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## INNOVATING THE TEACHING AND LEARNING METHODS OF POLITICAL THEORY SUBJECTS AT UNIVERSITIES AND COLLEGES THROUGH A CURRENT COMPETENCY APPROACH

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### Abstract

*Educational innovation to develop comprehensive human resources to meet the requirements of increasingly deep integration and internationalization is an urgent requirement today. Contributing to that effort, teaching political theory subjects at universities and colleges not only provides theoretical knowledge to orient politics and noble ideals but also equips and develops many life skills, thinking skills, and action skills. The paper analyzes the difficulties in teaching political theory subjects at universities and colleges, thereby proposing some solutions to contribute to innovating teaching and learning methods of political theory subjects at universities and colleges according to the current competency approach.*

**Keywords:** *Innovating, method, political theory, students, university, college, competency...*

### 1. Introduction

Political theory fostering and education is a part of the Party's ideological work. Throughout the process of leading the revolution, our Party has always paid attention to political theory education to raise awareness, enlighten revolutionary ideals, unify the will and action of cadres, party members and people in order to successfully carry out revolutionary tasks in each period. At the 13th Congress, when evaluating the work of political theory education in Vietnam, our Party stated: "Political theory fostering and education work has been innovated in both content and methods; management and

discipline in teaching and learning have been strengthened; the quality of training and education has been improved." For students, studying political theory subjects is quite important in the spirit of Resolution 14/CP of the Government on fundamental and comprehensive innovation of Vietnamese education in the 2006 - 2020 period, which clearly states: "Developing university education programs in the direction of research orientation and applied career orientation,... Innovating the training contents, closely linking with scientific research practice, developing

technology and careers in society, serving the socio-economic development requirements of each industry and field, approaching the advanced level of the world. Developing students' creative research potentials, professional skills, community activities and career development capabilities" [1]. Competency approach helps learners not only learn by heart and remember, but also know how to do through specific activities, using the knowledge learned to solve situations posed by life. Therefore, ensuring the quality of teaching and learning political theory subjects at universities and colleges plays an important role in orienting the ideology and shaping the personality of future generations.

## 2. Contents

### 2.1. Concept of capacity

There are many definitions of competency and this concept is attracting the attention of many researchers. In common understanding, competency is a combination of knowledge, skills and attitudes that are available or in the potential form that can be learned by an individual or organization to successfully perform a task. According to the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) "Competency is the ability to respond effectively to complex demands in a particular context"; According to the Vietnamese Encyclopedia Dictionary, "competency is an individual's characteristic that demonstrates the level of proficiency - that is, the ability to perform one or several types of activities proficiently and confidently"; "Competency is the ability to responsibly and effectively perform actions, solve tasks and problems in different situations in professional, social or personal fields on the basis of knowledge, skills, techniques and experience as well as readiness to act" [2].

From the above concepts, it can be seen that whether competency is an innate quality or a combination of many factors, the important thing is that it is only expressed and recognized when the learner knows how to apply it to solve or carry out a problem or a task in work or life, that is, it must be closely linked to practice.

Therefore, teaching in the direction of approaching learners' competencies requires teachers to have a positive teaching method, focusing on learners, to arouse learners' passion, and especially it must create conditions for "Learning goes together with practice" so that learners can apply the knowledge, skills and attitudes they have acquired to solve practical situations. To carry out this, each training institution needs to quickly escape the traditional educational model, shifting from equipping knowledge to comprehensively developing learners' qualities and abilities. That means it must change teaching perspectives and goals: from only caring about what learners learn to caring about what learners can do through learning. The competency approach is an approach that clearly states the outcomes - the abilities and skills that learners want to achieve at the end of each stage of learning in school in a specific subject. In other words, this approach aims to answer the question: What we want learners to know and be able to do.

### 2.2. The concept of political theory and the role of political theory subjects

Political theory education is one of the components of the Party's ideological work, contributing to the formation, development and perfection of political guidelines and ensuring the Party's leadership role over the whole society.

