



A Project-Based Learning Approach to Teaching Post-1975 Short Stories in Vietnamese Upper Secondary Schools

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ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
Published Online: 31 December 2025	In the context of competency-based educational reform, the selection and implementation of student-centered instructional approaches have become an essential requirement in upper secondary education. Project-Based Learning (PBL) is widely regarded as an effective instructional approach that connects academic knowledge with real-world contexts while fostering students' autonomy and creativity. However, the application of PBL in literature education—particularly in teaching Vietnamese short stories written after 1975—remains limited and lacks sufficient empirical evidence. This article reports the findings of an experimental study examining the effectiveness of Project-Based Learning in teaching post-1975 Vietnamese short stories at the upper secondary level. The study employed a quasi-experimental design involving Grade 12 students at a Vietnamese high school, with an experimental group taught using PBL and a control group taught using traditional instructional methods. Data were collected through pre- and post-tests and a student learning-interest questionnaire. The results indicate that Project-Based Learning significantly improves students' learning outcomes and learning engagement in the study of post-1975 Vietnamese short stories.
Corresponding Author: Assoc. Prof. Dr. Truong Thi Bich	Based on these findings, the article proposes pedagogical implications for enhancing the effectiveness of literature teaching in Vietnamese upper secondary schools.
KEYWORDS: Project-Based Learning; post-1975 Vietnamese short stories; literature education; student competencies.	

1. INTRODUCTION

Over the past decades, competency-based education has become a dominant reform orientation in educational systems worldwide. Contemporary educational research emphasizes that the primary goal of education is not merely the transmission of knowledge but the development of learners' capacities for independent thinking, problem solving, and the application of knowledge in real-world contexts (OECD, 2018; Darling-Hammond et al., 2020). In Vietnam, this orientation is clearly reflected in the 2018 General Education Curriculum, which places strong emphasis on the development of students' qualities and competencies (Ministry of Education and Training, 2018).

In language and literature education, many international scholars argue for a shift from transmissive instructional models to constructivist approaches in which learners actively construct textual meaning (Rosenblatt, 1995; Beach, Appleman, Hynds, & Wilhelm, 2011). From this perspective, literary reading is not a passive process of memorizing predetermined interpretations but an interactive engagement among readers, texts, and socio-cultural

contexts. Nevertheless, classroom practice in many countries—including Vietnam—continues to be dominated by teacher-centered methods, resulting in students' passive reception of literary texts and limited learning engagement (Nguyen Viet Chu, 2010; Applebee et al., 2003).

Within this context, Project-Based Learning (PBL) has emerged as a prominent instructional approach aligned with competency-based education. According to Thomas (2000), PBL is an instructional approach in which students learn through engaging in projects centered on meaningful, real-world problems that require the integrated application of knowledge, skills, and attitudes. A substantial body of empirical research has demonstrated that PBL positively affects students' academic achievement, learning motivation, and higher-order thinking skills (Hmelo-Silver, 2004; Krajcik & Blumenfeld, 2006; Bell, 2010). In language and literature education, PBL is particularly valued for its capacity to integrate reading, writing, speaking, and listening within authentic communicative contexts (Beckett & Miller, 2006; Stoller, 2006).

At the upper secondary level, international studies suggest that PBL facilitates interdisciplinary literary learning by enabling students to explore social, cultural, and humanistic dimensions of literary texts, thereby fostering deep reading comprehension and critical thinking (Barron & Darling-Hammond, 2008; Lee & Blanchard, 2019). This approach is especially suitable for modern literary works, which often address complex social and human issues.

Within the Vietnamese upper secondary literature curriculum, post-1975 Vietnamese short stories constitute a content area with significant pedagogical potential. These works reflect profound transformations in Vietnamese society and human consciousness during the post-war and renovation periods, alongside notable innovations in narrative techniques (Nguyen Van Long, 2009; Tran Dinh Su, 2021). Organizing project-based learning activities around these texts may contribute to the development of students' reading comprehension, communication skills, and problem-solving competencies.

However, despite the growing international literature on PBL, empirical studies on its application in literature education—particularly within developing educational contexts—remain relatively limited (Lee & Blanchard, 2019). In Vietnam, research on PBL in literature teaching has largely focused on theoretical discussions or descriptive pedagogical experiences, with a lack of rigorously designed experimental studies evaluating its impact on student learning outcomes and engagement.

Addressing this research gap, the present study investigates the implementation of Project-Based Learning in teaching post-1975 Vietnamese short stories at the upper secondary level through a quasi-experimental design. The study aims to examine the effects of PBL on students' academic performance and learning engagement, thereby providing empirical evidence to support instructional innovation in Vietnamese literature education.

