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Developing a Service-Learning-Based Instructional Model for Teaching Scientific Socialism in Vietnamese Higher Education

Van An Le Nguyen[*+], **Ngoc Phuong Nguyen**
Ho Chi Minh City University of Technology and Engineering, Vietnam

[*]Corresponding author. Email: anlnv.ncs@hcmute.edu.vn
[+] PhD Student, Institute of Technical Education, Ho Chi Minh City University of Technology and Engineering

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ABSTRACT

This article develops a service-learning-based instructional model for teaching Scientific Socialism in Vietnamese higher education. It addresses a specific pedagogical problem: although Scientific Socialism requires students to interpret social issues through theoretical concepts, current teaching practices often remain lecture-centered and weakly connected to community-based experience. The study adopted a conceptual model development approach, drawing on integrative literature synthesis, curriculum analysis, model construction, and expert-informed refinement. The proposed model comprises four interrelated components: course-specific learning outcomes centered on the application of Scientific Socialism theory; principles for selecting community issues aligned with course content; a three-phase instructional process connecting theoretical orientation, guided community engagement, and structured reflection; and a multi-source assessment system using lecturer, peer, student, and community-partner evidence. The contribution of the study lies not in presenting service-learning as a new pedagogy, but in translating it into a discipline-sensitive instructional design for a theory-intensive political education course. The model should be treated as a pre-implementation design requiring empirical testing in subsequent studies.

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1. Introduction

The teaching of political theory courses in higher education has received increasing attention as universities seek to enhance students' engagement with social realities and strengthen the relevance of theoretical knowledge in rapidly changing contexts. Scientific Socialism is a foundational component of the political theory curriculum in Vietnamese higher education, yet instructional practices remain largely lecture-based, content-driven, and limited in opportunities for experiential learning. The difficulty is not only that students may perceive the course as abstract, but that lecture-centered instruction offers limited opportunities for them to use theoretical concepts to interpret concrete social conditions, social relations, and civic responsibilities. These challenges require an instructional design in which students are asked to use theoretical concepts to examine social issues, not merely to reproduce course content. Service-learning has been recognized as a pedagogical approach that links academic learning, community engagement, and reflection [1], [2]. Evidence syntheses, including meta-analyses and systematic reviews, have reported overall positive effects of service-learning on students' cognitive, personal-social, and civic-related outcomes in higher education [3]–[6].

The gap, therefore, is not the absence of service-learning as a general pedagogical idea. Rather, the problem lies in the limited articulation of a discipline-sensitive instructional model that specifies how the theoretical content of Scientific Socialism can be translated into community-based inquiry, guided reflection, and assessable learning evidence [7]–[9]. Without such a model, community engagement risks becoming an add-on activity, while theoretical learning remains detached from the social conditions it is expected to explain [7]. This study addresses that gap by developing a service-learning-based instructional model for Scientific Socialism that aligns course-specific learning outcomes, community issue selection, instructional phases, and assessment evidence [7], [9].

2. Materials and Methods

This study adopted a conceptual model development approach. Its purpose was to construct a pedagogically defensible instructional model for teaching Scientific Socialism through service-learning, rather than to evaluate the model's effectiveness through classroom implementation. The model-development process involved four procedures: integrative synthesis of literature on service-learning, experiential learning, competency-based education, and constructive alignment; analysis of the Scientific Socialism curriculum to identify course characteristics and learning outcomes; construction of the instructional model by aligning course content, community engagement, reflection, and assessment; and expert-informed refinement of the model and associated sample instruments. The literature was selected purposively for its conceptual relevance to the model rather than through a systematic-review protocol. Sources included peer-reviewed studies, scholarly books, curriculum documents, and domestic studies on political theory education and service-learning. The organization of the model-development process was informed by educational design research literature [10], [11].

In addition to theoretical construction, the study used an explicit process for designing sample assessment instruments associated with the instructional model. These instruments included a student survey on perceived learning and readiness for service-learning, an observation checklist for monitoring participation and collaboration, a reflective writing rubric, and a community-partner feedback form. Each instrument was developed through item mapping based on the course-specific competency framework and then revised through expert feedback from lecturers in political theory education and specialists in service-learning. The content relevance and clarity of the sample instruments were preliminarily reviewed through expert feedback. Although empirical testing such as reliability coefficients or factor analysis was not conducted at this stage, the instruments were designed to support later implementation and should be adapted to institutional conditions, student groups, and community-partner arrangements.

