INNOVATING CURRICULUM, CONTENT, AND METHODS IN BUSINESS ADMINISTRATION TRAINING TOWARDS DEVELOPING STUDENTS' DECISION-MAKING COMPETENCY

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https://doi.org/10.51453/3093-3076/2026/1422

ARTICLE INFO

Received: 2/01/2026
Revised: 10/02/2026
Published: 28/02/2026

KEYWORDS:
Decision-Making Competency;
Business Administration;
Curriculum Training Program;
competency-based education;
Curriculum alignment;
Higher education reform;

ABSTRACT

The article focuses on identifying the phenomenon of "mathematization" in Business Administration (BA) education in Vietnam—considered a barrier to the development of students' decision-making competency (DMC). Using a combination of document analysis and pedagogical observation, the author highlights a misalignment between the emphasis on quantitative formulas and the ability to provide managerial reasoning. The study proposes a DMC competency framework that emphasizes higher-order levels (contextual analysis and strategic execution), while also suggesting a pathway for reform based on the competency-based education (CBE) model, which has been adopted in advanced education systems.

1. INTRODUCTION

In the context of rapid globalization and digital transformation, Vietnamese higher education is facing the need for comprehensive reform, particularly in line with the spirit of Resolution No. 71-NQ/TW of the Central Committee on breakthroughs in the development of education and training (Central Committee of the Communist Party of Vietnam , 2024). The Resolution emphasizes a shift from a knowledge-transmission model to a competency-based education model that focuses on developing learners' capacities and qualities, places learners at the center of the educational process, and strengthens the linkage between universities and enterprises. This orientation is also consistent with the competency-based curriculum reform issued by the Ministry of Education and Training (Ministry of Education and Training, 2018), as well as with international educational frameworks, notably OECD Education 2030, which highlights problem-solving ability, critical thinking, and decision-making in contexts of uncertainty (OECD, 2018). The overemphasis on purely quantitative tools (mathematization) is not only a challenge in Vietnam but also a barrier identified in numerous international studies. A study by (Meah, 2024), highlights a significant gap between solving mathematical problems and the ability to apply such knowledge in real-world business contexts. Students may become proficient in computational techniques, yet struggle to "translate" quantitative results into meaningful managerial decisions.

For the field of Business Administration (BA), the demand for reform becomes even more urgent, as the core objective of the discipline is to develop decision-making competency for learners. The theory of constructive alignment proposed by Biggs & Tang [3] suggests that learning outcomes, curriculum content, teaching methods, and assessment must be closely aligned to effectively develop the intended competencies. However, the current practice of BA education in Vietnam reveals a considerable lack of alignment between program objectives and instructional implementation, leading to a significant gap between academic knowledge and real-world professional requirements.

Recent domestic studies have also highlighted an alarming situation. A report published in newspaper of Economics and Urbans indicates that more than 60% of BA graduates are either unemployed or working outside their field of study, primarily due to the fact that they "learn a great deal of theory but receive little practical training, and lack decision-making and problem-solving skills" (Mintzberg, 1976). Another study by (Anh.Trinh Thuy et al, 2022), based on survey data from multiple universities, shows that BA programs remain heavily theoretical, focusing largely on analytical models and calculations while being insufficiently connected to the practical needs of service enterprises—the sector where the majority of BA graduates are expected to work after graduation (OECD, 2018).

These warnings indicate an urgent need to reassess the structure of curricula, course content, and current teaching methods in order to ensure better alignment with the objective of developing students' decision-making competency.

In response to these issues, this study aims to systematically evaluate the current state of BA education through an analysis of curricula, course content, and teaching methods at several higher education institutions, while also comparing them with labor market requirements and contemporary competency frameworks. Based on this analysis, the study proposes solutions for curriculum and pedagogical innovation to comprehensively develop decision-making competency among BA students.

Decision-making competency in business administration is approached as an integrated capability that reflects the entire decision-making process of managers. A conceptual framework of decision-making competency. Specifically, a schematic diagram summarizing key components identified in prior studies (Simon, 1977) (Mintzberg, 1976) has been added. Furthermore, based on this foundation, the paper proposes a three-level DMC competency pyramid to better reflect the progression from data processing to decision execution.