Political theory is a system of knowledge in the political field, including synthetic, interdisciplinary knowledge with clear party and class characteristics. Therefore, compared with other sciences,

political theory terms have a high level of thinking, expressed in generalization, abstraction and scientific prediction. Grasping the basic concepts of political theory terms will contribute to consolidating the worldview, outlook on life, scientific and revolutionary methodology of Marxism-Leninism, Ho Chi Minh thought, the Party's viewpoints and guidelines, the State's policies and laws; raising political awareness and mettle, strengthening faith in the Party, the State and the socialist regime; thereby, improving the vision, thinking, methods, leadership and management skills and applying them to practice for cadres, party members and the people.

Political theory subjects taught at universities and colleges today include: Marxist-Leninist philosophy, Marxist-Leninist political economy, Scientific socialism, Ho Chi Minh thought, History of the Communist Party of Vietnam. Political theory subjects contribute to:

*First*, contributing to comprehensive human development. Along with learning professional knowledge and vocational skills, students must be equipped with a system of correct political theory knowledge. Because theoretical knowledge is the compass for training political and moral qualities, guiding students to practical, humane, progressive, scientific actions, instilling in students' true patriotism, a steadfast and determined spirit, not wavering in the face of complex changes in the context of international integration.

*Second*, contributing to improving the quality of human resources to meet the requirements of innovation. Studying and mastering the content of political theory subjects help students have the level and capacity of scientific theoretical thinking, have correct viewpoints, a solid revolutionary stance and scientific methodology. It is also a condition for students to be proactive and confident in mastering advanced and modern science and technology.

*Third*, helping students have a steadfast ideological stance and strong political will, actively contributing to the struggle to defeat all plots and sabotage tricks of hostile forces. Thus, students are a team of intellectuals who not only need solid professional knowledge but also need to have political qualities, ethics, skills and noble ideals. Political theory subjects contribute to equipping students with a revolutionary worldview, outlook on life, and scientific methodology while fostering political ideology and ethics.

### 2.3. Difficulties in teaching and learning political theory subjects at universities and colleges according to the current competency-based approach

*First*, the conflicting developments in political, economic and social life in the world and in the country. Due to prolonged mistakes in many aspects, many socialist countries began to fall into crisis and when implementing wrong reform and restructuring policies, it easily led to crisis and even the collapse of the socialist regime. The collapse of the socialist regime in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe took place more than two decades ago, but to this day it still has a significant impact on the thoughts, feelings, and beliefs of billions of people around the world. That causes theoretical and practical difficulties for countries that continue to choose the socialist path. Meanwhile, many capitalist countries with new adjustments have achieved stability and development, especially in the economy and military. That development of capitalism makes a large part of the people in the world in general, our people in particular, including university and college students,

doubt the doctrine of Marxism-Leninism, and the inevitable existence of socialism in the historical process [3].

*Second*, due to the nature of political theory subjects, which are very abstract, and difficult to absorb, they are often included in the first- and second-year curriculum. This is the stage when new students enter school and are getting used to learning methods in university. Therefore, the teaching work of university and college lecturers as well as the learning of students encounter many obstacles, causing boredom with the subject.

*Third*, the selection and filtering of information to include in the lectures by lecturers are not really effective, lacks topicality... In the practical life of the current era of international integration, there are many events, information, and phenomena happening every day and every hour, intertwined between the bad and the good, the real and the fake. With the question posed, there are many issues to choose from and filter. This is a very difficult and complicated task that requires university and college lecturers to not only be diligent, accumulate and learn, but also to be sensitive, creative, observant, and have the ability to analyze, synthesize and generalize to select appropriate information to include in the lecture.

*Fourth*, facilities of universities and colleges. One of the reasons why political theory lecturers still use traditional lecture methods in teaching is that the number of students in a class is too large (some classes have from 70 to 134 students). With such a number of teachers, it is difficult to promote students' positive attitude in learning. Some universities and colleges have been still limited in facilities. The number of students enrolled each year increases too quickly compared to the development of the school's facilities. Under such conditions, it is difficult for lecturers to organize effective discussion hours.

