



INTERNATIONAL AND DEVELOPMENT EDUCATION

# Higher Education in Market-Oriented Socialist Vietnam

New Players, Discourses,  
and Practices

*Edited by*  
Phan Le Ha · Doan Ba Ngoc

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# International and Development Education

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Editors

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## SERIES EDITORS INTRODUCTION

We are pleased to introduce another volume in the Palgrave Macmillan International and Development Education book series. In conceptualizing this series we took into account the extraordinary increase in the scope and depth of research on education in a global and international context. The range of topics and issues being addressed by scholars worldwide is enormous and clearly reflects the growing expansion and quality of research being conducted on comparative, international, and development education (CIDE) topics. Our goal is to cast a wide net for the most innovative and novel manuscripts, both single-authored and edited volumes, without constraints as to the level of education, geographical region, or methodology (whether disciplinary or interdisciplinary). In the process, we have also developed two subseries as part of the main series: one is cosponsored by the East-West Center in Honolulu, Hawai'i, drawing from their distinguished programs, the Professional Development Program and the Asia Pacific Higher Education Research Partnership (APHERP); and the other is a publication partnership with the Higher Education Special Interest Group of the Comparative and International Education Society that highlights trends and themes on international higher education.

The issues that will be highlighted in this series are those focused on capacity, access, and equity, three interrelated topics that are central to



educational transformation as it appears today around the world. There are many paradoxes and asymmetries surrounding these issues, which include problems of both excess capacity and deficits, wide access to facilities as well as severe restrictions, and all the complexities that are included in the equity debate. Closely related to this critical triumvirate is the overarching concern with quality assurance, accountability, and assessment. As educational systems have expanded, so have the needs and demands for quality assessment, with implications for accreditation and accountability. Intergroup relations, multiculturalism, gender, health, and technology issues comprise another cluster of opportunities and challenges facing most educational systems in differential ways when one looks at the disruptive changes that regularly occur in educational systems in an international context. Diversified notions of the structure of knowledge and curriculum development occupy another important niche in educational change at both the pre-tertiary and tertiary levels. Finally, how systems are managed and governed are key policy issues for educational policymakers worldwide. These and other key elements of the education and social change environment have guided this series and have been reflected in the books that have already appeared and those that will appear in the future. We welcome proposals on these and other topics from as wide a range of scholars and practitioners as possible. We believe that the world of educational change is dynamic, and our goal is to reflect the very best work being done in these and other areas. This volume meets the standards and goals of this series and we are proud to add it to our list of publications.

W. James Jacob  
Collaborative Brain Trust

Deane E. Neubauer  
University of Hawai'i at Mānoa and East-West Center

*This book is dedicated to Dr. Doan Ba Ngoc and his family.*



## IN MEMORY OF DR. DOAN BA NGOC

Working on this book will keep me stronger and will help me win over my cancer. My brain needs stimulation and positive energy, and this book gives my brain the very nutrients it needs. I want to divert my mind to this meaningful endeavour. I want it to absorb me and I am enjoying it. It's joyful every morning waking up knowing that I can still read and write and think. I've made a lot of notes and I want to bring my thoughts together to write the Introduction chapter with you as the book is taking a clearer shape. (Dr. Doan said to me in a Skype conversation in 2019)

When this book is published, one of its co-editors, Dr. Doan Ba Ngoc, is no longer physically here with us to hold the book in his hands as he had been wholeheartedly longing for. Dr. Doan passed away in August 2019 right before we were about to send our comments back to the contributing authors for further revisions. His departure left all of us devastated. As our tribute to Dr. Doan and in honour of his dedication to this scholarly endeavour, the contributing authors and I were all committed to bringing this book project forward. Almost all of the contributing authors never met Dr. Doan. I was very touched by the commitments from everyone and by everyone's condolences.

I visited Dr. Doan's family in Adelaide, Australia in October 2018 while I was there to deliver a keynote at the ACTA 2018 Conference *English Language Learning in a Mobile World*. Dr. Doan, whom I referred to as “anh Ngoc—elder brother Ngoc”, was then lecturing at the University of South Australia. His wife, “chi Van—elder sister Van” welcomed me with a feast of homemade Vietnamese food. Their elder

son—Tung Anh—amazed me with his fluent, sophisticated and eloquent Vietnamese, despite the fact that Tung Anh had been schooled in Australia since he was 10 years old. Joining us for dinner that evening was his mother from Vietnam and Min’s family of three. Min was Ngoc’s best friend in Adelaide, who was also a lecturer at the same university. Our conversation that evening went on for hours. I then discovered that Ngoc’s wife’s father had learnt English from my father in the 1980s in Vietnam. One story linked to another, one account led to another; and Vietnam in our memories was vivid, complex, far and near, happy, mixed, and very dear in our hearts.

We reflected on our shared experiences going through hardship and poverty until the early 1990s when Doi Moi started to bring about economic growth in the country. In our recollections of those days, we remembered being full of hopes and optimism about our country’s future even when we had little to eat and little to wear. We recalled being cheerful, lively and full of energy. We talked about going to school with our empty bellies but ample eagerness in our hearts and minds. We all did our undergraduate in Vietnam and went overseas for further education. We all had held teaching positions in Vietnamese universities before doing our Ph.D. in Australia. As we were talking and recalling memories, we found ourselves so emotional, deeply attached to and appreciative of our education, our schools, our universities, our teachers, our students and our younger days in Vietnam.

We belong to the *golden generation*, a term my American friends have used to refer to those Vietnamese who grew up after 1975 when the Vietnam War or the anti-American War ended. We lived our childhood in the command economy and persevered extreme hardship and poverty in the 1980s; and we saw Vietnam transforming with the Doi Moi reform being introduced at the end of 1986. While our school and university curricula had taken much longer to incorporate change and images of a new Vietnam, what happened on the ground in our classrooms was constantly being altered to reflect and embrace the country’s transformations and new energy, new spirit. If, for a long time, earning extra incomes in Vietnam had been viewed as a much discouraged practice associated with “the so-called low class traders” in the society, then by the time we were at universities, it was such a great joy and delight to earn beyond our government-funded scholarship as we were doing part-time jobs working as private tutors, teachers at language centres, translators, interpreters, and news reporters. No doubt we were the beneficiaries of the emerging

market-oriented economy of our socialist Vietnam in the decade after Doi Moi. Upon graduating from universities, we were overwhelmed by a plenty of job options, as Vietnam was booming with opportunities. We also benefited from being sought after because of our fluency in English when international companies and organisations started to invest and establish offices in Vietnam in the 1990s and 2000s.

We had been witnessing and living major changes in Vietnam, as well as being subjected to many reform agendas as a result of Vietnam aspiring to embrace globalisation and international integration while being determined to maintain its distinctive national cultural identity. The reform agenda in higher education in the context of globalisation with a great emphasis on English, modern teaching methodologies, university autonomy, internationalisation, widening access and participation, and scientific research alongside teaching had contributed to shaping our student experiences and later to our own research interests in education studies, language issues, internationalisation and policy studies. ... During that dinner at Dr. Doan's house, we went on for hours reflecting on all those experiences and happenings, forgetting that the next morning I would have to give my keynote and everyone else had to go to work. ...

The many hours over dinner that we had spent together at Dr. Doan's house in October 2018 in Adelaide gave birth to this book project. Our email exchanges following that evening were filled with ideas, excitement, insights, and eagerness. Dr. Doan and I were overjoyed when all the prospective contributing authors agreed to join us. When the book proposal was accepted by Palgrave Macmillan and was recommended to be published under the *International and Development Education* book series, Dr. Doan said to me in a Skype conversation: *this book project is a highlight of my career, a major scholarly accomplishment of this decade, and a dream come true*. His eyes were tearful and filled with joys. I knew he treasured this book initiative so very much. Nothing was stronger than his determination.

Everything had been progressing as planned, and I was very confident that Dr. Doan's cancer had been under control and that he was recovering well. Then around mid-July 2019, I received an email from his wife telling me that he had been in so much pain that he could not sit up for long and couldn't type any more. She told me that he had wanted to talk to me. And we Skyped. Very little about his pain. All was about the many thoughts he had put together that he'd want me to bring

to our Introduction chapter. He was very hopeful that his pain would lessen once the new treatment started. He felt clear and his thinking was sharp. I was crying in my heart when he told me: *I know that you've been working so hard for everyone. You hardly ever take rest, and you constantly shoulder a lot of responsibilities. I don't want to leave you carrying all the editorial tasks and leading the book on your own. Trust me, I'll survive and will fight till the last breath, but I need you to have confidence in me. I know you're going away for work soon, and I want to type our comments on the individual chapters so that we can send them back to the authors. I can type bit by bit. Don't worry and please do let me do this.* I told him that I had been so grateful to him and to our friendship.

That was our last conversation. Dr. Doan was hospitalised after that. In late July, his wife emailed me on his behalf. She said he was very sad not being able to continue this project with me, and he wanted to apologise to me for leaving me alone to handle everything. I was crying so much as I knew I was losing him. He passed away in early August.

And our book has continued. ... I've assured him that this book will be published. This book project has been special and priceless to both of us and to all the contributing authors.

This book is dedicated to you—anh Ngoc—my dear friend, brother, and colleague! We miss you so much. RIP.

Bandar Seri Begawan, Brunei  
January 2020

Phan Le Ha

## FOREWORD

In the twenty first century, higher education in Vietnam has flourished in a dizzying cacophony of directions that are simultaneously confusing and exhilarating. There are the historic public universities that are moving from a Franco-Soviet model, heavily inflected, of course, by Vietnamese pedagogical traditions, toward more Anglo-inspired modes of higher education. Added to the mix are a myriad of initiatives spearheaded by, for instance, Vietnamese philanthropists attempting to create liberal arts colleges in the image of the Ivy League, Western-based universities establishing branches in Vietnam as part of a broader project of developing global, academic empires, and education entrepreneurs.

Given how nascent and explosive this educational transformation has been, it is understandable why scholars of higher learning have not kept pace. Over the past score, there have been just a handful of academic articles and books on higher education in Vietnam. Into this education studies void, step Phan Le Ha and Doan Ba Ngoc with their timely book, *Higher Education in Market-Oriented Socialist Vietnam*. Drawing on a breadth of scholarship, most of which generated by researchers who have been conducting research in Vietnam for decades, this volume helps to update and nuance a number of themes that have been examined to varying degrees within the existing academic literature, such as neoliberalism and the privatization of higher education. Equally important, this volume brings to light issues and analytical frameworks that have yet to be studied. Examples here include the new set of policies linked to the

notion of institutional autonomy as well as an obsession with global university rankings, which are perverting (rather than advancing) the quality higher education in Vietnam (and elsewhere).

As if the above were not enough, this volume offers a major contribution on yet another front, namely the epistemological. I believe that this influence is less obvious and so allow me to elaborate a bit more. Colonialism works on many levels. The physical occupation of a place is perhaps the most crude and certainly the most blatant form, which the Vietnamese people successfully brought to an end in 1975. Another mode is cultural. This has proven more insidious as it is built into aesthetics, habitus, social imaginaries, and symbols, and thus cannot so easily be remedied by seizing lands or expelling foreign armies. Given the different nature of this side of colonialism, it should not be surprising to learn that this epistemology was not completely uprooted with the Fall of Saigon. Complicating matters further is the fact that Western precepts and chauvinisms have been hard-baked into the sinews of the market-based global order into which Vietnamese policy makers decided it needed to enter (beginning in 1986) if their country was to survive let alone thrive.

What these colonial residues (both domestically and internationally) have meant for the academic study of Vietnam, including higher education, is that rather than assessing various aspects of Vietnam on its own terms, the country (like all of the Global South) has been juxtaposed to a Western standard, against which Vietnamese institutions and people inevitably fall short. Further, this benchmark is more idealized than real. For instance, I have often read and heard (in fact, I have probably been guilty of this myself) how students in Western institutions of formal education are taught to be more critical thinkers than Asian/Vietnamese students who tend to be instructed through a banking method of pedagogy. It is not as if there are not grains of truth to this generalization, but it largely hinges on an extremely selective image of the West as the vast majority of students in the US (where I teach) are taught via multiple choice exams based on rote memorization of facts gleaned from questionable secondary sources, namely textbooks. One could argue that this method of instruction is less common in the US than in Vietnam and then do some sort of quantitative study in an attempt to assess this distinction, but already one can see how nuanced differences get caste as reductive, binary oppositions against which many Vietnamese are told

(and believe!) that their education system comes up short. More importantly, has anyone found that graduates of higher education in Vietnam are less critical thinkers than those in the US? I would be surprised if they have.

Another common distortion that I often hear revolves around academic freedom. It is true that the Communist Party polices academic work in Vietnam to a degree that political parties do not in the West. But to then presume that this means that academic freedom reigns in the West would be naïve at best. It requires ignoring how government and big business have used funding to shape the theoretical directions of disciplines that then self-discipline themselves. A prime example of this is economics, which the US government and industry (primarily in the 1920s and 1950s) worked hard to ensure that mathematical methods and neoclassical theoretical models would prevail. The outcome has been a discipline that tolerates little heterodoxy and has become the intellectual enabler of a global plutocracy. With this brief example (and there are many others), one can readily see the spin required to define the Western academy as a bastion of academic freedom. And yet, this is the myth against which much of the world, including Vietnam, is often judged.

What is so refreshing and exciting about Phan Le-Ha and Doan Ba Ngoc's edited volume is that it moves the conversation about Vietnam's higher education system out from under this Western, neocolonial, comparative gaze. This does not mean that higher education in Vietnam is spared critique but rather that the evaluation (critical or otherwise) is no longer tethered to the standard of a largely mythical Western education system. Absent this point of comparison, the reader is able to see more clearly the strengths and shortcomings of higher education in Vietnam. As a result, the more constructive and fruitful work of assessing the state of Vietnamese higher education on its own socio-cultural terms can begin. And it is no secret that the north star for most Vietnamese people and its policymakers is economic growth and that they believe, rightfully so, that higher education should and must play an important role in this project. The most pressing question, then, that the Vietnamese public poses to education scholars is how its system of higher education can be retooled and expanded to serve this goal. Higher Education in Market-Oriented Socialist Vietnam does not provide all the answers to this and other key concerns related to higher education, but it most certainly offers the best and most comprehensive place to begin, freed



as it is from a colonial epistemology. Moreover, by shucking Vietnam's understudy status, this volume offers invaluable insights from which other societies, including the West, can and should learn. The final product is a book that is extremely useful for those working to improve higher education in Vietnam and elsewhere in the world.

Professor Jonathan Warren  
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This book is not possible without the contributions from all the contributing authors. I thank all of you for your commitments and moral support throughout the process.

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I thank Chau Duong Quang for his generous help with formatting and referencing for all the chapters. You have always been helpful, despite your own busy schedules with your Ph.D. and other endeavours. Thank you, truly!

I thank Dr. Jenny Barnett from the University of South Australia, the South Australia TESOL (SATESOL), and the ACTA organising team for having invited me to deliver a keynote at the ACTA 2018 Conference *Learning English in a Mobile World* in October, 2018 in Adelaide. Without this opportunity, I would not have had the chance to visit Dr. Doan Ba Ngoc's family; and without that visit this book project could not have happened.

My gratitude goes to Dr. Doan's family for having been superbly supportive of our book idea since its conceptualisation stage. Ms. Van, Dr. Doan's wife, was our communication messenger whenever Dr. Doan was not able to email. She would write to me and deliver all what he had wanted to tell me. She continued to stay in touch after his departure. I admire her spirit and am grateful to her support and gracefulness. Thank you truly sister Van!

Min Pham, Dr. Doan's family's best friend, has also been a great support in the process. Whenever I couldn't contact Dr. Doan and his wife, I would reach out to Min. Min has also pushed through the loss and completed a chapter he had initiated with Dr. Doan for this book. Thank you so much Min!

I thank all the reviewers who have spent time reading and commenting on the book as a whole and on its individual chapters. Our work can only improve as a result of invigorating scholarly conversations and constructive critiquing from you.

I apologise in advance if there are errors or inaccurate information found in the book.

All in all, I hope you enjoy reading our work and I look forward to stimulating engagement in the days ahead.

Bandar Seri Begawan, Brunei  
January 2020

Thank you, truly.  
Phan Le Ha

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The original version of this book was revised: error in author's family name being wrongly displayed in Citation and Running head. The corrections to this book is available at [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-46912-2\\_22](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-46912-2_22)

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PART I

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Engaging Vietnam Higher Education:  
Stirring Up the Field



# Introduction and Foregrounding the Work: ‘New’ Players, ‘New’ Discourses, ‘New’ Practices, and “New Flavours”

*Phan Le Ha and Doan Ba Ngoc*

## 1.1 SETTING THE SCENE

Higher education (HE) has been one of the most dynamic yet unsettling topics inviting endless debates and scholarly discussions, from issues concerning reform, quality assurance, curriculum, community engagement, academic mobilities, widening participation and access, privatisation, graduate employability and research development to challenges, and opportunities brought about by globalisation, internationalisation, and regionalisation (Bui, Nguyen, & Cole, 2019; Fry, 2018; Gregorutti & Delgado, 2015; Hawkins, & Mok, 2015; Neubauer, & Collins,

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2015; Neubauer, & Gomes, 2017; Neubauer, Mok, & Edwards, 2019; Neubauer, Shin, & Hawkins, 2013; Welch, 2011). What has been happening in Vietnam's HE since Vietnam's economic reform was introduced in 1986 (also known as *Đổi Mới*) has made Vietnam's HE one of the most dynamic and full-of-surprises HE systems globally. Since *Đổi Mới*, Vietnam's HE has been forced to and aspired to change and to embrace change and opportunities under the market-oriented logic and socialist ideology. The blend of the two seemingly paradoxical and contradictory values—market-oriented and socialist—in Vietnam's HE has set it apart in the global landscape of HE. In many ways, Vietnam still upholds certain Soviet legacies, those that are also observed in HE in China and Russia (Oleksiyenko, Qiang, Chirikov, & Li, 2018) and in post-Soviet HE systems such as those in Eastern Europe and within the former Soviet Union (Silova, 2010). At the same time, all these HE systems are going through varied transformations that have been driven by a strong Western-oriented spirit, energy and outlook, by the forces of globalisation and internationalisation of HE, modernisation and nation building, neoliberal ideals, and the global ranking aspirations. What makes Vietnam's HE different has much to do with the fact that its HE reforms and transformations take place under the Communist Party's leadership—the leadership that stays firm with socialist ideology, promotes a market economy and has gained significant experience over a long history of direct contacts with French education, Soviet education, American education, and now Southeast Asian and East Asian education.

While the country has witnessed exciting transformations and aspirations for improvement in its education system, Vietnam's education in general and HE in particular have been the target of fierce criticisms over the past decades in all spheres, from policy debates, academic research, professional forums, media coverage to everyday conversations. These significant and dynamic happenings have gradually been picked up in scholarly works, noticeably by many Australia-based and Australia-trained scholars and researchers, as one of us (Phan Le Ha) has been arguing in several speeches delivered at the annual *Engaging With Vietnam* (EWV) Conference Series, which she founded in 2009 and which remains active since. Higher education has always been a major theme of this conference series. As a matter of fact, the very first full edition on Vietnam HE co-edited by Harman, Hayden, and Pham (2010) was launched at the 2nd EWV Conference held in Hanoi in late 2010. Until now, Australia-based and Australia-trained scholars and researchers have

continued to dominate the literature on Vietnam HE. Many of them have also presented their work at the EWV conference series over the years.

Counting from the milestone Đổi Mới in 1986, six books have been published on Vietnam HE, among which five are edited collections (Harman et al., 2010; London, 2011; Nguyen, & Shah, 2019; Nguyen, & Tran, 2019; Tran, & Marginson, 2018), and one co-written by seven authors (Tran et al., 2014). Except for the title edited by London in 2011, the other five titles on this topic and most of their contributing chapters are from the above-mentioned Australia-related group. These books cover a wide range of topics and issues in HE in Vietnam spanning over the past 30 years since Đổi Mới. They are among the first scholarly publications on Vietnam's HE written by both international and Vietnamese scholars.

Specifically, Harman et al. (2010) was the first book on Vietnam's HE, featuring mostly non-Vietnamese authors. All the chapters in this book discuss major HE reforms in Vietnam through the lens of policy, systemic, structural, ideological, and political issues. It offers a solid overview of Vietnam HE in those days as well as the many hindrances that would bring challenges to the reforms introduced by the Vietnamese government. Because of this nature of the volume, very little empirical data was evident.

Like Harman et al. (2010) and London (2011) was written against the backdrops of 25 years after the country's economic reform and five years after the Higher Education Reform Agenda (HERA), or the Prime Minister's Resolution 14 on Fundamental and Comprehensive Reform of Higher Education of Vietnam. These are ideological and structural reforms that induced fundamental changes in Vietnam's economy and HE from centrally subsidised to market-oriented ones. As a result, issues and challenges in HE governance and structure, institutional financing, privatisation and autonomy, and graduate or labour force skills were central to the contributing chapters in Harman et al. (2010) and London (2011). Other topics, such as research and research commercialisation and the globalisation and internationalisation of HE, were included but of less focus.

In Tran et al. (2014), the seven co-authors—all receiving their Ph.D.'s from Australian universities—investigate the reform of Vietnam's HE from the background of the global knowledge economy, specifically the roles of university education and vocational training in creating

new knowledge (research) and educating the country's competitive workforce. This book argues that the HE reform of Vietnam should be informed by three national core virtues: flexibility, practicality, and mobility and by the demands of globalisation. It also argues that HE in Vietnam views knowledge as flexible, practical, and mobile and therefore, calls for Vietnam's HE and research systems to be flexible, practical, and responsive to both national traditions and globalisation in order to produce flexible, practical, and mobile graduates and workforce for the country.

In Tran and Marginson (2018), the authors continue their 2014 discussion of Vietnam's HE, while however turning their focus to the internationalisation in Vietnamese HE. The chapters in this edited volume collectively examine a whole new set of topics, including: key drivers and dimensions of internationalisation of Vietnam's HE and comparing them with those in the neighbouring countries; theories, models, and practices of internationalisation and reflecting them on the local needs in Vietnam; the influence of outbound student mobility and internationalisation on transformation and outcomes of Vietnam's HE; and suggestion for Vietnam's internationalisation of HE.

In 2019, two more edited collections on Vietnam HE were published. The editors and almost all of the contributing authors are graduates from Australian universities. While Nguyen and Shah (2019) pay specific attention to varied matters centred on quality assurance in Vietnamese HE, Nguyen and Tran (2019) place particular emphasis on the global forces—local responses theme that was identified and partly explored in the previous surveyed titles. While pursuing their own agendas, these two volumes have also touched upon graduate employability in HE. They offer a useful overview as well as initial insights into the topic. Indeed, graduate employability has recently become a critical issue in global higher education debates, and such debates have also been central in the reform agenda pursued by many national education systems, including Vietnam. Likewise, universities themselves play an important role in responding to issues and problems surrounding graduate employability. Hence, universities need to innovate, as collectively shown in Bui, Nguyen, and Cole (2019), which also includes several chapters focusing on Vietnam HE alongside other national contexts.

The obvious strength of Nguyen and Shah (2019) lies in it being the first book-length and in-depth reference available on a wide range of issues regarding quality assurance in the current context of Vietnam HE.

Against the backdrop of internationalisation, globalisation, and reform taking place globally and in Vietnam more specifically, the chapters in this title offer a comprehensive and complex picture of contemporary Vietnam's history, development, and management of quality assurance. It has brought together key authors and practitioners from government and private sectors, some of whom have been instrumental in building policies and practices of the quality assurance system for HE in Vietnam since its infant days about 15 years ago. Associated concepts including assessment, accreditation, and benchmarking are among the key inquiries pursued in this edited title.

One can't help wondering why Nguyen and Tran (2019) is also titled *Reforming Vietnamese Higher Education*, which is almost the same as Harman et al. (2010) *Reforming Higher Education in Vietnam*, published a decade earlier. The main difference in these two volumes lies in how reform is approached, interpreted, and discussed. All the contributing chapters in Nguyen and Tran (2019), to varied extent, elaborate how reform across several domains of HE is driven, enabled, and challenged by Vietnam's key culture and values. These chapters also draw on empirical data, which is different from Harman et al. (2010) in which empirical data was largely not evident in the contributing chapters.

As already indicated earlier, being the pioneer title on Vietnam HE, Harman et al. (2010) set the background and lay the foundation for the field although the editors and contributing authors hardly drew on any empirical data and fieldwork-informed studies to compile the book. This is understandable when in those days the reform agenda was still in its initial stage. The field then was largely dominated by a few foreign scholars and HE consultants. There were only a very small number of Vietnamese scholars who had started to write on HE issues then, such as Pham Minh Hac, Lam Quang Thiep, Vu Thi Phuong Anh, Do Huy Thinh, Bui Tran Phuong, Pham Thi Lan Huong, and Pham Thi Ly. However, in less than 10 years, Vietnamese with Ph.Ds in Education and related fields are fast rising in number, and they have been active in creating new knowledge on Vietnam HE. This is evident in not only Nguyen and Tran (2019) but also in Nguyen and Shah (2019), Tran et al. (2014), and Tran and Marginson (2018). This observation applies to other titles that do not focus on Vietnam HE solely such as Bui et al. (2019) and to titles on education more broadly such as Nguyen (2017), Pham (2014), and Pham (2019).

Although the topics raised and discussed in Harman et al. (2010) and London (2011) remain current scholarly concerns about Vietnam HE, only some of them, e.g. graduate skills, research in HE, and globalisation and internationalisation of HE, are followed up in Tran et al. (2014), Tran and Marginson (2018), Nguyen and Shah (2019), and Nguyen and Tran (2019). Some other fundamental issues and challenges associated with Vietnam HE in the current phase, e.g. HE governance, privatisation, and institutional autonomy are not followed up in any way significant in the latter volumes. Therefore, the audience for Vietnam HE is left suspended in its quest for updates on these issues and challenges almost ten years on. Put differently, there is a content gap between Harman et al. (2010) and London (2011) and the follow-up volumes mentioned.

Written approximately 35 years after Vietnam's economic reform, this volume and all its chapters offer both updates and new insights into the picture of the HE reform in Vietnam that was first sketched in Harman et al. (2010) and London (2011), and then pursued further in the more recent titles. On the one hand, our volume has benefited greatly from the above surveyed literature; and on the other hand, it also offers unique contributions to knowledge and scholarship, as elaborated below.

## 1.2 OUR BOOK: “HIGHER EDUCATION IN MARKET-ORIENTED SOCIALIST VIETNAM: NEW PLAYERS, DISCOURSES, PRACTICES”

Organised into four interactive parts, this book, building further on the existing literature, is located in the context of change and reform narratives in Vietnam's HE across the domains of policy, curriculum, research, pedagogy, practice, and society engagement, since the Communist Party introduced the Doi Moi Reform (often referred to as Economic or Open Door Reform) in 1986. Market-oriented socialist Vietnam since then has not only been going through major transformations, but has also been the very space for contested ideas and practices to be tried out and (re) introduced. Within this context, HE has been a hothouse, as demonstrated throughout the book.

This book collectively pushes the boundaries of existing scholarship as well as examines new phenomena and un(der)-explored issues. In Part I ‘*Stirring up the field*’, we foreground, identify, and engage with



a rounded range of persistent, developing and emerging issues, concepts, and ideologies embedded in the reform agenda in Vietnam HE. Specifically, Hayden and Le-Nguyen (Chapter 2) provide a thorough review and critical evaluation of the reform agenda for HE in Vietnam since Doi Moi. Without doubt, Hayden has been writing extensively on Vietnam HE since the early 2000s and possesses up-to-date and comprehensive knowledge of the country's reform agenda. Co-authoring with an experienced administrator and educator in Vietnam (Le-Nguyen Duc Chinh), Hayden continues to demonstrate his commitments to collaborating with Vietnamese scholars to ensure a balanced and accurate assessment of Vietnam's reform narratives and developments. Their chapter serves as a bridge connecting this volume with the arguments, observations, and discussions put forth in the surveyed literature on the reform agenda and what the next steps may be. Chapter 3 by Ngo conceptualises the inter-relationships of three sets of seemingly contradictory ideologies that are shaping and informing Vietnam HE's transformations: Confucianism, Socialism, and Neoliberalism. Ngo makes important arguments about where, how, and to what extent these ideologies may be complementary and disharmonising at the same time. One may go away thinking perhaps that for these ideologies to co-exist and bring about productive change and transformation in the market-oriented socialist Vietnam, ethical considerations, and constant engagement with social issues such as inequalities and access must be in place.

Since the beginning of Doi Moi, the reform agenda has identified research development in HE to be important and has continued to make this emphasis more strongly in response to global practices regarding research performance and university rankings. Nonetheless, the literature on this aspect is extremely limited. Nguyen (Chapter 4) is perhaps the very first piece of work that offers a comprehensive overview and assessment of university research development in Vietnam to the present. This chapter sets the context for the next chapter by Bui. Drawing on her well-established scholarship on learning organisation in HE, Bui in Chapter 5 brings into the current literature insightful comparative analyses of the factors impacting academics' performance in Vietnam and UK universities against the backdrop of the global university ranking exercise. It raises questions about the reform agenda in Vietnam in general and the reform and aspirations in the research development agenda in particular, as reviewed in Chapter 4 by Nguyen. While *research development* as both process and product has already been officialised

in Vietnam's HE reform, *learning organisation* has not yet entered the vocabulary of reform, but as Bui has argued, incorporating this theory would help institutions understand better how their academics perform in all research and teaching in both qualitative and quantitative terms. This is particularly important when neoliberal ideology and corporate culture have become more widespread and been increasingly incorporated in the rationale, vision, mission, and logic of HE. Under such conditions, academic performance in Vietnam, particularly research performance, has started to be assessed and managed in response to global rankings and institutional branding; and all this has resulted in certain worrisome responses, practices, and behaviours in the HE sector and all its components.

Closing Part I is a commentary from Felix (Chapter 6), who brings in critical inquiries through a policy analysis lens to not only join the other chapters in stirring up HE in Vietnam, but also to make links to other HE contexts that he has been a part of such as Trinidad and Tobago. He brings into the discussion a number of Caribbean-based scholars' work on policy, policy reform, and ideology to shed some light on the HE sector in Vietnam. Alongside this unique contribution, Felix does a serious job in *stirring up* and *steering* Vietnam HE through his employment of the two theoretical concepts: modernity and reflexivity. He shows how and to what extent modernity in general and Vietnamese modernity in particular as well as its accompanying process—modernisation—have been shaping, informing, and orienting policy reform in Vietnam HE. He also shows that Vietnam's aspirations for enhancing its national and institutional research development under the reform narrative are a manifestation of modernity and modernisation plus the knowledge economy mentality. While acknowledging and discussing problems and concerns arising from this (Vietnamese) modernity project, he joins forces with Hayden and Le-Nguyen (Chapter 2), Ngo (Chapter 3), Nguyen (Chapter 4), and Bui (Chapter 5) to highlight the utmost importance of reflexivity in addressing and responding to such problems and concerns. There is 'light at the end of the tunnel', as he gracefully implies.

The chapters in Part I set the tone for Parts II and III which the authors specifically draw on to locate their works and to further engage in-depth with '*new players, new discourses, new values, new practices, and new flavours*' in HE in the current social, economic, and political contexts of Vietnam and around the globe. These chapters (Chapters 7–18) collectively cross varied domains of policy, curriculum, teaching, learning,

professional development, internationalisation, student mobilities, and medium of instruction. In Part II in particular, the *new discourses* and *new values* critically discussed in these chapters include liberal arts education (Chapter 7, Ngo), institutional autonomy and academic freedom (Chapter 11, Marklein and Mai), and semi-elite private higher education (Chapter 8, Chau). Noticeable as well as notorious *new developments and practices* in the private HE sector are highlighted, analysed, and critiqued, such as mergers and acquisitions (M & A) and the participation of *new players* in HE including local conglomerates, wealthy families, and local US-dollar billionaires (Chapter 9, Pham). Another often overlooked group of *new players* in HE are community colleges, whose presence and role have been present on and off since the 1970s when Vietnam was divided into North Vietnam and South Vietnam (Chapter 10, Nguyen and Chau). These authors also show how the importance of community colleges in Vietnam has been subjected to varied local and governmental authorities' oscillating decentralisation and recentralisation policies and practices. Alongside these developments and happenings are *new observations* about inter-Asian student mobilities, in which Vietnamese students have been both active agents and the target of other Asian countries' internationalisation aspirations and their international and political diplomacy such as Taiwan (Chapter 12, Nguyen, Cao, and Pham).

The rather aggressive privatisation of HE in Vietnam with the increased participation of *new players* and the embrace of *new discourses* and *new practices* throughout the HE sector has been picked up in complex terms in Ortega's commentary (Chapter 13). Having been writing on HE issues in the Philippines as well as being familiar with HE systems in Singapore and Malaysia, Ortega acknowledges the unique and specific conditions in Vietnam that have led to and inspired the reform agenda and the diversification of the HE sector. She also locates the transformations in Vietnam in the broader contexts of globalisation, regionalisation, and of the shared tendency in Southeast Asian countries to privatise HE in varied ways. Importantly, Ortega wonders what will change and what will be replaced as HE in Vietnam becomes 'more privatised' and 'more autonomous', in the light of the discussion put forth in the book as a whole and in Part II more specifically. To a varied extent and in varied manners, answers to Ortega's question are offered in all the chapters throughout the book, including those featured in Part III, which focuses on the conceptualisation and implementation of internationalisation and English-medium-instruction (EMI) in Vietnam HE.

English is not new in Vietnam's HE, but *a new mentality* has been instilled and followed through in the country's evolving reform agenda to enable English to achieve its current status as the dominant foreign language, and to be employed as the medium of instruction in many courses and programmes by local universities. This *new mentality and flavour of the day* (as we call it) EMI is extensively and critically examined in all the chapters in Part III. Chapter 14 (Pham and Doan), Chapter 15 (Vu), and Chapter 16 (Truong, Ngo, and Nguyen) show that a great deal of enthusiasm exists yet also in the presence of vagueness, abstraction, confusion, inconsistency, and patchiness at all levels of policy, conceptualisation, curriculum, implementation, classroom practice, teaching and learning, material development, teacher training, and assessment. The two commentary chapters (Chapter 17, Nonaka; Chapter 18, Noorashid) offer insightful comparative analyses and discussion from EMI contexts in Japan and Brunei Darussalam respectively. While EMI has been established and a common practice in Brunei for decades, the situation in Japan is more similar to that in Vietnam. If EMI, as demonstrated in Chapters 15–17, has been employed mainly as strategies to boost and enhance competitiveness among local universities in Vietnam and thus targeting local students, then EMI in Japan has had much to do with attracting international students and to serve Japan's ambitious internationalisation of HE policy and aspirations (cf. Nonaka, 2018; Phan, 2017; among others). Brunei's relatively successful bilingual education policy may offer some implications for the situation in Vietnam. Nevertheless, the scholarship cited in Noorashid (Chapter 18) alerts us to some concerns that EMI has tended to dominate Brunei's HE systems to the extent that Malay-medium-instruction has become marginal. This alert sends important implications to Vietnam's language policy and foreign language policy as the country is looking into introducing more and more English and EMI.

It is often challenging to bring together all the above complex and insightful analyses, discussion and conceptualisations in a powerful, stimulating, and impactful manner, as a wrap up to this volume. This daunting task has been gracefully shared by Gomes (Chapter 19) and Rizvi (Chapter 21, also Afterword), who have provided insightful, thoughtful, and nuanced commentaries and thoughts for future work and engagement concerning the central theme of the book—*new players, new*

*discourses, new practices, and new flavours.* Gomes (Chapter 19) has identified several lessons that other HE systems could learn from the experiences of Vietnam as well as has highlighted the ways in which Vietnam's HE development journey could be inspirational. From a very different angle, Rizvi (Afterword) reflects on his very first experience with Vietnam and Vietnamese higher education in the late 1990s and on his more recent interactions. While acknowledging his amazement with Vietnamese people's enthusiasm about changes in Vietnam and the many impressive transformations of Vietnamese HE within a short period of time, Rizvi also points out the continuing challenges underlying Vietnam's rapid massification of HE and market-driven practices. These challenges, Rizvi argues, raise questions about the sustainability of the HE system, particularly when a solid and sustainable policy and implementation structure is not yet in place.

In between Gomes (Chapter 19) and Rizvi (Afterword) is an elaborate wrap-up essay by Phan Le Ha and Dang Van Huan (Chapter 20). Phan and Dang first pay careful attention to the revised Higher Education Law 2018 to offer a nuanced commentary on institutional autonomy and privatised HE in Vietnam. Together with picking up a number of key questions, observations, and arguments put forth throughout the book and engage with them further, the authors also bring in the discussion new writings in Vietnamese and from local sources, particularly those that have been published since the revised Higher Education Law was passed at the end of 2018. In doing so, the authors show a sense of the current and what Vietnamese policymakers, critics, administrators, academics, and scholars from within the system are concerned about and discussing/debating. They argue that 'new' players, 'new' values and discourses, 'new' practices, and 'new' flavours have collectively necessitated a 'new' status, 'new' order, 'new' challenges, and 'new' aspirations in Vietnam in general and Vietnam's HE in particular. At the same time and in this very context, they also argue that the battle between the Soviet tradition and the US-styled model of HE continues to be seen in both policy and practice; and the socialist legacy has found 'new' ways within the 'autonomous' and 'privatised' HE system to exert its influence. Therefore, to move scholarship and the current debate forward, these very important aspects ought to be recognised, discussed, and studied further and in dialogues with one another.

### 1.3 ‘NEW’ CONTENTS, ‘NEW’ APPROACHES, ‘NEW’ CONCEPTUALISATIONS, ‘NEW’ NETWORKS, ‘NEW’ DIALOGUES

Throughout the book, we introduce the most up-to-date scholarship from scholars specialising in Vietnam HE, some of whom have contributed to all the above surveyed titles, while others are critiquing the HE reform in Vietnam and elsewhere. The book sets itself apart by also examining how global and regional forces as well as certain neighbours’ policies and diplomacy have influenced and projected Vietnam and its HE reforms and aspirations. Such an influence and its projection have led to certain responses, formation and mobilisation of discourses, ideas, and practices. As such, this book provides readers with opportunities to update, compare, and contrast the issues and challenges associated with the reform of HE in Vietnam through all historical, sociocultural, ideological, economic, and political lenses. We also bring into the conversation the critiques, perspectives, and voices of international scholars studying other HE contexts. Specifically, we have located and invited commentators from different parts of the world to engage in the discussion of the topics covered in each part of the book. This would enable readers to obtain a good sense of richness and comprehensiveness of the scope and scale of HE reform in Vietnam and where we are in broader regional, international, and global contexts. The book then offers ample space for dialogues between contributing authors and other scholars in the field. When engaging with both the contributing chapters and the commentaries, readers are offered opportunities not only to understand but also to reflect on their understandings of the issues and challenges associated with the reform of HE in Vietnam and that elsewhere. This very exposure and engagement allows readers to obtain a complex and in-depth view of HE reform as well as the underlying discourses and on-the-ground realities.

As we were conceptualising this book project, we also invited the contributing authors to identify topics, issues, and phenomena in Vietnam HE that they consider to be important and significant in the current context of globalisation, internationalisation, change, reform, and mobility. We then worked together to identify changes and emerging discourses, values, and practices through an interactive process. This approach has allowed us to locate prominent trends and patterns of change in HE in Vietnam as compared with those in other parts

of the world and to be able to offer complex critiques and nuanced analyses of new and rising discourses such as: *liberal arts education*, *academic freedom*, *new players in HE* (including private providers and community colleges) and *new flavour of the day*—the eager embrace of the internationalisation of higher education and the booming offering of English-medium-instruction (EMI) programmes in HE across continents and regions of the world including Asia, the Caribbean, the Middle East, the Pacific, Africa, Europe, and Americas. The market-oriented socialist Vietnam has its unique take on and responses to these ‘new’ elements, as collectively and individually shown by all the contributing authors.

As briefly mentioned earlier, Harman et al. (2010), Nguyen and Shah (2019), Nguyen and Tran (2019), Tran et al. (2014), and Tran and Marginson (2018) largely feature the work of Vietnamese and non-Vietnamese authors with a link to Australia. These titles reflect a strong Australian influence on Vietnam HE scholarship. This is not surprising as Australia has been continuously playing a major role in training Vietnamese students since the collapse of the Soviet Bloc (Phan, 2008). Our book, while building further on this tie with Australia, engages much more widely with research work and scholarship from both Vietnamese and international scholars who have worked and/or studied in different educational systems including Vietnam, Australia, Brunei, China, Hong Kong, Taiwan, France, Japan, Singapore, Trinidad, and Tobago, the former Soviet Union, the UK, and the US. It brings together a wide range of expertise, experiences, and voices, from novice researchers to early career academics, and mid-career and established scholars. This varied range of contexts, exposures, experiences, and training traditions has enabled higher education change and emerging discourses to be examined, compared, contrasted, and explored with more nuance. In the same vein, it has also enabled the volume as a whole to embrace different theoretical, methodological, conceptual, epistemological, ontological, and experiential orientations and underpinnings so as to obtain a more holistic understanding of higher education change and emerging discourses, particularly in the case of Vietnam.

The following section continues to elaborate on the key points specified and discussed thus far.

#### 1.4 ‘NEW’ PLAYERS, ‘NEW’ DISCOURSES AND VALUES, ‘NEW’ PRACTICES, AND ‘NEW’ FLAVOURS

The book, as a whole, breaks new ground by paying particular attention to ‘new’ players and ‘new/desirable’ values, practices, discourses, and flavours advocated and enacted by the reform narratives and by ‘new players’ in current Vietnam HE. All the chapters identify and highlight critical issues and under-explored phenomena as well as on-going debates. In this way the book is multifold. It expands the current literature and scholarship, creates new knowledge, and makes substantial and unique contributions.

Specifically, regarding ‘new players’, following Phan’s (2017, 2018) new line of research on ‘new players’ in HE, in this volume ‘new players’ refer to new actors, new participants in HE such as ‘unconventional’ students recruited by private HE institutions and community colleges, university lecturers finding themselves pressured to teach in the medium of English without any training, academics having to publish in English to be recognised locally and for their institutions to be internationally ranked, and policymakers and administrators well-versed in the language of internationalisation, but confused in practice. ‘New players’ also encompasses emerging institutions and their stakeholders and international counterparts. These entities include newly established institutions, the fast growing private HE sector, provincial tertiary institutions, and lower-tiered forms of HE providers such as community colleges that are rising in number, newly promoted forms of institutions, and institutional partnerships. These ‘new players’ have also promoted and put in practice ‘new ideas’, ‘new practices’, and ‘new values’, that are, in many ways, driving and shaping current debates in Vietnam’s HE. This volume and all its chapters, as such, individually and collectively offer critical analyses of the varied forms and conceptualisations of ‘new and desirable’ values, practices, and discourses advocated and enacted by the ‘new players’ in Vietnam’s HE.

These ‘new’ ideas, practices, and values are largely termed ‘Western’ and/or ‘international’, which may have already been promoted in the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s in the Republic of Vietnam (South Vietnam) and the Democratic Socialist Republic of Vietnam (North Vietnam) during the partition of Vietnam into two Vietnams (1954–1975). The ‘Western’ and ‘international’ tags meant different things and advocated



different values to different stakeholders during the partition era, and many still do hold diverse and contradictory meanings in today's Vietnam. Indeed, as some chapters (such as Chapters 3, 7, 10, and 11) show, in the current climate of globalisation, reform and change, what is often called 'new', 'Western', and 'international' values promoted these days in Vietnam's HE may not be at all 'new', but are revised and revitalised from the 1950s to 1970s era or even earlier. Nonetheless, very little about this very dynamic phenomenon is known in the existing scholarly literature in both English and Vietnamese.

As individual chapters indicate, Vietnam's responses to change and new discourses are unique in certain ways. Its responses are historically embedded, and are always in tandem with and driven by what is taking place in other national and regional contexts. Vietnam does not respond to change in a vacuum; instead, what has been going on in its HE may also well be seen as messy, chaotic, spontaneous, patchy, inconsistent, and incoherent, yet refreshing, evolving, innovative, and aspirational at the same time. This very same situation may also be read as offering Vietnam opportunities for comprehensive transformations and for repositioning itself as a significant new player in the global HE landscape. The book as a whole is also unique in that it locates HE in Vietnam in dialogues with other national contexts, hence situating the field of HE more broadly in transnational and comparative dialogues and in interconnected relations.

All in all, 'Higher Education in Market-Oriented Socialist Vietnam: "New" Players, "New" Discourses, "New" Practices' is the first collection of its kind ever put together on Vietnam's HE. It sets itself apart in terms of: the content it covers; the conceptual and theoretical discussion it offers; the agenda and phenomena it identifies, examines, and critiques; the approach it adopts; the wide range of contexts and settings it addresses; and the diversity of the contributing authors' educational, experiential, and academic backgrounds as well as their exposures to a wide variety of global educational systems. Collectively, all the contributing authors have also moved beyond the 'business as usual' practice of criticising and talking about HE problems. They all examine and discuss new players, new energies, new flavours, new aspirations, and new happenings in Vietnam's HE in ways that advance knowledge and expand existing debates and discussion. Now, let the individual chapters speak for themselves.

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# A Review of the Reform Agenda for Higher Education in Vietnam

*Martin Hayden and Le-Nguyen Duc Chinh*

## 2.1 INTRODUCTION

In 2005, the Government of Vietnam adopted *Resolution 14/2005/NQ-CP, dated November 2, 2005*, entitled ‘A Resolution on the Fundamental and Comprehensive Reform of Higher Education in Vietnam 2006–2020’, also known as the Higher Education Reform Agenda (HERA). Resolution 14 proposed an extensive package of reform measures intended to bring about a significant transformation of the higher education sector by 2020. In particular, it sought to make the sector ‘advanced by international standards, highly competitive, and appropriate to the socialist-oriented market mechanism’ (Government of Vietnam, 2005, p. 1). Though considerable progress has been evident since 2005, the sector will be neither ‘advanced by international standards’ nor

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‘highly competitive’ by 2020. In general, the pace of the reform process has been both remarkably slow and highly sporadic.

This chapter reviews the sector’s reform progress since 2005, viewed from the perspective of measures proposed by Resolution 14. The chapter also seeks to identify obstacles to reform of the sector, and it proposes a number of future reform priorities.

Two Government commitments at the time of the adoption of Resolution 14 are important to note. The first is that Resolution 14 sought to address deficiencies that were seen to have accumulated in the sector since the early 1990s. These deficiencies were candidly acknowledged as follows in Resolution 14:

Weaknesses and inadequacies in the management mechanism, systematic structure, disciplinary structure, network of tertiary education institutions, training processes, teaching and learning methods, contingent of lectures and educational administrators, use efficiency of resources and negative phenomena in examinations, grant of diplomas and other educational activities should be soon addressed. (Government of Vietnam, 2005, p. 1)

The second is that Resolution 14 was strongly influenced by a public policy of ‘socialisation’, as approved in 1997 (*Decree No. 90-CP, dated August 21, 1997*) for adoption across the areas of health, education, culture, and sport, but which had not been intensively applied within the higher education sector. This policy advocated the need for increased social participation in sharing the cost of providing more community services. Given Vietnam’s collectivist political tradition, the policy was presented as ‘socialisation’. In many other jurisdictions, however, it would have been referred to as ‘user pays’. Over time, the policy contributed substantially to ‘the individualisation of responsibilities and the privatisation of public goods’ in Vietnam (Nguyen, 2018a, p. 627).

Resolution 14 identified seven broad areas for reform of the higher education sector. These concerned: sector planning; curriculum; student participation rates; staffing quality; research productivity; governance and management; and global engagement. Across these areas, 32 specific reform measures were proposed. The seven broad areas for reform provide a structure for the following review of the reform agenda since 2005.

## 2.2 THE REFORM AGENDA

### 2.2.1 Sector Planning

A priority for Resolution 14 was the need to improve the national higher education network. To this end, it was proposed that there should be a planning framework for the sector, that the sector should have both a qualifications framework and a classification system for higher education institutions, and that the ‘non-public’ component of the sector should be radically transformed.

The need for a planning framework received immediate attention. *Decision No. 121/2007/QĐ-TTg, dated July 27, 2007*, presented a plan for the development of the higher education network up to 2010. This plan focused mainly on growth targets, though it also addressed the need for a classification system for higher education institutions. Though the plan was detailed and systematic, it was also unrealistic. It adopted the same excessively ambitious growth projections as had been expressed in Resolution 14 (Hayden & Lam, 2006). The institutional classification scheme proposed by Decision 121 was equally unrealistic. A three-tiered sector was envisaged, with globally rated ‘top-200’ universities in the top sector, research-oriented universities in the middle sector, and vocational colleges in the bottom sector. At the time, hardly any universities in Vietnam were ‘research-oriented’, and there was none capable of achieving a ‘top-200’ global ranking by 2020.

A subsequent planning document, *Decision No. 37/2013/QĐ-TTg, dated June 26, 2013*, covering the period up to 2020, retained many of the features of *Decision No. 121/2007/QĐ-TTg*. It proposed the same high growth targets and the same three-tiered institutional classification system. However, the three tiers were now identified as including research-oriented universities and academies, application-oriented universities and academies, and vocationally oriented colleges. The question of how to implement this classification scheme was not addressed. In the new Higher Education Law of 2012 (*Law No. 08/2012/QH13, dated June 18, 2012*), however, it had been stated that higher education institutions in Vietnam should be ranked according to their prestige and quality. *Decree No. 73/2015/ND-CP, dated September 8, 2015*, sought to address this requirement. It proposed a stratification and ranking mechanism based upon a complicated mix of input and output measures. It envisaged that 30% of institutions within each of the three tiers identified

should form a top rank, while another 30% of institutions within each tier should form a bottom rank, with movement possible between ranks and tiers according to institutional performance. This scheme was fundamentally impractical because of its complexity. A subsequent decision taken in 2016 to give the Ministry of Labour, Invalids and Social Affairs responsibility for all two-year vocational colleges shifted attention from the matter. In the amended Higher Education Law of 2018 (*Law No. 34/2018/QH14, dated November 19, 2018*), there was no further reference made to the need for either stratification or ranking. Instead, individual universities were given the freedom to have themselves ranked, provided they selected a reputable national or international ranking agency.

The most recent planning document for the sector is *Decision No. 69/QĐ-TTg, dated January 15, 2017*. Its growth targets for the sector were more realistic than was the case with earlier planning documents. It also, more sensibly, proposed that Vietnam should have at least four universities ranked among the top 1000 universities globally by 2025.

Regarding the need for a higher education qualifications framework, progress was finally made in 2016 when Vietnam adopted the ASEAN Qualifications Reference Framework. However, the impact of this development on the higher education sector was minimal, given that the Higher Education Law of 2012 had declared that matters relating to ‘the volume and structure of training programs’ were a State responsibility (Article 68), decided upon by the Ministry of Education and Training (Article 69).

Regarding ‘non-public’ higher education, a dramatic policy shift was announced in *Decree 75/2006/ND-CP, dated August 2, 2006*, which proposed that all future ‘non-public’ higher education institutions should be ‘fully private’, that is, owned by private shareholders. This policy represented a significant departure from Vietnam’s longstanding mistrust of private ownership in the national education system. It also reflected the strength of the Government’s commitment to ‘socialisation’. A surge in the number of private higher education institutions followed, but aspects of the new policy remained untidy. One of these concerned a lack of clarity about the entitlements of community-based owners of former ‘people-founded’ higher education institutions (Hoang, 2019; Pham, 2019). Another was that, though the Government expressed a strong preference for ‘not-for-profit’ private higher education institutions, no official definition of ‘not-for-profit’ was provided. Seven years later, in

*Decree 141/2013/ND-CP, dated October 24, 2013*, ‘not-for-profit’ private higher education institutions were declared to be institutions generating a shareholder dividend below the rate of interest available from government bonds. This definition did not, however, settle growing community concerns about the profit-making behaviour of many private higher education institutions. Five years later, in the amended Higher Education Law of 2018, the Government returned to the matter, declaring that a ‘not-for-profit’ higher education institution was ‘one in which the investor declares that the institution does not run for profit’ (Article 7). This definition meant, in effect, that all private higher education institutions in Vietnam were ‘for-profit’, given that they all needed to make a profit to survive. The Government continued to express encouragement for ‘not-for-profit’ higher education institutions but declined to commit public funds to them. Pham (Chapter 9) provides a detailed account of the current state of private higher education in Vietnam.

In general, therefore, for much of the period since 2005, the pace of actual reform of the national higher education network has been significantly impeded by both unrealistic planning targets and a general lack of clarity about policy objectives. Complicated mechanisms for classifying higher education institutions were proposed and then abandoned, and intentions to expand the role of the private sector were undermined by difficulties in defining clearly a set of conditions for its expansion. The most significant progress made with sector planning since 2005 has occurred within the past two or three years.

### 2.2.2 *Reforming the Curriculum*

A commitment to developing the higher education curriculum predated the adoption of Resolution 14, but Resolution 14 was instrumental in identifying where further progress was needed. It proposed the establishment of a national quality accreditation system, the adoption of a credit-based curriculum model, and reform of the system of student selection for admission to higher education.

In 2007, shortly after the adoption of Resolution 14, and after completion of a two-year pilot scheme, the Ministry for Education and Training adopted a two-stage quality accreditation process for higher education institutions. The first stage required institutional self-assessments against ten quality standards and 57 quality criteria. The second stage required external audits organised by the Ministry of



Education and Training. In 2013, two accreditation centres, one from each of the two national universities, were given responsibility for conducting these audits. In 2016, the Ministry of Education and Training issued a set of quality assessment standards for application to all degree programs (*Circular No. 04/2016/TT-BGDĐT, dated March 14, 2016*). In 2017, higher education institutions were required to attend to 25 quality standards and 111 quality criteria (*Circular No. 12/2017/TT-BGDĐT, dated May 19, 2017*). In 2018, an Education Quality Management Agency within the Ministry of Education and Training was made responsible for managing five centres for education accreditation, including one with specific responsibility for auditing self-assessment reports produced by private higher education institutions.

Progress in implementing the national quality accreditation process has been slow. Nguyen, Evers, and Marshall (2017) identified the main difficulties as including a lack of independence from the Ministry, a lack of sufficiently well-trained personnel, and the managerial and control-oriented nature of the process. Currently, while about 92% of all universities have completed their institutional self-assessments, slightly less than one-half of them have completed their external audits. This situation means that some universities will be engaging in the five-year reaccreditation process before others have received accreditation for the first time.

Progress in adopting a credit-based curriculum model occurred much more quickly. In 2007, shortly after the adoption of Resolution 14, *Decision No. 43/2007/QĐ-BGDĐT, dated August 15, 2007*, introduced a credit-based model which was welcomed by the sector.

Progress in reforming the system of student selection for admission to higher education was not achieved, however, until 2015, when a single examination, the national secondary school examination, was adopted to serve both as the final examination for secondary school and as an entrance examination for university. There have been some reported concerns about this decision, especially from academically selective universities wishing to be able to admit students with particular aptitudes and talents (Thanh, 2018). The Higher Education Law of 2012 permitted universities to have separate processes of admission (Article 34, Term 2b). Nothing further could be done, though, until five years later when the Ministry of Education and Training eventually issued relevant regulatory procedures (*Circular No. 05/2017/TT-BGDĐT, dated 25/01/2017*). Some leading universities are now developing additional selection instruments (*Viet Nam News, 2019*).

Since 2005, therefore, though a credit-based curriculum model was swiftly adopted, there have been many challenges associated with implementing a national quality assurance process. Recent progress is now evident, but for many years since 2005 the pace at which reform has been implemented has been remarkably slow.

### 2.2.3 *Increasing Student Participation Rates*

Resolution 14 proposed that by 2020 there should be an enrolment rate of 450 students per 10,000 persons in Vietnam. According to *Decision No. 121/2007/QĐ-TTg, dated July 27, 2007*, this target would have required an enrolment of 4.5 million students by 2020. These aspirations seemed implausible at the time (Hayden & Lam, 2007; Pham & London, 2010), and, in fact, the peak level of enrolment since 2005 was only 1.82 million, achieved in 2014 (General Statistics Office of Vietnam, 2017, p. 744). Since achieving this peak, annual enrolment levels have been in slow decline (Ministry of Education and Training, 2019), possibly because of the emergence of relatively high rates of graduate unemployment (Vietnamnet, 2016).

Resolution 14 also proposed that ‘non-public’ higher education institutions, referred to after 2006 as private higher education institutions, should account for 40% of all higher education enrolments by 2020. This expectation also seemed implausible at the time, given that legislative and regulatory provisions for higher education for much of the period before 2005 had largely ignored the ‘non-public’ component of the higher education sector (Hayden & Dao, 2010, p. 222). By 2017, private higher education institutions accounted for only 15.5% of all enrolments (General Statistics Office of Vietnam, 2017, p. 744). This level of enrolment now appears to be stationary. Attending a private higher education institution is too costly for most young people and their families. In general, the tuition fees charged by these institutions are two or three times higher than those charged by their public counterparts. There also continues to exist a public perception that many private universities are of inferior quality. Private universities are, however, becoming increasingly diverse (as reported on more fully by Chau in Chapter 8). They now include some institutions that offer internationally benchmarked degree programmes. Though very expensive to attend, these institutions are attractive to an increasingly affluent middle-class segment in Vietnamese society.

In general, Resolution 14's projections for growth in the sector, especially regarding an expansion of private higher education, were highly inflated. These inflated projections no doubt contributed to the lack of realism that characterised the higher education network plans issued in 2007 and 2013, as referred to earlier. They also underestimated significantly the extent of the challenges associated with seeking to expand rates of participation at private higher education institutions.

#### 2.2.4 *Improving Staffing Quality*

With higher education enrolment rates growing by as much as 9% per annum during the 1990s and early 2000s, by 2005 the sector's staffing quality was placed under enormous strain. The student-to-lecturer ratio in 2005 was 29:1 (General Statistics Office of Vietnam, 2010, p. 649), which was widely agreed to be too high, and less than one-half of all higher education lecturers had any kind of postgraduate qualification (General Statistics Office of Vietnam, 2010, p. 651). Resolution 14 proposed a target student-to-lecturer ratio of 20:1, to be achieved by 2020. It also proposed that by 2020 at least 60% of all higher education lecturers should hold a master's qualification. Another expectation was that 35% of higher education lecturers should hold a doctorate. Also, more attention was to be given to providing professional development opportunities for academic staff members, and it was proposed that there should be new policies to improve the processes for making academic appointments and for assessing teaching effectiveness.

In some areas of staffing quality, there is clear evidence of improvement over the past 15 years. By 2016–2017, for example, the student-to-teacher ratio had improved to reach 22.6:1 (General Statistics Office of Vietnam, 2017, p. 744), and the proportion of all academic staff members holding a master's degree had reached 87% (General Statistics Office of Vietnam, 2017, p. 746). However, the proportion of university lecturers with doctorates stood at only 22% (Nguyen, 2018b). The enrolment rate in domestic Ph.D. programmes is reported to have been adversely impacted by a requirement issued by the Ministry of Education and Training in 2017 (*Circular No. 08/2017/TT-BGDĐT, dated April 4, 2017*) that all applicants for admission to domestic doctoral candidature should meet a foreign language requirement, and that all domestic doctoral candidates should achieve at least two peer-reviewed articles before being eligible to

graduate (Nguyen, 2018b). This requirement was imposed in response to a concern that domestic Ph.D. programmes were of poor quality.

Less progress has been made in terms of improved working conditions for academic staff members. Article 15 of the Higher Education Law of 2012 committed the State to provide the ‘necessary material and spiritual conditions for teachers to fulfil their roles and responsibilities, preserving and developing the tradition of respecting teachers and honouring the teaching profession’. In practice, however, most public universities do not have the resources needed to provide academic staff members with satisfactory working conditions. Furthermore, professional development opportunities often only mean attending courses on political ideology. Human resource management at public universities is constrained by a plethora of regulations that do not always cohere harmoniously. Workloads, for example, are regulated by the Ministry of Education and Training; while academic salaries, tenure, and promotion are regulated by the Ministry of Internal Affairs; and the Prime Minister’s Office sets standards for the award of professorial titles.

Outcomes are mixed, therefore, regarding Resolution 14’s aspirations for improving staffing quality. On the one hand, there has been a big improvement in the proportion of academic staff members holding a master’s degree. There has also been a significant increase in the number of Ph.D.-qualified members of academic staff. However, the proportion of all academic staff members with a Ph.D. qualification remains relatively low by international standards. It is in the regulatory environment affecting academic employment, and in the physical conditions for academic work, that least progress is evident. Various leading public universities have been able to improve the working conditions for their academic staff because of their ability to charge higher tuition fees and to attract large numbers of part-time and professional education students. These institutions remain, however, a minority group of universities within the sector.

### *2.2.5 Increasing the Level of Research Productivity*

Resolution 14 affirmed the need for a research orientation to become much more strongly developed within the higher education sector. It correctly identified the need for leading public universities to become major scientific centres, and to increase the level of income they earned from the commercialisation of their scientific and technological activities.

It proposed that by 2020 the level of income received by universities from the commercialisation of research should account for 25% of the total revenue across the sector, which was unrealistic, given that even leading international universities would find this goal to be very challenging. The point made, though, was that leading public universities needed to boost their research productivity and associated research earnings.

Progress made since 2005 in raising the level of research productivity is difficult to assess conclusively. On the one hand, data sources such as Scimago (2019) show a significant improvement, especially over recent years, in the number of citable research documents coming from Vietnam. According to the Scimago data set, however, Vietnam's h-index in 2018 was below Thailand's and Malaysia's, indicating that there remains much room for improvement in Vietnam. The challenges are especially acute in the humanities and social sciences (Pham & Hayden, 2019).

The development of legislation and regulatory provisions relating to the ownership of intellectual property is having a positive effect. So also is a provision in the amended Law on Science and Technology (*Law No. 29/2013/QH13, dated June 18, 2013*), whereby science and technology will receive 2% of the annual national budget. Most recently, in *Decree No. 13/2019/ND-CP, dated February 18, 2019*, enterprises willing to invest in science and technology projects are being offered a range of taxation and credit incentives.

Vietnam's higher education research culture remains fragile, however. The proportion of academic staff members holding a doctoral qualification remains low by international standards. Also, university lecturers have not traditionally regarded research to be an essential element in their professional role. Indeed, many academic staff members trade their workload allocations for research for opportunities to assume additional teaching responsibilities for which extra pay may be obtained (Le & Hayden, 2017, p. 85). As Nguyen (Chapter 4), reports, Vietnam's research and development sector receives a much lower proportion of the country's gross domestic product than is the case globally, and especially in comparison with various other regional neighbours.

Research funding is also problematic. As Pham (2013) has documented, the mechanisms employed within public universities to allocate research funds are 'bureaucratically fragmented and cumbersome' (p. 142). The National Fund for Science and Technology Development

(NAFOSTED), which became operational in 2008, introduced peer review procedures to assess which projects it should fund. It now plays a significant role in fostering high-quality research in universities, but it is responsible for only a small percentage of the national research budget. The rest is allocated directly to ministries and research institutes, to support research projects of variable quality.