The DMC competency pyramid consists of three hierarchical levels. Level 1 focuses on technical capabilities in data collection and processing. Level 2 emphasizes interpretive capabilities, requiring individuals to contextualize and make sense of data. Level 3 represents strategic decision-making capability, involving choice selection and accountability under conditions of uncertainty.

In the context of this study, particular emphasis is placed on the development of higher-order competencies at Levels 2 and 3, as these are critical for effective decision-making in dynamic and uncertain environments. This emphasis is further supported by (Mat Shoib and Talip, 2025), who, indicate that decision-making competency at these higher levels accounts for approximately 55% of organizational effectiveness [10]. Therefore, the traditional focus on Level 1 (technical data

processing) in current BA programs may be insufficient to meet the professional demands of the modern labor market.

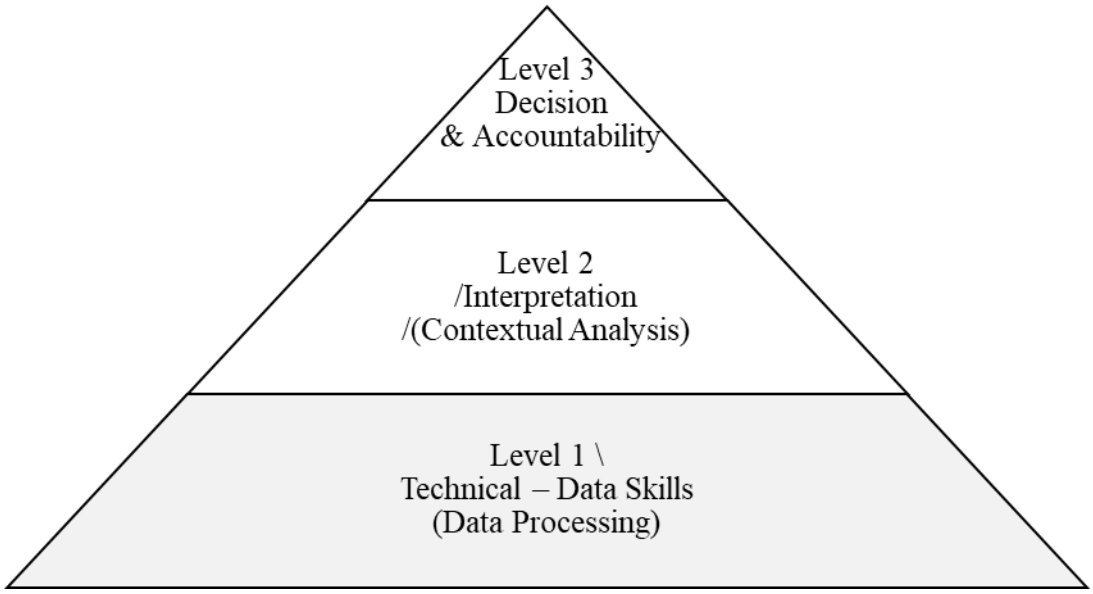

Figure 1. DMC Competency Pyramid (Proposed Model)

Source: Proposed by the author

2. RELATED WORKS

In recent years, the reform of higher education toward a competency-based approach has become a widely discussed topic in research on education and educational management. According to the orientation of the OECD (2018), higher education should shift from a knowledge-transmission model to one that develops core competencies such as critical thinking, problem-solving, and decision-making in the uncertain context of the knowledge economy. This approach is also reflected in Vietnam's education policies, particularly in the orientation toward competency-based higher education curricula issued by (Ministry of Education and Training, 2018). In modern higher education theory, (Biggs, J., & Tang, C. , 2011) emphasize the principle of "constructive alignment," according to which learning outcomes, curriculum content, teaching methods, and assessment methods should be systematically aligned to ensure that students truly acquire the competencies targeted by the training program.

