



Innovative Pedagogical Approaches in Political Theory Education: Challenges and Future Directions for Vietnamese Universities

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Abstract: Political Theory Education plays a crucial role in fostering political awareness, civic responsibility, and critical thinking among university students in Vietnam. However, traditional lecture-centered instruction is increasingly challenged by rapid digital transformation, changing student learning preferences, and the emergence of Generative Artificial Intelligence (GenAI). These developments require innovative pedagogical approaches that promote active learning, student engagement, and the effective integration of digital technologies into teaching and learning. This conceptual paper examines contemporary pedagogical approaches applicable to Political Theory Education in Vietnamese universities. Drawing on recent literature, it reviews learner-centered teaching methods, including active learning, problem-based learning, case-based teaching, flipped classrooms, blended learning, experiential learning, gamification, and AI-assisted instruction. The paper further analyzes the major challenges to implementing these approaches, such as lecturers' limited digital pedagogical competencies, disparities in technological infrastructure, conventional assessment practices, and ethical concerns surrounding the use of artificial intelligence in higher education. Based on this analysis, the paper proposes several future directions for enhancing Political Theory Education, including strengthening digital pedagogical capacity, promoting authentic and competency-based assessment, integrating AI responsibly into teaching, expanding digital learning resources, and fostering institutional support for pedagogical innovation. The paper argues that meaningful innovation extends beyond technology adoption and requires a comprehensive transformation of teaching philosophy, curriculum design, learning environments, and assessment practices. These recommendations provide practical implications for improving the quality, relevance, and sustainability of Political Theory Education in Vietnamese universities in the digital era.

Keywords: Political Theory Education, Innovative Pedagogy, Higher Education, Digital, Transformation, Generative Artificial Intelligence, Vietnam.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Higher education is experiencing profound transformation driven by digital technologies, educational innovation, and the emergence of Generative Artificial Intelligence (GenAI).

Universities are increasingly shifting from traditional teacher-centered instruction to learner-centered approaches that promote critical thinking, collaboration, creativity, and lifelong learning. These changes have reshaped students' learning

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expectations and challenged conventional pedagogical practices across disciplines. As a result, improving teaching quality through innovative pedagogical approaches has become a strategic priority for higher education institutions worldwide.

Within the Vietnamese higher education system, Political Theory Education refers to the compulsory curriculum consisting of Marxist Philosophy, Marxist Political Economy, Scientific Socialism, Ho Chi Minh Thought, and the History of the Communist Party of Vietnam. These courses play an essential role in fostering students' political awareness, civic responsibility, ethical values, and critical understanding of national development. However, Political Theory Education continues to face persistent challenges. Teaching remains largely lecture-based, with limited opportunities for active participation, collaborative learning, and the practical application of theoretical knowledge. Consequently, many students perceive these courses as highly theoretical and less engaging than other university subjects.

Recent advances in educational technology offer new possibilities for addressing these challenges. Pedagogical approaches such as active learning, problem-based learning, flipped classrooms, blended learning, experiential learning, gamification, and AI-assisted instruction have demonstrated considerable potential for enhancing student engagement, higher-order thinking, and learning effectiveness. Nevertheless, their implementation in Vietnamese universities remains uneven due to disparities in digital infrastructure, lecturers' pedagogical and technological competencies, assessment practices, and institutional support. Furthermore, the rapid adoption of GenAI has introduced new concerns regarding academic integrity, ethical use of artificial intelligence, and the need to redefine the roles of lecturers and students in the teaching-learning process.

Although previous studies have examined individual teaching methods and digital transformation in higher education, relatively few have provided an integrated discussion of innovative pedagogical approaches specifically for Political Theory Education in Vietnam. This paper addresses this gap by reviewing contemporary pedagogical innovations, analyzing the major challenges affecting their implementation, and proposing future directions for improving Political Theory Education in Vietnamese universities. It argues that sustainable pedagogical innovation requires not only technological adoption but also a comprehensive transformation of teaching philosophy, curriculum design, learning activities, and assessment practices.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Political Theory Education in Higher Education

Political Theory Education is an essential component of higher education in many countries, aiming to cultivate students' political awareness, civic responsibility, ethical values, and critical understanding of social and political issues. In Vietnam, Political Theory Education constitutes a compulsory curriculum that includes Marxist Philosophy, Marxist Political Economy, Scientific Socialism, Ho Chi Minh Thought, and the History of the Communist Party of Vietnam. Beyond transmitting theoretical knowledge, these courses seek to develop students' ideological orientation, analytical abilities, and capacity to apply political theories to contemporary social realities. As higher education increasingly emphasizes competency development, Political Theory Education is also expected to foster critical thinking, communication, collaboration, and responsible citizenship rather than relying solely on knowledge acquisition.

