

Toward Professional Standards for Driving Instructors in Viet Nam: a Vocational Education Perspective

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ABSTRACT

Road traffic safety remains a major policy challenge in transition economies, where driver education plays a key role in crash prevention. This study examines the policy coherence of professional standardization for automobile driving instructor training in Viet Nam using a Competency-Based Education and Training (CBET) perspective. Policy analysis, curriculum benchmarking, and documentary comparison were employed to assess the alignment between occupational classifications, pedagogical requirements, and safety-oriented instructional practices. The findings reveal a mismatch between the classification of driving instructors as skill-based service workers and the higher pedagogical qualifications mandated by sectoral regulations. This overemphasis on teaching credentials limits the development of essential safety coaching competencies. The study also identifies insufficient integration of defensive driving, hazard perception, and real-time risk management into instructor training standards. It concludes that instructor preparation should adopt a specialized safety-coach framework to better support occupational practice, regulatory coherence, and national road safety objectives. This is an open access article under the [CC-BY-SA](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0/) license.



Introduction

Road traffic safety remains a significant policy challenge for sustainable development across numerous nations, as traffic accidents continue to be a leading cause of injury, mortality, and socio-economic loss Global Road Safety Facility (2024), particularly among newly licensed drivers

(Senserrick et al., 2023; Maslamani et al., 2024). Within this context, driver education and training are regarded as a pivotal policy intervention instrument designed to equip learners with core competencies, including traffic law knowledge, vehicle operation skills, and safe road behaviors (Akbari et al., 2021; Maslamani et al., 2024). Extensive international research has demonstrated a robust correlation between the quality of training, driving behavior, and crash risk (Shell et al., 2015; Akbari et al., 2021; Ishii et al., 2023), thereby underscoring the critical role of driving instructors in determining the ultimate efficacy of road safety policies.

In Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET), the contemporary trend involves standardizing the teaching force through a Competency-Based Education and Training (CBET) approach, in which pedagogical competence is regarded as a fundamental pillar of quality assurance (Deißinger and Hellwig, 2005; Sturgis and Casey, 2018). Nevertheless, competency standards generally achieve effectiveness only when there is strict alignment with the occupational nature and practical requirements of the job position. The mechanical application of pedagogical standards from formal education systems to skill-oriented professions may lead to policy formalization, thereby undermining regulatory efficacy and resulting in the wastage of training resources.

At present, automobile driver training in Viet Nam is characterized by a notable policy paradox. In essence, this constitutes a short-term, highly practice-oriented form of instruction focusing on vehicle operational maneuvers and traffic situation management within high-risk environments Ministry of Construction (2025). Nevertheless, recently promulgated legal frameworks impose relatively stringent requirements regarding the pedagogical competence of driving instructors. Specifically, Decree No. 160/2024/NĐ-CP, which took effect on January 1, 2025, stipulates that driving instructors must possess pedagogical certificates for college, intermediate levels, superseding the previous requirement for an elementary-level qualification The Government (2024). This requirement is likely to elicit debate when situated within the context of the national occupational classification system. According to the Viet Nam Standard Classification of Occupations, the profession of "driving instructor" is categorized under Major Group 5 – Service and Sales Workers, which corresponds to Skill Level 2 based on the ISCO-08 (International Labour Organization, 2017; The Prime Minister, 2020). The marked discrepancy between the occupational positioning within the labor classification system and the pedagogical competence standards mandated by sector-specific regulations suggests an inconsistency in policy design. This raises significant questions regarding the proportionality, feasibility, and theoretical rationale of the current legal requirements.

Although this issue directly impacts the quality of driving instructors, driver training outcomes, and the overall efficacy of road safety policies, there remains a dearth of systematic research analyzing the degree of policy coherence between pedagogical competency standards and the occupational designation of driving instructors in Viet Nam. The majority of extant literature is confined to technical or managerial aspects of training - such as instructional methodologies, the organization of the training process, or the structure of driving examinations (Nguyen, 2022a; 2022b) - rather than approaching the subject from an interdisciplinary policy analysis perspective.

Drawing upon the aforementioned research gap, this paper seeks to address two primary research questions: (i) To what extent do current pedagogical competency standards align with the occupational nature and practical requirements of driving instructors in Viet Nam? and (ii) What policy ramifications may arise from this misalignment regarding training efficacy and road safety objectives? Utilizing policy analysis and curricular benchmarking, this study aims to provide academic evidence and practical implications for policy adjustments toward a more streamlined, substantive framework centered on core safety competencies.