In the field of management, many studies have shown that decision-making competence is a core capability of managers. (Simon, 1977) (Mintzberg, 1976) argue that the managerial decision-making process includes identifying problems, collecting and processing information, evaluating alternatives, and selecting actions under conditions of imperfect information. Later studies, such as (Bazerman, M. H., & Moore, D. A., 2013), further developed this theoretical perspective by emphasizing the role of analytical thinking, risk assessment, and behavioral factors in the decision-making process. These studies suggest that Business Administration education should aim to develop decision-making competence as an integrated capability that combines professional knowledge, analytical skills, and the ability to assess practical contexts.

In Vietnam, several studies have initially addressed the issue of reforming Business Administration training programs. The study by (Anh.Trinh Thuy et al, 2022) indicates that training programs in this field at many universities remain highly theoretical, heavily focused on

computational models, and insufficiently connected to the practical needs of businesses, particularly in the context of international integration. A report in (Economic and Urban Newspaper, 2011) also warned that many Business Administration graduates face difficulties in finding jobs or end up working outside their field of study. The main reason is that training programs tend to be theory-oriented, lack practical components, and pay insufficient attention to developing real-world problem-solving skills.

Although previous studies have identified several limitations in Business Administration training programs, most of them remain at the level of general assessments regarding the weak linkage between education and labor market demands. These studies have not systematically analyzed the relationship between curriculum structure, training content, and teaching methods in relation to the objective of developing students' decision-making competence. In particular, the phenomenon of "mathematization" in training programs—referring to the increasing number of quantitative courses and computational models—has not been examined as a potential factor that may distort the objectives of management education. Moreover, previous studies have not clearly addressed the shift in the business environment from traditional manufacturing enterprises toward service- and trade-oriented business models, nor the implications of this transition for the content and methods of Business Administration education.

Based on these research gaps, this paper analyzes the current state of Business Administration education in Vietnam from the perspectives of curriculum structure, training content, and teaching methods, while examining them in relation to the requirement of developing students' decision-making competence in the context of an economy increasingly shifting toward services and digital transformation. On that basis, the study proposes directions for reforming curriculum design, training content, and teaching methods in order to enhance decision-making competence among Business Administration students.

3. PROPOSED METHODOLOGY

This study primarily employs qualitative research methods to describe, analyze, and evaluate the current situation of curriculum structure, course content, and teaching methods in Business Administration education. The specific methods include the following:

Firstly, document analysis.

The author collected and reviewed documents related to Business Administration training programs currently implemented at several universities in Vietnam. These sources include course syllabi, program descriptions, teaching plans, course content outlines, and instructional guidelines for program implementation. Document analysis helps identify the program structure, the composition of knowledge blocks, teaching–learning organization methods, as well as assessment practices currently in use.

In addition, studies published during the period 2011–2012 are used in this research as reference materials for comparison in order to examine changes in Business Administration curricula over time. Meanwhile, the analysis of the current situation is based on the existing training programs of higher education institutions, updated to 2024.

Secondly, the method of analysis and synthesis.

Based on the collected data, the study analyzes three main aspects: curriculum structure, training content, and teaching methods. The analytical results are then synthesized to form a

comprehensive overview of the current state of Business Administration education at higher education institutions.

Thirdly, the comparative method.

The current curriculum and training content are compared with:

(1) the professional competency requirements for Business Administration graduates in the context of an economy increasingly shifting toward the service–trade sector;

(2) the trend toward competency-based education; and

(3) the practical requirements of enterprises.

This method helps identify the degree of alignment or misalignment between training content and labor market demands.

Fourthly, pedagogical observation.

Through practical teaching experience, supervising student theses, guiding internships, and interacting with recruiting enterprises, the author observed several notable issues related to students' learning skills, learning approaches, and their ability to apply knowledge in practice. These observations serve as supplementary evidence for analyzing the current situation of teaching methods and assessment practices.

Fifthly, logical reasoning.

Based on the identified limitations, the study employs logical reasoning to determine underlying causes and propose a system of corresponding solutions across key areas, including: curriculum design, training content, teaching methods, assessment approaches, and university–enterprise collaboration.

The combination of multiple qualitative research methods helps ensure objectivity, systematic analysis, and reliability in evaluating the current situation and proposing solutions for improving Business Administration education. In addition to document analysis and curriculum comparison, the arguments presented in this study are also derived from the author's teaching experience, supervision of student projects and internships, as well as professional exchanges with students and enterprise representatives within the context of training collaboration.