Because the research involved the design of instructional materials intended for later use with university students and community partners, ethical considerations were addressed at the model development stage. No students or community partners were recruited for empirical data collection during the conceptual model-development phase. Accordingly, no classroom-based learning outcome data or community-partner datasets were generated. Procedures for later implementation, including informed consent, anonymity in survey responses, voluntary participation, and secure storage of documents, were prepared in alignment with accepted ethical standards in educational research. The methodological process described above provides a foundation for future classroom implementation and empirical testing of the instructional model.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1. Design principles and overview of the instructional model

The proposed model was designed from the premise that teaching Scientific Socialism through service-learning requires more than adding community activities to an existing lecture-based course. Because Scientific Socialism is a theory-intensive political education course, community engagement must be organized in ways that help students use course concepts to interpret concrete social issues, rather than merely participate in social activities. The model therefore rests on four design principles.

(i) *The model is discipline-anchored.* Community-based tasks are selected only when they can be linked to central course themes, such as social structure, social equality, civic responsibility, national development, and the relationship between individual roles and collective life. This principle protects the theoretical integrity of the course and prevents service-learning from becoming an extracurricular extension.

(ii) *The model is experience-mediated*. Service-learning is used as a pedagogical structure that connects academic learning, community engagement, and reflection [1], [2]. In this model, experience is not treated as learning by itself. It becomes educational when students are guided

to observe social conditions, question initial assumptions, and relate community-based evidence to relevant theoretical concepts [1], [9].

(iii) *The model is outcome-aligned*. Learning outcomes, community tasks, reflection prompts, and assessment evidence are designed to support the same intended learning: students' capacity to apply Scientific Socialism theory to interpret and respond to social issues. This principle follows the logic of constructive alignment, in which objectives, learning activities, and assessment must be coherently connected [7].

(iv) *The model is context-sensitive*. It is designed for implementation within existing semester-based course structures in Vietnamese higher education, rather than requiring radical curricular restructuring. For this reason, the model combines theoretical orientation, guided community engagement, and structured reflection into a phased instructional process that can be adapted to different institutional conditions and community partnerships.

Taken together, these principles define the model as a course-sensitive instructional design rather than a general application of service-learning. The model links disciplinary content, community issue selection, instructional phases, and assessment evidence into a coherent structure for teaching Scientific Socialism through service-learning. Figure 1 presents the overall structure of the proposed model.

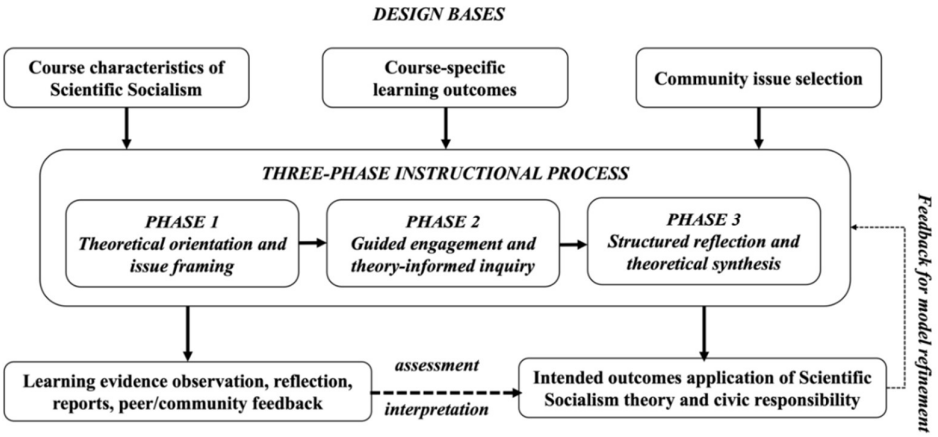


Figure 1. *Service-learning-based instructional model for teaching Scientific Socialism.*

3.2. Competency framework for teaching Scientific Socialism through service-learning

The competency framework underpinning the instructional model was designed to reflect the disciplinary purpose of Scientific Socialism rather than a generic set of service-learning outcomes. Cognitive, social, and civic dimensions are relevant, but they are organized around one central outcome: students' capacity to apply Scientific Socialism theory to interpret and respond to social issues. This orientation is consistent with constructive alignment because the intended competency, learning tasks, reflection prompts, and assessment evidence are designed to support the same learning claim [7].