As in other areas, Resolution 14's reform aspirations in the area of research productivity were too ambitious. These aspirations were also narrowly conceived, given their exclusive focus on improving the commercialisation of the research outputs of Vietnam's universities. There has certainly been an improvement since 2005 in the research productivity of the sector, but there are data limitations on being able to map its extent. Evidence available from leading universities suggests that no university in Vietnam has achieved anything like 25% of its total revenue coming from the commercialisation of its research outputs.

### *2.2.6 Reforming Governance and Management*

Resolution 14 offered the prospect of removing the system of line-management of public higher education institutions by ministries and other State instrumentalities. It also proposed that higher education institutions should have a guaranteed level of autonomy, commensurate with an appropriate level of accountability. The system of line-management remains intact, but selected public universities now have far more autonomy, though the conditions for their autonomy remain problematic.

Line-management control means that there are now 18 ministries and more than 60 State instrumentalities (including provincial governments) that 'own' universities and academies. These authorities vary markedly in terms of how they manage and support the institutions for which they are responsible. The Ministry of Education and Training, which has line-management responsibility for most of the leading universities, but not for the two national universities because these universities report directly to the Cabinet, has system-wide responsibility for issuing and implementing regulations associated with the Higher Education Law. The Ministry's capacity to enforce these regulations across the sector is, however, limited because other ministries and provincial governments may not be fully supportive of the regulations. There is, therefore, a high level of fragmentation in the governance and management practices within the sector. Various other countries, most notably China, which

also had multiple line-management arrangements in higher education sectors, have brought their higher education sectors under control by one ministry. In Vietnam, however, there appears to be a reluctance to move in this direction.

Since 2005, various legislative and regulatory instruments have endorsed the importance of giving public higher education institutions more autonomy. Article 29 of the Higher Education Law of 2012 declared, for example, that universities should be entitled to enjoy autonomy in their teaching and research, their management of technology, finances and international relations, and their decision-making about organisational structures. This entitlement was, however, made conditional upon their capability, their ranking, and their quality assessment results. Processes for assessing capability, for ranking institutions, and for performing quality audits were then either not developed or else implemented very slowly, meaning that the task of assessing eligibility for autonomy had to wait.

The Ministry of Education and Training in 2015 introduced a pilot scheme whereby public universities willing to forego direct public subsidies would receive ‘autonomous’ status. They could, therefore, have more decision-making freedom across a wide range of areas of responsibility. Initially, four universities were declared to be autonomous. Since then, the number has increased to 23. The price of this autonomy is that the universities must become financially self-reliant. The universities concerned may set their tuition fee levels, within ceiling levels set by the Government, which enables them to function more like public corporations. As public corporations, however, they are subject to many laws and regulations that do not fit well with the circumstances of a university. They also find that being financially self-sufficient limits their capacity to exploit many of the other freedoms supposedly available to them.

A particular issue for the sector is the level of difficulty public universities have experienced in establishing university councils. The Government has for many years expected that public universities should have governing councils (see, for example, *Decision 58/2010/QĐ-TTg, dated September 22, 2010*; *Decision 70/2014/QĐ-TTg, dated December 10, 2014*). Rectors have been cautious, however, calling for ever more detailed instructions about how these councils are supposed to function. A concern for them is a lack of confidence regarding the true extent of the authority able to be exercised by a university council. Another concern for rectors is that they might become the ‘meat in the sandwich’ in

the event of conflict between a university council and a line-management authority. The role of the Communist Party of Vietnam regarding university councils has also remained unclear.

As widely documented (see, for example, Dao, 2015; Dao & Hayden, 2015; George, 2011; Hayden & Lam, 2007; Le & Hayden, 2017; Marklein, 2019), the culture of governance and management in the sector continues, therefore, to preserve a legacy of centralised control. Resolution 14's promise of a more contemporary model of higher education governance and management has not produced the outcomes that many anticipated.

### 2.2.7 *Becoming More Globally Integrated*

Resolution 14 identified a need for the sector to become more globally integrated. It proposed that there should be improved international cooperation and a higher level of international competitiveness. It also proposed an increased emphasis on teaching foreign languages (especially English), an increase in exchanges with foreign higher education institutions, and an increase in the number of international students attending higher education institutions in Vietnam.

The success of the sector's internationalisation agenda has attracted wide scholarly interest (see, for example, Hoang, Tran, & Pham, 2018; Tran et al., 2014; Tran & Marginson, 2018; Tran, Ngo, Nguyen, & Dang, 2017; Tran, Phan, & Marginson, 2018; Welch, 2010). The sector is now much more outward-looking than was the case in 2005, but Tran and Marginson (2018) report that many of the reform-oriented activities to date have been 'fragmented, narrow, ad hoc, inconsistent and un[sus]tainable' (pp. 2–3). Three examples lend support to this observation. In 2010, in *Decision No. 911/QĐ-TTg, dated June 17, 2010*, the Government committed to sponsoring more than 10,000 young university lecturers to go abroad to complete a Ph.D. qualification. Project 911, as it was known, then took more than three years to become operational. By 2017, it had resulted in the training of only 3800 graduates. Budgetary constraints are said to have played a pivotal role in its unsustainability (Vietnamnet, 2017). A second example, reported by Tran et al. (2018), concerns the 'advanced programs' delivered across 20 universities in Vietnam. These programmes, borrowed from leading international universities, appear to have been limited in terms of their broader institutional capacity-building impact (p. 50).



A third example concerns programmes delivered in a foreign language (usually English). In general, these programmes provided the institutions responsible for them with an opportunity to charge higher tuition fees. Access to them tended, therefore, to be confined to students whose families could afford to pay the additional tuition fees required, thereby restricting their impact.

### 2.3 OBSTACLES TO THE REFORM AGENDA

Given Vietnam's status as a developing nation and having regard for the long-lasting impact of warfare until 1975 and extreme poverty until the late 1980s, it would have been extraordinary had the higher education sector managed to become 'advanced by international standards' and 'highly competitive' by 2020. Many of the specific reform measures proposed by Resolution 14 were, however, successfully implemented, and their impact on the sector proved to be overwhelmingly positive. The problem is, though, that the pace of the reform process has been both slow and sporadic. Furthermore, some critically important reforms proposed by Resolution 14 have yet to be properly implemented.

Culturally, the higher education sector in Vietnam seems to remain heavily dependent upon the leadership provided by a slow-moving State bureaucracy. The distinctive characteristics of this situation include the centralisation of authority, the use of rules and regulations to achieve coordination, and the proliferation of bureaucracy. A further characteristic is that newly appointed leaders frequently take little notice of the policy agenda of their predecessors, preferring instead to take a direction that reflects their personal priorities. Predictably, therefore, reform proceeds sporadically. Reform also proceeds slowly. Laws must be interpreted and operationalised by ministerial decisions, circulars, and directives before being implemented. This process can take years. Any unintended consequence of a particular regulation requires slow and careful reconsideration before anything can be done to address the problem, which gives rise to even more delay.

Structurally, the higher education sector seems unable to break free from a system of line-management control of public higher education institutions by multiple ministries and State instrumentalities. According to Resolution 14, this arrangement was supposed to cease, but no change is evident. At present, therefore, the Ministry of Education and Training, which is principally responsible for implementing the Higher

Education Law, makes regulatory pronouncements intended to improve the effective functioning of the sector as a whole. Other ministries and State instrumentalities responsible for their own higher education institutions may have different priorities, in which case they are reluctant about complying with the priorities of the Ministry of Education and Training. Few, if any, of the line-management authorities responsible for higher education institutions in Vietnam seem willing to surrender authority to a single sector-wide coordinating authority. There is also a widespread lack of conviction within the sector about the desirability of permitting the Ministry of Education and Training to exercise more sector-wide control. The sector continues, therefore, to function without much national coordination. The uncoordinated nature of the sector, together with its tendency for fragmentation, are conditions identified by Ngo (Chapter 3) as having their roots in tensions deriving from a competitive relationship between neoliberalism and socialism.

The pace of sector-wide reform might be faster had public universities been given more institutional autonomy, as was proposed by Resolution 14. Government legislation in this regard has been extremely cautious. The Law on Higher Education of 2012 indicated that higher education institutions should function independently concerning organisational, curriculum, international, and quality matters, ‘depending on the capability, the rankings and the educational quality assessment results’ (Article 32). The foundations for establishing the capability, rankings and quality assessment results then took more years to develop. The amended Higher Education Law of 2018 declared more forcefully that ‘higher education institutions shall have autonomy and accountability as prescribed by law’ (Article 32). The Ministry of Education and Training is currently developing regulations required to give effect to this provision, which means that any meaningful reforms may not be implemented until 2020 or 2021.

There are serious challenges for the Ministry to address. First, there continues to be uncertainty within the sector about how much independence university councils as governing bodies may exercise, given the persistence of line-management by ministries and State instrumentalities, and also given the overriding authority of the Party. Second, notions of autonomy and accountability are relatively new in Vietnam, with autonomy often regarded as referring only to resource management (Dao & Hayden, 2015), and with accountability often understood as referring narrowly to self-responsibility or social responsibility (Salmi & Pham, 2019).

As discussed by Marklein and Mai (Chapter 11), the notion of academic freedom, though inconsistent with Party ideology, must also somehow be considered, given its foundational importance for models of institutional autonomy being examined in the West. Third, the kind of autonomy given so far to 23 ‘autonomous’ public universities is problematic. Though now authorised to make decisions about their priorities and use of resources to an extent previously unimaginable, these universities have also been ‘cut adrift’ financially from public funding. This situation means that they now depend heavily on an unpredictable marketplace for income from student tuition fees. This model of institutional autonomy will not suit most public universities in Vietnam. Furthermore, it will encourage a trend already evident across the sector, that is, for universities to become preoccupied with making money.

Finally, the pace of reform might have been faster had the higher education sector become more globally engaged. To become more globally engaged, Vietnamese universities would need to become better connected with global knowledge networks, and standards of excellence would need to correspond more with international benchmarks, as opposed to being articulated by the State bureaucracy in the form of ever more detailed statements about accreditation standards and quality criteria. Leading universities in Vietnam are now making strong progress in terms of becoming more globally engaged, but the large majority of universities in the sector remain far removed from this development.

## 2.4 A NEW REFORM AGENDA

As George (2011, p. 224) pointed out, Resolution 14 did not represent a ‘radical reshaping of higher education’ in Vietnam. Instead, it addressed acknowledged deficiencies in the sector, and it proposed reforms intended to give expression to a policy of ‘socialisation’. The slowness of its implementation has meant that the higher education sector has made much less progress than might have been anticipated in light of the ambitious tone of Resolution 14 when it was adopted by the Government in 2005.

It is now timely for Vietnam to consider the development of a new long-term vision for its higher education sector. This vision would need to address aspects of Resolution 14’s reform agenda that were not fully implemented, especially in the areas of system-wide coordination,

institutional governance and management, and internationalisation. It should also take account of implications for the sector of disruptive technological innovation, and of Vietnam's need to focus on achieving regional and global significance in specific areas of research specialisation and technological innovation. There remains much to be done to improve the sector's performance, and no time to waste.

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# ‘Standing Between the Flows’: Interactions Among Neoliberalism, Socialism and Confucianism in Vietnamese Higher Education

*Ha T. Ngo*

As documented in the literature, the ‘Doi Moi’ (literally means renovation or reform) reform led by the Communist Party of Vietnam (CPV) in 1986 brought about dramatic changes in contemporary higher education (HE) of Vietnam (Hayden & Thiep, 2010). Transition from a centrally planned to a market-oriented economy (Boothroyd & Phạm, 2000) led to major shifts in higher education, including diversification in funding sources and types of institutions (with the inclusion of the private sector) (Fry, 2009), dramatic increase in enrolment

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(Hayden & Thiep, 2010), improvement in facilities and educational environment (Đỗ & Đỗ, 2014), and significant changes in curriculum (George, 2011).

Obviously, HE in Vietnam in recent decades has been fundamentally transformed. The resulting narrative which began with Doi Moi in 1986 is characterised by the constant addition of new elements, players, values, discourses, and practices as described explicitly in this volume as liberal education (Ngo, Chapter 7), private higher education (see Chau, Chapter 8 and Pham, Chapter 9), community college (see Nguyen and Chau, Chapter 10), academic freedom (see Marklein and Mai, Chapter 11), and internationalisation (see Pham and Doan, Chapter 14; Vu, Chapter 15; Truong, Ngo, and Nguyen, Chapter 16; Nguyen, Cao, and Pham, Chapter 12).

The introduction of these new ingredients definitely adds new flavours to traditional Vietnamese HE, previously dominated by the public sector under the strict control of the Ministry of Education and Training (MoET) representing the state (Hayden & Thiep, 2007). However, the presence of these old and new elements has resulted in a diverse yet somehow fragmented picture of Vietnamese HE, full of dynamism, even conflicts. The excessive control of the government over HE despite the system's stronger demand for autonomy (Hayden & Thiep, 2007; Van Dao & Hayden, 2010) and/or the rapid expansion of the private sector and the strengthening practices of privatisation in the public sector (Hoang, 2019) amidst the state adherence to Socialism as the national orthodoxy (George, 2005) are to name a few typical examples of the contradictory practices in the HE of Vietnam.

Hence, I found the portrayal in the poem below, which was written almost 80 years ago by one of the most renowned poets and communist soldiers in modern Vietnam—Tố Hữu, a perfect description of the current situation of Vietnamese HE in this twenty-first century.

Bâng khuâng đứng giữa đôi dòng nước,  
 Chọn một dòng hay để nước trôi?  
 (Between the flows I stand, confused  
 Choose one? Or let them go?<sup>1</sup>)

<sup>1</sup>Translated by the author.



The above quotation is from a poem titled 'Dậy lên thanh niên' (Rise up! Oh young<sup>2</sup>), published in Tô Hữu's first poem collection 'Từ ấy' (Since then<sup>3</sup>) for the first time in 1946 (Tô Hữu, 2008). This poem was penned in 1940, a critical period in Vietnamese history when the country was confronted with various external threats to as well as opportunities for independence. This quotation vividly depicts the state of cognitive dissonance of the then-young generation of Vietnam as they were in the midst of the country's tumultuous situation, being exposed to different flows of thoughts and ideologies such as imperialism, nationalism, democratism, socialism, etc.

Similarly to the young man in this poem being perplexed by divergent flows of thoughts, researchers, policymakers, and practitioners interested in contemporary Vietnamese HE are challenged by the contradictory, or at the least, uncoordinated practices in the current system. Although this situation has been acknowledged in the literature, there has been little research explaining the cause of this state of fragmentation.

Therefore, in this chapter, I address this gap in the literature, using the institutional logics perspective as the framework of analysis. The chapter is organised in three major sections. The first section briefly introduces the key ideas of the institutional logics perspective and its implications to provide the theoretical basis for this analysis. Accordingly, an analysis of the contemporary HE system of Vietnam is provided in the second section, arguing that it is characterised by Neoliberalism, Socialism, and Confucianism as the three major ideologies at the societal level. A further analysis of each ideology in the third section reveals that there are significantly compatible as well as contradicting elements among them.

Finally, I conclude that understanding the three dominant ideologies that characterise Vietnamese HE, namely Neoliberalism, Socialism, and Confucianism, and the compatibilities as well as contradictions among them crucially improve our knowledge of the current situation of Vietnamese HE. Most importantly, this understanding significantly contributes to further attempts to address existing issues in HE of Vietnam because effective solutions can only be generated based upon a sound understanding of the problems.

<sup>2</sup>Translated by the author.

<sup>3</sup>Translated by the author.

### 3.1 INSTITUTIONAL LOGICS AS THE THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Firstly introduced by Friedland and Alford (1991) and further developed by Thornton and Ocasio (1999, 2008), the institutional logics perspective has been widely adopted in research since the 2000s (Lounsbury & Boxenbaum, 2013). According to Thornton, Ocasio, and Lounsbury (2012a), institutional logic is defined as ‘the socially constructed, historical patterns of cultural symbols and material practices, including assumptions, values and beliefs, by which individuals and organizations provide meaning to their daily activity, organize time and space, and reproduce their lives and experiences’ (p. 2). In other words, institutional logics are values and beliefs representing ‘expectations for social relations and behaviours’ (Waldorff, Reay, & Goodrick, 2013, p. 101), thereby providing references and justifications for social actors in their choices of sensemaking, decisions, and identity (Thornton et al., 2012a).

Several important implications of this perspective follow. Firstly, it does not view individuals and organisations as being dis-embedded from their context and therefore can act freely. Instead, both individuals and organisations are situated in an institutional environment in which they are simultaneously regulated in their behaviours and provided opportunities to exercise their agency (Thornton, Ocasio, & Lounsbury, 2012b; Waldorff et al., 2013). In other words, the divergent responses of actors in the reform narrative of Vietnamese HE are not a coincidence but a result of interactions between actors and the institutional environment in which they are placed. As logics offer actors references and justifications for actions, the institutional logics perspective helps understand how these actors in HE of Vietnam justify their responses.

Secondly, the institutional logics perspective, inherited from the Neo-Institutional Theory (NIT) school of thought, recognises that there are multiple levels of analysis in which institutional logics are manifested (Besharov & Smith, 2014). Scott, one of the most influential scholars of NIT, identifies six levels of analysis, including the world system, society, organisational field, organisational population, organisation, and organisational subsystem (2008). Among these, the concept of organisational field is a significant contribution of NIT scholars to the literature. It is defined as ‘a recognised area of institutional life: key suppliers, resource and product consumers, regulatory agencies, and other organisations that produce similar services or products’ (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983, p. 148). An organisational field is constituted by institutions that

are produced and reproduced through repeated interactions of organisations (Barley & Tolbert, 1997). According to these definitions, higher education is an organisational field constituted with organisations such as universities, colleges, state authorities, industries, and supranational organisations (Kyvik, 2009).

Generally, researchers agree that logics are located at a societal level (Friedland & Alford, 1991; Glynn, 2008; Thornton, 2004) while the manifestation of logics at lower levels such as organisational fields, organisations, and/or individuals are derived from logics at this societal level (Besharov & Smith, 2014). For this reason, it is important to understand the source of the logics at the societal level while studying the influence of institutional logics on fields, organisations, or individuals. Hence, to understand the institutional logics that justify the behaviours of organisations in the HE field of Vietnam, examining the logics at the societal level is required.

Finally, the institutional logics perspective acknowledges the coexistence of multiple logics at the societal and field levels which is referred to as 'institutional complexity' (Besharov & Smith, 2014; Greenwood, Raynard, Kodeih, Micelotta, & Lounsbury, 2011; Waldorff et al., 2013). The relationships among these coexisting logics can be competitive (Greenwood et al., 2011; Lounsbury, 2007) as well as cooperative (Goodrick & Reay, 2011; Greenwood, Díaz, Li, & Lorente, 2010). In competitive relations, the increasing adoption of one logic in organisational practices will correspondingly lead to a decrease in another logic (Waldorff et al., 2013). Consequently, competing logics cause organisations to be confronted with 'incompatible prescriptions' (Greenwood et al., 2011; Zilber, 2013), resulting in tension and pressures that challenge organisations' existence (Tracey, Phillips, & Jarvis, 2011). Meanwhile, cooperative relations among logics means that coexisting logics can jointly influence practices and strengthen one another (Goodrick & Reay, 2011).

Accordingly, the divergence of behaviours in the field of HE in Vietnam may be explained as the result of logic multiplicity of the field. More importantly, given the prevalence of multiple logics in the field of HE and their significant influence on organisations, examining the relationships among these logics (whether competitive or cooperative) may reveal important implications for the development of Vietnamese HE.

Collectively, this chapter aims to examine the institutional logics used to rationalise the behaviours of actors in the field of HE in

Vietnam, particularly those located at the societal level. Neoliberalism, Socialism, and Confucianism as the dominant ideologies in contemporary Vietnamese society therefore become the object of this analysis. Especially, the relationships among these three ideologies are the major focus of the discussion provided in the subsequent section.

## 3.2 NEOLIBERALISM, SOCIALISM AND CONFUCIANISM AS THE DOMINANT LOGICS IN CONTEMPORARY HE OF VN

### 3.2.1 *Neoliberalism*

Neoliberalism, being rooted in the belief of the market's supremacy (Bamberger, Morris, & Yemini, 2019), is a theory that emphasises economic rationality (Kezar, 2004) and promotes the idea of liberalising individual entrepreneurial freedom to maximise personal benefit (Harvey, 2007). As a result, Neoliberalism encourages shifting the role of the state to market regulation (Bamberger et al., 2019) and supports the protection of private property, free markets, and free trade (Harvey, 2007; Mudge, 2008). Developing since the 1970s, Neoliberalism has become the dominant discourse that pervasively impacts people's way of thinking and interpreting the world, thereby being widely adopted in many countries as a central template for economic and political practices (Clarke, 2007) under the strong promotion of international organisations such as the World Bank (WB), International Monetary Fund (IMF), Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), and World Trade Organization (WTO) (Neubauer, 2008).

HE is not excluded from the widespread influence of Neoliberalism. Neoliberal reforms that advocate the reduction of the state's involvement while increasing the participation of the private sector in HE provision are common in many countries (Mok, 2006; Moutsios, 2009). Consequently, neoliberal practices such as liberalisation, decentralisation, privatisation, commodification, and corporatisation have become prevalent in HE (Mok, 2007; Mok & Lo, 2007).

In Vietnam, neoliberal practices are evident in the Vietnamese government's recent reforms. Firstly, decentralisation and market instruments were introduced since 'Doi Moi' in 1986 in various domains from the economy (Beeson & Pham, 2012; Masina, 2006) and rural development (Taylor, 2007) to HE (Oliver, Thanh, Elsner, & Phuong, 2009).

In HE, HE institutions (HEIs) have been granted more autonomy to determine (to some extent) their internal affairs (Nguyen, Oliver, & Priddy, 2009). Diversification in funding has been implemented through the cost-sharing policy that allows HEIs to charge tuition fees (Oliver et al., 2009), and private HEIs started to emerge in the late 1980s (Huong & Fry, 2002).

Nevertheless, the influence of Neoliberalism in the Vietnamese government's policies is 'limited and ambiguous' (Masina, 2012). The state of Vietnam still maintains a central role while adopting a 'gradualist approach' to its development strategies (Masina, 2006) despite strong suggestions of neoliberal reforms from WB and IMF (Masina, 2012). In HE, the Vietnamese government represented by the MoET undoubtedly remains the highest administrative body that has ultimate control over the system, despite promising to grant autonomy to HEIs through decentralisation (George, 2005). This conflict in practices in the case of Vietnam is explained by the literature as the state's attempt to 'walk the line' (Madden, 2014) between Socialism as its orthodox ideology (George, 2005) and the pervasive influence of Neoliberalism as an external ideology promoted by international organisations (Dang, 2009). The influence of Socialism in Vietnamese HE is discussed specifically in the following subsection.

### 3.2.2 *Socialism*

Socialism is the ideology developed based on Marxist theory and adopted by communist countries such as China and Vietnam as the national orthodoxy (George, 2005; Li, 2016; Mok, 2008). Some major characteristics of a socialist regime include the state owning the major means of production, allocating resources through central planning, eliminating private entrepreneurial activities, and governing all facets of society from politics and the economy to education and culture (Beresford, 2008; London, 2006).

In 1986 the Communist Party of Vietnam (CPV), under the reform agendas of Doi Moi, decided to abandon the central planning model to transform from state socialism to a 'socialist-oriented' market economy under state guidance, often referred to as 'market socialism' (Mok, 2008), leading to remarkable achievements in subsequent decades. Nevertheless, the influence of Socialism in Vietnam, particularly its HE system, is still visible (Beresford, 2008). Despite greater autonomy

having been granted to HEIs, and the system having been diversified with the increasing participation of private providers, contributing to the massification of the system (London, 2006), HE in Vietnam still strongly adheres to the socialist ideology, clearly manifested in the following aspects.

Firstly, the CPV is granted extraordinary power by the constitution of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam, maintaining its leading role in the governance structure of the education system (Truong, Hallinger, & Sanga, 2017). Secondly, HE is commissioned to build socialism in Vietnam, being a key driving force to contribute to the country's transition process from a central-planned economy to market socialism (George, 2005). Finally, the HE curricula include a compulsory component of the teachings of Marxism-Leninism and Ho Chi Minh's thoughts (Harman & Bich, 2010; Welch, 2010), because the authorities believe that an important function of HE is to cultivate socialist characteristics in people (George, 2005; Salomon & Ket, 2007).

Obviously, Neoliberalism and Socialism uncompromisingly contradict each other. Thus, the case of Vietnam is especially fascinating because it provides a stark example of the contradiction between socialist orthodoxy and a growing market economy (Welch, 2010). To understand this seemingly inexplicable coexistence, it is necessary to understand Confucianism, the third important ideology that fundamentally upholds the Vietnamese education system and its relationships with the other two ideologies.

### 3.2.3 *Confucianism*

Confucianism is the ethical and philosophical ideology developed based on the teachings of Confucius that has tremendous influence on East Asian countries (Li, 2012; Marginson, 2011, 2012). Confucianism was first introduced to Vietnam during the Han Dynasty (Vuong & Tran, 2009) and was institutionalised in every facet of society when China ruled over Vietnam for more than one thousand years from 111 BC to 939 AD (Hãng, Meijer, Bulte, & Pilot, 2015; Huong & Fry, 2004). As a result, the influence of Confucianism on Vietnamese culture, education, and social structure until the present is undeniable (Doan, 2005; Welch, 2010). Despite the prevailing impact of Socialism as the national orthodoxy and the widespread influence of Neoliberalism (Duc, 2008; London, 2010), Confucianism still remains as the firm foundation on

which Vietnamese culture is built (Borton, 2000; McHale, 2002), permeating and guiding Vietnamese society, from social conduct and state management to the form and content of the education system (Tran, 2013; Vuong & Tran, 2009; Welch, 2010).

As to the influence of Confucianism on education, the most profoundly influential thoughts of Confucian philosophy on education are its pragmatic view regarding the purpose of education, and its belief that all human beings have the same potential to develop. Firstly, education in Confucianism has a strong pragmatic orientation. Although Confucius believed that learning is a private pursuit to cultivate one's full humanity, he viewed an individual as a 'flowing stream' (Hayhoe & Li, 2008), and education is the tool to help develop and harmonise the individual with the family, society, and nature (Tu, 1993). For him education was the only way through which an ideal state and a peaceful world that he dreamed of could be built (Kim, 2009).

Hence, knowledge and education in Confucianism clearly have ethical, moral, and political purposes (Li, 2016). In other words, in Confucian ideology, knowledge per se is not an end product of learning. The accumulation of knowledge through education is to guide people's social conduct (Dawson, 1981) and the value of knowledge is in its application to contribute to the public good (Li, 2016). Thanks to this pragmatic view regarding knowledge and education, the imperial states in the East Asian Confucian-heritage zone such as China, Korea, and Vietnam (Hayhoe & Li, 2008) considered Confucianism a useful tool to construct a well-ordered society. Consequently, it was adopted by the states to be the orthodox ideology that governed every aspect of the countries, from individuals' relationships to national management (Kim, 2009).

Secondly, Confucius' belief that everyone has unlimited potential, that there is no class distinction in education, and that everyone is educable (Hayhoe & Li, 2008; Lee, 1996) is another value that strongly shaped East Asian societies, particularly their education systems. This thought forms one of the most basic principles of education in Confucianism—egalitarianism. Because Confucius taught that everyone has equal potential, egalitarianism is the underpinning thought of the famous national civil service examination organised by the imperial states in the three East Asian countries. This examination ensured that equal opportunities would be given to all men to demonstrate their knowledge (Hayhoe & Li, 2008). The reward for those succeeding in this examination was an

opportunity to participate in the imperial bureaucracy as a recognition for one's maximum effort in learning (Kim, 2009) and his ability 'to endure the course of study and to pass the examination' (Williams, 2017, p. 26).

As the examination was the only opportunity for commoners to upgrade their social status, it had added extrinsic values to education in Confucianism: social and political (and possibly economic) motivations for social mobility (Hayhoe & Li, 2008). Through this state-organised examination, scholastically excellent candidates were rewarded with official government positions. Thus the link between knowledge and private gains (i.e. social, political, and economic power) has been strengthened throughout the thousand-year-long history of this 'government-orchestrated examination system' (Kim, 2009).

Consequently, a kind of social contract was formed between the imperial states and societies, that the states satisfied people's demand for social mobility by providing equal opportunities for everyone in the form of the civil service examination. In return, everyone accepted the social orders and hierarchies established by the imperial states. Education, therefore, acted as a means and currency for the states and citizens to fulfil this social contract. For this reason, the state became the grand patron of education (Kim, 2009). It took the role of guarding the principle of equal opportunity extorted by Confucianism as the state orthodoxy by controlling curriculum, selection standards, and procedures (Kim, 2009). In return, education institutions were utilised as a subsidiary body of the imperial states (Yang, 2016) to produce future officials for the bureaucracy (Li, 2016).

Nevertheless, this does not mean that the traditional educational systems in Confucian East Asia were entirely funded by the imperial states. In fact, traditional HE in these countries were identical systems that consisted of imperial and private learning institutions in parallel (Kim & Woo, 2009; Li, 2016; Trinh, 2014). Because Confucius taught that learning is a personal pursuit, it was natural for private schools to emerge where the imperial states could not reach. The imperial institutions were mainly established in the capital cities and provinces in which the Imperial Academy (太學-國子監 or Thái Học – Quốc Tử Giám) served as a HE institution and the state administrative department of education (Li, 2016; Trinh, 2014). At the same time, private academies (書院) were established at lower levels (towns or villages) by individuals who (1) were famous scholars; (2) had passed the official imperial exams; or (3) had attended the Imperial Academy (Li, 2016;



Park, Kang, Jeong, & Kang, 2008; Trinh, 2014). Although there were certainly variations in the different East Asian countries, generally this coexisting imperial—private system had gradually developed and institutionalised for more or less a thousand years (Li, 2016; Park et al., 2008; Trinh, 2014). In other words, the traditional model of education in East Asia, for around one thousand years, depended significantly on private education.

Accordingly, understanding the Confucian legacy of East Asian countries is critical to explain the HE practices in these countries from national to individual levels. At the national level, understanding Confucianism and its influence on East Asia helps explain the dominant role of the state in managing education. Education generally and HE in particular in these countries have been considered to be a subsidiary body of the state (Yang, 2016) and the primary vehicle for national development (Li, 2016; Li & Hayhoe, 2012). At the individual level, Confucian values help explain the extraordinary enthusiasm of East Asian people towards HE and their willingness to privately invest in HE. The strong link between education and private gain which has been strengthened for centuries encourages East Asian households to spend on HE. East Asian governments do not need the human capital theory as in Western society to convince families to privately invest in HE for their children's success in the workforce (Marginson, 2012).

More importantly, understanding Confucianism and its legacy helps explain the coexistence of the two contradicting ideologies in Vietnamese HE, namely Neoliberalism and Socialism, thereby providing justification for the presence of conflicting practices associated with these two ideologies such as the rapid expansion of private HE on one hand and the dominant role of the government controlling almost all aspects of HE on the other. It is the analysis of these three critical ideologies revealing significant compatibility as well as contradictions among them that offers such explanations, which is discussed in the next section.

### 3.3 INTERACTIONS AMONG NEOLIBERALISM, SOCIALISM AND CONFUCIANISM

As indicated, Neoliberalism and Socialism are fundamentally contradictory. I argue that it is the influence of Confucianism that enables these two conflicting ideologies to coexist. Hence in this section,

I focus on analysing the interactions between these two ideologies and Confucianism, while a discussion about the direct interactions between Neoliberalism and Socialism is omitted.

### *3.3.1 Between Socialism and Confucianism*

The socialist practices in education are mainly compatible with the Confucian tradition of Vietnam, particularly in the role of the state in education and the egalitarian emphasis. Firstly, in terms of managing education, the centrally planning and governing role of the socialist state of Vietnam is very similar to its previous imperial counterparts. As it was in the past in Vietnam as well as in other East Asia countries, the state still is the driving force of HE development, being responsible to establish goals and targets of the system, selectively investing to achieve such goals, developing standards and procedures to assure quality, and closely supervising universities (Marginson, 2011, 2012). Secondly, the socialist belief of accomplishing equal distribution in education by strengthening public education provision is the communist implementation of the Confucian principle of egalitarianism. In addition, in a society like Vietnam where people strongly believe that education is the only means for social mobility, this socialist practice therefore receives enormous support to be implemented. Thanks to these alignments, Socialism and Confucianism cooperate with one another to be strengthened and institutionalised in Vietnamese HE.

### *3.3.2 Between Neoliberalism and Confucianism*

#### *3.3.2.1 Compatibility*

Likewise, the compatibility between Neoliberalism and Confucianism can be observed in at least two aspects. Firstly, the economic rationale of Neoliberalism is compatible with the Confucian pragmatic view of education. The emphasis of Neoliberalism on the individual's economic rationality (Kezar, 2004) is endorsed by the Vietnamese society in which the inseparable link between education and private gain has been strengthened throughout the history of its civilisation. Secondly, there is alignment between Neoliberalism viewing education as an individual investment in one's human capital and Confucianism viewing learning as a personal pursuit. The neoliberal approach encouraging private

investment in HE based on the human capital theory is aligned with the traditional Confucian value of seeing education as being for the sake of one's self-cultivation. In addition, private education in Vietnam, similarly to other East Asian countries, has for a long time coexisted with the state-established imperial institutions and played a significant role in providing access to education to the wider public (Trinh, 2014). Thus, Vietnamese parents, like those in East Asia, need little convincing to privately invest in HE for their children (Marginson, 2012).

### 3.3.2.2 *Contradiction*

However, there are potential conflicts of values between the two ideologies that may pose serious challenges to the healthy development of HE in Vietnam in particular and in East Asia in general. Most critically, the inequality generated by the neoliberal approach ultimately contradicts the principle of egalitarianism supported by Confucianism. It is evident that the prevailing adoption of Neoliberalism has generated significant discrepancies in education opportunity and other related social problems such as regional disparity, and income and gender inequality (Hill & Kumar, 2012; Hursh & Martina, 2003; Unterhalter & Carpentier, 2010). Nevertheless, I argue that, in countries under the influence of the Confucian legacy like Vietnam, hidden behind these social problems of inequality is the conflict of values, of which educational inequality generated by Neoliberalism is fundamentally in conflict with the essential Confucian value of egalitarianism perpetuated in these societies. Thus, there are potential risks existing in the seemingly happy marriage between Neoliberalism and Confucianism.

## 3.4 CONCLUSION

In summary, in this chapter I have examined the cause of conflicting practices in contemporary HE in Vietnam using the institutional logic perspective as the theoretical framework. This perspective acknowledges the possibility of logic multiplicity, which means that there are different logics coexisting in a society, providing social actors with different systems of reference and justifications for their actions. Based on this argument, the uncoordinated and fragmented condition of the contemporary Vietnamese HE can be explained as a result of a competitive relationship between Neoliberalism and Socialism. However, the alignments between these two ideologies and Confucianism allow them to

coexist in Vietnamese HE. Nevertheless, there is potential incompatibility between Neoliberalism and Confucianism, which may lead to possible conflicts of value and contradicting practices. These findings therefore indicate that the tensions caused by conflicting practices that are attributed to Neoliberalism and Socialism as the two conflicting ideologies in Vietnamese HE may be exacerbated due to the potential dispute between Neoliberalism and Confucianism.

To answer the question of how to resolve the conflicts among these ideologies is beyond the scope of this chapter. However, by offering a meaningful explanation of the causes of the uncoordinated state of HE in Vietnam using the institutional logics perspective, the research argument provides substantial foundation for further attempts to tackle these issues. Specifically, the literature in the institutional logics perspective suggests that as tensions and conflicts caused by incompatible logics may threaten organisations' existence (Battilana & Dorado, 2010), they are forced to use different strategies to manage (Pache & Santos, 2013). In the poem at the beginning of the chapter, the young man experienced cognitive dissonance caused by conflicting ideas (metaphorically portrayed as many flows confronting him). Consequently, he asked himself whether he should choose one or go with the flow. This question is actually a poetic description of what the literature refers to as strategic thinking. Hence, organisations in Vietnamese HE, to survive, are required to exercise a certain level of strategic planning to overcome the 'incompatible prescriptions' (Greenwood et al., 2011) caused by conflicting logics as described in this chapter.

Nevertheless, this does not mean that Vietnamese HE is recommended to follow the suggestions of the poet to either choose one or go with the flow. Since institutional logics not only regulate social actors' behaviours but also provide them opportunities to exercise agency (Thornton et al., 2012a), actors are not and should not be mere carriers to implement institutional logics. Instead, if strategically utilised, institutional logics can provide helpful 'tool kits' (Swidler, 1986) for actors to influence external and internal environments of organisations.

Most importantly, although various actors participating in Vietnamese HE use different logics to justify their actions, resulting in divergent, even conflicting practices, they all aspire to improve the current system and to achieve better HE. Thus, such conflicts can be resolved if these actors achieve an agreement about what a more effective and efficient

HE system should look like and how to realise such a system. In other words, to overcome the current challenging situation, the Vietnamese HE system requires an unambiguous vision, transparent goals, and a clear action plan as a result of collective agreement among stakeholders.

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# A Review of University Research Development in Vietnam from 1986 to 2019

*Huong Thi Lan Nguyen*

## 4.1 INTRODUCTION

Since the ‘Doi Moi’ (Reform) policy in 1986, Vietnam’s ISI-indexed journal articles have increased more than 10-fold, from only 200–300 papers a year in 1986 to almost 3000 in 2015 (Nguyen, Ho-Le, & Le, 2017). In 2019, for the very first time, some Vietnamese universities were included in some quality world university rankings such as the Academic Ranking of World Universities (ARWU) (one in top 901–1000), Times Higher Education (two in top 801–1000, one in top 1000+), and the QS (Quacquarelli Symonds) ranking (one in top 400–550). A fast growth rate in research output and inclusion in some international university rankings demonstrates the progress of Vietnam’s Research and Development (R & D). However, does this mean that Vietnam has hugely improved its university research performance?

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This chapter reviews the historical context, government policies, and current capacity of university research development in Vietnam and suggests what should be done to further enhance the Vietnamese university research development. This analysis follows from my previous work that reviews university research policies in Vietnam from 1986 to 2013 (Nguyen, 2014), the strategies, policies, and processes of building research capacity at leading Vietnamese universities regarding strategies (Nguyen & Van Gramberg, 2018), resources (Nguyen, 2013), organisational structure (Nguyen & Meek, 2016), and human resources (Nguyen, 2016). This chapter revisits key issues discussed in these works and provides an update on government policies for University research development in the past five years (2014–2019).

## 4.2 VIETNAM'S HISTORICAL CONTEXT FOR UNIVERSITY RESEARCH DEVELOPMENT

University research development in Vietnam seems to be influenced by two main distinctive historical features: (1) a fast growth higher education (HE) system that focused heavily on teaching and (2) a Soviet modelled national R & D system that neglected university research.

### 4.2.1 *A Fast Growth Higher Education System that Focused Heavily in Teaching*

Vietnam is the 15th most populated country in the world, with a population of over 96 million, equivalent to 1.25% of the total world population. As a new lower-middle-income country, in 2018, Vietnam's total GDP (gross domestic product) valued at 245 billion US\$, represents 0.40% of the world economy. Its GDP per capita is 2564 US\$ with a 7.1% GDP growth rate. Along with China, Cuba, North Korea, and Laos, Vietnam is one of the world's five remaining single-party socialist states espousing communism. In accordance with Vietnam's different periods of historical development, the HE sector underwent six main stages of development.

#### 4.2.1.1 *The Feudal Period (from 938 to 1847)*

During the Feudal Period, Vietnam was dominated by Chinese imperial regimes. Although Vietnam's first university, the 'Quốc Tử Giám' or Imperial Academy, the oldest known university in South East Asia, was

founded during this period in 1076, modelling the Chinese system, the main responsibility of HE was to train bureaucrats, nobles, royalty, and other members of the elite (Welch, 2007). Research was not prioritised.

#### *4.2.1.2 The French Colonial Rule (from 1847 to 1945)*

During the French Colonial period, the French colonial regime's policy was to keep the Vietnamese ignorant to be more easily controlled. As a result, the sole aim of training was to maintain colonial rule. Very little was invested in tertiary education. Valley and Wilkinson (2008) note that during the early twentieth century a wave of institutional innovation in HE swept across much of Asia. Many of Asia's leading institutions of higher learning were established during this period. This establishment created strong institutional foundations for numerous Asian countries to build their HE systems on. In contrast, due to the French colonial regime, Vietnam missed this opportunity. Although some colleges were established during this period, HE was highly elitist.

### *4.2.2 The Temporary Independent Nation (from 1945 to 1954)*

In 1945, with the August Revolution, Vietnam gained temporary independence from France. The newly formed government put strong emphasis on improving the education system. However, after a short time, the French returned, and colonialism continued until 1954. The government prioritised regaining national independence. They could neither develop HE nor university research.

#### *4.2.2.1 The Divided Nation (1954–1975)*

In 1954, with the Dien Bien Phu victory, Vietnam regained independence from the French. However, the country was separated into two parts. In the north, the Democratic Republic of Vietnam modelled the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe HE system. In the school year 1974–1975, there were a total of 30 institutions serving 56,000 students (Albacht & Umakoshi, 2004). Most of the lecturers were trained in the USSR. Most of the HE Institutions (HEIs) were mono-disciplinary. This model was not conducive for research development. In the south, the Republic of Vietnam followed the US HE system. In the school year 1972–1973, 18 HEIs, served a total of 87,608 students. Many teaching staff were trained in the US. Most of the universities were multi-disciplinary.

#### 4.2.2.2 *The Reunified Nation (1975–1986)*

In 1975, the North took over the South. Vietnam was reunified as one country under the leadership of the Vietnamese Communist Party. As a result, the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe continued to influence the system heavily until the world's socialist systems collapsed in 1986. During this period (1975–1986) the Ministry of Education and Training (MOET) rebuilt the national education system. However, modelling the Soviet Union model, most Vietnamese HEIs were still mono-disciplinary. Most overseas trained lecturers undertook their studies in the Eastern bloc. Curricular materials were mainly taken from the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe. The foreign language taught at universities was either Russian or Chinese. Universities did not undertake research as a core function.

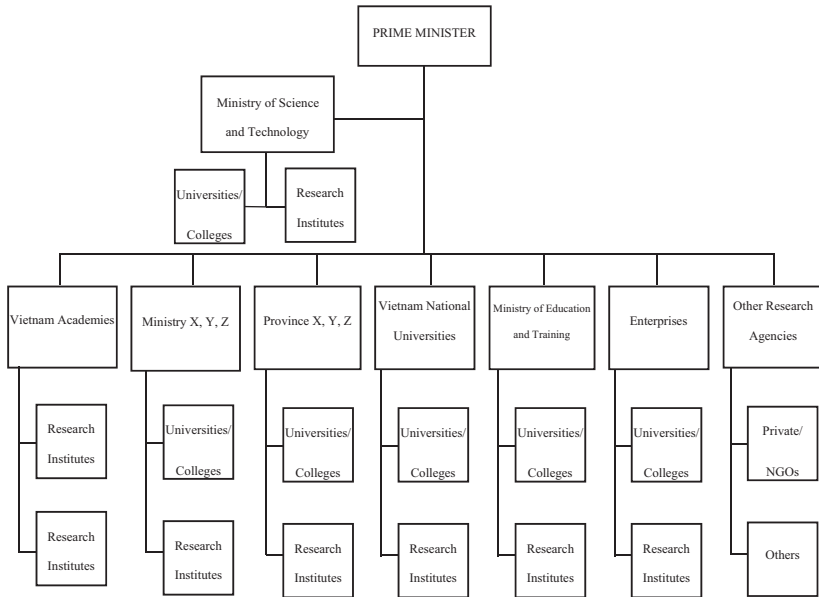
#### 4.2.2.3 *The Post-economic Innovation ‘Doi Moi’ Policy (from 1986 until Now)*

With the government's economic innovative ‘Doi Moi’ policy in 1986 and the collapse of the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe socialist systems in 1991, since the early 1990s, Vietnam has independently developed its HE system. The government considered education development as a primary national priority (Quốc hội, 1992). As a result of the transition from a centrally planning economy to a socialist market-oriented economy in 1986, Vietnam has gained enormous achievements in various socio-economic sectors including education. The number of universities and student enrolments increased substantially. In 1998, there were only 22 colleges and 86 universities. However, by the academic year 2017–2018, Vietnam had a total of 235 universities, serving 1.707.025 students (Bộ giáo dục và đào tạo, 2018). In 1999, the gross enrolment rate was 10.6%, but in 2016, it was 28.54 (UNESCO Institute for Statistics, 2017b). As the sector was under pressure to ensure quality for this rapid expansion, few Vietnamese universities could prioritise research.

### 4.2.3 *Vietnam's R & D: A Cumbersome Soviet Modelled System that Invests Poorly in University Research*

#### 4.2.3.1 *A Cumbersome State-Dominated R & D System*

Figure 4.1. shows the cumbersome hierarchical governance structure of the Vietnamese R & D system (Nguyen, 2014). Modelling the Soviet Union system, universities and research institutes in Vietnam have been



**Fig. 4.1** Organisational structure of the science and technology system in Vietnam (*Source* H. T. L. Nguyen, 2014)

managed either by the government, a line ministry, or a province. The government owns most research institutes. Universities and enterprises own only 4.85% (150/3088 institutes) (Bách, 2017).

#### 4.2.3.2 *A Poorly Resourced R & D System That Invests Modestly in University Research*

Vietnam has invested poorly in R & D. Data from the UNESCO Institute for Statistics (2017a) shows that in relative terms, Vietnam's GERD (Gross Domestic Expenditure on R & D) as a % of GDP has increased rapidly, from 0.2% in 2011 to 0.5% in 2017, however, this percentage is much lower than the world average, at 1.7% and East Asia and the Pacific at 2.1%. This percentage is smaller than that of some major ASEAN countries such as Thailand at 0.8%, Malaysia at 1.4%, and Singapore at 2.2%. In absolute terms, in current PPP\$, 000s (Purchasing Power Parity), this expenditure is equivalent to 3 million, 1/3 of



Thailand (9 million), just over 1/4 of Singapore (11 million), and 1/4 Malaysia (12 million).

By sources of funding, R & D expenditure from government and business enterprises accounts for up to 90% of the total GERD, at 26.93% and 64.12%, respectively in 2017. Expenditure for university R & D accounted for only 1.4%. Funds from abroad, private non-profit, and non-specified sources together account for less than 10%.

By types of research, only 9% of expenditure was on experimental development, 69% on applied, and 17% on basic research. By comparison, China devotes 84% of its R & D expenditure to experimental development, with 78% of R & D activities being performed in the business sector.

### 4.3 VIETNAMESE GOVERNMENT POLICIES FOR DEVELOPING UNIVERSITY RESEARCH

#### 4.3.1 *Governance*

##### 4.3.1.1 *Assigning Research as a Core University Mission*

The earliest and most important policy was the 1992 Decision 324-CT by the Chair of Committee of Ministers (the present Prime Minister) on restructuring the network of Research and Development Institutions. This decision aimed to combine universities and research institutes into one unified national R & D system. By this Decision, the government expected universities to ‘conduct all types of research from basic to applied, experimenting and applying research results into life and production’ (Hội đồng Bộ trưởng, 1992). This research mission is repeatedly confirmed in all subsequent HE related government regulations such as the HE Law Quốc hội (2012, 2018). The latest 2019 Education Law reaffirms ‘R & D activity is a mission/responsibility of an educational organisation’ (Quốc hội, 2019).

##### 4.3.1.2 *Mapping the National Higher Education Institution (HEI) Network*

Table 4.1 summarises main government policies for university research development during the period 2001–2019. Over the last 20 years, the Vietnamese government has created some important policies for developing the HE sector and academic research such as the HE Reform

**Table 4.1** Main government policies for university research development (2001–2019)

<i>Year</i>	<i>Policy document</i>	<i>Key objectives for research</i>
2001	National universities and colleges network plan (2001–2010) (Thủ tướng chính phủ, 2001)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Build some national labs in some national and key universities and applied colleges</li> <li>• Gradually establish strong research institutes and centres within universities</li> <li>• Study the possibility of merging existing research institutes outside universities into universities</li> </ul>
2004	National universities and colleges network plan (continuing) (Chính phủ, 2004)	Develop a group of 16 key public universities
2005	HE Reform Agenda 2005 (Thủ tướng chính phủ, 2005)	To have 15% of university revenue comes from R & D activities by 2010, 25% by 2020
2007	National universities and colleges network plan 2006–2020 (Thủ tướng chính phủ, 2007)	To have at least one university ranked in the world's top 200 universities by 2020
2009	Quality assurance standards for evaluating universities (Bộ giáo dục và đào tạo, 2007)	Describe the standards for university research performance and management
2012	HE Law (Quốc hội, 2012)	Formalise all regulations related to R & D activities performed by universities.
2013	Resolution of the 8th Party Congress XI on fundamental and comprehensive innovation of education and training	Study the possibility of merging existing research institutes outside universities into universities
2015	Stratifying and ranking universities (Chính phủ, 2015)	Specify rules for classifying HEIs into three tiers: 'research', 'applied', and 'professional and vocational'.
2019	HE Quality Improvement Project (Thủ tướng Chính phủ, 2019a)	To have at least four universities ranked in the top 1000 world universities, two in the top 100, and 10 in the top 400 Asian universities

*Source* Author

Agenda 2005 (Thủ tướng chính phủ, 2005), the HE Law Quốc hội (2012, 2018), and the HE Quality Improvement Project (Thủ tướng Chính phủ, 2019a). These policies reaffirm the government expectation for universities to conduct research. However, as stated above, state funding for this new task has been very limited. It remains unclear

when universities will officially be classified into ‘research’, ‘applied’, and ‘professional and vocational’ status and what the funding implications are (see Chapter 2).

With the international world-class university movement (Marginson, 2014), Vietnam was strongly pushed to improve its university research and university rankings. In 2007, the government set a target of having one university ranked in the world’s top 200 universities by 2020. This objective was unrealistic (Hayden and Le-Nguyen, Chapter 2); however, at least on paper, it shows the government’s desire in integrating the national HE system into the world. In 2019, the government lowered its expectation to have ‘at least 4 universities ranked in the top 1000 world universities, 2 in the top 100 and 10 in the top 400 Asian universities’ (Thủ tướng Chính phủ, 2019a, p. 2). This target seems more achievable (Hayden and Le-Nguyen, Chapter 2).

#### *4.3.1.3 Granting Autonomy for Universities*

The government and line ministries used to control all aspects of a university’s operation including staffing, curriculum, and finance (see Chapter 3 by Ngo). However, over the past 15 years, the government has committed to granting more autonomy to universities (Ban chấp hành trung ương, 2013; Quốc hội, 2018). Autonomy is a university’s right and ability to exercise independent control over its day-to-day operations such as governance (e.g. removing line ministry management), curriculum (e.g. deciding which programmes to offer), staff (e.g. creating recruitment and remuneration policies), and finance (e.g. decision-making revenues and expenses decisions). If being granted a higher level of autonomy, in theory, universities can create their own research development policies. Unfortunately, only a few universities have gained total autonomy. The majority have only achieved partial autonomy (Huỳnh & Hà, 2019). As almost all 26 public universities only gained an ‘autonomous’ status since 2015 (Hayden and Le-Nguyen, Chapter 2), it remains unclear in what ways these universities have benefited from being ‘autonomous’ for their research development.

#### *4.3.1.4 Applying International Practices in Managing Research*

##### **Applying a Competitive, Performance-Based Mechanism to Allocate Research Grants**

In 2003, the Vietnamese Government founded the National Foundation for Science and Technology Development (NAFOSTED) (Chính phủ, 2003).

Unlike other state-funded programmes, NAFOSTED applies a competitive, performance-based funding mechanism. NAFOSTED is committed to increasing the number of international peer-reviewed publications published in ISI-covered journals by Vietnamese researchers. For a researcher to be funded by NAFOSTED, a prerequisite is to have at least one international peer-reviewed publication. Officially operated in 2008, NAFOSTED's establishment and operation is a 'revolution' in research management in Vietnam. Although funding allocated by NAFOSTED accounts for only a very modest proportion of the total state budget for research, it seems that NAFOSTED has created a positive culture within the national research system. NAFOSTED-funded projects generate 20–25% of the national number of ISI-indexed publications and 50% of the national state-funded ISI-indexed publications (Ủy ban thường vụ quốc hội, 2016).

### **Evaluating Academics' and Doctoral Graduates' Research Through Peer-Reviewed International Publications**

Peer-reviewed international publications have increasingly become a mandate for academics and doctoral graduates in Vietnam. Since 2017, all doctoral graduates must have published at least one *Scopus* and/or *Web of Science* indexed journal article or two peer-reviewed conference papers or journal articles (Bộ Giáo dục và Đào tạo, 2017). To become a doctoral advisor/supervisor, academics must have peer-reviewed international publications. From 2018 onward, newly promoted professors and associate professors must have published in an indexed international journal (Thủ tướng Chính phủ, 2018). These are important policies to make Vietnam academics aligned better with international academic norms and practices.

#### *4.3.1.5 Specifying the Government's Regulations and Guidelines on How to Invest in and Maximising Academic Research Capacity and Potential*

In 2014, the Government issued Decree No 99/2014/NĐ-CP (Chính phủ, 2014). This Decree specifies the government's regulations and guidelines on how to invest in and maximise research capacity and potential in HEIs. It defines areas of investment (e.g. human resources, infrastructure and funding); types of HEIs that deserve investment (e.g. key universities), and criteria for receiving investment (e.g. having 25% of lecturers with a Ph.D. qualification). This Decree also provides a list of suggested human resources (HR) management

policies for research development such as providing financial rewards for international publications, tax benefits for income from R & D activities, funding for establishing a strong research group and for attending international conferences. With this policy, universities can reward a lecturer up to 30 times a basic salary level if s/he can publish a journal article in ISI, SCI, SCIE indexed journals. Following this Decree, both line ministries (e.g. MOET) and universities have provided financial rewards for lecturers with international publications. For example, University of Economics Ho Chi Minh City will reward up to 200 million (equivalent to US\$ 8500) for lecturers who can publish a top-ranking ISI/Scopus indexed journal article (Huynh, 2017).

### 4.3.2 *Talent: Develop the National Academic Workforce*

Human resources are key to research performance. Through Project 322 (Thủ tướng Chính phủ, 2000), 911 (Thủ tướng Chính phủ, 2010), and most recently 89 (Thủ tướng Chính phủ, 2019b), the Vietnamese government has developed a national strategy for the academic workforces for the country since 2000.

The main objective of Project 322 is to ‘Train and develop R & D staff at doctoral, masters, and University level overseas or in collaboration with overseas institutions to response to the demand of the country’s modernisation and industrialisation’. The main recipients of this project are any students, academics, and researchers who are working at universities, research institutes, and advanced technology centres.

Project 911 focused exclusively on training doctoral graduates for universities and colleges for the period 2010–2020. Project 911 aims to train at least 20,000 new doctoral graduates for HEIs in Vietnam with 10,000 being trained overseas, 10,000 in Vietnam, and 3000 by collaborating between Vietnamese universities and foreign universities.

Project 89, the latest policy, aims to enhance the capabilities of HE Institutions’ leaders, managers, and lecturers to meet the demands of comprehensively innovating Vietnam’s education and training in the period 2019–2030. The goal of Project 89 is to train Ph.D. graduates for 10% of the total number of university lecturers. 7% will be trained overseas, 3% will be trained in Vietnam. This project also aims to attract at least 1500 international and local Ph.D. holders from outside the HE sector to join the HE academic workforce. Four main tasks of

this project are to: (1) improve the quality of Vietnamese universities' academic staff; (2) attract Ph.D. holders to work for Vietnamese universities; (3) improve leadership and management capabilities for university leaders and managers; and (4) improve existing academic staff's teaching, research, and services capabilities.

These three projects show the Vietnamese government's strong commitment to developing the national academic workforce. After 10 years, Project 322 trained 4590 staff, with nearly 3000 being trained overseas. Over 1000 are Ph.D. graduates. However, overseas trained Ph.D. graduates from Project 322 seem to experience great challenges upon returning. Some returned to their previous academic positions without being provided with adequate conditions for doing research. Their salaries were not enough for maintaining a middle-class life (Lâm, 2011).

Project 911 could not achieve its target of training 20,000 Ph.D. holders either. During 2012–2016, only 800 Ph.D. graduates were trained overseas. Only four Ph.D. graduates were trained by the 'collaboration' model, co-trained by a Vietnamese and an overseas university. A main barrier seems to be doctoral candidates' lack of English language proficiency (RFA, 2017).

Project 89 seems to be a more comprehensive package for building university human resources capacity. Hopefully this new project will address the drawbacks of the Project 322 and 911 so that universities will not only send their staff overseas for doctoral education but will also be capable of utilising doctoral graduates' research capabilities after returning.

### 4.3.3 *Funding*

Although the government set an ambitious target for university research and university world ranking, universities have received a very small proportion of direct government expenditure for research. In 2013, only 5.6% of the state R & D expenditure was allocated to universities managed by the Ministry of Education and Training (MOET) (Nguyen, 2014). This situation remains the same over recent years (Ủy ban thường vụ quốc hội, 2016). A poor state budget for research prevents universities from doing research and from utilising the highly skilled academics from overseas after returning. Business enterprises have yet funded academics for doing research.

## 4.4 UNIVERSITY RESEARCH CAPACITY AND PERFORMANCE

### 4.4.1 *The Number of Researchers*

Vietnam has a poor research capacity as measured by the number of researchers per million people. Data from the UNESCO Institute for Statistics (2017b) show that Vietnam has 672 researchers in full-time equivalents (FTE) per million inhabitants. This number is higher than that of the Philippines (at 188), a country with a similar population size; however, it is only half of Thailand's (at 1210), a third of Malaysia's (2274), and one-tenth of Singapore's (at 6730). In headcounts (HC), this number is 1424 per million inhabitants. The percentage of female researchers is about 44%, in terms of both FTE and HC.

Regarding researchers' employment sector, the government employs the largest number of researchers, both in FTE and HC. In 2017, up to approximately half of Vietnam's FTE researchers (49.73%) work for the government. Business and HE each employ only about a quarter of the total FTE researchers, at 24.06% and 25.77%, respectively. Private non-profits employ 0.44%. This situation is in stark contrast to that in many high-income countries where the business enterprise sector often employs the largest share of researchers. Although in many upper-middle-income European countries most researchers (over 40%) work in universities, in North America and Europe, the business sector employs over 65% and 45%, respectively. Few high-income countries employ a large percentage of researchers in the government sector.

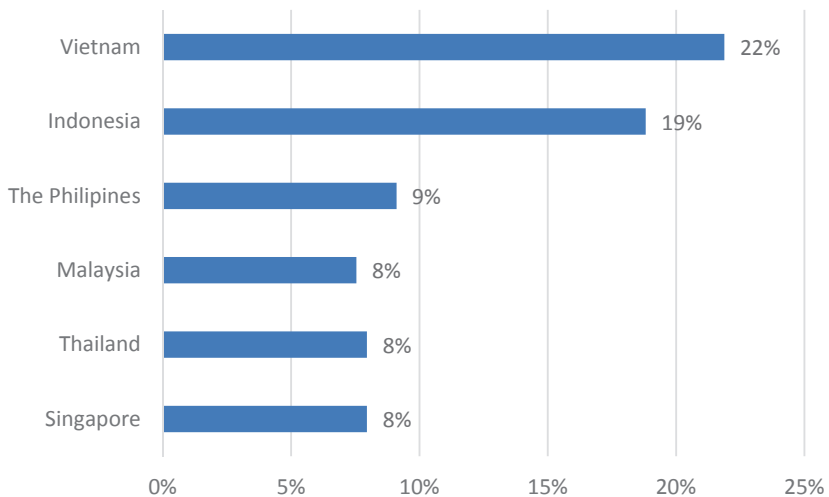
### 4.4.2 *Qualifications of Researchers*

As measured by the educational qualifications of its researchers, Vietnam's potential for research remains poor. In 2017, fewer than half of Vietnamese researchers (48.30%) in FTE have a university degree. Researchers with a Ph.D. or doctoral qualification account for only 10.59% in FTE and 11.59% in HC. This percentage is much lower than both world and Asian averages, of which over one-third of researchers have a doctorate-level degree (UNESCO Institute for Statistics, 2017a). In the university sector, in the year 2017–2018, Vietnam had a total of 74,991 tenured staff. However, only a quarter of this (20,198) hold a Ph.D. qualification. Only 1% (7290) are professors and 6% (4538) are associate professors (Bộ giáo dục và đào tạo, 2018).

### 4.4.3 Research Output

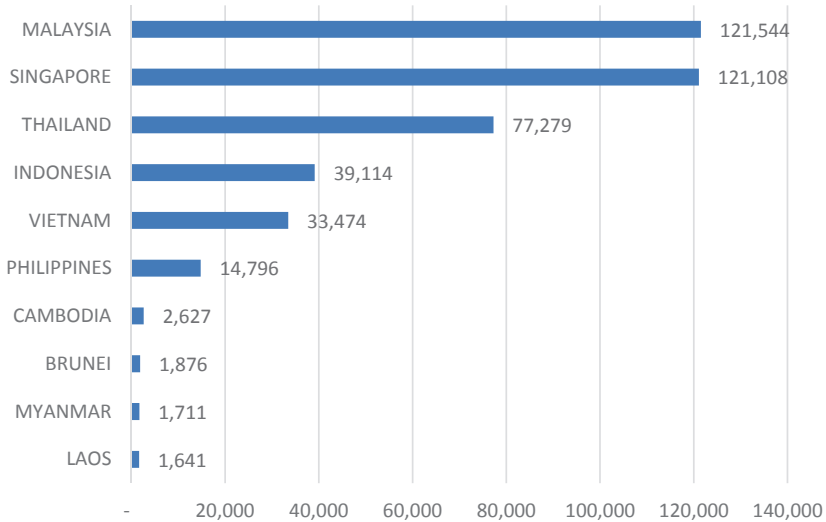
#### 4.4.3.1 Total National Research Output

Figure 4.2 shows Vietnam and major ASEAN countries' average annual publication growth rates (2011–2018). As measured by the number of peer-reviewed international publications indexed in the ISI Web of Science, in the last decade, Vietnam has achieved a rapid growth. By employing the Nguyen and Pham (2011) search method, we found that during the 2011–2019 period, Vietnam published a total number of 33,474 ISI-indexed English articles, achieving an average growth rate of 22% annually. This growth rate is the fastest compared to major ASEAN countries such as Indonesia at 19%, Philippines at 9%, and Malaysia, Singapore, and Thailand at 8% each (Fig. 4.2.). The 22% annual growth rate is also the highest record for Vietnam so far. During the 1966–2011 period, this rate was 13% annually (Nguyen and Pham, 2011). During the 2001–2015 period, this rate was only 17% per annum (Nguyen et al., 2017). However, despite this fast growth rate, the total number of Vietnam's ISI-indexed articles during 2011–2019 equals only 28% of Singapore's and Malaysia's, and 43% of Thailand's (Fig. 4.3.).