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Project-Based learning in education and literature teaching

Project-Based Learning (PBL) is regarded as one of the representative instructional approaches of contemporary education, grounded in learner-centered educational philosophies and emphasizing the role of experiential activities in the learning process. According to Thomas (2000), PBL is an instructional approach in which learners engage in the resolution of complex learning tasks connected to meaningful real-world problems, requiring the integrated mobilization of knowledge, skills, and attitudes to produce concrete learning products. Hmelo-Silver (2004) argues that PBL not only facilitates knowledge acquisition but also fosters higher-order thinking by placing learners in problem-based learning situations that demand analysis, evaluation, and decision-making.

International research has identified several core characteristics of PBL, including: (1) a focus on meaningful driving questions or central problems; (2) a close connection between school-based knowledge and authentic real-world contexts; (3) an emphasis on learners' active roles in planning, implementing, and evaluating the learning process; and (4) the creation of tangible learning products that can be presented, shared, and assessed (Krajcik & Blumenfeld, 2006; Bell, 2010). On this basis, PBL is considered well aligned with competency-based education, particularly in fostering competencies such as collaboration, communication, critical thinking, and problem-solving.

In the field of language and literature education, PBL is viewed as an approach with strong potential for effectively integrating reading, writing, speaking, and listening skills into meaningful learning tasks. Beckett and Miller (2006) contend that PBL enables learners to use language as a tool for exploration, interaction, and knowledge construction, rather than merely treating language as an object of study. Stoller (2006) likewise emphasizes that organizing learning projects in language instruction supports the development of academic communicative competence through activities such as research, discussion, presentation, and feedback.

With respect to literature instruction at the secondary level, PBL allows students to approach literary texts from multidimensional and interdisciplinary perspectives, linking textual interpretation with cultural, social, and existential issues. According to Barron and Darling-Hammond (2008), learning projects in literature classes can create highly interactive learning environments in which students are encouraged to express personal viewpoints, engage in debate, and collaboratively construct textual meaning. This approach is consistent with contemporary reader-response theories, which conceptualize literary reading as a personal and social process of meaning-making (Rosenblatt, 1995).

In the Vietnamese educational context, PBL has been introduced as one of the active instructional methods aimed at realizing the goals of pedagogical innovation toward learner competency development. Several domestic studies have affirmed the role of PBL in enhancing students' learning motivation and promoting learner autonomy and responsibility in the learning process (Nguyen Van Cuong & Nguyen Thi Dieu Thao, 2004; Dinh Van Duc & Nguyen Van Hoang Hanh, 2021). Nevertheless, the application of PBL in Literature instruction—particularly in literature teaching—still requires further investigation and validation through systematic empirical research.

2.2. Overview of Research on Project-Based Learning in Literature Instruction

Internationally, project-based learning (PBL) has been extensively researched and widely implemented across diverse educational domains, particularly in science and technology education as well as language education. Empirical studies indicate that PBL exerts positive effects on students' learning outcomes, levels of engagement, and

learning motivation (Hmelo-Silver, Duncan & Chinn, 2007; Bell, 2010). Within language and literature education, several studies suggest that PBL contributes to the development of reading comprehension, academic writing competence, and critical thinking through learning tasks that are closely connected to inquiry processes and product presentation (Beckett & Slater, 2005; Lee & Blanchard, 2019).

Nevertheless, international scholarship also highlights certain challenges associated with implementing PBL in literature instruction, including high demands on teachers' instructional design competence, the extended duration required for project implementation, and the need to adapt projects to specific learning contexts (Krajcik et al., 2014). Accordingly, many scholars emphasize the importance of conducting empirical research in particular educational settings to more accurately evaluate the actual effectiveness of PBL and to propose context-appropriate implementation models.

In Vietnam, studies on PBL in the subject of Literature have primarily focused on proposing procedures and organizational models or describing pedagogical experiences. Some works have initially affirmed the feasibility of applying PBL to the teaching of literary genres such as poetry, medieval prose, and selected modern texts, while also noting positive changes in students' attitudes and learning interest. However, most of these studies remain largely descriptive; relatively few empirical studies employ controlled research designs to objectively measure the impact of PBL on students' learning outcomes and competencies.

With regard to the teaching of Vietnamese short stories written after 1975, domestic research has mainly concentrated on literary history, poetics, and genre-based approaches to textual analysis. These studies have clarified major innovations in post-1975 Vietnamese short fiction in terms of themes, inspiration, characterization, and narrative art, thereby providing an important theoretical foundation for teaching this content area in secondary education (Nguyen Van Long, 2009; Tran Dinh Su, 2021). Nonetheless, research on instructional approaches to post-1975 Vietnamese short stories—especially from a PBL perspective—remains limited and has not been sufficiently examined through empirical investigations.

