

COMPETENCE-BASED REFORM OF TEACHING HISTORY AT VIETNAM'S SCHOOLS

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Abstract: Addressing the importance of teaching history in Vietnam's schools, the article analyses and proposes some guidelines and measures to reform history teaching methodology in order to develop learners' competences.

Keywords: Teaching History, schools, competence-based, learners.

1. INTRODUCTION

The contemporary Revolution of Science and Technology, especially the 4.0 Technology Revolution and the process of global integration have heightened the urgent need for educational reform. All educational elements, namely objectives, content, organisational forms, teaching methodology, testing and assessment, are closely integrated. It is impossible to update objectives, syllabus and textbooks without reforming teaching methods and forms as well as testing and assessment. Therefore, in response to the requirement for higher quality of teaching history (TH), the need of developing learners' professional competences as well as general competences and valuable ethics, the reform of teaching is crucial.

2. CONTENT

2.1. Importance of teaching forms in history lessons at school

From philosophical viewpoint on teaching content and its form of manifestation, some Vietnamese educators claim that “*Conducting teaching activities is performing the teaching content in specific location, space and conditions in order to complete teaching task and objectives.*” [1, p. 245] or “*Teaching forms are the exist form of teaching progress and these forms are varied.*” [2, p. 251].

Teaching forms can be classified as in-class or outside the classroom forms; within-curriculum or extra-curricular forms. The major differences are learners' autonomy level and teachers' methods to monitor learners' self-studying or learning location and timing, etc. In general, various teaching organisational forms are widely employed including whole-class, groupwork, pairwork, and individual. Each form has their own advantages and disadvantages and requires teachers' flexibility when performing.

In general education, especially History education at schools, in-class teaching is the most basic teaching form, yet not the only form. This process aims at teaching the whole class, including a fixed number of learners, and it suits teachers' competence. Teaching forms are decided, organised, and monitored by

teachers to support learners' perception. The lesson (which may last over one or several periods) may occur in the classroom, or other venue (such as laboratory, school botanic garden, field site, museum, etc.).

A History lesson is the form of an integrated process of teaching and learning activities. Teachers teach, educate, organise and give instruction while learners actively perceive the knowledge, enrich their thoughts, ethics, and practice their skills, etc. Delivering the lesson is compulsory in teaching the subject of history at schools. The quality of subject teaching is improved, and learner's subject technical competences as well as general competences and positive qualities and ethics are developed when the lessons are delivered effectively. Moreover, there are other teaching forms such as self-studying, educational exhibitions, and fieldtrips, etc. These forms are flexible and useful in creating varied learning environment, which motivate learners, develop the subject technical competence, general competences, especially learners' competences of self-studying, practicing and integrating learning at schools with practice. Forms of TH play important role in developing learners' competences and history education. The success of curriculum, textbook and teaching method reform and the achievement of subject teaching objectives both depend on the delivery of the teaching forms.

In reality, forms of TH at schools in Vietnam has been improved, yet still lagged behind expectation. Teachers still focus on in-class lessons in stead of outside-classroom activities. In History lessons, learners are not active and teachers are mainly delivering ready-made knowledge instead of developing learners' competences. There are theoretical and practical needs for reforming forms of TH towards developing learners' competences and improving subject teaching quality.

2.2. Some directions and measures to reform organisational forms of TH at schools to develop learners' competences

The word ‘reform’ is defined in ‘General Vietnamese Dictionary’ as “further transformation and progress” or

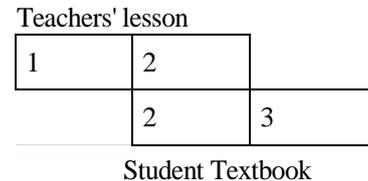
“renovation” [3, p. 396]. In TH, teaching method reform at schools has been discussed and concensused that reform is not the “complete denial”, but the critical inheritance of the former versions. The nature of history teaching reform is the transformation from teacher-centred model to learner-center model in which “*teachers are not rulers granting knowledge to learners, but act as guides, motivators and facilitators who help learners create relationships and their own definitions and relationships by themselves*” [4, p. 48]. Therefore, learner-center model in TH means promoting learners' autonomy and dynamics, mainly in their perception activities. The reform can happen in every stage of teaching process, forms and methods.