Method

Analytical framework

This study adopts CBET as its primary theoretical framework. Under the CBET approach, occupational standards and training programs are expected to ensure alignment with the practical requirements of specific job roles. Effective training should not be grounded in formal qualifications per se, but rather in clearly defined learning outcomes that are directly linked to the real-world context of occupational practice (Deißinger and Hellwig, 2005; Sturgis and Casey, 2018). When such alignment is disrupted, policy design is prone to credentialism and over-qualification, resulting in inefficient use of training resources and the creation of unnecessary barriers to occupational entry (Quintini, 2011; Dockery and Miller, 2012).

In advanced models of driver education, the dominant pedagogical approach is coaching-based instruction, characterized by one-to-one interaction, mobile learning environments, and the need for immediate situational decision-making (Bartl et al., 2005; Jawi et al., 2017; Watson-Brown et al., 2020). In this context, competencies such as demonstrating driving maneuvers, anticipating risks, and intervening promptly are far more critical than capabilities related to curriculum design or classroom-based lecturing (Bartl et al., 2005; Watson-Brown et al., 2020; Senserrick et al., 2023).

A key strand of research in this field is safety pedagogy, which focuses on developing learners' capacities for risk prevention. International research consistently highlights two core pillars of safety-oriented driver education: defensive driving and hazard perception (Hatakka et al., 2002; Bartl et al., 2005; Mayhew et al., 2024). Empirical studies demonstrate that hazard perception ability is strongly associated with reduced crash risk, particularly among novice drivers (Senserrick et al., 2023; Mayhew et al., 2024).

However, several studies caution that when standards for driving instructors become excessively academised, the central objective of safety education may be overshadowed by formal pedagogical and qualification requirements (Smith and Tuck, 2023; Senserrick et al., 2023). In such cases, training tends to shift from "teaching for safe driving" towards "teaching to pass the test", thereby undermining the ultimate effectiveness of road safety policy (Bartl et al., 2005; Senserrick et al., 2023).

In the Vietnamese context, there remains a notable research gap concerning policy coherence between pedagogical competency standards and the occupational classification of this distinctive group of practitioners. To address this gap, the present study develops an analytical framework grounded in the concept of policy coherence Nilsson et al (2012), with the aim of assessing the degree of structural consistency between legal regulatory frameworks and training content, and of elucidating the implications of such misalignment for training quality and the overall effectiveness of road safety policy.

Research approach and methodological design

This study adopts a policy analysis approach focused on assessing policy coherence among the regulatory systems pertaining to automobile driving instructor training in Viet Nam. Rather than evaluating training effectiveness at the learner level, the research concentrates on the logic of policy design - specifically the degree of consistency among occupational designations, pedagogical competency standards, and the practical requirements of the job position. Methodologically, the study employs desk research combined with curriculum benchmarking and comparative legal analysis. This approach is well-suited for public policy research, aiming to elucidate the structural relationships and potential ramifications of the current legal framework.

Data sources and selection of analytical documents

The data corpus for this study comprises current Vietnamese legal normative documents and professional materials, selected based on criteria directly pertinent to: (i) driving instructor standards; (ii) pedagogical training and development programs; and (iii) the national occupational

classification. The documents are categorized into three primary groups:

First, the group of sector-specific legal normative documents, including Decree No. 160/2024/NĐ-CP on driver training and testing (The Government, 2024) and Circular No. 06/2022/TT-BLĐTBXH stipulating the pedagogical training program for vocational education (Ministry of Labour, War Invalids and Social Affairs, 2022). This set of documents defines the formal legal requirements regarding pedagogical competency standards for driving instructors.

Second, the category of documents reflecting pedagogical practice and job requirements, encompassing Circular No. 14/2025/TT-BXD, which mandates the driver training curriculum (Ministry of Construction, 2025), and the professional training materials for practical driving instructors issued by the Directorate for Roads of Viet Nam (2017). These materials serve to identify professional tasks, the work environment, and the competencies frequently utilized in actual instructional settings.

Third, the national reference document group, primarily Decision No. 34/2020/QĐ-TTg promulgating the Viet Nam Standard Classification of Occupations (The Prime Minister, 2020). This document functions as a standard reference framework for determining the legal standing and skill levels of the driving instructor profession in alignment with the ISCO-08 (International Labour Organization, 2017) classification system. The selection of these documents ensures the completeness, currency, and interdisciplinarity of the data, while accurately reflecting the hierarchical policy layers regulating driving instructor training in Viet Nam.