Overall, the national and international literature reveals a notable research gap: although PBL has been shown to be effective across multiple educational fields, empirical studies on the application of PBL in upper-secondary literature education—particularly in teaching Vietnamese short stories after 1975—are still scarce. This gap calls for focused and rigorously designed studies to evaluate the effects of PBL on students' learning outcomes and learning interest within the contemporary Vietnamese educational context.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1. Research Design

The study was conducted using a quasi-experimental pedagogical design with a control group to evaluate the effectiveness of organizing project-based learning in the teaching of post-1975 Vietnamese short stories at the upper secondary level. The research design employed a pre-test–post-test model involving two groups of students: an experimental group and a control group. The experimental group received instruction through a project-based learning approach, while the control group was taught using traditional instructional methods.

This design enabled a comparison of changes in students' academic achievement and learning interest before and after the experimental intervention, as well as an assessment of differences between the two groups subjected to different instructional approaches.”

3.2. Participants and Research Context

The focus of this study is the process of organizing project-based learning in the teaching of post-1975 Vietnamese short stories to upper secondary students and the impact of this instructional approach on students' academic achievement and learning interest.

The experiment was conducted at an upper secondary school in Phu Tho Province. Two Grade 12 classes with relatively comparable levels of achievement in Literature were selected to participate in the study. Specifically:

- Experimental group: Grade 12 students who were taught post-1975 Vietnamese short stories using a project-based learning approach.

- Control group: Grade 12 students who were taught the same content using traditional instructional methods.

The experimental class was not a specialized Literature class in order to ensure the objectivity of the study and to examine the feasibility and effectiveness of implementing project-based learning in general educational settings rather than in subject-specialized contexts.”

3.3. Instructional Intervention and Procedure

The experimental content focused on teaching a selection of representative post-1975 Vietnamese short stories included in the upper secondary Literature curriculum, associated with themes reflecting postwar Vietnamese society and human experiences. In the experimental class, these contents were organized through a project-based learning approach, in which students engaged in integrated learning tasks such as text comprehension, group discussion, information gathering, and the development of learning products.

The experimental procedure was implemented through the following main stages:

- Pre-experimental assessment: Students in both classes were assessed to determine their baseline academic

levels and to ensure comparability of learning outcomes prior to the intervention.

- Experimental instruction: The experimental class was taught using a project-based learning approach, while the control class received instruction through traditional teaching methods with the same content and instructional time.

- Post-experimental assessment: Students' academic achievement and levels of learning interest in both classes were assessed after the completion of the instructional intervention.

- Comparison and analysis of results: Pre- and post-test results from the two classes were compared and analyzed to evaluate the impact of project-based learning.

3.4. Data Collection Instruments

Research data were collected using the following instruments:

- Academic achievement tests: These tests were administered before and after the experimental intervention to measure students' mastery of knowledge and their ability to apply what they had learned to the content of Vietnamese short stories after 1975. The test content was closely aligned with the expected learning outcomes of the upper secondary Vietnamese Literature curriculum and incorporated items targeting different cognitive levels, including knowledge recognition, comprehension, and application.

- Learning motivation and interest questionnaires: These questionnaires were designed to collect students' feedback on their level of interest, participation, and perceptions of the instructional approach implemented. The questionnaires employed a Likert-type scale in combination with several open-ended questions to capture students' perspectives more comprehensively.

The data collection instruments were developed in accordance with the research objectives and the actual conditions of the school.

3.5. Data Analysis Methods

The collected data were processed using descriptive statistical methods, combined with comparisons of pre- and post-experimental results between the experimental group and the control group. The results were summarized in the form of data tables and percentages, serving as the basis for analyzing and evaluating the impact of project-based learning on students' academic performance and learning motivation.

Data processing and analysis were conducted in a manner that ensured objectivity and was appropriate to the scope and objectives of the study

4. RESEARCH FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

4.1. Research Findings

4.1.1. Students' Academic Performance Before and After the Experiment

The pre-experimental survey results indicate that the Vietnamese Literature learning proficiency of students in the experimental class and the control class was relatively

comparable, as reflected in the distribution of scores across different achievement levels. The proportion of students achieving good and excellent grades in the two classes did not differ significantly, suggesting that the initial conditions of the two groups were equivalent and ensuring the objectivity of the experimental process.

After the instructional intervention, the post-experimental survey revealed a marked improvement in the experimental class. Specifically, the proportion of students attaining good and excellent grades increased compared to the pre-experimental stage, while the proportion of students achieving average and below-average results decreased. In contrast, the academic performance of students in the control class showed only marginal changes, with the proportion of students achieving average scores remaining relatively high.

