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A TNE Game-Changer: From Filling Supply Constraints to Offering Skills Experiences in Vietnam

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Introduction

Transnational education (TNE) can be briefly defined as ‘the mobility of higher education programmes and institutions/providers across international borders’ (Knight and Liu 2017). It is understood in this chapter as in-country international higher education (HE) provision leading to degree and/or diploma awards from institutions based outside Vietnam. The aim of this chapter is to explore modes of TNE in Vietnam and discuss how beneficial they are to the host country with respect to widening participation and skills development.

Importing TNE has offered many developing Asian countries, including Vietnam, a valuable opportunity to expand access to the knowledge and qualifications needed for capacity building in HE and to workforce skills development. Being aware of the opportunity, the Vietnamese government strongly believes in academic studies, skills development, and

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the social and cultural benefits of TNE to domestic HE and, in this regard, is well-placed to seek international partners to steer TNE toward cultivating the workforce needed for the nation's productivity and comparative advantage in global markets.

Since the 1990s, TNE collaborations with various partnership models were approved exclusively for partnership with the public sector to provide joint training programmes (JTPs). Since the 2000s, the private sector has provided foreign programmes in the form of foreign direct investment (FDI) on international branch campuses (IBCs), and recently on 'international standard universities' (ISUs) which include newly established government-owned universities, public or private universities with FDI, and private for-profit corporate universities providing accredited foreign programmes. Such collaborations and establishments rely heavily on foreign curricula but to some extent, they also rest on how the programme fits the market skills in demand.

This chapter, based on Vincent-Lancrin's (2007) conceptual framework of capacity building in HE through TNE, demonstrates TNE's benefits to domestic HE and its wider benefits to workforce development for Vietnam. It discusses various modes of TNE collaboration and the extent to which TNE is making an impact in the domestic sector in addition to contributing to upskilling the workforce in support of social and economic development in Vietnam.

The discussion of TNE in Vietnam is contextualised within the higher education sector and recent shifts in TNE policy. It describes TNE partnership models and delivery modes in the form of JTPs, IBCs and ISUs. Data are presented on JTPs, numbers in each field, total enrolments, and number of graduates in order to discuss the effectiveness of TNE in providing access to skills experiences. The chapter concludes with remarks on the need for further research on TNE curriculum and pedagogy based on recently published outcomes of graduate employability in Vietnam and the implications for TNE and the future of Vietnam.

Methodology

This chapter presents part of the findings of PhD research conducted from 2011 to 2014 at the School of Global, Urban & Social Studies, RMIT University, entitled ‘The Contribution of Cross-Border Higher Education to Human Resource Development in Ho Chi Minh City’ (Pham 2014). It also draws on postdoctoral research to 2019. The research explored the current state of TNE in Vietnam to examine its capability in providing access to international qualifications, knowledge and skills required for employability and success in a global work setting.

Data were sourced from qualitative research including document analysis and semi-structured interviews (Denzin and Lincoln 2008). Document analysis used intergovernmental and governmental sources supplemented with print media updates including statistics of Vietnam HE, a compilation of data from the latest unpublished report on the current state of foreign investment and joint training education conducted by the Ministry of Education and Training (MOET), the International Co-operation Department (ICD) and the latest published list of JTPs approved by MOET. These were verified through publicly available government documents and semi-structured interviews with senior government education officials.

Higher Education and Recent Shifts of TNE Policy in Vietnam

The Vietnamese higher education sector is shifting focus from increasing supply to enhanced quality (Austrade 2018, 2019). The sector has made extraordinary progress in the numbers of HE institutions and student enrolments since 1990 (Le and Hayden 2017; Tran and Marginson 2015; Dao and Hayden 2015; Harman et al. 2010). In 2019 there are 422 universities and colleges with more than 2.2 million students (MOET 2019a). The number of universities, students and lecturers in the 2017–18 academic year is provided in Table 6.1 below.