The competency framework in Table 1 specifies the course-specific learning outcomes that guide the instructional model. Rather than presenting generic service-learning outcomes, the framework identifies the forms of learning evidence through which students' capacity to apply Scientific Socialism theory can be observed and assessed.

As shown in Table 1, the competency framework is organized around four interrelated components: conceptual-theoretical understanding, theory-informed social interpretation, reflective socio-political judgment, and civic-oriented responsibility. The first two components protect the theoretical substance of the course, while the latter two connect theoretical interpretation with reflective judgment and responsible civic orientation. This framework also prevents service-learning from being assessed merely through participation or project completion. What matters is not simply whether students engage with a community, but whether they can use course concepts to make sense of social conditions and justify responsible responses.

Table 1. *Course-specific competency framework for teaching Scientific Socialism through service-learning.*

Component	Role in Scientific Socialism	Observable learning evidence
Conceptual-theoretical understanding	Students understand core concepts, principles, and analytical categories of Scientific Socialism as the disciplinary basis for interpretation.	Accurate explanation of concepts; appropriate use of terminology; distinction among key theoretical ideas.
Theory-informed social interpretation	Students use Scientific Socialism theory to identify and explain concrete social issues rather than merely describe community experience.	Connection between course themes and community situations; use of theoretical concepts to frame social problems.
Reflective socio-political judgment	Students examine the conditions, limits, assumptions, and social implications involved in applying theory to practice.	Reasoned comparison between theoretical perspectives and observed evidence; recognition of complexity and avoidance of slogan-like interpretation.
Civic-oriented responsibility	Students orient responses or actions in ways consistent with civic responsibility, ethical engagement, and community conditions.	Feasible proposals, responsible communication, and consideration of community-partner needs and constraints.

3.3. The three-phase instructional model

Building on the competency framework, the proposed instructional model is organized into three phases that connect academic learning with community engagement. The structure follows the logic of experiential learning, in which experience becomes educational when it is connected to reflection, conceptualization, and further action [1], [12].

Phase 1: Theoretical orientation and community issue framing

The first phase establishes students' theoretical grounding in Scientific Socialism and guides them to frame a community-related issue that can be interpreted through course concepts. Core concepts, principles, and analytical perspectives are introduced through lectures, guided discussions, and analysis of contemporary social phenomena. The aim is to prepare students for engagement without reducing the course to general social participation.

Phase 2: Guided community engagement and theory-informed inquiry

The second phase forms the experiential core of the model. Students participate in structured service-learning activities developed in collaboration with community partners. These activities may include field inquiry, group-based projects, or support for local initiatives aligned with course themes. The lecturer's role shifts from knowledge transmission to academic facilitation, ensuring that community activities remain connected to intended learning outcomes [1], [2].

Phase 3: Structured reflection and theoretical synthesis

The final phase requires students to analyze their community experiences through relevant concepts of Scientific Socialism. Students engage in reflective writing, group discussion, and presentation to examine assumptions, synthesize evidence, and articulate what their experience reveals about the theoretical issues studied in the course.

The three-phase instructional process requires alignment among design focus, student work, assessment evidence, and targeted competencies. Table 2 presents this alignment by showing how each instructional phase connects course concepts, community-based engagement, learning evidence, and competency development.

As shown in Table 2, each phase of the instructional model is linked to a specific design focus, a corresponding form of student work, and assessment evidence aligned with targeted competencies. Phase 1 emphasizes issue framing and conceptual-theoretical understanding; Phase 2 focuses on guided community engagement and theory-informed inquiry; and Phase 3 supports structured reflection, theoretical synthesis, and civic-oriented responsibility. This alignment helps ensure that community engagement is not treated as a separate activity but is integrated into the instructional logic of the course.