The observed differences in learning outcomes between the two classes after the experiment indicate that project-based learning had a positive impact on improving students' academic performance in teaching Vietnamese short stories after 1975.

4.1.2. Students' Learning Motivation and Interest

In addition to academic performance, students' learning motivation and interest constitute an important criterion for evaluating the effectiveness of instructional approaches. The post-experimental survey results demonstrate that students in the experimental class exhibited a significantly higher level of learning interest compared to those in the control class.

Specifically, in the experimental class, a high proportion of students selected the levels “very interested” and “interested” in relation to the lessons, while the proportion of students who felt “neutral” or “not interested” was relatively low. Conversely, in the control class, a considerable number of students reported that their learning experience was only “neutral” or “not interested.”

These findings suggest that project-based learning contributes to creating a positive learning environment, enhancing student engagement, and increasing learning interest in the study of Vietnamese short stories after 1975.

4.2. Discussion

The research findings demonstrate that project-based learning has a positive impact on both students' academic performance and their learning motivation in teaching Vietnamese short stories after 1975. First, the improvement in learning outcomes among students in the experimental class indicates that project-based learning creates favorable conditions for students to actively construct knowledge through integrated learning tasks that connect text comprehension with discussion, information seeking, and the development of learning products. This approach enables students not only to grasp the content of literary works more effectively but also to apply their knowledge to interpret social and humanistic issues raised in post-1975 Vietnamese short stories.

Moreover, the higher level of learning interest observed in the experimental class reflects the advantages of project-based learning in fostering students' learning motivation. Participation in open-ended learning activities, opportunities to select and present personal viewpoints, and collaboration with peers during project implementation help transform students' roles from passive recipients of knowledge to active agents in the learning process. These findings are consistent with previous studies suggesting that project-based learning enhances students' engagement and participation in learning activities.

In the context of teaching Vietnamese short stories after 1975, project-based learning appears particularly suitable given the content and artistic characteristics of literary works from this period. Post-1975 short stories often address complex issues related to social realities, human destinies, and humanistic values, requiring learners to engage in deep reading, analysis, and multidimensional evaluation. Organizing learning projects around these issues enables students to approach literary texts more comprehensively while simultaneously developing essential competencies such as critical thinking, communication, and collaboration.

However, the findings also indicate that implementing project-based learning requires substantial investment of time and effort from teachers, particularly in the stages of instructional design, organization, and assessment. Additionally, some students experience difficulties in adapting to this instructional approach, especially those who are not accustomed to group work or self-directed learning. These challenges highlight the need for further research and pedagogical adjustments when applying project-based learning in the teaching of Vietnamese Literature at the upper secondary level.

5. CONCLUSION

This study was conducted to evaluate the effectiveness of project-based learning in teaching Vietnamese short stories after 1975 in upper secondary schools. Based on a quasi-experimental design with a control group, the research findings indicate that project-based learning has a positive impact on both students' academic performance and their learning motivation compared to traditional teaching methods. Students in the experimental class not only demonstrated significant improvement in post-experimental assessment results but also exhibited more positive and proactive learning attitudes during instructional activities.

The findings also suggest that project-based learning aligns well with the content and artistic characteristics of Vietnamese short stories after 1975. By organizing learning tasks around social and humanistic issues presented in the texts, students are afforded opportunities to approach literary works comprehensively, integrating reading comprehension, discussion, collaboration, and the articulation of personal viewpoints. As a result, project-based learning contributes to

the development of key competencies in Vietnamese Literature education, including reading comprehension, communication, collaboration, and critical thinking.

Nevertheless, the study reveals that implementing project-based learning in Vietnamese Literature instruction imposes certain demands on both teachers and students. Teachers need to engage in careful preparation in project design, activity organization, and learning assessment, while remaining flexible in adapting project content and formats to the actual conditions of schools and students' proficiency levels. From the students' perspective, not all learners can readily adapt to this instructional approach, particularly those with limited group-work and self-learning skills.

Given that the scope of the study was limited to a small number of classes and specific short story contents, the findings cannot be generalized to all contexts and teaching conditions. Future research should involve larger and more diverse samples, incorporate a wider range of literary contents, and combine quantitative and qualitative research methods to provide a more in-depth evaluation of the impact of project-based learning in Vietnamese Literature education.

Despite these limitations, the findings provide initial evidence supporting the feasibility and effectiveness of applying project-based learning in teaching Vietnamese short stories after 1975 at the upper secondary level. This study contributes practical evidence to the ongoing reform of Vietnamese Literature teaching methods toward a competency-based approach, in line with the requirements of the current general education curriculum.

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