**Fig. 4.2** Major ASEAN countries' average annual publication growth rate (2011–2018) (*Source* Author [ISI data access date: 26 Oct 2019])





**Fig. 4.3** ASEAN countries' total scientific outputs 2011–2019 (*Source* Author [ISI data access date: 26 Oct 2019])

#### 4.4.3.2 *University vs Research Institutes' Research Output*

Table 4.2 indicates Vietnam's scientific output during 2011–2019 by universities/research institutes. In the last two decades, there has been a big shift in the number of peer-reviewed international publications produced by Vietnamese universities and government research institutes. For example, during 2004 and 2008, Vietnamese universities produced only 55% of the total number of peer-reviewed international publications (Hien, 2010). However, during 2011–2019, my research shows that Vietnamese universities produced just over 80%; research institutes published only under 20%. Notably, the top 10 universities produced as much as 50% of the total national ISI-indexed English research output. Only a quarter of Vietnamese universities (66/235) published ISI-indexed English articles.

#### 4.4.4 *Research Impact*

Vietnam still relies heavily on international collaboration for research productivity and impact. Adams, Pendlebury, Rogers, and Szomszor (2019) examined the state of the research base of 14 South and East

**Table 4.2** Vietnam's scientific output during 2011–2019 by universities/ research institutes

<i>Types of organisations</i>		<i>Records</i>	<i>% of 33,474</i>
Research Institutes		6434	19.22
1	Vietnam Academy of Science Technology	5218	15.59
2	Institute of Mathematics Vietnam	563	1.68
3	Bach Mai Hospital	207	0.62
4	Vietnamese Academy Forest Science	100	0.30
5	Vietnam Academy Social Science	91	0.27
6	Children Hospital 1	90	0.27
7	Cho Ray Hospital	84	0.25
8	Children Hospital 2	81	0.24
Top 10 Universities		18,290	54.6
1	Ton Duc Thang University	3739	11.17
2	Vietnam National University Ho Chi Minh City	3726	11.13
3	Vietnam National University, Hanoi	3263	9.75
4	Duy Tan University	1785	5.33
5	Hanoi University of Science Technology	1691	5.05
6	Can Tho University	978	2.92
7	Hue University	947	2.83
8	Hanoi National University of Education	875	2.61
9	University of Danang	659	1.97
10	Hanoi Medical University	627	1.87
Other 56 universities (64-533 publications per university)		8750	26.1
Total		33,474	100

*Source* Author

Asia countries. The authors found that during the 2009–2018 period, up to 78% (20,883 out of 26,742) of ISI-indexed journal articles from Vietnam involved international collaboration. Only 22% (5859) were produced purely by the Vietnamese. The average Category-Normalised Citation Impact (CNCI) of all Vietnam's total output is 1.09; however, that of Vietnam domestic scholars is only 0.62. For Singapore, these figures are 1.61 and 1.29, respectively. These numbers indicate that as measured by Citation Impact, compared to some other advanced regional countries such as Singapore, Vietnam's domestic research impact remains low.

## 4.5 DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

### 4.5.1 *A Summary of Key Findings*

This chapter reviews the historical context, government policies, and current capacity and performance of Vietnamese university research. Historically, Vietnam had an unfavourable condition for research development. Emulating the Soviet Union model, until the early 1990s, Vietnamese universities still neglected research and focused primarily on teaching. Up to the present, despite having stopped emulating the Soviet R & D model, a cumbersome system of state research institutes still exists and consumes most of the government funding for research.

Regarding government policy for university research, in the last 20 years (1999–2019), the government has created many structural and HR policies to develop research. For example, with respect to governance, the government assigns research as a core mission for universities, grants institutional autonomy to universities, applies advanced international norms and practices in managing research, and specifies regulations and rules for how to invest in and maximise academic research potential. In developing talent, the government created three important projects for developing the national academic workforces: Projects 322, 911, and 89. These projects have trained thousands of internationally qualified Ph.D. graduates for the system. However, in funding, the government has yet been able to mobilise funding for R & D. Government funding for university research remains very modest, at 1.4 the total national GERD in 2017.

With respect to research productivity, compared to other Southeast Asian countries, during 2011–2019, Vietnam has achieved the fastest growth rate in the number of ISI-indexed English articles, averaging at 22% annually. However, in terms of productivity, the total number of Vietnam's ISI-indexed articles equals only 28% of Singapore's and Malaysia's, and 43% of Thailand's. Vietnam's researchers per million population (672) are only half of Thailand's (at 1210), a third of Malaysia's (2274), and one tenth of Singapore's (at 6730). Vietnam still relies heavily on international collaboration for research productivity and impact. The contribution of Vietnam to the world's scientific output is still very modest (0.2%) compared with the country's population size (1.2% of the world's population) (Nguyen et al., 2017). In sum, Vietnam is still at an initial phase of building its research capacity.

### 4.5.2 *Recommendations*

Funding, governance, and human resources have been proven as key to many countries' and universities' paths to academic excellence (Altbach & Salmi, 2011). To further develop university research in Vietnam, I suggest that the government should:

- Increase funding for university research;
- Re-structure the state R & D system;
- Extend the application of a competitive funding allocative mechanism to the entire R & D system; and
- Implement a comprehensive plan for developing the national academic workforces.

#### 4.5.2.1 *Increase Funding for University Research*

Compared to the state research institute system, the university sector employs a smaller number of full-time equivalent researchers (25.77% compared to 49.73%) and receives a much smaller amount of government funding for research (1.4% compared to 26.93%) (2017 data). However, this sector produced four times as many ISI-indexed articles as those created by all research institutes (80.78% compared to 19.22%) (2011–2019 data). In headcounts, HE employs up to 50% of all researchers in Vietnam. It is suggested that the government should increase research funding for universities so that the existing research talent within universities can be fully utilised.

China, a country that had a similar political structure as Vietnam, has applied this strategy successfully. For example, with the aim of building WCUs, in the first phase of the 985 Project (1999–2003), China allocated nearly four billion US dollars to the 34 universities intending to become WCUs (Huang, 2015). In the Academic Ranking of World Universities 2019, China has four universities ranked in the top 50, 20 in the top 200, 33 in the top 300, 47 in the top 400, 66 in the top 500, and 88 in the top 501–1000 (ARWU, 2019).

#### 4.5.2.2 *Re-Structure the State R & D System*

Vietnam has a very limited budget for R & D (only equivalent to three million in current PPP\$, 000s), therefore, this budget must be spent effectively. The cumbersome system of state research institutes seems to have consumed a huge amount of state R & D expenditure

for operational costs. The Vietnamese government has long desired to combine relevant state-funded research institutes into appropriate universities (Ban chấp hành trung ương, 2013; Thủ tướng chính phủ, 2001), yet this process seems to be very slow.

It is recommended that the government should speed up this process so that R & D expenditure will be spent on actual R & D projects granted by a competitive funding mechanism. Some former Soviet bloc countries (e.g. Russia and China) have re-structured their R & D systems successfully (Bách, 2017). The government should urgently re-structure its state research institutes.

#### *4.5.2.3 Extend the Application of a Competitive Funding Allocative Mechanism to the Entire R & D System*

Funding mechanisms usually regulate research norms and behaviours (Benner & Sandström, 2000). Different funding mechanisms may drive different research behaviours (excellence vs economic relevance) (Hicks, 2012). At present, most state funding organisations in Vietnam still apply plan-based and formula-driven research funding, considered as time-consuming, complicated, and demotivating to researchers (Nguyễn, 2012). With the establishment and operation of NAFOSTED, a new funding agency that applies competitive international funding allocation practices, the number of international publications produced from Vietnam seems to increase remarkably.

It is suggested that Vietnam should continue to apply this competitive funding allocative mechanism to the entire R & D system. In a competitive funding model, instead of receiving funding based on a set of criteria and an annual plan, based on research performance indicators, researchers and institutions compete with one another to secure funding and to be committed to improving their research excellence and performance (Fussy, 2018). A strong ability to apply competitive funding mechanisms is one of the main differences separating a high performing from a weak performing research and innovation system (Aghion, Dewatripont, Hoxby, Mas-Colell, & Sapir, 2008). Vietnam should extend the application of a competitive funding allocative mechanism to the entire R & D system to utilise the limited R & D expenditure to the fullest.

#### *4.5.2.4 Implement a Comprehensive Plan for Developing the National Academic Workforces*

Vietnam's potential for R & D remains poor, both in terms of quantity (number of researchers per million people) and quality (percentage of researchers with a doctoral degree). Results from Project 322 and 911 show that although the government has invested in training thousands of doctoral graduates overseas, there was a lack of a long-term plan for nurturing and maximising their talent upon return. To further enhance both the quantity and quality of Vietnam's national academic workforce, it is suggested that the government should implement a comprehensive plan for developing the national academic workforces. One component of this programme may be to create relevant funding programmes to nurture the whole life cycle of a research career. Many countries (e.g. Australia) have provided competitive performance-based funding programmes to early career researchers (within five years of Ph.D. graduation); mid-career researchers (over 5–10 years from Ph.D. graduation); and later-career researchers (developing 'world-class' researchers). Vietnam should learn from such programmes so that it can further develop, retain, and utilise the talent of doctoral graduate returnees to the fullest. This group of overseas trained doctoral graduates should become the trainers of the next generations of locally trained but internationally qualified doctors for Vietnam.

## 4.6 CONCLUDING REMARKS

As a new middle-income country that underwent multiple wars, Vietnam faces many challenges in funding, governance, and human resources in rebuilding the country and in advancing its HE and R & D system. This chapter provides an overview of the historical context, government policies, capacity and performance and implications for future development. I hope that information presented in this chapter provides both academic readers and policy makers with some critical insights into the history, current context, and challenges of developing university research in Vietnam. Universities are not just creators of knowledge, trainers of minds, and transmitters of culture, but can also be major agents of economic growth. University research development is a long process that requires not only good political will but also abundant human and financial resources, and strategic leadership. The Vietnamese government must invest heavily in university research so that research is not just a desirable value but a mandate, a culture, and a driver for HE development of Vietnam.

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# What Impacts Academics' Performance from the Learning Organisation Perspective? A Comparative Study

*Hong T. M. Bui*

## 5.1 INTRODUCTION

Academics in higher education worldwide are facing two major unprecedented trends, namely global rankings and a new managerialism, which have significantly changed the nature of academics' work in this sector. Global university rankings have concreted the notion of a market for higher education arranged in “league tables” for comparative purposes and powerfully pushed for intra and international competition (Marginson & van der Wende, 2007). The new managerialism focuses service providers on outputs measured in terms of performance indicators and rankings, emphasises the language of choice, competition and service users, and promotes the decentralisation of budgetary and personal authority to line managers, and project-led contractual

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employment arrangements rather than permanency (Lynch, 2015). Such competing pressures have lost fundamental dimensions of what it means to be an academic, i.e. the interdependency of teaching and research (Locke, 2012; Mitten & Ross, 2018).

The crisis of fundamental identity of academics also lies in the crisis of universities as organisations. Having teaching and learning, research and professional practice as core businesses of universities, they are supposed to be learning organisations, and embrace organisational learning (Sarange, 2018). A learning organisation is defined as “an organisation in which a supportive learning culture and structure are strong enough to enable learning mindsets and systems learning across the organisation to constantly transform and innovate itself for sustainable development in a complex and uncertain environment” (Bui, 2019, p. 144). It is thought to enhance innovation and internationalisation of higher education (Bui & Baruch, 2013). The concept of learning organisation is gaining more prominence globally, and has become a new player, new discourse, and new practice in higher education, particularly in the context of Vietnam. Being influenced by the global games of rankings and managerialism, Vietnamese higher education has to transform itself more profoundly to adapt with such new players, new discourse, and new practices.

In this chapter, I provide the evidence through a research question: What determines academics’ teaching and research performance in the era of global ranking and the new managerialism from a learning organisation perspective? This research question is answered with three international comparative studies related to Vietnamese higher education about academics’ teaching and research performance in relation to three disciplines of learning organisation, namely personal mastery, team learning, and shared vision as initially proposed by Senge (1990), and further developed by Bui and Baruch (2010a, 2010b). This chapter is beneficial for academics who are struggling to survive in the toxic game-playing environment, for managers who are being pressurised to achieve certain targets of the game, and policy makers who need to reconsider directions that they want higher education to go with or go against the trends, which are not always good for education.

The chapter is presented in three sections. Firstly, the literature briefly reviews the impacts of the internationalisation of higher education, the ranking game, and the new managerialism on academics; and covers the research on learning organisations in the higher education sector. Secondly, three international comparative studies related to teaching and

research performance in higher education are presented. These published and on-going studies are selected to present in this chapter because they are interconnected around the theme of learning organisation in higher education, and come from the same large data set. Finally, I conclude the chapter by discussing some implications for key stakeholders of this sector.

## 5.2 LITERATURE REVIEW

### 5.2.1 *Internationalisation of Higher Education*

Driven by the influences of globalisation, internationalisation has become an increasingly important strategic agenda for higher education institutions. The whole sector is changing rapidly in order to become “international”. Robson (2011) viewed the internationalisation of higher education as a multidimensional, dynamic, and potentially transformative process. Internationalisation is often associated with success in terms of research funding, international staff and student recruitment, and co-authorship with international research partners. Among the many benefits that the internationalisation of higher education has returned, such as flows of knowledge, people and capital internationalisation at home, internationalisation of policies and priorities (Marginson, 2007; Wihlborg & Robson, 2018), it is also seen as a challenge for this sector when it creates pressures for diversity and the increasing popularity of managerialism (Teichler, 1999).

More than ever the purposes and processes of internationalisation are being debated in relation to the changing geopolitical and economic landscape. For example, Oxford University has agreed to offer places with lower grades to students from disadvantaged backgrounds for the first time in its 900-year history (Swerling & Turner, 2019); and the rise of China in world science is likely to change world higher education forever (Marginson, 2018). Musselin (2014) called for a re-examination of the social role of higher education, while Goddard and Hazelkorn (2016) reasserted the public good role of HE in relation to the global challenges that threaten the world future. Higher education has been scrutinised for its rationales for, and approaches to internationalisation that underpin its particular strategies and policies, initiatives, priorities, and targets (Yemini & Sagie, 2016). Wihlborg and Robson (2018) called for more ethical and value-driven internationalisation strategies and practices in both national and institutional contexts.

### 5.2.2 *Finite Ranking Games in Higher Education*

While rankings have generally been aimed at external stakeholders, for example prospective students and their parents, interest in and usage of media rankings have broadened to higher education institutions themselves and governments (Johnes, 2018). In other words, most universities around the world are playing the “finite game” (Sinek, 2019), including many universities in Vietnam because they do not want to be out of the “internationalisation game”. There are six main rankings in the international arena: Academic Ranking of World Universities (ARWU) by the Shanghai Jiao Tong University; THE World University Rankings by Times Higher Education and in partnership with Thomson Reuters; QS World University Rankings by Quacquarelli Symonds; Performance Ranking of Scientific Papers for World Universities or NTU ranking by the National Taiwan University; Ranking Web of World Universities by the Cybermetrics Lab (CCHS), a unit of the Spanish National Research Council (CSIC); and UTD top 100 Business School Research Rankings by the University of Texas (UT) Dallas’s School of Management. Together with international rankings, there are many more national rankings, such as Australia, Brazil, Canada, Germany, India, Netherlands, the United Kingdom, and the United States to name a few. Universities as well as all their disciplines are in races to compete in various league tables above depending on their strategy and context.

“Rankings are a part of politically inspired, performativity-led mode of governance, designed to ensure that universities are aligned with market values through systems of intensive auditing” (Lynch, 2015, p. 190). They have become a finite, but unavoidable part of academic life in both positive and negative perspectives (Harvey, 2008), and a battle for world-class excellence (Hazelkorn, 2015). Rank ordering and measuring put higher education institutions on public display, pressing them to change from being “a centre of learning to being a business organisation with productivity targets” (Doring, 2002, p. 140) regardless of the fact that those rankings have been proved to be highly controversial in terms of methodological concerns, reliability, validity, dealing with missing values, and haphazard weighting of indicators (Harvey, 2008).

### 5.2.3 *New Managerialism in Higher Education*

Neoliberalism is a value-based, normative economic, and social theory with an assumption that the market mediates all relationships in the society (Harvey, 2005). New managerialism in education is seen as a dominant mode of governance aligned with neoliberalism: it involves institutionalising market principles in the governance of organisations (Lynch, 2014; Lynch, Grummell, & Devine, 2012). Higher education has been turned into a marketable commodity that can be traded internationally (Marginson, 2006).

As a result, universities have been transformed into powerful consumer-oriented corporate networks, where performance is measured and controlled by numbers and various indicators. This fosters competition between academics (Castro-Ceacero & Ion, 2019). For example, the Research Excellence Framework (REF) in the UK asks for academics to submit their research output every five to seven years. Normally only one author in each institution can “claim” their publication for REF. “Where there are substantial pieces of co-authored work, reflecting large-scale or intensive collaborative research within the same submitting unit, and a double-weighting request has been submitted for the output, institutions may attribute the output to a maximum of two members of staff returned within the same submission. This output may be counted as the required minimum of one for each staff member. The inclusion of any reserve outputs in this instance must be in accordance with the minima and maxima requirements where the panel does not accept the request for double-weighting” (REF, 2021). In reality, a high quality and impactful project often requires the strong collaboration of a whole lab or a research team. Therefore, such policy and regulation discourage teamwork and collaboration within the same institution. In order to achieve high quality research outputs, academics must look for collaboration outside their institution due to the severe internal competition. This is against the priorities of efficiency and effectiveness of new managerialism, and it shows that this sector just talks the talk and walks its own walk.

Managerialist values manifest themselves in education through the promotion of forms of governance such as measurement, surveillance, control, and regulation, that contradict with the caring that is at the heart of good education, while the caring dimensions are not open to measurement in terms of quality, substance, and form within a metric



measurement system (Lynch, 2014). One of the major concerns about new managerialism is that it gains efficiency and effectiveness at the expense of more broadly based moral and social values (Lynch, 2014), and public-interest values are seriously challenged (Ball, 2012). Focusing on measurable outputs has its ultimate impact on defining human relationships: trust, integrity, care, and solidarity are secondary to regulation, control, and competition, while numerical ordering gives the impression that what is of value in education can be measured numerically, hierarchically ordered, and incontrovertibly judged (Lynch, 2015). Vietnamese higher education seems also to be on a stepping stone toward that managerialism.

#### *5.2.4 Teaching and Research Performance from the Learning Organisation Perspective*

The internationalisation of higher education, the finite ranking games, and new managerialism are blended together to determine not only the finite position of universities in dominant global league tables, but also the performance indicators of academics. Marklein and Mai (Chapter 11) discuss academic freedom in the United States and Vietnam, but I suspect the real freedoms that academics have today are actually challenged with pressures from the above internationalisation of higher education, finite ranking games, and new managerialism. If we look at job descriptions of many professorship positions in higher education, they give us an impression of all being super heroes and heroines who must be outstanding in not only research and teaching excellence, but also excellence in enterprise activities, social impacts, public engagement, and income generation. How academics can achieve all these within their contract of less than 40 hours per week given their spousal, parental, and many other social responsibilities outside work is still a myth.

In the scope of this chapter, I focus on the core roles of academics, namely teaching and research because the teaching-research nexus in higher education has been the focus of on-going inquiry (Mitten & Ross, 2018). Development and knowledge creation are the two fundamental values of higher education. However, in reality, teaching and research are often separated where higher education institutions brand themselves as either “research-led” (or research-intensive) or “teaching-led” (or teaching-focused) universities. “The last 40 years has seen the ‘dislocation’ of these core academic activities as a result of

policy and operational decisions to distinguish the way they are funded, managed, assessed and rewarded. The activities of 'teaching' and 'research' are also disintegrating and the roles fragmenting, which, paradoxically, is allowing their reintegration in novel and innovative ways" (Locke, 2012, p. 261).

The concept of universities as learning organisations has been in discussion for a while because a learning organisation is one of the "must's" that universities have to master in order to succeed in the era and internationalisation of higher education and global competition (Wilson & Thomson, 2006). For example, Meade (1995) presented the strategies employed by an Australian university to support a learning organisation committed to continuous quality improvement. In its implementation, the university encountered various barriers, of which establishing a learning culture seemed to be a mountain to climb. Franklin, Hodgkinson, and Stewart (1998), Rowley (1998) and Bui and Baruch (2010b, 2013) have proposed different models of a learning organisation for higher education institutions for innovative and sustainable development in the context of internationalisation, that emphasise the role of organisational learning at all levels. Bui and Baruch (2012) presented empirical evidence in support to their learning organisation model in higher education, but show that universities are not ready to become learning organisations. Gibb and Haskin (2013) proposed a model of an entrepreneurial stakeholder learning organisation, in which the learning organisation is decentralised but held together by shared informal culture as agreed ways of seeing and doing things for and with society. In general, the majority of work on the learning organisation in higher education is limited to the development of a conceptual framework and scattered empirical evidence that universities are not ready to be learning organisations. Ortenblad and Koris (2014) added another reason why only a few universities are truly learning organisations because they seem to single-loop learn (learning within the current mindset) much more than they double-loop learn (questioning the current mindset and learning a new one).

Higher education institutions do not seem to be learning organisations, though they must be (Bui & Baruch, 2012; Wilson & Thomson, 2006). In other words, very few universities truly walk their talk of learning for constant transformation and innovation. Thus, given the current literature in this era of global ranking and new managerialism, I review and investigate to what extent aspects from the learning organisation,

namely personal mastery, shared vision and team learning, determine (or not) academics' teaching and research performance. Personal mastery is defined as "the capacity to grow and learn on a personal level" (Garcia-Morales, Llorens-Montes, & Verdu-Jover, 2007, p. 547); shared vision as "a vision that people throughout an organisation are truly committed to" (Senge, 2006, p. 141); and team learning as "the process by which combined efforts and involvement of team members improve their ability to perform, leading to a change in their actions and outcomes" (Bui, Baruch, Chau, & He, 2016, p. 30).

## 5.3 METHODS

### 5.3.1 *Context*

In this chapter, I summarise three different published and on-going international comparative studies that investigate the above question from three different disciplines of the learning organisation by Senge (1990), namely personal mastery, team learning, and shared vision. The three studies derive from a large data set of two case studies, one university in Vietnam and one university in the United Kingdom. The Vietnamese one was a teaching university, which was under a major transformation into a research university due to government's policies to develop research within higher education to catch up with the internationalisation of higher education around the world (Nguyen, Chapter 4). The UK study was of a research-led university. Both universities have a similar size of around 5000 employees, including academics and non-academics. A total of 444 questionnaires were received from academics at these two universities, including 41 professors, 68 readers, 78 senior lecturers, 172 lecturers, and 38 academic managers. In terms of qualifications, 295 had Ph.D.s, 93 had a Master's degree, 49 had Bachelor degrees, and seven had PG certificates. Unfortunately, we did not capture gender or age.

An item was designed to measure research performance, and another item to measure teaching performance. *Research performance* can be standardised easily and represents an objective measure. It was calibrated and ranked into seven performance scores based on the UK system of research evaluation output. The responses in the questionnaire were found to be highly correlated with the actual research performance rated by academics themselves in the large survey ( $r=.53$ ,  $p<.05$ ).

This suggests that the two have high reliability and validity for evaluating research performance. The actual objective research performance of both universities was utilised in all three studies to control and minimise any possibility of research bias (Podsakoff, Mackenzie, Lee, & Podsakoff, 2003). *Teaching performance* however, had to rely on a personal rating, because student evaluation is personal to the individual, and is kept confidential.

*Personal mastery* is measured by five items: (1) There is no gap between my current position at this university and the position I would like to reach; (2) I have a personal goal of moving beyond my current position within this university; (3) I have a clear idea of my personal future as an employee within this university; (4) As an employee, I am encouraged to explore the way things are being done; and (5) I have a clear picture of my current position within this university. *Shared vision* is measured by five items: (1) I understand my university's vision; (2) I understand how my university's mission is to be achieved; (3) This university's mission statement identifies values which I share as an employee; (4) I am an important part of my university's vision; and (5) Overall, I accept and support this university's missions. *Team learning* is measured by five items: (1) People on my team work well together; (2) I am encouraged to solve problems with my colleagues before discussing them with a manager; (3) This university encourages team learning and working; (4) We sometimes form informal groups on our own to solve problems within our team; and (5) I solve most problems with help from people from different departments. These measurements were adapted from Reed (2001). The Cronbach alpha value for personal mastery is .69, shared vision .83, and team learning .68. They are at the acceptable level to the threshold (Nunnally, 1978).

### 5.3.2 *Study 1: Relationships Between Personal Mastery and Teaching and Research Performance*

Bui, Ituma, and Antoconapoulou (2013) investigated and compared the relationship between personal mastery with teaching and research performance in a much larger conceptual framework with the focus on personal mastery. They proposed that personal mastery is positively associated with personal research performance, and that the relationships are stronger among the UK employees than the Vietnamese counterparts. Table 5.1 summarises Bui et al.'s (2013) finding related to the above

**Table 5.1** Regression results of personal mastery on teaching and research performance in both Vietnamese and UK university

	Vietnam							
	Teaching performance		Research performance		Research performance			
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 1	Model 2	Model 1	Model 2		
Qualifications	.01	.01	-.54**	-.52**	-.02	-.01	-.32**	-.30**
Tenure	.12	.12	.68**	.64**	.12	.12	.64**	.62**
Job's roles	-.05	-.05	.07	.05	.09*	.08*	.18*	.16*
<b>Personal mastery</b>								
Model F	.84	.63	16.16**	14.00**	4.39*	8.18**	17.52**	14.52**
R <sup>2</sup>	.02	.02	.20	.23	.07	.16	.21	.23
R <sup>2</sup> change		0		.03		.09		.02
F change		.01		6.10		18.22		4.57*
Durbin-watson		2.11		2.11		1.53		1.87
N		128		197		176		209

Results are unstandardised regression coefficients, \* $p < .05$ , \*\* $p < .01$   
 Source: Summarised by author from Bui et al.'s (2013) study

relationships, and the relationships between control variables with teaching and research performance. It shows that those with high qualifications such as PhDs only have impacts on research, but not on teaching in both the Vietnamese and UK case. The longer people work in the sector, the higher impact they can create on research performance, but not teaching performance in both cases. The more senior academics are, e.g. professors and readers, the higher teaching and research performance they can achieve in the UK case, but academic roles do not create any significant impact on both teaching and research in the Vietnamese case, and even more senior roles are likely to have adverse impact on teaching performance.

Regarding the main relationship, personal mastery shows to be positively associated with research performance in both cases ( $\beta = .25$ ,  $p < 0.5$  for the Vietnamese university, and  $\beta = .29$ ,  $p < 0.5$  for the UK university). It means that any unit of improvement in personal mastery can increase research performance to 25% in the case of the Vietnamese university, and 29% in the case of the UK university. However, it shows to have positive impact on teaching performance in the Vietnamese case ( $\beta = .22$ ,  $p < 0.5$ ), i.e. any unit of improvement in personal mastery can increase teaching performance to 22%, but tends to show negative impact on teaching performance in the UK case ( $\beta = -.01$ ,  $p > 0.5$ ), i.e. reduce teaching performance down to 1%, or hardly have any impact on teaching performance.

### 5.3.3 *Study 2: Relationships Between Shared Vision and Teaching and Research Performance*

In an on-going study, we investigate the relationship between university's shared vision with teaching and research performance by hypothesising that a shared vision is positively associated with both teaching and research performance. The study involved 237 academics collected from the Vietnamese university and 194 from the UK counterpart after removing systematic missing survey data. Table 5.2 simply shows the regression results in the relationships between shared vision and teaching and research performance in the two cases of Vietnam and the UK. The results look similar to the ones for personal mastery cited above. In other words, shared vision shows a positive impact on both teaching and research performance in the Vietnamese university. Any increase in any unit of shared vision can improve teaching performance to 25% and

**Table 5.2** Regression results of shared vision on teaching and research performance in both Vietnamese and UK university

<i>Direct effects of Vietnam sample</i>	$\beta$	$p$	<i>Direct effects of UK sample</i>	$\beta$	$p$
Shared vision → Research performance	.25	.01	Shared vision → Research performance	.17	.01
Shared vision → Reaching performance	.09	.01	Shared vision → Reaching performance	.02	.10

research performance to 9% ( $\beta = .25$ ,  $p = 0.1$  and  $\beta = .09$ ,  $p = 0.1$  respectively). However, shared vision shows positive impact only on research performance in the UK case to 17% ( $\beta = .17$ ,  $p = 0.1$ ). Shared vision does not seem to have any significant impact on teaching performance in the UK university.

### 5.3.4 Study 3: Relationships Between Team Learning and Research Performance

Bui et al. (2016) examined the role of team learning in enhancing research performance via self-efficacy in a larger conceptual framework that focuses on team learning and knowledge sharing in higher education. The study involved 204 academics collected from the Vietnamese university and 197 from the UK counterpart. In that study we did not include teaching performance because the framework did not allow us to include teaching performance statistically. In other words, the structure equation modelling did not work when teaching performance was included. However, even when we examined the indirect relationship between team learning and research performance in the case of the UK and Vietnamese universities, the outcomes were not positive at all. Figures 5.1 and 5.2 illustrate the results of our study visually.

The two figures clearly show that team learning in both cases does not have any direct or indirect impact on research performance at all. Even when we look at the set of proposed antecedents of team learning, the results are very different in the two cases. Team commitment and motivation ( $\beta = .30$ ,  $p < 0.1$  and  $\beta = .31$ ,  $p < 0.1$  respectively) are shown to be to important factors that constitute team learning in the context of the UK university. In detail, any improvement in team commitment can improve team learning to 30%, and any improvement in team commitment can improve team

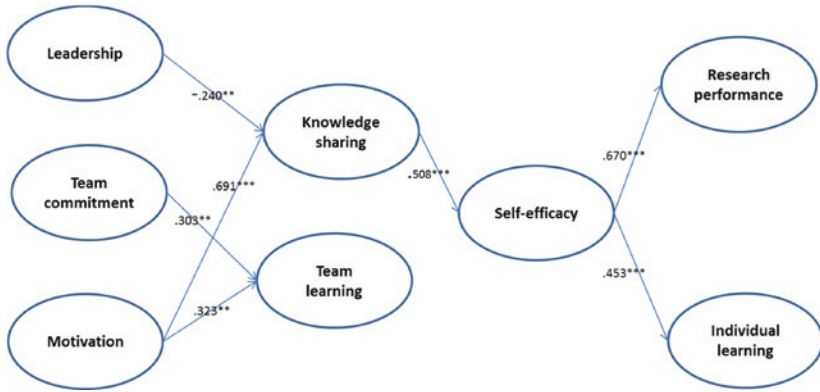


Fig. 5.1 Results from the UK case (permission granted). *Note* Only significant paths shown

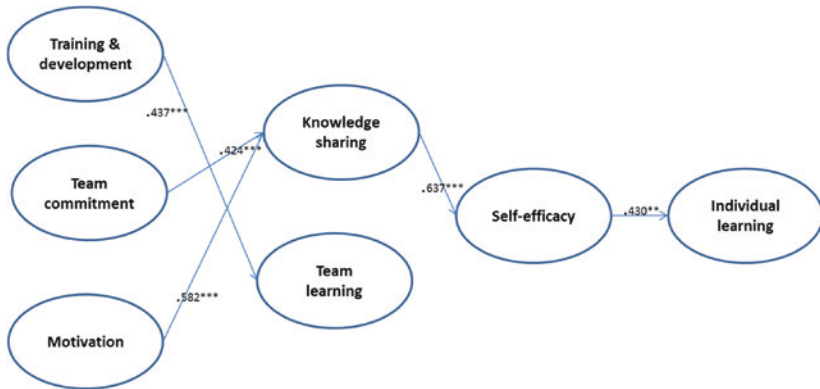


Fig. 5.2 Results from the Vietnamese case (permission granted). *Note* Only significant paths shown

learning to 31%. Any improvement in training and development can significantly improve team learning in the case of the Vietnamese university to 44% ( $\beta = .44$ ,  $p < 0.1$ ). The findings of Bui et al.'s (2016) study once more emphasise the fact that we know little about team learning in higher education environment though we teach our students about the importance of teamwork and team learning in most of programmes at university.



## 5.4 DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

With a clear correlation between learning organisation and organisational performance (Kim & Lu, 2019), being a learning organisation has become a new discourse for universities (Bui & Baruch, 2010b, 2012). When the findings from the above studies are linked together, they indicate a number of significant implications for higher education about key performance indicators in the global games of rankings and new managerialism. Not only academics but also managers and practitioners in higher education must rethink their jobs and roles as individuals and institutions.

First of all, these studies reveal a fact that academics seem to be playing the games of performance in order to comply with managerialism rather than dedicating themselves to education, or teaching and learning in the other terms. This is shown in the results related to personal mastery and shared vision. The two cases from Vietnam and the UK from Study 1 and Study 2 show that depending on the vision and missions set by the university, academics would act upon it because their performance is measured mainly based on what their university wanted to achieve. In detail, because the UK case was labelled and envisioned as a “research-led” university, both personal mastery and shared vision show a positive impact on research performance only, not teaching performance, despite the fact that UK gains the most benefits in the internationalisation in higher education in which they attract students from all the world. In contrast, the Vietnamese counterpart was in a transition from a teaching to a research university, and personal mastery and shared vision show positive impact on both teaching and research performance. I am curious and feel unfortunate that I did not investigate any case related to a “teaching-focused” university to confirm my statement of the sad fact that academics now seem to have lost much of their academic freedom to care about students’ learning and development through their teaching excellence.

Secondly, Study 2 shows empirical evidence to confirm that universities can actually achieve their vision and missions if they know how to share them properly across the university. For example, the research-led university would lead to a strong association with research performance, while the teaching-but-under-transition-to research university would show a significant association with both teaching and research performance. In the case of the Vietnamese university, that finding also seems

to be resulted from a changing culture. Vietnam was originally a collectivist culture (Thêm, 1999), which has shaped a family-like organisational culture in many public sector organisations, such as universities. In such a family-like organisational culture, professors and teachers are seen and see themselves as “parents”, and do not necessarily collaborate with their subordinates or their peers. The harmony in such a culture like Vietnam dominantly is the “listen-and-obey” hierarchy, i.e. juniors in an organisation show their respect by listening to and obeying their seniors. However, the internationalisation of higher education and the emergence of the new managerialism has been changing that culture gradually. Younger generations, particularly those graduated from overseas, are bringing a research culture from Western individualist societies home to create more equality, and a breaking of the age hierarchy in this conservative environment. Ngo (Chapter 3) argues from the institutional logic perspective that Vietnamese higher education is under the interactions between neoliberalism, socialism, and Confucianism. I call this tendency of harmonising flexibly the benefits of collectivist vs. individualist cultures, neoliberalism vs. socialism vs. Confucianism as “balanced culture”. This changing culture, reflected in changes in beliefs about values and norms, together with the transition from teaching to a research orientation seems to well explain the impact of personal mastery and shared vision on both teaching and research performance in the Vietnamese case.

Thirdly, Study 3 shows no meaningful relationship between team learning and research performance in both contexts of the UK and Vietnam. Bui et al. (2016) have explained that “this is possibly due to the pressures of internal competition in publishing among academics around the world” (p. 44). However, I would like to add further an explanation for this finding. In the case of the UK university, it seems to result from the REF rules and regulations that only one author from an institution can claim a publication to REF, or a maximum of two authors only in exceptional cases. In the case of Vietnam, it is likely to result from an ivory tower and teacher-centred culture of higher education, in which many professors think they know best and are not willing to collaborate or work in teams. As a result, the educational leadership knowledge base is seen at a nascent developmental stage, in which “publications are often limited to prescriptions or commentaries that lack empirical basis or do not follow research conventions; local and international knowledge are isolated from each other; institutions focus on

teaching and leader preparation. Individuals lack opportunity to develop research capacity” (Bryant, Walker, & Haiyan, 2017, p. 383). As stated previously, this culture must change and is changing, hopefully positively.

Last but not least, Study 3 points out that teaching team learning seems to be missing in higher education. This challenges the educational philosophy of higher education where academics do not seem to practice what they preach in terms of team learning. In order for academics to walk their talk of team learning to their students, there must be institutional changes from policy makers and top management of institutions to identify and remove the roots of the issues that I discuss above. They might rethink to what extent new managerialism is (or not) relevant and beneficial to higher education, or this sector may find a more suitable approach to sustain and innovate itself.

Readers of this chapter may obviously find that mental models and systems thinking are missing disciplines from the learning organisation’s perspective. This is the key limitation of the chapter that I should acknowledge. Mental models and systems thinking are more complicated and not easy to capture with numbers like the other three disciplines in this study. Even though I have data about the two disciplines, I find them uneasy to quantify. Therefore, I hope to explore them further with additional qualitative data in the future.

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# Commentary: Modernity and Reflexivity in Vietnamese Higher Education—Situating the Role of the Ideological, Capacity Building, Learning Organisation, and Policy Reform

*Jonathan J. Felix*

## 6.1 INTRODUCTION

Several commendable advances have been made within the higher education sector in Vietnam, as both local and international scholars have identified previous strides and a range of future-oriented opportunities for development (Dang & Glewwe, 2018; Tran, 2018; Tran et al., 2014). Nevertheless, many old challenges persist which threaten to undermine current progress, while at the same time delaying the rate of advancement which could be made as the nation has moved into a new historical epoch at the time of this writing (Anh & Hayden, 2017; Pham, 2019; Tran, 2018).

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Drawing on existing data and research, this chapter posits Modernity as a conceptual lens to make sense of higher education in market-oriented socialist Vietnam, while also asserting the importance of reflexivity in forging new paths of progress towards the sector's necessary development as well as an assessment of its current trajectory. I argue that Modernity serves as a critical theoretical starting point to examine and interrogate assumptions and occurrences in all aspects of present-day Vietnam in general and the higher education sector in particular.

Also, I define reflexivity in this chapter in light of existing scholarship related to reflexive governance and Modernity (Brew, Boud, Lucas, & Crawford, 2017; Feindt & Weiland, 2018; Greenbank, 2003; Popoveniuc, 2014; Sol, van der Wal, Beers, & Wals, 2018; Voß & Kemp, 2006). In this chapter, reflexivity is defined as a deep socially constructed awareness of the process of historical and context-specific modern identity formation and the active, ongoing negotiation of this based on internal and external factors, including material and immaterial realities, which lead to anticipated and defined outcomes as well as iterative mechanisms for change.

## 6.2 STIRRING AND STEERING THE FIELD

A recurring idea evident in the preceding and subsequent chapters of this volume and other published works is the role of policy in positively transforming Vietnam's higher education environment (Anh & Hayden, 2017; Dang & Glewwe, 2018; Le, 2014; D. T. H. Nguyen, 2016; Nguyen & Vu, 2015; Tran & Villano, 2017; Tran et al., 2014). While this chapter will not present a rehash of notable ideas put forward concerning higher education policy in Vietnam, it will continue to reiterate its productive benefits, particularly with its use value from a philosophical standpoint.

To clarify the use of the terms *policy* or specifically, *higher education policy* in this chapter, I will draw on Caribbean-based higher education scholarship to synthesise and elucidate the various uses of these terms and corresponding concepts in the preceding chapters in this section (Ali, 2007; Gift, Leo-Rhynie, & Moniquette, 2006; Thurab-Nkhosi & Marshall, 2009), in addition to similar ideas located in previous scholarship on Vietnamese higher education as noted in the introduction of this volume.



From here on, the use of these terms refers to a clearly defined political strategy with commensurate outcomes that involve relevant and necessary processes including appropriate quality assurance mechanisms which span the gamut of affairs related to higher education. This includes matters related to accreditation, curriculum, language(s) of instruction, assessment, institutional governance, and so forth (Brew et al., 2017; Müller-Christ et al., 2014; Rowlands, 2013; Shreeve, Sims, & Trowler, 2010).

As the concluding chapter of the first section of this publication, it will, however, provide a brief review of chapters by the preceding authors in this volume by drawing on their scholarship with a view towards evaluating and establishing the unity of the arguments and perspectives put forward. Considering this, the review of previous chapters will lean more towards being thematic rather than based on their chronological organisation in this volume. Yet before this, a general framework for Modernity will be outlined as a critical starting point to further contextualise the work of both preceding and succeeding authors. Finally, the immeasurable value of reflexivity as it relates to higher education policy will be advanced towards the end of this chapter.

Moreover, the argument presented in favour of the concept of reflexivity defined earlier might be employed to reframe an understanding of previous and contemporary discourses and developments in higher education in Vietnam, while at the same time offering a means of addressing a variety of challenges identified by scholars in this specific area of interest. Indeed, the ‘new’ players, ‘new’ discourses, and ‘new’ practices’ find their place against the backdrop of major shifts in Vietnam’s economy, political life, social orders, and cultural practices, which are marks of the process of modernisation, which is indicative of the concept of Modernity or several underlying ideas and assumptions related to these changes (Gardner & Osella, 2003; Hall & Gieben, 1992).

### 6.3 THE DEFINING CONTEXT OF MODERNITY

Modernity as a historic context and time period is argued to have its starting point in the West with pivotal events such as the invention of the printing press, ideas which circulated during the Enlightenment during the seventeenth century, and the migration of ideas and discourses through the European colonisation of Asia, Africa, and the Americas (Allan, 2011; Bhabra, 2007; Trainor, 1998). However, scholars have

observed differences in the articulation of Modernity in various regional or national settings and have argued for the idea of Multiple Modernities which better describes these occurrences, even going so far as to identify Asian Modernity as a subset of this broader categorisation (Bhambra, 2007; Brook, 2013; Fan, 2016; Gauntlett, 2002; Lee & Cho, 2012; Morley, 2007; Rappa & Wee, 2006; Schmidt, 2011). What follows from this point will be an attempt to provide linkages between various aspects of higher education in Vietnam and how these relate to the type of Modernity articulated in this space.

As previously mentioned, I offer here a brief definition of Modernity to provide a potential means for situating the work both preceding and succeeding authors in this volume. Firstly, the concept of Modernity I reference in this chapter primary relates to ideas and assumptions relating to narratives of progressive development which diffuse through all aspects of a given society, but which are amplified by processes of globalisation and migration (Gardner & Osella, 2003; Hall & Gieben, 1992; Jacobson, Hall, & Gay, 2003; Rappa & Wee, 2006).

It is this guiding narrative of 'progress' that separates modern societies from traditional ones since this unstable, reflexive narrative serves as a point of distinction and departure from the perpetuations of the past (Latour, 1993; Lu & Kao, 2002; Rappa & Wee, 2006; Takeuchi et al., 2018). Embedded in this narrative is the role of rationality and secularisation which brings with it ideas related to individual autonomy, identity, and a redefinition of social categories that are marked by a sense of fluidity which allows for social mobility to be realised (Latour, 1993; Rappa & Wee, 2006).

As such, it makes sense to see why a framework of Modernity is useful here since higher education in Vietnam supports narratives of progression that are linked to the transformative role of education and its intangible and material outcomes. In this context, higher education can enable one to foster a more defined sense of personal, professional, and even familial identity—and more broadly an institutional and/or even national identity based on the unified social character of the actors within the higher education ecosystem. Furthermore, the identity formation which might be formed through the outcomes of higher education may lead to individual economic benefits that allow for social mobilities as one might progress through various social categories defined by education, income, prestige, and so forth.

Still, the role of rationality and secularisation which underpins many academic endeavours relate to the categorical fragmentation of human knowledge and experience vis-à-vis academic disciplines and how these are used to generate meaning and respond to a range of ills which threaten the quality of human life individually and collectively (Bhambra, 2007; Gardner & Osella, 2003; Latour, 1993; Rappa & Wee, 2006). Now I maintain with other scholars a clear distinction between the notions of Modernity and modernisation (Gardner & Osella, 2003; Han & Shim, 2010; Rappa & Wee, 2006; Weiming, 2014); while the former is related to the ideas outlined previously, the latter refers to the actualisation of such ideas through processes such as urbanisation, nation-branding, or migration.

The conflation of these notions can obscure the role of the assumptions and ideas in the formation of material outcomes, while also causing the processes of modernisation to appear autonomous, isolated, or disconnected from broader ideological or discursive formations. Also, the theoretical grounding of this present chapter serves to advance the commentary on the ideas which underpin the work of the authors contained in this volume, particularly the first section.

Advancements in Vietnam's higher education sector may be regionally categorised as an articulation of Asian Modernity and further subdivided into what may be argued as Vietnamese Modernity (Goscha, 2004; C. A. Nguyen, 2016; Nguyen, Nguyen, Pham, & Nguyen, 2018; Raffin, 2008; Tran, 2012), which can be characterised as postcolonial and nationalistic, while also bearing considerable ideological influence from both Confucianism and Socialism respectively. In what remains of this chapter, I will attempt to provide a commentary of the previous chapters of this edited volume by outlining the relationship between higher education in Vietnam and its distinct mode of Modernity.

#### 6.4 LEARNING ORGANISATION AND RESEARCH DEVELOPMENT

Surveying the ideas of preceding authors in this volume, Bui (Chapter 5) provides an interesting comparison between Vietnamese and UK-based universities as it relates to academic performance and key factors which impact the process of the work and corresponding outputs of faculty. Academic performance in this context is linked to the overarching framework of higher education learning organisation which includes three core elements or principles: personal mastery (individual growth and personal

learning capacities), shared vision (a common objective which unifies diverse efforts among colleagues serving within an institution), and team learning (collaboration and support among colleagues as a realisation of their shared vision). The content of this chapter builds upon previous work (Bui & Baruch, 2010, 2012), but significantly differs by way of its context-specific and comparative foci in this volume.

Findings from Chapter 5 suggest a type of gamification of contemporary higher education through the learning organisation framework, with parameters determined by the organisational goals of any given university. Bui notes that Vietnamese universities are experiencing a productive transition from knowledge transmission to knowledge generation at this present time, in keeping with international benchmarks for quality assurance and institutional recognition. Within this context, the expressions of Modernity evident in these kinds of benchmarks and recognition standards provide opportunities for professional and institutional identity formation in addition to social mobilities for both entities as noted earlier (Gardner & Osella, 2003; Latour, 1993; Rappa & Wee, 2006).

Yet, Bui also observes that key challenges to research development in Vietnamese universities are often the result of cultural barriers, specifically the collectivist and hierarchical structure of Vietnamese society and corresponding social relationships which are articulated because of these paradigms. Interestingly, with overseas educated Vietnamese returning home from Western universities with the potential to build local research capacities within higher education institutions across the nation, cultural barriers to the objective of research development and excellence are in some ways being put under erasure. This is arguably an outcome of the ongoing articulation of Vietnamese Modernity as an active postcolonial project in national development and nation-branding, uniquely informed by ideological undercurrents noted in Chapter 3.

This cultural erasure signals a change in the discourse of higher education in Vietnam since the development of research capacities through aspirations towards international quality assurance benchmarks and the research capacities of foreign-trained faculty are indicative of the transformative role of both globalisation and migration in the exchange of experience(s) and knowledge(s) across borders. Observing these processes, I maintain also with other scholars that both globalisation and migration are key aspects and indicators of Modernity which are indicative of relations of power at both micro and macro levels (Gardner & Osella, 2003; Lee & Cho, 2012; Ludden, 2003; Staiff & Bushell, 2013).

The occurrence and influence of these phenomena are important in understanding the evolution of higher education in Vietnam in general, as well as the university research development from the 1986 Doi Moi economic policy reforms until the time of this writing, as outlined in Chapter 4.

In reviewing the history of state policy and institutional capacity for research development in higher education in Vietnam, Nguyen (Chapter 4) notes that the research focus of universities across the nation is still in a state of infancy, and suggests that the aspiration of knowledge generation and research excellence should be made concrete through changes to sector-wide policy and robust systems of institutional governance. As such, these proposed changes will be aimed at fostering a culture in which research is normative and thereby optimising the development and capacity of the national workforce in addition to situating Vietnam as a change agent in both local and global contexts. It is this sense of reflexivity concerning such contexts, I argue, is what characterises higher education in this space as a project of Vietnamese Modernity.

This early phase of capacity building has been marked by a notable inflow of students within the higher education system, yet in contrast to limited institutional resources, considerable progress has been slow. However, Nguyen argues that the potential benefits to be accrued from major investments in building research capacity in national universities far outweigh the costs involved in such efforts. At the core of this thrust for research development in Vietnamese universities, as noted by Nguyen, is the importance of the political in Chapter 4 and in this author's previous work (H. T. L. Nguyen, 2016; Nguyen & Van Gramberg, 2018). This namely involves providing strategic leadership which will not only prioritise the introduction of new policies and amendments to existing ones but also about the competent management of people and resources towards this end.

With a deep sense of urgency, Nguyen contends that research should become a mandate within the Vietnamese higher education system, by incentivising progress and outputs, while at the same time providing support for the nation's academic workforce through competitive funding opportunities, the restructuring of research and development mechanisms, as well as career plan development for local and overseas doctoral graduates. These graduates are signifiers of Modernity as it relates to the disciplinary fragmentation of knowledge and experience in addition to a synecdoche for human mastery over material and intangible aspects of

reality intending to advance the social, cultural, economic, and political evolution of the human condition (Latour, 1993; Perselli, 2016; Rappa & Wee, 2006).

At this juncture, I would also like to advance the notion that the corresponding occurrence and development of both policy and institutional structures are manifestations of Modernity. Both policy and institutional structures facilitate forms of social organisation which are indicators of modern societies in the sense that these rest upon underlying assumptions of the essentiality of ‘progress’ or in other words, the historically contingent ‘need’ to optimise human and financial resources in support of ideas related to ‘new’ players, ‘new’ discourses, and ‘new’ practices.

Recommendations provided by both researchers previously mentioned (Chapters 4 and 5) suggest that the importance of policy and institutional structures cannot be overemphasised or underestimated as a necessary scaffold for productive outcomes within the higher education sector which are in keeping with national interests. Ideas presented by Nguyen in Chapter 4 correspond with the learning organisation framework noted by Bui in Chapter 5 as both chapters highlight the importance of the political in shaping the orientation of higher education research capacity in Vietnam at both individual and institutional levels. Yet, underpinning the structural is the marked influence of the ideological, of which the importance of this factor is more pronounced in Chapter 5, and further developed in the work of Ngo (Chapter 3). This is particularly noteworthy given the critical theoretical focus of the arguments I attempt to present in this chapter and the importance of assumptions and ideas in shaping lived experience.

## 6.5 HIGHER EDUCATION REFORM AND IDEOLOGICAL FLOWS

Like Bui (Chapter 5), Ngo (Chapter 3) identifies Neoliberalism, Socialism, and Confucianism as a triad of institutional logics which underpin the higher education sector in Vietnam and which also permeate the rest of Vietnamese society in a broader sense. As with previous work (Ngo, 2019), Ngo again identifies institutional logics as a systematic construction of ideas which govern the actions and behaviours of persons who exist within a social structure, which in this case would be higher education in Vietnam.

Ngo highlights the compatibility between Neoliberalism and Confucianism, in that both ideologies maintain the value of education

in terms of personal economic benefit and private gain in the cultivation of the self. Confucian thought and practice in Vietnam continue to be a pervasive influence since the traditional organisation of local society in centuries past when it was introduced, to its modern iteration in the present day in the twenty-first century. As such, the desirability of education is one of many social mores that is very much aligned to and arguably complements the economic rationality of Neoliberalism which is also a significant force.

However, a contrasting tension is yet presented between Neoliberalism and Confucianism despite the measure of congruence that articulates itself among the presences of these two dominant ideologies in modern-day Vietnam. Given the egalitarian principles which are endorsed by Confucianism, Ngo argues, the reproduction of socio-economic inequalities under Neoliberalism puts it at variance with the former. While Ngo observes that Socialism is a more harmonious alternative given the idea of equal distribution and state ownership and control over national resources, it also stands at variance with the economic focus of Neoliberalism, and by extension practices such as decentralisation, privatisation, commodification, and corporatisation noted by other scholars (Deem, Mok, & Lucas, 2008; Luke, 2010; Mok, 2003).

In observing the social compatibilities and contradictions brought about by these differing ideological systems, Ngo posits that more reflexivity is required among the social actors within the higher education sector, which would result in the negotiation of unambiguous shared goals and corresponding plans of action towards the achievement of such ends. In this sense, the work of Ngo here suggests that the ideological can be instrumentalised as a cultural resource for the exercise of organisational agency both internally and externally. This rationale alludes to the gravity of policy as a means of explicating the intended ends of higher education in Vietnam.

It is also worth pointing out, however, notwithstanding the tension between Socialism and Neoliberalism, that both ideological systems are products of Modernity given their departure from traditional structures of social organisation, including as an example, their respective features of secularisation and rationality in the case of the former and individuality in the case of the latter, as examples of some of their defining characteristics. Even so, the triadic confluence of Socialism, Neoliberalism, and Confucianism infuses Vietnamese Modernity with its unique quality, in addition to the nation's postcolonial national identity.

Shifting back to from the ideological to the organisational, Hayden and Le-Nguyen (Chapter 2) have restated the need for policy reform within Vietnamese higher education while acknowledging the year 2005 as a major turning point for the implementation of quality assurance mechanisms. Both Hayden and Chinh argue for greater degrees of institutional autonomy and sector-wide collaboration as the social actors within the higher education sector require clear goal definition and coordination (Anh & Hayden, 2017; Mok, 2007).

According to Hayden and Chinh, in their estimation, the issue specifically lies not with the lack of progress but the rate at which it is carried out in the sector. Again, in their analysis, the collectivist and hierarchical structure of Vietnamese society is in keeping with the somewhat paradoxical institutional logics of Neoliberalism, Socialism, and Confucianism. As such, this results in centralised authority rather than institutional autonomy as well as a lack of continuity when initiatives commence but are transferred to succeeding leadership. This is also compounded when issues of transparency and accountability are considered foreign elements to quality assurance mechanisms, which may be limited to standards or criteria for accreditation.

It is this lack of organisational cohesion which significantly hinders forthcoming progress and undermines existing strides, as this disunity does not lend itself to the creation of an environment for healthy competition, growth, and benchmarking. The result, Hayden and Chinh posit, could lead Vietnam to end up being negatively affected by disruptive organisational and technical innovations, and ultimately losing regional and international significance considering this. In other words, this could leave the nation with an underdeveloped articulation of Modernity in contrast to other regional and global entities in the field of higher education worldwide.

The dire need for higher education policy reform as noted by Hayden and Chinh highlights a series of external opportunities and threats, which may be appropriately dealt with given the internal strengths and weaknesses. Indeed, linkages to global networks of knowledge and local knowledge production efforts play a key role here in shaping the character of the higher education sector in Vietnam and how Modernity may be articulated within the nation at large.



## 6.6 CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the authors in the preceding chapters in this section have all contributed to the thematic proposition of ‘stirring up the field’ employing their assessment of issues and ideological frames of reference concerning Vietnamese higher education. What is clear from this assessment is that while policy is a necessity to the present challenges and future state of higher education in Vietnam, more reflexivity needs to be exercised as policy objectives and outcomes are negotiated. Consideration should be given to the role of ideological influences in shaping policy-based decisions and actions.

Revisiting the Caribbean-based higher education scholarship briefly referenced earlier in this chapter offers a few fitting points for further reflection which is applicable within the Vietnamese context, as the relationship between policy and reflexivity is featured in these works. Specifically, Ali (2007) places a special emphasis on process as an essential aspect of higher education policy as it involves a series of questions related to not only the ‘what’, ‘how’, and ‘why’ of policy, but also the issue of impact beyond the parameters of the academy towards the wider society. This points towards having inclusive policy decisions which are representative of and responsive to the needs of the interests of the population, taking into account the complex and dynamic nature of modern societies (Ali, 2007). The chapter by Hayden and Le-Nguyen (Chapter 2) strongly advocates for such an approach, while also considering the momentum at which change is articulated as a key factor which may affect the scope and quality of urgent changes they argue in favour of.

Other Caribbean-based scholars such as Gift et al. (2006) note that the implementation of policy in higher education has the potential to support the indigenous knowledge production through which institutions have the potential to be mobilised as exporters of knowledge. Indeed, if higher education policy is to be currently productive as well as future-oriented, it would be worthwhile to consider not only the construction of local knowledge and the correlated production of internationally recognised scholarship from Vietnamese universities but also how Vietnam can be positioned as a key site for the dissemination of knowledge both regionally and beyond. The importance of capacity building by Nguyen (Chapter 4), suggests the immense potential for the export of knowledge and the benefits to be accrued from the creation and management of efficient systems which incentivises knowledge production and their impact among local society.

Similarly, Thurab-Nkhosi and Marshall (2009) note that higher education institutions must ensure that systems for evaluation and the tools needed in the management of the quality assurance process must remain open systems that respond to dynamic changes within the internal and external dimensions of the higher education ecosystem. Considering this, institutional autonomy would put Vietnamese universities in a better position to create adaptable systems which are pertinent to their individual contexts. Again, the importance of process is noteworthy here as not only ends should be considered, but also the means to achieve them. The learning performance framework identified by Bui (Chapter 5), serves as the means of optimising the resources available to universities in Vietnam utilising clear targets, processes, outcomes, and ideas. And finally, the work of Ngo (Chapter 3) highlights the role of ideological influences in learning performance, capacity building, and higher education policy reform, like the coalescence of Socialism, Neoliberalism, and Confucianism can affect the definition, implementation, and outcomes of higher education policy.

Reflexivity remains a productive component of higher education policy in Vietnam so long as there is the acknowledgement of the elements of Modernity which inform it. Some elements of Vietnamese Modernity outlined in this chapter include the international mobility of the local academic workforce, the increasing awareness of the relationship between international performance and national identity, in addition to the confluence of differing ideological schools of thought as major socio-cultural influences on policy and practice. Even so, for both Vietnamese nationals and international stakeholders, the ongoing hope for transformation within the higher education sector and all other facets of society continues to be the driving force behind scholarship, policy, and practice which will ultimately lead to the public good in this present time and for the future generation.

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PART II

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‘New Players’, ‘New Discourses’, ‘New  
Values’, and ‘New Practices’ in a Socialist  
State: Dialogical Responses from Within and  
Outside



# Critiquing the Promotion of American Biased “Liberal Arts Education” in Post- “Đổi Mới” Vietnam

*Ngo Tu Lap*

## 7.1 INTRODUCTION

One of the major topics in the debate about education among Vietnamese educators, researchers, and policymakers is the search for a new model and its underlying philosophy (Hayden and Le-Nguyen, Chapter 2). In this debate, one can hear many conflicting voices, but the idea of borrowing the American model of liberal arts education seems to be increasingly noticeable. The purpose of this chapter is not to deny the benefits of liberal arts education, nor to downplay the achievements and strengths of the American higher education system, but rather to show a worrying tendency, especially among a number of US-educated authors, to absolutise the American model while negating totally the national achievements of the past.

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## 7.2 THE NEED FOR MODEL AND PHILOSOPHY CHANGE UNDER THE IMPACTS OF “ĐỔI MỚI”

The change of education model and philosophy is not new in Vietnam. Before 1986, Vietnam had at least three times abandoned its higher education model and adopted a new one.

The history of Vietnam’s traditional higher education began in 1075, when the first mandarin examinations were organised by King Lý Nhân Tông. One year later, Quốc Tử Giám (College of National Sons) was established. Designed for the education of sons of the royal family, Quốc Tử Giám later received also sons of high-ranking officials, and from 1252, students from other backgrounds. This higher education institution in the Chinese style is often considered Vietnam’s very first university. The Confucian model of higher education lasted for ten centuries, and ended in 1919, under King Khải Định.

*The first change of model occurred under the French domination.* To produce officials for the colonial administration, the French imposed on the country a Western-style education system. The first “modern” university in the so-called French Indochina (Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia) is the Indochinese University, established in 1906, consisting of five *Écoles supérieures*: *École supérieure de Droit et Administration*, *École supérieure des sciences*, *École supérieure de médecine*, *École supérieure du génie Civil*, and *École supérieure des lettres*. The Indochinese University started its first academic year in 1907, and was the only institution of higher education in French Indochina before 1945 (Vu, Dao, Nguyen, Nguyen, & Pham, 2006).

The French model was sustained even after August Revolution (1945), when the Indochinese University was renamed to Vietnam National University (VNU), and during the anti-French war (1946–1954), when it was evacuated to mountainous regions. At the same time, several new colleges were established by the government of Hồ Chí Minh despite numerous difficulties.

*The second change of model occurred during the anti-American war, when Vietnam was divided.* During this period, both in the North and the South, higher education underwent significant developments.

In 1956, the higher education system in the North abandoned the French model and followed the Soviet model, in which all institutions were public, organised according to specialisation, and highly centralised. In 1975, the North Vietnam higher education system

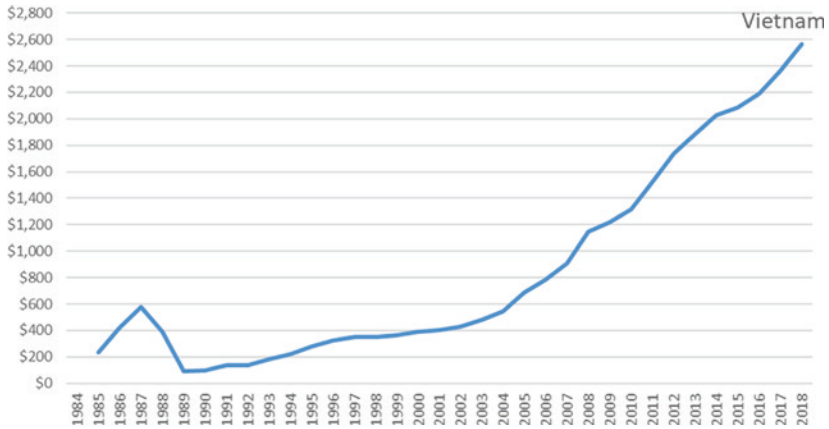
included 30 universities (excluding colleges) with about 56,000 students. Meanwhile, the higher education system in the South adopted the American model. This system included both public and private institutions. In 1975, South Vietnam's higher education system had 7 public and 7 private universities with about 166,000 students (Dang, 1997).

*The third change of model was in 1976, when the Soviet model was chosen to be applied in the whole country.* Just as in North Vietnam before 1975, this system was highly centralised, and all its institutions were public. The mission of the system was to produce the “new socialist all-round developed citizens” to fulfill socio-economic plans set by the government and to build socialism in general. (See, for example, the article by Nguyen (2015) entitled “Ho Chi Minh Ideology of new fully and comprehensively developed people regarding the development of new Vietnamese people nowadays”). One of the major developments of this period was the rapid expansion of graduate programmes, although the government continued to send a large number of students to study in the East European socialist countries.

*But the need for model change has never been as urgent as it is today under the impacts of “Đổi Mới”.* Initiated by the Communist Party of Vietnam in 1986, this policy has led to the opening of the country to the outside world, adopting the market economy, and has turned Vietnam from a war-ravaged and chronically starving country into one of the fastest growing economies in the world. Despite two international financial crises in 1997 and 2008, during the last 30 years, Vietnam's GDP has increased significantly at an average rate of about 7% and per capita GDP, from under US\$100 in 1989 to about US\$2587 in 2018 (General Statistics Office, 2016). See Fig. 7.1.