#### ***2.4. Innovating the teaching and learning methods of political theory subjects at universities and colleges according to the current competency approach***

Innovation in teaching and learning methods means improving ineffective forms and ways of working of lecturers and students, using more effective forms and ways to improve teaching quality, promote positivity, self-reliance and creativity, and develop learners' competency. For political theory subjects at universities and colleges, to innovate teaching and learning methods of political theory subjects towards a competency approach, the following solutions need to be implemented:

##### ***2.4.1. Regarding the lecturer***

Reducing presentation time of university and college lecturers: During a lecture, the lecturer should only present for a maximum of 80% of the total time; the remaining time is for exchange and discussion; inviting leaders at all levels and practical experts in related fields to report on topics and co-chair discussions.

Innovating teaching methods of lecturers in a positive direction, taking students as the center. In which, the teaching method of the lecturer must encourage students to learn by themselves, develop their own initiatives, the lecturer plays the role of an instructor. Providing opportunities for students to actively participate in the teaching and learning process; the lecturer acts as the main source of information, but also as a motivator of student's learning. According to Article 7, Section 2 of the 2019 Education Law, it also clearly states: "Educational methods must be scientific, promote the positivity, self-awareness, proactiveness, and creative thinking of learners; foster learners the ability to self-study and

cooperate, the ability to practice, the passion for learning, and the will to rise." The lesson is mainly used to analyze, learn basic knowledge and practice requiring thinking such as: Analyze, debate, apply, create and make decisions. Students will search for common knowledge and facts in reference materials from various sources. Therefore, to improve the quality of lectures, during the teaching process, lecturers need to flexibly and creatively use a combination of methods such as: Teaching methods include problem-raising and problem-solving, methods of organizing students into cooperative groups, and lecturers' presentation methods combined with the use of electronic lesson plans [4].

For problem-solving teaching methods: Teachers pose problematic situations and direct students' activities to help them independently solve learning problems, facilitate the acquisition of new knowledge and new actions, and form students' creative thinking abilities. The lecturer is the one who really motivates students to actively research and study documents. It must be clearly identified that students are the ones who directly recreate knowledge, not the lecturer doing it for them.

Choosing the teaching knowledge: Lecturers choose knowledge in the direction of integrating subject knowledge with industry knowledge, with the reality of students' training profession, helping students apply knowledge of political theory subjects to their life as well as their future career.

Choosing teaching methods: When starting a political theory course, the lecturer assigns students self-study content for the entire course. This content is designed to be linked to the formation of learners' competency. Therefore, with the same content, lecturers will build different self-study content for students in different majors.

Promoting the application of information technology in digitizing political theory learning materials and innovating political theory teaching methods: In the context of national digital transformation, digitizing political theory learning materials is one of the effective ways to innovate political theory teaching methods. Digitizing textbooks is the process of converting traditional paper-printed textbooks into digital data files that can be easily stored and shared anytime, anywhere on an Internet-connected environment. Lecturers and students can easily access data sources, thereby saving printing costs and ensuring access speed, helping learners to be proactive in searching for knowledge. Lecturers need to apply information technology to build an electronic lecture system stored in video format that includes the following elements: Images, audio, text and links. E-lectures are a replacement for face-to-face lectures in traditional training. With this format, lecturers combine with Powerpoint presentations to enrich the lecture; at the same time, reference videos can also be used interspersed in the teaching process.

The nature and requirements of the competency approach are knowing how to do and apply knowledge and skills to solve problems in study and life. Therefore, students need to practice applying a combination of knowledge, skills and attitudes in professional application situations. To meet this condition, when teaching political theory subjects, lecturers need to increase research, exploration, and construction of situations and typical cases related to the profession they are studying. Such situations contain problems that need to be solved, and to solve them requires decisions based on reason. Knowledge of Marxism-Leninism, Ho Chi Minh thought and the Communist Party of Vietnam's

guidelines at this time are the most general orientations and methodologies to solve the problem.