In terms of reform the delivery methods in TH, learners' dynamics and autonomy in their thinking style are crucial to their knowledge perception and the development of their skills, competences and morality. To promote learners' dynamics and autonomy, teachers can apply the following measures:

2.2.1. Applying problem-solving techniques in teaching. Problem-solving technique is a leading principle in teaching and it is employed in all stages of a lesson. In fact, it is one of the teaching styles. N.G. Dairi states that “problem-solving technique is particularly important to forming knowledge based on learners' independent thinking” [5, p. 92]; it can stimulate perception activities, motivate learners and enhance their competences to recall, think, evaluate, and solve problems, etc. Problem-solving technique includes presenting the problem, problematic situations and problematic tasks (perception task). Applying this technique in TH involves: - Setting the learning objectives before the new lesson (lead learners to problematic situations and present perception task); - Leading learners to solve the problems (introduce the perception methods and impose eliciting questions, present the problems and instruct learners to exploit the knowledge; facilitate learners' discussion and exchanges to draw the conclusion, etc.); - Checking learners' perception activities to reinforce the lesson; - Instructing learners' for self-studying and assigning homework. Applying the problem-solving technique helps teachers effectively organise the lesson by developing learners' dynamics, independent perception and especially their logical thinking.

2.2.2. Identifying fundamental knowledge, vary and cooperate effectively different teaching methods. In TH, it's impossible to provide and perceive all history knowledge. Teachers are expected to help learners perceive fundamental knowledge of the subject. Thus,

identifying the fundamental knowledge helps teacher to lighten the lessons and develop learners' dynamics and independent perception. It's important for teachers to understand the definition of fundamental knowledge and rules to identify fundamental knowledge. Dairi diagram can be of great help to teachers:



Number 2 in Dairi's diagram is the fundamental knowledge in student textbook and teachers' lesson. Number 1 is extra materials that teachers use in the lesson to clarify the fundamental knowledge. Number 3 is the less important knowledge in the textbook or knowledge that teachers cannot teach properly in class due to lack of time and learners are instructed to self-study at home, etc. Besides, it's necessary that teachers vary and cooperate effectively and smoothly different teaching methods in accordance with each historical content to maximize the teaching effectiveness.

2.2.3. Organizing and combining smoothly and reasonably learning activities when conducting history lessons. The organization of different type of learning activities in class has been discussed by many researchers nationwide and worldwide. They all agree that there are three types of learning activities namely whole class, group and individual. Each type of activity has its advantages and disadvantages, so teachers need to combine them smoothly and reasonably when they teach the lesson. In History teaching, we can organize learning activities and combine them as follows: Individual activity is the foundation for students to participate in team, group and class activities; Combining group activities with individual work when instructors guide students to explore difficult complex content; Combining group activities with the whole class while guiding students to solve cognitive tasks or difficult content (such as the embedded knowledge in textbooks).

The combination of different types of learning activities in TH has a practical effect to promote students' positive side. That is when the students work actively and seriously under the guidance of teachers to gain knowledge. At the same time, the combination of forms of learning activities also educates students to work diligently, patiently, and with collective spirit. Through this combination, students are helped to train and develop learning power, especially critical thinking, evaluation, problem solving and cooperation. However,

it is essential to ensure the requirements of the teaching content and methods

2.2.4. Effectively organizing students' self-study in class and at home. Self-study is an important issue, which is the internal factor that determines the quality of learning. Self-study in the school is self-taught, so it also has its own characteristics. Self-study of students during their history lessons can be seen both in class and at home. Self-study in class is a self-awareness activity when students listen to teacher's lectures or work in groups. The self-study activities include self-adjustment when listening to lectures, selective knowledge to record; answering the teacher's question; use textbooks when required by the teacher; combine listening, recording, thinking; contribute their ideas when working in groups ...; Self-study contents at home usually include: mastering the material by re-studying the notebooks and textbooks for unification and deep understanding of the knowledge, reproducing the learned knowledge, completing questions and exercises in textbooks, self-dealing with maps, pictures, reference textbooks, self-paced homework assignments; self studying under the guidance of the teacher; preparing for new lessons.

In order to develop the self-study of the students in class, teacher can apply the problem-solving technique in teaching, asking questions, and organizing discussions and tutorials for students to use textbooks or materials. For self-study at home, teachers should provide instruction and guidance on how to do it, and assign homework in a variety of forms (especially the task of requesting ants in reality and tested and evaluated). The well-organized self-study activities in class and at home for students have the influence on stimulating students' positive thinking and interest so that they can control knowledge, consolidate, expand, deepen and systematize knowledge by themselves. At the same time, it is important to organize good self-study activities for the students' skills, learning techniques and education of diligence, self-will, the will to overcome difficulties to complete the task; It contributes to the development of learning abilities, especially self-learning.

2.2.5. Conducting history lessons in cultural heritage sites (fields, museums, traditional local houses...). Conducting a history lesson in heritage sites has a significance for the student in all three aspects: knowledge formation, skill training, attitude orientation to developing subject learning abilities; especially self-study, practical, cooperative, and ethical qualities. This is because the field or the museum is where the traces, debris or artifacts of the past

are displayed. When conducting the lesson here, students are aware of the "traces of the past" to supplement and specify the knowledge they are studying; It helps to develop the imagination, diversify the cognitive activity, and stimulate the study of the subject. This is a teaching method that is linked to life, which enhances the understanding of subject knowledge, culture, and education for love of homeland, country, and aesthetics for children.