Table 2. *Alignment among instructional phases, learning activities, assessment evidence, and targeted competencies.*

Phase	Design focus	Student work	Assessment evidence and competency focus
1	Link core concepts and course themes to a community-related issue.	Analyze course themes, frame a social issue, and prepare for guided engagement.	Issue-framing note, short analytical task, and initial reflection; conceptual-theoretical understanding and theory-informed social interpretation.
2	Use Scientific Socialism concepts to observe and interpret community conditions.	Conduct field inquiry or participate in a community-based task while documenting evidence.	Observation checklist, progress report, peer feedback, and partner feedback; theory-informed social interpretation and civic-oriented responsibility.
3	Reconstruct understanding through reflection, evidence, and theoretical synthesis.	Write reflective analysis, present findings, and revise initial assumptions.	Reflective essay, project report, and presentation rubric; reflective socio-political judgment and civic-oriented responsibility.

3.4. System of learning activities and assessment

The assessment system is designed to support the instructional logic of the model, not to function as a validated measurement scale at this stage. Across the three phases, assessment collects evidence from more than one perspective: lecturer assessment, peer feedback, student reflection, and community-partner comments. This multi-source design helps examine different aspects of learning, including theoretical understanding, participation in community-based inquiry, quality of reflection, and civic-oriented responsibility.

To support the assessment system, the model includes a set of sample instruments that can be adapted for later classroom implementation. Table 3 presents these instruments, their purposes, sample evidence, and links to the competency framework.

Table 3. *Sample instruments associated with the instructional model.*

Instrument	Purpose	Sample evidence	Link to competency
Student survey	Capture students' perceived learning, readiness for service-learning, and self-reported development.	Items on theory application, reflection, collaboration, and civic responsibility. Examples: self-rated ability to connect course concepts with community issues	Theory-informed social interpretation; reflective socio-political judgment; civic-oriented responsibility (self-reported indicators).
Observation checklist	Record participation, collaboration, communication, and responsible engagement during learning activities.	Lecturer notes on group work, interaction, task completion, and engagement quality.	Civic-oriented responsibility (observed participation and engagement).
Reflective writing rubric	Assess the quality of theory-experience connection and reflective judgment.	Reflective essay or project report evaluated by analytic criteria. Examples: criteria for theoretical integration, evidence use, and reflective judgment.	Reflective socio-political judgment and theory-informed social interpretation.
Community-partner feedback form	Gather partner feedback on relevance, professionalism, and community contribution.	Partner comments and ratings on student engagement and usefulness of activities. Examples: relevance, professionalism, responsiveness to community needs.	Civic-oriented responsibility.

As presented in Table 3, the assessment system draws on multiple instruments rather than relying solely on the final project report. The student survey captures perceived learning and readiness for service-learning; the observation checklist records participation and collaboration; the reflective writing rubric assesses the quality of theory-experience connection; and the community-partner feedback form gathers evidence of relevance, professionalism, and community contribution. Together, these instruments help lecturers collect evidence from different perspectives and align assessment with the intended competencies of the model.

In Phase 1, short analytical tasks, concept explanations, or issue-framing notes are used to examine whether students can use disciplinary concepts to frame social problems. In Phase 2, observation, peer feedback, progress reporting, and partner comments help capture participation and inquiry processes rather than only final products. In Phase 3, reflective essays, project reports, and presentations are evaluated through analytic criteria emphasizing theoretical integration, quality of judgment, coherence of argumentation, and civic-oriented responsibility.

This design is consistent with the logic of authentic assessment, which evaluates students' ability to use knowledge, skills, and attitudes in tasks resembling real-world situations [13]. At the same time, the assessment tools should be treated as sample instruments for future implementation. Their clarity, relevance, reliability, and usability require further empirical examination before they can support formal assessment claims.

3.5. Discussion: contributions, alignment, and implications

The contribution of this study lies in specifying how service-learning can be organized as a course-sensitive instructional design for Scientific Socialism. The model does not claim that service-learning, constructive alignment, or competency-based education is new. Its contribution is more specific: it connects disciplinary content, community issue selection, guided engagement, structured reflection, and multi-source assessment within one instructional design for a theory-intensive political education course.