Vietnam's economic progress has had enormous impacts on the country's higher education system (Hayden and Le-Nguyen, Chapter 2; Chau, Chapter 8; and Pham, Chapter 9). As both living standards and market demand for qualified human resource are now much higher, the number of universities and students increased significantly. Many colleges were transformed into universities, and a large number of new universities, both public and private, were established. Table 7.1 indicates the development of Vietnam's higher education system in terms of institutions and students in the 2000–2015 period.

The rapid expansion of the higher education system has generated criticism from a number of educators who worry about education quality.



**Fig. 7.1** Vietnam's per capita GDP growth (*Source* Data from the World Bank)

**Table 7.1** Number of higher education institutions and students (thousands)

	2000		2005		2010		2015	
	<i>Inst.</i>	<i>Students</i>	<i>Inst.</i>	<i>Students</i>	<i>Inst.</i>	<i>Students</i>	<i>Inst.</i>	<i>Students</i>
Total	178	899.5	277	1387.1	414	2162.1	445	2118.5
Public	148	795.6	243	1226.7	334	1828.2	357	1847.1
Private	30	103.9	34	160.4	80	333.9	88	271.4

*Source* General Statistics Office (2016)

But the biggest problem, in my opinion, is the mismatch between higher education system's governance and philosophy and the country's market economy (Marklein and Mai, Chapter 11). After three decades of reforms, despite the label "Socialist" in its official name, Vietnam has become largely similar to capitalist countries in the world, except for a state-owned sector that is ineffective and irresistibly diminishing. Slowly, but noticeably, Vietnam has been renouncing the Soviet-style governance model by increasing the number of private universities, offering more autonomy to higher education institutions, and allowing a more flexible ceiling of tuition fees and higher enrolment quotas, to name only a few. However, those changes are far from enough. The globalisation

trend, especially after Vietnam joined ASEAN [1995], APEC [1998], WTO [2006], and CPTPP [Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership, 2018], has required Vietnam's universities and their graduates to cooperate and compete globally, and at the same time posed for this higher education system many new challenges and problems, making the need for reform more urgent than ever.

It is in this context that the mentioned debate on higher education philosophy and model has emerged. In the debate, one can notice three main points:

1. Criticism of Vietnam's traditional education;
2. Criticism of the Soviet-styled model; and
3. The idea of borrowing the American model of liberal arts education.

I will examine these points below.

### 7.3 DIFFERING PERSPECTIVES ON LIBERAL ARTS EDUCATION: “KHAI PHÓNG” AND “KHAI SÁNG”

In South Vietnam before 1975, the term “*Giáo dục khai phóng*” was popular. Largely forgotten after 1975, the term returned to life only recently to mean “Liberal Arts Education”, and quickly became fashionable. Numerous conferences on the topic were organised, such as “Liberal Arts Education and the Future of Vietnamese Education” (*Giáo dục khai phóng và tương lai của giáo dục Việt Nam*) by FPT University in March 2015, “Liberal Arts Education” (*Giáo dục khai phóng*) by Vietnam Japan University, Vietnam National University in May 2017, “Liberal Arts Education – the US Model” (*Giáo dục khai phóng – mô hình Hoa Kỳ*) by Vietnam—US Friendship Association in August 2017—to name only a few. Recently, the newly established Fulbright University Vietnam declared that it is a “liberal arts education” university.

The re-emergence of the term “*Giáo dục khai phóng*”, in my opinion, must be considered in the context of an interesting anti-official sociocultural tendency, that tends to re-evaluate, and sometimes over-evaluate, the achievements of the South Vietnamese regime during the anti-American war while downplaying those of the North. In this chapter, what I intend to do is to show that the outrageous promotion of the American model is a product of a biased dichotomy.

Ironically, an example of that biased dichotomy is the paper “Liberal Arts in Vietnam’s Higher Education” that Dr. Vũ Thành TỰ Anh from Fulbright University Vietnam presented at the conference “Beyond Dichotomies: Vietnam from Multiple Perspectives” organised by “Engaging With Vietnam” in Ho Chi Minh City and Phan Thiết (December 2018). Declaring that “Giáo dục khai phóng” was first introduced to Vietnam in the South before 1975 and has been revived by Phan Châu Trinh and Hoa Sen universities, Dr. Anh contrasted “Giáo dục khai phóng” with both traditional and contemporary higher education in Vietnam, declaring that the aim of both traditional and contemporary higher education is to produce servants, or even slaves, but not free people.

Dr. Vũ Thành TỰ Anh is not the only author who holds that accusation. Dr. Nguyễn Thị Từ Huy, for example, in her answer to Phan Văn Thắng’s question about whether the Vietnamese education during the last decades aimed at liberating human thought and creativity, stated: “No! If we are honest, we have to answer ‘no’. There were some liberating efforts of some people, in some families, at some parts of some schools or institutions. But our education system as a whole is not designed with liberation spirit and method”<sup>1</sup> (Nguyen & Phan, 2019).

Such arguments are totally understandable in the HE context of Vietnam. But they can be applied to all education systems, including that of the USA. In fact, reading the arguments of the authors, who promote the term “Giáo dục khai phóng”, one can notice that what they mean is not different from the term “Khải sáng” (Enlightenment) that was popular in the North. These arguments sound like Kant’s arguments in his famous book *The Conflict of the Faculties*. There, Kant studies the traditional division of the Western Medieval University into three *higher* faculties, including theology, law, and medicine, whose teachings interest the government, and one *lower* faculty, that is philosophy, “whose function is only to look after the interests of science” and may use its own judgement about what it teaches. Showing that

<sup>1</sup>“Không! Nếu chúng ta trung thực thì chúng ta sẽ phải trả lời là “không”. Có những nỗ lực khai phóng ở một số cá nhân, ở một số gia đình, ở một số bộ phận tại một số trường, tại một số tổ chức nào đó. Nhưng toàn bộ nền giáo dục của chúng ta không được thiết kế theo tinh thần và phương pháp khai phóng.”

*the biblical theologian (as a member of a higher faculty) draws his teachings not from reason but from the Bible; the professor of law gets his, not from natural law, but from the law of the land; and the professor of medicine does not draw his method of therapy as practiced on the public from the physiology of the human body but from medical regulations.* (Kant, 1979, p. 35)

Kant concludes:

*...the government is interested primarily in means for securing the strongest and most lasting influence on the people, and the subjects which the higher faculties teach are just such means. Accordingly, the government reserves the right itself to sanction the teachings of the higher faculties, but those of the lower faculty it leaves up to the scholars' reason.* (Kant, 1979, p. 27)

In contrast, according to Kant, a philosophy professor is the “one that, having no commands to give, is free to evaluate everything, and concerns itself with the interests of the sciences, that is, with truth: one in which reason is authorized to speak out publicly” (Kant, 1979, pp. 27–29). Kant conceives the modern university with universal and autonomous reason as its guiding idea, and doing so gives the university universality and autonomy. The purpose of Kant’s university is to produce not servants but free, “enlightened men”, who are able “to make use of his understanding without direction from another” (Kant, 2003, p. 54).

Thus, Kant’s university is intrinsically the university of reason, as Bill Readings puts it: “In this sense, the lower faculty turns out to be the higher, the queen of the sciences, the discipline that incarnates the pure principle that animates the University and differentiates it from either a technical training school (a guild) or a special academy (a royal society)” (Readings, 1996, p. 57). As we all know, Kant’s idea of the modern university was first realised by Humboldt in Berlin and later became the model for Western universities.

In brief, both “Khai sáng” and “Khai phóng”, as used both during the wartime and today in Vietnam, mean “liberating education”, and they can be used interchangeably. The vague differing nuance in their contemporary connotation might be explained, probably, by the ways in which they were introduced in Vietnam: “Khai sáng” entered the Vietnamese vocabulary as the translation of the French term “Les lumières”, while “Khai phóng”—of the English “Liberal arts”.

#### 7.4 CRITICISM OF VIETNAM'S TRADITIONAL HIGHER EDUCATION

Kant's arguments sound very convincing in the West, but they are much less plausible when being put in the contexts of Vietnam and East Asia. Kant is one of the most important figures of the Western Enlightenment, the eighteenth-century intellectual movement the central ideas of which are the celebration of reason, the belief in the power and advancement of knowledge, and the opposition to intolerance and abuses in Church and State. All these ideas were born after, and largely because of, the ten medieval centuries that Europe had gone through under the Catholic Church, during which, to borrow Nietzsche's words,

*All the methods, all the principles of the scientific spirit of today, were the targets for thousands of years of the most profound contempt; if a man inclined to them he was excluded from the society of "decent" people—he passed as "an enemy of God," as a scoffer at the truth, as one "possessed." As a man of science, he belonged to the Chandala.* (Nietzsche, 2006, p. 58)

That is the reason why Kant, in the mentioned essay "What is Enlightenment?", emphasised the revolt against ignorance and superstition with the motto "Sapere aude!" (Kant, 2003, p. 54).

The situation in East Asia is different. Enlightenment has a much longer tradition in East Asia under the influences of Buddhism, Confucianism, and Taoism. But before going further, it is worth mentioning, even in the most simplified manner, the difference between Christianity and the Eastern religions.

Nietzsche is probably the best writer on differences between Christianity and Buddhism. Christianity is a typical *monotheistic revelation religion of salvation*, in which God, in Nietzsche's words, "becomes merely a weapon in the hands of clerical agitators, who interpret all happiness as a reward and all unhappiness as a punishment for obedience or disobedience to him, for 'sin'". He continues:

*Christianity had to embrace barbaric concepts and valuations in order to obtain mastery over barbarians: of such sort, for example, are the sacrifices of the first-born, the drinking of blood as a sacrament, the disdain of the intellect and of culture; torture in all its forms, whether bodily or not; the whole pomp of the cult [...] Christianity aims at mastering beasts of prey; its modus operandi is to make them ill—to make feeble is the Christian recipe for taming, for "civilizing".* (Nietzsche, 2006, p. 74)

By contrast, Buddhism is a *nontheistic religion of enlightenment* (or awakening). Siddhartha Gautama is not God, nor Saviour, but a teacher. The goal of Buddhism is to attain enlightenment by meditation and following the *Eightfold Path* (right view, right aspiration, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness, right concentration), but not to be saved by a loving God and obeying his commandments. According to Nietzsche, “Buddhism is a hundred times as realistic as Christianity—it is part of its living heritage that it is able to face problems objectively and coolly; it is the product of long centuries of philosophical speculation. The concept, ‘god’, was already disposed of before it appeared. Buddhism is the only genuinely positive religion to be encountered in history, and this applies even to its epistemology (which is a strict phenomenalism). It does not speak of a ‘struggle with sin’, but, yielding to reality, of the ‘struggle with suffering’. Sharply differentiating itself from Christianity, it puts the self-deception that lies in moral concepts behind it; it is, in my phrase, beyond good and evil” (Nietzsche, 2006, p. 70).

In the same way, Confucius is not a divine being but a great teacher. Confucianism is not a religion per se, but rather a sociological theory that does not have much to deal with God or the relationship of human beings to God, but mostly about how people should live with each other and in harmony with nature. An easy criticism of Confucian higher education (“*Đại học*” literally means “higher learning”) is that its pedagogical method is authoritarian, and that the only goal of its students is to pass exams to become mandarins, rather than to become free and open-minded people. In reality, Confucius’ pedagogical method is strikingly modern, very close to what we call “learner-centred” today. Instead of long monological lectures, a good Confucian teacher poses questions and cites classic books, using allusions and analogies to stimulate his students to brainstorm until they arrive at the right ideas. Here is a passage from *The Analects* (Lunyu):

*I do not open up the truth to one who is not eager to get knowledge, nor help out any one who is not anxious to explain himself. When I have presented one corner of a subject to any one, and he cannot from it learn the other three, I do not repeat my lesson.* (Confucius, 1861, Book VII. Shuh Urh, Chapter VIII, p. 61)

Although Confucian higher learning relies heavily on classic books, Confucius insists that thinking is more important than memorising: “Learning without thought is labour lost; thought without learning is



perilous” (Confucius, 1861, Book II. Wei Ching, Chapter XV, p. 14). Confucius also encourages his students to have a dialectic and pluralistic attitude which is the message in a popular anecdote attributed to him. One day, Zi Gong, one of Confucius’ students, was asked by a guest: “How many seasons are there in a year?” “Four seasons” answered Zi Gong. “No! Three seasons”—replied the guest. They quarrelled until Confucius came and said: “There are three seasons in a year”. After the visitor left, Confucius explained, “That man was a cricket spirit. Because crickets are born in the spring and die in the fall, they never see the winter. For them, there are only three seasons in a year”.

The anecdote is anecdote, but its popularity reflects the Confucian conception of knowledge that is very different from that of Socrates. As Francois Jullien puts it in his book *Le détour et l'accès*, Socrates’s two important—maybe the most important—contributions to Western philosophy are “Inductive reasoning” and “universal definition”.

*Induction (epagôge) is understood as the progression from the particular to the general: from the consideration of the most diverse examples, the spirit rises up to the common character which unites them in a single kind; and definition, the true logos, is the collection of those general characteristics which say the essence of the thing, its ousia. This, to which we aspire the Socratic irony, by malmeaning our opinions, and of which the dialectic tries to give birth, is this in itself, of which the criterion is the universality (implying the non-contradiction) and which, alone, can found “science”.<sup>2</sup>* (Jullien, 1995, p. 259)

The exigency of universality implies that any liberating education must free students from false knowledge and must orient them towards the truthful knowledge, that is universal, objective, and unique. Thus, Western liberating education, whether it is under the name of “Liberal arts” or “Enlightenment” is intrinsically of *imposing nature*, and the *Socratic*

<sup>2</sup>In French: “L’induction (*epagôge*) est comprise comme la progression du particulier au général: de la considération des exemples les plus divers, l’esprit s’élève au caractère commun qui les rassemble en un genre unique; et la définition, comme *logos* véritable, est la collection de ces caractéristiques générales qui disent l’essence de la chose, son *ousia*. Ce, à quoi nous aspirer l’ironie socratique, en malmenant nos opinions, et dont tente d’accoucher la dialectique, est cet *en soi*, dont le critère est l’universalité (impliquant la non-contradiction) et qui, seul, peut fonder la ‘science’” (trans. Ngô Tự Lập).

*(dialogic) method* or the so-called *critical thinking* are nothing but techniques. And this is true throughout the history of Western education, both before and after Kant.

But in Confucius's philosophy, the search for the universal truth, on the basis of the non-contradiction principle, is not priority. Jullien puts it:

*His avowed concern is therefore not knowledge, having in mind the Truth, but the regulation of the conduct - which allows to marry the regulation of the World. Therefore, far from pretending to describe the real, to reproduce on an abstract plane the great articulation of things, the Confucian statement, pronounced from Master to disciple, in relation to the circumstance, can be only indicative. But by reacting sharply, and in a special way, he opens at the same time the infinity of the course of things. It illuminates indirectly, from their slightest detail, what cannot be defined in a general way: their background of immanence.*<sup>3</sup> (Jullien, 1995, p. 228).

Similarly, Taoism is rather a philosophical school than religion. It is about the principle, or the "way", of everything in the universe, and about how to learn and master that principle to achieve the state of harmony and perfection.

As in the famous saying "The finger pointing at the moon is not the moon", Taoist educational philosophy insists that students must learn the essence of things but not their names defined and dictated by others, and that teachers must enlighten their students instead of imposing on them fixed ideas. Here are the first lines of Lao Tzu's *Tao Te Ching*: "The way you can go isn't the real way. The name you can say isn't the real name" (Lao, 2009, §1: Taoing; p. 2).

A good Taoist teacher should not be authoritarian. He should not try to put as much as possible information into learners' minds, nor to impose on them his viewpoints, but should instead motivate students to learn by themselves in the most natural, effortless way: "Studying and

<sup>3</sup>In French: "Son souci avoué n'est donc pas la connaissance, ayant en vue la Vérité, mais la régulation de la conduite - qui permet d'épouser la régulation du Monde. Aussi, loin de prétendre décrire le réel, reproduire sur un plan abstrait la grande articulation des choses, le propos confucéen, prononcé de Maître à disciple, en rapport à la circonstance, ne peut-il être qu'indicatif. Mais en réagissant à vif, et de façon particulière, il ouvre du même coup sur l'infini de la marche des choses. Il éclaire de biais, à partir de leur moindre détail, ce qu'on ne saurait définir d'une façon générale: leur fond d'immanence" (trans. Ngô Tữ Lập).

learning daily you grow larger/Following the Way daily you shrink/You get smaller and smaller/So you arrive at not doing..." (Lao, 2009, §48: Unlearning; p. 72).

What is shared by Buddhist, Confucian, and Taoist teachers is their open and suggestive teaching method. At first glance, their teaching method seems to be very Socratic. But there is a big difference between them: the aim of the Asian teachers is to invite their students to *know*, rather than to *define* things. Let's take only one example from *The Analects*. "Xian asked what was shameful. The Master said, 'When good government prevails in a state, to be thinking only of salary; and, when bad government prevails, to be thinking, in the same way, only of salary – this is shameful'" (Confucius, 1861, Book XIV. Hëen Wan, Chapter I, p. 139). This passage, rich in implications as all others in Confucian classics, is examined brilliantly by François Jullien in the mentioned book *Le détour et l'accès*. Different commentators interpret it in different ways. For He Yan, it is normal to think of salary when the country is well governed, it is shameful to do so when the country is not well governed. James Legge's translation that I cite above reflects perhaps Zhu Xi's interpretation, according to which it is shameful if one always thinks of salary regardless whether the country is well governed or not. Here Confucius does not try to define, but rather to open a path of reflexion on the topic (Jullien, 1995, p. 261).

It is interesting to notice that while traditional East Asian higher learning is often criticised for relying too much on classic books, the Great Books Movement, initiated and promoted by many Catholic Liberal Arts institutions, follows the same path: focusing on the Great Books of Western Civilisation, which is hailed as a new sort of higher education. Mortimer J. Adler, for example, writes in "Reforming Education":

*In the early 1930s President Hutchins was asked whether great books seminars, then open only to a picked handful of students, should be accessible to all the students in our colleges. His brief reply was crisp and clear. He said that the best education for the best was the best education for all. Great books seminars in our public schools and in our colleges should be available to all the students there, not only to the few who elect to take them or who are specially selected.* (Adler, 1990, p. 5)

## 7.5 CRITICISM OF THE SOVIET-STYLE MODEL

Criticism of Vietnam's Soviet-style higher education, and the Soviet model itself, is also often biased and exaggerated. First of all, the Soviet higher education system was nothing but a Western system *par excellence*, and the Soviet university is intrinsically Kant's university of reason applied to the Union of the Soviet Socialist Republic (USSR). What makes it different from other Western University models is its philosophical foundation—Marxism, or more precisely, dialectical materialism, and historical materialism, a typical Western philosophical school. The authors of the book *Critiquing Bourgeois Trends in Pedagogy*, for example, cite Engels's *The Principles of Communism* as their philosophical foundation:

*Education will enable young people quickly to familiarize themselves with the whole system of production and to pass from one branch of production to another in response to the needs of society or their own inclinations. It will, therefore, free them from the one-sided character which the present-day division of labour impresses upon every individual. Communist society will, in this way, make it possible for its members to put their comprehensively developed faculties to full use.* (Sokolova, Rodionov, & Sklovsky, 1978, p. 6)

The liberating mission is clearly declared in many, if not most, Soviet documents about education. M.A. Prokofiev, for example, writes in *Higher Education in the USSR*, a book published by UNESCO in 1961, that the mission of the Soviet university is to produce enlightened citizens for the communist society that is believed to "... open boundless vistas for the cognition of the objective laws of nature and social phenomena, for the development of science, education and culture" (Prokofiev, Chilikin, & Tulpanov, 1961, p. 6). In the following excerpt from the same book, Tulpanov explained more clearly the aim of the Soviet education system:

*The all-round development of man, the bringing up of a generation able to complete the building of the Communist society – the society of highest social justice and welfare – such is the aim of upbringing, education and training of the younger generation in the Soviet Union. [...] The harmonious of the personality is ensured by a combination of the physical, mental, labour, ethical and aesthetical education of the growing generation, the fostering in young people of lofty sentiments of humanity, exalted moral traits, by upbringing in the spirit of service to society, service for the good of all the people.* (Prokofiev et al., 1961, p. 33)

One can even find in Tulpanov's text the term "enlightenment":

*The all-round development and education of man is ensured in the Soviet Union not only by the board system of secondary and higher education but also by the entire system of cultural enlightenment and scientific propaganda. Suffice it to point to the activities of the vast network of various museums, palaces and houses of culture with their diverse amateur art groups, libraries, sport organisations, radio and TV programs, etc. (Prokofiev et al., 1961, p. 33)*

In brief, the whole Soviet education is conceived as general education, that is practically not different from what we call liberal arts education today.

As to the relationship between university and state, one might pose a question: how can the university realise its enlightenment mission without autonomy? The answer is, unlike Kant's, that Soviet educators, with their strong belief in the scientific nature of Marxism, do not think that autonomy is necessary. For them, being a scientist is being a Marxist. Prokofiev puts it:

*Some foreign circles hold the view that universities need autonomy, that they have to be independent of society and the State, the view that the task of universities is to propagate knowledge, irrespective whom this knowledge serves. Such views frequently express the desire of progressive scientists to escape from the thrall of prevailing bourgeois ideology and views [...] What matters is not whether the State influences the university or not, but in what direction it influences it. The Soviet State is concentrating its efforts on the utmost improvement of the people's well-being, the progress of science and the arts, on educating the young generation through work, in the spirit of respect for all the nations. In our society there is no contradiction between the State and the people, between the State and science, between the State and the university. (Prokofiev et al., 1961, p. 6)*

It is also with their strong belief in the power of Marxism, i.e. of science, which is essential also for the thinkers of the Enlightenment, that Soviet educators see no need of distinguishing between liberal education and other forms of education.

*There is no contrast between education in the humanities and other forms of education in the Soviet higher school [...] Science represents the exact knowledge of objects and processes of objective reality and in this sense there is no*

*difference in principle between the sciences of nature and the sciences of society and man as a member of society [...] That is why [...] humanistic education in the USSR is an integral part of any education in general whether in the natural or in the technical sciences, whether a higher or secondary education.* (Prokofiev et al., 1961, p. 33)

The Soviet model of higher education has been applied systematically in North Vietnam since 1954 and expanded throughout the country since its reunification in 1976. But the liberating spirit of the new education system was declared and applied by Hồ Chí Minh's government since 1945 in the whole country. On November 25, 1945, only two months after the birth of the newly independent Vietnam, the Central Executive Committee of the Indochinese Communist Party issued the *Directive on Resistance and National Construction*, instructing Party members on the tasks of building a new culture. The document reads in part:

*On culture, organizing popular educational campaigns, actively eliminating illiteracy, opening new universities and secondary schools, reforming education in the new spirit, eliminating indoctrinating teaching method, promoting national culture, building a new culture based on three principles: national, scientification, massification, and nationalisation.*<sup>4</sup> (Central Executive Committee of Indochinese Communist Party, 2000, pp. 9–17)

The target set by the revolutionary government was to build a new system of scientific, democratic, and patriotic education for the mass. To establish the legal framework for it, during the anti-French resistance war (1946–1954), Vietnam issued two important documents, Decrees No. 146-SL and No. 147-SL, confirming again its three fundamental principles: “national”, “scientific”, and “popular”. In this system, not only sciences, but all subjects, are seen as tools of enlightenment. All undergraduate programmes, whether in social sciences and humanities or not, and whether they are in comprehensive universities or in narrowly specialised institutions, include compulsory courses of general education, that are intrinsically liberal arts. That is the reason why a Vietnamese

<sup>4</sup>In Vietnamese: “Về văn hóa, tổ chức bình dân học vụ, tích cực bài trừ nạn mù chữ, mở đại học và trung học, cải cách việc học theo tinh thần mới, bài trừ cách dạy học nhồi sọ, cổ động văn hóa cứu quốc, kiến thiết nền văn hóa mới theo ba nguyên tắc: khoa học hóa, đại chúng hóa, dân tộc hóa.”

bachelor's degree is earned over four or five years of full-time study like in the USA (while it is for 3 years in Europe).

Despite significant difficulties, Vietnamese higher education system was quite successful before 1986—to meet the demand of a Soviet-style command economy, and is still considered as a good education system. In 2018, based on average PISA and TIMSS scores, the World Bank's report “Growing Smarter: Learning and Equitable Development in East Asia and Pacific” ranks Vietnam as one of the Top 10 Best Performing Education Systems in the world. The report reads: “East Asia and Pacific dominates the ranks of top scorers, with 6 of the top 10 and 8 of the top 20 scores since 2000. The Top Performing Systems include seven economies with an average score above 550 points - equivalent to 1.6 more years of learning than the average OECD member country. These systems enrol 24 million students, or 7 percent of the region's students. All of the highest scorers are middle- or high- income countries. But some low- and middle-income countries perform well, too. Average performance in Vietnam and in B-S-J-G (China) surpassed OECD member countries” (World Bank, 2018, p. 7).

My arguments do not mean that the higher education system of Vietnam today is without problems and shortcomings. What I want to say is that Vietnamese higher education shares the enlightenment mission with other Western modern systems of higher education. What matters is not whether it includes liberal arts education in its curriculum, but how liberal arts education is conceived and realised. In reality, the Vietnamese Soviet-style higher education systems are often criticised for producing “too many masters and too few workers” (*Thừa thầy thiếu thợ*), i.e. being too comprehensive, for concentrating too much on general knowledge, rather than on practical skills needed for students while entering job market.

## 7.6 THE IDEA OF BORROWING THE AMERICAN MODEL

The authors who champion the idea of borrowing the American model never mention the ever-worsening state of liberal arts education in the USA. However, the idea sounds much like an echo of the call for restoring US-style liberal arts education, which in its turn, reflects a problem of higher education in the USA and in the world in general: the decline of social sciences and humanities in the university that is now redefined as a commercial corporation rather than an institution of enlightenment.

The decline of liberal arts education in the USA is not a new trend. It began decades ago, and has long been an important and controversial topic in academic publications. As early as in 1996, Bill Readings, in his outstanding book *The University in Ruins*, analysed profoundly the relationship between what he called the “Corporate University” and Consumerism, reflected in the “Universities of Excellence”, which functioned and were classified in rankings much like bestsellers books or music CDs. One of the most important consequences of higher education commercialisation is the said declining role of social sciences and humanities, or the liberal arts. According to Readings, the university’s mission has shifted from guaranteeing the social bond to producing “human resources” for the marketplace, abandoning its traditional “adventure of a liberal education” (Readings, 1996).

One decade later, another author, Ronald Strickland, in “*The Decline of Privilege and the Rise of Privatisation in Public Higher Education*” (2006) puts it in a bigger picture:

*The expansion of American higher education during the 1960s marked the beginning of a struggle for democratic empowerment that has continued to the present. Although this conflict has taken shape in debates over issues such as affirmative action and political correctness, at bottom, the key issue is whether public higher education will function primarily as a site for vocational training in service to the corporate sector or as a site for critique-based liberal education in the common public interest. Humanities education should be central to this struggle because, unlike other academic fields, the humanities are only indirectly focused on job preparation.* (Strickland, 2006, p. 207)

Here I want to draw attention to one of his observations: today, among Western universities, only the elite universities have good programmes in social sciences and humanities, and even in the elite universities, it is the faculties of business and technology that are profitable and considered the centre of their activities.

The decline of liberal arts education in the USA still continues today. When the University of Wisconsin–Stevens Point announced its plans to drop liberal arts majors in geography, geology, French, German, two- and three-dimensional art—and history, *The Atlantic* published an essay by Adam Harris entitled “The Liberal Arts May Not Survive the 21st Century”. The text examines the moves of American universities to promote STEM vocationalism, to reduce in-depth focus on the liberal



arts, in the contexts of dramatic cuts in public budget for higher education. The author writes: “Wisconsin built a public higher-education system that was admired around the world. But it may not withstand a tech-hungry economy” (Harris, 2018).

Why liberal arts education is declining is not the topic of this paper. What I want to say here is that the decline of liberal arts education is a problem not only in Vietnam, but also in the USA and in the world in general. One might pose a question: why should we borrow a model while it is struggling itself for survival?

## 7.7 CONCLUSION

Like most, or more precisely all, higher education systems in the world, Vietnam’s higher education system of today is facing big challenges. Some of those challenges are common, others are specific to Vietnam due to its specific history, tradition, and current contexts. There are also the challenges created by the country’s remarkable achievements—not only achievements in economic development, but also achievements in education, which turned Vietnam from a country with 90% of the population being illiterate into a country with a large system of schools and over 700 universities and colleges.

To cope with those challenges, Vietnam’s higher education has to learn from experiences of other countries, especially the USA and European countries, whose models have proved to be excellent in many aspects.

However, learning is not copying. And learning does not necessarily require negating the past. The absolute contrasting of the Western University with East Asian Higher Learning, and the US-style with the Soviet-style higher education, are both too easy and biased. There is no perfect model for all countries or at all times. My standpoint is that any blind attempt to borrow foreign models without careful consideration of concrete local conditions cannot be successful.

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# Fighting the Stigma of “Second-Tier” Status: The Emergence of “Semi-Elite” Private Higher Education in Vietnam

*Quang Chau*

## 8.1 INTRODUCTION

Vietnam’s private higher education (PHE) system marked its three decades of development in 2018. From its beginning in the Thang Long centre for higher learning, which was licensed in 1988 as a pilot project for the PHE sector (Chau, 2017a), the sector now consists of 65 universities in 26 provinces and cities, and enrolls over 267,000 students—or, respectively 28 and 15% of total number of universities and total higher education enrolment (Ministry of Education and Training—MOET, 2019).

Unlike two other Western-imported “new players” such as liberal arts education and community colleges—both of which are well-received by educators and policymakers (see Chapter 7 by Ngo and Chapter 10 by Nguyen and Chau)—PHE has in contrast been lowly regarded since its inception. When established, Thang Long’s recruitment pool was almost exclusively students that could not get admission to public universities

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(Huong & Fry, 2002; Sinh, 1995). Until now, anecdotal evidence suggests that the stigma of second-tier status associated with PHE has stubbornly remained. For instance, the Association of Vietnam Universities and Colleges—formerly the Vietnam Private Universities Association—has repeatedly attributed private universities’ under-enrolment to the expansion of public universities. This claim seems to acknowledge implicitly that public universities are students’ first choice, whereas private universities mainly target at those who perform poorly in the university national entrance exam.

In this chapter, I argue that PHE has many potentials—most of which stem from the macro socio-economic reforms initiated under *Doi Moi* (Reform) 1986—to overcome the stigma of second-tier status and become semi-elite universities. Taking into consideration the remarkable complexity and debates associated with the term “elite”—which will be elaborated in later sections—I define semi-elite universities as those that are of good quality and are often the first choice of middle-class students.

The chapter starts with a review of the literature on social class and stratification. I succinctly argue that although stratification does exist, there are still numerous avenues for social mobility. The literature on PHE that I examine also indicates that many private universities catering initially for low socio-economic status (SES) students have become choices for middle-class students. I then proceed with some anecdotal evidence as well as empirical data to suggest that Vietnam’s private universities—which are often stigmatised as second-tier status—have considerable potentials to become semi-elite institutions, and that some specific privates have indeed become semi-elite institutions.

## 8.2 SOCIAL CLASS AND EDUCATIONAL STRATIFICATION

In a Marxist perspective, which defines class almost entirely based on economic status, society seems to be dually divided into the oppressed, and the oppressor—both in constant conflict with each other. Although mentioning the third class—the petty bourgeoisie, e.g. semi-autonomous peasantry and small business owners—Marxist theorists often posit that this class will eventually join either the oppressed or the oppressor and cease to exist (Worsley, 2002). However, this postulation seems to contrast with many empirical studies which find that a third class—largely overlapped with the contemporary middle class—is extraordinarily persistent in most societies.

Departing from the economic perspective, Bourdieu (1977) argues that cultural capital—which often manifests itself through cultural values such as fashion, cuisine tastes, and educational credentials—groups people into different social classes. Although Marxist theorists also mention the persistence of social inequality, it is Bourdieu that first explicitly stresses the cross-generational accumulation and inheritance of cultural capital, and concludes that cultural capital is thus a major source of social stratification.<sup>1</sup>

Although recognising the existence of social stratification—in educational opportunities, graduation rates, employability, etc.—education scholars tend to disagree on why such stratification exists. In Bourdieu’s perspective, working-class students are under-represented and under-privileged in higher education systems essentially because of the limited cultural capital inherited from their working-class parents, who neither hold high regard for nor have experience in higher education. Marxist theorists offer, however, different explanations. For example, Althusser (2014) argues that education is an ideological tool the state utilises to maintain the status quo in capitalist societies. Consequently, education issues like curriculum design, pedagogy, etc., are largely controlled by the oppressors and reflect the oppressors’ values—a phenomenon that Jackson (1968) terms “the hidden curriculum”. Regardless of such explanations, that high-SES students outnumber and outperform their low-SES peers seems to be a consensus and empirically proven.

Trow (1984) extends the literature on education stratification by arguing that higher education institutions are similarly stratified. He elaborates that elite institutions have long dominated higher education systems because “the advantages of elite institutions are so overwhelming that they create what is for them but perhaps not for the rest of higher education or the larger society” (Trow, 1984, p. 149). This explanation reminds us of how Marxists and Bourdieu explain why high-SES students outperform their low-SES peers.

<sup>1</sup>Although both social inequality and stratification similarly indicate the differential award, stratification additionally links such award differences with accident of birth—See Grodsky and Jackson (2009).

### 8.3 RATIONALISATION AND EDUCATION

Weber (2001) considers rationalisation a key characteristic that distinguishes ancient and modern capitalist societies. Rationality urges people to question, and then break the seemingly inherent social order and religious values. Ritzer (1993) builds on Weber's rationalisation concept and coins the contemporary term McDonalised, which consists of components such as efficiency, calculability, predictability, standardisation, and control. In this section, I use Weber's thesis to argue that rationalisation also helps challenge social stratification.

The concept of meritocracy that Young (1994) invented was among the first acknowledgement of the rationalisation in education context. He argues that merit does matter for success, and that the division between upper- and under-class is largely based on people's merit. In addition, Young also predicted that objective tests—which were being adopted quite widely in his time as measurements for students' merit—would play an increasingly more important role than students' SES in deciding which types of education students would pursue, thus would challenge the social stratification structure. In the contemporary era, the growing influence of standardised and large-scale tests (Meyer & Benavot, 2013) partly confirms Young's thesis. Besides, the concept of the Evaluative State (Neave, 2012)—i.e. states are now inclined to replace in-process intervention with performance-based criteria to control society—seems to be the acknowledgement at the institutional level of rationalisation in general and meritocracy in particular.

Institutions also engage in rationalisation through the legitimacy-building process. Suchman (1995) developed a legitimacy model of three main pillars that institutions, including universities, often utilise. First is pragmatic legitimacy—what universities provide to benefit their stakeholders such as students, companies, and the state. Second, moral legitimacy is external judgement about whether institutional procedures, structures, or activities are morally right to pursue. Institutions often earn the third legitimacy—cognitive legitimacy—after having developed the first two pillars and gained social recognition.

In a similar vein, DiMaggio and Powell (1983) argue that over time, institutions tend to go through coercive, normative, and mimetic mechanisms and become isomorphic. Their argument suggests that universities—public or private, elite or non-elite—will follow similar legal regulations, social norms and values, and learn from each other.

Consequently, the status stratification among different types of universities will gradually be challenged. In contemporary time, the emergence of university rankings, with clear sets of ranking criteria, has significantly facilitated mutual learning among universities. Studies (see e.g. Mohrman, Ma, & Baker, 2008) have shown that highly ranked universities share many extraordinary commonalities.

#### 8.4 STUDENTS, INSTITUTIONS, AND SOCIAL MOBILITY

Many authors have pointed out convincingly that stratification is embedded in higher education. That low-SES students are under-represented in higher education, especially at elite universities is well-documented. For instance, Maguire, Ball, and Macrae (1999) find that through branding strategies and marketing messages, universities signal their classness, i.e. what their prospective students should look like. Consequently, even when gaining the same entrance score as high-SES students, low-SES students tend to prefer a lower tier institution for fear of lifestyle and value incompatibility. Many authors have overlooked or even refused to acknowledge the rising influence of meritocracy on social mobility. They see meritocracy as a myth (Bloodworth, 2016; McNamee & Miller, 2009). Some even claim meritocracy to be misleading people—it makes low-SES people to blame for their under-representation and under-achievement in higher education for their lack of merit, intelligence, and aspiration—and not the social structure that is controlled largely by the oppressors. Critics of meritocracy have become increasingly vocal after the recent admission scandal at some American elite universities (e.g. see Reich, 2019).

Although not rejecting the embeddedness of stratification in higher education, I argue that concepts like legitimacy, isomorphism and meritocracy, and the rationalisation process more broadly remind us that stratification is not static—students and institutions also actively engage in social mobility to overcome their lower status. For example, Williams and Filippakou (2010) find that although leading UK universities have remained a main source of educating the British elite class, more and more “elite people” have recently graduated from other younger and more lowly regarded universities. Succinctly, on one hand, I acknowledge the embeddedness of social stratification, on the other hand, I argue that stratification does not go unchallenged. In the following section, I will discuss how the three major contemporary trends



in higher education—expansion, internationalism, and the growth of middle-class students—challenge the status of elite students and elite universities.

#### 8.4.1 *Higher Education Expansion*

Higher education expansion has brought with it new dynamics for both students and institutions to challenge stratification. In general, higher education systems worldwide have transformed into massified ones during the several past decades, thus significantly raising the percentage of students among the college-age cohort. On the one hand, low-SES students have remained under-represented in universities, especially elite ones—which confirms the embeddedness of social stratification. On the other hand, the massification process has also provided access for many first-generation students—who would otherwise be unable to enter higher education. In addition, affirmative action policies such as those in the US have helped low-SES and non-traditional students—e.g. part-timers, mature, and single-parent students—to study at elite universities, and enrol in programmes like medical education, which have long been considered the preserve of elite students (Boursicot & Roberts, 2009).

Higher education expansion also causes non-traditional types of higher education institutions—such as private and open universities, polytechnics, two-year colleges, etc. (see Chapter 10 by Nguyen and Chau on Vietnamese community colleges)—to emerge. In general, after the massification era, although almost all higher education systems have become stratified according to institutional status (Palfreyman & Tapper, 2009), elite institutions cannot be guaranteed to enjoy their elite privileges; they have to instead engage in competitions with less elite ones. Clark (1998) has pointed out that entrepreneurialism has become a norm in contemporary higher education, irresistible for both elite and non-elite higher education institutions. In DiMaggio and Powell's terms (1983), universities become increasingly isomorphic.

#### 8.4.2 *Higher Education Internationalism*

The growing internationalism within higher education systems has also provided new avenues for students and institutions to engage in social mobility. By internationalism, I broadly indicate the embrace of educational philosophy that is not native to the host country, and the import

of programme design, pedagogy, governance models, etc., from outside—a typical example of which is liberal arts education (see Chapter 7 by Ngo). For instance, foreign languages, especially English, have become important tools for students to overcome their low social status (Phan, 2017). In addition, as Gaulter and Mountford-Zimdars (2018) have argued in their examination of British students, overseas study could provide low-SES students with “wholesale escape of habitus”. In a similar vein, but at the institutional level, global university rankings—which have for a long time been dominated by Western, especially US elite universities—have recently seen the rapid rise of universities in the East, such as Japan, South Korea, Hong Kong, and China. Besides, as Phan (2017) has pointed out, Asian countries have participated strongly in the race of higher education internationalisation, and have competed with Western countries to recruit a growing share of international students worldwide.

### 8.4.3 *Education and the Middle Class*

Studies of social stratification often divide students into either high-SES or low-SES groups, and thus neglect the middle-SES cohort. I adopt the Weberian perspective and define people in the same SES group as those who have similar levels of *both* income and social honour or prestige. Weber (2019) argues that people who earn similar incomes do not necessarily share similar spending levels and consumption habits, while the latter two are important factors to connect people through a sense of community. I find the Weberian view relevant in education studies because how much people spend in education, and what choices they make for education matter much more than how much they earn.

The middle class has quite a unique position in social mobility. On the one hand, members have more economic and cultural capital, and thus have more options for education than those in the working class. On the other hand, with more constrained economic and cultural capital than the elite class, middle-class members have to make well-thought-out choices. For instance, as Tsang (2013) has pointed out, when failing to enter elite universities in China, Chinese middle-class students make essentially different choices from those in the elite class—while the former tend to enrol in private universities with good international collaboration programmes in hope of overseas transfer opportunities, the

latter often choose to study overseas completely. Compared to the elite class, the middle class is more vulnerable to education choices, and is characterised by “an amalgam of dread and confidence” (Lewis & Maude, 1995, cited in Ball, 2003).

## 8.5 SEMI-ELITE PRIVATE HIGHER EDUCATION

Studies on higher education history (e.g. Perkin, 2007) find that religious groups had established and governed almost all universities until the French Revolution when the state stepped in. Gradually, religious groups’ attempts to regain their influence in higher education signalled the first wave of PHE worldwide. The second wave of PHE establishment occurred in the higher education massification era, when universities had to open their doors wide to enrol non-traditional students. Having long dominated existing universities, elite students saw a threat of elitism erosion from the rising number of low-SES peers in higher education. Elite students thus left public universities and established their own sector—what is often called elite PHE. However, the departure of elite students could neither provide enough spaces for the rapidly growing higher education demand, thus the third type of PHE—non-elite PHE—emerged. Although all these three waves existed in Latin America (Levy, 1986), in other regions, only the first and third wave occurred.

Although elite PHE is minimal outside the Latin American region, and the US, what is more common is that many non-elite universities have, however, become increasingly *similar* to those in the elite PHE subsector, and thus are called by Levy and his associates—such as Kinser et al. (2010), Musial-Demurat (2012), Praphamontripong (2010), Silas Casillas (2008)—semi-elite. Two in-depth case studies on Thai (Praphamontripong, 2010) and Polish (Musial-Demurat, 2012) PHE confirm some characteristics of semi-elite private universities pointed out by Levy. They also find that some private universities have become middle-class students’ first choices. Key characteristics of semi-elite private universities that Levy (2010a, forthcoming) points out include entrepreneurship; internationalist orientations, and US-oriented practices and structures; high tuition along with attempts to build diverse sources of private finance; high-SES student and employment profile; high academic and social standing; attraction of well-prepared secondary-school graduates and instructors; research interests or aspirations. Some of those

characteristics—more specifically internationalism and high-SES students—overlap with the aforementioned factors that challenge institutional stratifications.

## 8.6 THE POTENTIALS FOR SEMI-ELITE PRIVATE UNIVERSITIES IN VIETNAM

### 8.6.1 *Departure From a State-Focused Society*

After the *Doi Moi* 1986, Vietnam’s economy not only expanded but also—through the privatisation process—became more diverse. In 1988, the state issued Decree #10 (*khoán 10*) to legalise the household economy. Cooperatives and state-owned enterprises have also been equitised, and run like private joint-stock enterprises (Gainsborough, 2010; Pham, 2017).

In parallel with the privatisation process, Vietnam’s economy has also become internationally integrated. In 1987, the state issued the first foreign investment law to attract investment outside the Communist bloc (Pham, 2004). After the US lifted its economic embargo against Vietnam in the early 1990s, and after the accession into the WTO in the mid-2000s, Vietnam has become increasingly integrated with the global economy. Consequently, the Vietnamese have had more consumption choices, including choices for higher education.

### 8.6.2 *Vietnam’s Middle Class*

The emergence and growth of a private economy and economic integration provided a solid foundation for the Vietnamese middle class to emerge. Although remaining a politically sensitive topic, the middle class does exist now in Vietnam (Gainsborough, 2002; King, Nguyen, & Minh, 2008). I side with Earl (2014); Nguyen-Marshall, Drummond, and Bélanger (2012) to define the Vietnamese middle class from the (Weberian) consumption-based perspective—but not from an economic one like Bui (2015).

King (2008) argues that the Vietnamese middle class shares many commonalities with the middle classes in Southeast Asia—such as possession of cultural capital, a firm interest in and commitment to education, an orientation to consumption and to accessing news and information, and aspirations to improve and develop in personal and career terms.

However, the Vietnamese middle class has remained substantially reliant on the state, and thus has not developed into a meaningful civil society. I should note that participants in King's studies were born between the late 1970s and the early 1990s, and can be labelled the first-generation middle class. The second-generation Vietnamese middle class is currently emerging and will likely share more common characteristics with their peers in other Southeast Asian countries—more specifically, they will likely become increasingly autonomous from the state, engage in urban migration, and hold higher regard for education values (Hsiao, 2001).

### 8.6.3 *Vietnam's Private Higher Education and the Stigma of "Second-Tier" Status*

The economic privatisation process kicked off by the *Doi Moi* quickly penetrated into other social fields including higher education (Huong & Fry, 2004). In the late 1980s, a higher education market emerged—the state both allowed public universities to charge tuition fees, and simultaneously legalised non-state (*ngoài công lập*) higher education (George, 2003)—a euphemism for PHE. Vietnam's first non-state university, Thang Long University, was founded in 1988 by a group of noted intellectuals (Phuong, 2006). In the early 1990s, a series of legal frameworks was enacted to regulate three different types of non-state universities: people-founded (*dân lập*) universities are established by social and professional associations; privates (*tư thực*) by corporates or individuals; and semi-publics (*bán công*) set up by the state but wholly financed by private income (Chau, 2017a; Huong & Fry, 2002).

However, during most of its development, PHE has not been considered a fully legitimate sector. PHE emerged under the state's substantial control, and has since its inception, faced scepticism from policymakers (Pham, 1997). Thang Long University had to wait for five years to get the state's official legal recognition. In 1993, the first legal regulation for PHE allowed PHE to operate as joint-stock companies and to share profits. However, due to political sensitivity, the state did not grant licences for any private universities, and instead mandated all non-state universities follow the hastily issued temporary people-founded regulation. Accordingly, non-state universities have to be legally sponsored by state-authorised associations, are not allowed to share profits, and the private ownership rights are ambiguously regulated (Pham, 1997).

## 8.7 DATA

My dataset is gathered from three main sources. First is the University and College Entrance Exam Manual (*Những điều cần biết về tuyển sinh Đại học, Cao đẳng*), published by the Ministry of Education & Training (MOET) Vietnam. This manual lists all Vietnamese universities and colleges (with separate public and private designation), their programme offerings, as well as admission requirements for each programme. The second source is the MOET-administered website *thituyensinh.vn* which reports the admission quota that each institution is assigned by the MOET, actual enrolment figures, as well as the admission score for each programme. After the data cleaning phase—i.e. eliminating cases in which one of those collected variables is missing—I come to the total 167 universities (51 of which are private). Last but not least, I rely on data from the unpublished report—conducted by a group of FPT researchers—on higher education national entrance exam. This report lists 100 institutions that receive most applications. Unless otherwise stated, my data is for 2015 academic year. In addition, I focus only on university sector within the higher education.

With respect to the admission plans in Vietnam’s higher education, in 2015, there were four that universities could choose from to recruit students. The first is to rely wholly on the university-administered entrance exam. Vietnam National University in Hanoi was the only institution licensed to proceed with this option. Second is to use results from the MOET-administered national entrance exam. Third is to admit students based on their high school academic records. The last option is to base it on the national entrance exam, but add additional requirements. My dataset shows that all Vietnamese private universities use the MOET-administered exam to set the entrance requirement. The minimum score—commonly called the “quality-assurance” score (or *điểm sàn*)—that universities, either public or private, can admit students is 15 (out of 30).

Although I do not gather data on tuition, by law (Government of Vietnam, 2015) the highest annual tuition levels that public universities can charge are capped between roughly 700 USD (for social sciences, economics, law) and 1700 USD (for medical studies). However, only public universities that no longer receive state’s subsidy can charge this range. For subsidised universities, the corresponding range is between 250 USD and 450 USD. In the following sections, where I include data on tuitions, I draw such data from the institutions’ official websites.

## 8.8 AVENUES FOR PRIVATE UNIVERSITIES TO FIGHT THE SECOND-TIER STIGMA: SOME ANECDOTAL EVIDENCE

In this section, I present my findings—anecdotal evidence—which indicate that a few Vietnamese private universities have utilised available opportunities, especially the rapid economic privatisation and the consequent expanding middle class, to reduce the stigma attached to their relatively ambiguous standing. In addition, some private universities show their strong orientation towards entrepreneurial management and internationalism—two characteristics that distinguish non-elite from semi-elite privates.

Vietnam in the mid-2000s witnessed many remarkable macro changes—the accession into the WTO, the profound reshuffle of political top leaders, the Communist Party of Vietnam’s resolution to encourage party members to be involved in private businesses (*Đảng viên làm kinh tế tư nhân*) (Dao & Vu, 2008)—which manifested themselves in sharp policy turns for PHE. By including PHE in its master plan for higher education in which PHE was expected to account for 40% of total enrolment by 2020 (Hayden & Khanh, 2010), the state provided legal legitimacy for the sector. In addition, in 2005, the state legalised the term “private university” for the first time, and allowed private universities to share profits.

This legitimacy created a strong impetus for the PHE sector to grow and engage in entrepreneurialism. First, private universities are legally mandated to operate like joint-stock enterprises, and thus are required to increase financial and ownership transparency. Such transparency was distinct from the previous period when private universities had collectively been owned by a group of owners that were in many cases vaguely defined (Chau, 2019). Second, well-financed corporations quickly entered the sector and targeted poorly managed and under-financed universities for merger and acquisition. Their enthusiasm partially stemmed from the state’s new regulations to standardise and professionalise PHE (Chau, 2017b). FPT founded the first corporation-affiliated universities in 2006 (George, 2011), and other conglomerates followed suit. Most of these corporation-affiliated universities are in generally run more professionally than other private universities (see Chapter 9 by Pham for more information).

Apart from entrepreneurialism, some private universities have also developed international activities. Tan Tao University, founded in 2010

by Tan Tao Group, is a telling case.<sup>2</sup> Its partner, Rice University, a global top-100 university and noted for applied technology programmes, has been involved in programme design. In addition, some former senior administrators from Rice also joined Tan Tao University’s founding team and governance committees. Tan Tao University, branding itself as an “American-styled University in Vietnam”, was also among the first universities that introduced liberal arts education into Vietnam. The British University of Vietnam—Tan Tao’s twin example in Hanoi—was established in 2009 by British entrepreneurs and university administrators, and offers programmes taught in English by international faculty members. Tuition fees at both of these universities, that range between 2000 USD and over 6000 USD for Tan Tao University, and from over 5000 USD to more than 11,000 USD for the British University of Vietnam, indicate that their students mostly come from the (upper) middle class. In conclusion, I find that some private universities that embed entrepreneurialism, internationalism, and serve mostly middle-class students. They could be legitimately seen as semi-elite universities.

The most recent, and probably the most potential evident case of a semi-elite private university is Vin University, founded by Vin Group, one of the largest conglomerates in Vietnam. The university seems to be much more ambitious than all other universities in Vietnam—both public and private—when explicitly aspiring to be “*the first private, not-for-profit Vietnamese university, established based on the international standards [...] in order to make a breakthrough in Vietnamese Higher Education and to become a world class university*”. Vin University has successfully secured collaboration with two American Ivy-league universities—the University of Pennsylvania and Cornell University—that will take primary responsibility for faculty and administrator recruitment, and programme design. Although it is premature to reach any conclusion on Vin University’s aspirations, the university establishment seems to be the extension of services that the Vin Group has been provided for their predominantly middle-class customers (Le, 2019).<sup>3</sup>

<sup>2</sup>Data for Tan Tao case is drawn mostly from the institution’s official website.

<sup>3</sup>Vin group has now also run a chain of K-12 schools that mainly enrol children of their middle-class customers. It can thus be expected that a large proportion of their students will then transfer to Vin University.



Apart from presenting some anecdotal evidence that indicates the emergence of several Vietnamese semi-elite private universities, I also find many private universities which have served the market economy as well as the middle class emerging from the market economy. For instance, the first management programmes in Vietnam were opened not at leading public universities, but at newly established private ones like Thang Long (Sinh, 1995) and the Open University in Ho Chi Minh City in the early 1990s (Cao, 2010). Concepts like business management did not exist in the command economy in the pre-*Doi Moi* era. As Levy (2010b) points out, private universities often pioneer entrepreneurial and market-oriented initiatives, and thus provide reflective examples for public universities. My dataset shows that almost half of all students in PHE are enrolling in Business management and Law programmes (which are offered at 55 out of 60 private universities).

I also find that increasingly more private universities have initiated General Practitioner Education (GPE—*bác sĩ đa khoa*) programmes, which often provide graduates with middle-class career prospects and lifestyle. For instance, Tan Tao University and Phan Chu Trinh University have built GPE as institutional flagship programmes. Both Tan Tao University (the first private university licensed to offer GPE programme), and Phan Chu Trinh University (now owned by a group of entrepreneur-physicists)—through institutional collaboration with many hospitals and research institutes in Vietnam and overseas—have aimed at providing students with ample internship opportunities. Besides, many faculty members of the GPE programme at both universities are Vietnamese physicians of note and international professors.

Last but not least, many private universities are now offering doctoral training programmes—often associated almost exclusively with the middle class. As mentioned earlier, the middle class tends to invest more than the working class into higher education. In Vietnam, most doctorate degree holders seem to be either university lecturers or middle-managers in the state bureaucracy. Currently, five private universities—Duy Tan, Hong Bang, HUTECH, Lac Hong, and Hanoi University of Business and Technology—have opened doctoral programmes in Business administration. In 2017, Duy Tan ran a doctoral programme in Accounting, and thus became the private university that offered the most doctoral programmes in Vietnam at this point. Doctoral programme requirements at Duy Tan University seem to be higher than those at other public and private universities. Ph.D. candidates are jointly advised by a professor at Duy Tan

University and a professor at an American partner university. In addition, graduation requirements also include a publication indexed by the Social Sciences Citation Index (SSCI) or the Information Sciences Institute (ISI).

## 8.9 THE EMERGENCE OF SEMI-ELITE PRIVATE UNIVERSITIES: SOME STATISTICAL EVIDENCE

Whereas the previous section details some avenues that private universities can utilise and indeed have utilised to leverage their competitiveness and overcome the second-tier stigma, in this section, I rely on my dataset to find specific private universities that share common characteristics with semi-elite privates elsewhere. Overall, my dataset points to a group of private universities which charge tuition affordable only to the middle and elite class, attract a large number of applicants, enrol a good number of students, and simultaneously set a higher admission bar.

### 8.9.1 *Number of Applications*

First, I find which private universities are the top choices of students. My data show six private universities in Ho Chi Minh City (HCMC): University of Foreign Languages and Information Technology (HUFLIT), Van Lang, Nguyen Tat Thanh, Duy Tan, Hoa Sen, and HCMC University of Technology (HUTECH)—in the top 100 universities that received the most applications in 2015. HUFLIT tops the private list with 5632 applications and ranks 17th in the top 100. With over 3500 applications, HUTECH ranks second in the private sector and 47th in the top 100. The remaining four privates fell into the latter half in the top 100—as Table 8.1 shows.

### 8.9.2 *Admission Scores*

Second, I examine the selectiveness—which is reflected through high admission scores in the national entrance exam—of private universities. Universities cannot claim themselves semi-elite if attracting a good number of applicants who can only manage to obtain the baseline score in the entrance exam. I compare average institutional admission scores, which are the average admission scores of all programmes offered by the institutions.

**Table 8.1** Private universities in the top 100 universities nationwide that received most applications in 2015

<i>University</i>	<i>Number of applications</i>	
	<i>Number of applications</i>	<i>Rank in the top 100 universities with most applications</i>
HCMC University of Foreign Languages and Information Technology (HUFLIT)	5632	17
Van Lang University	2851	59
Hoa Sen University	2285	65
HCMC University of Technology (HUTECH)	3505	47
Duy Tan University	2022	76
Nguyen Tat Thanh University	1564	91

*Source* Author's own calculation from the dataset

My data suggest a large discrepancy in admission scores among 167 universities—both public and private—whose figures are available. For the whole public sector, the average institutional admission score in 2015 was 19.42—which was nearly 4.0 higher than that of the private sector (15.5). Besides, whereas the vast majority (355 over 418, or 85%) of programmes offered at privates admitted students at the “quality assurance” score of 15.00, only just above a fifth (575 over 2742, or 21%) of programmes at public universities admitted students at that score.

Within 31 private universities for which I have data, only 11 set their admission score higher than 15.00, with only 5 above 16.00. Those having higher admission scores than most other privates are apparently more selective, and hence could be legitimately called semi-elite private universities (see Table 8.2).

### 8.9.3 *Student Enrolment*

My decision to look at an institution's enrolment size is informed by empirical studies such as Musial-Demurat (2012) and Praphamontripong (2010) which similarly confirm Levy's postulations. For 51 private universities whose data are available for 2015, the average enrolment is 1126 students per university. The majority—33 over 51—of private universities have fewer than 1000 enrollees in 2015. According to Table 8.3

**Table 8.2** Private universities with higher-than-minimum admission score

<i>Institution code</i>	<i>Institution name</i>	<i>Admission score</i>
DNT	HUFLIT	18.67
DQT	Quang Trung University	18.00
DVL	Van Lang University	17.49
DTL	Thang Long University	16.88
KTD	Danang University of Architecture	16.46
DTH	Hoa Sen University	15.79
DDT	Duy Tan University	15.70
TTU	Tan Tao University	15.36
DAD	Dong A University	15.27
DPD	Phuong Dong University	15.24
NTT	Nguyen Tat Thanh University	15.19

*Source* Author’s own calculation from the dataset

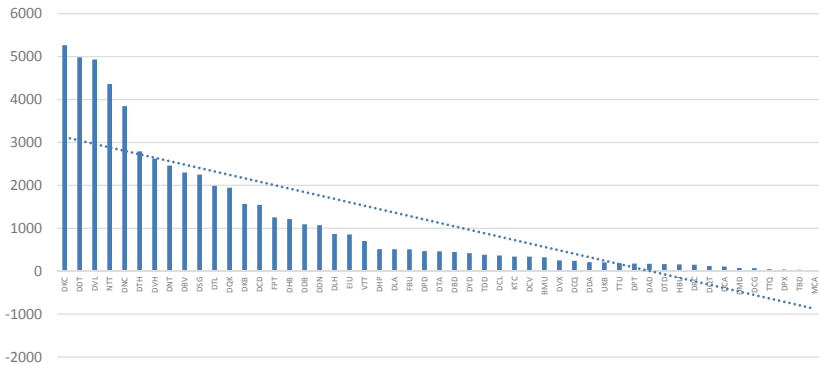
**Table 8.3** Private universities with highest enrolment (over 2000) in 2015

<i>Institution code</i>	<i>Institution name</i>	<i>Enrolment</i>
DKC	HUTECH	5267
DDT	Duy Tan University	4983
DVL	Van Lang University	4932
NTT	Nguyen Tat Thanh University	4364
DNC	Can Tho Southern University	3848
DTH	Hoa Sen University	2793
DVH	Van Hien University	2625
DNT	HUFLIT	2462
DBV	Ba Ria—Vung Tau University	2300
DSG	Saigon University of Technology	2252

*Source* Author’s own calculation from the dataset

and Fig. 8.1, I can identify a group of 5 private universities that have far more enrolment than all remaining universities: HUTECH, Duy Tan University, Van Lang University, Nguyen Tat Thanh University, and Can Tho Southern University.

Although student enrolment alone tends to be a debatable indicator, its correlation with the semi-elite status is clearer when combined with other indicators. One possible thesis that can explain the relationship between the number of enrolments and institutional semi-eliteness



**Fig. 8.1** Enrolment at private universities in Vietnam (2015) (*Source* Author’s own calculation from the dataset)

is “easy admission”: private universities have good enrolment because they lower their entrance requirements, both academic and financial. To evaluate this argument, I will now analyse (i) whether private universities with high enrolment are those with low admission scores, and (ii) whether private universities with high enrolment charge low-fees.

According to Tables 8.2 and 8.3, five private universities with high enrolment have at the same time a minimal admission score. HUTECH is representative of this group because despite the highest enrolment among private universities, its admission score lies at the “quality assurance” level. This may suggest the easy admission argument. However, Tables 8.2 and 8.3 also point to another group of five private universities that have significantly high enrolments and simultaneously set higher admission scores than most other privates: HUFLIT, Hoa Sen, Nguyen Tat Thanh, Duy Tan, and Van Lang. This is remarkable especially because those five universities—according to Table 8.1—also receive the most applications. In short, my dataset points to a group of five private universities that attract the highest number of applications, highest number of enrolments, and simultaneously high admission scores, and consequently can be legitimately called semi-elite private universities—or private universities that are choices of high-quality students.

Semi-elite status is confirmed when I look at another common entrance barrier—i.e. tuition. All those aforementioned five private universities are in the high-fee category; their tuition is much higher than

most other privates in the sector. Hoa Sen University, at over \$7500 USD for the whole programme, is the highest-charging within this group of five. Four other private universities charge less than Hoa Sen, but are still considerably higher than most of the remaining private universities in my dataset.

## 8.10 DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

In this Chapter, I argue that Vietnam’s PHE has many potentials to become the first choice of middle-class students. More specifically, I find many private universities that are professionally run, deeply engage in internationalism, and largely serve the market economy. In addition, some private universities have opened GEP and doctoral training programmes, which provide graduates with a middle-class lifestyle, and for which public universities had a monopoly for a long time. Based on empirical data, I also find a group of five private universities that are attractive to many students, most of whom are middle class with high academic performance and ample financial resources. The progress of the PHE sector is remarkable given that the Communist state had for a long time not recognised the sector’s legitimacy. In general, the emergence of semi-elite private universities to some extent reflects the growing pluralism in higher education—no longer can public universities monopolise the higher education system, nor can they remain the top choice for academically high-achieving and financially well-endowed—two key characteristics of middle-class students.

A common thread in the emergence of semi-elite private universities is the rise of the Vietnamese middle class, a key characteristic of which is their substantial and diverse demands, including a higher education demand. Once public universities cannot meet the middle class’ demand for higher education, the middle class—with ample economic resources and academic capabilities—can opt for other options including private universities.

By no means will the state remain an inactive observer to the rising middle class. Although focusing largely on semi-elite private universities, I also note that public universities have been granted more autonomy and are expected to satisfy the middle class’ demand for higher education. Since 2012 when the state initiated higher education reform on autonomy, 23 public universities have been granted more decision-making rights (see Chapter 20 by Phan and Dang). However,

the reform has focused predominantly on financial autonomy while overlooking that in curriculum design, leadership appointment, and staff and faculty recruitment, which consequently have not yet met the middle class' demand.