Table 6.1 Number of institutions, students and lecturers in the Vietnamese HE system

	Academic Year 2017–2018		
	Public	Private	Total
No. of universities	170	65	235
No. of students	1,439,495	267,530	1,707,025
No. of graduates	281,965	38,613	320,578
No. of lecturers	59,232	15,759	74,991

Source: MOET (2019a)

Despite such impressive progress, ‘Vietnamese HE institutions fail to meet the demand for quality outputs with the necessary skills and competencies required by industry’ (Austrade 2019, p. 7). According to Ousmane Dione, World Bank Country Director for Vietnam, this is because different skill sets and competencies are required to strengthen access to, and the quality of, higher education in Vietnam. The country needs better labour productivity and further shifts of the workforce to more productive sectors (World Bank 2017).

By addressing the requirements of skills and competencies, the Vietnamese government has committed to a range of changes in TNE policy to facilitate international HE partnerships to strengthen capacity in the domestic sector. Relevant to TNE is the unpublished ‘National Strategy of Higher Education Internationalisation 2025’ of November 2017 (MOET 2017) and ‘Decree 86/2018/ND-CP on Foreign Cooperation and Investment in Education’ of June 2018 (Vietnam Government 2018). The Strategy advocates strengthening key areas such as internationalisation of curriculum, delivering quality JTPs, international accreditation and rankings, student exchange, research collaboration and translation and internationalisation of vocational and school sectors.

Decree 86, a sub-set of HE Law, provides TNE definitions and terms which are relevant to various practices of established and prospective TNE co-operation, investment and/or delivery. TNE collaborations regulated by Decree 86 include ‘joint training’ in the form of JTPs and new ‘HE establishments’. ‘Joint training’ refers to TNE co-operation with foreign partners to deliver JTPs at tertiary level, including Bachelors, Masters

and PhD leading to the issuance of degrees or certificates without establishing a legal entity; 'HE establishments' refer to HE institutions invested with foreign sources of capital, either through 100 per cent FDI or joint ventures between foreign and domestic investors leading to forming IBCs or ISUs in Vietnam (Vietnam Government 2018).

Imported Capacity

Countries have various motivations for importing TNE. Importers of educational services are driven by the need to build and improve their higher education (Altbach and Knight 2007; OECD 2006; Ziguras 2011). TNE has been an increasingly important and integral part of HE internationalisation (Huang 2007) which can supplement domestic educational capacity building and provision more rapidly than if the country were relying on its own human resources. Vincent-Lancrin (2007) suggests that TNE contributes significantly to the growth of quantity, quality and relevance of the domestic sector, and the best way to improve quality and relevance is through internationalising the domestic sector. He argues that TNE is able to link importing countries with cutting-edge knowledge through the provision of programmes and in this way assists in training an effective workforce and high-quality faculty for the domestic sector. He demonstrates the TNE impact through its ability to provide entry to quality courses and research facilities to allow teachers and students access to updated knowledge, enhanced skills and international experience.

Chapman (2009) looks at the possibilities arising from host country HE institutions in seeking help and collaboration from international partners. His argument is based on the need for the expansion of domestic student access to be balanced with quality and the relevance of imported programmes to national and/or regional labour market needs. He notes that provision and knowledge-sharing through TNE collaborations is drawn from different sources such as the host country's own experience, other countries in the region and wider international experience. The attention, in this regard, should therefore be put on the agenda for

higher education reform and capacity development in each country where TNE programmes are delivered.

Strengthening the capacity of domestic HE and enhancing TNE collaborations are significant challenges. While domestic education programmes have generally not covered the range of skills needed (Wilmoth 2004), the capacity of domestic HE and international partnerships in filling this gap seems not to have developed sufficiently in either scale or scope. Lynham and Cunningham (2006, p. 127) present eight desirable attributes for national skills development, including that it be ‘nationally purposeful, ... formulated, practiced and studied for the explicit reason of improving the economic, political and socio-cultural well-being of a specific nation and its citizens’. These attributes set the needs of TNE as imported capacity at national level, not only on capacity building in HE only.

Vincent-Lancrin (2007, p. 53) states that TNE can indeed be ‘a helpful capacity development tool’ since foreign capacity, and the knowledge-sharing it enables, allows for the strengthening and development of local capacity. But little data exist to evaluate the effectiveness of TNE as an educational development tool. He argues that addressing TNE challenges and opportunities will typically lead to reconsidering HE policies for both the domestic and foreign sector. He also highlights the importance of identifying the fields of, and appropriate local policy and/or strategies for, TNE programmes to be imported and the flexibility needed for TNE to engage and facilitate capacity development at multiple levels.