#### 2.4.2. *Regarding students*

Teaching and learning are two dialectically unified activities. Changes in teaching methods of lecturers lead to changes in learning methods. In political theory subjects, teaching based on the competency approach leads to learning also following this orientation. Students must always learn, grasp the reality and professional skills of their major to integrate into the study of political theory subjects. Students cannot learn by heart but must think creatively in their studies. They cannot just study the textbooks but must actively go into the field, go to the library, go online to look up, search, and update information to serve their studies. All of these make the process of knowledge transfer by lecturers a self-learning process with guidance and management by lecturers, thereby contributing to approaching the general professional competencies of learners such as creativity, self-updating, and self-research. To improve the quality of teaching and learning political theory subjects, it is necessary to:

Building motivation and the right attitude in studying political theory for students: The goals of learning political theory are diverse and multi-level. Therefore, the construction and formation of motivation for studying political theory for students is also diverse in content and rich in form and measures. In shaping students' motivation to study political theory, lecturers play an important role in orientation. Lecturers should not impose or give out available learning motivation models, but should be the ones to arouse in students the need to perceive, acquire knowledge, form the right learning motivation to create the basis for building a self-conscious learning attitude, aiming for the right learning goals. In the process of teaching political theory, lecturers need to organize for students to discover new things, find creative ways to solve learning tasks, have good experiences through learning so that they arise and appear the need for political theory knowledge and apply that knowledge to solve problems in social life. As a result, studying political theory gradually becomes an internal need, becomes a passion of students, motivating students to overcome barriers and obstacles, actively and voluntarily study political theory. In addition, to help students form the right motivation to study political theory, schools and political theory lecturers need to encourage and remind students to answer questions about their studies such as: Study for what? (Purpose of learning); Learning for what? (Learning motivation); Why learn? (Learning needs); and How to learn? (Learning attitude). Four questions, also four closely related issues, are prerequisites for one another. At the same time, students' answers to the above four questions help us visualize a picture of the process of forming students' motivation to learn political theory.

Innovating students' political theory learning methods: In teaching and learning, the activities of teachers and learners are closely related to each other. The teacher always plays a leading, dominant role, while the student holds the central position. Therefore, when teaching methods are innovated, it is necessary to innovate learning methods to achieve training goals. To innovate students' methods of learning political theory, the following methods should be applied: First, mastering the subject's methods in learning and research. This is a solution to overcome the "parrot" learning style which is learn by heart and mechanical memorization of most students when studying and researching political theory subjects. To effectively implement this solution, it is necessary to have the

help and enthusiastic guidance of political theory lecturers, at the same time organize experience sharing and method training sessions, or experience reports of excellent students in previous courses for students to refer to and learn from; Second, building self-study skills for political theory courses, to help students' research of books and documents achieve the set goals, such as: Choosing appropriate books; Mastering different ways of reading; Actively thinking and taking scientific notes when reading.

#### 2.4.3. *Regarding the Schools*

Continue to thoroughly grasp and raise awareness of the meaning and importance of "fundamentally innovating the program, content, and methods of political theory education" according to the viewpoint of the 13th Congress: Perception plays a decisive role in the activities of subjects. All components and forces participating in the innovation of teaching political theory subjects, if they want to properly perform their functions and tasks, must have full awareness of the Party's viewpoints and guidelines. The issues related to innovation in the curriculum, content, and methods of political theory education that the 13th Party Congress pointed out are very necessary for each school and teaching staff because this is an important theoretical basis for schools and teaching staff to innovate the curriculum, subject content, and teaching methods. Therefore, schools and political theory lecturers need to thoroughly understand and concretize in all aspects of educational and training activities, but first of all in awareness to unify implementation. Thoroughly grasping and implementing these contents must go hand in hand with thoroughly grasping and implementing the Party's resolutions and directives related to innovation in teaching political theory subjects such as: Conclusion No. 94-KL/TW dated March 28, 2014 of the Secretariat on continuing to innovate the study of political theory in the national education system; Directive No. 23-CT/TW dated February 9, 2018 of the Secretariat on continuing to innovate, improve the quality and effectiveness of studying, researching, applying and developing Marxism-Leninism and Ho Chi Minh thought in the new situation.