Analytical procedure

The analytical procedure is conducted in three primary stages. The first stage involves job analysis, wherein the tasks, skills, and working conditions of driving instructors are extracted and systematized from the driver training curricula and professional manuals. The objective of this stage is to identify the set of competencies utilized in practice, serving as a baseline for subsequent benchmarking steps.

The second stage entails cross-mapping the aforementioned occupational competencies against the TVET pedagogical training program. This analysis aims to identify the degree of alignment, overlap, or misalignment between the competencies provided through training and those necessitated by actual driving instruction practice.

The third stage consists of an occupational classification comparison, in which the qualification and training requirements stipulated in sector-specific regulations are benchmarked against the skill levels of the driving instructor profession as defined by the national occupational classification

system. This analytical step allows for an assessment of the proportionality between training standards and the nature of the occupation from a labor market perspective.

Compatibility matrix and evaluation criteria

To systematize the analytical results, this study develops a compatibility matrix as a synthetic analytical tool. The matrix applies a three-level ordinal scale (1 = Unsuitable, 2 = Partially suitable, and 3 = Suitable). These scores are not treated as statistical measurements; rather, they structure qualitative judgments about policy coherence across four criteria and make the logic of the assessment more transparent.

The four criteria are: (i) the degree of proportionality between occupational classification and qualification requirements; (ii) the relevance of pedagogical training content to professional tasks; (iii) the alignment between the trained pedagogical environment and the actual work environment; and (iv) the extent of integration of core safety competencies within instructor training standards. Table 1 summarizes the scale and the analytical logic used in the compatibility matrix.

The utilization of a compatibility matrix enables a systematic comparison among policy components while elucidating structural contradictions rather than merely identifying isolated shortcomings. Ordinal scale and indicators for assessing policy compatibility presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Ordinal scale and indicators for assessing policy compatibility

Criterion	Key indicator	Evidence source	Level of suitability
Occupational proportionality	Fit between occupational skill level and required qualification/certificate	Decision No. 34/2020/QĐ-TTg; Decree No. 160/2024/NĐ-CP	1 = Unsuitable, 2 = Partially suitable, and 3 = Suitable
Task relevance	Extent to which trained competencies are used in driving instruction tasks	Driver training curriculum and instructor manuals	1 = Unsuitable, 2 = Partially suitable, and 3 = Suitable
Learning environment alignment	Match between training setting and actual in-vehicle/on-road instruction	TVET pedagogical program; practical driver training materials	1 = Unsuitable, 2 = Partially suitable, and 3 = Suitable
Safety competency integration	Coverage of defensive driving, hazard perception, and real-time risk management	Professional training program and assessment structure	1 = Unsuitable, 2 = Partially suitable, and 3 = Suitable

Methodological limitations

Given the reliance on desk research, this study does not directly measure the practical competence of driving instructors or the impact of pedagogical standards on learners' safety behavior. Therefore, the findings reflect the underlying logic and potential ramifications of policy design rather than empirical effectiveness at the individual level. This limitation is considered consistent with the primary policy-oriented research objectives of the paper and concurrently proposes trajectories for future research, which should integrate both quantitative and qualitative data to evaluate the actual impact of driving instructor competency standards on training quality and road safety.

Result and Discussion

Characteristics of automobile driver training and the current driving instructor standard structure

Current automobile driver training regulations (Ministry of Construction, 2025) indicate that this is a training format characterized by its brief duration, rigid structure, and high degree of standardization. The curriculum is bifurcated into two primary components - theory and practice - where practical instruction constitutes a substantial proportion and is predominantly conducted in real-world environments, including training vehicles, practice circuits, and public roads. The maximum prescribed duration for the longest training program is 90 days, which is notably shorter than the standard period of three months to less than one academic year mandated for elementary-level vocational training within the broader TVET system. Table 2 details the instructional modes for theoretical and practical modules for initial driver license acquisition.

Table 2. Curricular modules for manual transmission Category B and Category C1 licenses

No.	Subject title	Contact hours		Mode of instruction
		B	C1	
1	Road Traffic Laws	90		On-site instruction at training facilities, distance learning, or guided self-study.
2	Basic Vehicle Construction and Maintenance	18		
5	Traffic Situation Simulation Software Training	4		Practice circuits and public roads.
6	Practical Driving	83	93	
	Total	235	245	

A salient feature of the training curriculum is its "rigid framework": the entirety of the content, duration, and assessment methods are uniformly stipulated by state regulatory authorities. This represents a continuation of long-standing practices in driver training within Viet Nam Nguyen (2024). Consequently, driving instructors - both theoretical and practical - lack pedagogical autonomy regarding curriculum design, content adjustment, or the selection of assessment instruments. The professional roles of these instructors are thus geared toward procedural execution and coaching rather than instructional design or curriculum development. Driving instructor standards presented in Table 3.