Multi-Level Capacity Building

Vincent-Lancrin (2007) also places the potential of TNE into a theoretical framework for multi-level capacity building. Drawing on Bolger (May 2000), he discusses five levels of capacity: individual, organisational, sectoral, social and global. He draws attention to the implications of the improvement of domestic HE institutions at organisational level, explains how capacity would enhance the consistency of sector policies and promote better co-ordination between organisations at sectoral level, and demonstrates the ability for capacity-building to enhance a country’s

participation in, and utilisation of, international organisations, treaties and agreements. TNE, as such, can help a country to expand its higher education system more rapidly at the societal level and it implies the ability to improve practices at sectoral levels.

The impact of TNE in host countries in the forms of programme and provider mobility has been discussed (Vincent-Lancrin 2007; Knight 2010, 2011, 2013). But little research has been conducted on the ways in which the fields and levels of TNE provision contribute to filling the skill gaps in the local workforce. While some countries, including Vietnam, have imported TNE provision for decades, there has not been much done to evaluate the impact of this foreign provision in each country from the perspective of the importer. The strategy of capacity building through TNE would arguably be ineffective if TNE programmes were of low quality or if they were imported as a system wholly separate from the domestic education network. At best, they would likely leave the domestic system unimproved; at worst, they would have a negative effect (Vincent-Lancrin 2008).

Filling Supply Constraints

TNE, as earlier suggested, supports the quantity, quality and relevance of HE in host countries (Vincent-Lancrin 2007) and this is the case in Vietnam. Regarding quantity, TNE data from MOET show that TNE does in fact fill supply constraints in the fields and levels in which there is currently a shortage in the domestic sector. Such support is made possible through the provision of JTPs and other modes of TNE collaboration such as IBCs and ISUs.

Statistics from another unpublished MOET report in June 2019 (MOET 2019b) note 550 JTPs approved to date: 316 by MOET and 234 by 17 self-governing universities (see Table 6.2). TNE collaboration in other modes is also documented with two well-known IBCs, RMIT International University and British University Vietnam; three ISUs with FDI including Fulbright University Vietnam, the American University in Vietnam and the University of Tokyo Medical University; four government-owned joint ISUs, including Vietnam-German University,

Table 6.2 Overview of JTPs in 2019

Approved by MOET	316
Approved by eligible self-governing universities	234
Active	358
Discontinued	192
Fully in-country delivery	345
English as language of instruction	454
Foreign awards issuance	513
Total JTPs	550

Source: MOET (2019b)

Vietnam-France University, Vietnam-Japan University, Vietnam-UK Institute for Research and Executive Education; one co-campus of Western Sydney University and one Joint-Centre of Technology and Innovation Research of the University of Technology Sydney.

Joint Training Programmes

As a means to fill supply constraints, TNE supports the quantity of domestic HE in various ways. JTPs, with affordable fees, help to minimise unequal access to high-fee foreign programmes at IBCs and, in this way, support domestic institutions in widening access to international education. IBCs and ISUs allow students who can afford high fees to be more fully exposed to the international education experiences. This frees up public resources and facilities for less advantaged students.

TNE data show a significant dip in the number of JTPs from 2015 to 2017, followed by an even larger increase from 2017 to 2019 (see Table 6.3).

According to MOET, the decline after 2015 was due to difficulties in student recruitment, which led to 192 JTPs being fully discontinued. Another 59 JTPs have suspended new recruitment.

The top five TNE providing countries of JTPs in 2017 were France, USA, UK, Australia and China. The first three countries contribute to 86, 84 and 85 JTPs, while Australia and China have 49 and 34 respectively. The numbers of foreign institutions providing JTPs in Vietnam in 2017 are presented in Fig. 6.1.