In the era of globalisation, higher education choices are not restricted to any national territory. A larger portion of the Vietnamese middle class now has enough economic capital to consider higher education choices offered in developed countries. The migration of the middle class who bring with them a substantial amount of economic resources, is nowhere a trivial loss for the country. I therefore expect that in the near future, the state will sooner or later loosen its control over higher education—public and private—so that such middle class' demands will be better satisfied domestically.

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# The Emergence of Mergers and Acquisitions in the Private Higher Education Sector in Vietnam

*Ly Thi Pham*

## 9.1 INTRODUCTION

There seems little doubt that the privatisation of higher education is having an increasingly important impact on the national higher education landscape in Vietnam (Asian Development Bank [ADB], 2012; Dao, 2015; Le, 2006, pp. 170–176). Private higher education institutions now account for about 14% of all higher education enrolments and 19% of all higher education institutions (Ministry of Education and Training [MOET], 2019). Though not yet key actors in the system, their importance is increasing, and is likely to continue to do so in light of constraints on the Government’s capacity to fund future growth in the public higher education sector.

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The private higher education sector has been through a number of policy transformations since first obtaining official recognition during the early 1990s. Its most recent policy stage involves a proliferation of mergers and acquisitions (M&A) within the sector.

This chapter provides an account of this new development and of its likely implications. To establish a context for the development, the chapter begins with a review of four stages in the evolution of policy regarding Vietnam's private higher education sector. For more general circumstances, see Chapter 2 regarding the reform agenda for higher education in Vietnam.

## 9.2 THE EVOLUTION OF POLICY FOR THE PRIVATE SECTOR

The first stage dates from 1975 to 1988. It was one characterised by a total rejection of the notion of private higher education. Prior to 1975, Vietnam was split politically between the North and the South. In the North, there was a policy commitment to non-market socialism, along Soviet lines, while in the South, the prevailing policy commitment was to market capitalism, drawing upon the United States as a model. There had also developed a vibrant private higher education sector in the South, but this development was brought to an abrupt conclusion when in 1975 the country was reunified under the leadership of the Communist Party of Vietnam (the Party). All higher education institutions became publicly owned and centrally managed by the State.

The second stage dates from 1988 to 2000. An important prelude to this stage was Vietnam's decision in 1986 to transition from non-market socialism to market socialism. This transition enabled a rekindling of private ownership in areas of agriculture, industry, and the provision of services. Its impact on the higher education sector was first seen in 1988 when a collective-organised learning centre, the Thang Long People Founded University Centre, was formed in Hanoi by a professional association interested in providing higher education opportunities for talented young people from the local community, funded entirely by donations and modest tuition fees. Its success subsequently prompted an official review of alternatives to state ownership in the national higher education system. In *Resolution 04, dated January 14, 1993*, the Party identified four models of ownership of higher education institutions: state ownership, semi-public ownership, people-founded ownership, and private ownership. State ownership was seen as providing the bedrock for

the system, and private ownership was completely rejected, but notions of 'semi-public' and 'people-founded' higher education institutions began to be entertained. Both forms required that higher education institutions should be financially self-supporting through their partial or total reliance on the payment of tuition fees. Semi-public higher education institutions would be public higher education institutions that converted to becoming financially self-sufficient by charging tuition fees. People-founded institutions would indirectly be public institutions, having been technically established by government-controlled agencies, but would be underwritten financially and administered by community-based collective groups and professional associations. Together, these two models were said to comprise a 'non-public' higher education sector.

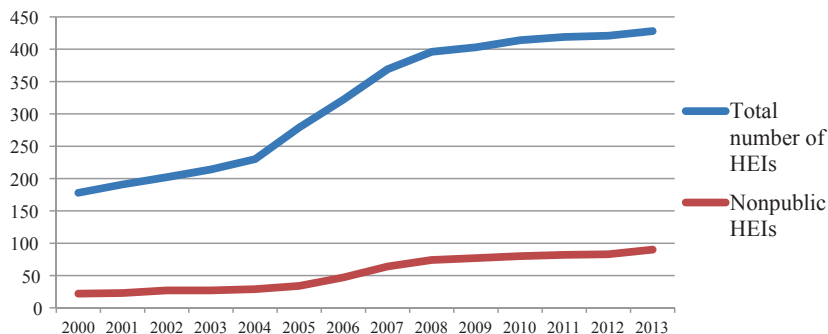
In 1994, the Ministry of Education and Training issued temporary regulations on people-founded universities, enabling Thang Long People Founded University to be established on a trial basis. Various other 'non-public' higher education institutions, most of which were people-founded, were then also established. During this stage of the development of the 'non-public' sector, leadership for the establishment and administration of people-founded institutions was mostly provided by reputable academics and experienced educational leaders from the public sector. In Hanoi, for example, the newly established institutions included: Dong Do University (1994), established by a group of academics from the Vietnamese Science Institute; Phuong Dong University (1994), established by some retired professors of Vietnam National University, Hanoi; and the Management and Business University (1996), established by a former Vice-Prime Minister, Tran Phuong. In Ho Chi Minh City, they included: University of Foreign Language and Information (1994); Van Lang University (1995); Hung Vuong University (1995); and Hong Bang University (1997). All of these institutions were founded by individuals or groups of academics. Some 'non-public' universities were also established in the provinces, including Duy Tan University (1994) in Da Nang City, Lac Hong University (1997) in Dong Nai, etc. These new institutions did not differ much from public higher education institutions in terms of their governance models and organisational structures. The big difference was that they were self-financing. Some of them were also established as family businesses, as in the case of Duy Tan University in Da Nang.

There was for much of the 1990s a sense in Party circles of 'crossing the river by feeling the stones' with respect to a rapid expansion of the

‘non-public’ sector during the late 1990s. It was not until 2000 that permanent regulations for the two ‘non-public’ models of ownership were formally approved. Much of the caution was derived from concern about any forms of profit-making within the ‘non-public’ sector (Lam, 2004). To contain profit-making, the Government declared that any financial surpluses made by ‘non-public’ institutions should be placed in a reserve fund for reinvestment in institutional infrastructure, or to be used for debt repayments and the payment of interest on loans (*Decision 86, dated July 18, 2000, Article 29; Education Law 1998, Article 20*). Some funds were, however, being distributed as profit, but this practice was tolerated provided the value of the profit was small.

The third stage dates from 2000 to 2013. This stage may be said to have begun with the adoption of Decision 86, concerning people-founded universities, which gave official recognition to these institutions and which provided a legal framework for them to develop. In this regard, Decision 86 was pivotal to the future direction for the ‘non-public’ higher education sector. During the early 2000s, the sector’s development was held in check while details of a new policy approach to the ‘non-public’ higher education sector were resolved. Important here was a renewed commitment to a policy of ‘socialisation’, which had been approved in *Decree No 90-CP, dated August 21, 1997*, but which had yet to be brought to bear on the higher education system. The intention of ‘socialisation’ was to achieve cost-sharing between the Government and the community for the purposes of providing more public services across a range of areas that included education, health, culture, and sport.

The impact of this policy was evident in the *Education Law of 2005*, and especially in *Decree 75/2006/NĐ-CP, dated August 2, 2006*, which presented regulations for implementing the Education Law. The ‘non-public’ model in the higher education sector was effectively abandoned and replaced by a ‘fully-private’ model. This development marked a radical shift in Government policy, given its traditional disapproval of private ownership in the higher education system. In a new set of regulations on private universities (*Decision 14/2005/QĐ-TTg, dated January 17, 2005*), concepts such as ‘shares’, ‘shareholders’, ‘founding members’, ‘general meetings of shareholders’, ‘authorized capital’, and ‘boards of management’ began to enter the official vocabulary for the first time with respect to the ‘non-public’ sector. In 2006, these concepts assumed practical importance because all new ‘non-public’ higher education institutions were expected to be privately owned by shareholders



**Fig. 9.1** Non-public higher education institutions as a proportion of all higher education institutions, Vietnam, 2001–2013 (*Source* Ministry of Education and Training—MOET 2019)

and corporately managed by boards of management. New semi-public and people-founded institutions could no longer be established. Existing semi-public institutions were made to convert to ‘fully-private’ status, and all people-founded institutions were forced to rearrange their ownership and governance arrangements so that they could continue as ‘fully-private’ institutions.

Between 2006 and 2012, there was a surge in the number of private higher education institutions. Whereas in 2006 there were 29 of these institutions, by 2012 there were 80 of them. The growth pattern is shown in Fig. 9.1, which also shows, though, that in proportional terms, the size of the private higher education sector remained relatively small. At the same time, as the number of private higher education institutions was increasing dramatically, there was also a dramatic expansion in the number of new public higher education institutions being established.

Subsequently, in *Circular 20/TT-BGD-ĐT* in 2010, and again in *Circular 45/TT-BGD-ĐT* in 2014, all remaining people-founded higher education institutions were directed to convert ‘fully-private’ higher education institutions. This process was far from simple because it was not clear if the original contributors of the funds to these institutions could reclaim their investment, together with a significant dividend, given that the value of the land on which many of these institutions had been built had greatly increased since the mid-1990s. Moreover, it was difficult to place a value on the intellectual and political capital that had been



invested in the establishment of these institutions. It was, indeed, a challenge to transform from a collective basis of ownership to one in which individuals could be identified as the owners.

Between 2000 and 2013, the ownership profile within the ‘non-public’, and then the ‘fully-private’, sector changed significantly. Whereas up to 2001, the founders of ‘non-public’ higher education institutions had been academics, education administrators, or families committed to the provision of higher education, by the late 2000s most founders/owners were corporations or professional investors. Examples include FPT University, Tan Tao University, and Ho Chi Minh University of Technology (HUTECH). Of note also is that in 2001 RMIT Vietnam became established as Vietnam’s first foreign-owned private higher education institution.

From 2006 to 2013, there was an especially steep learning curve to be negotiated within the sector concerning issues related to corporate governance and management. University presidents were being appointed as chief executive officers within the new ‘fully-private’ institutions, but the owners often considered that they should also play a direct role in the management of their institutions. Power struggles ensued, as for example that which occurred at Hung Vuong University and Hoa Sen University. The situation at Hung Vuong University became so serious that the University lost its right to enrol new students for a period of time (Duyen, 2012).

Official and the general public’s concern about profit-making within the sector continued to attract attention. The Government had expected the sector to contain the extent of its profit-making, but uncertainty lingered about how much profit shareholders could actually retain before becoming liable for the payment of income tax. In *Resolution 05/2005/NQ-CP, dated May 18, 2005*, the Ministry of Finance and related ministries had been requested to study the features of ‘for-profit’ and ‘not-for-profit’ higher education institutions in the ‘non-public’ sector, with a view to implementing accountabilities appropriate to the policy of ‘socialisation’. In January 2006, the Prime Minister then issued *Direction 193*, requiring a distinction to be made between ‘for-profit’ and ‘not-for-profit’ institutions by the end of that year. No progress was made.

The issue was again discussed nationally in the context of the development of a decree on international partnerships in education investment. In May 2010, a National Assembly Supervision Group report recommended that criteria for distinguishing between ‘for-profit’ and ‘not-for-profit’

higher education institutions were needed. In 2012, in the newly developed Higher Education Law, the matter was finally resolved: as of 2013, a ‘not-for-profit’ private higher education institution was declared to be one in which there should be no distribution of profits, or else where shareholders received a dividend less than the amount they would have received from investing in public bonds (Section 7, Article 4). This decision was important because it provided clarity about the taxation status of ‘for-profit’ higher education institutions, but many problems remained, especially concerning the distribution of surplus earnings by ‘not-for-profit’ institutions in forms other than shareholder returns.

The Government also sought to retain some control over profit-making by private higher education institutions that were self-declared ‘not-for-profit’ providers. The Higher Education Law of 2012 regulated that the governing boards of these institutions should include not only representatives of the owners, but also local government representatives, and representative of other organisations closely associated with the Party, including the Labour Union (Section 3, Article 17). The extent of public control over the self-declared ‘not-for-profit’ institutions tended, however, to be fairly superficial. In 2013, in a report by the Association of Non-Public Universities and Colleges, it was observed that most private higher education institutions were claiming to be ‘not-for-profit’, even while making substantial surpluses. This situation meant that the Government was disinclined to provide any public resources to these institutions. It has also meant that any form of endowment funding for these institutions was problematic because the funds received would be under control by shareholders with a financial interest in the benefits. The situation also prolonged a negative community outlook with respect to private higher education providers because almost nobody believed that they were truly ‘not-for-profit’.<sup>1</sup>

Since 2013, the sector may be said to have entered a fourth stage in its development. This stage dates from a tightening by the Government of conditions attached to the establishment of new higher education institutions. In 2010, the chartered capital required to establish a new private higher education institution was 50 billion VND (\$2.2m. USD). Then, in 2013, it was lifted to 250 billion VND (approximately \$11.2m. USD). Currently, new entrants to the sector are required by *Decree 46/2017/NĐ-CP dated April 21, 2017*, to have acquired at least

<sup>1</sup>See, e.g., Phi (2011).

5 hectares of land and to have a chartered capital 1000 billion VND (\$45m. USD), excluding land price. Progressively the best option for newcomers wishing to invest in the sector is now by means of a merger or acquisition, thereby setting the scene for the emergence of the M&A phenomenon. Before turning to this phenomenon, however, some other developments since 2013 are noteworthy.

One is a growing public concern about the number and quality of private higher education institutions. By 2014, social media had begun to focus strongly on the emerging phenomenon of graduate unemployment.<sup>2</sup> Competition between private higher education institutions was also becoming increasingly fierce. A vicious cycle had become established, with private higher education institutions setting lower tuition fees to compete with public higher education institutions for enrolments, but taking short-cuts with the quality of their academic programs because of their lower earnings, and so becoming even less able to compete with the public higher education institutions for enrolments.<sup>3</sup> In 2017, the Ministry of Education and Training stepped in by further tightening the licensing requirements for newly established private higher education institutions (*Decree 46/2017/NĐ-CP, dated April 21, 2017*). It is in this context that the phenomenon of M&A began to emerge.

Another is that the amended Higher Education Law of 2018 sought finally to resolve problems relating to the distinction between ‘for-profit’ and ‘not-for-profit’ private higher education institutions. In Article 7, it declared that:

*A non-profit higher education institution is one in which the investor declares that the institution does not run for profit as written in the decision to permit its establishment or conversion; the investor will not withdraw capital or receive dividends; the annual accumulated profit shall be considered non-distributable property and will be used as reinvestment in such institution.*

<sup>2</sup>See, e.g., Communist Party of Vietnam Online (n.d.). In this article (published in Communist Party of Vietnam website), the Minister for Education and Training, Pham Vu Luan, reported that the total number of unemployed graduates in 2014 was double the number in 2010.

<sup>3</sup>See, e.g., Ha (2015). In this article (published in Journals of State Inspectors), MOET provides statistics of 2015 enrolments: 135/230 universities attracted only less than 50% total of enrolments quota.

Hardly any private higher education providers in Vietnam could meet this standard, in which case they all became effectively ‘for-profit’ institutions. The definition did not, however, resolve the legacy of people-founded institutions, which had been founded by collectives rather than by individual owners, and which to a large extent had operated on a ‘not-for-profit’ basis. They were being required to convert to ‘fully-private’ and ‘for-profit’ status, which was very difficult. Of note is the issue of ownership: ‘not-for-profit’ higher education institutions are also regarded as being ‘fully-private’, which means they can be sold like any other private assets.

In seeking to resolve the problem of defining a ‘not-for-profit’ private higher education institution, the amended Higher Education Law of 2018 (*Law No. 34/2018/QH14, dated December 3, 2018*) created the circumstances for a removal of various governance constraints on investors in private higher education institutions. The amended Law delegated authority to the legitimate owners of these institutions to govern and manage them in the same manner as all private enterprises. Although the governing board for these institutions is defined by law as the ‘governing body representing of the investors and other stakeholders’ (Article 17), its composition may now be determined by the investors. By law, the governing board must include faculty representatives, but the process for electing them is vaguely specified, meaning that the selection of the members of governing boards is now fully under the control of the owners. For ‘not-for-profit’ private higher education institutions, however, the governing board must include inherent members as well as members elected by the academic community. Inherent members include the Party secretary, the rector, the chair of the Labour Union, and the secretary of Ho Chi Minh Youth Communist group (Article 17).

One other change introduced by the amended Higher Education Law of 2018 was that investors were designated as having a separate set of powers to those of governing boards (Article 16), such that governing board members may now be hired by the investors to exercise institutional governance, including a responsibility for supervising rectors in the performance of their chief executive officer functions. In this regard, the governance and management model for these ‘for-profit’ institutions has come to resemble the model of boards of directors as found in large private companies.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>4</sup>HSU and POU can be seen as illustration examples.

In summary, then, there has been an extraordinary policy evolution with respect to the private higher education sector since 1975. First, from 1975 to 1988, there was absolute antagonism to private higher education. Then, from 1988 to 2000, there was guarded acceptance of it. Then, from 2000 to 2013, it was embraced, but with an expectation that it would be largely ‘not-for-profit’ in orientation. Most recently, the sector has become strongly profit-driven and, to an extent, commercially predatory. In 2018, the amended Law on Higher Education completed a process that had commenced in 1988 by declaring two options for the sector, that is, ‘for-profit’ or ‘not-for-profit’. Such a policy evolution and the practical development can be explained and understood more deeply by the institutional logics perspective, which examines the interactions among the three major ideologies that characterise Vietnamese higher education (HE), namely Neoliberalism, Socialism, and Confucianism, as presented in Chapter 3 by Ngo.

### 9.3 THE EMERGENCE OF MERGERS AND ACQUISITIONS

The emergence of M&A has been a significant feature of the most recent stage in the development of the private higher education sector in Vietnam. This section of the chapter sets out to examine the facts and present an initial analysis of the implications of this trend.

One of the earliest examples of an ownership transfer took place in 2012, in the form of a divestment by the original investors in Van Hien University (VHU) and the acquisition of the University by the Hung Hau Corporation. Hung Hau invested 75 billion VND (\$3.26m. USD) in the deal. Prior to its acquisition by Hung Hau, VHU had been a site of ongoing governance disputes between shareholders.

More deals of this nature followed. Some were direct acquisitions of private higher education institutions, such as in 2013 when the University of Phan Thiet was sold to Mr. Vo Van Thuong for 60 billion VND (\$2.6m. USD). The sale price included land lease rights and school facilities. Also in 2013, the Saigon College of Technology Economics was sold to Mr. Le Lam for 30 billion VND (\$1.3m. USD). At the same time, this University had been prohibited from accepting new enrolments for a period of two consecutive years. The institution was renamed the Dai Viet Saigon College. A year later, Mr. Le Lam acquired another

school, Viet Tien College, also for 30 billion VND (\$1.3m. USD). He now owns four private higher education institutions in Vietnam.

The deals progressively became more complex, involving multiple partners and larger sums of money. In 2014, for example, the HUTECH Education Investment and Development Joint Stock Company, led by Mr. Kieu Xuan Hung, acquired the University of Economics and Finance (UEF) at the sale price of 100 billion VND (\$4.3m. USD). The Company contributed 51% of the sale price and the shareholders in HUTECH (Ho Chi Minh University of Technology) contributed the rest. In 2015, the Hoan Cau Group acquired Quang Trung University, and the Nguyen Hoang Group acquired Hong Bang International University (HIU). In 2016, the Thanh Thanh Cong Group acquired Yersin University and Sonadezi College, and the Nguyen Hoang Group completed another deal to become the new owner of Ba Ria Vung Tau University (BVU).

By 2018, mergers and acquisitions involving private higher education institutions had become widespread. The Institute of American Education acquired Phu Xuan University (PXU); the Thanh Tay University (TTU) had a new owner; and the Nguyen Hoang Group had acquired Hoa Sen University (HSU), having already acquired Gia Dinh University (GDU) earlier in the year. A local media report indicated the sale price for GDU to be 100 billion VND (\$4.3m. USD), the sale price of HIU to be 500 billion VND (\$21.45m. USD), and the sale price of HSU to be 2000 billion VND (\$85.8m. USD) (Huyen, 2018; D. Nguyen, 2018). Except in the case of HSU, most of these deals were executed at prices well below the amount of chartered capital officially required for the establishment of a new higher education institution in 2017. The newcomers were clearly attracted to entering the market by acquiring an existing university rather than by establishing a new one.

A related development has been the extent to which individuals or corporations have begun to own multiple private higher education institutions, or else they have become significant shareholders in several private higher education institutions at the same time. Hung Hau Holdings, for example, now owns one private university and four private colleges; the Nguyen Hoang Group is the owner of four private universities; the Thanh Thanh Cong Group and the Institute of American Education now each own two private higher education institutions; and three of the four owners of Tay Do University are also owners, or have a strategic shareholding, in a number of other private universities and

colleges. These individuals and corporations have also invested heavily in private schools and kindergartens. The transactions are legally sanctioned because private higher education institutions are now seen to be no different from other private enterprises.

What, then, are the implications for the private higher education sector in Vietnam? One implication is that the governance and management culture of these institutions has become dominated by corporate expansion and profitability. Individuals, structures, and procedures have value only to the extent that they are contributing to the generation of even larger profits for the owners. It is nearly always the case that once an existing private higher education institution has been acquired, a new governance and leadership group familiar with the profit orientation of the owners is installed to replace the existing governance and leadership group. There is a new board of management, a new president, and a new group of executive managers appointed. Decisions are made by senior administrators and faculty members are given little say.<sup>5</sup> Huge differences appear between the salary levels of administrators and the salary levels of faculty members. There are no official statistics available concerning the salary levels of the presidents of corporatised private universities, but it has been reported that one of these university presidents was earning \$500,000 USD per annum, while the more usual rate was from \$40,000 to \$150,000 USD per annum. These rates contrast with annual salary levels of between \$5000 and \$12,000 USD paid to faculty members (e.g., see Pham, 2018). Faculty members are routinely given key performance indicators, as are administrators. These performance indicators are closely linked to financial outcomes, and with success measured indicated primarily in terms of effectiveness in contributing to the financial profitability of the enterprise.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>5</sup>See, for example, Pham (2017). In this article, the author listed a number of universities that might not have Academic Council or have no information about it in higher education institution websites; even there is no spot for academic council in school organisation structure. One example is Hoa Sen University, which recently established its academic council, 8 years after transforming into university from a college status.

<sup>6</sup>For instance, according to a local media, FPT Education reported that its revenue in 2015 was 590 billion VND (\$USD 28 mil. approx.) and the profits were 171 billion VND (\$USD 8.1 mil. approx.), equivalent to 29%. See more Nguyen (2015).

The changes made by new corporate owners can sometimes be surprising. In general, research is more often regarded as a financial liability than as a source of profit by the new corporatised private higher education institutions. At Phenikaa University, however, formerly known as Thanh Tay University, the new ownership immediately established two new research centres: The Inter-Discipline Social Sciences Research Center and the Thanh Tay Institute for Advanced Sciences.

Other changes introduced may be regarded in a more positive light, though the basis for their introduction is invariably the drive to increase profitability. It is typically the case, for example, that the newly acquired institutions see an immediate improvement in their appearance and in the quality of their facilities, the aim being to make them more attractive to prospective students and their families. In the same vein, members of academic staff are required to be more ‘customer-friendly’, mainly by being more student-oriented in their approach to teaching and learning. New campuses may also be established, as for example at the University of Economics and Finance (UEF), Hong Bang International University (HIU) and Van Hien University (VHU), with new equipment and facilities available to support student learning. According to Nguyen, L. (2018), Nguyen Quoc Toan, a consultant from Ernst & Young, who specialised in mergers and acquisitions, stated in an interview :

*The investors see the market from the perspective of Vietnamese people [being] degree-oriented. Everyone wants to have a university degree. People just need a degree. They do not care about the quality. Pursuing university education in international schools or public schools is not easy due to selective process, or financial affordability. Private higher education institutions still attract good enrolments thanks to responding to the need of the degrees of the Vietnamese.*

Toan also stated:

*[The] quality of some private higher education institutions has been better than before, but many private higher education institutions are diploma mills providing university degrees at very low quality.*

The new investors are also attracted to the possibility of being able to take advantage of favourable policies towards land use for education: According to L. Nguyen (2018), ‘They are provided land but having no resources for campus constructions. They simply keep the land and



wait for buyers'. From his point of view, the phenomenon of M&A in Vietnam's private higher education sector represents an 'education bubble', not unlike a stock market bubble. The selling price of many private higher education institutions is now widely regarded to be much higher than either the true value of the capital assets or the profit-making potential. According to Nguyen, there is 'no education model that allows such a huge capital return quickly'.

In some cases, however, the new governance and management practices in newly acquired private higher education institutions have not brought about more favourable results. The Pacific Ocean University (POU), located in Khanh Hoa Province, was established in December 2008. During its first five years of operation, it changed the chair of the board of management three times, and the president four times. By 2013, it had an enrolment of only 100 students.

A similar story can be seen in China, which has over 740 private universities. As in Vietnam, the Chinese Government set the barrier high for the establishment of new universities, including the prerequisite of possessing land and campus buildings. It has a huge influence over the amount of initial capital required for licensing. According to Kai Yu, the chief executive officer of China Education Group Holdings Limited, a company listed in the Hong Kong Stock Exchange, mergers and acquisitions of the private higher education institutions in China are now breaking previous records for the amount of money changing hands (Yu, 2018). Many of these deals fail to realise the anticipated benefits. Some estimates put the success rate at less than 20%. However, China Education Group Holding has been a success. It became a listed company in Hong Kong in December 2017. In the six months since listing, its share price had increased by more than 80%. It raised \$420m. USD in its initial public offering. Three months later, the group acquired two schools in Zhengzhou and Xi'an in China.

The phenomenon of M&A in the private higher education sector in Vietnam is consistent with the Government's policy commitment to the idea of 'socialisation', as referred to earlier. Prior to 1988, higher education was seen as a state responsibility, provided for the sake of advancing the socioeconomic development of the country. The notion of 'socialisation', when first introduced, involved a focus on government and people working together. It became a vital element in providing for a labour force with sufficient skills to meet the needs of a rapidly expanding economy. Over time, however, 'socialisation' has steadily morphed

into ‘privatisation’, and ‘marketisation’, with higher education coming to be seen as a commodity capable of being delivered by a private corporation. The M&A phenomenon is symptomatic of these changes that have occurred in the values framework of higher education in Vietnam since the early 1990s.

In general, the M&A phenomenon is succeeding in bringing a huge amount of private investment into the higher education sector, and it is also generally creating better teaching and learning experiences for students whose families can afford the tuition fees charged. It means also that less efficient private higher education enterprises are being swept aside by more efficient private higher education providers. Such a situation suggests a small number of private universities can become semi-elite institutions, which might be the first choice of middle-class students and provides a counterbalance to established public universities, as stated in Chapter 8 by Chau. The downside, though, is that the professional and academic independence of faculty members has become increasingly subjected to the kinds of values that drive an intense pursuit of private profit. The extent to which this trend becomes more evident as the incidence of mergers and acquisitions in the private higher education sector increases over coming years will require close monitoring.

#### 9.4 CONCLUSION

The M&A phenomenon has become a characteristic of the private higher education sector in Vietnam in less than 20 years since the Government cautiously embarked on an experiment in permitting the development of a ‘non-public’ higher education sector. Since 2013, the phenomenon has come to dominate the private higher education sector, resulting in the emergence of corporate investors and corporatised systems of governance and operational practices. The private higher education sector now functions in a context of ‘marketisation’. This development seems at odds with the values of a State commitment to traditional Communist Party values, but, as in China, it is a development that has taken place very rapidly. However, it is a development that warrants more critical scrutiny. At stake is a notion of higher education being valued more for its social importance than its value as a commodity, able to be bought and sold by an increasingly wealthy collection of investors.

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# Vietnam's Community College: The Question of Higher Education Decentralisation in Contemporary Vietnam

*Huy Vi Nguyen and Quang Chau*

## 10.1 INTRODUCTION

Since Doi Moi (Reform) 1986, the decentralisation process occurring in many socio-economic realms including political system has been felt by Vietnam's higher education system. Vestiges of a centralised system—such as the persistence of line ministries (*cơ quan chủ quản*) in higher education governance, the entrance exam nationally administered by the Ministry of Education and Training (MOET), the rigid national curriculum framework (see Chapter 2 by Hayden and Le-Nguyen)—are still noticeable. However, many decentralisation initiatives—such as the

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legalisation of private higher education, the recent public autonomous university reform (*đại học tư chủ tài chính*), the establishment of two national universities with tremendous governance autonomy, and the formation of a non-state accreditation system—are equally clear, and have recently left profound influences on the system (see e.g., Hoang, 2019; Nguyen, Oliver, & Priddy, 2009). In addition, despite not concerning the centralisation versus decentralisation dichotomy, recent studies on higher education internationalisation and marketisation (e.g., T. H. Nguyen, 2009; Tran & Marginson, 2018; Trần et al., 2014; Welch, 2011) portray the Vietnamese system as one in which universities enjoy a considerable amount of flexibility, autonomy, and initiatives to collaborate with non-state entities—key elements of a decentralised system.

We find a higher education initiative which reflects the decentralisation, yet is overlooked in existing literature—i.e., the emergence and development of community colleges. In this chapter, we critically analyse how Vietnam's community college model contributes to the scholarly and policy debates on centralisation versus decentralisation in higher education. We draw data from two main sources. First is the review of several current studies on contemporary Vietnam's community colleges—e.g., Dang and Nguyen (2009), Le (2013), Nguyen (2011, 2015, 2016). The second source includes observations and interviews with key stakeholders of community colleges in Vietnam—such as senior administrators, policymakers, and students—that were conducted in 2009 as part of the Ph.D. dissertation of one author (H. V. Nguyen, 2009). Throughout the chapter, where we sporadically draw cross-country comparisons, we mainly look at the literature on US community colleges—the largest, most studied and documented community college model worldwide.

We divide this chapter into four main sections. First, we discuss current scholarly debates on higher education decentralisation. Second, after a brief review of the community college literature, we argue that community colleges in general represent the higher education decentralisation process. We then highlight the total retreat of the Vietnamese central government during the higher education decentralisation process, and more specifically in the case of community colleges. The chapter concludes with our discussion of how the case of Vietnamese community colleges contributes to our understanding of higher education decentralisation, and of the Vietnam's political economy.

Our chapter seeks to contribute to policy discussions and scholarly debates in some aspects. First, it enriches the currently scant research on Vietnamese community colleges—a sector which used to attract high hopes from education reformists and policymakers. Second, unlike several prior descriptive studies on this topic, we aim to inform Vietnam's higher education policy debates by advancing some educated predictions on the not-so-promising future of this sector. Last but not least, our Vietnamese case contributes to scholarly debates on higher education decentralisation—more specifically, as elaborated in the discussion and conclusion section, we raise doubts about the readiness of higher education decentralisation in Vietnam. Essentially, our argument challenges the pro-decentralisation viewpoint advanced—in passing or emphatically—in other chapters.

## 10.2 HIGHER EDUCATION DECENTRALISATION

Apart from a few exceptions, especially the US case, the majority of higher education systems worldwide were traditionally formed and have been governed centrally by the national government—or the “Continental model” in Clark's term (Clark, 1983). Rarely are the merits of higher education centralisation versus decentralisation critically debated, compared, and contrasted—both concepts involve many untested assumptions (Meyer, 2009). Arguments for education centralisation that Bray (2007) points out succinctly concern efficiency and equality. First, centralisation improves efficiency by avoiding cumbersome duplication of functions and simultaneously utilising economies of scale. Second, centralisation—through the standardisation of curriculum, instruction, admission, etc.—helps mitigate disparity, which is in many cases associated with social stratification. In a typical centralised higher education system, the state makes the majority of key decisions, and sets rigid criteria on funding, leadership appointment, admission, curriculum, etc. Centralisation has, however, attracted only scant scholarly analyses.

Contrastingly, decentralisation seems to be a buzzword in the contemporary higher education literature. It is generally defined as “the transfer of decision-making authority, responsibility, and tasks from higher to lower organisational levels or between organisations” (Hanson, 2006, p. 10). The state can decentralise by granting governance authority to lower levels in the bureaucracy hierarchy—a process that Bray (2007) calls “territorial decentralisation,” and Asklung

and Almen (1997) “vertical decentralisation.” For example, in the UK, USA, and some other European countries, local governments have now remained significantly influential in education policies. The transfer of decision-making authority, responsibility, and tasks between organisations, often those outside the state bureaucracy—a process that Bray (2007) terms “functional decentralisation”—manifests itself through examples such as the legalisation of private higher education, the introduction of tuition and fees, various forms of public–private partnership, etc. In general, this type of transfer resembles the privatisation process, and causes the influence of stakeholders to disperse (Askling & Almen, 1997).

A common argument for decentralisation concerns efficiency. More specifically, decentralisation—especially functional decentralisation—is believed not only to enhance the efficiency in resource management, but also to mobilise more resources. Agency theory suggests that problems will almost always arise when people (agents) make decisions on behalf of others (principals). More specifically, due to their self-interest, agents will make decisions that benefit themselves, rather than the people that they represent (Lane & Kivisto, 2008; Toma, 1986). In a centralised higher education system, the state holds the decision-making authority in funding, leadership appointments, etc., and thus will make decisions that primarily benefit themselves, rather than taxpayers. This discourages taxpayers from contributing additional resources to the system. In addition, agency theory also implies that in a centralised higher education system, unless having personal gains from policies they themselves make, policymakers are not necessarily compelled to make optimal policies that will improve the efficiency of the higher education system. In short, by engaging a wider base of policy beneficiaries in the decision-making process, higher education decentralisation will likely encourage stakeholders to make policy decisions that enhance resource efficiency for the system.

Decentralisation is not without concerns—which are yet often overlooked by its proponents. For example, Li (2017) in a study of financial decentralisation of Shanghai higher education finds that decentralisation exacerbates social inequality by admitting the majority of in-province students in higher-paying programs, rather than out-of-province students in lower-paying ones. The aforementioned efficiency argument is likewise debatable, and is not always empirically proven (Bray, 2007).

Even with critical, scholarly informed analyses, decentralisation largely involves political decision-making (McGinn, 1992) and is closely



interrelated with changes in governance philosophies. New public management, strongly advocated by Thatcher's and Reagan's administrations in the 1990s (Harvey, 2005), called for the state's retreat—the state, instead of playing the controlling role, should only govern through regulatory and supervisory frameworks (Osborne & Gaebler, 1992). In addition, the legitimacy crisis (Friedrichs, 1980), which succinctly means the eroding trust in the state—a phenomenon common in the 1980s in the United States and many European countries—also contributed to the state's retreat from direct control. (See Chapter 3 by Ngo for a discussion of conflicting institutional logics and governance philosophies in Vietnam's contemporary higher education.)

As Mok (2001) reminds us, “isation” indicates a process. Therefore, we should expect to see decentralisation to go hand in hand with the gradual retreat of centralisation. In other words, we can easily find a good mixture of both centralised and decentralised identities in any higher education system (McGinn, 1992). In addition, as many studies—such as Chan and Wang (2009), Hawkins (2000), Mok (2004)—have pointed out, decentralisation also invites re-centralisation. By no means will the state voluntarily withdraw its control altogether—control brings with it influences and benefits, as patron-client theory indicates (Eisenstadt & Roniger, 1980). Peck and Tickell (2002) term the state's withdrawal and re-entrance, respectively, as the “roll-out” and “roll-back”—on one hand, the state transfers its decision-making authority, on the other hand, it formulates detailed and sometimes stricter regulations to supervise the just-decentralised entities. Consequently, the state's role in many cases has increased, rather than decreased, after decentralisation reforms (see e.g., Dale, 1999; Hawkins, 2000; Mok, 2006).

McGinn (1992) portrays the state's roll-out and roll-in in more detail through his typology of decentralisation—each category looks at the interaction between authority transferors and transferees. First is de-concentration—which means the state assigns responsibility, but not the authority to make decisions. A typical example of de-concentration is the introduction, and increase of tuition fees, but not of students' participation in institutional management. Second, delegation indicates the assignment of authority to lower levels, but this authority can be withdrawn. Third is devolution—the state transfers the authority to autonomous units, and can intervene only minimally into these units—as autonomous accreditation agencies in the United States illustrate.

As elaborated below, the emergence of community colleges not only represents the decentralisation process in higher education, but in the case of Vietnam, also reveals the tension between central and provincial governments in the governance of these colleges—in other words, the tension between decentralisation and re-centralisation.

### 10.3 COMMUNITY COLLEGE AS A MODEL OF HIGHER EDUCATION DECENTRALISATION

Community college, a terminology that took root from American higher education, and is thus often assumed an American model, does in fact exist in many countries.<sup>1</sup> These colleges have the following common characteristics (Raby, 2009; Raby & Valeau, 2018). First, they offer programs under the International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED—the 1997 version) levels 4 and 5—which range from post-secondary up to bachelor’s programs.<sup>2</sup> Second, these colleges’ principal mission is to provide trained human resources for the social and economic development at the local level. As can be seen in the American model, apart from the general education component, community colleges also offer programs that are tailored to meet specific local needs. Third, these colleges target primarily non-traditional students, such as first-time, racial minority, working students. Fourth, and relatedly, community colleges are often considered second-tier institutions, an inexpensive option for higher education, and thus are often much less funded than traditional universities. Rarely does public funding suffice for community colleges—a large proportion of revenues come from non-state sources.

The emergence of community colleges signifies the decentralisation process that took off in many countries. First, unlike traditional universities, these colleges are not governed by national governments. In countries where the state tightly controls public universities—the

<sup>1</sup>For cross-country variations of names, see Raby (2009), Raby and Valeau (2018), Taylor, José, de Maria, and Rui (2008). Throughout this chapter, we use the term community colleges to indicate both institutions of higher education that are called “community colleges,” and institutions that are called by different names, but share similarities with community colleges.

<sup>2</sup>Although many community colleges do not award bachelor’s degrees, there have been calls for these colleges to be allowed to do so. One such advocacy association is the Community College Baccalaureate Association (<https://www.accbd.org>).

Continental model (Clark, 1983)—community colleges are governed by sub-national governmental units. In countries where public institutions enjoy significant autonomy from the state, and are governed by a governance board (the US model—Clark, 1983), the difference in board composition between community colleges and traditional universities is noticeable—for community colleges, their board is filled by members who live close to the college location; whereas for traditional public universities, their board is comprised of members from all over the state, even the nation. Second, local governments, despite contributing close to nothing to public universities, provide finance for—sometimes are even the major funders of—these community colleges.

Just as the literature suggests that by no means does decentralisation indicate the state's significant retreat, the central government did not withdraw its control altogether from community colleges. In contrast, these colleges must abide by regulations, procedures, and standards set by the central government. Besides, the central government also contributes funding to these colleges through student loan schemes and research grants that are administered nationally, by the national budget.<sup>3</sup>

#### 10.4 COMMUNITY COLLEGES IN THE PRE-1975 VIETNAM

Community colleges first emerged in Vietnam in the early 1970s, when the Republic of Vietnam (RVN) was—in high hopes of a war-ending treaty—preparing for its post-war social mobilisation plans. A report prepared by US consultants in 1970 proposed that community colleges would help both relax the enrolment constraint that public universities were facing, and provide trained human resources for the post-war social reconstruction (Reich, 2003). Do Ba Khe—the first senior official that conducted research on US community colleges (Khe, 1970)—seemed to be the most influential advocate for the US community college model to be planted in Vietnam.

The first two community colleges were established in My Tho and Nha Trang. Both received funding from the national and provincial governments, were academically affiliated with, and received technical assistance from the University of Saigon. In 1973, the third college was established in Da Nang, and affiliated with the University of Hue.

<sup>3</sup>See examples of Finland (Kohtamäki, 2011) and Portugal (Teixeira, Rocha, Biscaia, & Cardoso, 2014).

The plan to found several more colleges in other regions had not yet materialised when the RVN collapsed in 1975. Although gaining only modest achievements during four years of existence, the community college model in the RVN left many impacts—both positive and negative—on the model’s re-emergence in the post-Doi Moi period.

## 10.5 THE RE-EMERGENCE OF COMMUNITY COLLEGES IN THE DOI MOI 1986

### 10.5.1 *The Decentralisation of Vietnam’s Political Economy Since the Doi Moi*

Vietnam’s political economy literature suggests that decentralisation was among the key reforms of Doi Moi. In the economy, decentralisation is reflected through the transfer from the planned economy, dominated by state-owned enterprises (SOEs) and governed mostly through state’s directives, to the multi-sector economy, governed by market principles (Dang, 2008; Fforde & De Vylder, 1996). Politically, the elimination of the centralised redistribution mechanism—in which goods and produce must be gathered in Hanoi before being re-distributed to other provinces and lower units—considerably mitigated the central power. As Thayer (1988) observes, the percentage of provincial representatives in the Central Committee—the central organ, with the highest authority, of the Communist Party of Vietnam (CPV)—increased.

### 10.5.2 *The Re-Emergence of the Community College Model*

#### 10.5.2.1 *The Context of Higher Education Reform*

Vietnam’s higher education also participated in the broad decentralisation process that Doi Moi kicked off. In 1987, the conference of university and college rectors concluded with a four-point resolution that facilitated decentralisation and privatisation reforms (Quan, 1995). Accordingly, the Ministry of Higher and Vocational Post-Secondary Education—in its three-year action plan (1987–1990), and the following five-year plan (1991–1995)—placed system restructure as a prioritised program (Association of Vietnam Universities and Colleges, 2017) from which community colleges emerged.

Vietnam's higher education decentralisation proceeded, however, fairly slowly. A generally accepted view is that the system has remained somewhat centrally controlled. Central agencies, especially the MOET, still powerfully intervene in higher education institutions. Line ministries decide funding, leadership appointments and tightly control many other issues of institutional management, whereas the MOET dictates curriculum and program offerings (David & Le, 1995; Hayden & Lam, 2010). Although the Higher Education Reform Agenda 2005 (HERA)—Vietnam's higher education master plan between 2005 and 2020—proposed that line ministerial control be eliminated (Harman, Hayden, & Pham, 2010), the results have appeared modest (as Chapter 2 by Hayden and Le-Nguyen argues). In this context, as elaborated below, the emergence and growth of community colleges seems to represent progress in higher education decentralisation.

#### *10.5.2.2 Three Phases of Community College Re-Emergence and Growth in Post-Doi Moi*

The formation and development of the community college model in contemporary Vietnam has undergone three phases. The first focused on policy advocacy and pilot projects (see Oliver [2002] for more information). Turcan, Reilly, and Bugaian (2016)'s view that decentralisation stimulates international collaboration held true in the case of Vietnam. Collaboration projects with international agencies in the early 1990s were critically helpful in bringing the community college model to policy agendas. The Vietnam Education and Human Resources Sector Analysis—the first United Nations Development Programme-funded project in the post-Doi Moi—put forward a long list of policy recommendations, including the establishment of community colleges. This policy advocacy phase also included some study tours to North America, and a project sponsored by the Asian Development Bank (ADB) to test the feasibility of community college establishments in several specific locations (Dang & Nguyen, 2009). This phase concluded with the two pilots—sponsored by the Association of Canada Community Colleges (ACCC) in 1995, and the Embassy of the Netherlands in 1998—which provided the strongest impetus for the community college model to take shape in Vietnam.

The aforementioned projects helped familiarise the state with, and become increasingly receptive to, the community college model. However, changes in policymakers' attitudes occurred only incrementally

and were not linear. In 1992, 1995, and 1996, the MOET—through various channels—advocated for the community college model, and actively sought for the government’s approval to establish some colleges. However, these initiatives yielded only modest dividends, and community colleges needed to wait for another four years to get official legalisation.

The second (institutionalisation) phase commenced in 2000 with the first, yet provisional regulation, that officially legalised community colleges. Accordingly, they were by law defined as public multi-level, multidisciplinary, provincially funded and governed short-cycle institutions of higher education whose primary aim is to meet the local needs for human resources. In 2001, in the first Master Plan for Universities and Colleges 2001–2010 (*Quy hoạch mạng lưới trường Đại học, Cao đẳng giai đoạn 2001–2010*), community colleges were re-affirmed as a component of Vietnamese higher education. In the same year, the Education Development Strategy 2001–2010 (*Chiến lược phát triển giáo dục 2001–2010*) directed community colleges to standardise articulation procedures, as well as to design and launch programs that could transfer students to full-fledged universities. The government expected to multiply community colleges in many provinces.

The second phase reached its peak in the mid-2000s, when the community college model was repeatedly and publicly endorsed. In 2004, at two international conferences on higher education reform, the MOET Minister stated that the community college would be a component of Vietnam’s higher education reform. Besides, HERA 2005—through its plans to expand vocational and practically oriented programs and to increase the system’s flexibility and transferability—indirectly opened up new prospects for community colleges to grow.

The third phase witnessed community colleges diverting from higher education, towards lifelong learning, and recently the vocational education system. Community colleges were then charged to build a learning society, and to provide access for under-represented and under-privileged students. In 2016, MOET’s transfer of a system of over 500 colleges and professional schools (*trường trung cấp*) to the Ministry of Labour—Invalids and Social Affairs (MOLISA—*Bộ lao động thương binh xã hội*) signified the vocationalisation of short-cycle colleges, including community colleges.

In total, as indicated in Table 10.1, there have been 18 community colleges in Vietnam—three of which were upgraded into provincially

**Table 10.1** List of community colleges in Vietnam

<i>Community college</i>	<i>Foundation year</i>	<i>Notes</i>
Hai Phong	2000	
Quang Ngai	2000	Became a 4-year university in 2007
Tien Giang	2000	Became a 4-year university in 2005
Ba Ria – Vung Tau	2000	
Dong Thap	2000	
Ha Tay	2000	
Tra Vinh	2001	Became a 4-year university in 2006
Kien Giang	2002	
Vinh Long	2002	
Hanoi	2005	
Hau Giang	2005	
Soc Trang	2006	
Ca Mau	2007	
Binh Thuan	2007	
Lai Chau	2008	
Bac Kan	2010	
Lao Cai	2011	
Dak Nong	2018	

*Source* Authors' summary from Internet

controlled full-fledged universities. In general, although spreading in all regions, these colleges tend to cluster more in low-income provinces, especially in the Mekong Delta.

## 10.6 COMMUNITY COLLEGES AND VIETNAM'S HIGHER EDUCATION DECENTRALISATION

The emergence and growth of community colleges in Vietnam is in many aspects a manifestation of the territorial decentralisation that Bray (2007) conceptualises. For the first time, provincial governments—but not central state agencies—gained control of multidisciplinary institutions of higher education. We see two common patterns through which provincial governments established community colleges—either to upgrade existing educational institutions, such as centres of in-service training and continuing education, outside the higher education system; or to add multidisciplinary programs to teachers' colleges (Nguyen, 2016). Community colleges indeed spurred the territorial

decentralisation in higher education—the establishment of many other provincially controlled universities and colleges unfolded quickly.

Not only do we find no evidence to support the often claimed argument that decentralisation increases efficiency, we also find anecdotal evidence indicating an efficiency reduction in the case of Vietnamese community colleges. There is remarkable overlap in terms of program offerings between community colleges and other institutions of higher education in the same province. For instance, in Kien Giang, the community college and other two colleges—including one teachers' training college—are considerably indistinguishable in terms of institutional mission and program offering. The provincially controlled full-fledged university (Kien Giang University) also offers—among other programs—many short-cycle, vocation-oriented programs, just as other colleges do. In addition, these institutions—except for the university—do not spread throughout the province, but instead cluster in the province's capital city. This overlapping of institutional mission as well as program offering repeats itself in most of the provinces where community colleges were established (H. V. Nguyen, 2009).

Contrary to the common aforementioned expectation—which is confirmed in the US community college case (Cohen & Brawer, 2008)—that decentralisation will facilitate new sources of income, the case of Vietnamese community colleges points to the opposite conclusion. More specifically, provincial appropriation accounts for a significant share of community colleges' total revenue with tuition almost all the remaining share (Le, 2013; Nguyen, 2011, 2016). In other words, in the case of Vietnam, provincial governments replace—rather than supplement—the central government to fund community colleges. Consequently, no additional revenue has been generated.

Although we lack data to draw an empirical conclusion on the impact of community colleges on social inequality, personal communications with colleges' senior faculty and administrators suggest an adverse influence (H. V. Nguyen, 2009). More specifically, since almost all provinces where community colleges have been founded also have full-fledged universities, and given the significant overlap in program offerings between colleges and universities in the same province, most better-performing and more affluent students prefer to attend universities, whereas community colleges are a preferred option among students of lower-socio-economic status (SES). This stratification—which also occurs in US community colleges (Cohen & Brawer,



2008)—is exacerbated in the case of Vietnam because community colleges are territorially close to major cities in which higher education opportunities are relatively numerous and diverse. Consequently, only the *lowest*-SES students who seriously lack both academic and financial resources choose to stay in the home province and enrol in community colleges—whereas even students with some limited resources and capacities can with ease migrate to neighbouring major cities. In short, Vietnamese community colleges tend to provide examples that challenge the equality argument which is commonly used in the literature to advocate higher education decentralisation.

Our aforementioned detailed descriptions about the three-phase development of community colleges illustrate McGinn's (1992) argument that decentralisation probably stems from political changes rather than from technical, and cost/benefit analyses. We find that policy delays and zigzags in the Vietnamese case—as mentioned in the previous section on the model's emergence and development—stemmed largely from the resistance of centralisation proponents in the MOET. In the early 1990s, the ADB-funded project's recommendations that the MOET only supervise—rather than directly control—community colleges faced strong opposition from MOET senior officials (Marklein & Mai, 2018). This resistance was rooted deeply in the prejudice that community colleges—since established in the RVN period—were a US/Capitalist product, and thus were politically incompatible with Vietnam. In some other instances, however, decentralisation seemed to triumph. For example, the question of whether community colleges should be granted a university title was eventually resolved with mixed results. Although community colleges—but not full-fledged universities—were eventually established in many provinces, neither of the first two ACCC-funded community college pilots in Thanh Hoa and Hai Phong materialised—a result of local resistance. Hai Phong refused the pilot (Marklein & Mai, 2018) whereas Thanh Hoa not only bypassed the MOET's decision but also itself established Vietnam's first provincially controlled full-fledged *university*—i.e., Hong Duc University (Natali, 2001).

As McGinn (1992) points out, centralisation and decentralisation often co-exist in a system, and the case of Vietnamese community colleges tends to support that observation. In terms of governance, while leadership nomination criteria and appointment procedures are set by central agencies, provincial governments have increasingly gained increased autonomy in such appointments. In a similar vein, while central

agencies dictate some mandatory courses, and curriculum framework, provincial governments decide which programs these colleges will initiate and support.

While the literature points to the “roll-back” of state’s control (e.g., Chan & Wang, 2009; Hawkins, 2000; Mok, 2004; Peck & Tickell, 2002), the Vietnamese central government seems to be, as the community college case illustrates, significantly retreating from the process of decentralisation. The most obvious evidence is the national government’s near-complete withdrawal from subsidising community colleges. In addition, whereas other centrally controlled universities and colleges receive admission quotas from central agencies, provincial governments decide those for community colleges. Although these colleges will then need formal approval from central agencies regarding admission quotas, in practice, such approvals are rubber stamped.

We find two additional instances of anecdotal evidence pointing to the central government’s significant retreat in this higher education arena. The first concerns the upgrade of community colleges into full-fledged universities. Although this upgrade results from various reasons—as the process of academic drift (Clark, 1983; Neave, 1978, 1979) and institutional isomorphism (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983) as the literature suggests—in the Vietnamese case, the central government’s voice is largely absent, as the aforementioned Hai Phong and Hong Duc cases illustrate. Second, the central government remains similarly silent on the recent trend of community college privatisation—more specifically the transfer of these colleges to private corporations. In recent years, provincial governments—in the era of budgetary austerity—have become increasingly hesitant to subsidise community colleges (see Marklein & Mai, 2018), whereas education conglomerates realise an enormous potential, and show interest in taking over such colleges. In late 2018, the Nguyen Hoang Group proposed to take over Pham Van Dong University—formerly a community college—in Quang Ngai (Viet, 2019). The proposal got tentative approval from the provincial government, but was then widely covered in media and triggered public debates, resulting in a pause in the process. This private takeover—which goes against the basic communist ideology of pro-public education—received no guidance or public comment from the central government. (Compare this instance with the acquisition of private universities reported on in Chapter 9 by Pham.)

## 10.7 CONCLUSION

The chapter unfolds the emergence and development of Vietnam's community colleges, which reflect the decentralisation in higher education as well as in political economy in general. An easily overlooked fact is that half of the total institutions of higher education—both public and private—are now not controlled by the central government. It was the emergence of community colleges that considerably facilitated this decentralisation process.

Our chapter—through the analysis of Vietnamese community colleges—makes some contributions to the literature of higher education decentralisation. First, it sides with a few other studies—such as Li (2017)—to challenge the equality argument often advanced by decentralisation proponents. Second, although we—like other studies—find a mix of both centralised and decentralised mechanisms in the emergence of Vietnamese community colleges, in general, decentralisation prevails. The central government refuses to fund, or provide sufficient guidance and supervision for community colleges—even on politically sensitive issues like the privatisation of those colleges. Like Tran's (2014) case study of two Vietnam National Universities, we are concerned about whether Vietnam's higher education is ready for decentralisation reforms, especially when the higher levels of government appear unwilling to maintain subsidies or provide guidance—though temporarily—for the decentralisation. In Hanson's (2006) term, Vietnamese community colleges seem to fall into the most autonomous decentralisation category—devolution. This conclusion leads us to challenge a common view which sees the Vietnamese state as highly centralised and interventionist (London, 2014). In short, we argue that community colleges—like many other new players and initiatives in Vietnamese higher education that this book investigates—have ample room to operate as long as they contribute to the overall aim of the higher education system while not creating additional tasks for higher management levels. Third, the case of Vietnamese community colleges reveals how education policies in Vietnam are made not necessarily from scholarly debates nor technical analyses but rather from political interaction—in this case between the central and provincial governments.

We see two major challenges that community colleges will face in the future. The first concerns overlapping regulations. The Vocational Education Law 2014 states that MOLISA will replace MOET to

supervise academically all short-cycle colleges, including community colleges, but *excluding* teacher training colleges. This vocationalisation has not only derailed the original mission of community colleges, and complicated the transferability between community colleges and university, but also created a vague area in governance. Many community colleges that had been established by the upgrading of teacher training colleges still focus largely on teacher education. Thus, it is still unclear whether these community colleges should also be put under the MOET or MOLISA supervision. All in all, since the transfer from MOET to MOLISA only took effect in 2017, it is still too early to conclude how short-cycle colleges, including community colleges, will react to this abrupt change. Further, community colleges have become increasingly less distinct from other short-cycle colleges. Although provincial governments have consistently emphasised multidisciplinary as the key characteristics of community colleges (Epperson, 2010), many other centrally controlled short-cycle colleges that are located in provinces have also expanded to become multidisciplinary (Nguyen, 2011). This pushes community colleges into the competition with “non-community colleges” and probably to their disadvantage.

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## CHAPTER 11

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# The Construction, Deconstruction, and Reconstruction of Academic Freedom in Vietnamese Universities

*Mary Beth Marklein and Mai Van Tinh*

### 11.1 INTRODUCTION

Sometime in early 1990, Doan Viet Hoat received an invitation to meet with Lam Quang Thiep, who at the time was director of the higher education division in Vietnam's Ministry of Education and Training (MOET). Hoat, who had earned a doctorate in higher education at Florida State University in 1971, had only recently been released from a re-education camp, the price he paid for having served as a university vice president in Saigon when the American war ended in 1975. Now, under the government's new policy of *Doi Moi*, it was Thiep's job to restructure Vietnam's tertiary education system. He wanted to study the U.S. model, but the U.S. trade embargo on Vietnam prevented him from traveling to the United States, and so he hoped Hoat might

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offer some insights. Hoat, though wary, wished to see more democratic institutions in Vietnam, and agreed to develop an outline. His core message: If Vietnam wants to join a global higher education community, the government must not interfere with the university's fundamental mission of advancing knowledge. Academic freedom "is the main reason for opening a university", Hoat recalls telling Thiep (personal communication with DVH, April 20, 2017).

We begin our chapter with this anecdote to underscore three key themes in our examination of the role U.S. higher education policies and practices may have played on higher education reform in the Socialist Republic of Vietnam: (1) that academic freedom represents a core value of U.S. higher education but appears to conflict with Vietnam's socialist tradition favouring state interventions; (2) that Vietnamese society has a long history of adapting foreign ideas to suit its purposes; and (3) that the experiences of Vietnamese scholars who were trained in the United States may provide useful insights into how best to resolve conflicting views about academic freedom in a local context. We draw in part from the literature on academic freedom and public documents related to Vietnam's higher education policy. We also draw from the personal experiences of two figures, Hoat and Thiep, who are familiar with the trajectory of Vietnam's higher education system since *Doi Moi*. Their accounts, conducted in a series of separate interviews between 2014 and 2019, fill in gaps around the direction Vietnam has chosen to take.

An increasingly interconnected global higher education landscape has drawn attention to a need for some common understanding of academic freedom, which scholars agree is essential to the work of the university (Altbach, 2009, 2015). As Kerr (1990) has noted, "institutions of higher education are inherently international institutions devoted ... to universal learning (but) they are still situated in a world of nation-states" (p. 18). There is no consensus, whether among political leaders of nation-states, university administrations, or individual scholars (Akerlind & Kayrooz, 2003), on its parameters, its limits, or how those limits are to be determined. Altbach (2009) argues that "a new, and probably more delimited, understanding of academic freedom is needed" (p. 2) that can accommodate variations in local practices. Tierney and Lanford (2014) call for disputes to be resolved at a transnational level. Some scholars suggest indicators of academic freedom could be linked to global rankings

(Grimm & Saliba, 2017; Hoffmann & Kinzelbach, 2018) as an incentive for nation-states, including Vietnam (see Hayden and Le-Nguyen, Chapter 2), that use rankings to benchmark their progress.

## 11.2 DEFINITIONS AND BACKGROUND

In 1997, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation's (UNESCO) issued its Recommendation Concerning the Status of Higher Education Teaching Personnel (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, 1997), which sought to establish a standard on which its 185 member states (including Vietnam) could agree. The recommendation defines academic freedom as:

*the right, without constriction by prescribed doctrine, to freedom of teaching and discussion, freedom in carrying out research and disseminating and publishing the results thereof, freedom to express freely their opinion about the institution or system in which they work, freedom from institutional censorship and freedom to participate in professional or representative academic bodies.*  
(para. 4)

UNESCO also identifies institutional autonomy as a “necessary precondition” (para. 9) to guarantee these rights, and shared governance and tenure as two indicators of academic freedom. This interpretation, which reflects primarily a Western knowledge tradition (Zha, 2012), might more accurately be described as normative than empirically derived (Marginson, 2014). A wave of nationalism in recent years has seen a scaling back of academic freedom in many countries (Altbach, 2015), including Hungary (Ignatieff, 2018), Turkey (Aktas, Nilsson, & Borell, 2018), Egypt (Holmes & Aziz, 2019), and the United States (e.g. Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations, U.S. Senate, 2019; Zengerle, 2019). Marginson (2014) suggests that “any world-wide approach to academic freedom would need to combine a universal element with space for context-specific elements” (p. 26). An understanding of how academic freedom is practised in the United States, whose top research universities enjoy a global reputation as “exemplars of ideal practice” (Marginson, 2008, p. 311), provides a starting point for examining its influence on higher education in Vietnam. More than any other country, the U.S. higher education system is independent from the government (Eckel & King, 2011).

### 11.2.1 *Academic Freedom in the United States*

Academic freedom can be traced to twelfth-century Europe, when the charter of the University of Bologna guaranteed the “unhindered passage” (Norman, n.d.) of traveling scholars across territorial borders. U.S. higher education draws from European and especially nineteenth-century German traditions (Altbach, 2009, 2015), which protects scholars within their field of expertise. In the twentieth century, that boundary extended into the public sphere (Altbach, 2015) so that faculty took on a role of social critic. The American Association of University Professors (AAUP, n.d.) was founded in 1915 for the purpose of protecting faculty in this context.

Donoghue (2009) describes the AAUP’s earliest declarations as an “idealist vision” (p. 605) that bestowed on all faculty the right to free expression “without the warranty of professional task or acknowledged expertise” (p. 604). In 1940, it defined the parameters of tenure, awarded after completion of a probationary period during which aspiring scholars must build a record of teaching and research that demonstrates their eligibility for the protections of academic freedom. AAUP in 1970 incorporated “interpretive comments” (para. 5), describing the 1940 document as a set of norms flexible enough to provide guidance in changing times and circumstances. It again narrowed the parameters under which academic freedom protections can be applied, noting that teachers “should be careful not to introduce into their teaching controversial matter which has no relation to their subject” (AAUP, n.d., “Academic Freedom”, para. 2).

The legal test for academic freedom is determined by the U.S. Supreme Court. In a landmark 1957 case, the Court upheld the right of faculty to challenge social structures, stating that the pursuit of knowledge “cannot flourish in an atmosphere of suspicion and distrust” (*Sweezy v. New Hampshire*, 1957). A decade later, the justices affirmed that academic freedom “is of transcendent value to all of us” (*Keyishian v. Board of Regents*, 1967), and described the university as a

*... ‘marketplace of ideas.’ The Nation’s future depends upon leaders trained through wide exposure to that robust exchange of ideas which discovers truth ‘out of a multitude of tongues, [rather] than through any kind of authoritative selection.’* (*Keyishian v. Board of Regents*, 1967)

Yet even among scholars, interpretations of academic freedom remain highly contested. The National Association of Scholars, founded in 1987 by a group of politically conservative faculty, for example, argues that the AAUP fails to promote the robust debate that the Court encouraged. A study involving more than 150 scholars affiliated with Australian universities found a broad spectrum of definitions of academic freedom that located a tension between free expression and social responsibility (Akerlind & Kayrooz, 2003).

### 11.2.2 *The Evolution of Thinking About Academic Freedom in Vietnam*

Tran and Marginson (2014) describe an ethos of “flexibility, practicality, and mobility” (p. 3) in Vietnamese society borne of a long history of foreign domination. In their analysis of Vietnamese folk tales, Vuong et al. (2018) conclude that the agility with which Vietnamese integrate conflicting values drawn from Confucianism, Daoism, and Buddhism into local practices “might be the reason behind the country’s quick and flexible adoption of, and adaptation to, new ideas, be it religions, languages, or even ideology” (p. 12). This openness to learning, whether from friend or foe, is sometimes referred to as Vietnamisation (e.g. Jamieson, 1995; Nguyen, 2015; Pham & Fry, 2004a). A prominent and oft-cited symbol of Vietnamisation can be found inside the Temple of Literature, a peaceful respite in downtown Hanoi where schoolchildren each year pay tribute to Confucius, the Chinese philosopher whom it honours. The Temple, established during the Ly Dynasty in 1076, is considered the first university in Vietnam and drew from Confucian traditions introduced during China’s tenth-century rule, until 938 AD, over Vietnam. The traditional Chinese university “possessed neither autonomy nor academic freedom equivalent to the Western model” (Nguyen, citing Hayhoe, 2011, p. 127), though Chinese imperial law recognised that Daoism and Buddhism, both of which are major influences in Vietnam (e.g. Ngoc, 2006, 2016; Vuong et al., 2018), emphasise “the independent exploration of knowledge” (Li, 2019, p. 5). Confucian philosophy, which emphasises education for self-development, knowledge enhancement, and moral awareness (Pham & Fry, 2004b, p. 302), has had a lasting impact on Vietnam. Confucian scholars were viewed as scholar-officials, “expected to combine the roles of acquiring knowledge, cultivating morality, and managing the state”

(Zha, 2012, p. 213). An appreciation for the traditions of Confucian education, and especially respect for teachers, remains strong in Vietnam today, as have the pedagogical traditions of memorisation and exams.