Table 3. Driving instructor standards

No.	Theoretical instructor standards	Practical instructor standards
1	Possession of an intermediate degree or higher in law, automotive technology, automotive engineering technology, automotive assembly, or other disciplines in which specialized content related to Law or Automotive studies constitutes at least 30% of the total curriculum.	Possession of a professional intermediate degree, a vocational intermediate degree, or higher.
2	Instructors teaching the Driving Techniques subject must possess a valid driving license of a class equivalent to or higher than the vehicle category they are authorized to teach.	Holding a driving license of a class equivalent to or higher than the vehicle category being taught. Instructors teaching license categories B and C1 must have held their driving license for a minimum of three years; instructors teaching categories C, D1, D2, D, BE, C1E, CE, D1E, D2E, and DE must have held their driving license for a minimum of five years.
3	Candidates must hold one of the following pedagogical qualifications: • a bachelor's degree in teacher training, pedagogy, or technical pedagogy; • an intermediate pedagogical degree; • a Level 1 or Level 2 Pedagogical Professional Certificate; • a Pedagogical Professional Certificate for College and Intermediate levels.	
4		Having successfully completed professional training in practical driving instruction.

In contrast, current driving instructor standards are structured through a bifurcation into theory instructors and practical instructors, each subject to distinct requirements for professional qualifications and pedagogical certification The Government (2024). Practical driving instructors are subject to a specialized requirement: "Completion of professional training for practical driving instruction." This training, conducted over a 10-day period, comprises three primary components: (i) pedagogical theory and methodology for lesson planning and practical instruction; (ii) instructional methods for automobile driving; and (iii) steering insurance and intervention techniques The Government (2024). Table 3 delineates these standards in detail.

Notably, effective from 2025, the pedagogical requirement for both instructor categories has been elevated to the standard of pedagogical certificates for college and intermediate levels, mirroring the requirements for TVET lecturers Government (2024). In this context, intermediate pedagogical degrees and Level 1 or Level 2 Pedagogical Professional Certificates have not been offered for several years. Consequently, it is evident that this standardization upgrade does not originate from transformations in the nature of the work or an expansion of professional autonomy for driving instructors; instead, it primarily reflects an administrative adjustment within the qualification and certification system. This serves as a significant premise leading to the various forms of policy misalignment discussed in the following subsections.

Incompatibility in occupational designation and skill levels

Benchmarking specialized regulations against the national occupational classification system reveals a structural contradiction in the designation of the driving instructor profession. According to the Viet Nam Standard Classification of Occupations, the "driving instructor" occupation - which is not bifurcated into separate theoretical and practical roles - is categorized within the service worker group, corresponding to Skill Level 2 under the ISCO-08 (International Labour Organization, 2017; The Prime Minister, 2020). This level reflects a job nature predominantly centered on practical skills and procedural compliance, performed within high-risk environments.

Conversely, the requirement for driving instructors to hold pedagogical certificates for college and intermediate levels has indirectly elevated the standard for this profession to a level equivalent to associate professional or professional occupational groups within the ISCO (International Labour Organization, 2017) framework. The discrepancy between occupational designation and training standard requirements creates a phenomenon of over-qualification, wherein practitioners must satisfy credentialing criteria that are disproportionate to the inherent nature and complexity of the work.

From a labor policy perspective, this incompatibility risks distorting the human resource market for driver training. Individuals possessing robust safe-driving competence and extensive practical experience, yet lacking suitable formal pedagogical credentials, may be excluded from the system. Meanwhile, credentialing criteria do not guarantee a direct correlation with the actual quality of road safety coaching.

Misalignment between pedagogical training content and professional practical requirements

A comparative analysis of the pedagogical professional development program for college and intermediate levels (Ministry of Labour, War Invalids and Social Affairs, 2022) against the occupational tasks of driving instructors reveals a significant degree of misalignment across multiple dimensions. The program is designed to equip learners with the necessary pedagogical competencies to meet the professional and vocational standards required of TVET teachers at college and intermediate levels. This objective is clearly ill-suited for the field of driver training, including for theoretical instructors.