2.2. Innovative Pedagogical Approaches in Higher Education

Contemporary higher education has witnessed a significant shift from teacher-centered instruction to learner-centered pedagogy. Innovative pedagogical approaches emphasize active participation, knowledge construction, collaboration, and authentic learning experiences instead of passive information transmission. Active learning encourages students to engage in discussion, reflection, and problem-solving activities that enhance conceptual understanding and long-term knowledge retention. Similarly, problem-based learning and case-based teaching enable students to apply theoretical concepts to real-world situations, thereby strengthening analytical and decision-making skills.

Other pedagogical innovations, including flipped classrooms and blended learning, combine face-to-face instruction with digital learning environments to increase flexibility and student autonomy. Experiential learning and project-based learning further promote meaningful learning by connecting classroom knowledge with practical experiences. More recently, gamification has been adopted to improve student motivation and engagement through game-based elements such as challenges, rewards, and interactive activities. Collectively, these approaches encourage deeper learning and better prepare students for the complex demands of contemporary society.

2.3. Digital Transformation and Artificial Intelligence in Teaching

Digital transformation has fundamentally reshaped teaching and learning in higher education. Learning management systems, online educational resources, cloud-based collaboration tools, and virtual classrooms have expanded access to knowledge while supporting flexible and personalized learning. These technological developments have also altered the role of lecturers from knowledge transmitters to facilitators of learning who guide students in inquiry, collaboration, and critical reflection.

The emergence of Generative Artificial Intelligence has accelerated this transformation. AI-powered applications can assist lecturers in designing instructional materials, generating assessment items, and providing personalized feedback. Students, meanwhile, increasingly use AI tools to search for information, summarize academic literature, and support independent learning. Although these technologies offer substantial educational benefits, they also present challenges related to academic integrity, information reliability, ethical use of AI, and the preservation of students' independent critical thinking. Consequently, recent educational research emphasizes the need for responsible AI integration supported by appropriate pedagogical design and institutional policies.

2.4. Research Gap

Previous studies have extensively examined digital transformation, active learning, blended learning, and AI-assisted teaching in higher education. However, research specifically addressing innovative pedagogical approaches in Political Theory Education remains relatively limited, particularly within the Vietnamese context. Existing studies often focus on individual teaching methods or technological applications without providing a comprehensive analysis of how multiple pedagogical innovations can be integrated into Political Theory Education. Furthermore, limited attention has been given to the implications of Generative Artificial Intelligence for teaching political theory and developing students' critical political understanding. Therefore, this paper seeks to bridge this gap by synthesizing contemporary pedagogical approaches, examining implementation challenges, and proposing future directions for enhancing Political Theory Education in Vietnamese universities.

3. Innovative Pedagogical Approaches in Political Theory Education

Pedagogical innovation in higher education extends beyond the adoption of new technologies or teaching techniques; it represents a fundamental shift in educational philosophy from teacher-

centered knowledge transmission to learner-centered knowledge construction. In Political Theory Education, this transformation is particularly significant because the primary objective is not only to deliver theoretical knowledge but also to cultivate students' critical thinking, civic responsibility, political awareness, and the ability to interpret contemporary social issues from informed and evidence-based perspectives. Consequently, no single pedagogical approach is sufficient to achieve these multidimensional learning outcomes. Instead, an integrated combination of complementary teaching approaches is required.

Among contemporary pedagogical approaches, active learning serves as the foundation for enhancing student engagement. Rather than passively receiving information, students participate in discussions, debates, collaborative activities, and reflective exercises that encourage deeper understanding of theoretical concepts. For Political Theory Education, classroom dialogue on current socio-political issues enables students to connect abstract theories with real-world contexts while developing communication and critical reasoning skills.

Problem-based learning (PBL) further strengthens this connection between theory and practice by organizing learning around authentic social and political problems. Students are encouraged to identify issues, collect evidence, evaluate multiple perspectives, and propose reasoned solutions. This inquiry-oriented process promotes independent learning and analytical competence while demonstrating the practical relevance of political theory to contemporary society.

Similarly, case-based teaching provides opportunities for students to analyze historical events, public policies, governance practices, or ethical dilemmas through theoretical frameworks. Case analysis allows students to examine complex situations from multiple perspectives instead of relying solely on textbook knowledge. Such activities encourage evidence-based reasoning and improve students' ability to apply theoretical principles in diverse contexts.