Theoretically, the model reframes service-learning design from a generic sequence of community participation and reflection into a course-anchored design problem. For Scientific Socialism, the central design question is not how to increase student activity, but how to make theoretical interpretation visible through community-based inquiry and structured reflection. Pedagogically, the model gives lecturers a set of design decisions: which course concepts can be connected to community issues, what forms of engagement are educationally justifiable, what reflection prompts are needed, and what evidence can support judgments about students' application of theory.

The model also responds to a methodological problem in service-learning research. Evidence syntheses suggest that service-learning and related community-engaged learning practices can support academic, social, and civic outcomes in higher education [3]–[6]. Yet such findings do not automatically indicate how a particular course should be designed. A political theory course requires a sharper instructional logic: students must not only participate in community activities but also use theoretical concepts to interpret social issues and justify responsible responses.

The model should therefore not be read as a simple transfer of service-learning into an existing political theory course. Its feasibility depends on conditions that are often underestimated. Community-based tasks must be selected because they illuminate course concepts, not merely because they provide opportunities for social participation. Lecturers need time and institutional support to coordinate partners, prepare students for ethical engagement, and assess evidence from multiple sources. Community partners should also be treated as co-educators rather than passive sites for student practice; their needs, constraints, and feedback should shape the learning tasks [14]. Scalability is another concern. A model that is manageable in one class or with one partner may require adjustment when applied to larger cohorts, different institutional cultures, or communities with limited resources.

These constraints define the conditions under which the model can be responsibly implemented and empirically tested. Future studies should examine not only student outcomes but also the usability of the instructional phases, the quality of community partnerships, the workload required from lecturers and students, and the reliability of the proposed assessment tools.

4. Conclusions

This study developed a service-learning-based instructional model for teaching Scientific Socialism in Vietnamese higher education. The model addresses a specific pedagogical problem: how a theory-intensive political education course can help students use disciplinary concepts to interpret social issues and orient responsible civic action. The main outcome is a pre-implementation instructional design comprising four interconnected elements: course-specific competencies, principles for community-issue selection, a three-phase instructional process, and a multi-source assessment system.

The contribution of the study lies in specifying how service-learning can be organized for Scientific Socialism through explicit links among disciplinary content, community issue selection, guided engagement, structured reflection, and assessment evidence. The study remains limited because the model has not yet been tested through classroom implementation. Future research should examine student learning evidence, community-partner feedback, implementation conditions, and reliability analysis of the proposed assessment tools.

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Conflict of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

Data Availability Statement

No empirical dataset was generated or analyzed in this conceptual model development study. Sample instruments and model-development materials are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

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Van An Le Nguyen received the bachelor's degree in Political Education from Ho Chi Minh City University of Education, Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam, in 2015, and the master's degree in Scientific Socialism from the University of Social Sciences and Humanities, Vietnam National University Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam, in 2017. The author is currently a PhD student in Education at Ho Chi Minh City University of Technology and Engineering, Vietnam. Since 2017, the author has worked as a lecturer in the Faculty of Political Education at Ho Chi Minh City University of Education, Vietnam. The professional activities include teaching political theory courses, curriculum development, and educational research. The research interests include service-learning, instructional design, political theory education, competency-based education, civic learning, and digital transformation in education.

Email: anlnv.ncs@hcmute.edu.vn. ORCID: https://orcid.org/0009-0004-5144-5402.

Ngoc Phuong Nguyen received a bachelor's degree in Automotive Engineering from Ho Chi Minh City University of Technology and Engineering, Vietnam, in 1987. He subsequently earned a master's degree in Educational Management in 2012 and a Ph.D. in Educational Management in 2017 from Vinh University, Vietnam. The author is currently a lecturer at the Institute of Technical Education, Ho Chi Minh City University of Technology and Engineering, Vietnam. The research interests include educational management, vocational and technical education, competency-based education, e-learning, and digital transformation in education.

Email: nnphuong@hcmute.edu.vn. ORCID: https://orcid.org/0009-0002-7076-2740