Table 4 presents the list of modules within the pedagogical professional development program for college and intermediate levels. Based on this, a substantial degree of incompatibility can be identified between the pedagogical training content and the operational environment in which driving instructors function.

First, regarding curriculum development and scientific research competencies: The pedagogical program requires instructors to possess the capacity for job analysis, independent design of detailed curricula, formulation of learning outcomes, and the conduct of scientific research. However, in actual driver training practice, instructors must strictly adhere to a "rigid" framework curriculum mandated by regulatory authorities, leaving them with no autonomy to modify the program. Consequently, these competencies remain largely unutilized throughout their professional practice, resulting in a significant waste of training resources.

Second, concerning the pedagogical environment: The professional development modules are primarily designed for static classroom contexts, emphasizing skills such as classroom management, lecturing, and group activity organization. In contrast, practical driving instruction occurs in a high-risk, mobile environment characterized by one-on-one interaction within the vehicle cabin, necessitating continuous concentration and the capacity for immediate intervention. This contextual misalignment significantly diminishes the practical utility of many existing pedagogical training components. List and duration of pedagogical professional development modules for college and intermediate levels explain in Table 4.

Table 4. List and duration of pedagogical professional development modules for college and intermediate levels

Code	Module title	Contact hours
<i>Compulsory modules</i>		
MĐ01	General foundations of TVET	40
MĐ02	Curriculum development	40
MĐ03	Preparing teaching	44
MĐ04	Digital teaching and learning in TVET	28
MĐ05	Conducting teaching	52
MĐ06	Assessment in teaching and learning	20
MĐ07	Educational research in TVET	24
<i>Elective modules (choose 1 out of 4)</i>		
MĐ08	Pedagogical internship	32
MĐ09	Pedagogical communication	32
MĐ10	Developing employability skills for vocational learners	32
MĐ11	STEM education in TVET	32
Total		280

Third, there exists a Digital Competence Paradox. The pedagogical program requires instructors to possess design-level competence, specifically in designing digital lessons, video editing, and creating online assessment tools. In practice, however, practical driving instructors primarily operate standardized technological systems - such as traffic situation simulation software and DAT (Distance and Time) devices - acting as end-users rather than designers. This highlights a significant disconnect between the competencies provided through training and those actually utilized in the profession.

Finally, the minimum educational requirement for both theoretical and practical instructors is an intermediate degree, which is consistent with the standard for elementary-level vocational teachers. It is unrealistic to expect graduates at this qualification level to conduct scientific research, design digital lectures, or perform video editing. Notably, these components are entirely absent from the pedagogical professional development curriculum for elementary-level instruction (Ministry of Labour, War Invalids and Social Affairs, 2022).

In summary, the misalignment between academic pedagogical training and the practical job requirements of driving instructors serves as clear evidence of the "bureaucratization of training". The findings regarding structural incompatibility and competency misalignment are synthesized in

the Policy Compatibility Assessment Matrix (Table 5) below. The suitability ratings presented in the matrix represent an analytical judgment based on policy coherence criteria rather than empirical performance measurement. Policy Compatibility Assessment Matrix explain in Table 5.

Table 5. Policy Compatibility Assessment Matrix

Comparison criteria	Occupational classification and job reality	Description of key pedagogical requirements	Evaluation of suitability
Occupational category	Group 5 (Service Workers) - Skill Level 2	Similar to Groups 2 and 3 - Skill Levels 3-4	1 - Unsuitable
Curriculum development	Teaching based on a "rigid" framework curriculum	Job analysis, formulating learning outcomes, curriculum design, etc.	1 - Unsuitable
Preparing teaching	Designing theoretical lessons for classrooms or practical instruction in vehicles (excluding integrated teaching)	Capability to design dossiers for theoretical, practical, and integrated lessons; implemented in classroom settings	2 - Partially suitable
Digital teaching and learning in TVET	Utilizing standardized technology and equipment	Designing, organizing, and evaluating digital instruction	1 - Unsuitable
Conducting teaching	Theoretical classroom instruction or self-study; practical instruction in vehicles, 1-on-1, high-risk and frequent interventions	Requires skills in static classroom management, lecturing, teamwork, etc.	2 - Partially suitable
Assessment in teaching and learning	Computer-based multiple-choice tests using predefined question banks; automated practical scoring via electronic devices	Requires skills to independently design assessment tools and construct examination matrices	2 - Partially suitable
Educational research in TVET	No requirement	Capability to execute research stages for a scientific and technological task	1 - Unsuitable

Limitations of specialized training and the safety pedagogy gap

The specialized professional training program specifically designated for practical driving instructors (The Government, 2024) may be regarded as a supplementary solution designed to offset the shortcomings of formal pedagogical standards. A granular analysis of the training documentation (Directorate for Roads of Viet Nam, 2017) indicates that this program exhibits certain levels of suitability, especially regarding content pertaining to steering insurance and emergency situation handling - unique professional competencies that possess high practical utility

in real-world instruction. Evaluation matrix of the specialized professional training program content presented Table 6.