The rapid expansion of digital technologies has also made blended learning and flipped classrooms increasingly relevant for Political Theory Education. In a flipped classroom, students study digital learning materials before attending class, allowing classroom time to focus on discussion, problem-solving, and collaborative learning rather than one-way lectures. Blended learning further integrates face-to-face teaching with online platforms, providing greater flexibility, continuous

access to learning resources, and opportunities for personalized learning. These approaches support self-directed learning while enabling lecturers to monitor student progress more effectively.

Another emerging direction involves experiential and project-based learning, both of which emphasize learning through authentic experiences. Students may participate in community engagement activities, policy analysis projects, field visits, or research assignments related to political and social issues. Such experiences encourage learners to connect theoretical knowledge with practical observation, thereby strengthening reflective thinking, civic responsibility, and problem-solving abilities.

The emergence of Generative Artificial Intelligence (GenAI) has created both opportunities and challenges for pedagogical innovation. AI-powered tools can assist lecturers in preparing teaching materials, generating discussion questions, designing formative assessments, and providing personalized feedback. For students, AI facilitates literature exploration, concept clarification, and independent learning. Nevertheless, effective integration of AI requires careful pedagogical design to ensure that technology enhances rather than replaces critical thinking. Lecturers should therefore employ AI as a learning support tool while designing assessment activities that emphasize analysis, reflection, argumentation, and original interpretation.

Rather than viewing these pedagogical approaches as isolated innovations, this paper argues that they should be integrated into a coherent learner-centered framework for Political Theory Education. Active learning provides the overall pedagogical philosophy; problem-based and case-based learning connect theory with practice; blended learning and flipped classrooms create flexible learning environments; experiential learning develops civic competence; and responsible AI integration supports personalized and efficient learning. Together, these approaches contribute to developing not only disciplinary knowledge but also higher-order competencies required in contemporary higher education.

The principal contribution of this paper lies in proposing this integrated conceptual framework for pedagogical innovation in Political Theory Education within Vietnamese universities. Existing studies frequently examine individual teaching methods—such as blended learning, active learning, or AI-assisted instruction—in isolation. By contrast, this paper synthesizes these complementary approaches into a unified pedagogical perspective

that aligns with the educational objectives of Political Theory Education and the broader context of digital transformation. The proposed framework suggests that sustainable pedagogical innovation should be guided by four interconnected principles: learner-centered instruction, authentic learning experiences, responsible digital technology integration, and competency-based assessment. These principles provide a holistic foundation for curriculum redesign, lecturer professional development, and institutional policy, thereby supporting the modernization and long-term effectiveness of Political Theory Education in Vietnamese universities.

4. Challenges

Despite growing recognition of the importance of pedagogical innovation, the implementation of innovative teaching approaches in Political Theory Education remains constrained by multiple institutional, pedagogical, technological, and cultural factors. These challenges are particularly evident in Vietnamese universities, where educational reforms are progressing alongside rapid digital transformation but are often uneven across institutions. Addressing these barriers is essential for ensuring that pedagogical innovation contributes meaningfully to improving teaching quality and student learning outcomes.

One of the most persistent challenges is the continued dominance of traditional teacher-centered instruction. Political Theory Education has historically relied on lectures as the primary mode of knowledge delivery, with lecturers serving as the principal authority and students assuming relatively passive roles. Although lectures remain valuable for introducing complex theoretical concepts, excessive dependence on this method often limits classroom interaction, collaborative learning, and critical inquiry. Students may acquire factual knowledge without developing the analytical and reflective competencies necessary to interpret political and social issues independently. Consequently, innovative pedagogical approaches frequently coexist with conventional teaching practices rather than replacing them in a systematic manner.

Another significant challenge concerns lecturers' pedagogical readiness for educational innovation. Effective implementation of learner-centered approaches requires more than familiarity with digital tools; it demands the ability to redesign learning activities, facilitate discussion, guide collaborative inquiry, and assess higher-order learning outcomes. However, many lecturers have been professionally trained within traditional instructional paradigms and may have limited opportunities for continuous professional development in contemporary pedagogy. As a result,

innovative teaching methods are sometimes adopted superficially without corresponding changes in curriculum design, classroom interaction, or assessment practices. Sustainable pedagogical innovation therefore depends heavily on strengthening lecturers' pedagogical competencies alongside their technological capabilities.