Although the study does not conduct an independent quantitative survey, pedagogical observations and feedback from teaching and recruitment practices are considered important qualitative data sources that help reflect common issues in Business Administration education today. This approach is consistent with the research objective of identifying systemic trends and issues, thereby providing a basis for proposing directions for innovation in Business Administration training programs.

4. RESEARCH RESULTS

4.1. Current situation of business administration training

4.1.1. Current Situation of Business Administration Training Programs

An analysis of Business Administration curricula at several universities in Vietnam shows that the total training volume is approximately 130–135 credits, typically divided into several blocks: general education, supporting courses, foundational courses, major courses, and specialized courses. Although this structure ensures coverage of major functional areas of management, the programs exhibit a high degree of fragmentation, as most courses carry only 2–3 credits, making it

difficult for students to develop integrated thinking—an important component of decision-making competency.

Notably, quantitative and mathematics-based content accounts for a large proportion of many courses, such as *Econometrics, Business Statistics, Production Management,* and *Corporate Financial Management*. This trend of the "mathematization" of the curriculum has been highlighted in previous studies. According to (Anh.Trinh Thuy et al, 2022), quantitative courses account for 35–40% of the total professional curriculum, yet most of them focus mainly on models and formulas, with limited connection to real-world case analysis. This situation leads to a misalignment between the goal of developing managerial competencies and the actual training content.

From the author's own teaching experience in Corporate Financial Management, the tendency toward mathematical formalization in Business Administration courses is clearly observable. The author has therefore suggested that adjustments are needed so that the curriculum better aligns with the primary objective of Business Administration education, which is to develop students' decision-making competencies. However, curriculum changes cannot be implemented rapidly, as they require consultation and approval from multiple institutional levels. To partially address this gap, the author has incorporated real economic and financial cases into classroom teaching to help students practice applying knowledge and to reduce the excessive emphasis on purely numerical exercises in the curriculum.

In addition, the training content still strongly reflects the model of traditional manufacturing enterprises—for example, topics such as EOQ, MRP, and production scheduling. However, according to *Economic and urban* newspaper, over 70% of Business Administration graduates work in service, trade, and office-based sectors, while only a small proportion work in manufacturing (Economic and Urban Newspaper, 2011). Consequently, the current curriculum does not fully correspond to the practical demands of the labor market.

4.1.2. Current Situation of Training Content

Although the curriculum covers the major areas of management comprehensively, it lacks newer courses that reflect trends such as service orientation and digital transformation, including service management, customer experience management, digital operations, and business data analytics.

A report by (Anh.Trinh Thuy et al, 2022) indicates that students perceive the curriculum content as being "detached from the realities of service enterprises," lacking real-world context and case studies derived from actual businesses. Training content remains overly focused on manufacturing sectors, while the economy and labor market are gradually shifting toward service-oriented activities.

From the author's experience supervising graduating students, more than half of the students undertake internships in small and medium-sized enterprises specializing in services, consulting, and trade, while the course materials and thesis report templates still focus mainly on manufacturing contexts. This mismatch often causes difficulties for students.

For example, in the Internship Report I, students are required to analyze issues such as production capacity management and production scheduling, even though many of them intern in service companies. In such cases, students find it difficult to adapt. Although instructors may remind students to adjust their reports accordingly, the absence of courses such as Service

Management or Operations Management in services makes it even more challenging for students to approach unfamiliar concepts during their final year of study.

Furthermore, the lack of integrated cross-functional courses also creates difficulties for students when they must make decisions in complex and multi-variable situations—an essential characteristic of modern Business Administration practice.

4.1.3. Current Situation of Teaching and Assessment Methods

Teaching methods still rely heavily on lecturing theoretical content and solving numerical exercises with predefined datasets. Students rarely encounter open-ended problems, real-world cases, or incomplete datasets, which are typical characteristics of real managerial decision-making contexts.

According to a survey reported by *Economic and urban* newspaper , 84% of Business Administration students believe their studies are "too theoretical and heavily focused on computational exercises," while 72% report that they have "never worked on real enterprise cases." Meanwhile, enterprises often assess graduates as having weak decision-making and analytical thinking skills (Economic and Urban Newspaper, 2011).