Another expression of Vietnamisation can be seen during the French colonial period beginning in the mid-1800s. The French insisted that Vietnamese learn to read and write using a Romanized alphabet rather than Chinese characters. While the French sought to educate Vietnamese only enough to better control them, Vietnamese intellectuals, eager to break from both Vietnam's Confucian heritage and French imperialism, seized on the opportunity to expand literacy in Vietnam with the new language, *quoc ngu*, which was easier to learn than Chinese characters (Hoanh, 2015; Truong, 1973). In 1904, an anonymous author published a body of literature known as *Van Minh Tan Hoc Sach* (the Civilisation of New Policy and Learning), which became the primary text for *Dong Kinh Nghia Thuc* (Tonkin Free School), a Vietnamese-founded school modelled on a Japanese school (Bao, 2019). The school offered education to anyone who wanted it. The French shut the school down within months, but a reform movement had taken hold. As Khoi (2016) writes, "Throughout the urban and rural areas, underground flows of ethnic and democratic ideologies have been opened up" (para. 1). Khoi also notes the impact of Western concepts developed during the Enlightenment in Europe. Pham Quynh, an influential journalist and reformer during the period of French colonisation, urged Vietnamese to "absorb science and Western civilisation" (para. 13), believing that doing so would be the key to Vietnam's liberation.

Perhaps no historical figure better reflects the embodiment of traditional Vietnamese values than Ho Chi Minh, the revolutionary who led the struggle for Vietnam's independence from France in 1945. Tran and Marginson (2014) make that connection in this way:

*His life exhibits both Vietnamese patriotism and globally mobile, flexible and cosmopolitan being. Though being brought up in a family with a strong Confucian tradition, Ho Chi Minh was able to identify not only the positive aspects of the tradition, but also aspects that were outdated or were not compatible with the patriotic pathway to the independence of Vietnam. He was determined to go abroad so as to enhance his understanding of the world and better develop a suitable agenda to protect the nation against colonialism and foreign domination. That agenda drew flexibly on both nationalism and socialism. ... Ho Chi Minh was able to flexibly draw on and harmonise*

*different principles including communism and socialism ... and Oriental ideologies including Confucianism, Taoism and Vietnamese traditional values. All played a role in developing his guideline for national liberation.*  
(pp. 17–18)

Ho's victory speech in 1945 borrowed from both the French and U.S. declarations of independence. His executive order No. 43, signed 10 October 1945, was intended to set up a fund for university autonomy (Ngo, 2015, p. 453). As political tensions between North and South Vietnam escalated, however, Ho accepted support from the Soviet Union and China, a move that would shape Vietnam's political philosophy in the coming decades (Goscha, 2017). As leader of North Vietnam, Ho would draw from Marxist–Leninist ideology. Education was seen as serving “the political policy of the Party and the Government” (Hoat, 1971, p. 190). A new generation of intellectuals was expected to be “totally loyal to socialism” (p. 191). In a 1956 speech in Hanoi, Ho urged professors of political science to cultivate a righteous mind—“a mind that realised that, although freedom of thought was necessary, ‘after everyone’s view has been expressed and the truth has been established, freedom of thought turns into freedom to obey the truth’” (as cited in Hoat, 1971, p. 192). This interpretation represents the larger tensions that ultimately funnelled North and South Vietnam into a war fuelled by U.S. military might.

In South Vietnam, the U.S. government was promoting its view that higher education contributes to democracy by remaining independent from the federal government. Paradoxically, as Elkind (2016) points out, U.S. higher education supported U.S. foreign policy interests in Vietnam. The U.S. government sponsored scholarships for Vietnamese students to study in the United States. It also dispatched U.S. academics and university administrators to Saigon to advise on higher education (Reich, 2003). One of the earliest examples was the Michigan State University Advisory Group, which saw its mission as that of modernising a “backward” society (Elkind, 2016, p. 20). Its efforts were frequently frustrated by Vietnamese leaders, who “attempted to muzzle any negative reports (leading to) battles over academic freedom and the proper role of American advisers in Vietnam” (Elkind, 2016, p. 59). The relationship would end unceremoniously in 1962 (Elkind, 2016).

Another higher education team came from what was then known as Wisconsin State University at Stevens Point. (This is the same university Ngo refers to in Chapter 7.) By 1973, the team had helped to establish two public universities and three community colleges in South Vietnam (Reich, 2003), and offered assistance to existing institutions. In a 1971 USAID report, Thich Minh Chau, the rector of Van Hanh University in Saigon, welcomed support from “any system likely to be of any help” (Hoshall, 1971, p. 58), but also noted that the university would fashion its own solutions inspired by multiple sources:

*We do not follow the French system, we do not follow the British system, we do not follow the American system. We sit down together, our faculty members, to discuss and to try to find out which things are suitable for Van Hanh University, our students and our country.* (Hoshall, 1971, p. 58)

Some critics inside and outside of Vietnam argued at the time that many U.S. efforts in South Vietnam fostered an unhealthy dependency on American higher education (Pham & Fry, 2004a). One U.S. review of the Wisconsin team report described it as an “American value-laden document full of generally untested assumptions about education and development” (Reich, 2003, p.158). Hoat (1971), who examined the U.S. reports as part of his doctoral studies, concluded that the recommendations drew “heavily from the American experience without any serious consideration of the cultural or historical background of Vietnam” (p. 286). Present-day concerns such as those raised by Ngo in Chapter 7 echo those of Ton-That Thien (1973), a public intellectual, who worried that the U.S. team’s recommendations, if implemented, could “tear the Vietnamese social fabric to pieces” (p. 39):

*The Americans have been, consciously or unconsciously, teaching the Vietnamese to behave like people of a consumption, individual-orientated, and permissive society. This is something Vietnam cannot afford ... What Vietnam badly needs an ideal America cannot teach the Vietnamese, still less impose on them.* (p. 39)

Two years later, on 30 April 1975, the Democratic Republic of Vietnam in the North entered the Independence Palace in the Republic of Vietnam in the South, bringing an end to the American war. A year after that, a reunified Vietnam dismantled South Vietnam’s colleges and



universities, replacing them with a Soviet-style higher education system being used in the North and sending Hoat and other U.S.-trained intellectuals to re-education camps.

A decade later, as the Soviet Union's economy began to crumble, the Socialist Republic of Vietnam again looked abroad for support, including to the United States. Its invitation to negotiate diplomatic relations with the United States grew out of the Communist Party of Vietnam's (CPV) rollout in 1986 of *Doi Moi*, an expansive plan to overhaul its economic policies. In 1991, The 7th National Congress of the CPV introduced the term "socialist-oriented market economy" as part of its strategy, signaling its desire to strike a "delicate balance" (Bui, 2016, p. 648) between neoliberal, market-based economic principles and its Soviet-influenced political philosophy of state control. Thiep, as head of MOET's higher education division, was charged with developing a plan to restructure Vietnam's university system. The next section draws in part from interviews with Thiep (2014, 2019), conducted primarily in Vietnamese with translation provided by one co-author, who served as MOET's higher education specialist during Thiep's tenure and attended the 1990 meeting described in this chapter's opening paragraph.

### 11.2.3 *The U.S. Influence on Higher Education in Vietnam*

Thiep (2005) describes the U.S. influence on higher education in Vietnam as stretching over three periods, demarcated by the status of diplomatic relations (p. 9). Before 1975, the influence in South Vietnam was direct but the relationship with U.S. government officials and aid workers was not particularly harmonious. Thiep describes the second period as centring on his 1990 meeting with Hoat, who had been released from a prison camp in 1989 as part of U.S.–Vietnam diplomatic negotiations. At this point, Thiep and his staff wanted to learn about U.S. higher education, but used discretion because U.S. sanctions against Vietnam were still in place. In reports to Party officials, Thiep mentioned neither Hoat nor the United States; he instead described the plan (not inaccurately) as drawing from a model that was gaining traction in Southeast Asia (personal communication with LQT, April 14, 2014).

Hoat's contributions based on his U.S. experiences would become the foundation for higher education reform in Vietnam over the next several years. In 1993, MOET consolidated several Soviet-style

mono-disciplinary institutions into two national multi-disciplinary universities, one each in Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City, and similarly created three regional universities (Thiep, 2005). The concept of institutional autonomy was mentioned for the first time in CPV documents in 1993 (Dang, 2013, p.112), and new curriculum guidelines emphasised a general education for the first two years of undergraduate study. By 1995, about 20 non-public universities had been established in Vietnam. (For more on this sector, see Chau, Chapter 8.) When U.S.–Vietnam diplomatic relations normalised in 1995, the U.S. influence was considered by Thiep to be, for the first time, both direct and openly welcomed. With the consensus of the government and the national higher education community, Vietnam introduced a number of other reforms that drew on U.S. traditions, including community colleges and an accreditation system. However, academic freedom remained unaddressed (personal communication with LQT, April 14, 2014).

Meanwhile, in another precursor to reconciliation, the United States established a Fulbright academic exchange programme in Vietnam, with the first student cohort announced in 1992 (Crossette, 1992). Thiep, who left MOET in 1998 to teach at Vietnam National University, spent the 2001–2002 academic year as a Fulbright Scholar at the State University of New York at Buffalo. Out of that came a book about U.S. higher education, published in 2005 in Vietnamese and edited by Thiep, who also contributed an introductory chapter titled “The Relevance to Vietnam of Higher Education in America”. While no chapter was devoted specifically to academic freedom, related or enabling features such as institutional autonomy and governance are addressed in several chapters, and at length in one. The strength of U.S. higher education, Thiep (2005) wrote, is “maintained mainly by internal linking forces, not by directly imposed external powers” (p. 14). If anything, Thiep saw academic freedom as a long-term project, one that would require mechanisms to support institutional autonomy and accountability (Thiep, 2016). Over the years, Thiep would advocate for legislative and regulatory reforms aimed at building public confidence in the processes of institutional self-governance (Hayden & Thiep, 2007).

Also in 2005, Thiep was tapped by MOET to develop its Higher Education Reform Agenda (HERA), a proposal that would become the foundation for the government’s Resolution 14 (Vietnamese Government, 2005). Described as both highly innovative (Dang, 2013) and perhaps overly ambitious (Nghị, 2010), HERA and Resolution 14

aspired to redefine the relationship between the state and its system of higher education (Hayden & Thiep, 2007). Though neither document offered prescriptions for implementation, their emphases on institutional autonomy were seen as “highly significant” (Hayden & Thiep, 2007, p. 73), given the CPV’s long-standing philosophy of central planning. Vietnam’s higher education law of 2012 links autonomy in teaching and research to quality assurance but offers little in terms of regulatory implications. Meanwhile, other policy documents made clear Vietnam’s intent to draw from models in other countries. See Hayden and Le-Nguyen (Chapter 2) for a deeper examination of HERA and Vietnam’s higher education policy internationalisation agenda.

#### 11.2.4 *Pathways to Reform*

The Vietnamese government has taken three general approaches toward preparing its higher education system for a global economy: It seeks development assistance through transnational organisations such as the World Bank; it invites bilateral and multilateral cooperation with foreign governments; and it seeks to build up its teaching staff with Vietnamese lecturers who earned their advanced degrees from highly ranked universities overseas. In keeping with its national character, Vietnam has reached out to many countries, including France, Russia, Japan, Australia, and China. Yet, as Ngo demonstrates in Chapter 7, U.S. higher education has attracted some of the most critical scrutiny.

**Transnational initiatives.** In 1994, the World Bank, reversing its long-held philosophy that higher education is a luxury item in developing countries, launched the first in a series of reports declaring higher education reform as critical to the economic competitiveness of low-income countries (World Bank, 1994). Another pivotal moment came in 1995, when the newly established World Trade Organisation negotiated the General Agreement on Trade in Services (GATS), which made it easier for wealthier, mostly Western industrialised countries to export higher education services to developing countries (e.g. Portnoi, Rust, & Bagley, 2010). In some eyes, GATS reinforced an already-held contention that Western approaches reflect universal values and best practices—in short, that “West is Best” (e.g. Barnawi, 2018; Phan, 2017; Trahar, 2011). The same year (1995), Vietnam joined the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, signalling its alignment with the interests and practices of neighbouring countries. The World Bank would go

on to establish several higher education projects in Vietnam. Dang's (2009) analysis of the bank's role in Vietnam's higher education reform describes a strategy of instilling, through conferences and the like, its "competitive ethos" (p. 83) in Vietnamese thought leaders, who "then became the owners and promoters of the idea to build world-class universities" (p. 83). Moreover, although Dang (2009) found no direct link between the bank's education loans and the participation of U.S. higher education in bank projects, she suggests a prevailing sentiment within the higher education community that the two were nevertheless intertwined:

*... little was known about what was communicated through the World Bank and what was planned by the country's leaders at the highest level. All of a sudden, seeking assistance and support from leading American universities to establish world-class universities in Vietnam was announced as one of the key activities of the first official visit by Vietnam's then Prime Minister, Mr. Phan Van Khai, to the United States on the occasion of the 10th anniversary of Vietnam-U.S. normalized relationship. (p. 79)*

While similar joint projects with governments of Germany, France, Japan, and Russia, to name a few, would also emerge, Dang's analysis suggests the U.S. relationship was especially noteworthy.

**International cooperation.** The U.S. relationship with Vietnam required a strategy that recognised the U.S. government's hands-off approach to its universities. As a result, the U.S. Mission primarily facilitated university-to-university collaborations. The Advanced Programme, launched in 2006, was intended to elevate the global reputation of select Vietnamese universities. During a pilot stage, MOET granted nine Vietnamese universities permission to borrow curricula, including course design, teaching methodologies, and assessment methods, from U.S. university partners in certain disciplines. At the announcement of the initiative, Vietnam's prime minister described U.S. universities as "number ONE in science and technology" (as cited in Dang, 2009, p. 78). By 2018, the Advanced Programme had expanded to include 34 university partnerships, of which just five involved non-U.S. institutions. The Advanced Programme has received mixed reviews from Vietnamese scholars. Nguyen and Tran (2017), for example, suggest a "possible mismatch between the philosophy underpinning these foreign-born programs and Vietnamese cultures, values and context" (p. 28). Ngo (2015) likens the Advanced Programme to Special Free Economic Zones, in

which business and trade laws are exempt from those affecting the rest of the country. Through the Advanced Programme, he says, “the essential ideas of academic freedom (can) be realized” (p. 442).

While the Advanced Programme may offer a back-door approach to academic freedom, perhaps the most direct U.S. leverage in this regard is Fulbright University Vietnam (FUV), modelled after the U.S. liberal arts tradition. It is funded in part by the U.S. government on condition that the institution, among other things, establishes “a policy of academic freedom and prohibits the censorship of dissenting or critical views” (United States Department of State, Foreign Operations, and Related Programs Appropriations Act, 2015). The United States Agency for International Development (USAID, 2018) says FUV aims to model U.S. values such as academic freedom, meritocracy, and transparency. FUV has enjoyed high-profile support from both the U.S. and Vietnamese government but one key obstacle has been FUV’s “philosophical incompatibility” (Tu-Anh, 2018) with Vietnam’s formal higher education system.

**Individual level.** In addition to Thiep, other Vietnamese alumni of the Fulbright exchange programmes have had an impact on Vietnam’s higher education reform. Nguyen Thien Nhan, who in 1993 studied public policy at the University of Oregon, in 2006 was appointed Minister of Education, and a year later approached U.S. higher education leaders about the potential for establishing an American-style university in Vietnam (Wasley, 2007). FUV’s president, Dam Bich Thuy, pursued an MBA degree in 1994 from the University of Pennsylvania using her Fulbright award. Another exchange programme, the Vietnam Education Foundation, funded more than 600 Vietnamese graduate students pursuing graduate degrees at U.S. universities in the fields of science, technology, engineering, and math (Petrochenkov, Bui, Nguyen, & Dang, 2016). Another initiative, supported by USAID, trained Vietnamese lecturers on how to teach workplace skills (Higher Engineering Education Alliance Program, n.d.).

More broadly, MOET has continued Vietnam’s tradition of encouraging overseas study. Between 2012 and 2016, through the government’s Project 911, 3800 Vietnamese students received funding to pursue a graduate degree overseas on the condition that they return to teach at Vietnamese universities (Vietnam News, 2017). That programme, which was cancelled in 2017, failed to meet target enrolment goals, though many Vietnamese scholars are pursuing their education abroad.

One recent study suggests that foreign-educated university lecturers see themselves as reformers (Pham, 2019). Another study (Tran, Ngo, Nguyen, & Dang, 2017) concludes that foreign-trained faculty are experimenting with new policies and practices, many of them designed to encourage transparency and free expression. The authors note that modifications were “happening on the surface only” (p. 1911). But their findings nevertheless suggest these foreign-educated academicians have the potential to be a “dominant force” (p. 1913) in shaping a higher education system that is appropriate for Vietnam.

### 11.3 CONCLUSION

The bilateral initiatives described in this chapter identify a number of avenues through which Vietnamese educators and researchers are exposed to U.S. higher education policies and practices. At the level of national policy, the Politburo, the highest-level decision-making body in Vietnam, has continued to emphasise the authority of the state in higher education governance (e.g. Anh & Hayden, 2017; Hoang, 2018; Pham, 2018). One example of its perspective can be found in its long-standing requirement that all university students take a series of courses using a curriculum developed by the government, in Marxism–Leninism, Ho Chi Minh Thought and the history of Communism. Another example, in 2018, involved the expulsion of a well-known retired academic from the CPV for publishing Vietnamese translations of books such as John Dewey’s *Democracy and Education* and Noam Chomsky’s *Understanding Power*.

Yet neither of these examples, taken together, offers a comprehensive picture of the state of academic freedom in Vietnam. The topic is openly discussed, and its purpose publicly acknowledged (e.g. Hoang, 2018; Thiep, 2016). In his book on free speech in Vietnam, Kerkvliet (2019) describes a government today that appears more tolerant than international indices of human rights or policy documents would suggest. Some evidence is emerging to suggest that change affecting academic freedom at the institutional level is either possible or already taking place, perhaps traceable in some way to the experiences of Vietnamese lecturers who were trained overseas. A fuller understanding of academic freedom would examine the “everyday working conditions of those who make

up academia—lecturers, students, and independent and mid-career researchers—(whose voices) are fairly absent from the debates” (Grimm & Saliba, 2017, p. 47). Ngo (Chapter 7) rightly states that foreign approaches must be considered with care. Our examination suggests that Vietnamese academicians educated at U.S. universities may be in the best position to weigh in on such concerns. Their experiences could offer valuable insights into how U.S. policy and practice may have contributed to higher education reform in Vietnam and inform the larger international discussion of how a global understanding of academic freedom in local context might be developed. Given Vietnam’s long history of creatively adapting foreign ideas, an examination of how, if at all, the concept of academic freedom is being interpreted, or reinterpreted in a Vietnamese context shows promise of yielding fruitful results.

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# Impact of the New Southbound Policies in International Students on Taiwan: An Exploratory Study from Vietnamese Oversea Students

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## 12.1 INTRODUCTION

Recruiting and maintaining international students have been regarded as a strategic component of the current New Southbound Policy and the previous Southbound Policy of Taiwan's government. The number of students from (New) Southbound-influenced countries (e.g. Malaysia, Vietnam, Indonesia, Thailand, India) that come to Taiwan for

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education and employment has reached 4.1 million in 2018 (Study in Taiwan, 2018). In the first half of 2018 alone, Taiwan attracted more than 41,000 international students from its strategic southern countries (Joseph, 2018). This growing number of international students is expected to become a crucial factor in the development of the higher education system in Taiwan (Roberts, Chou, & Ching, 2010).

In recent years, there have been several studies investigating the results of the New Southbound Policy in Taiwan in terms of economic and political impact (for instance, see Hickey & Niou, 2017; Hsu, 2017; Jing, 2016). However, we still have little understanding of the impacts each of these policies has created on the international education sector.

More particularly, relatively little research has been carried out on Vietnamese students in Taiwan despite the fact that among the countries listed in the New Southbound Policy, Vietnam has the second-largest group of international students in Taiwan. Despite having a smaller number than Malaysian students, who are most able to study in Chinese-taught courses and are Chinese origin, Vietnam is the country with most English speaking students in Taiwan. Accordingly, in terms of the total number of non-citizen students in Taiwan, Vietnam ranks third with Malaysia ranked second, and China ranked first (Ministry of Education, 2018, 2019).

In this chapter, we will explore the reasoning behind the decisions to study in Taiwan of Vietnamese students, who traditionally prefer European, North American, or Oceanian countries for higher education. In addition, we will proceed to examine how the efforts of the Taiwanese government in promoting the Southbound policy affect the decision to study in Taiwan of Vietnamese students.

Given the rise of Asia as a new destination of international students over the previous decade (e.g. see Kondakci, Bedenlier, & Zawacki-Richter, 2018; Lavakare, 2018), this chapter contributes to the extant literature by focusing specifically on a sending–hosting

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relationship, i.e. Taiwan and Vietnam. The findings of the study also provide implications for policymakers and university administrators in Taiwan, Vietnam, and other countries within the region.

## 12.2 LITERATURE REVIEW

### *12.2.1 The Predominant Position of the USA, Australia, and the European Union's Countries in the International Higher Education Sector*

Traditionally, developed countries in the Western world, such as the United States and the United Kingdom, are often considered as the ideal destinations for international students from developing countries such as Vietnam (e.g. Pham, Lai, & Vuong, 2019). According to Roberts et al. (2010), the United States has the most significant number of international students, followed by the United Kingdom, Germany, France, Australia, and Japan. In the top 21 host countries that attract most international students, 12 countries belong to the European Union. These European countries take three-quarters of the annual cohort of international students, and this figure is 25% higher than the United States' international student population. Therefore, in the last decades, the international education sector has been dominated mostly by the USA, European nations, and several other developed countries (Roberts et al., 2010).

### *12.2.2 Asia as a New Hub of International Students*

In recent years, it is observed that the overwhelming dominance of developed countries in the higher education sector has been undermined. By improving the quality of its education systems, promoting brands, and providing attractive career prospects, Asia is becoming an appealing destination for international students (Chan, 2012) and a fierce competitor of Europe and the United States in the international higher education market (De Wit, 2017). Initially, the competition with the European nations, the USA, and Australia focused on Asian countries with more developed socio-economic infrastructures. For example, Japan always appears in the top countries that attract international students in recent years (Chan, 2012). Korea has also become an emerging actor in the international education market. According to the World Education News

and Review (Mani, 2018), the number of international students in 2018 reported by the Korean government reached a record high of 142,205, an increase of 70% compared to 2014. Furthermore, the world has also witnessed the role of several developing Asian countries. In recent years, according to the Asian-Pacific Association for International Education, Malaysia is becoming a new prominent destination for international students and is expected to become a global major education hub (see Yahaya, 2018).

### *12.2.3 The Underlying Motivations for the Decision to Study Abroad*

In order to understand the growing interest in studying in Asian countries, especially Taiwan, we must understand the factors that contribute to the decision-making process of international students.

By looking at motivational and environmental influences, various studies have created frameworks that seek to explain the mechanism behind the educational choices of international students. For example, Mazzarol and Soutar (2002) introduced a “push-pull” model that motivates international students to study abroad. The model considered domestic sources of motivation that “push” students to go offshore as well as attractive international opportunities that “pull” them to study abroad (Pham, 2018).

In addition to this “push-pull” model, there are several alternative external factors that explain international students’ choice of a study destination. For example, when students consider studying abroad, they often consider cost issues, such as living expenses, travel costs, and social costs (Bourke, 2000). Also, the cost and value of studying abroad can be viewed from both social and economic perspectives. Socially, studying abroad and meeting with peers from different nationalities provide students the chance to acquire cross-cultural skills, which might greatly influence their future career prospects. Meanwhile, the availability of part-time or well-paid jobs (Relyea, Cocchiara, & Studdard, 2008) might provide more financial incentives for the decision to study abroad of international students.

Furthermore, Simpson and Tan (2009) found that for many higher education institutions in developed nations, the exchange between international students and universities is similar to a buyer–seller relationship. That is, on the one hand, international students and their families are willing to pay a high cost to study in a foreign country that offers good



opportunities for professional and academic advancement. On the other hand, as service providers, universities, strive to increase their appeal to international students and measure their level of success in business terms. As a result, international education has become a critical business as it can significantly profit the host country.

Another contributing factor is the overall level of general knowledge and awareness about the host country, which is influenced by the overall availability of information about the potential destination country and how easily students can obtain such information (Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002). The destination's reputation for quality and the recognition of its qualifications in the student's home country are also parts of this factor.

Recommendations from friends and relatives are also an essential and informative source of knowledge for international students. Students are heavily influenced by the perspectives and experiences of graduates who have completed their study abroad. María, Sánchez, and Cerviño (2006) found out that to many students faced with the decision to study abroad, opinions from friends and family members who studied overseas and professor's recommendations are the most valuable source of information.

The environment of the host country also plays an essential role in attracting international students. Mazzarol and Soutar (2002) found that the distance between the student's home country and their study destination is another factor that can motivate students to study abroad. However, Bodycott (2009) and María et al. (2006) added that physical climate, ambient noise, air quality as well as lifestyle, crime rate, overall safeness, international integration, and racial discrimination are also critical factors to students' decision to study overseas.

Studying overseas is the best way that students can achieve a reputable degree while improving their language skills (Sánchez, Fornerino, & Zhang, 2006). However, some might consider the language barrier a significant obstacle when choosing a country to study. In either way, the availability of languages spoken in the host country can be a crucial factor for international students.

Overall, the detailed categorisations of both internal and external factors in the literature have demonstrated the diversity in value attribution and cost-benefit evaluation of international students. However, as the cultural background of the decision-maker and the host country are accountable for the variability in the outcomes of the decision-making process (Mau, 2000), there is little research on this aspect. Furthermore, most of the research conducted on this topic has been primarily

descriptive and provides inadequate explanations for the interaction between the environmental and motivational factors during the process of considering a study destination. Thus, it is reasonable to approach this heavily saturated topic with a qualitative approach.

## 12.2.4 *An Overview of Taiwan's New Southbound Policies*

### 12.2.4.1 *The New Southbound Policy*

First initiated by the Taiwan government in 1994 under the regime of President Lee Teng-hui, the Southbound Policy continued in the next generations of President like Chen Shui-bian (2000) and Ma Ying-jeou (2008). However, the results yielded by this policy were not as high as expected (Yan, 2016). In 2016, Ms. Tsai Ing-wen, during her presidential campaign, renamed the “Southbound” to “New Southbound” to enhance cooperation and exchange between Taiwan and 18 countries in Southeast and South Asia, along with Australia and New Zealand. As an enhanced version of the “old” Southbound endeavour, the New Southbound Policy puts a stronger emphasis on education, talent exchange, resource sharing, and regional integration, as well as trade and economic cooperation. In terms of attracting talent, the policy emphasises “people” as the core philosophy. President Tsai Ing-wen aims to raise the capability of young scholars, students, and the bilateral industrial workforce through international exchanges and to share talented resources with partner countries (The New Southbound Talent Development Program, 2019).

To these ends, the New Southbound focuses on strengthening Taiwanese scholarships to attract talents from ASEAN and South Asia. Furthermore, the policy also strives to attract more international students by connecting with Taiwanese industrial companies to provide more vocational opportunities for graduate students. The current Taiwanese government, through this policy, also encourages Taiwanese universities to open branch schools or special overseas classes to build promising career prospects for their students.

### 12.2.4.2 *Policies on International Higher Education*

Overall, the New Southbound Policy is divided into three main parts: Enhancing Human Capital, Financial Service, and Industrial Service

Programs (Bureau of Foreign Trade, 2016b). In the scope of this chapter, we will mainly discuss the first part of New Southbound Policy, which focuses on strengthening the human resource (Bureau of Foreign Trade, 2016a). In Table 12.1, we represent core components of New Southbound Policy, which focuses, to a larger or lesser extent, on attracting international students.

Generally, Taiwan regards outstanding students as the key component of its industrial development. Thus, with the hope of attracting more talented individuals from the South to study, live, and work in Taiwan, the Taiwanese government has actively implemented the New Southbound Policy to enhance bilateral and multilateral exchanges.

Since 2016, with the introduction of the Human Capital Program under the agenda of the New Southbound Policy, the Taiwanese government has made continuous and generous efforts to foster international talent exchange. Besides that, it has also expanded the window of educational opportunity to draw more students, industry professionals, and scholars from Southeast Asia, South Asia, Australia, and New Zealand as well as those who could fulfil Taiwan's industrial needs. Courses and programmes that focus on academia-industry cooperation, training camps for international youth, and service from employment agencies are some of the added benefits being provided to students in order to maximise their potential.

Under these New Southbound programmes, the Taiwanese government encourages universities and colleges to set up more campuses, courses, and preparatory programmes for international students. The New Southbound also offers elementary and junior high school language courses for new immigrants and supports universities to cultivate more Southeast Asian language experts and regional trade professionals (Office of Trade Negotiations, 2016).

In order to foster domestic human resources, the “Domestic Talent Incubation” programme provides outstanding Taiwanese students the chance to study or to receive professional training in New Southbound influenced countries, including Southeast and South Asian Countries, as well as in Australia, and New Zealand.

Indeed, the New Southbound Policy not only benefits Taiwanese students but also provides more opportunities for international students to study in Taiwan. For example, the Taiwan Scholarship granted

**Table 12.1** Programmes relating to international students under the New Southbound Policy

<i>Programme name</i>	<i>Host organisation</i>
<i>A. Domestic Talent Incubation—Outstanding Taiwanese students studying for degrees or receiving professional training in Southeast and South Asian Countries as well as New Zealand and Australia</i>	
A1. National scholarship for overseas studies for a higher degree	Ministry of Education
A2. Sponsorship for overseas internships	Ministry of Education
A3. Special programmes for ASEAN language, culture, and business studies	Ministry of Education
A4. Incubation programmes for young specialists in ASEAN and South Asian countries as well as New Zealand and Australia	Ministry of Education
A5. Youth Overseas Peace Corps	Ministry of Education
A6. Assistant programme for youth innovation and venture network aiming at New Southbound Policy target countries	Ministry of Education
A7. Sponsorship for internship in emerging markets	Bureau of Foreign Trade
A8. Talent incubation through industry co-education	Ministry of Economic Affairs
<i>B. Industry-Oriented Human Capital Training Programs</i>	
B1. Multinational enterprise marketing manager training program	Bureau of Foreign Trade
B2. MICE industries (meetings, incentives, conferences, exhibitions) specialist training program	Bureau of Foreign Trade
B3. E-commerce training program	Small and Medium Enterprise Administration
<i>C. Overseas Taiwanese Business Management Improvement Project</i>	
C1. Incubating overseas Taiwanese students from ASEAN countries and matching them with Taiwanese businesses in the area	Oversea Community Affairs Council
<i>D. Talent Matching for Taiwanese Businesses Aiming at ASEAN Markets</i>	
D1. Facilitating Taiwanese businesses recruit overseas Taiwanese students	Oversea Community Affairs Council
D2. Helping overseas Taiwanese students and the next generation of immigrants from ASEAN countries to work with Taiwanese businesses in this region	Oversea Community Affairs Council
<i>E. Contact Taiwan—a web-based talent matching platform</i>	Ministry of Economic Affairs
<i>F. Recruit High-Quality Teachers for Promotion of Traditional Chinese Education and Taiwan Culture in Foreign Countries</i>	Ministry of Education

(continued)

**Table 12.1** (continued)

<i>Programme name</i>	<i>Host organisation</i>
<i>G. Taiwan Host Family Project</i>	Ministry of Education
<i>H. Promoting talent exchange providing more opportunities for students from the target countries to study for a degree in Taiwan or on short term visiting programs</i>	
H1. Taiwan Scholarship	Ministry of Education
H2. Overseas Taiwanese Student Sponsorship	Ministry of Education
H3. Overseas Professional Short Term Study Program	Ministry of Education
H4. Taiwan Fellowship	Ministry of Foreign Affairs
H5. Industrial Cooperative Education for Students from ASEAN and South Asian Countries	Council of Agriculture
H6. Agricultural Professional Visiting and Training Program	Council of Agriculture

Source Bureau of Foreign Trade (2016b)

by the Ministry of Education covers both the tuition fees and monthly stipends for international students. Upon graduation, students will have a chance to work in Taiwan for at least two years (Strong, 2018). The Taiwan Ministry of Education also provides incentives for foreign experts and scholars who show an interest in research topics related to Taiwan, Cross-Strait relations, the Asia–Pacific region, and Sinology, to conduct advanced research at universities or academic institutions in Taiwan.

The educational programme of the New Southbound Policy for international students is extensive. In this chapter, we present an overview table of all related policies and programmes included in the enhancing human capital plan.

Overall, it is clear that the Human Capital Program included in the New Southbound Policy is striving to increase Taiwan’s bilateral exchange with other countries. As both the Financial Service, and Industrial Service Programs also provide additional benefits for career development, the New Southbound Policy should be an attractive opportunity for international students considering their study destinations.

### 12.3 METHODS

A qualitative approach, which is often utilised to discover hidden insights, was employed by the authors. Specifically, 21 Vietnamese students in Taiwan or Vietnamese alumni of Taiwanese universities were invited for an in-depth interview that lasted between 30 and 60 minutes. Interviews were undertaken via face-to-face in Taiwan or via online instruments such as Skype or Zoom as decided by the respondents. Table 12.2 represents the demographic profiles of the research participants.

The interview started with a quick warm-up by discussing the general purpose of the study. In the next section of the interview, the participants were asked to name the most essential reasons that contributed to their decision to study and work in Taiwan. In order to provide more insight, we explored the participants' perspectives on how the previous Southbound and the current New Southbound Policies has impacted their decision to study in Taiwan. All these recorded interviews were conducted in Vietnamese and then translated into English by the interviewers.

### 12.4 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

#### 12.4.1 *Main Reasons for the Decision to Study in Taiwan*

Overall, the interview procedures revealed five of the most important factors that influence the decision to choose Taiwan by Vietnamese students: (i) the cost of studying abroad; (ii) quality training and

**Table 12.2** Demographic details of the respondents

<i>Demographic profile</i>		<i>Frequency</i>
Gender	Male	7
	Female	14
Age	20–24 years old	2
	25–29 years old	11
	More than 30	8
Education	Master's degree	15
	Doctoral degree	6
Programme	English	20
	Chinese	1
Financial resource	Full scholarship	15
	Half scholarship	3
	Self-funded	3

research environment; (iii) home-host country distance; (iv) living environment; and (v) language.

#### 12.4.1.1 *The Cost of Studying Abroad*

The most critical factor of Vietnamese students when they consider studying overseas is the cost factor. Taiwanese living costs are comparable to Vietnam and much lower than in the US, or EU countries. According to respondent No. 10 (male, age 36, former master's student):

*This is very important because when I spent time studying there (in Taiwan), the cost in Taiwan is almost the same as in Vietnam, so it is very suitable for me. If the cost of living is too high, my financial situation will be affected a lot.*

In addition, the financial consideration when studying abroad was strongly emphasised, especially by students who are married: “*the cost is important because you have to ensure the daily life of the whole family*” (female, age 30, Ph.D. student).

Aligned with financial issues, many participants also mentioned the importance of supportive policies such as the reduced housing costs. Respondent No. 14 (female, age 28, master student) commented:

*...(the) university allows students to rent with only one-third of the normal price; the international students are being treated the same as Taiwanese students, so the fees are reasonable.*

Overall, the main reason that makes Taiwan so attractive to Vietnamese students is low living costs and acceptable tuition fees. As the mean age of first marriage in Vietnam is relatively low  $M= 27.6$  for males and  $M= 23.3$  for females (General Statistic Office of Vietnam, 2018), there are a large number of Master and Ph.D. students in Taiwan who already have to take care of their families. Thus, monetary issues play an important role in the decision-making process of these participants. Living costs are not a problem for students who receive a scholarship, and thus they can focus more on their study. However, even with students who must work part-time, the amount of time consumed for work to cover daily needs is relatively low.

#### 12.4.1.2 *Quality Training and Research Environment*

The capability in research and training of Taiwanese universities is highly appreciated by Vietnamese students. According to respondent No. 21 (female, age 30, Ph.D. student):

*No one can deny that the quality of Taiwanese education is excellent, the educational system of this country is recognized by the whole world, and I am proud to be educated in a highly intellectual environment like this.*

Before deciding to study in Taiwan, Vietnamese students have learned from friends and colleagues about the quality of students' research, the universities, and the value of academic qualifications. According to respondent No. 16 (female, age 30, former master student):

*When I partake in a research exchange program, most of the students and teachers who have studied in Taiwan possess high research capability. Research skills are very important, before going to school, we have researched several options, and many only require coursework, and several credits to graduate, so they are not aware of scientific research methods. However, in Taiwan, we focus on studying, writing theses, and attending specialized seminars.*

In addition to advanced curriculum, the Taiwanese educational system is famous for a developed approach in teaching. In particular, universities have various courses and programmes taught in English, and many Taiwanese professors were trained abroad. Respondent No. 19 (male, age 33, Ph.D. student) concurred:

*The university uses a team of internationally trained staff from the United States, Canada and Australia fluent in English, a clear vision and a different way of teaching. Taiwanese education is similar to Vietnam, but professors here are much more innovative and capable.*

As each of the factors proposed by the interviewers can influence reciprocally, the quality of research and cost considerations illustrate part of the decision-making process of Vietnamese students. Generally, international students place a heavy emphasis on monetary issues. However, as proposed by the buyer–seller relationship (Simpson & Tan, 2009), the level of financial worthiness is only valid when the quality of education is put into consideration.



#### 12.4.1.3 *Home to Host Country Distance*

The geographical distance between Taiwan and Vietnam is relatively close, which is the third most important factor affecting the decision to choose Taiwan of Vietnamese students. A few hours of air travel can allow Vietnamese students to return home during Lunar New year, summer holidays, or on urgent occasions. Moreover, due to the close proximity, travel costs, and airplane tickets for flights between Vietnam and Taiwan are affordable for the limited budgets of Vietnamese students. As stated by respondent No. 7 (female, age 26, master student):

*Before I chose Taiwan, I prefer Canada, but my friends who studied there (Canada) could not visit home once a year, so I did not choose Canada but chose Taiwan.*

The geographical distance also has a close relationship with the studying cost because travelling expenditures might place a heavy financial burden on international students. Indeed, this factor becomes the first priority for students who have the responsibility to take care of their relatives. For example, respondent No. 12 (male, age 34, Ph.D. student):

*My parents are old, my family has few relatives, I want to go home on summer vacations, and I think studying in Taiwan would allow me to go home more easily. When studying for a master's degree, students can ask the professor for about 2 to 3 weeks' leave.*

Overall, most Vietnamese students being interviewed showed a strong sense of responsibility for family and community. Therefore, studying in Taiwan is a favourable option since it allows the student to acquire a quality education without sacrificing their relationships.

#### 12.4.1.4 *Safe and Attractive Living Environment*

Apart from academic matters, international students also based their decision on the living environment and the recreational aspects of the host country. Taiwan is a stable society well known for its friendly and distinctive culture, which is also the fourth main concern of Vietnamese students when studying abroad. Evidently, most Vietnamese students display a great interest in various Taiwanese cultural aspects such as “*beautiful scenery and delicious food*”, which improve their overall “*health and quality of life*”.

Other factors such as their perception of civilised, polite Taiwanese, and a stable society without threats from terrorists or criminals make students feel safe when studying abroad. Accordingly, respondent No. 14 (female, age 28, master student) stated:

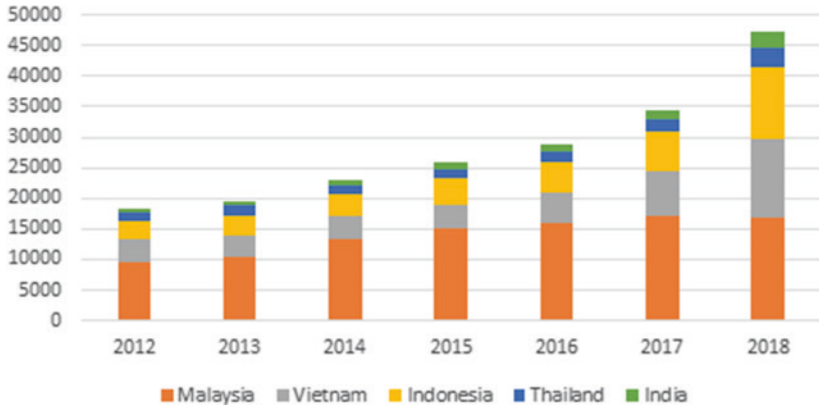
*Cities in Taiwan are very safe; the crime rates are low. I think Taiwan is the safest country in Asia that makes my family and I relieved.*

To some people, studying in Taiwan might be their first time living abroad, and it is reasonable to be “*afraid of feeling unsafe*” (No. 11, female, age 31, former master student). Thus, the level of security is highly appreciated. Moreover, it is also clear that the safeness of Taiwanese society is valued significantly more by female respondents. Being “*a daughter away from home*”, No. 14 is happy that her “*family*” and herself can feel “*relieved*”.

#### *12.4.1.5 Language Advantages*

Language is a complicated factor to consider when studying abroad. The majority of the participants in this research choose to study in an English-taught programme. Although unfamiliar with Chinese language (i.e. Mandarin), many Vietnamese students consider language difference a learning opportunity because most Taiwanese universities offer Chinese classes, and students can also learn by themselves through daily communication with native speakers. This result contradicts the literature on international students, as substantial previous research has pointed out that language barrier is oftentimes considered an obstacle by international students (Sandhu & Asrabadi, 1994; Savage, 2007). A possible explanation for this result is that most Vietnamese students place a high value on the chance to learn Chinese. International students who studied in an English-taught programme in Taiwan are promised a more advantageous career path than students in other countries because of their capability to use both English and Chinese, two most widely-used languages in the world. Respondent No. 20 (female, age 29, Ph.D. student) confirmed:

*At first, I do not know Chinese (Mandarin), so the English program helps me to understand the lecture. Vietnamese and Chinese have many similarities, and Chinese is the most popular language in the world. If I know how to speak Chinese, I can communicate with Chinese and Taiwanese people in the future.*



**Fig. 12.1** Number of international students in Taiwan from 2012 to 2018: Top 5 New southbound countries with the most international student (*Source* Data synthesised by authors [for details, see Ministry of Education, 2018])

Furthermore, the economic relationship between Vietnam and Taiwan is actively promoted, as Taiwan is Vietnam's fourth-largest foreign investor (Lee, 2017). As a result, this has created extra demand for Vietnamese with Chinese-speaking skills in Vietnam, and vice versa.

Overall, the five most prominent features identified in this chapter might play a crucial role in explaining the attractiveness of Taiwan as an education destination and the decision to study in Taiwan of Vietnamese students. The data collected by Taiwan's Ministry of Education (see Fig. 12.1) indicate that, along with Malaysia and Indonesia, Vietnam is among the countries with the most international students in Taiwan.

#### *12.4.2 The Effects of the New Southbound Policies on Vietnamese Student's Decision to Study in Taiwan*

##### *12.4.2.1 Vietnamese Student's Awareness About the New Southbound Policies*

As mentioned above, the New Southbound Policy has opened a window of opportunity for talented individuals from Vietnam to study in Taiwan. However, whether students take these favourable circumstances into

consideration is heavily dependent on the student's perception of the Policy. Although international education is one out of three main collaborative aspects of the New Southbound Policy, only 11 out of 21 of the participants were somewhat aware of this policy. Regarding an understanding of the purpose of the New Southbound Policy in the international education sector, which is their primary concern, most Vietnamese students overlook the industrial and financial aspects of the policy. By receiving information via newspapers regularly, respondent No. 12 (male, age 34, Ph.D. student) showed a broader scope of understanding on this topic:

*I read newspapers to know that this is a rotating policy of Taiwan away from China, the goal (of the policy) is to find new markets, shaking hands with Southeast Asian countries, taking tourist attraction by the relaxation of visa policy.*

Respondent No. 19 (male, age 33, Ph.D. student) also commented about the bilateral relationship between Vietnam and Taiwan and acknowledged the role of the policy as to “*shift the economy towards the Southern part of the globe, Vietnam is an important partner of Taiwan*”.

Overall, most Vietnamese students revealed a non-specific understanding of the New Southbound Policy, as most of them have not had enough exposure to the original policy document. Without proper introduction to these materials, the students have to actively search for opportunities that are already widely available, which might cause negative effects on the goal of attracting international talents of the Taiwanese government.

#### *12.4.2.2 Knowledge About the Educational and Vocational Aspect of the New Southbound Policies*

Vietnamese students can benefit from the New Southbound Policy in education through scholarships such as the Elite scholarship programme for teachers in the targeted countries. After graduation, these students will return to Vietnam and use the knowledge gained in Taiwan to educate students in their homeland. Respondent No. 12 (female, age 34, Ph.D. student) acknowledged:

*Some of my friends are teachers; they have received scholarships that rooted in the New Southbound policies. Most of them are in the fields of health, culture, and applied technical science.*

To look for the talent, who can fulfil industrial requirements, the New Southbound Policy also provides incentives for talents from Southeast Asian countries through human resource training. According to Respondent No. 7 (female, age 26, Ph.D. student):

*This policy of President Tsai Ing-wen aims to support Southeast Asian students to come to Taiwan to study and work. After four years, I can apply for a job in Taiwan.*

The domestic, trained human resource can work in Taiwan or return home and work for Taiwanese companies. Respondent No. 19 (male, age 33, Ph.D. student) agreed:

*Taiwanese companies tend to invest in foreign countries, and Vietnam is a country with many Taiwanese companies. The Taiwanese government has an expansion policy to provide expenses for Vietnamese students to study in Taiwanese. After graduation, these students will work at Taiwanese companies.*

Different from their lack of knowledge about the industrial and financial policy, it is clear that Vietnamese students in Taiwan have a better understanding of the educational and vocational prospects that the Taiwanese government provides. This is only reasonable as future academic and career success directly influences the decision-making process of international students. However, the New Southbound Policy also provides extra valuable opportunities that are currently being overlooked by most Vietnamese students.

#### *12.4.2.3 The Impact of the New Southbound Policies*

For Vietnamese students, the policy has a positive impact. Previously, most of the students from Vietnam received scholarships from a school to support their study. With the introduction of the New Southbound Policy, additional incentives to attract talents have increased the number of Vietnamese students in Taiwan into a new high. Respondent No. 1 (male, age 32, Ph.D. student) explained that:

*Back in the day, most of the school's scholarships could not cover sufficiently or sometime inadequately the cost of studying in Taiwan. However, the amount of money provided by the Elite Scholarships program (stemmed from the New Southbound Policy) is as high as the full scholarship provided by the Taiwanese Ministry of Education.*

Respondent No. 4 (male, age 27, master student) also recognised the impact of the New Southbound scholarships:

*If there is no Taiwan government scholarship, it would be many difficulties for Vietnamese students, especially in terms of financial resources.*

Currently, many Vietnamese students do not have much access to the New Southbound Policy, which provides many more educational opportunities than its (Old) Southbound predecessor. Therefore, the Taiwanese government needs to communicate the information effectively to organisations and schools to attract talents efficiently.

#### *12.4.2.4 The Decisive Factors in the Retention of Vietnamese Students in Taiwan*

There are many attractive elements that influence Vietnamese students' decision to stay in Taiwan for further education or work. Some examples include a favourable culture, financial benefits, and a civilized society. As respondent No. 10 (male, age 36, former master student) said:

*If I have a chance, I will return to Taiwan to work or study... Taiwan is the most suitable place.*

According to respondent No. 15 (female, age 28, former master student), it is the Taiwanese culture of “*learning and working*”, that has left her “*deeply impressed*” about the “*personality of the Taiwanese [38]*”. Even with students who intended to “*return to Vietnam to work*” (No. 19, female, age 33, Ph.D. student), it is the “*living environment*” in Taiwan that captures their interest.

#### *12.4.2.5 The Affection of Vietnamese Students Towards Taiwan*

In general, after having some experience in studying and working in Taiwan, Vietnamese students expressed warm feelings towards this island. Despite having an initial negative feeling about Taiwan, respondent No. 11 (female, age 33, former master student) eventually admitted:

*Before I came to Taiwan, I had a bad feeling because I have heard about cases of Vietnamese brides being treated badly by Taiwanese husbands. However, since I have been to Taiwan, that idea is no longer remained. At first, I only knew about Taiwan through movies, but when that negative feeling is over, it feels much better.*

The positive feeling of Vietnamese students covered a wide range of social-cultural aspects in Taiwan. According to respondent No. 15 (female, age 28, former master student), the goodwill for the country not only stemmed from the “*comfortable and civilized working style*” of the Taiwanese but also from the ruling government and a “*peaceful*”, “*safe and secure*” society, as well as many other factors.

## 12.5 CONCLUSION AND LIMITATIONS

With a stronger emphasis on countries in the South, the Taiwanese government has brought forward the Southbound policy and its revised version, the New Southbound Policy to foster the bilateral exchange relationship, especially with the Southeast Asia region. As a result, students who reside in countries that have a strategic relationship with Taiwan have taken this opportunity to study abroad in Taiwan. With the implementation of the New Southbound Policy, Vietnam is one of the most important partners with Taiwan in terms of mutual student exchange. In the last five years, the number of Vietnamese students in Taiwan is always among the top. However, the Vietnamese student in Taiwan still receives little attention from academic community as well as policymakers. In this chapter, we have examined the reasons why Vietnamese students were attracted to the Taiwanese educational system and the effects of the New Southbound Policy on the decision to study abroad of these students. Overall, Vietnamese students were most attracted to study in Taiwan by five main factors, namely (i) the cost of studying; (ii) quality training and research skill; (iii) home to host country distance; (iv) living environment; and (v) language.

Although most Vietnamese students consider finance and environment among the most important factors, it is surprising that only half of the research participants have a basic understanding of the New Southbound Policy, especially with regard to scholarships and support programmes for international students provided by the policy. Thus, it is suggested that Taiwan’s government and Taiwanese universities take greater effort to advertise and promote the New Southbound Policy and its international higher education programmes to Vietnamese students.

Despite having a low awareness about the New Southbound, most respondents in our sample expressed their high appreciation towards the Taiwanese, Taiwanese society, and Taiwanese educational system. Previous studies have indicated several benefits that the host country

and host university might gain from the positive attitude of their international students. For instance, international students with a positive attitude tend to have a long-term relationship with their host country and university. They would also disseminate positive word-of-mouth about their host country and university and, thus, help to reduce advertising and operational costs (Pham & Lai, 2016). These students might become more attached to their former host country and university through activities such as to coordinate with former professors, provide feedback, and participate in alumni events (Hennig-Thurau, Langer, & Hansen, 2001). Given this circumstance, the Taiwanese government and universities are advised to continue to maintain and improve the current status of living qualities as well as overall educational quality to retain their incumbent or international alumni students as well as attract more international students and talents, including Vietnamese students.

For the Vietnamese government and universities, the findings, as shown in this chapter, suggest several implications. Traditionally, in order to develop its higher education system, Vietnam often cooperated with developed countries in the Western world rather than a neighbouring partner such as Taiwan. However, recent trends have indicated that Vietnam tends to have an increasing number of partners within the region, such as China (see Yang, 2012) or The Philippines (see Le Ha, 2018). The New Southbound Policy implemented by Taiwan might become a new actor that shapes the future of higher education in Vietnam. If Vietnam were able to take advantage of Taiwan's New Southbound Policy, it would result in a win-win situation for both higher education systems and national labour forces. If not, Vietnam might continue to suffer from "brain-drain" (i.e. win-lose situation), which has been one of the most chronic issues of concern at present (Ho, Seet, & Jones, 2018).

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## Commentary: What Lies Ahead? Considering the Future of a “New” Vietnamese Higher Education

*Yasmin Y. Ortiga*

What is the role of colleges and universities in a rapidly changing world? The chapters in this volume discuss how Vietnamese higher education grapples with this issue in the context of a nation’s shift towards a market-based economy, under the helm of a government that holds on to its socialist identity. As noted in the introduction of this volume, the last few decades have seen the emergence of “new” players, discourses, and practices in Vietnam’s postsecondary education, raising important questions as to what kind of higher education people want to experience, and from whom such change should come from. The chapters in Sect. 13.2, in particular, provide readers with a broad view of how these questions play out within different areas of Vietnam’s higher education system, from the large public universities to community colleges and semi-elite private institutions.

In this commentary, I highlight two major tensions that underlie the authors’ arguments: autonomy and privatisation. I argue that while the

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chapters in this volume contextualise these issues in line with Vietnam's unique circumstances, their discussion reflects broader dilemmas that have plagued education scholars and practitioners across the world. I end with a brief section on how we can compare the Vietnam case to other higher education systems, and what this contributes to what we know in the scholarship on higher education and globalisation.

### 13.1 QUESTIONS OF AUTONOMY

One important theme that runs through the chapters in this section is the gradual decline of the Vietnamese state's monopoly of higher education and the meaning of this change for the purpose and delivery of postsecondary schooling. Vietnam is not alone in going through this massive shift, with neighbouring Southeast Asian nations also opening their education systems to private owners and foreign providers. Of course, the reasons behind the loosening of state control can vary across different contexts. In places like Singapore and Malaysia, state officials have allowed universities to chart their own development with the expectation that such independence will help them become "regional hubs" for international students and researchers (Mok, 2011). Such aspirations are less prominent among Vietnam's institutions. However, there are also common factors that challenge the viability of states monopolising higher education: financial crises, pressures to "compete" in a globalised education market, and a growing demand for more access to postsecondary schooling (Deem, 2001; Naidoo, 2016).

As the state relaxes its grip, how then do we define the "autonomy" that universities should enjoy? In Chapter 7, Ngo argues against the tendency to valorise American higher education as the model for an independent academy. She emphasises that despite the rigidity of Vietnam's Soviet-style education, this system also promotes the empowerment and development of individual students—albeit in the context of working for the good of the nation and its government. I agree with the critique that those who push for liberal arts education in Asia can sometimes parrot Western discourses of liberalism, without acknowledging that American institutions themselves have also failed to defend the independence and autonomy of their own faculty and students. Yet, in some ways, Ngo's chapter can run the risk of making the opposite mistake: demonising American education and valorising Vietnam's current system. Marklein and Mai chapter (Chapter 11) provides a necessary counterpoint, portraying

Vietnamese colleges and universities as much more dynamic institutions, taking on some policies on academic freedom common in the United States, while rejecting others as inappropriate for the Vietnamese context. In some cases, less government intervention is not necessarily a good thing. Nguyen and Chau's chapter (Chapter 10) notes that in the case of community colleges, state involvement had been scaled back significantly over the years. Ironically, this approach compromised the potential of such institutions to serve the needs of the local communities where they are embedded.

As Vietnamese higher education grapples with such questions of autonomy, perhaps a possibility for future research is a further study of how the Vietnamese government has chosen to position itself in the context of a more loosely regulated system. Multiple sources that examine higher education governance in East Asia have pushed against the black-and-white view that states are either fully in control or are completely absent from the education market (see Mok, 2016). This volume provides an important initial step in theorising the role of the state in the fast-changing landscape of higher education in Southeast Asia. In many ways, Vietnam is similar to Singapore and Malaysia in that state agencies have sought to make themselves more "entrepreneurial" in order to compete in the global economy (Mok, 2011, p. 63). Yet, as education scholars are well aware, broad discourses of global competition and "world class education" get interpreted differently on the ground. The chapters in this section are the beginning of an important effort towards figuring out how this might look in Vietnam, reminding us that the move towards change need not be a zero-sum game.

### 13.2 THE PATH TO PRIVATISATION

Alongside the issue of autonomy is the question of how to manage the growth of private, for-profit institutions in Vietnam's higher education system. Studies based in Western nations such as the US and UK have tended to depict privatisation as an assault on the university, lamenting prioritisation of profit-making endeavours such as student recruitment and industry partnerships (Giroux, 2002; Molesworth, Scullion, & Nixon, 2011; Sidhu, 2008). While such critique is important, it is easy to forget that abstract terms like "neoliberalism" and "privatisation" manifest in different ways, depending on the particularities of context. The chapters in this volume make a compelling argument as

to how privatisation has both benefits and costs for Vietnamese higher education, moving beyond its general abstraction as an “assault” on the university.

On the one hand, the authors in this volume argue that despite the problems of for-profit education, the presence of private institutions in Vietnam actually allows the higher education system to serve a wider population of students who would otherwise be unable to enter public universities. As Chau argues in Chapter 8, private institutions can provide new opportunities for Vietnam’s emergent middle class, and initiate avenues for internationalisation. Using quantitative data, he demonstrates how a number of “semi-elite” universities can be as selective as public institutions, challenging the stereotype that private institutions merely recruit as many tuition-paying students as they can. Meanwhile, Pham’s chapter shows how the rise of fully private universities also encourages the development of more student-oriented programmes. While her chapter acknowledges the problems of treating students as “customers”, she also highlights the benefits of understanding student needs and innovating institutional practices in order to address these gaps. In many ways, the controls of state bureaucracies can often make it difficult for public universities to respond quickly to student and faculty demands.

When a population of students feels underserved by their institutions, many may feel the need to seek education elsewhere. As early as 2007, Altbach and Knight (2007) cited Vietnam as an “emerging centre” for international higher education, given the entry of foreign education providers and branch campuses such as Monash University. In their chapter on Vietnamese international students (Chapter 12), Nguyen, Cao, and Pham discuss how other countries like Taiwan have aggressively sought foreign students for its own universities, providing lucrative scholarships and competitive rates to attract young people from neighbouring Asian nations. Their interviews show how Vietnamese students seek creative pedagogy and research experience, aspects that they often see lacking in Vietnamese institutions. If public institutions take too much time to fully change, perhaps the entry of private providers serves as a quicker way to provide a more dynamic set of higher education experiences, one that would prevent Vietnamese students from seeking their degrees elsewhere.

However, the chapters also highlight the problems of privatisation in Vietnam—which in some ways, looks very different from that of

the West. Here, Pham's chapter (Chapter 9) on mergers and acquisitions provides an insightful discussion of what dangers can accompany Vietnam's more liberal education market. Rather than a heterogeneous group of education providers, Pham warns that Vietnam is seeing the growing dominance of corporations seeking to enter the education market. Large companies use their resources and state connections to buy up smaller colleges and universities—pushing out the community organisations which had once provided the “non-public” options for university students. Again, such trends are not unique to Vietnam. The dominance of large companies can also be seen in the Philippine higher education, where businesses built on shopping malls and subdivisions now own colleges and universities as well (Flores, 2008). If universities can no longer have a monopoly over higher education, Pham's chapter raises the question of what other forms of monopoly we might see as state agencies relax their hold on postsecondary schooling.

### 13.3 WHAT IS NEXT FOR VIETNAMESE HE?

As higher education in Vietnam continues to change, it is interesting to think about what lies ahead for its academics, students, and administrators. Instead of strict government control, will Vietnam see the rise of a stronger neoliberal regime, where restrictions are less explicit yet also limiting in many ways? In general, education scholars based in the West have condemned the marketisation of colleges and universities as a displacement of “collective professional values” for commercial goals and profit-making behaviour (Ball, 2015, p. 259). Yet, as Ngo argues in his chapter (Chapter 7), Vietnam may still be grappling with the question of what these “collective” values may be. While acknowledging the shortcomings of Vietnam's previous system, Ngo cautions against the wholesale acceptance of an American-style liberal arts education—a campaign that has many supporters in the country. Ngo's chapter seems to argue that the embrace of such “new” approaches comes too quickly—bordering on the haphazard—with little reflection on how Vietnam's original system reflects many similar aims with that of the liberal arts model. In contrast, Chau's chapter laments that Vietnam's higher education system is changing too slowly. He underlines how state policies and the Vietnamese public unfairly stigmatise private colleges and universities as institutions of lower quality and status, thus diminishing their potential to address the unmet needs of Vietnam's growing middle class. In this



sense, there is still much disagreement as to what direction Vietnam's colleges and universities must take, amidst the entry of new stakeholders into the system.

Perhaps, what is missing in this volume is an investigation of not only what will change, but also what might be replaced and sacrificed as Vietnamese higher education becomes more "autonomous" and "privatised". The authors provide an in-depth discussion of the potential benefits and possible dangers of Vietnam's shift towards deregulation and a more neoliberal higher education market. Yet, I also wanted to read more about how these changes reveal themselves in the way colleges and universities operate, and how teaching and learning occur within the classroom. In doing so, we can identify what universities must fight to maintain in order to fulfil the purpose of higher education for the society it is meant to serve.

What seems clear is that education scholars are only seeing the beginning of Vietnam's transformation. As discussed by Pham in Chapter 9, the shift from the "non-public" to a "fully private" model only occurred in 2006. Shortly after, the state implemented stricter requirements for those seeking to establish universities, thus limiting the number of private institutions to only 65 schools in 2019 (see also Chau, Chapter 8). In many ways, Vietnam's higher education system is a far cry from the case of the United States—a notorious example of how privatisation and deregulation can lead to serious social problems such as the rapid increase of tuition fees and the stratification of colleges and universities based on students' entry scores (Chow & Leung, 2016).

Even within Southeast Asia, the Vietnamese higher education system seems comparatively less marketised compared to neighbours like the Philippines, where close to 88% of the country's 1906 colleges and universities are owned by private enterprise (Commission on Higher Education, Philippines, 2018). Unlike Vietnam, the Philippines' postcolonial state never invested heavily in higher education, choosing instead to focus on basic education services and leave postsecondary schooling to the private sector. When private institutions began to grow after World War II, many of these universities were established with good intentions: a desire to increase access for families who lived far away from urban centres, a need to provide alternative options for those unable to enter public universities, and for some, an altruistic effort to serve their local communities (Isidro & Maximo, 1973). Yet, as education grew into a lucrative business, these original intentions were easily

discarded as pressures for financial viability and student demands placed pressure on for-profit institutions. Reading through the chapters in this section reminds me of the promise of private institutions, particularly in a context where state infrastructure is not strong enough to provide the mass higher education that current society demands. Yet, in my own work on Philippine higher education, I emphasise the need for more government control and regulation (Ortiga, 2018). As Vietnamese higher education moves towards a path that its Philippine counterparts have already taken, I wonder if there can exist a middle ground, where private providers and public institutions can provide a balanced market for higher education services.