Institutional conditions also present considerable obstacles. Although Vietnamese universities have made substantial investments in digital transformation, disparities remain in technological infrastructure, learning management systems, internet connectivity, digital learning resources, and technical support services. These differences influence the feasibility of implementing blended learning, flipped classrooms, and AI-supported instruction. Universities located in economically disadvantaged regions may experience greater difficulties in providing stable digital environments, thereby limiting equal access to innovative learning opportunities. Furthermore, institutional policies often prioritize technological adoption without simultaneously establishing comprehensive strategies for pedagogical transformation, quality assurance, and faculty support.

Assessment practices represent another important barrier to pedagogical innovation. Traditional assessment in Political Theory Education frequently emphasizes knowledge reproduction through written examinations and memorization of theoretical content. Such assessment methods are not fully aligned with learner-centered pedagogies that aim to develop critical thinking, problem-solving, communication, and collaborative competencies. Innovative teaching approaches require authentic assessment strategies capable of evaluating students' analytical reasoning, argumentation, practical application, and reflective learning. Developing reliable and transparent assessment criteria for these competencies remains a considerable challenge for many lecturers and institutions.

The rapid emergence of Generative Artificial Intelligence has introduced additional complexities to Political Theory Education. AI-powered applications provide valuable support for information retrieval, content generation, academic writing, and personalized learning. Nevertheless, inappropriate dependence on AI may weaken students' independent thinking, reduce opportunities for intellectual exploration, and encourage passive acceptance of automatically generated content. Moreover, AI-generated information is not always accurate, objective, or contextually appropriate, particularly when discussing political, historical, or ideological issues. Without sufficient digital literacy

and critical evaluation skills, students may struggle to distinguish credible academic knowledge from inaccurate or biased AI-generated responses. Consequently, universities must address not only technological adoption but also ethical AI literacy, responsible use policies, and academic integrity.

Student-related factors further influence the effectiveness of pedagogical innovation. Contemporary university students generally possess high levels of digital familiarity but exhibit considerable variation in learning motivation, self-regulation, and independent learning capacity. Learner-centered pedagogies require students to actively participate in discussions, conduct independent research, collaborate with peers, and reflect critically on complex issues. However, some students remain accustomed to examination-oriented learning habits and may initially experience difficulties adapting to greater learning autonomy. Consequently, successful implementation of innovative pedagogy requires gradual development of students' self-directed learning skills alongside appropriate academic guidance from lecturers.

Finally, pedagogical innovation in Political Theory Education must balance educational modernization with the distinctive objectives of the discipline. Unlike many other academic subjects, Political Theory Education aims not only to develop intellectual competencies but also to cultivate political awareness, civic responsibility, ethical values, and understanding of national development. Therefore, introducing innovative pedagogical approaches should not simply replicate educational models from other disciplines without considering the specific characteristics and educational mission of Political Theory Education. Instead, innovation should preserve theoretical rigor while creating learning environments that encourage critical inquiry, open dialogue, evidence-based reasoning, and meaningful engagement with contemporary social realities.

Taken together, these challenges demonstrate that pedagogical innovation is a multidimensional process rather than a purely technological one. Sustainable improvement in Political Theory Education requires coordinated efforts involving lecturers, students, university leadership, and educational policymakers. Addressing pedagogical competencies, institutional support, assessment reform, digital infrastructure, ethical AI governance, and learner development simultaneously will provide a stronger foundation for implementing innovative teaching approaches that respond effectively to the evolving demands of higher education in the digital era.

5. Future Directions

The future development of Political Theory Education in Vietnamese universities requires a comprehensive pedagogical transformation that extends beyond the adoption of new instructional technologies. Sustainable innovation should be viewed as a long-term process involving changes in educational philosophy, curriculum design, teaching practice, assessment strategies, and institutional governance. Rather than implementing isolated pedagogical initiatives, universities should establish coherent frameworks that integrate learner-centered education with the broader objectives of digital transformation and competency-based higher education.

A primary priority is the redesign of Political Theory curricula to better align with contemporary educational needs. While maintaining the theoretical foundations and educational objectives of the discipline, curricula should incorporate authentic social, political, and economic issues that encourage students to apply theoretical concepts to real-world contexts. Learning activities should emphasize inquiry, dialogue, evidence-based argumentation, and interdisciplinary perspectives instead of focusing predominantly on content transmission. Such curriculum renewal would strengthen students' ability to interpret complex societal challenges while reinforcing the practical relevance of Political Theory Education.

The professional development of lecturers should also become a strategic priority. Future training programs should move beyond technical instruction in digital tools and focus on developing comprehensive pedagogical competencies. Lecturers need support in designing learner-centered activities, facilitating collaborative learning, integrating digital technologies effectively, and implementing authentic assessment methods. Professional learning communities, interdisciplinary collaboration, peer observation, and continuous pedagogical training can further encourage the exchange of innovative teaching experiences and promote a culture of educational improvement within universities.