Continuing to effectively standardize the content and curriculum of political theory subjects in universities and colleges: Standardizing the training content and programs is an important requirement that has been repeatedly identified by the Party in documents, directives and resolutions. The standardization of the content and curriculum of political theory subjects must ensure political, scientific, and accurate nature in a basic, practical direction and develop in accordance with the training goals and requirements, and be expressed in the academic level, modernity, and practicality of the content and curriculum of each subject, each topic, and lecture that the goals and requirements of each specific training subject require; the system of concepts and central categories of the subject must be standardized; the sources of documents, textbooks, and teaching materials used in teaching must be standardized; the lesson plans of lecturers must be standardized; and the proportions of the components of the teaching content must be standardized. Standardizing the content and curriculum of political theory subjects must be in the direction of increasing students' self-study and research time, increasing practice time and post-lecture forms. The standardization of the content and curriculum of political theory subjects at each level and grade in universities must both ensure stability and be regularly supplemented and improved to suit the development practices of the contemporary world, the country, and the requirements of the cause of building and defending the Fatherland in the new situation.

Innovating methods of training and fostering political theory to suit practices: Practices are always moving and changing, so to effectively innovate political theory education methods, it is necessary to innovate forms of training and fostering. It is the transition from a combination of direct, lecturer-centered training methods to a combination of direct and online, student-centered training methods. At the same time, combining the traditional teaching methods with new, advanced teaching methods, integrating modern technical means in order to increase the visibility and appeal of political theory lectures. Additionally, training institutions need to appropriately balance direct classroom teaching time with exchange, discussion, extracurricular activities, and practical research so that students have the opportunity to apply the knowledge they have learned into practice, test, and verify political theory knowledge in practical activities. Moreover, through exchange and discussion, students have the opportunity to supplement each other's knowledge, consolidate what they have learned, and at the same time promote creativity in learning political theory. Especially for management leaders, this is a condition for them to exchange experiences through practical work in the locality.

Increasing investment in facilities and equipment to ensure the teaching of political theory subjects: Facilities and equipment are a set of means and equipment that undertake certain pedagogical tasks, including: Classrooms, lecture halls, technical equipment, general and specialized teaching aids for each subject... Facilities and teaching equipment are considered an important factor, an essential condition of the training process in each school. Without them, lecturing will be difficult to take place, or if it does take place, it will be in an incomplete, inadequate state. Therefore, to innovate the teaching and learning of political theory subjects, schools need to upgrade and modernize lecture halls and teaching equipment; develop long-term plans to re-equip technical facilities, especially teaching aids, textbooks, and syllabuses; actively supplement and consolidate the system of documents, materials, textbooks, and reference books; strengthen modern technical means for testing, practice, and supplementary work... Teaching facilities and equipment need to be developed synchronously and diversified, with models, simulation market, picture tools, drawings, projectors, film projectors, recorders, and other modern teaching equipment... to stimulate learners' connection with reality. At the same time, it is necessary to focus on fostering lecturers and students to exploit and use teaching and training equipment and facilities proficiently and effectively.

### 3. Conclusion

Studying political theory subjects at universities and colleges in a competency-based approach helps students have the necessary awareness of socialist ideology; firm belief in the Party's leadership, in the cause of innovation towards socialism in our country today. This will determine the tendency, purpose and effectiveness of students' activities in studying and working, having pure revolutionary ideals, self-mastery, love for the homeland and country, building and firmly consolidating ideal goals. In the current context, facing a series of new issues arising from the vibrant social life of the country and the world, one-way teaching from lecturers will no longer be appropriate. Therefore, innovation in teaching and learning methods of political theory subjects at universities and colleges is considered a central task. Teaching these subjects must be linked to practice in accordance with the current innovation requirements of our country, in the

direction of promoting the positivity, proactiveness, and creativity of learners; suggestion, discussion, and exchange frankly between lecturers and students.

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