Table 6.3 Joint training programmes (JTPs) in recent years

	2015	2017	June 2019
Foreign Countries	32	29	33
Foreign Institutions	255	211	258
Vietnamese Institutions	88	84	85
Bachelor Programmes	255	134	255
Master Programmes	200	122	229
Doctorate Programmes	12	4	13
Diploma Programmes	N/A	N/A	23
Certificates	N/A	N/A	11
Unknown	N/A	N/A	19
Total JTPs	467	260	550

Source: MOET (2019b, c)

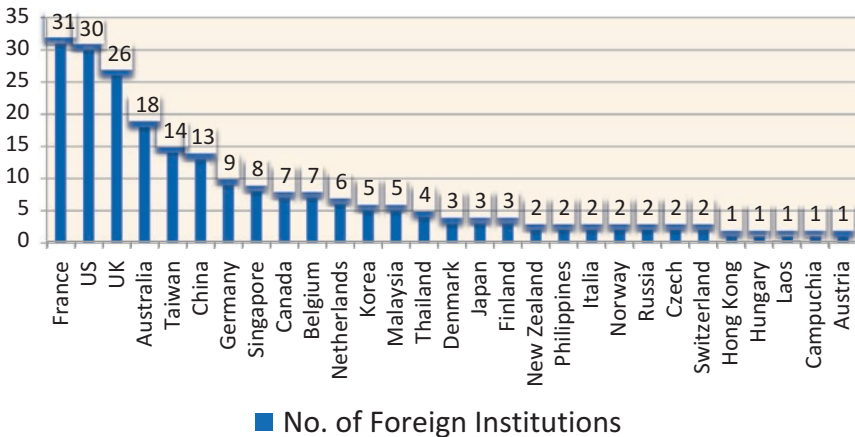


Fig. 6.1 Total foreign countries and foreign institutions in 2017. (Source: MOET 2019b)

The number of Vietnamese institutions acting as partners in JTPs is in Fig. 6.2. It also shows that the USA and UK had 25 and 22 local partner institutions in 2017; France and Australia each had 18 Vietnamese partner institutions.

Overall, TNE import through JTPs, IBCs and ISUs has been making positive impacts on HE quantity in Vietnam. The number of JTPs can fluctuate but enrolments more smoothly increase over time. Total TNE enrolments in JTPs, active enrolments and graduates are presented in Table 6.4.

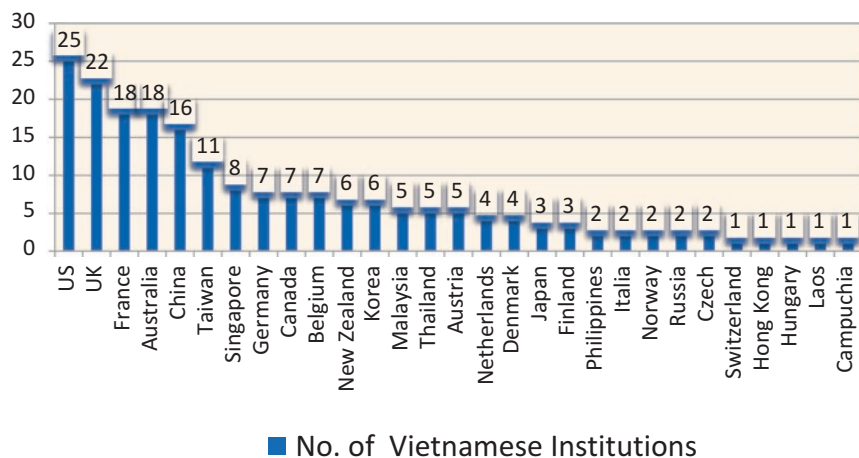


Fig. 6.2 Total foreign countries and Vietnamese institutions. (Source: MOET 2019b)

Table 6.4 JTP enrolments by programme levels

Levels	Total enrolments		Active enrolments		Total graduates	
	2015	2019	2015	2019	2015	2019
Bachelor	39,520	49,100	24,827	25,527	14,104	20,484
Master	30,649	40,030	7,146	11,664	22,931	28,030
PhD	441	522	239	311	2	62
Total	70,610	89,652	32,212	37,502	37,073	48,576

Source: MOET (2019b)

With such variety and flexibility in joint training provision, JTPs widen the participation in international education for the non-mobile in-country student cohort. These programmes also consistently support the Vietnamese government strategy of international integration in the HE sector (Communist Party Central Committee 2002, 2013). Although HE participation in Vietnam has been among the lowest in the East Asian region (MOET 2019c), the number of 89,652 students enrolled into 550 JTPs to date (as presented on Tables 6.3 and 6.4) confirms TNE ability to contribute to the amount, quality and relevance of domestic HE capacity.

