplift their spirit. Then she introduced the new lesson by showing on slides some pictures of a village (rice fields, hay roofed houses, trees, chickens etc.) and lead in the poem *Chicken Sounds at Noon* - the focus of the lesson.	Students clapped their hands while singing and looked relaxed. During the lesson, the teacher frequently smiled and looked at the students who answered the questions. Her voice was warm and the feedback was encouraging.
Teacher spent approx. 8 minutes introducing the author's bio and asked students to add the information that they had learned or prepared beforehand.	
Approaching the poem	Teacher's questions were generally well-designed, ranging from simple comprehension to advanced evaluation queries, most of them were open questions. Sometimes, the teacher linked to the knowledge that students learned in previous years, for example by asking: "*Do you remember any other poems of the similar genre that we learned in grade 6?*"
Teacher called some students to read expressively some stanzas. She read the final stanza to show how the poem should be read with emotions.	
The teacher talked about poem's main idea after checking students' understanding of difficult terms. The students approached the poem by answering the teacher' questions about the poem's genre, structure, and purposes.	
T: How do you divide the poem, in terms of emotional message, and what message that the writer wants to convey in that part?	
About one-third of students raised hands and teacher invited one girl student.	
S1: I think the poem can be divided into three parts. Part 1 is stanza 1 which is about the sound of chicken on the way to the battle; part 2 from stanza 2 to 6, about [the author's] memories; part 3 is the rest, about how the chicken sound recalls [the author's] thinking.	
T: (to the whole class) She has divided the poem like that, do you have any ideas? (to the student) Thank you, you can sit down. I invite Le (to a raising-hand student), do you have any comment?	

S2: I would like to add…to propose another idea for the third part, the author justified the purpose of going to the battle.

T: Ah I see, explaining why he went to the battle, right? Thank you!

T: Great! You all have a good way to divide the poem. I know you all prepared the lesson very well and pondered about this issue. Here is another way that we can divide the poem [Teacher shows on the slides 3 parts of the poem and explains the associated message]. What do you think? So do you agree or have any other ideas?

Class: No.

Analyzing the poem

The teacher guided the class to analyze the poem. She lectured on different aspects of the first stanza and at times asked questions for the students to understand deeply the context, the use of language, and the message of a specific idea in the poem.

The teacher took most of the talking time. While lecturing the whole class, she intermittently checked some students' opinions. If they had alternative ideas, the teacher asked clarifying questions. She then explained her solution and checked if the whole class agreed with it as the final answer. The teacher would move close to the individual students who were speaking and talked with them in a friendly manner.

Discussing rhetorical devices and the poem's messages

The teacher continued to lecture for about 10 minutes. Then she got the class to discuss in groups three questions (*Read the first stanza carefully and identify literary devices or figures of speech that the poet used. What is special about their locations [in the poem]? How about their usages and impacts?*). The questions were shown on the slide after the teacher divided the class into 4 groups (of around 10) and give a brief instruction.

After the groups discussed the questions for about five minutes. They were asked to have one student representative present their groups' answers. Other groups were invited to provide comments and additions.

The teacher cared about students' different perspectives and respected their individual voices. She moved around and assisted group discussions. Student video shows that most students looked engaged and comfortable.

Concluding the lesson

The teacher asked the class to do the homework and prepare for the next lesson.

Period 2. (the following day)

Classroom's main activities	Comments
The class started with a familiar song and review of the previous period. One student was called to remind of what they have learned about the poem.	

Discussing rhetorical devices and the poem's main ideas	The students listened attentively to the lecture and responded very well to teacher's queries and friends' work. They were also animated in pair/group discussions and collectively came up with good solutions to the assigned tasks/questions. Nonetheless, they rarely initiated questions to the teacher or vocally challenged other friends' ideas during both periods. This means students took active role but within constraints that were defined by the teacher.
The teacher wrote on the board the sub-headings of the work the students were doing in analyzing the poem. The students took notes of what teacher lectures. The class continued analyzing poetic devices and the inferred messages.	
Then they were asked to work in pairs.	
T: Now, please turn to your friend next to you and discuss the question on the slide (What memories are recalled as the soldier hears the chicken sounds at noon?). You have one minute for discussion and then tell us your answers. I will give *good scores* to those who come up with nice answers.	
The teacher let the students discuss more than one minute because she said that "*Some groups are not ready so we wait for them, don't we?*"	Like other teacher participants, this teacher would encourage student participation by giving high scores as a form of bonus to good performers. She also asked the class to give an applause to students who had a detailed and good response. The learning atmosphere was generally positive and engaging.
After that the class had two additional discussions in groups and pairs, following the teacher's prompts to identify literacy devices and understand in-depth the explicit and implicit messages of each stanza of the poem.	
After calling two students to sum up what they had learned about the poem, the teacher summarized the main points they had covered and moved on to the practice.	

Practice and application	Many students raised hands with excitement to volunteer to answer the teacher's questions. Most of the responses were extended, though at times some were incorrect or not quite fluent. This shows that
The teacher asked the class to reflect on the poem and choose a stanza that they liked best. She called some volunteers to explain why. Then she asked others to describe the picture they to illustrate the specific scenes	

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from the stanza of the poem that they really enjoyed.	students had prepared the lesson quite well and were confidently participated in the lesson.
Concluding the lesson The teacher recapped the lesson by restating the main points. The wrap-up is a fun activity in which the students were encouraged to describe an imaginary picture from their favorite poem stanzas.	Students enjoyed describing their imaginary pictures about the soldier, his grandmother, and the village house with chickens moving around and making sounds. The class would have more fun and creativity if the teacher gave them a few minutes to draw the real pictures instead of describing orally.