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‘Flavour of the Day’: Internationalisation  
and English as a Medium of Instruction  
(EMI)



# English as a Medium of Instruction (EMI) in Vietnamese Universities: Policies of Encouragement and Pedagogies of Assumption

*Min Pham and Doan Ba Ngoc*

The growth of English as a Medium of Instruction (EMI) on a global scale has been well reported (e.g. Dearden, 2015) and in many Asian countries, including Vietnam, this trend has recently become more and more visible, especially in tertiary education (Macaro, Curle, Pun, An, & Dearden, 2018; Tran & Marginson, 2018). To date, the literature on EMI in Vietnamese higher education has largely placed emphasis on the macro-level perspective (Nguyen, 2018; Nguyen, Walkinshaw, & Pham, 2017; Tran & Marginson, 2018), with little attention to addressing the practicalities of EMI at the level of the institution and within the classroom. This chapter therefore focuses on how EMI is enacted through policies and pedagogical practices in public Vietnamese universities at both institutional and classroom levels.

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While offering EMI courses has been a significant trend in Vietnamese higher education over the past ten years, Vietnamese universities are facing considerable issues in the delivery of EMI courses (Dang, Nguyen, & Le, 2013; Nguyen et al., 2017). These include issues such as students' low level of academic English (Le, 2016), lecturers' limited awareness and use of EMI pedagogies and access to suitable materials (Le, 2019; Vu & Burns, 2014; also see Chapters 15 and 16). However, the question of how to address these issues is largely bypassed. Thus, a key remaining concern is how students' content learning can best be assured alongside the development of academic English, both for studying in their discipline and for eventual professional purposes.

Such a question calls, in the first instance, for an investigation into how EMI is currently being enacted through policy and pedagogical practice. This is needed in order to better understand the supports and constraints for EMI implementation, and to identify possible pathways to achieving the outcomes anticipated by the various stakeholders. This chapter therefore reports findings on the actual enactment of EMI courses. These are derived from in-depth interviews with four university managers and ten lecturers teaching EMI courses at various public universities in Vietnam. The findings have led us to propose the following argument, which will be elucidated as the chapter progresses.

Data from the four university managers show that the drivers behind the offering of EMI courses are several, and largely to do with matters of status, student numbers and government funding allocations, rather than with educational goals for students. These drivers are in fact common in universities from other countries such as Japan and Turkey (Kirkgöz, 2019; Shimauchi, 2018). The focus on non-educational goals exists despite the ethical requirement that both non-educational and educational perspectives must be considered (Hamid, Nguyen, & Baldauf, 2013; Liddicoat & Baldauf, 2008). We argue that, together with a lack of professional development preparedness and resources, these non-educational drivers have led to the practice of what can be conceptualised as a 'policy of encouragement' for EMI, encouraging faculties and lecturers to provide EMI courses, but offering little or no policy guidance on EMI pedagogy. Furthermore, based on lecturers' personal accounts of their EMI course practices, we contend that this unguided encouragement has been a primary reason for the practice of a 'pedagogy of assumption' on the part of lecturers—assumptions about what EMI 'is supposed to be' and 'what the university expects', as well as assumptions

about EMI learning challenges for students. The chapter ends with a review of the key features characterising the EMI project in the context of Vietnamese higher education reform, followed by recommendations for a more coordinated approach to the delivery of EMI at both institutional and classroom levels.

## 14.1 DESIGN OF THE STUDY

The data for this chapter was collected via semi-structured individual interviews with four senior managers and ten EMI lecturers from several public universities in Hanoi, Da Nang and Ho Chi Minh City, in other words from North, Central and South Vietnam. It is important to note that only one senior manager and one EMI lecturer were from the same institution, while the other participants were from different universities.

Of the four managerial interviewees, one was the Rector heading a university, and the other three were Vice-Rectors in charge of academic programmes. All four had prior experience of EMI teaching in their own disciplines, which can be expected to enrich their understanding of how EMI institutional policies are perceived and enacted (Table 14.1).

The ten lecturers interviewed all had achieved at least one postgraduate degree from a programme overseas in which English was used as the medium of instruction. All have at least two years of experience in EMI teaching, and some have taught more than one course while others have taught only one EMI course repeatedly over the years. As shown in the table below, these lecturers are diverse in terms of gender, discipline and EMI experience (Table 14.2).

For reasons of anonymity, no more information can be given here on these lecturers' additional roles in their institutions.

Two separate sets of open-ended questions were developed to interview senior managers and lecturers, and participants were encouraged to

**Table 14.1** Senior participant managers

<i>Manager</i>	<i>Position</i>	<i>HE Institution</i>	<i>Location</i>
Manager 1 (M1)	Vice-Rector	Public	Northern Vietnam
Manager 2 (M2)	Rector	Public	Central Vietnam
Manager 3 (M3)	Vice-Rector	Public	Southern Vietnam
Manager 4 (M4)	Vice-Rector	Public	Southern Vietnam

**Table 14.2** EMI participant lecturers

<i>Lecturers</i>	<i>Gender</i>	<i>EMI experience</i>	<i>Disciplines</i>	<i>Qualifications</i>
Lecturer 1 (L1)	Female	2 years	International Studies	Ph.D.
Lecturer 2 (L2)	Female	3 years	Business Management	Ph.D.
Lecturer 3 (L3)	Female	3 years	Tourism Studies	Ph.D.
Lecturer 4 (L4)	Male	2 years	Communication	Ph.D.
Lecturer 5 (L5)	Male	4 years	Computer Science	Ph.D.
Lecturer 6 (L6)	Male	3 years	Information Technology	Ph.D.
Lecturer 7 (L7)	Female	3 years	Economics	Ph.D.
Lecturer 8 (L8)	Female	2 years	Nursing	Ph.D.
Lecturer 9 (L9)	Male	3 years	International Relations	M.A.
Lecturer 10 (L10)	Female	2 years	Physics	M.Sc.

elaborate on topics and feel free to move the interview in the direction of their choice. The interviews with the four managers focused on their institutions' EMI policies, while the interviews with the ten lecturers were about their pedagogical practices. All participants were asked if they preferred to be interviewed in English or Vietnamese and all chose to use Vietnamese as the main medium but referred to English whenever appropriate. All the interviews were audio recorded and notes were also taken for the purpose of asking to follow up questions without breaking into the conversation, and for clarification if needed. The data collected from these 14 interviews were transcribed and analysed using content analysis. Specifically, the transcripts were first read individually and then dissected so that emergent themes could be identified and grouped. These themes were then re-tracked holistically to ensure that the entire information in the data was reflected.

## 14.2 RESULTS OF THE STUDY

Given the focus of the study on the drivers behind university offerings of EMI courses and on how EMI is addressed by managers and lecturers, we start from institutional objectives in introducing EMI and then consider policy in the light of those objectives before looking at lecturers' readiness for EMI, their willingness to engage in it, and how they go about practicing it. All of these points must be seen in the context of



students' low level of academic English acting as a major stumbling block to successful EMI, as has been repeatedly demonstrated in studies of EMI across Asia (Macaro et al., 2018; Yamagami & Tollefson, 2011; Zhao & Dixon, 2017).

### 14.3 INSTITUTIONAL OBJECTIVES FOR EMI: 'EMI CAN HELP OUR UNIVERSITY'

The introduction of EMI has often been regarded as a strategy to internationalise higher education in non-English-dominant contexts such as Korea, Japan, Malaysia and Thailand (Altbach & Knight, 2007; Cho, 2012; Evans & Morrison, 2011; Toh, 2013), and attracting international students is considered an important objective of introducing EMI, e.g. Japan's Global 30 Project (Rose & McKinley, 2018). Internationalisation, however, was barely mentioned in this Vietnamese study, whereas all four interviewee managers specifically mentioned that attracting more domestic students was a key objective of introducing EMI at their institutions. M1 as a Vice-Rector in charge of academic affairs labelled himself a strong advocate of EMI, believing that the use of EMI could help the university to attract more domestic students, particularly in the context of a recent decline in the number of students enrolled in his university. M2 likewise shared this perspective, as did M3:

*We try to increase the number of students enrolling in our university by offering them more options and EMI is one of these options.*

According to M4, it may be too early to think about attracting international students as EMI courses are still in the process of development. He elaborated that:

*EMI can help our university with two things. First, it can help to attract more students and we can expand our program. Second, it can give our institution recognition as a high-quality university so that we can employ more staff and get more funds from the Ministry and the government.*

From these comments, two inferences can be readily made regarding the key objectives of introducing EMI in these Vietnamese HEIs. First is that the objectives relate to domestic competitiveness rather than to internationalisation, thus running counter to the international findings

reported by Dearden (2015) and Bradford (2016). Second is that the objectives highlighted in this study are primarily non-educational. In other words, they focus on status, growth and resourcing, not on the learning goals of students for their university education—educational goals. This is not to say that EMI is seen as unrelated to educational goals, but the relationship was not mentioned explicitly by any of the four administrators, who all prioritised non-educational goals. This has implications for the place of EMI in institutional policy.

#### 14.4 INSTITUTIONAL GUIDELINES FOR EMI: 'NO OFFICIAL POLICY DOCUMENT'

The four senior managers interviewed in this study all acknowledged that EMI is a growing phenomenon and seems to be inevitable in higher education, referring specifically to national policy documents, especially Project 2020. They were insistent that HEIs in Vietnam should not be left behind.

*EMI is an inevitable trend in higher education in the world; some institutions in Viet Nam have already implemented their EMI courses and therefore our university should join in this trend. (M2)*

Nevertheless, despite this high-level commitment to EMI, most of the ten lecturers interviewed indicated that they were not aware of any specific policy document that stipulated the introduction of an EMI programme. They said it was often just mentioned as a small reference in other broader documents as a way to improve teaching and research outputs or a way to internationalise higher education.

*There is no official policy document stipulating that lecturers or departments have to offer EMI courses... but I remember that our head of the university has mentioned this a few times in our staff meetings and in his opening speeches to various international conferences. (L1)*

Similarly, L9 received only a verbal message about the introduction of EMI passed on from the head of university to all the staff members in the department.

*I remember one day Mr. A [head of the department] said in our staff meeting that the University Rector wanted to promote EMI courses and he [the Rector] said that since our department has some lecturers who had studied abroad, we should take the lead in offering some EMI courses. But I have never seen a particular document about this with my own eyes. I am not sure if there is such a document. (L9)*

Thus the institutional commitment to EMI is not formalised in a transparent way, and lecturers are not made aware of the objectives of the innovation nor what their role should be in implementing it. This suggests a process that could be conceptualised as a ‘policy of encouragement’ rather than a precise guiding policy. It also suggests a certain lack of preparedness for the introduction of EMI in terms of achieving the universities’ intended objectives as well as students achieving their intended educational goals.

#### 14.5 LECTURERS’ READINESS FOR EMI: ‘I AM NOT SURE’

As all of the respondents had achieved at least one postgraduate degree from overseas institutions where English was used as a medium of instruction, most described themselves as ‘confident enough’ to teach their own discipline subjects in English; however four of them were openly hesitant about it.

*I am not sure about it [teaching in English]. You know, if student comments about me are good, that would be lovely but if not, other colleagues would say that I achieved my degree overseas but my English, especially speaking, is bad. I am not confident about my speaking skill, students may not understand what I say...and they may make fun of my English. (L2)*

L1 also expressed similar reasons for hesitating to teach in English:

*My colleagues and students say that my English pronunciation is very good, but teaching subject content in English is a different story. I do not want other people to say that I am not good at teaching if I teach an EMI course. (L1)*

From these comments, it appears that unfavourable judgements from colleagues and students could be strong reasons for some lecturers hesitating to adopt EMI.

Other lecturers had specific concerns relating to aspects of methodology. While all ten had been teaching in Vietnamese as the medium of instruction for many years, teaching in English was still something new to them. As a result, although they were confident about their content knowledge of the discipline, they were not confident about teaching it in English. A lecturer in Tourism Studies made this very clear:

*I rate my own English proficiency as good or between average and good. I know that speaking English to other colleagues or doing an oral presentation is easy, but giving a lecture in front of students is totally different. I may not know how to explain a technical or abstract concept in English. If students' English proficiency is limited, then it would double the difficulty to teach. (L3)*

How to explain technical or abstract concepts was also a concern for L5 who pointed out that science subjects can have some very complex concepts. He added that his accent was difficult for students to understand and that he was concerned that his language ability could negatively influence not only students' English development but also their understanding of subject contents.

This links to a related concern expressed by the lecturers, namely the lack of professional development to guide them in how to teach using EMI; for example, how to explain complex concepts in English, how to design an EMI course, how to select and/or adapt materials, how to gauge students' understanding of the content provided through English.

*I come from a different background, International Studies - as you know, I learned English as an additional language and I have been teaching academic English for many years. But I know teaching other disciplinary contents in English is different. Speaking English and understanding content does not mean that I can teach an EMI course. Many things we have to learn; for example, how to balance between English and content, how to design assessments, or how to select materials relevant to both the course content and students' English ability so that they can learn well. (L1)*

Lack of readiness in terms of human capital and resources was well recognised by all four senior managers, who admitted that the English language proficiency of their staff and especially of students was one of the biggest hurdles to EMI. However, they insisted their institutions had to implement EMI courses regardless; they could not wait for readiness to be established. In all four cases, the chosen strategy for introducing

EMI courses without delay was ‘learning while doing’. None of these institutions had provided professional development training for their staff members before they started teaching through EMI; everything was to be learned on the job.

This acknowledged lack of readiness raises concern as to the possibility of students satisfactorily achieving their educational goals through EMI coursework at these universities. It also raises concerns as to the sufficiency of a policy of encouragement to address the situation, as well as questions about lecturer willingness to engage in EMI.

#### 14.6 WILLINGNESS TO ENGAGE IN EMI: ‘DO WE HAVE CHOICES?’

When asked how willing they were to teach EMI courses, the majority of the lecturers expressed ambivalence, for reasons such as students’ limited English proficiency and additional workload. Some lecturers commented that the use of EMI enabled them to continue using English in teaching and research, which meant that they would continue to improve their own English proficiency. For example, L10, originally a French speaker who only recently learned to speak English, considered the use of EMI as an opportunity for professional development. More generally, however, the lecturers mentioned feeling obligated to engage in EMI, referring to concepts such as ‘responsibility’, ‘no choice’ and ‘setting example’, which were accompanied by verbs such as ‘have to’, ‘must’ and ‘get to’. Perhaps L1 was most illustrative of this sense of obligation:

*If the university says we need to have EMI courses, we have to try our best to do it. If they say we have to use English, we will have to do it. Do we have choices? I am not sure. (L1)*

In this comment, lecturers are positioned as having little or no choice or freedom to act; teaching in English is a responsibility that lecturers are obliged to take on in response to institutional policy.

To address this sense of obligation and to compensate for the lack of readiness in their institutions, managers provided various incentives for staff to take on EMI teaching. For example, one university:

*calls on the willingness of our staff members who are able to teach in EMI to develop EMI courses on the basis of their current Vietnamese medium*

*instruction (VMI) courses. We consider this as their contribution to the university. In return, we give them flexibility in teaching, such as timetable choices. Also, the workload [in teaching an EMI course] can be multiplied by 2.5 compared to the workload in a similar VMI course. (M1)*

Such incentives were used to motivate lecturers to develop and teach in EMI courses, reflecting what seems to be common institutional practices elsewhere with respect to EMI teaching (Doiz, Lasagabaster, & Sierra, 2011; Tatzl, 2011).

However these Vietnamese institutions struggled to find funding and resources to provide such material incentives:

*The major problem is financial issues. Designing EMI courses, selecting materials, purchasing textbooks from international publishers, and so on add up to a huge amount of work for our lecturers. We know that lecturers should be provided with professional development too. But we do not have sufficient budget for all of these. Consequently, we just encourage our staff members to teach in English if they want to do so... we cannot force them. (M2)*

This comment was echoed by M4 who stated that his university had to rely on their academics' goodwill to teach in EMI given that financial incentives for EMI lecturers were very limited.

Relying on academics' goodwill and willingness to fulfil what they see as their obligations is further evidence for the conceptualisation of these universities' EMI strategy as 'policy of encouragement'—encouragement through material incentives, through personal approaches from senior managers and through reliance on lecturers' sense of duty to the institution.

Students were also recipients of this policy of encouragement, sometimes being given incentives to enrol in EMI courses. One university offered both VMI and EMI courses in parallel and encouraged students to enrol in EMI courses as an option. The Vice Rector of this university further detailed:

*First, we advise students about potential benefits if they enrol in an EMI course. For instance, we let them know that it [taking an EMI course] will be clearly stated in their academic transcripts upon their graduation. This would benefit them to showcase to their future employers. Second, we do not charge students additional fees for EMI courses. They just have to pay the same amount as for normal [VMI] courses. Third, while we only offer a VMI course if at least 15*

*students enrol, we can offer an EMI course as long as at least 5 students enrol. You can see, the university is happy to compensate for the fees. Finally, the university gives students flexibility to enrol in an EMI course from any discipline which is relatively relevant to their own program. This means that students from International Studies can choose an EMI course in another discipline such as History or Journalism. As an EMI lecturer myself, I always encourage students to enrol in my EMI course although this is not compulsory. (M1)*

The financial incentives for students indicated here suggest that the objective of generating revenue through domestic student enrolments in EMI courses is one that this university is prepared to defer in the short term in order to establish its EMI offerings.

In terms of achieving educational objectives, however, there are some issues to be considered. For example, although students were being actively encouraged to enrol, there was no guidance to them as to how to support their content learning and how to develop their English proficiency through the coursework. Likewise, there was no guidance to lecturers as to how to support students in these educational goals, nor how to ensure student learning of content through EMI processes. This could be interpreted as a severe limitation in the universities' introduction of EMI and raises questions about how lecturers have responded to the challenges they and their students face.

## 14.7 ENACTING EMI IN COURSEWORK: MAKING ADJUSTMENTS

Lecturers spoke in some detail about how they adjusted their teaching in response to what they saw as the expectations of EMI coursework, by both the institution and the students. Adjustments were in three key pedagogical areas: course design, selection of materials, and the use of language in lectures and tutorials.

### 14.7.1 *Adjustments to Course Design*

The participating lecturers had different understandings about ways to design their EMI courses. Most of them indicated that they just translated into English the courses that they previously taught in Vietnamese. Specifically, they translated their lecture slides and handouts from Vietnamese into English and used English to give their lectures. L7

mentioned that she had taught an economics course using VMI for years and she just had to translate all the course activities in English to offer it as an EMI course. Another two lecturers followed the same practice (L2 and L3). L2 shared her story:

*I met my university Rector after one of our staff meetings and said to him that I am not sure if I can teach in an EMI course as I do not know how to teach in English. He told me not to worry and advised that I should use English as much as possible and I just need to translate my course from Vietnamese into English. I felt more confident then but still did not know exactly what I would have to do.*

On the one hand, this excerpt nicely illustrates a policy of encouragement on the part of the university leadership, and the lecturer's acceptance of that. On the other hand, it sheds light on the perceptions of senior managers and lecturers on the delivery of EMI courses as being primarily a matter of translation without necessarily any international orientation in the content nor any intercultural component. In other words, EMI is seen as just a language switch and need not include an international orientation nor an expansion of intercultural knowledge, nor necessarily any change in pedagogy.

Although recognising the challenges of EMI for students, none of the lecturers was willing to simplify the course content to assist the students' understanding. L3 reasoned that simplifying some advanced course content would render her course at an introductory level while it was supposed to be designed for second or third-year students. While her concern was to avoid negatively influencing student achievement of course objectives, L9 was worried that simplifying or reducing course content to accommodate students' English language level could damage his career reputation.

*I have been teaching different EMI courses for various universities and I know that English proficiency of their students is very limited. But I cannot leave out some advanced contents of the courses because they would think that I teach easy things to their students and may not invite me to teach again next year...I still want to teach for these universities. (L9)*

Whether concerned about students' educational outcomes or personal career outcomes, these lecturers refused to adjust their course content despite their appreciation of students' limited English proficiency and its



hindrance to content learning. Based on their pedagogical assumptions, they found themselves in a dilemma of professional ethics which their universities were not addressing either through policy, professional development or student support services.

Other lecturers said they tried to adapt their course content in order to make it ‘EMI appropriate’, but when asked how they did this they chiefly referred to the selection of reading materials appropriate to their students’ English language proficiency. For them, the most significant difference between VMI and EMI seems to be the language used in the materials, the lectures and the tutorials. None of them mentioned pedagogical differences although a few mentioned thinking that teaching in EMI should be different from teaching in VMI, whilst admitting that they did not have clear understandings of the differences. This suggests a powerful need for professional development focusing on successful EMI pedagogies.

#### *14.7.2 Adjustments to Selection of Course Materials*

With respect to the selection of course materials, the lecturers had different approaches, but almost all agreed that the official course outline document should only refer to materials in the English language. They noted, however, that they had never seen an official policy document stipulating whether or not Vietnamese materials could be used in EMI courses. In other words, they made the assumption that only English language materials were permitted in EMI courses. However, in order to cater to what they saw as the learning needs of their students, they often adopted supportive cross-lingual strategies. One common practice is that, while all the materials listed in their EMI course outlines are in English, in practice both English and Vietnamese materials are offered in parallel. One participant noted:

*It is an EMI course and thus all the reference materials should be in English, at least, those materials included in the course outline. I have selected some [English language] academic articles and textbooks...I often have to prioritise a textbook which I know has been translated into Vietnamese so that students can refer to it when needed. I do not include [the Vietnamese version] in the course outline but I suggest students refer to this book. I know it would be very challenging for them to read such an academic textbook in English. (L7)*

Another lecturer mirrored the above sentiment, and recommended students:

*refer to some Vietnamese materials which I know would have similar content, so that they can understand key terminology in our discipline.*

This strategy was also shared by L9, a lecturer in International Relations:

*Because students' English is still limited, I often select some articles which I know are translated and free to access on the NghienCuquocte website [a website which provides Vietnamese translations of numerous academic papers in the area of International Studies].*

Despite believing that an EMI course should only comprise English language materials, these lecturers provided access to Vietnamese language materials because they were well aware of the difficulties that students would face when reading academic materials in English, and were committed to responding to those difficulties.

In contrast, several lecturers were quite content to use only English materials, being excited to be able to refer to a wider range of publications.

*When I studied in Australia, I collected a lot of materials in English and if I wanted to use them as reference materials (additional reading) for students in my courses I would have to translate them into Vietnamese. Now, with EMI, I can use these materials and do not have to provide the translation. (L8)*

This comment from L8 suggests a pedagogical assumption that teaching through EMI means that students can be expected to read and comprehend materials in English, without needing Vietnamese language support of any kind.

### 14.7.3 *Adjustments to Classroom Language Use*

All of these lecturers considered that they should use English as much as they could in EMI lectures and tutorials, but opinions varied as to the degree to which classroom language use should include Vietnamese. Some believed that English should be the only language used throughout lectures and tutorials. For instance, when asked if students were allowed to speak Vietnamese in class, L2 commented:

*I think English should be the only language used in lectures and tutorials because this is an EMI course. It's a norm, unwritten norm. It's not something that I find in a policy document or a handbook but students should know this because when they choose to enrol in an EMI course, they expect to use English in class.*

Some lecturers mentioned that it was advantageous to be able to use specialist terms in English when they do not translate easily into Vietnamese, and that EMI allowed them to express the ideas of the discipline better in class. They apparently assume that their students will understand the concepts underlying the English terms; however a recent study at an Australian university (Heugh, Li, & Song, 2017) found that targeted pedagogical practices need to be in place to assist students with understanding specialised technical terms before they can actually use them.

Although an English only perspective was shared by other lecturers as the ideal situation for their classes, in actual fact they often allowed students to use Vietnamese in class discussion and as a way of double-checking if the content had been understood.

*Sometimes students look confused so I have to ask them to summarise what I have just said in Vietnamese. That's not what EMI is about, but I need to make sure that they understand the lecture content. If not, I have to re-explain it. It's time-consuming. But they have to do assessments so they need to understand the content first. (L1)*

It appears that L1 was caught between her allegiance to what she believes 'EMI is about' and her sense of moral responsibility to the students. This dilemma was echoed by other lecturers, including a computer science lecturer making a similar assumption about EMI:

*The goal of EMI is to use English all the time. But some concepts are very complicated and students sometimes ask me to explain these concepts in Vietnamese. It's good that I can know whether students understand a concept or not but it takes a lot of time while I may not be able to cover all the content. (L5)*

Another interview participant chose to ignore the dilemma and accept her students' use of their first language during class discussion, preferring to consider it a feature of inclusive teaching.

*When I ask students to discuss in groups, I know that some of them speak in Vietnamese but I pretend that I pay no attention to it. I do not want those who use Vietnamese to feel bad about it. I do not want them to be excluded from group discussion. At least, they learn something. (L8)*

Despite their assumption that an ideal EMI course employs the use of English only, these lecturers often let students use their L1 in EMI classes, primarily due to their concern to meet the students' learning needs for achieving the educational goals of their courses.

#### 14.7.4 *Summary: Adjustments as 'Pedagogy of Assumption'*

The foregoing account of how lecturers enacted EMI in coursework suggests that a number of adjustments made were based on a pedagogy of assumption. Key assumptions were:

1. EMI means English only (in course materials, lectures and tutorials)
2. EMI is just a language switch and need not include an international orientation nor an expansion of intercultural knowledge.
3. \* EMI courses should maintain the content level of VMI courses  
\* VMI course contents can be adjusted to be 'EMI appropriate'
4. \* Students cannot access the course contents through English only, therefore supportive cross-lingual strategies are a necessary pedagogical inclusion  
\* Students can be expected to read and comprehend materials in English, as well as English terminology given in spoken lectures, without needing Vietnamese language support of any kind.

All the lecturers made the same assumption that what EMI 'is supposed to be' is English only, and that was 'what the university expects'. Similarly, none of the lecturers mentioned considering EMI as including an international orientation and an expansion of intercultural knowledge; all of them focused on the language aspects. However, assumptions about maintaining content level and the EMI learning challenges for students varied, with associated differences in pedagogical practices.

## 14.8 CONCLUSION

The managers in this study clearly indicated the dominance of non-educational goals for the introduction of EMI courses, notably goals relating to matters of status, student numbers and government funding allocations. The emphasis on such non-educational goals indicates domestic competitiveness rather than internationalisation as the primary driver for the introduction and delivery of EMI courses in Vietnamese higher education institutions, unlike many of their counterparts in other

countries (as reported in Bradford, 2016; Dearden, 2015). However, institutional bias towards non-educational goals not only runs counter to expert recommendations (Hamid et al., 2013; Liddicoat & Baldauf, 2008), but also to the interests of both domestic competitiveness and internationalisation in the context of higher education reform. While the introduction of EMI programmes was often cited as one of the strategies in internationalising higher education (Hoang, Tran, & Pham, 2018; Nguyen et al., 2017; Tran & Nguyen, 2018), the dominance of non-educational goals signifies that Vietnam's higher education reform seems to be far from vision.

Furthermore, it is apparent from the data that the bias towards non-educational goals is a contributing factor to the practice of what we have termed a policy of encouragement for EMI, and which we can now define based on the data presented earlier. A policy of encouragement is policy lacking transparent guidance and formal documentation, in which verbal injunctions are substituted for implementation planning. It is policy reliant upon incentives to lecturers and sometimes to students, and typically without sufficient back-up by way of related professional development and EMI support provisions for students. In addition, a policy of encouragement overlooks students and lecturers as key actors in the policy implementation process and as potentially valuable contributors to the policy-making process itself.

From this study, it is clear that a policy of encouragement relies on lecturers' willingness to teach EMI courses, but this should not be mistakenly interpreted as their readiness to do so. Rather, lecturers' willingness in this study might be best seen as their personal efforts towards professional development. This is particularly important because lecturers are indeed the 'gatekeepers' of any language policy implementation (Kaplan & Baldauf, 1997; Liddicoat & Baldauf, 2008); the success of EMI policy implementation therefore relies on these lecturers. HEIs should function as mediators between the macro-level (the national policy level) and the micro-level (classroom level) to involve lecturers in the policy-making process. This may contribute to eliminating the disconnection in the top-down model that seems also to be common in other institutions across the world (Macaro et al., 2018).

A policy of encouragement for EMI can also be considered a contributing factor to a pedagogy of assumption in the actual practice of EMI coursework. Lecturers' efforts in EMI teaching in this study were undoubtedly conditioned by the lack of clear policy guidelines,

in interplay with the absence of professional development together with the limited English proficiency of students. However, despite the lack of specific policy and professional development, these lecturers appear to have found a pathway to teaching EMI courses on the basis of their best judgement of what EMI teaching should be and what the learning needs of their students are. This pathway we have conceptualised as a pedagogy of assumption—assumptions about institutional intentions, assumptions about the nature of EMI globally, assumptions about students' learning needs, and assumptions about how best to address those needs.

In some ways the lack of guidelines and professional development has given lecturers the pedagogical freedom to develop their own classroom teaching techniques to address the needs of students. One of these techniques was to provide support materials in Vietnamese, and another was to allow the use of Vietnamese in class in order to compensate for students' lack of English. Several lecturers perceived this practice of code-switching as an effective linguistic strategy for achieving EMI policy intentions, whilst also assuring student grasp of content. Other lecturers saw it as unacceptable in terms of policy intentions, which has also been a common perception in other contexts (Peek, 2010; Setati, Adler, Reed, & Bapoo, 2002). This finding is not surprising as these lecturers have not been trained in how to teach their discipline contents via English as the medium of instruction. They are therefore not aware of translanguaging as an EMI pedagogy which acknowledges learners' linguistic and epistemological repertoire and utilises their first language to develop class activities that simultaneously promote content and language learning (García & Kleyn, 2016; García & Wei, 2014; Heugh, 2015). Based on this understanding, and given the limited English proficiency of students, it is appropriate for code-switching to be recognised and woven into EMI classroom practices as a legitimate strategy to optimise content learning.

To achieve a more coordinated and effective approach to EMI than that represented in this study, we make five broad recommendations:

1. HEIs must clearly identify their educational goals for EMI, recognising that EMI involves international cultural and intercultural knowledge as well as English language
2. HEIs should develop formal and transparent policy for implementing EMI, based on current research and experience

3. HEIs should involve experienced lecturers and students in developing implementation plans
4. As important actors for EMI policy enactment at the operational level (Liddicoat & Baldauf, 2008; Martin, 2008), lecturers must be equipped with the knowledge and skills needed to achieve the institution's educational goals for EMI
5. In addition, where there is a lack of preparedness on the part of both institutions and lecturers, together with limited English proficiency of students, institutional policy makers should allow the gradual use of English in EMI courses as a strategy to progress EMI implementation.

These recommendations are based on analysis of data from public HEIs in three regions of Vietnam, which we believe can provide insights into the enactment of EMI policies and pedagogies in other similar contexts where EMI has become an increasing trend. Further research would provide more dynamic insights into what kinds of professional development training are needed for EMI lecturers and how HEIs can develop a more coordinated approach to their policies to maximise teaching and learning in which English is used as the medium of instruction. Meanwhile, we suggest that policies of mere encouragement, whether they occur nationally or internationally, should be identified and replaced with evidence-based guidance on best EMI practice. This in turn would allow for pedagogies of assumption to be replaced with informed and consistent pedagogical decision making.

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# Training English-Medium Teachers: Theoretical and Implementational Issues

*Thi Thanh Nha Vu*

## 15.1 INTRODUCTION

English has been widely adopted as the medium of instructions (EMI) in many contexts where English is not the first language of the majority of the population (Doiz, Lasagabaster, & Sierra, 2012). In the context of Vietnam, the increasing adoption of EMI has been attributed to three agendas: national, institutional and personal (Vu, 2017).

At the national level, English has been a means of economic and social development to transform Vietnam from an inward-looking nation to an active member of the world community. From 1975 to 1986, Vietnam was literally a closed economy with little international cooperation. The year 1986 was a milestone for major political, economic and social changes in Vietnam (Wright, 2002) when the 6th National Congress of the Communist Party of Vietnam acknowledged the weaknesses of existing practices and resolved to comprehensively reform the economy through ten missions, such as reforming economic management

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mechanism (mission 3), and actively promoting diplomatic activities (mission 7) (Communist Party of Vietnam, 1986). These missions resulted in several important diplomatic achievements such as ASEAN membership in July 1995, World Trade Organisation membership in January 2007 and the removal of the US trade embargo against Vietnam in 1994. Foreign investments into Vietnam, consequently, surged, leading to the widespread employment of English (Kirkpatrick, 2011; Vu, 2017).

At the institutional level, English language education policies have been revised to accommodate the new demands, which makes English courses to be widely offered at tertiary institutions, secondary schools and in evening classes and in-service programmes (Le, 2007). The government formally launched a national initiative on foreign language teaching and learning in the educational system during the period 2008–2020 (Vietnam Government, 2008), which officially supported the establishment of EMI courses. As a result, multiple EMI programmes have been offered in Vietnamese universities such as VNU's 16 International Standards Programs in 2008, or the MOET's 30 Advanced Programs at selected universities from 2008 to 2015 in popular courses, e.g. Business, Chemistry and Computer Sciences. English is the instructional medium for most content subjects which were originally developed in English-speaking countries.

The argument for the establishment of these EMI programmes is that EMI will improve the quality of English learning by providing a direct link between learning English and students' professional development. Consequently, content-based teaching is perceived as an effective way to improve English language education quality (Huong, 2010). However, EMI was introduced into educational institutions with a complicated agenda of political, economic and educational drives. Overall, it aims to prepare a skilled workforce for economic development and internationalisation and transform educational practices to improve education quality.

At the personal level, students enrolled in EMI programmes to gain their economic and educational benefits (Vu, 2017). They had better access to qualified teachers, financial support and scholarship embedded in the English language materials.

However, the change into EMI has not been a linear process towards better outcomes. EMI lecturers face multiple challenges (Vu & Burns, 2014; Chapter 14 by Pham & Doan; Chapter 16 by Truong, Ngo, & Nguyen), one of which is pedagogical adaptation. Teaching is very contextually situated. Each context with its own teachers, students

and resources will adopt a model that best serves its educational goals. Any pedagogical transferability needs a thorough consideration. Dalton-Puffer (2007) strongly advises that various pedagogies can be used in a “well-considered dosage” (p. 296). In fact, the EMI literature reveals that the content and language integration goal could resemble one or more of the existing approaches (bilingual education, ESP, CBI, language immersion, or CLIL). This chapter, therefore, aims to elaborate on the diverse contexts of EMI practices and practical implications for Vietnam. It will particularly focus on EMI pedagogies and teacher development to address the issue of inadequate EMI teacher training (Macaro, Curle, Pun, An, & Dearden, 2017). First, I review the literature on EMI pedagogies and teacher development. Then, I present an action research study of an EMI teacher training course and draw out practical lessons for teacher training.

## 15.2 THE EVOLUTION OF CONTENT AND LANGUAGE INTEGRATED LEARNING PEDAGOGY

Brown (2007) characterises changes in language teaching theories in a cyclical pattern in which a new method is “breaking from the old and at the same time taking with it some of the positive aspects of the previous paradigm” (p. 13). He concludes that methods lie in the creativity of individual teachers because “no quick and easy method is guaranteed to provide success” (p. 14). Nevertheless, the problem arises when teachers misinterpret the principles and apply superficial classroom practices (Richards, 2005; Thompson, 1996). Kaplan, Baldauf Jr., and Kamwangamalu (2011) argue that inappropriate methodology is one of the factors leading to the failure of language education policies.

Theoretically, EMI pedagogy has a dual focus: content and language. However, we find different views when tracing back the development of this pedagogy as a well-researched practice. The first group believes that EMI pedagogy is based on content-based instruction research in American bilingual settings (Cenoz, 2015; Kong, 2009). The second group is based on the Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) approach in Europe (Coyle, 2008; Doiz et al., 2012) or English for Academic Purposes (Costa, 2015). The third group attempts to remove this confusion by a comparative analysis of the approaches to identify similarities and differences (Pecorari & Malmström, 2018). So far, there is a consensus that EMI pedagogy involves both language and

content teaching. An effective and balanced EMI programme should employ a framework that best promotes these two types of learning goals. In this study, I use the term EMI pedagogy and language and content integrated learning interchangeably. This section reviews the development of these pedagogies and how they have shaped EMI teaching principles.

**Bilingual education** or multilingual education, refers to the use of more than one language as a medium of instruction for subjects other than the languages themselves. Bilingual education is strongly linked to immigrants and indigenous people in Western contexts. The contribution of bilingual education centres on education model classification and insights into students' second language acquisition and cognitive development. Accordingly, bilingual education models are implemented with an interplay of various factors, including children involved, language in the classroom, societal and educational aims (assimilation, enrichment, maintenance) and aims in language outcome (monolingualism or bilingualism) (Baker, 2001).

Another contribution in bilingual research is the distinction of basic interpersonal communicative skills (BICS) and cognitive academic language proficiency (CALP) (Cummins, 2008). BICS refers to conversational fluency in a language, which develops in the context of embedded communication for a shorter period (two years), while CALP refers to students' ability to understand and express concepts and ideas that are relevant to success in school via both written and spoken forms, which develops in context-reduced communication for a longer period (five to seven years).

The second body of research that looks into language and content teaching is **content-based instruction (CBI)**, which emerged in the 1960s. The dual characteristics indicate that CBI aims to promote both language and content in one course, and the inequality results in various forms of content-based instruction. Mohan's (1986) pioneering work affirms the importance and effectiveness of teaching languages through content. Content in CBI refers to non-language school subjects of the curriculum such as Mathematics, themes of interest to students, or vocational and occupational areas. Therefore, CBI is similar to English for Specific Purposes (ESP) to some extent (Grabe & Stoller, 1997). However, in CBI, language and content have a reciprocal relationship in which the learning of content leads to the learning of language and a mastery of language enables the understanding of content (Stoller, 2008). CBI works on three major theoretical perspectives, namely second

language acquisition, educational and cognitive psychology, and training studies (Grabe & Stoller, 1997; Kaufman & Crandall, 2005; Snow, 1998). It provides insights into how learning occurs with content and language.

The third influential approach is **English for Specific Purposes (ESP)**, which emerged as a response to the increasing demand of learning English for academic and work purposes after the World War II. It focuses on the independent relationship between language and content. Content in ESP classes acts as a carrier to help learners learn a language (Dudley-Evans & St John, 1998). Language development is generally perceived as separated from or subordinated to content goals (Benesch, 2001). Linguistically, it is assumed that each domain of discipline or profession has a distinctive language discourse (Hyland, 2002). Works on genres and discourse analysis provide insights into the practices of a disciplinary or professional community to inform language teaching, which has become more relevant in recent CLIL teaching (Dafouz, Huttner, & Smit, 2018). Its insights into disciplinary literacy and communication need help teachers to identify teachable linguistic goals.

The fourth approach that considers both language and content development goals is the **language immersion movement** that emerged in St Lambert, Montreal, a French-speaking city in Canada in 1965 (Baker, 2001, p. 204). Some middle-class English-speaking parents initiated the idea of an experimental kindergarten class in which the children were taught in French. The programme aimed to develop French literacy and cultural understanding for the children while maintaining normal achievement of the curriculum. The success of the programme has led to a rapid growth of immersion programmes in Canada and other countries in the world (Baker, 2001; Lasagabaster & Sierra, 2010). It is evident that education is a language-rich and meaningful environment to nurture language development. The content of the curriculum is the focus for language learning. Language communication in the classroom is meaningful and relevant to students. A second language is unconsciously learnt from classroom activities with less emphasis on formal instruction of language forms, which is believed to occur later in the programme. It can be said that content and language are both the goals of language immersion though the emphasis can vary in different stages of immersion (Baker, 2001). The criticism of immersion programmes is the lack of focus on language forms and specific classroom activities to develop content and language (Swain, 2000). In addition, subsequent immersion programmes in other parts of the world appear to occur with different conditions, leading to mixed outcomes.

**Content and language integrated learning (CLIL)** emerged in Europe in the mid-1990s when the European Commission started a movement to promote multilingual education in the European Union which strongly argued that each European citizen should be able to speak three languages (a national language and two other European languages) (Coyle, 2008).

The English acronym CLIL was used by the Commission to refer to “any dual-focused educational context” (Coyle, 2008, p. 97) that promotes content and language. Lasagabaster and Sierra (2010) criticise this definition for failing to distinguish CLIL from the Canadian language immersion method or specifying exactly what CLIL involves. This confusion caused problems for teachers who apply CLIL pedagogy. In fact, the Eurydice Survey in 2006, which examined CLIL in 30 European countries at various education levels (primary, secondary and tertiary), concluded that “different countries use different terminology which reflects the emphasis given to either the subject-based component or the language of CLIL” (Coyle, 2008, p. 100) under the umbrella acronym of CLIL. Dale and Tanner (2012) place CLIL between CBI and language immersion on a language-content continuum.

From a pedagogical focus, CLIL’s innovative power lies in the word “integration”. Various elements including language, content, thinking, and culture are integrated. Therefore, to understand CLIL pedagogy, Coyle (2008) suggests using a 4Cs framework (content, cognition, communication and culture) to examine these intertwined elements. Coyle (2008, p. 104) summarises the pedagogical implications of this framework, emphasizing essential concepts of subject content, cognitive demand, linguistic demand, the language and cognition relationship, interactions and the role of culture.

Obviously, CLIL pedagogy and CBI are much alike. They work on the principles of learners’ active roles, language and content reciprocal relationships, contextual learning, and meaningful interactions. These are also ideal Communicative Language Teaching characteristics (Bruton, 2013). The difference is that CLIL additionally promotes intercultural awareness (Coyle, 2008) and immediate authenticity for language use (Bruton, 2013). Consequently, Coyle (2008) confirms that “CLIL per se” (p. 105) is not the immediate cause of improved language abilities and subject knowledge, skills and understanding. Other educational factors need to be considered as well. CLIL, therefore, should offer an “appropriate pedagogical practice which is fit-for-purpose” (Coyle, 2008, p. 105).



To summarise, the discussion on content and language integration has concluded that there is not a single best model of language and content integration that can be applicable for all contexts. There are some principles that practitioners of content and language (English) teaching generally agree on.

1. A good content and language integration lesson has to address both language and content goals (Baker, 2001; Coyle, 2008; Macaro et al., 2017);
2. Language and content development are reciprocal. Language is important for the learners to construct their understanding of the subject matters. Deep learning of the content provides good opportunities for language usage (Dafouz et al., 2018; Stoller, 2008);
3. Language can be developed in two processes: accidental learning from students' exposure to English-medium classroom activities and form-focused learning of linguistic elements (such as vocabulary) (Basturkmen, 2018; Kong, 2009);
4. Interactions are essential for students' learning (Basturkmen, 2018; Dafouz et al., 2018);
5. Learners should have choices over the content and learning relevant to their learning and linguistic needs (Coyle, 2008).

Therefore, this study reported in this chapter selectively applied some content and language integration principles to Vietnamese EMI teachers for a locally effective pedagogy. The next section focuses on teacher development lessons that are applicable to Vietnam.

### 15.3 EMI TEACHER DEVELOPMENT

Teacher development may take various forms ranging from an informal discussion to a credit-bearing course. This study involved postgraduate students, most of whom were currently teaching or working. Therefore, it focused primarily on in-service teacher training courses, including teacher knowledge, teacher learning and important elements of EMI teacher training courses. The selected supporting literature provides insights into either EMI environments or CLIL.

Theoretically, conceptualizing teacher knowledge has several components. Foremost among these, content knowledge constitutes factual

information, organizing principles and central concepts of a discipline (Grossman, Wilson, & Shulman, 1989). Pedagogical content knowledge in general refers to knowledge of the ways of representing and formulating the subject that makes it comprehensible to others (Shulman, 1986). Pedagogical knowledge of teaching includes knowledge of generic principles of classroom organisation and management (Shulman, 1986). Practical knowledge is directly linked to action, that is, readily accessible and applicable to cope with real-life situations, and is largely derived from teachers' own classroom experiences. The literature has reached a consensus that these components of knowledge interplay and are needed for effective classroom practices (Borg, 2015). However, it also highlights a possible gap between conceptual understanding and classroom practices.

Drawing on various learning theories, e.g. sociocultural theory, constructivism and metacognitive studies, further work has characterised effective teacher learning as a complicated process, which is situated, reflective, collaborative, and durable (Postholm, 2012). Research indicates that teachers learn better when their learning is in a school-based context in which they perform daily tasks and learn from their own experience. In this context, they benefit most from opportunities to lead their own learning, reflect on their own teaching and to interact with other experienced teachers in their learning (Wenger, 1998). In addition, it takes some time for such learning to occur (Cammarata & Haley, 2018; Desimone, 2009). Desimone (2009) suggests that teacher development activity should last at least one semester, and include approximately 20 contact hours between participants.

In short, teacher development courses should aim to change teachers' conceptual understanding of the subject matter and teaching as well as to provide them with opportunities to reflect on their own actions. I next examine various EMI teacher development programmes to identify their content and methods. As the EMI contexts are diverse, I selectively review studies, which explicitly use the term EMI or address issues in teaching content and language. The studies reviewed identify the content, the participants, training methods, success indicators, and possible implementation barriers.

Regarding participants of the training course, it can be seen that there is a mix of teacher experiences. In Cammarata and Haley's study (2018), 15 immersion teachers specialised in four disciplines (French language arts, social studies, science, and mathematics). Their experience ranged

from 2 years (novice) to more than 20 years (experienced). Similarly, nine participants in Tuomainen (2018) came from four areas (Dentistry, Medical School, R&D Office, and University Library) with teaching experience ranging from 1.5 to 15 years. The diversity of participants' experiences can be an additional benefit for the collaborative lesson study activity (Cammarata & Haley, 2018), but a challenge in content selection to meet the participants' needs (Tuomainen, 2018).

In examining the training contents, we found disparity across the courses provided. Most courses held in Croatia, Denmark, and Italy focus on English language skills (Costa, 2015). Other courses aimed to improve pedagogical language knowledge (Ball & Lindsay, 2012), pedagogical knowledge of teaching, and practical knowledge (Cammarata & Haley, 2018; Tuomainen, 2018). This distribution of foci may be accounted for by the diversity of participants' backgrounds, which made it difficult to find common areas to focus on. An alternative explanation lies in a review of participants' content area specialisations, leading to the presumption that they may need more training in language teaching pedagogy.

Across the range of participants and content selection, some common methods are prevalent. Lectures are used to address content issues (language, language teaching or specific teaching methods) while discussion sessions following the lectures are to assist participants to better understand the theoretical issues presented in the lecture materials. Participant presentations are required for those who wish to improve their oral skills or teaching in a second language. As tools for developing practical knowledge, micro-teaching and role playing of teaching activity, are commonly employed.

To summarise, the literature indicates a diversity of needs and contexts in which EMI training courses have been implemented. Most courses are of non-credit professional development mode. Typical durations vary from some taking place for only a few days and focusing on one aspect of EMI teaching, language or pedagogy. Others, by contrast, may extend over a period of several semesters—in this case mandated by the need to develop both conceptual and practical knowledge for participants in their own school contexts. The training objectives and resources available will influence the choice of methods. It is clearly the case that in this realm of experience, a “one-size-fits-all” recipe for training does not exist. In this context, my study was designed to contribute to developing another model, which focused more on a credit-bearing EMI teacher training course with Vietnamese participants.

## 15.4 THE STUDY

In this exploratory research study, I aim to explore how EMI teachers were prepared for their teaching work by focusing on three questions:

1. What tasks are EMI teachers involved in?
2. What challenges do EMI teachers face in completing their teaching tasks?
3. How can training support teachers in doing these tasks?

This section elaborates on the research context and the method adopted for the study.

### 15.4.1 *The Research Context*

The study was developed in the context of a 3-credit training course on EMI teaching methodology, a selective course leading towards a master degree in language teaching. To qualify for the degree, students need to accumulate 55 credits, including 25 for compulsory courses, 21 for selective courses, and 9 for a final project over a two-year period.

This 12-week course lasts 45 hours. It aims to introduce current issues in EMI pedagogy such as EMI contexts, content and language integration approaches, educational theories, language support, learner support, content support and assessment. It also develops skills to read and synthesise academic texts, and practice the pedagogy. The course includes three main activities: lectures, group work and a project. Assessments for the course include online quizzes, micro-teaching and a final essay.

The teacher was also the researcher of the study. Participants were 53 master students aged 23–46, including 1 Korean and 52 Vietnamese of varied education and work experiences. Most had graduated from EMI institutions (81%), and their English proficiency was at least B2 (European framework). The majority were English teachers (96%), with one Math teacher (2%) and one non-teaching participant. These teachers worked in various teaching context with seventeen (17) mainly working at primary schools (years 1–5), 4 at lower secondary schools (years 6–9), 15 at high schools (years 10–12), 14 at universities, and one who did not teach. Only 26 participants had direct or indirect experience in teaching

a content subject (Math or Science) while 27 had not taught an EMI course before. (Below, they are referred to either as teachers or teacher participants.)

#### 15.4.2 *Data Collection*

Data were collected along with teaching activities (Burns, 2010) to explore students' opinions and performance, using a questionnaire, micro-teaching observations and reflection notes for data collection.

The questionnaire consisted of 12 items on participants' background, understanding of EMI work, challenges and support available within their work situation. The questionnaire also served to provide a "needs analysis" to determine the types of activities involved in their teaching.

Twelve micro-teaching observations were conducted from week 7. Participants worked in groups of 4–5 to choose, develop and teach a 40-minute EMI lesson based on EMI teaching principles. In this micro-teaching lesson, one group member acted as a trainee teacher running the class, members of which were assigned roles as either observers or students. The observer group took notes using predetermined observation sheets while the student group participated in-class activities organized by the trainee teacher. After the micro-teaching, the whole class, including the researcher, discussed and gave comments on the activities, based on which the group was asked to create a revision of the lesson plan. The overall data generated from this activity included sample lesson plans and observation data (notes and videos of the micro-teaching).

At the final session, all participants created "reflection notes" about micro-teaching, responding to some guided questions (e.g. who was involved, which steps they took, responsibilities of group members, communication methods), and indicating the challenges they faced in developing lesson plans and delivering the lessons, and the "take-aways" from the process.

#### 15.4.3 *Data Analysis*

Data analysis in this exploratory research was an iterative process (Creswell & Clark, 2011). Data was analysed to inform subsequent data collection activities. New findings again informed data analysis. Close-ended questions were described in tables and charts. Open-ended

questions and students' reflection notes were analysed, using a constant comparative analysis method (Creswell, 2007; Strauss & Corbin, 1998), to identify key themes. The participants were anonymised and numbered consecutively.

## 15.5 FINDINGS

This section presents findings from the questionnaire, students' reflection notes and classroom observation under three themes: teacher's tasks, teacher's challenges, and the effectiveness of the training activities.

### 15.5.1 Teachers' Tasks

Two questions examined the teacher's tasks. Only those who had been previously involved in EMI teaching (either as teachers or as a teaching assistant) were asked to respond by rating their frequency of use on modified Liker Scales (e.g. 1-rarely and 5-always) and perceived difficulty of the task (Very easy/Extremely difficult). These tasks were based on Bowers' (1980) work on teachers' verbal behaviours in the classroom. One additional category focused on reading materials for lesson planning.

As shown in Table 15.1, all tasks were employed by the teachers, the most frequent being to provide instruction (Mean = 4.63), followed by the use of reading materials for planning (Mean = 4.41). The least often employed tasks were organising group work (Mean = 3.93) and explaining new concepts (Mean = 3.93). While observing their micro-teaching, group work was the less frequently used activity. Participants reported

**Table 15.1** Teacher's rated frequency for classroom tasks

	<i>Response</i>	<i>Missing</i>	<i>Total</i>	<i>Mean</i>
Read materials to plan the lesson	27	26	53	4.41
Give presentations	27	26	53	4.00
Organise group work	27	26	53	3.93
Give instruction	27	26	53	4.63
Answer the students' questions	27	26	53	4.26
Explain new concepts	26	27	53	3.93
Socialise with the students	27	26	53	4.15

focusing primarily on providing inputs to students and checking their understanding. For example, two out of 12 sample lesson plans failed to include group work.

Regarding the perceived difficulty of the tasks involved, mean scores (as calculated in Table 15.2) clustered around 3 (the difficult range), whereas, as teachers, participants, considered reading materials (Mean = 3.35), giving presentations (Mean = 3.35) and explaining new concepts (Mean = 3.27) more challenging than other tasks.

### 15.5.2 Teachers' Challenges

Exploring the challenges trainee teachers face in the micro-teaching activity made use of the questionnaire, lesson plans, observation data and reflection notes. The participants focused primarily on the tasks facing teachers in planning and delivering an EMI lesson, and on working as a group.

#### 15.5.2.1 Challenges in Planning an EMI Lesson

Teachers reported that they had several issues in planning an EMI lesson. The most frequently reported issue was to identify balanced objectives of language and content for an EMI lesson. Most teachers could easily identify a language point to teach, but they often neglected specifying the aims guiding the development of content knowledge or cognitive skills. For example, in the following lesson plan for year 3 Science, most objectives focused on language (vocabulary, pronunciation, structures). The content knowledge (trash objects) was not coherently stated.

**Table 15.2** Teacher's perceived difficulty for classroom tasks

	<i>Responses</i>	<i>Missing responses</i>	<i>Total</i>	<i>Mean</i>
Read materials to plan the lesson	26	27	53	3.35
Give presentations	26	27	53	3.35
Organise group work	26	27	53	2.89
Give instruction	26	27	53	2.84
Answer the students' questions	22	31	53	2.96
Explain new concepts	21	30	53	3.27
Socialise with the students	21	30	53	2.83

By the end of the lesson, students will be able to:

- Understand the content words (the sea, under the sea and the life under the sea)
- Identify and remember some vocabularies about the life under the sea (dolphin, seal, whale, lobster, starfish, coral, seaweed) and some difficult words (polluted, littering, oil spill)
- Practice pronunciation of these vocabularies correctly.
- Understand and use the structures (it's a..../I can.....)
- Identify trash objects in the lesson

(LP9)

In some groups, the students totally ignored the language objectives. For example, in lesson plan 3 for university students, the participants only focused on the translation techniques without any linguistic reference:

At the end of this lesson, students will be able to:

- Define translation procedures;
- Identify and differentiate translation procedures categorised by Peter Newmark;
- Apply major translation procedures by Peter Newmark in both English—Vietnamese and Vietnamese—English translation.

(LP3)

In lesson plan 11 for year 3 students, the participants also left out the language objectives:

After the lesson, students will be able to:

1. Understand the concept of living things and non-living things.
2. Recognize four characteristics of living things.
3. Distinguish living things and non-living things.

(LP11)



Some explanation for this omission was later found in the questionnaire and reflection notes. One teacher admitted that her [group members] did not have good content knowledge and pedagogical content knowledge about the topic they chose, so they heavily relied on the materials that were used for content knowledge, e.g. translation theories in lesson plan 3 and a Science textbook, lesson plan 11.

*It is quite hard for us to think of ways to help young learners understand the knowledge related to food, balance diet, and health. Therefore, we had to search and read different reliable materials. It is not easy to find the reliable, relevant, up-to-date and suitable materials. (R39)*

*Teaching a content subject in English requires teachers to understand clearly both English and content subject. I know English, but I know nothing about any other content subject. That would be my challenge. (Q15)*

To sum up, teaching and incorporating both content and language knowledge is challenging for teachers in planning EMI lessons.

#### *15.5.2.2 Challenges in Delivering an EMI Lesson*

When delivering micro-teaching lessons, teachers also found it difficult to perform in-class tasks. The most-commonly reported problem was class management. Most groups chose to teach Science to primary students. However, some group members were high school teachers with little experience working with younger children. They chose the topic as a compromise to other group members:

*Most of us are teaching English language in high schools and have no experience in teaching kids, especially teaching them science subjects. Although the topic was very interesting, it was rather difficult for us to design the lesson contents, organise activities and tasks as well as build up the whole lesson plan appropriately. (R8)*

Another challenge was to explain new concepts in the context of the target students' language proficiencies. Teacher 28 explained how they struggled in that process:

*We discuss to choose appropriate vocabularies such as using 'making babies or seeds' instead of using 'reproduce'... we needed to consider what students know already and select the best way to explain clearly... Maybe I should have given more examples and add one more activity to explain deeper about the concept. (R28)*

Other teaching problems identified were to give instruction (R29), to give feedback (R45), to manage time (R15, R11) and to present new words (R45).

Clearly, the problems identified indicate that there exist a considerable number of diverse “needs” across the range of trainee teachers.

### *15.5.2.3 Other Challenges*

In addition to the identified problems in planning and delivering the micro-teaching lessons, participating teachers indicated other issues, which focused on collaborating with other group members. These issues varied in terms of age differences, workplace, language proficiency and experience, all of which could constitute challenges for gaining effective teamwork.

*The plan withstands various challenges, the greatest of which is the discrepancies between the levels of language proficiency of the team members' learners and their levels of cognition and perception. (R37)*

*Our group initially felt difficult to choose the material because we did not share professions, background knowledge and target learners. (R4)*

Some groups reported challenges of meeting for group work sessions because of physical distance and lack of personal engagement:

*Actually, everybody in my group was quite busy all day, thus we just made use of time in evenings to discuss and do the tasks. Unfortunately, at that time, Tien's mother passed away, Th. had to be in hospital for several days for her illness treatment and Q. was too busy with her affairs at school. (R8)*

In short, the teachers faced challenges of planning, teaching, and collaborating with others in engaging their micro-teaching activities.

### *15.5.3 The Effectiveness of the Training Activities*

Participants were also asked to reflect on what they had learned from the micro-teaching activity. Generally, they considered the activity a valuable learning experience. Teacher 13 summarised activities that they engaged together:

*Preparing and teaching microteaching lesson with my peers was a phenomenal and unforgettable learning experience for me. In addition to planning activities and aligning the lesson with standards of our group's requirement, I also had the opportunity to observe other teachers and receive constructive feedback on our own lesson. (R13)*

Most participants indicated that the micro-teaching lesson helped them to better understand EMI pedagogy in action:

*I learned some new ways to teaching and I also tried to make my lesson plan clear, define the content, the communication, cognition and culture in each lesson in a detailed way. (R35)*

*After delivering the lesson, I have learnt that the lesson plan lacked the language part. It is very challenging to balance content and language. But after the micro-teaching and the whole course, I really learnt what is in the content part and what is in the language part. (R28)*

Others reported that they had developed new or better teaching skills such as giving instruction, giving feedback, explaining concepts, providing effective classroom language and scaffolding the range of classroom activities.

*The learner [participating teacher] has learnt a great lesson from this experience. He has learnt to scaffold his lesson carefully with activities to better prepare students for his lesson. (R37)*

*I can employ some types of communication methods when teaching to make the content understandable, for example, modelling, showing a picture, making experiments, and asking students to present the knowledge via reading, discussing in groups and making presentation materials, sharing ideas. (R45)*

Also reported were improvements in language skills (R39), board writing (R11), classroom management (R11), lesson planning (R30, R39) and teamwork (R29, R20). One participant even saw it as a process of learning about teaching.

*This micro teaching taught me how lessons do not always go as planned, how to adapt my approach and the importance of reflecting on my teaching experience. In fact, we spent time after the micro teaching lesson to review and give comments to each other. It was really wonderful time. (R13)*

Clearly, as a whole, participants developed various practical and teaching knowledge and skills even as they experienced and reported on the need to confront and engage with a range of challenges.

## 15.6 DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

This chapter provides a snapshot of how lecturers and student teachers embarked on engaging EMI pedagogy, and discusses findings in the areas of content and language integration, teaching challenges and the training activity.

Overall, EMI pedagogy has evolved from a variety of teaching approaches designed to develop both content and language for learners. Individuals may be informed by various approaches to develop an effective pedagogy of what Dalton-Puffer have characterized as a “well-considered dosage” (Dalton-Puffer, 2007, p. 296). The findings of the research reported here suggest that EMI classes should include both language and content elements in their course objectives. In this study, although the teacher participants were aware of these dual goals, they found it difficult to achieve both content and language development in one session. To gain this outcome, it seems clear that they need to develop both pedagogical content knowledge (Grossman et al., 1989) and pedagogical language knowledge (Ball & Lindsay, 2012). As most of the participants had appropriate language backgrounds (96%), they did not seem to face problems in meeting the language requirement. However, they did report challenges in mastering the content knowledge and explaining it to the students (Q15). This finding is contrary to those of Kong (2009) and Tuomainen (2018), in which teachers in their study had content backgrounds but faced challenges to achieve the desired language development goals.

Within the overall context of the teaching challenges facing EMI teachers, this study yielded similar findings to those of previous studies. In specific, EMI teachers face a challenge conducting a lesson that accommodates both content and language objectives within the same pedagogic activity, similar to findings in previous studies (Basturkmen, 2018; Kong, 2009). When they plan lessons, the dominant tendency seems to perceive that language objectives are, or may be, separated from the content ones. Therefore, when conducting their instruction, teachers tend to approach these learning objectives in a linear manner: presentation (new words, structures or content), practice, and assessment.

Group work, on the whole, is not much employed. In fact, language and content are treated as two sides of a coin. As Coyle, Hood, and Marsh (2010) have framed it, they tend to constitute a reciprocal relationship: “acquiring subject knowledge, skills and understanding is related to learning and thinking (cognition). To enable the learner to construct an understanding of the subject matter, the linguistic demands of its content must be analysed and made accessible” (p. 104). It is generally agreed that some language knowledge, e.g. technical terms or concepts, can be explicitly taught (Coleman, Hultgren, Li, Tsui, & Shaw, 2018), but other language knowledge can interplay with content in interactional and co-constructing classroom activities (Dafouz, Hüttner, & Smit, 2018). Kong (2009, p. 257) has suggested further that to foster language and content integration effectively, lessons should be “cyclical” to provide multiple opportunities to visit content-related language and explore content in depth.

In the specific instance reported above, to provide practical knowledge for the participants, the course used a micro-teaching activity that required the training teachers to work in groups to conduct an EMI lesson for their peers. As such, the participants reported difficulty in identifying the materials and learning activities necessary for the micro-teaching activity. One possible explanation was that most of them had not taught EMI courses before, so they did not have access to a course book specifically designed for EMI teaching. Another possibility was that their diverse backgrounds and experiences resulted in a lack of agreement with respect to choosing the appropriate materials on which to work. This situation is similar to Tuomainen’s (2018) observation of issues faced by participants in her training courses.

Another challenge to this group was that, as EMI teachers, they needed more training in oral presentation (Ball & Lindsay, 2012; Tuomainen, 2018; Vu & Burns, 2014). My participants reported difficulty in giving presentations and explaining concepts during the micro-teaching activities even though as a whole, they possess good language proficiency (B2 equivalent). One possible explanation for this finding is that their pronunciation skills were not fully adequate leading to instances of poor intelligibility (Ball & Lindsay, 2012; Tuomainen, 2018), which affected students’ perception of the words being employed. Another possible explanation of this was the ineffective engagement of a “distinctive language” for teaching, resulting in perception and comprehension problems. Freeman, Katz, Garcia Gomez, and Burns (2015), in

fact, have problematised the notion of using general language proficiency as a basis for understanding, addressing and assessing the English language knowledge needed by teachers to perform teaching tasks. They call for explicit training of teachers in a classroom functional language. The teachers in my study showed the challenge to modify their teaching language to accommodate young learners' more limited cognitive and linguistic skills and development. To accomplish this effectively, one needs to understand the learners' language and cognition (Cummins, 1979) levels and their language competence to perform specific classroom tasks (Freeman et al., 2015; Morton, 2016).