The study by (Anh.Trinh Thuy et al, 2022) also indicates that current teaching methods result in a situation of "learning one thing but doing another", as course content focuses on theoretical models while internships require students to analyze real business situations.

This situation can also be observed in practice at the author's institution. In several courses, teaching activities focus largely on numerical problem-solving using hypothetical datasets. Examples include *Production Management, Corporate Financial Management,* and project-based courses such as *Production Management Project* or *Corporate Financial Management Project*. However, when students reach their final year, Internship Reports and Graduation Theses require them to write analytical reports in Word format based on a specific real enterprise.

As a result, many students feel confused about how to properly structure and present their reports or theses. During their coursework, they are mainly accustomed to solving numerical exercises, whereas in the final stage of their studies they are required to conduct analysis and produce structured analytical reports based on real organizational contexts.

4.2. Evaluation of the Current Situation of Business Administration Education

4.2.1. Strengths

Firstly, the training program is relatively comprehensive and covers the core functional areas of management such as marketing, finance, human resource management, production management, and strategic management. This enables students to acquire a broad knowledge base that is appropriate for undergraduate education.

Secondly, the curriculum structure ensures a systematic organization of knowledge, with courses divided into supporting courses, foundational courses, major courses, and specialized courses. This arrangement allows students to gradually progress from fundamental knowledge to more advanced and specialized knowledge.

Thirdly, several quantitative courses contribute to the development of students' analytical thinking. These courses help students understand techniques for data processing and basic modeling of business-related problems.

Fourthly, teaching methods that combine theoretical instruction with problem-solving exercises help students understand and apply models and formulas to simulated situations. This is an important step in helping students develop initial technical skills.

Fifthly, the assessment methods are relatively diverse, including assignments, mid-term exams, final exams, and short essays. These forms of assessment help measure students' ability to acquire and understand theoretical knowledge.

4.2.2. Limitations

Despite the advantages mentioned above, the current state of Business Administration education still exhibits several systemic limitations.

Firstly, the curriculum remains highly fragmented. The large number of courses combined with the limited number of credits per course makes it difficult for students to develop integrated competencies and a holistic managerial perspective.

Secondly, the program content tends to emphasize quantitative models and technical methods, particularly in courses such as statistics, econometrics, business performance analysis, production management, and corporate finance. This emphasis reduces the time available for learning content connected to real-world business contexts.

Thirdly, the curriculum continues to be strongly influenced by the traditional manufacturing enterprise model, while the current labor market is rapidly shifting toward service, trade, and office-based business sectors. As a result, several practice-oriented topics relevant to service environments—such as service management, service operations, and customer experience design—remain insufficiently represented in the curriculum.

Fourthly, teaching methods still rely heavily on solving numerical exercises, typically based on datasets that are complete and well-structured. Students are rarely required to analyze real enterprise contexts. This approach leads to the "formula-driven" learning style, limiting opportunities for students to develop analytical thinking, case analysis skills, and decision-making capabilities.

Fifthly, assessment methods tend to focus on computational exercises, while evaluation formats that measure decision-making competence—such as case analysis, managerial memo writing, presentations, and critical discussion—have not yet received sufficient attention.

Sixthly, project-based courses in some specializations do not clearly reflect real business practice. These courses often require students to conduct formula-based simulations, rather than engaging in activities such as field investigation, real data collection, or analysis of actual business problems. As a result, a disconnect emerges between the learning process and the internship experience. This situation makes it difficult for students to write internship reports and to transform theoretical knowledge into practical skills.

4.3. Solutions for Improving Business Administration training toward Developing Students' Decision-Making Competency

Based on the analyzed limitations regarding the "mathematization" phenomenon and the lack of higher-order competency levels, this study proposes a synchronized reform system. These solutions are not isolated but revolve around three core pillars aimed at transitioning from a knowledge-transmission model to a Decision-Making Competency (DMC) development model.