To carry out a history lesson in the heritage sites (the field, the museum, etc.) effectively, the teacher should do the following activities: - Fulfilling the requirements of an internal lesson production (preparation, selection of content, methods of conducting); - Choosing how to conduct the lesson in accordance with the condition of the facilities at the estate; - Flexible use of creative steps to conduct lessons at the heritage; - Thoroughly exploiting the source of knowledge from traces and artifacts of the heritage to organize learning activities for the students (from introductory stage to the end of the lesson). - Renewing the organization of study tours at the heritage site (the field, the museum). Study tours have an important role in TH in high school; it is a form of teaching that has great effect in terms of knowledge, skills and attitudes towards students. Study tours serve directly to the content of the lesson, so it has the effect of deepening, expanding knowledge, forging skills, techniques and orientating students to appropriate attitude. Good implementation of this type of teaching will contribute to the development of self-learning, practice, thinking, cooperation skills and good moral qualities in children. This is an internal activity, so the main content is to consolidate the learned knowledge or prepare for learning new lessons. Therefore, the implementation of this form of study must be in accordance with the prescribed program to avoid arbitrariness.

In reality, it is shown that this form of teaching is not well done because teachers often turn it to extracurricular or formal activity. As a matter of fact, the teacher's work is dominant whereas the active and independent involvement of the student is limited. Therefore, teachers can apply the spirit of project-based teaching through the following steps: - At the preparation stage, besides planning, reporting the school, contacting relics, museums, dissemination goals, requirements and what to do, teachers need to schedule time for the topic. Next, students find a sub-topic, group them and give each group a sub-topic (learning task); - During the tour, teachers guide groups of students to observe, learn, collect information, and take pictures of documents or objects to solve the group's learning task. At the end of the tour, in addition to the moral attitude

review, teachers ask and instruct students to discuss in groups and have group's opinions on the assigned tasks, and then the group assigns tasks to each member. - After the tour, groups continue to cooperate to complete the product of the group (PowerPoint presentation). For the new lesson in the classroom, groups will make a report on the product of the group while other groups give feedback. At the end of class, teachers and students re-evaluate the learning project they have done and then draw conclusion.

Project-based learning is a learning activity designed to provide students with the opportunity to synthesize knowledge from a variety of areas of study and to apply creatively to the realities of life". [6: 125]. Following the spirit of project-based learning to organize study tours will have practical implications for students; contribute to the combination of thinking and action and link theory and practice. At the same time, it can stimulate interest in learning, develop independence, sense of responsibility, creativity and forge problem-solving abilities for students.

2.2.6. Effectively organizing extra-curricular activities and practice towards the development of learners' competences. The curriculum and extracurricular activities are closely linked and addressed the overall curriculum / program curriculum. Therefore, in the process of TH in high school, it is necessary to conduct extra-curricular activities. Based on the task of educating the young generation in high school, the task of improving knowledge, consolidating beliefs and practical activities, extracurricular activities, history has two main directions: - Deepening and enriching the knowledge students gained in the course activities, especially the basic issues of the course (the typical events become the basic knowledge, the life and career of historical characters reflect the development of the society, the great achievements in culture, science, literature and art, and production; - Problems of local history and social work... Voluntary extra-curricular activity in these directions has great effect on students in all aspects; it not only deepens, enriches comprehensive education, develops intellectual and practical skills, but also guides students to self-discipline and discipline to complete their work; - contribute to the development of self-learning, thinking and practice, especially the ability to apply knowledge into reality, cooperate upon work and foster the quality of pride, love the country and gratitude to the predecessors.

The reality of TH in high school shows that, for various reasons, extracurricular practice of history has not received adequate attention. If the extracurricular activities are done, their efficiency is not high. To

develop positive and independent thinking as well as to improve the self-learning ability and practice of students, teachers can apply some measures to renovate extra-curricular activities, such as: - Renovating the method of organizing extra-curricular activities in the positive direction of the student's role; - Combining reading and discussion to find good content and beautiful ideas in books; - Strengthening the organization of historical gala (general extracurricular form); - Guiding students to collect historical materials, relics at museums to organize exhibitions, release study newspapers; - Organizing competitions to learn about the national and local history on the occasions of holidays, local traditions and celebrations...; - Coordinating with localities in organizing local pupils to participate in social work which is suitable for their ages and educational levels (take care and protection of local cultural heritages, collect and build traditional local culture, dissemination of historical knowledge to local people...).

To effectively implement effective extra-curricular activities, history teachers need good teaching methodology and help from the society, family and administrators at all levels.

3. CONCLUSION

The implementation of different forms of TH in high school is of great importance. The degree to which the subject is targeted largely depends on the type of teaching. However, due to the misperception and insufficiency of this problem, the implementation of History teaching remains ineffective. Therefore, in order to meet the requirements of the teaching quality, the implementation of teaching forms should be innovated to develop students' competencies.

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