Table 6. Evaluation matrix of the specialized professional training program content

Content	Evaluation of suitability	Comments
Part I: Pedagogical theory, lesson planning, and practical instruction methods		
1. Pedagogical communication	2 - Partially suitable	Primarily focused on classroom settings.
2. Application of integrated instruction in driver training	1 - Unsuitable	The curriculum is not designed for integrated teaching models.
3. Application of IT and modern instructional equipment	2 - Partially suitable	Not applicable for practical driving instructors in real-world settings.
4. Methods for planning practical driving lessons	3 - Suitable	Necessary, yet lacks practical application or drills.
Part II: Methods for guiding practical automobile driving		
1. Basic maneuvers	3 - Suitable	Closely aligned with test requirements; leans toward "teaching to the test."
2. Basic driving skills	3 - Suitable	
3. Instruction for maneuver yard (circuit) exercises across license categories	3 - Suitable	
4. Instruction for the Road Test on public roads	3 - Suitable	
Part III: Steering insurance methods (intervention techniques)		
1. Utilizing non-verbal signals for control and communication during instruction	3 - Suitable	Necessary, but leans toward passive situational response (post-incident) and lacks drills or assessment.
2. Road positioning methods	3 - Suitable	
3. Steering assistance for learners (utilizing auxiliary and hand brakes when necessary)	3 - Suitable	
4. Mastery of vehicle speed control	3 - Suitable	
5. Insurance/Intervention in specific scenarios	3 - Suitable	
6. Anticipation of psychological states	3 - Suitable	

However, this specialized training program remains significantly influenced by the "bureaucratization of training" logic. Much of the content is formalistic - such as classroom-based pedagogical communication or the preparation of lesson plans and digital lectures - and lacks a close alignment with the actual context of on-road driving instruction. Particularly, integrated teaching -

which necessitates the combination of theory and practice within a single lesson - is fundamentally infeasible in driver training Nguyen (2018).

More notably, the program systematically lacks the core components of modern safety pedagogy, specifically Defensive Driving and Hazard Perception, leading to a paradigm where instruction prioritizes "teaching to the test" over genuine safe driving. Furthermore, even specialized skills such as "steering insurance" are primarily approached from a passive situational response perspective (intervening after an incident has occurred) rather than through proactive risk prevention. The content analysis results for the specialized professional training program are synthesized in Table 6.

Furthermore, the end-of-course assessment structure fails to incorporate an evaluation of pedagogical coaching competence in real-world environments; instead, it primarily replicates the testing formats designed for regular learner drivers. Specifically, the final examination lacks a pedagogical practice component, consisting only of a 120-minute written exam for Part I, a computer-based theoretical test, and a practical driving test on a maneuver circuit. These latter two components are identical to the requirements for standard learner drivers. This indicates that the program has not yet shifted its focus from "driver assessment" to "safety coaching competence assessment," thereby highlighting a distinct policy gap in current driving instructor training standards.

Discussion

The research findings not only reflect technical inadequacies within the legal provisions governing driving instructor standards in Viet Nam but also corroborate and elucidate numerous tenets established in international literature regarding TVET, occupational classification, and safety pedagogy. From a theoretical perspective, this study contributes to confirming the phenomenon of "credentialism" in vocational training policy design, while simultaneously extending the theoretical framework of safety pedagogy to the field of driver training - a domain that remains under-analyzed from a public policy lens.

Policy incompatibility in driving instructor standardization: Perspectives from theory and international literature

The research findings indicate that the incompatibility in driving instructor standardization in Viet Nam is not an isolated phenomenon; rather, it reflects a broader issue extensively discussed in international literature concerning TVET and CBET.