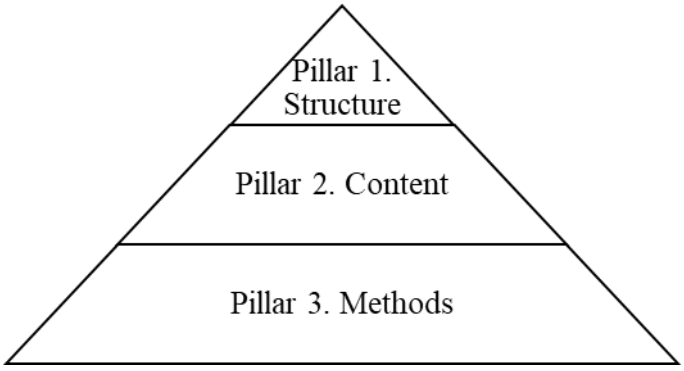

Figure 2: The Three-Pillar Model of Business Administration Training Reform

Source: Proposed by the author

This model establishes a comprehensive innovation roadmap from "hardware" (curriculum structure) to "software" (intellectual content) and "operational methods" (teaching pedagogy):

- Pillar 1 (Structure): Adjusting the curriculum towards integration. This involves reducing fragmented quantitative-heavy courses to create space for Decision Science and integrated business modules.

- Pillar 2 (Content): Innovating academic content. Shifting the focus from formula-solving to managerial insight and reasoning (Level 2), while updating knowledge on service management and digital transformation.

Pillar 3 (Method): Transforming teaching and assessment. Adopting Competency-Based Education (CBE) through experiential methods such as Case Studies and Simulations to cultivate strategic execution and accountability (Level 3).

4.3.1. Adjusting Curriculum Structure toward Integration and Competency Development

One of the most important reforms is to shift from fragmented course-based curriculum design to competency-based curriculum design. The program should be restructured to reduce fragmentation among small individual courses and increase the number of integrated learning modules.

Instead of maintaining a large number of 2–3 credit courses that merely introduce basic concepts, universities could reorganize them into larger modules that integrate the content of several related subjects, allowing students to approach knowledge through a coherent learning pathway.

Interdisciplinary modules such as *Integrated Business Analysis*, *Comprehensive Operations Management*, or *Marketing – Sales – Customer Experience* would help students develop the ability to address problems from multiple perspectives and better reflect real managerial decision-making contexts.

A competency-based approach also requires the curriculum to clearly reflect a developmental learning trajectory, moving from problem identification to analysis, information synthesis, evaluation of alternatives, and ultimately decision-making. Therefore, the curriculum structure should ensure logical progression among courses, enabling students to gradually improve their ability to handle increasingly complex managerial situations.

4.3.2. Updating Training Content to Reflect Service Orientation and Digital Transformation

The strong influence of traditional manufacturing models in the current curriculum calls for significant adjustments. As the economy increasingly shifts toward the service and trade sectors, training content should be expanded to include areas such as service management, service operations, service process design, customer experience management, and digital operations.

These are the domains in which most Business Administration graduates will work and therefore require practical decision-making competencies.

While traditional topics such as production planning, EOQ calculation, MRP, and production scheduling still have educational value, they should be placed within a broader context that includes management in service environments.

Such an approach helps students understand that modern business management is no longer limited to managing production lines, but increasingly involves managing experiences, flexible processes, customer relationships, and service touchpoints.

Moreover, integrating content related to digital transformation, integrated e-commerce operations, and customer data analytics would enhance the relevance of the curriculum and better respond to labor market demands.

4.3.3. Innovating Teaching Methods to Strengthen Decision-Making and Case-Based Learning

To address the current tendency toward excessive mathematization in teaching, an essential solution is to shift the focus from teaching technical calculations to developing decision-making capabilities.

Instead of providing students with standardized datasets and requiring them to solve exercises with a single correct answer, lecturers should introduce open-ended situations, incomplete datasets, and uncertain contexts, requiring students to evaluate options and select appropriate courses of action.

Encouraging students to explain their reasoning and evaluate the risks associated with their choices is one of the most effective ways to develop managerial thinking.