Offering Skills Experiences

Vincent-Lancrin (2007) also emphasises the importance of identifying the fields of TNE programmes. JTP data show TNE provision in various fields, reflecting TNE support to domestic HE in providing access to knowledge and practice in the fields. JTPs by disciplinary fields, from 2015 to 2019, are presented in Table 6.5.

JTP enrolment data indicate the ability of TNE to offer skills experiences in the most popular JTP fields, such as economics, business, management, engineering and technology, and thereby support the relevance of knowledge in existing HE capacities of local partner institutions. However, concerns remain over the ability of TNE to create a quality transformation in the fields in which highly qualified and skilled people are required for social welfare (e.g., social sciences and humanities) and for the competitiveness of exports in agriculture, forestry and fisheries.

Vietnam is among the top five exporters of seafood, tea, cashew nuts, black pepper, rubber and cassava and the second-largest exporter of rice and coffee globally. Agriculture accounts for 20% of Vietnam's exports (PwC 2017) and there is an extreme shortage of labour for this (Austrade 2014). When 44 per cent of JTPs are in Economics, Business and Management and only two per cent in Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries, there is a large gap in provision. This gap may adversely impact on the ability of TNE to enhance the quality and relevance of the local HE system.

Table 6.5 JTPs by disciplinary fields

Fields	2015	2017	2019
Economics, Business and Management	280	115	324
Engineering & Technology	80	40	90
Social Sciences & Humanities	40	32	44
Medical & Pharmaceutical	6	9	14
Agricultures, Forestry and Fisheries	12	2	6
Others	49	62	53
Unknown	N/A	N/A	19
Total JTPs	467	260	550

Source: MOET (2019b, c)

Conclusions

Importing TNE can transfer knowledge to supplement existing capacities through JTPs, IBCs and ISUs but it is market-driven and affordable for wealthier students. JTPs, however, expand access to knowledge and skills experiences in fields and at levels which are highly sourced in the local labour market (Austrade 2019). While TNE is with the capability of capacity building in HE for developing countries (Vincent-Lancrin 2007; Ziguras 2008; Ziguras and McBurnie 2011), initiatives with focus on the underrepresented fields and levels are highly recommended for TNE development in the years to come. With significant presence of TNE in Vietnam (McNamara and Knight 2014) and positive employability of Vietnamese TNE graduates from employers' perspectives (Pham 2018). Such import of JTPs suggests the implications for sustainable growth of TNE at sectoral and societal levels.

At the sectoral level, since a very large proportion of TNE students doing economics, business and management seek employability with locally based multinational employers, government incentives should be considered to support TNE collaboration and institutions to provide in the fields which potentially contribute more to key industries but less to income generation for students to eliminate the imbalance on enrolments and, in this way, encourage both foreign and local institutions to invest in providing programmes in these fields.

At the societal level, while students still pay high amounts for their enrolment into JTPs, IBCs or ISUs and usually enrol into the fields with the potential of high return of investment, local talent development should be considered in the fields and at the levels where talents are scarce and in high demand to make JTPs affordable to most students and, as such, ensure the workforce remains competitive.

With recent shifts in TNE policy and current quantity profiles of JTPs, such suggested reforms on the allocation of TNE, together with government incentives, will pave the way for TNE providers to lift their provision towards offering the skills experience which is necessary for the local workforce and better address the skill demands and consumer preferences. Given that the Government of Vietnam is focused on maintaining economic growth to ensure that Vietnam successfully transitions from

middle-income status to a high-income economy, and with a greater need for international education in terms of facility, educators, curriculum and access to global knowledge and networks (Austrade 2018, 2019), further research is suggested on TNE curriculum and pedagogy (Knight and Liu 2017) including internships for developing employability skills (Bilsland et al. 2014) in a host country such as Vietnam.

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