Another important direction involves establishing balanced approaches to the integration of Generative Artificial Intelligence into Political Theory Education. Rather than viewing AI solely as a technological challenge or replacing conventional teaching practices, universities should position AI as a complementary learning resource that supports both lecturers and students. Institutional guidelines should clearly define appropriate AI use in teaching, learning, and assessment while emphasizing transparency, academic integrity, and critical evaluation of AI-generated content. Students should

be encouraged to use AI to enhance inquiry, idea generation, and information exploration without diminishing independent reasoning or academic responsibility.

Future pedagogical innovation should also be accompanied by comprehensive assessment reform. Assessment systems need to move beyond measuring factual knowledge toward evaluating higher-order competencies such as critical thinking, analytical reasoning, collaborative problem-solving, communication, and reflective learning. Authentic assessment methods—including project-based assignments, policy analyses, presentations, debates, reflective portfolios, and case studies—can provide more meaningful evidence of student learning than traditional examinations alone. Equally important, formative assessment should be integrated throughout the learning process to provide timely feedback that supports continuous improvement rather than merely evaluating final performance.

Institutional leadership will play a decisive role in sustaining pedagogical innovation. Universities should establish supportive policies that encourage experimentation with new teaching approaches, recognize pedagogical excellence, and provide adequate technological infrastructure and academic resources. Investment should extend beyond digital platforms to include instructional design support, educational technology services, open learning resources, and mechanisms for evaluating teaching quality. Strong institutional commitment can reduce disparities in innovation capacity across faculties and create conditions for long-term educational transformation.

Finally, future research should continue to examine pedagogical innovation in Political Theory Education through diverse methodological perspectives. While conceptual analyses provide valuable theoretical insights, empirical studies are needed to evaluate the effectiveness of innovative teaching approaches in different institutional contexts. Comparative research, longitudinal investigations, mixed-methods studies, and cross-national collaborations may generate stronger evidence regarding the relationships between pedagogical innovation, student engagement, learning outcomes, and digital competence. Such evidence will contribute to refining educational policies and strengthening the theoretical foundation for future reforms.

Overall, the future of Political Theory Education depends not on isolated technological innovations but on the creation of an integrated pedagogical ecosystem that connects curriculum, teaching, assessment, institutional support, and

responsible digital transformation. By embracing this holistic approach, Vietnamese universities can enhance the quality, relevance, and sustainability of Political Theory Education while preparing students with the intellectual competencies, civic responsibility, and critical thinking required to participate effectively in an increasingly complex and digitally connected society.

6. CONCLUSION

Political Theory Education continues to play a fundamental role in cultivating students' political awareness, civic responsibility, and critical understanding of contemporary social issues in Vietnamese higher education. However, the accelerating pace of digital transformation, changing learner characteristics, and the emergence of Generative Artificial Intelligence have created an educational environment that demands more adaptive, interactive, and learner-centered pedagogical practices. These developments require universities to reconsider not only how Political Theory is taught but also how meaningful learning experiences can be created in an increasingly digital society.

This paper has examined contemporary pedagogical approaches that can enhance Political Theory Education, including active learning, problem-based learning, case-based teaching, blended learning, flipped classrooms, experiential learning, and responsible AI-assisted instruction. Rather than considering these approaches as separate instructional innovations, the paper argues that they should be integrated into a coherent pedagogical framework that supports competency development, authentic learning, and student engagement. Such an integrated perspective represents the principal conceptual contribution of this study and provides a more comprehensive understanding of pedagogical innovation within the context of Vietnamese universities.

The analysis also demonstrates that successful pedagogical innovation depends on multiple interconnected factors, including curriculum renewal, lecturers' pedagogical competence, assessment reform, institutional support, digital infrastructure, and responsible technology governance. Consequently, sustainable educational improvement cannot be achieved solely through technological investment but requires coordinated transformation across teaching

philosophy, learning design, institutional policy, and academic culture.

Although this study is conceptual in nature, it provides a theoretical foundation for future empirical research examining the effectiveness of innovative pedagogical approaches in Political Theory Education. Further investigations involving lecturers, students, and educational institutions will contribute to validating the proposed framework and refining strategies for implementation. Ultimately, strengthening pedagogical innovation will enhance the quality, relevance, and long-term sustainability of Political Theory Education while better preparing university graduates to become critically informed, socially responsible, and active citizens in the digital era.

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