In addition, teaching approaches such as case studies, business simulations, role-playing, business games, and decision-oriented group assignments should be increasingly applied. These methods are particularly suitable for Business Administration education, as they allow students to experience decision-making processes rather than simply memorizing formulas.

When students are placed in the role of managers, they develop essential competencies such as analytical reasoning, evaluation of qualitative factors, communication skills, and teamwork abilities, all of which are fundamental in modern management practice.

4.3.4. Reforming Assessment Methods toward Evaluating Practical Competencies

Curriculum innovation cannot be successful if assessment methods remain focused primarily on computational exercises. Therefore, assessment should shift toward evaluating practical competencies, analytical ability, and decision-making skills.

Midterm and final examinations may incorporate real business cases, requiring students to analyze the situation, propose solutions, and justify their decisions. Assessment formats such as decision memos, presentations and debates, case analyses, and group projects allow for a more comprehensive evaluation of students' competencies.

Assessment should also be based on clear rubrics, focusing on criteria such as analytical ability, synthesis of information, logical reasoning, coherence of decisions, and feasibility of proposed solutions. In this way, assessment measures not only knowledge acquisition but also the competencies that the program aims to develop.

In line with recent international practices, competency-based education models increasingly emphasize assessment as the core mechanism for validating learning outcomes. For example, the

competency-based BBA program at University of Massachusetts Global (Massachusetts Global , n.d) evaluates students based on their demonstrated mastery of competencies rather than time spent in instruction. Students are required to provide evidence of their abilities through performance-based assessments, such as applied projects and real-world problem-solving tasks.

This approach highlights a fundamental shift from knowledge testing to competency validation, aligning assessment with real-world performance expectations. However, it also suggests that effective assessment reform should be accompanied by corresponding changes in curriculum design and teaching methods to ensure that students are adequately prepared to demonstrate higher-order competencies, particularly in interpretation and decision-making.

4.3.5. Reforming Project-Based Courses through Stronger Links with Real Enterprises

Another key solution is to redefine the role of project-based courses, which should ideally represent the most practice-oriented component of the curriculum.

To avoid projects becoming merely formula-based simulations, universities and lecturers should require students to work with real business problems, including conducting surveys, interviews, and collecting real data from enterprises.

When students work with real data—which is often unstructured, incomplete, and influenced by qualitative factors—they develop the adaptability and decision-making mindset required in real professional environments.

Enterprise-based projects not only strengthen professional skills, analytical abilities, and report-writing competencies, but also reduce the gap between academic learning and practical work, a problem frequently observed in current Business Administration education.

4.3.6. Strengthening University–Enterprise Collaboration and Experiential Learning

Collaboration with enterprises should be considered a continuous component of the curriculum, rather than being limited to the final internship period.

Activities such as professional seminars, thematic workshops, company visits, managerial shadowing programs, and career experience activities can help students identify real business problems as early as their first or second year.

Early exposure to enterprises enables students to better understand professional expectations, shape their competency development pathways, and increase their motivation for learning.

5. CONCLUSION AND FUTURE DEVELOPMENT

This study has systematically analyzed the current state of Business Administration education in Vietnam through three main dimensions: curriculum structure, training content, and teaching methods. The findings reveal a noticeable misalignment between the core objective of the discipline—developing students' decision-making competency—and the current organization and implementation of training programs.

The tendencies toward "mathematization" and "formula-driven learning" in many courses have reduced practical applicability and limited students' ability to transform theoretical knowledge into practical managerial actions after graduation.

Based on these findings, the study proposes a set of integrated reform solutions in three directions:

(1) restructuring the curriculum according to a competency-based approach, reducing fragmentation and increasing integration;

(2) updating training content to reflect the shift toward service- and trade-oriented economies and digital transformation; and

(3) innovating teaching and assessment methods by strengthening case analysis, simulations, and decision-making practices.

However, the study also has several limitations. The analysis is primarily conducted at a general level based on commonly used training programs and has not yet involved in-depth investigation at a specific university or direct surveys of lecturers, students, and enterprises.

Future research could adopt case-study approaches at particular institutions or evaluate the effectiveness of pilot curriculum innovations. Such studies would provide deeper empirical evidence to support the development of more effective and practical policies for improving Business Administration training.

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