The Vietnamese case corroborates findings regarding jurisdictional overlap between labor management authorities and training regulatory bodies. Specifically, while the national occupational classification system (pursuant to Decision No. 34/2020/QĐ-TTg) designates the "driving instructor" profession as a skilled service occupation (Group 5, Skill Level 2 according to ISCO-08), sector-specific regulations impose pedagogical competency standards intended for formal TVET teachers at the intermediate and college levels. This "designation misalignment" leads to direct consequences in the design of competency standards and training pathways.

From the perspective of CBET theory, competency standards are only meaningful when they directly reflect the competencies utilized in actual professional practice. In the field of driver training, nations with advanced road safety systems typically do not categorize driving instructors as "teachers" in the traditional sense, but rather as safety coaches or driver trainers. Consequently, policy focus is directed toward competencies such as defensive driving, hazard perception, timely intervention, and the modeling of safe behavior, rather than curriculum design or scientific research. Governing a profession that is fundamentally characterized by skill coaching through a standard framework intended for academic teaching is a clear indicator of "formalistic standardization." This misalignment undermines policy effectiveness and results in the inefficient allocation of training resources.

The phenomenon of “over-pedagogization” and the risk of training bureaucratization

A key finding of this study is the emergence of what may be termed "over-pedagogization" within Viet Nam's driving instructor training policy. This concept refers to the trend of excessively increasing academic pedagogical requirements for professions whose job nature does not necessitate such a level of pedagogical expertise.

This finding reinforces international arguments regarding the phenomenon of credentialism in labor and training policies, occurring when qualification requirements and training standards are disproportionate to the occupational skill levels defined by national classifications. Consequently, this creates unnecessary barriers to professional entry. Comparisons with countries possessing advanced driver training systems reveal a stark contrast. In many jurisdictions, driving instructors are recognized primarily based on their record of safe driving experience, coaching competence, and practical assessment skills, rather than academic pedagogical certifications. Conversely, the Vietnamese case demonstrates a trend toward the "bureaucratization" of competency standards, where requirements for scientific research, curriculum design, or integrated lesson planning are imposed on a job role that lacks curricular autonomy.

Within the context of driver training, over-pedagogization entails at least three negative consequences:

1. Increasing professional entry barriers: It exacerbates barriers to entry for practically experienced drivers - the demographic with the greatest potential to serve as safety coaching instructors.
2. Shifting the training focus: It redirects the focus of instructor training from the development of safety competencies toward mere compliance with administrative certification requirements.
3. Distorting the workforce structure: It prioritizes candidates who satisfy bureaucratic paperwork requirements over those possessing robust safe driving competencies and effective coaching skills.

These research findings provide empirical evidence for the argument that the over-reliance on credentials as a quality management instrument can result in a decoupling between the training system and the authentic demands of the labor market within the driver education sector.

Repositioning the role of driving instructors within the road safety system

Based on the aforementioned analysis, the core of the issue lies not in whether driving instructors require pedagogical competence, but rather in determining the specific type and level of pedagogy necessitated by the profession. Driving instructors serve as more than mere conduits for traffic regulations or technical maneuvers; they are direct social agents who actively shape the safety behaviors of learners within high-risk environments.

Consequently, the standardization policy for driving instructors must be repositioned toward an integrated safety-oriented pedagogy. In this framework, competencies such as defensive driving coaching, hazard recognition and forecasting, in-cabin risk management, and real-time behavioral feedback should be recognized as core competencies. This approach is more closely aligned with international best practices and the inherent professional nature of driving instruction. Repositioning the driving instructor's role from a "vocational teacher" to a "traffic safety coach" represents more than a technical adjustment in training standards; it signifies a paradigm shift in policy thinking - one that prioritizes road safety outcomes over administrative management objectives.

Implications for policy reform in driving instructor standardization

The research findings highlight an imperative to re-evaluate the approach to driving instructor standardization in Viet Nam. Primarily, a clear distinction must be established between the training of formal TVET educators and the training of specialized skill instructors, thereby avoiding the uniform application of a single pedagogical standard to professions with fundamentally different occupational natures.

Secondly, rather than pursuing vertical escalations in pedagogical credentialing, policy should focus on the development of "horizontal" competency standards directly linked to road safety and professional practice. Professional development programs should be designed as short modules, assessed through situational simulations, and integrated with periodic re-certification requirements.

Finally, adjustments to driving instructor standardization policies must be situated within the broader national road safety strategy, wherein safety education and coaching are recognized as a critical pillar on par with infrastructure and law enforcement. This approach ensures that instructor standard reforms are not merely administratively sound but are substantively meaningful in achieving the overarching goal of reducing traffic accidents.

Conclusion**Conclusion**

This study examines the policy compatibility regarding the standardization of automobile driving instructors in Viet Nam by benchmarking occupational designations, pedagogical competency standards, and the practical imperatives of safe driving coaching. The findings reveal a structural misalignment between the professional nature of driving instructors - a skill-based coaching occupation within high-risk environments - and pedagogical standards originally designed for formal TVET educators.

Elevating pedagogical requirements toward an academic orientation, in the absence of expanded professional autonomy or substantive changes to job content, has resulted in over-qualification and the bureaucratization of training. This incompatibility not only undermines the rationale of instructor standardization policies but also poses a potential risk to the core objective of driver education: the enhancement of road traffic safety.

Policy implications for Viet Nam

Based on the research findings, this article proposes several key policy implications for reforming driving instructor standardization in Viet Nam, aimed at addressing the identified structural incompatibility and the bureaucratization of training.

First, it is imperative to restructure the driving instructor standards system toward specialization and the reduction of professional entry barriers. Policy should establish a clear demarcation between formal TVET teacher standards and specialized skill instructor standards, avoiding the uniform application of academic pedagogical requirements to professions characterized by a high practical-coaching nature, such as driving instruction. Regarding the restructuring mechanism, the distinction between practical and theoretical instructors should be abolished to facilitate the application of a unified professional and pedagogical framework. Recognizing the specialized professional training program for practical instructors as an independent pedagogical competency standard would significantly lower entry barriers while ensuring congruence with national occupational designations.

Secondly, driving instructor training content must be streamlined and safety-oriented. Standardization policies should shift their focus from credential management to the development of core competencies inherently linked to road safety - specifically defensive driving, hazard perception, and risk management within real-world traffic environments. Simultaneously, academic modules with low practical utility should be eliminated. Professional development programs should be designed as short, flexible modules, assessed through real-world situational simulations and linked to a periodic re-certification mechanism, rather than long-term, formalistic pedagogical courses.

Third, the reform of driving instructor standards must be integrated into the national road safety strategy, ensuring consistent coordination between vocational education, labor, and transportation policies. This interdisciplinary approach is essential to enhance the effectiveness and sustainability of policy interventions, ensuring they contribute meaningfully to public safety outcomes.

To operationalize the shift from a formalistic vocational teaching model to a specialized safety-coach framework, policymakers may follow a phased roadmap. Step 1: conduct a regulatory mapping exercise to align Decree No. 160/2024/NĐ-CP and Circular No. 14/2025/TT-BXD. Step 2: develop a dedicated driving instructor competency standard that replaces blanket pedagogical certification with modules on defensive driving coaching, hazard perception, learner behavior feedback, and emergency intervention. Step 3: pilot the new standard in selected training centers

and assess instructors through in-vehicle coaching demonstrations, scenario-based hazard recognition, and intervention drills. Step 4: institutionalize periodic re-certification based on road-safety outcomes, learner feedback, and instructor performance audits. This sequence offers a practical pathway for resolving over-pedagogization while preserving quality assurance.

Policy implications beyond the Vietnamese context

Although this study focuses on the Vietnamese case, the findings hold significant reference value for many countries currently reforming their driver training systems toward standardization and professionalization. Notably, the research highlights a prevalent risk: the mechanical application of academic pedagogical standards to safety-skill coaching professions, which results in a misalignment between regulatory management objectives and actual safety effectiveness.

Consequently, policymakers in developing countries and transition economies can employ the analytical framework developed in this study to re-evaluate the compatibility between driving instructor competency standards, occupational classifications, and road safety goals. Prioritizing competency standards anchored in safety outcomes and practical behavior, rather than formalistic credentials, can contribute to enhancing the effectiveness of driver training policies on a broader, international scale.

Research limitations and future research directions

This study is subject to several limitations that warrant consideration. First, owing to its reliance on a desk research (documentary analysis) methodology, the study does not directly evaluate the actual impact of existing pedagogical standards on instructors' real-world coaching competencies or the subsequent safety behaviors of learners. Second, an empirical comparison between driving instructor standardization models across diverse national contexts has not yet been conducted. Looking ahead, future research could expand upon these findings by integrating quantitative traffic accident data, conducting surveys with both instructors and learners, and performing international comparative case studies. Such research trajectories will facilitate a deeper validation of policy assumptions and further refine the scientific foundations for comprehensive reforms in driving instructor education.

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