Finally, the extent to which micro-teaching activity supports teacher participants in their EMI teaching is illustrated in this study through an Asian context in which EMI teacher training was organized as a credit-bearing course with 53 participants, most of whom had limited EMI teaching experience. The micro-teaching activity conducted aimed at providing them with training opportunities to engage in collaborative teaching. One goal was to gain a measure of the right dosage of content and language for an effective EMI lesson. Generally, the participants in the study appreciated the teamwork experience, emphasizing the ability to learn from other team members' feedback. This finding is in line with those from other training courses (Ball & Lindsay, 2012; Cammarata & Haley, 2018; Costa, 2015). Participants could also apply a range of EMI teaching principles and reflect on their own observations. Moreover, the activity seemed to be able to accommodate diverse learning needs by giving participants options to choose group members and contents to work on. However, the learning task of micro-teaching was, in the end, far removed from an EMI situation engaging specific learner groups for designated instruction in EMI.

In conclusion, this study has provided insights into the "learning to teach journey" of EMI teachers. It is not a quick and simple switch of instructional language, from Vietnamese into English. Rather, doing so involves a dynamic and evolving process in which EMI teachers learn new principles for integrating language and content, understanding their learners, adapting their practices, and creating new meanings to their own practices. There is no universal formula for achieving effective changes and desired outcomes. EMI teachers must learn how to develop a localized and personalized pedagogy from a sound theoretical understanding and hands-on practices. Future research studies may continue the pedagogical exploration into classroom language and EMI practices at school levels.

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# Assessment Practices in Local and International EMI Programmes: Perspectives of Vietnamese Students

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## 16.1 INTRODUCTION

Recent research on the implementation of English-Medium Instruction (EMI) in Higher Education (HE) contexts has shed useful light on several aspects of students' learning experience in EMI programmes.

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These aspects have mainly concerned the development of language abilities and content knowledge when learning through the medium of English (see Dearden, 2014; Doiz, Lasagabaster, & Sierra, 2012; Fenton-Smith, Humphreys, & Walkinshaw, 2017). Specifically, participation in EMI programmes appeared to be a challenge to students whose English language abilities were insufficient (Ellili-Cherif & Alkhateeb, 2015; Khan, 2013), while others found that learning in an EMI environment helped improve their receptive English skills (i.e. listening and reading) (Yang, 2015). Regarding acquisition of content knowledge, studies have also reported mixed findings about the impact of EMI on students' comprehension and uptake of the content subject. Some showed positive influences of learning through English (e.g. Hernandez-Nanclares & Jimenez-Munoz, 2017), while others reported relatively similar amounts of learning gains between EMI and non-EMI students (Dafouz, Camacho, & Urquia, 2014; Joe & Lee, 2013). There are also cases where EMI students had problems understanding lectures delivered in English, which adversely impacted on their knowledge of the subject matter (Hellekjaer, 2010).

Nevertheless, this existing body of research has focused excessively on investigating EMI experience through teaching and learning activities. Much less attention has been paid to assessment practices, a component considered indispensable to ensuring quality of learning at several levels, including HE (Boud & Soler, 2016). This is a considerable literature gap, as investigating assessment practices in this study environment promises to provide an additional window into understanding EMI students' learning experience.

The present study focuses on the context of Vietnam, where the number of EMI programmes in the last few decades has significantly increased under the influence of several governmental policies as well as bottom-up initiatives. Addressing the abovementioned gap, it aims to explore Vietnamese students' perceptions of assessment practices in local and international EMI programmes. Local EMI programmes are those implemented in Vietnam in which the majority of lecturers and students are Vietnamese, while international EMI programmes refer to those delivered outside of Vietnam in international, multilingual, and multicultural settings. As a country in the Asia Pacific undergoing exciting processes of internationalisation and globalisation of educational opportunities (Tran & Nguyen, 2018), Vietnam is a promising context for research into EMI implementation.

## 16.2 EMI IN VIETNAM

During the last twenty years, Vietnam has witnessed an increasing focus on internationalisation of HE through EMI implementation through governmental policies (Tran & Nguyen, 2018). The Prime Ministerial Decision No. 1400/QĐ-TTg, often known as the *National Foreign Language 2020 Project*, dictates the goal of using a foreign language as a medium of instruction in Vietnamese HE (Government of Vietnam, 2008). That foreign language, in most cases, is English. Another key policy is the *Higher Education Reform Agenda*, which underlines the necessity to use English for teaching and learning in universities as well as boost international cooperation with partners overseas (Government of Vietnam, 2005). Against this backdrop, a number of EMI programmes have been introduced in both public and private universities in Vietnam (Vu & Burns, 2014).

EMI programmes in Vietnamese HE institutions can be broadly classified into two main groups: foreign and domestic programmes (Nguyen, Walkinshaw, & Pham, 2017), as described in Table 16.1. Both types of foreign programmes (i.e. *Joint programme* and *Advanced programme*) have input from foreign partner universities in terms of curriculum, materials, and assessment. However, their main differences lie at the ranking of partner universities, student recruitment, academic population, and degree-awarding institutions (Tran & Nguyen, 2018). On the other hand, domestic programmes are completely constructed by Vietnamese universities based on the reference of curriculum, materials,

**Table 16.1** Types of EMI programmes in Vietnamese HE

<i>Types of EMI programmes</i>	<i>Programme nature</i>	<i>Degree conferred</i>	<i>Programme nomenclatures in Vietnamese HE</i>
Foreign programmes	Offshore Franchising	Foreign degree Local degree	Joint programmes Advanced programmes
Domestic programmes	Locally developed with reference to foreign programmes	Local degree	High quality programmes

*Source* (Nguyen et al., 2017, p. 40)

and assessment schemes from foreign HE institutions, and comply with the educational objectives and training structures regulated by MOET (Nguyen et al., 2017).

While EMI is increasingly developing in Vietnamese HE, not much research on the topic has been conducted in the country. The existing EMI literature in Vietnam has primarily investigated challenges of EMI implementation, such as students' and lecturers' insufficient English language proficiency, lack of resources, pedagogical and teacher training issues, or policy issues (see Dang, Nguyen, & Le, 2013; Le, 2012; Nguyen et al., 2017; Tran & Nguyen, 2018; Vu & Burns, 2014). Meanwhile, assessment practices, an important component of any EMI programme due to the complexity of integrating language and content in assessing students' performances and achievements, have not received adequate research attention. The current study, therefore, addresses this gap by looking at assessment practices from the perspective of Vietnamese students studying EMI in and outside Vietnam.

### 16.3 ASSESSMENT PRACTICES IN EMI SETTINGS

The fact that EMI students are learning a content subject in English, which is typically not their first language (L1), inherently complicates assessment practices (Dafouz & Camacho-Minano, 2016). One major concern is whether language performance should be included with content in the marking criteria. Nonetheless, this remains inconclusive based on various responses from both lecturers and students. Baker and Hüttner (2017), in exploring three EMI settings in Austria, Thailand, and the UK, found that most of their lecturers did not assess students' language performance. As long as lecturers could understand what students expressed, language-related mistakes did not affect the final scores. However, from students' perspective, 45.7% of them felt that their English was being assessed in examinations (ibid.). Similarly, Aguilar and Rodriguez (2012) reported that their lecturer participants prioritised content assessment, as it is strongly linked to their content expert identity. This is not uncommon in EMI settings, where content matters are often lecturers' top priority whereas developing students' language proficiency falls beyond their responsibility (Dafouz, 2011; Doiz et al., 2012).

Whether or not language ability may influence students' performance in EMI assessment has also been raised as an issue of test justice and validity, particularly in relation to the choice of language in actual assessment

tasks (Shohamy, 2013, p. 205). Previous studies into the effect of L1 and L2 on students' performance (Levin & Shohamy, 2008; Robinson, 2010) have shown that the inclusion of students' L1 in bi/multilingual tests has been recommended as a way of accommodating students (Shohamy, 2013). This is in line with assessment practices reported by Guarda and Helm (2017), in which a small number of lecturers let students make their own language choice in either written exam questions or oral presentations. Likewise, Pulcini and Campagna (2015) found that while the vast majority of their lecturers employed an English-only policy in assessment, 8% adopted a bilingual orientation of both English and Italian. Accommodating students by providing the translations of keywords in the exam questions was also a practice of Turkish lecturers in Macaro, Akincioglu, and Dearden (2016). Similar practice has been found in Ngo's (2019) study of an EMI programme in Vietnam, where lecturer participants allowed students to write their answers in both L1 and L2. All these flexible assessment practices mainly resulted from lecturers' beliefs other than a top-down guideline. Consequently, some lecturers were uncertain if using L1 to accommodate students in exams is 'the right thing to do' (Macaro et al., 2016, p. 64). They also received contradictory instructions from higher level administrators, when the head of the school suggested doing exams in Italian, while the delegate of the rector insisted on English as the only exam language (Guarda & Helm, 2017). This reflects the lack of a coherent policy concerning EMI assessment.

Comparing assessment practices in EMI and non-EMI settings—where the MoI (medium of instruction) is students' L1—is another topic of enquiry. In studying lecturers' beliefs of EMI, Dafouz, Hüttner, and Smit (2016) looked at four different HEIs in Austria, Finland, Spain, and the UK. Their findings revealed that all lecturers—except for those from Austria—declared to use identical assessment criteria and practices regardless of the MoI. On the other hand, the Austrian participants believed that a flexible assessment system should be followed to address respective student groups. These differences in their beliefs, as argued by Dafouz et al. (2016), may be linked to their 'institutional assessment, ideologies as well as practical circumstances and facts of language ability and professional responsibility' (p. 139). However, the lecturers in this study were generally aware of the necessity to prepare students for EMI assessment through various preparatory practices such as organising workshops and giving specific sets of instructions on pre- and post-assessment activities, including providing feedback (p. 138).

Dafouz and Camacho-Minano's study (2016) aimed to investigate if there were any differences in the types of assessment formats between EMI and Spanish-medium instruction programmes. Their students learned the same academic subject with the same teacher and were all assessed through participation (10%), a mid-term exam (10%), seminars (20%), and a final exam (60%). Their findings showed that the use of different assessment formats did not appear to have any impact on students' performance, irrespective of the MoI. This is possibly because their EMI students were familiar with the examination criteria, assessment formats, and the academic and cultural conventions in the investigated university.

It should be noted that most of the aforementioned studies only investigate assessment practices as one small aspect of their larger research inquiries. In addition, only a few have explored assessment practices from students' perspectives; most have studied teachers' perceptions towards EMI assessment. Also, while these studies have investigated EMI assessment practices across contexts (e.g. Baker & Hüttner, 2017; Dafouz et al., 2016) or between EMI and non-EMI degrees (e.g. Dafouz & Camacho-Minano, 2016), they did not look at assessment practices in various EMI settings experienced by the same participants. Especially, hardly any EMI research in Vietnam has investigated the issue of assessment, which warrants the need for further research that explores the perspectives towards assessment practices of students who have experience studying in both local and international EMI environments. To that end, our study aims to address the following research question: How do Vietnamese university students perceive assessment practices in the local EMI programmes compared to the international EMI programmes?

## 16.4 OUR STUDY

### 16.4.1 *Participants*

Participants were six female Vietnamese students who were studying towards or recently completed a Bachelor's or Master's degree in a science- or business-related discipline in Australia, the UK, and France. They were between 20 and 29 years of age. These students had also previously participated in different kinds of EMI programmes in Vietnam. Details of the participants' EMI experience are presented in Table 16.2.

Following the stratified random sampling method (O'Leary, 2010; Riazi, 2016), we were able to recruit participants with a wide range of



**Table 16.2** Participants' EMI experience

<i>Participants (pseudonyms)</i>	<i>EMI experience in Vietnam</i>	<i>International EMI experience</i>
1. Chung	Studied Bachelor of Banking and Economic Law; two subjects of the first year were taught entirely in English Studied Master of Business Administration for one year ( <i>Joint programme</i> with a French partner institution)	Completed the second year of Master of Business Administration in France
2. Thu	Studied Bachelor of Business Administration for three semesters ( <i>Joint programme</i> with an Australian partner institution)	Studying Bachelor of Professional Accounting in Australia (Year 3)
3. Diep	Studied Bachelor of Biotechnology for four years ( <i>Domestic programme</i> )	Completed Master of Pharmaceutical Science in Australia (two-year programme) Ph.D. in Pharmaceutical Science in Australia (Year 1)
4. Trinh	Studied Bachelor of Business Marketing for four years ( <i>Domestic programme</i> )	Studying Master of Business Analytics and Finance in the UK (Year 1)
5. Nhung	Studied Bachelor of Business Administration for two semesters ( <i>Joint programme</i> with an Australian partner institution)	Studying Bachelor of Business Analytics in Australia (Year 3)
6. An	Studied Bachelor of Finance for four years ( <i>Domestic programme</i> )	Studying Master of Finance and Economics in the UK (Year 1)

EMI experience. The Vietnamese EMI programmes attended by the participants included both *foreign joint programmes* and *domestic programmes* (Nguyen et al., 2017). Regarding their experience in international EMI programmes, at the time of the research, two participants had completed their postgraduate degrees; two were studying towards a bachelor's degree; and one towards a master's degree.

#### 16.4.2 *Data Collection Instruments and Procedure*

Data for the current study was collected using semi-structured in-depth interviews. The interviews were conducted online via Facebook Messenger calls for convenient access to participants who were located in various

geographical spaces. The interviews ranged from 15 to 30 minutes in duration and were audio-recorded. In order to obtain data about participants' perceptions of several aspects of assessment practices in local and international EMI programmes, we followed Robinson and Taylor's (2007) framework on researching students' voice when designing interview questions and conducting the interviews. This framework highlights four factors contributing to effective research on student voice, including conception of communication as dialogue, requirement for participation and democratic inclusivity, recognition of power relations between students and the researcher, and possibility for change and transformation based on appreciation of student voice work (Robinson & Taylor, 2007). Along this line, the interview questions were built around two main topics: types of assessment tasks and their advantages and disadvantages, and students' response to marking criteria and feedback. To ensure the reliability of the data, the interview transcripts were sent to the participants along with clarification questions to check for accuracy of information and interpretation.

#### 16.4.3 *Data Analysis*

The interview data were transcribed and coded in NVivo following three levels of qualitative content analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Dörnyei, 2007). The whole data set was first read through and segments containing the participants' perceptions of assessment practices were highlighted. Next, initial codes were given to the segments. Existing codes were then examined and grouped into potential themes. Finally, names were generated for each theme. It was interesting to find that even though the sampling was seemingly modest in number, it yielded significant insights, as suggested by Dörnyei (2007, p. 127) that 'the sample size of 6-10 might work well' for an interview study. To help this sample size remain manageable and increase the depth of information, we decided to look more closely at the collected data rather than adding more participants to the existing cohort of six students to see beyond the saturated information.

### 16.5 FINDINGS

The present study investigated Vietnamese students' perceptions of assessment practices in local and international EMI programmes. Our analysis shows similarities and differences in these students' local and international EMI experience. The following sections outline the key findings.

### 16.5.1 *Familiarity with Types of Assessment Items*

All the participants were familiar with different types of assessments they encountered in their Vietnamese and international EMI programmes. They recalled that both programme types employed similar assessment tasks such as *mid-term tests*, *final exams*, *written assignments*, and *oral presentations*. There were only minor differences; for example, for An, *attendance* was an assessed category in her Vietnamese EMI programme, while it was not assessed in her UK programme. As for Nhung, the difference was that group oral presentations in her Australian programme were often delivered in video format instead of face-to-face presentations as in her previous local EMI experience. These differences, however, did not seem to cause them difficulties. Throughout the interviews, the participants did not describe any types of assessment as unexpected or completely strange. They also expressed confidence when completing assessment activities in international EMI programmes. In fact, five out of six students attributed this confidence level to what they were equipped in Vietnam in terms of assessment practices. Also, familiarity with online Learning Management Systems in the EMI programmes in Vietnam was an added advantage when they completed assessment tasks in international EMI contexts. An explained, ‘*My university in Vietnam had a lot of reference to the Australian iLearn system so the interactions were quite similar*’.

### 16.5.2 *Preparation for Exams*

A notable consensus among the six participants was that a great deal of their anxiety when studying in international EMI programmes came from their final exams, not necessarily because of the level of difficulty or the different components within the exams but mostly because of the large amount of workload they were exposed to. One source of burden associated to their final exam experiences in the international EMI programmes came from the more extensive coverage of content where ‘*the tested knowledge ranges from what we have learned from the first till the very last week of the semester*’ (An). This has been seen as ‘*extremely exhausting in final exam preparation, especially for the more theoretical subjects*’ (An). Nevertheless, in the Vietnamese EMI programmes, often the final exams would only cover contents of the second half of the semester, as the first half was already tested in mid-term tests.

Additionally, other participants found the amount of reading materials they needed to cover in preparation for exams in the international EMI programmes significantly higher than in the Vietnamese programmes.

The successive teaching and learning format in many EMI programmes in Vietnam was also a challenge to these Vietnamese students. They had been more accustomed to the routine of finishing one subject (both learning and testing) then moving on with the next one when studying in Vietnamese EMI programmes. This practice was due to the shortage of eligible staff to teach EMI courses, especially when the lecturers came from partner universities from overseas. For this reason, when moving to the overseas EMI programmes where various subjects were taught in the same time frame, these students would have to adopt more intensive learning habits. This caused difficulties in learning and especially testing.

### 16.5.3 *Feedback Practices*

In both contexts, feedback on assessment emerged as an interesting theme, and varied from lecturer to lecturer as recalled by our participants. This is not surprising given that many EMI curricula are often a combination of traditional teaching–learning practices and the so-called imported methodology from partner universities, making the practices of providing feedback a stage where improvisation is deemed unavoidable. A notable feature of feedback practices in EMI programmes in Vietnam is related to feedback on oral presentations. The participants reported that their lecturers in the local EMI programmes often provided detailed feedback on their oral tasks.

*Most lecturers would comment on various aspects of the presentation, ranging from form (i.e. font size, slide organisation, how to dress when delivering a presentation, the manners of the presenters, etc.) to content (i.e. the percentage of each section in the overall content, which part needs more details, etc.).*  
(An)

Given that EMI students had been exposed to a much greater number of presentation activities compared to their prior education in high schools as well as their peers in the Vietnamese-medium instructed strand, EMI lecturers' stress on this stage reflects their willingness to facilitate their students' EMI endeavour for more communicative learning practices.

Regarding other assessment activities, feedback that participants received in international EMI programmes seemed to focus more on written assignments. They were also quite content with the amount of detailed feedback provided.

*In the overseas programme, we can always access online feedback from the university website via Turnitin where clear explanations can be found next to our errors or the points that are not persuasive to the lecturer. Generally, I can receive more detailed feedback in assignments here compared to the EMI programme back home. (An)*

With the widespread use of institutional intranets, international EMI programmes were seen as more effective in distributing feedback to their students. More importantly, such detailed feedback seems to have worked as a means to maintain students' sense of fairness. Specifically, Thu told us about her experience of being able to claim for a higher score after noticing the mismatch between her test results and the feedback. She cited that if it were in the Vietnamese context, she might have had no clues as to how she was given that grade, thus having fewer chances to have it re-considered.

#### 16.5.4 Attitudes Towards Group Assessment

Group assessment was reported to be a component in all participants' study experience in both local and international EMI programmes. While all six respondents were positive about group assessment in their Vietnam-based EMI programmes, the international EMI programmes presented more challenges. The participants unanimously found completing group assignments in their local EMI programmes an 'easy' collaborative experience. Their most commonly cited reason was group homogeneity. They considered working with classmates who were also Vietnamese an advantage owing to similar learning and working styles. Nhung, for example, recalled that it was efficient to work in groups with Vietnamese members in her local EMI programme. For each group task they needed to meet only a few times to assign individual work; after all members had finished their part, they could easily put together a group presentation. It seems that having shared cultural, linguistic, and study backgrounds was an important factor contributing to effective collaboration among students in local EMI programmes.

In the case of occasional conflicts among group members, the participants reported to solve it quite easily through negotiation and discussion.

*If some members in our study groups in Vietnam slacked off, I found it easy to discuss their behaviour with them directly and find solutions. (An)*

This active approach to dealing with group conflicts seemed conducive towards the participants' positive group work experience. Additionally, most of them consider opportunities to work together to complete an assessment task beneficial for both learning and social interaction.

*Group tasks are good because they gave us the chance to interact with each other. We not only improve our knowledge, but also make new friends. (Diep)*

These overwhelmingly positive attitudes towards group assessment experience in the Vietnamese EMI programmes were in contrast with the participants' perceptions of how group work was carried out in their international EMI programmes. The main difference between the nature of group assessment between the two programme types was the linguistic and cultural make-up of the groups. In the international EMI programmes, the participants often worked in groups consisting of members from different cultural and linguistic backgrounds, including both English native speaker and non-native speaker students. They, however, realised that not all members of their groups in the international EMI programmes were highly invested in their learning, which adversely influenced the quality of their contribution. Both Thu and Nhung expressed their disappointment when working with international classmates who showed minimal interest in group tasks, made only very modest contribution, and failed to attend group meetings.

*Another Vietnamese friend and I were once in the same group with an international friend. We worked very hard and she didn't do much at all. (Nhung)*

The participants attributed this non-cooperative behaviour to differences in backgrounds as these friends were from 'a different country' with 'different personalities' (An). Interestingly, while they seemed upset by these incidents of non-participation of their international friends, none of them attempted to confront or deal with it in the same way that they

would have done with their Vietnamese classmates in the local EMI programmes. Their main reason was to maintain harmony.

*That [group member's non-collaboration] happened in my first semester here [in Australia]. I was very new then, and so was she, so I didn't want to make life more difficult for her... I still gave her a high evaluation score for participation. (Nhung)*

Nhung's reaction was representative of how other participants also responded, which reflects a non-confrontational pattern of dealing with intra-group conflicts in diverse group composition in an international study environment.

Another source of tension concerning group assessment was differences in levels of academic competence among the participants and their international friends in the programmes. The most common area of concern was academic writing. They found that not all their group members, including those who were considered 'native' speakers of English, were familiar with academic writing conventions. In Thu's experience, it was not uncommon that she and her other Vietnamese group members had to proofread their group's written reports to check for grammatical errors.

*Another Vietnamese friend in our group was good at writing, so she had to revise a lot of what a native English speaker student wrote. These native speaker students often write in the same way that they speak, so their writing is very colloquial. Some of their word choice is good, but their grammar doesn't follow academic conventions. (Thu)*

### 16.5.5 *Students' Reflection on Their Performance*

The participants gave an overall impression that they were generally confident with their English competence, which means their English level was sufficient for studying in an English-medium environment. Nevertheless, English competence does not seem to play a prominent role in their assessment performance in the Vietnamese EMI programmes, and assessments in this context did not often specify language use as part of the requirements. In EMI courses that were taught by Vietnamese lecturers, the participants reported that some teachers were quite flexible about accuracy of language expression.

*When Vietnamese teachers marked our assignments, I think they were quite lenient. They paid more attention to content than language, as long as they understood what we wrote. (Thu)*

Thu's experience resonated with Chung: in her Vietnamese EMI programme, students were allowed to write their exam responses in bullet points, instead of full sentences. This lessening focus on the quality of English used for completing assessment seemed to be appreciated by the participants while they were in the local EMI programmes. However, when continuing their study in international EMI contexts, they reported that English proficiency assumed more importance, especially with oral presentations and written assignments. They reported paying closer attention to their language use (i.e. organisation of ideas and clarity of expression) in written assignments, as this was often included as a criterion for evaluation.

*In the UK program, language is given more attention in the marking criteria [compared to the Vietnamese program]. Some of my teachers here even corrected my spelling and grammar errors when marking my mid-term papers. (An)*

For this reason, two of the participants, Thu and Trinh, explicitly expressed preference for exams as a type of assessment than written assignments, claiming that English writing was not their strength.

*I would prefer final exams. I have higher grades when taking exams than doing written assignments because I am not very good at writing. I often score lower in courses that require a lot of writing such as marketing, than courses that involve mathematic skills. (Trinh)*

It can be seen here that students' reflection on their performance is closely related to the controversial issue of language and content in EMI assessment.

## 16.6 DISCUSSION

This section focuses on discussing students' perceptions of EMI assessment practices in local and international EMI contexts with reference to existing literature, focusing on three main themes: (1) types of assessment, (2) intercultural influences on assessment, and (3) the role of content and language in EMI assessment practices.



### 16.6.1 *Variation in Assessment Types and Feedback Practices*

In both types of EMI programmes, the participants reported to be exposed to a variety of contemporary testing formats. This is arguably advantageous, as it caters to diverse learning styles and linguistic abilities of EMI learners (Dafouz & Camacho-Minano, 2016). Additionally, the local EMI programmes in Vietnam demonstrated a high level of compatibility with international EMI programmes in terms of assessment types, which gave Vietnamese students several advantages as they transitioned into international EMI environments. Another noteworthy finding is most of the assessment activities used in both types of EMI programmes reported in the dataset focused on assessment *of* learning (measuring and reporting the level of students' accomplishments—such as final exams). This finding echoes what Kao and Tsou (2017) and Li and Wu (2018) revealed in their studies of EMI assessment in Taiwan: participants reported that most of the assessment tools in their courses were summative assessments such as written final exams, in-class quizzes, and weekly assignments. These assessment types are considered instrumental and allow little room to motivate students' intrinsic learning desires (Earl & Katz, 2006). Additionally, the current study found that assessment *for* learning (integrated into teaching to enhance learning—such as oral presentations) was a significant means of assessment throughout their EMI experience. This suggests a more balanced assessment practice in the EMI programmes of the current study compared to other EMI contexts. Nonetheless, assessment *as* learning (providing teachers with rich and detailed information about students' progress—such as self- and peer-evaluation), was almost absent in all EMI programmes attended by the participants.

Regarding feedback practices, the students demonstrated some degrees of indifference towards receiving feedback on their assessed tasks. While showing some enthusiasm for feedback on oral presentations in the Vietnamese EMI programmes, many participants remained largely aloof from feedback they received in other assessed activities. However, within the scope of this study, this attitude towards feedback was not further investigated. In-depth studies into EMI students' responses to feedback, therefore, may be needed.

### 16.6.2 *Intercultural Influences on Assessment Performance*

Participants' responses in relation to group assessment participation revealed significantly more challenges in conducting group assessment

in the international EMI contexts than in the Vietnamese EMI programmes. The multicultural group environment in international EMI programmes, while it could have brought about several advantages for learning and communication (Shiri, 2015; Taguchi, 2018), in fact appeared to be a source of problems for all the participants. This is in line with Dippold's (2015) comment that students in international programmes often hold a rather negative view of group work, be it assessed or not. Also, Volet and Ang (1998) argue that students tend to prefer working in mono-cultural groups for four reasons: social-emotional connectedness, language, pragmatism, and negative stereotypes. These factors probably explain why the participants in this study found group assessments in their local EMI programmes less problematic. Furthermore, one underlying yet unstated explanation for the students' difficulties in group cooperation might come from the use of their mother tongue. Many participants admitted developing the habit of discussing in L1 rather than English in their local EMI programmes. This codeswitching phenomenon may result from students' lack of readiness when taking up their new 'social role' accompanied by the switch of medium of instruction from their L1 to English (Ljosland, 2011). However, heavily relying on the use of L1 may cause students significant challenges in international EMI programmes, where they have to work with group mates from multicultural backgrounds.

### *16.6.3 The Role of Language and Content in EMI Assessment*

The complex issue of language and content focus in assessing EMI performance revealed in this study is similar to those reported in previous research. From the students' perspectives, lecturers in Vietnamese EMI programmes appeared to adopt a more flexible policy and take students' levels of language proficiency into consideration when designing assessment criteria and marking. This corroborates findings by Baker and Hüttner (2017) and Guarda and Helm (2017). Meanwhile, in international contexts, 'the institutional assessment, ideologies as well as practical circumstances and facts of language ability and professional responsibility' have arguably exerted an influence on the ways students are assessed (Dafouz et al., 2016, p. 139). Another interesting finding is the participants' 'avoidance' attitudes, as they preferred assessment tasks that do not involve much writing. To a certain extent, this reflects language-related difficulties that students in many EMI contexts experience when learning

through the medium of English (see review by Macaro, Curle, Pun, An, & Dearden, 2018). Notably, language issues are still relevant to participants of the present study, who had EMI experience in a local context before transitioning to an international EMI environment.

The attention given to language and content in bilingual education has been a controversial issue, reflected in various perceptions and attitudes of lecturers and students (see, for example, Chen, 2017; Doiz et al., 2012). When it comes to assessment, the question of validity—whether assessment of content knowledge in a language that students may not be as proficient as in their mother tongue reflects their real learning progress—is a big concern (Lo & Fung, 2018). While many content instructors deny their language-related identity and think that they do not target language when marking students' assignments in L2, research has shown that is not always the case (Hönig, 2010). In other words, it is impossible to separate language and content because the latter is generally constructed through the former (Lemke, 1990).

## 16.7 CONCLUSION: IMPLICATIONS FOR ASSESSMENT PRACTICES IN EMI PROGRAMMES

This research suggests some useful implications for the implementation of assessment in the two types of EMI programmes under investigation. Regarding assessment types, given the predominant amount of summative assessments featured in both types of EMI programmes (assessment *of* learning), more assessments oriented towards enhancing students' intrinsic learning desire (assessment *for/as* learning) should be provided, targeting to promote both acquisition of content knowledge and improvement of English skills. Assessment *as* learning activities such as self- and especially peer evaluation, should be encouraged to allow for more interaction among students in the same course/program. This practice might help to partly address problems in intercultural communication commonly experienced by participants of the present study when studying in international EMI programmes.

Additionally, both programme types could better prepare their students by equipping them with assessment-related study skills, such as preparing for exams and handling conflicts in group assessments. Specifically, apart from general exam preparation skills, it may be beneficial to offer EMI students support in preparing for and doing exams in English such as employing mind-mapping to improve reading comprehension and

writing skills (Davies, 2011). Another implication is related to the use of feedback as a scaffolding activity for learning. Given EMI students' lack of active uptake of teacher feedback as reported in the present study, EMI lecturers should aim to provide feedback with ideas for adjusting, re-evaluating, and provoking students' thinking. EMI students may also benefit from additional training focusing on how to interpret and make good use of assignment feedback for their future studies.

Concerning managing group conflicts in international EMI environments where groups often involve students from different backgrounds, assistance might be provided through soft skills training workshops, where both international and domestic students are given opportunities to practise effective intercultural communication (Smith & Khawaja, 2011). As for local EMI programmes where most students share similar cultural backgrounds, communication skills training, including group conflicts management, should still be incorporated as an important component in general study skills sessions. It may also be useful to critically discuss with local EMI students the pros and cons of codeswitching between English and a shared L1 (see Dearden, 2014) in discussion in mono- and multicultural groups. The goal is to guide them towards creating workable strategies to achieve comfortable use of English for group discussion, as well as harnessing the advantage of having a shared L1 in helping each other to acquire content knowledge.

Finally, concerning the non-unified approach towards content and language evaluation in EMI assessment, it would be helpful if marking criteria were consistently made clear to students following pedagogical discussions among EMI lecturers in the same programme, specifying the weighting of language and content aspects. This is particularly applicable to local EMI programmes, where content lecturers often find that they are left to their own devices when designing evaluation criteria for their course assignments. In fact, a recent study by Vu (Chapter 15) on EMI teacher training in Vietnam has raised similar concerns regarding the combination of content and language in an EMI lesson. This suggests the growing needs for EMI assessment, especially marking criteria, to be clearly discussed not only among the chalkface participants of an EMI programme but also within initial EMI teacher training courses for increased effectiveness of assessment practices in particular and EMI teaching in Vietnam HE in a broader context.

The current study provides useful empirical evidence to shed light on similarities and discrepancies in assessment practices in local and

international EMI programmes as seen through the perspectives of Vietnamese students. Both types of EMI programmes were found to expose these students to a wide range of assessment tasks. The international EMI environments, however, reportedly presented them with more challenges, particularly in terms of assessment types, response to feedback, group assessment, and language skills needed to perform well in assessment tasks. These findings reflect the impact of EMI as a new discourse and educational practice on the HE landscape of Vietnam. Particularly, they highlight how EMI implementation has brought about changes in learning and teaching at tertiary level in Vietnam, taking assessment practices as a case in point. This practice is crucial in keeping Vietnamese HE abreast of new trends of development within the world's HE systems. Additionally, our research paves the way for suggestions on improving the quality of assessment practices in Vietnamese and international EMI programmes so that they better meet EMI students' diversified learning needs. Future research could build on our study by exploring perceptions of EMI lecturers on the effectiveness of EMI assessment in comparison with students' views. Given the increasingly varied aspects of EMI in Vietnam under research (see other chapters also in this volume for more discussion and insights on EMI in Vietnam) and the growth in the quantity of other HE studies, it is hopeful that the tipping point of HE research in Vietnam education would soon be approached.

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## Commentary: Who Is EMI for? From Vietnam, Thinking About a Clash of Realities Behind the Policy, Practice, and Pedagogy in Japan

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Part III is a neat collection of studies that examine EMI-related issues in Vietnamese higher education through the perspectives of different stakeholders. While the focus is on Vietnam, the authors demonstrate the complexity as well as the changing landscape of EMI policy, practice, and pedagogy by offering and drawing from international comparative analyses.

Chapter 14 by Pham and Doan builds upon the results of Dearden's (2014) report on the international comparative analysis of 55 countries on EMI policy and practice. While the authors acknowledge the similarities between Dearden's results and their own findings from in-depth interviews with university managers and lecturers in Vietnam, they delve further and argue that the "Policy of Encouragement" and "Pedagogy of Assumption" seem pervasive in Vietnamese higher education today.

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So, what are some of the specific concerns and issues when such a “Policy of Encouragement” is translated into practice and teachers are expected to teach EMI courses based on a mere “Pedagogy of Assumption”? Chapter 15 by Vu offers some insights. In Chapter 15, Vu discusses issues surrounding EMI pedagogy and pertinent professional development from the rare perspectives of in-service teachers in Vietnam. By reviewing and analysing the questionnaire responses, observations, and reflection notes, Vu presents potential challenges of teaching EMI courses. Her findings indeed demonstrate that the successful delivery of EMI courses requires a careful mixture of English language skills, content knowledge, and pedagogical competence of the teacher.

To add another layer to the already-complex reality of EMI in Vietnamese education, Chapter 16 by Truong, Ngo, and Nguyen invites the voices of Vietnamese university students who have EMI experiences in both Vietnam and overseas. The authors discuss how different factors such as culture, language, and academic backgrounds of the students have an impact on the way in which they perform in EMI courses, both in Vietnam and overseas. More importantly, the chapter highlights the urgency to revisit and improve the current EMI practice from the assessment perspectives.

Bearing a striking resemblance to the picture painted by the above three chapters, Japanese higher education is currently experiencing a clash of different realities particularly in terms of the delivery of EMI at the institutional and classroom levels. In what follows, I will first provide a quick overview of Japan’s recent internationalisation efforts with a focus on EMI programmes in higher education. Subsequently, by comparing and contrasting the findings from the above three chapters, I will present specific cases in the implementation of EMI programmes within the context of Japanese higher education.

Since the 1980s, the Japanese government has experimented with a number of large-scale internationalisation policies. These policies range from general recommendations to curriculum overhauls including the introduction and promotion of EMI courses in Japanese (mostly higher) education. From the late 2000s, the government began to issue calls for proposals from universities and carefully select universities for funding institutional internationalisation efforts. The most recent large-scale competitively funded internationalisation project is known as the “Top Global University Project” (TGUP hereafter), which was launched in 2014. There are 37 universities in Japan that are being funded for

different initiatives within the large project scheme and each university has designed a specific and unique strategic plan to implement during the approved funding period. As I work in one such institution, I will draw from both literature as well as my own professional experience of EMI policy and practice while also making connections to the findings from the above three chapters.

According to the most recent report by Japan's Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science, and Technology (MEXT, 2019a), approximately 42% of four-year universities in Japan offer EMI courses. In addition, although the practice of EMI was traditionally more prevalent at the graduate school level, there is an increasing number of universities that offer undergraduate degree programmes via EMI (MEXT, 2019a, p. vii). This recent trend suggests a constant growth not simply in the quantitative sense, but also in variety and diversity of EMI programmes.

In fact, a range of EMI programmes in Japan may be grouped into three different categories given their target student population, purpose, and scope. Namely, Shimauchi (2016) offers three models including: (1) the Global Citizen model; (2) the Crossroad model; and (3) the *Dejima* model.

Aiming to foster globally minded Japanese students, the first model caters to the needs and wants of Japanese domestic students. In fact, about 90% of students enrolled in "Global Citizen" type EMI programmes are said to be Japanese students (p. 131).

The second model appears most ideal yet perhaps far from becoming a reality of many campuses across Japan. In this model, both international and domestic students of diverse backgrounds enrol in the same EMI courses where they not only become classmates but also gain opportunities to extend their relationship beyond the classroom for more sustainable personal and professional connections across borders.

The last model is named after *Dejima* island in Nagasaki, which was the only contact point with the rest of the world during Japan's self-imposed isolation from 1639 to 1854. Alluding to the historical meaning of the place, in the *Dejima* model, international students and Japanese returnee students alike enrol in EMI courses that are designed especially for such populations, and, therefore, they have very little contact with other Japanese students on campus.

As a faculty coordinator of a *Dejima*-model EMI programme in my current institution, which is also one of the 13 select TGUP institutions

“that are [*supposedly*] conducting world-leading education and research” (MEXT, 2019b), I found it intriguing that the three chapters in Part III, especially Chapter 14, also problematise the budgetary and financial constraints of running EMI programmes in the context of Vietnamese higher education. In Japan, financial factors seem to be the key determinants of how EMI programmes are coordinated and delivered (e.g. Birchley, 2018, pp. 132–134; Ota & Horiuchi, 2018, p. 128). While most EMI courses and programmes in Japan do not necessarily incur additional or special fees and are instead calculated per credit or per term, the operation and management of EMI can be a significant financial burden on the university (Birchley, 2018).

In fact, the programme I currently coordinate is designed specifically for short-term exchange students from our partner universities around the world. The programme participants are exempt from paying tuition fees to the host university (= my institution) since they are on exchange via the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between the host university and their home universities. This means, the programme must be carefully budgeted and managed within the means of the university and it is not generating any profit nor breaking even for that matter. While the funding from internationalisation projects such as the above-mentioned TGUP enables additional employment of faculty and staff members, most of these talented and experienced members are released after the end of the funding period. This leads to the general inconsistency and unsustainable nature of EMI programmes at the institutional level.

Additionally, the students enrol in EMI courses, most of which are taught by the three main programme coordinators including myself and additionally by three instructors from outside of our department. These outside instructors receive monetary compensation for their offerings of the EMI courses for exchange students in the programme. This, in turn, implies that the programme needs to stay reasonable and manage the number of course offerings by outside instructors within the yearly budget allocated to the programme. As discussed also by Birchley (2018), many of these internationalisation policies in Japan are highly contingent on the government’s funding which raises questions about the prevalence and actual effects of the otherwise-costly ideological enterprise.

Aside from the financial constraints, there seem to be similar ideological and operational issues found in EMI programmes in both Japanese and Vietnamese higher education contexts. One such issue is the lack

of guidance and support available to practitioners of EMI courses and programmes. As demonstrated in Chapter 16, the absence of a coherent policy for EMI assessment may result in the confusion of students and inconsistent (or “flexible” to put it nicely) assessment practices by teachers. The authors in Chapter 14 also argue that insufficient policy guidance and professional development will result in the unsatisfactory delivery of EMI, which likely leads to falling short of institutional (often political and economically driven) goals.

A similar situation is presented by Wilkinson (2015) that pedagogical guidelines and training are rarely offered to EMI teachers in Japan. This may derive from the idea of a “Pedagogy of Assumption” as conceptualised by Pham and Doan in Chapter 14. This assumptive nature of EMI is particularly concerning because “even high [English] proficiency teachers [may experience] linguistic challenges” (Aizawa & Rose, 2019, p. 1139) in some cases. In their analysis of Japan’s EMI policy into practice, Aizawa and Rose (2019) explain that these challenges are commonly experienced by EMI practitioners around the world and call for more case studies of different contexts at both institutional and classroom levels to uncover the complex reality and inform the policymakers. In a similar vein, the findings from Chapter 15 on in-service EMI teachers’ experiences illuminate that, although the teacher’s language proficiency, content knowledge, and pedagogical competence are of importance independently, teaching an EMI course requires a careful and unique collaboration of the above skills to address and accommodate the contextual elements of the specific classroom.

While the Japanese version of the “Policy of Encouragement” (conceptualised in Chapter 14) may be partially enacted as EMI courses and programmes at the institutional level, the realities are far too complex to be simply “encouraged” for a sustainable and meaningful change. For instance, speaking of the EMI programme at my institution, the EMI courses offered as part of the said programme are in practice made “open” to the general population of domestic students on campus. Therefore, in theory, any Japanese student at the institution can join the course alongside their largely international classmates. As one may expect, however, it is extremely rare to find Japanese students with sufficient English language skills as well as motivation and dedication to complete or even enrol in such EMI courses. After all, if the equivalent of (or at least one similar to) these courses are offered in their mother tongue

(= Japanese) within the same campus, why would the Japanese students leave their comfort zone to take EMI courses?

This then poses a fundamental yet rarely addressed question: *Who is the current internationalisation campaign for?* If the present issues and challenges remain unattended, Japan's internationalisation efforts seem to keep "un-internationalizing" the campus through the invisible yet daunting divide between the EMI and non-EMI programmes. To elaborate, the divide may first and foremost stem from *language*, which is Japanese v. English. It can also be of *physical space* as the international students hardly spend any time with domestic Japanese students in the classroom environment. The divide, therefore, can be of *emotion* for the international students as they have little to no contact with the Japanese students during their study abroad experience in Japan.

Returning to the above question of who the current internationalization is for, the glaring reality is that it does not seem to be for international students at all. This answer may seem puzzling, especially in the context of *Dejima*-model programmes which almost exclusively target international students on Japanese campuses. However, as critiqued in Shimauchi's (2016) work, the so-called EMI programmes in Japan often include courses taught "on" English (skills) and they do not necessarily mean courses taught "in" English (p. 116). At the same time, the *Dejima*-model programmes often lack diversity and rigour while at least superficially emulating an international feeling on campus (Hashimoto, 2018; Phan, 2013; Rivers, 2010).

In the case of the *Dejima*-model programme at my institution, the programme participants are students who come on exchange in Japan via an institutional MOU between partner universities. Such MOUs in general spell out the requirements and exchange quotas by which the number of Japanese students allowed to study at a partner university in a foreign country must be close to if not equal to the number of students sent from the foreign university to my institution. In other words, to ensure that the Japanese students who wish to go on exchange to their desired partner university, EMI programmes including mine exist to maintain the mutual and active flow of international student exchanges.

Through a critical examination of the TGUP funding schemes and related policy documents, Hashimoto (2018) argues that the current EMI practice in Japanese higher education is in fact "for recruiting international students and internationalisation of Japanese universities, rather than about individual (domestic or international) students' language

choice and enhancing their international understanding and experience” (p. 40). Indeed, this rhetoric of internationalisation as a means to increase Japan’s global appeal and presence for their own political, economic, and diplomatic interests has long been studied (e.g. Burgess, Gibson, Klaphake, & Selzer, 2010; Phan, 2013; Rivers, 2010).

More recently, scholars have advanced this rhetoric by closely examining and evaluating the current EMI practice in Japan. Based on the analysis of admissions procedures for EMI programmes at the undergraduate level, Ota and Horiuchi (2018) found that such programmes often seem to be used “as a means of branding or window-dressing in the competition among Japanese universities, and that the most important aim is not to recruit more international students but to gain a competitive edge over domestic rivals” (p. 128).

As for my institution that is not located in the more popular destinations of Tokyo or Osaka, but instead in a smaller and more obscure city of Japan, a *Dejima*-model EMI programme may hold a wider and larger significance. For one, it seems to function as a necessary lifeline to stay in the domestic competition to lure as many “Japan fans” (borrowed from Hashimoto’s work, 2018) as possible, within the framework of the full-fledged nationwide “Study in Japan” campaign (e.g. JASSO, n.d.). The above *Dejima*-model programme is often referred to as the university’s flagship international programme through which our international partner university students are welcomed and appreciated.

At the same time, since the programme does not generate any profit, it has long been under critical scrutiny within the institution for its financial burden on the entire university system. To make things worse, the results of the recent mid-term evaluation of the TGUP efforts at the institution were mediocre, which has accelerated the pressure and criticism towards costly internationalisation programmes on campus for being high investment, low return. In addition, the latest government-led plan that aims to revitalise higher education for 2040 (Central Council for Education, 2018) have largely scaled down the focus on the internationalisation of higher education. Although the TGUP is technically left with five more years, new and innovative plans such as *Society 5.0*<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>According to the Japanese government, it is a form of society where physical and cyber spaces exist in harmony to “resolve various social challenges” (The Government of Japan, n.d.).



and *100-Year Life Society*<sup>2</sup> have outshined the once-untouchable mantra of internationalisation in Japanese higher education.

In short, while Japanese higher education seems to face similar challenges as its Vietnamese counterpart in light of the clash between EMI policy and practice, Japanese universities endure unique problems as well. With Japan's hyper-aging low-birth society, the government may be shifting its focus from the previous almighty "internationalisation" strategy to a more realistic cost-effective technology-led scheme that utilises the resources already in place. With the diminishing financial and political support, EMI programmes in Japan may be at the critical point where educators must revisit the original intention and purpose of internationalisation policies and ask how we can serve the best interest of our domestic as well as international students.

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<sup>2</sup>This refers to a society where people are active and healthy past the age of 100 (Cabinet Office, Government of Japan, 2017). It involves various labour market and pension system reforms to meet the changing needs and expectations of today's hyper-aging society.

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‘Expectations vs. Practicalities’:  
Key Issues of EMI Policy and Pedagogical  
Implementation in Higher Education  
in Vietnam, with Reference from Brunei  
Darussalam

*Najib Noorashid*

18.1 INTRODUCTION

Issues on English as a Medium of Instruction (EMI) in Vietnamese higher education (HE) have garnered attention in recent years. Today, EMI in HE has contributed to various potentials of internationalisation, economic reformation and nation-building as well as the exchange of knowledge and cultures between people and countries. As nations aim to move forward with the demands of implementing EMI policy and pedagogy, they must also prepare for challenges along the way. Such endeavours have provided vast opportunities to explore related concerns, which not only relevant to policy makers and stakeholders in education, but also local and international researchers.

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This chapter reviews major key issues raised in: Pham and Doan's study on policy and pedagogical practice of EMI in Vietnamese universities (Chapter 14); Vu's study on theoretical and practical challenges of training EMI among Vietnamese teachers (Chapter 15); and Truong, Ngo, and Nguyen's study on assessment practices in local and international EMI programmes from student perspectives (Chapter 16). This chapter also compares the EMI policy, practices, and pedagogical issues raised in the contexts of HE in Brunei Darussalam (henceforth Brunei)—where EMI is experiencing substantial shifts in its national education system in recent years. The analytical lens in juxtaposing the EMI in the HE of these Southeast Asian countries aims to offer more insights and recommendations for future research.

## 18.2 'EXPECTATIONS VS. PRACTICALITIES' OF EMI IN HE

Pham and Doan's scene setting chapter based on the perspectives of university senior managers and educators raises critical issues on the implementation of EMI at the institutional policy *vis-à-vis* the pedagogical practices in HE in Vietnam. One of the main issues is the difference in objectives at the top managerial stakeholder level and the impracticality of the institutional expectations to the enactment of pedagogical approaches involving educators in the classroom. This further confirms how the top-down initiative in Vietnamese higher education institutions (HEI) affects EMI prospect.

The EMI implementation in Vietnamese HEIs is motivated predominantly by non-educational goals, which are to promote the status of HEIs in terms of student attractions according to the allocated government funding. The authors described the lack of emphasis on educational goals caused by the 'policy of encouragement' in EMI with no specific policy guidance for education, which led to the notion of a 'pedagogy of assumption' among the educators. This could be a starting point of other issues in the implementation of EMI in Vietnamese HEIs. The senior managers are more interested in commercialising EMI programmes than providing support to the educators in preparing for EMI practices in a classroom, which causes uncoordinated expectations and experiences between them. This is evident from the educators' statements, which highlight their lack of readiness in managing EMI classrooms, their lack of knowledge of EMI practices, and their apprehension to communicate in English or engage in EMI approaches, further affecting the students' learning.

The same issue is raised in the chapters by Vu and Truong, Ngo, and Nguyen. From teachers' and learners' perspectives, both case studies also confirm the limitations of pedagogical effectiveness among educators in Vietnamese HEIs. While the educators in Pham and Doan's study were not aware of their role in teaching EMI as part of the institutional policy, the absence of acknowledging internationalisation at HEIs among the research participants could be another reason for the disconnection between stakeholders. This caused detrimental effects to both educators and learners and further hindered the effectiveness of EMI in HE. This is shown in the emergence of issues of the diversity of teachers' and learners' backgrounds and intercultural differences in Chapters 15 and 16, where many teachers and learners seemed hesitant in dealing with EMI issues.

The 'policy of encouragement' may also exist in HE in Brunei as 'there is no explicit policy on the medium of instruction for universities set by the Ministry of Education, so each institute determines its own system' (Ishamina & Deterding, 2017, p. 285). Nevertheless, Bruneian educators and learners are conditioned to acknowledge the bilingual policy in all education levels in the country, since the implementation of the *Dwibahasa* (Bilingual) Policy in 1984 and the National Education System for the twenty-first century (SPN-21) in 2009. Noor Azam and McLellan's (2018) study showcases the understanding of the bilingual policy and EMI practices among the educators at Universiti Brunei Darussalam (UBD). The authors claim that the logical movement of using EMI in UBD is from the use of EMI throughout the primary and secondary levels of education in Brunei. This may be why there are less problematic EMI experiences in UBD, amid a few reports on moderate English competence among students as they prefer to converse in Malay outside of educational settings.

Drawing comparisons between Vietnamese and Bruneian contexts, the acknowledgement of EMI policy is significant to the success of its pedagogical practice and deliverance. In this case, the Bruneian HE educators claimed to be highly confident about their teaching and assessment practices in their EMI classrooms, which is in contrast to the reports on the Vietnamese HEIs. Thus, the effectiveness of EMI implementation depends on the consistency of and familiarity with institutional policy and time. While it took many years for Bruneians to adapt to EMI practices at all education levels, the impractical alacrity of Vietnamese senior managers has caused them to overlook variables that

could affect the effectiveness of EMI in practice. This is understood from statements in Chapter 14 detailing their eagerness to achieve the National Foreign (English) Languages 2020 and Higher Education Reform Agenda, while maintaining their institutions' competitiveness.

All three chapters suggest the detrimental effects over the inconsistencies and impracticalities involving stakeholders in Vietnamese HE that should be addressed immediately. The mismatch between theoretical expectations of implementing EMI with the actual enactment in pedagogy may lead to unexpected turns against the aspiration of the institutions and the policy makers in pushing forward the implementation of EMI in Vietnam.

### 18.3 THE IMPORTANCE OF EMI PEDAGOGICAL KNOWLEDGE AND PRACTICES

All three chapters suggest the pedagogical knowledge, practices, and the awareness of EMI are crucial to all stakeholders in HE. However, these chapters emphasise that the lack of knowledge, familiarity, and experiences involving EMI has affected their classroom practices, assessment and even the whole of their educational experiences and transformation. Furthermore, these chapters suggest the limitations of English proficiency among the educators and students also dampen the efficacy of EMI in HEIs.

Vu has stated that the lack of knowledge of pedagogical practices relates to the lack of experience in undertaking EMI, which also outlines some theoretical and implementational issues in training EMI teachers in a Vietnamese university. The lack of experience among English teachers in teaching subject-content knowledge that requires specific use of terminologies such as in Science is seen as a challenge to the efficacy of EMI pedagogy. Interestingly, the positive responses in self-reporting data on their English proficiency show a discrepancy in their pedagogical practice, particularly when it involves an unfamiliar field of study. This also raises the necessity of incorporating good understanding of knowledge content and high proficiency in English to successfully implement EMI in classroom. Moreover, the lack of knowledge and experience dealing with EMI might contribute to the difficulty for these teachers to choose suitable learning activities as they also disregard group work activities that can further assist in developing communicative approaches as well as language and content development among learners. Truong, Ngo,

and Nguyen also report on the inefficiency of assessment practices by Vietnamese educators vis-à-vis evaluation procedures in HEIs overseas based on students' perspectives and learning experiences.

Similarly, Noor Azam and McLellan (2018) suggest that the familiarity of EMI policy, content knowledge, and high proficiency of English among lecturers in Brunei—who had gone through the local bilingual education system and overseas education—at UBD has given them more confidence in undertaking EMI at the higher learning institution. These Bruneian lecturers are able to accommodate their EMI classrooms effortlessly. The Bruneian case study involved expert educators in their field of studies whereas Vu's research participants were English teachers dealing with Science subject in EMI classroom. The contrasting beliefs in their teaching may signal a crucial reconsideration for the Vietnamese teachers' development programme to focus on training skilful teachers of respective fields to fully utilise their language and knowledge competence in EMI educational setting. This is because the EMI educators in Pham and Doan's study do not encounter issues in delivering content, even though they still experience difficulty in communication skills. This shows that experiences also play a significant role in the efficacy of EMI pedagogy.

Nevertheless, the teachers in Vu's study used pedagogical strategies to enhance teaching and learning experiences in an EMI classroom. These can be deduced from the teachers' interview excerpts, and can be investigated further as Vu has stated that the study has yet to 'explicitly provide what and how to develop language for teaching effectively' (Chapter 15). Reviewing these aspects could foster more understanding towards managing EMI in Vietnamese contexts and further develop strategies to accommodate EMI learning. For instance, the 'pedagogy of assumption' in HEIs in Pham and Doan's study has led the educators to come up with pedagogical initiatives accommodating EMI challenges in classrooms.

Vu claims that the accessibility to suitable teaching materials should also become a central focus in the teachers' training development. Pham and Doan also report that this seems to be a major setback for educators in pedagogical enactment in HEIs due to the lack of guidance, support, and funding from the top-down approach. This has 'forced' educators to translate teaching materials in Vietnamese into English to fulfil the institutional obligation, as there is less sense of direction about using content knowledge in English. This is amid their awareness that EMI is

not merely language transference, which is another focal issue that should be addressed by Vietnamese policy makers and top managerial stakeholders in HEIs. Such issues are less problematic in Brunei as the educators at UBD reported their utmost satisfaction towards provision and accessibility of pedagogy materials that further assist their EMI pedagogical practices in class (Noor Azam & McLellan, 2018).

Truong, Ngo, and Nguyen's chapter further investigates learner perspectives towards educational assessment in EMI in Vietnam and international contexts with the authors finding slightly different but related outcomes. The familiarity of pedagogical approaches and theoretical knowledge and practices in EMI settings has helped Vietnamese students to adapt to both local and international EMI programmes. Their familiarity with the standardised pedagogical approaches, particularly on assessment procedures, has contributed to better educational experiences and higher confidence among these students in preparing and undertaking EMI courses in both local and international contexts. In a way, this provided a stronger indication that the compatibility of local assessment process to international assessment practice in HEIs could contribute to greater success and satisfaction of learning for English as a Second Language (ESL) or English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners. This is an opportunity for policy makers and stakeholders in HE to review and align the policy in Vietnam with international levels, thus, perhaps, increasing the competitiveness and effectiveness of EMI practices in Vietnam.

A similar approach is practised in Brunei, where its national education system, SPN-21, is aligned to fit into global compatibility by revising and implementing various stages to add value and raise the quality of education to the highest international standards, in line with the contemporary needs and coveted life skills in order to achieve its Brunei Vision 2035 (Ministry of Education Brunei Darussalam, 2013). Bruneian policy makers have continuously carried out various efforts to meet this vision and to foster more collaborative efforts with other international institutions. Aligning local national education with international needs and standards while encapsulating EMI practices will increase competitiveness and effectiveness in HE, and increase the chance for increased mobility and internationalisation among local students. This fosters better teaching and learning experiences for educators and students in Brunei (Noor Azam & McLellan, 2018), which has 'the most successful' bilingual education policy in Southeast Asia (Kirkpatrick, 2010, p. 35).



In short, all three chapters highlight that balancing language and content knowledge is crucial in the efficacy of EMI in the classroom. However, the case studies report that the main challenge for Vietnamese teachers and learners is in incorporating both language and content knowledge in planning, executing, and assessing for EMI lessons. The ideal balance of language and content knowledge is often overlooked and at times neglected, due to the unreadiness of the stakeholders to implement EMI. In this case, the authors also agree that integrating language and content in EMI pedagogy is a complex process as it affects students' learning.

#### 18.4 DIVERSITY AS A FACTOR INFLUENCING THE EFFICACY OF EMI

Cultural aspects could also affect the efficacy of EMI in pedagogical practices. Therefore, policy makers and relevant stakeholders in education should be more sensitive towards this issue.

Vu's chapter reveals that an issue in preparing for EMI practices is work culture, particularly involving collaborative efforts in completing training tasks between teachers in HE. Various factors including age, workplace, and experience, create challenges for teamwork among the teachers. Teachers faced difficulties in planning, teaching, and collaborating in micro-teaching activities, further suggesting that the diversity of work cultures may cause problems in the implementation of EMI in HE. Similarly, Truong, Ngo, and Nguyen's study underscores that the diverse range of academic competence among Vietnamese students and their international colleagues can also become an issue in EMI practices. Also, differences in ethnic and national cultures and attitudes between students in international HEIs can disrupt the efficacy of EMI learning among students. The authors propose that EMI approaches in local and international contexts may provide different educational experiences to the learners, particularly in assessment and diversification of cultures. As mentioned, the lack of guidance and support by local HEIs may have caused the educators and the learners to experience difficulties in facing intercultural differences and accommodating pedagogical strategies. This can also be detected from their ambivalent feelings towards the rapid transitioning of Vietnamese Medium of Instruction to EMI, as reported in these chapters.

Although Truong, Ngo, and Nguyen's chapter acknowledges the advantage of diversity in many cases in EMI classrooms, Vu's findings have shown otherwise. Vu claims that the diverse fields and expertise among teachers and cultural differences between learners can become problematic in implementing EMI. This also includes the use of code-switching or translanguaging, that is believed to hinder the effectiveness of EMI. Both studies also suggest translanguaging (in their first language and English) can reduce the efficacy of EMI teaching and learning in Vietnam, where Truong, Ngo, and Nguyen describe it as a sign of lack of readiness in taking up EMI practices.

In contrast, Ishamina and Detering (2017) found translanguaging among local and international undergraduates in Brunei did not lead to serious communication breakdowns, but instead assisted their communications. Noor Azam and McLellan (2018) also report a similar finding through the educators' perspectives. Nevertheless, both studies suggest a highly promising future for EMI in Brunei, specifically in tertiary education. This is due to the locals' understanding of the needs, targets, and their identity, amid rapid substantial shift of EMI in the local national education.

As the notion and practice of EMI is a top-down initiative in Vietnamese HEIs, this might also influence the research participants' attitudes in all three chapters to have a neutral to negative stance on using L1 in EMI classrooms, where translanguaging is seen disrupting the deliverance of EMI. This is similar to the 'unstated discouragement' of using Malay in EMI settings in Brunei, but the detrimental effect of translanguaging in Bruneian EMI classrooms has yet to be proven at large. Nevertheless, Pham and Doan' counterargue that translanguaging can assist EMI teaching and learning as it can foster better understanding of content and enhance language proficiency, particularly in the practice of EMI involving ESL and EFL speakers such as in Vietnam. However, there should be more comparative studies of Brunei with an international context as it may be able to provide a comprehensive understanding towards the same issue.

In this case, the success of implementing EMI is not only restricted to the policy and pedagogical aspects, but it goes beyond language and content knowledge as mutual cultural understanding also plays a significant role in EMI success. Therefore, researchers could explore further mitigating factors and strategies dealing with diversity of languages,

cultures, and people that might address the hindrance of efficacy in promoting pedagogical effectiveness in EMI classrooms. This can also contribute to a larger scope of EMI literature in Vietnamese higher learning context.

## 18.5 PEDAGOGICAL DEVELOPMENT AS A KEY TO EMI SUCCESS

All three chapters suggest academic reflection and teacher's and students' assessment on pedagogical practices as effective strategies to further enhance EMI development. In this respect, the authors encourage pedagogical guidance, support, and funding to maximise the efficacy of EMI, perhaps not only at the tertiary level, but all education levels in Vietnam.

For instance, Vu's chapter highlights that the teacher development programme has provided an opportunity for them to review their shortcomings in dealing with EMI classrooms, while also giving them the prospect of confirming their knowledge and practice of EMI through an iterative process. The programme is 'a valuable learning experience' (Chapter 15) in enhancing the educators' language skills and classroom management while developing various teaching and practical knowledge elements, thus inevitably showing the significance of the reflective process to pedagogical implications. Truong, Ngo, and Nguyen's chapter does not further explore students' responses towards any development programmes, as the case study only focuses on discussing learners' perspectives. However, the authors stress the importance of providing further self-development training to overcome students' readiness deficits and increase their understanding of dealing with different EMI assessment practices, while boosting their communication skills to lessen intercultural differences that may hinder EMI success.

Pham and Doan, also highlight the importance of coordinating institutional expectations of educators' practices while reviewing pedagogical strategies implemented by educators to reflect the EMI policy and national aspirations. All three chapters claim that the issues of EMI pedagogical approaches and practices are due to the unplanned implementation of 'pedagogical of assumptions' at HEIs. Thus, it is crucial to streamline and foster mutual understanding between educators and students in EMI classrooms, while urging university managers and policy makers to collaborate in real pedagogical EMI settings.

In Brunei, there are no emphases on professional development dealing with EMI among educators in UBD, as they are also comfortable with delivering content as part of the EMI tradition (Noor Azam & McLellan, 2018). The importance of educators' evaluation and assessment practices to students' achievements, involving various aspects including stakeholders' backgrounds, cultures, familial, and financial support, are still highlighted in Brunei education development. Such activities are meant to synchronise the aspiration of national policy and educators' pedagogical practices within the ESL context such as practiced in Brunei (Mayyer Ling & Haji Amran, 2018).

The positive responses by educators in all three of the subject case studies seem to suggest that the overall success within the pedagogical development of EMI programmes in Vietnam can be maintained. These educators are willing to improve their pedagogical approaches and English proficiency to enhance teaching and learning experiences in EMI classrooms as well as for their self-betterment and opportunities that would thereby arise. Thus, policy makers and top managerial stakeholders should see and utilise these positive attitudes as a sign of readiness and acceptance to improve their EMI practices. As there are reports of the educators' ambivalence due to the lack of support from the top-down initiative, finding a common ground between stakeholders is significant to optimise EMI practices.

I also believe the educators' and students' development programme in Vietnamese HEIs should also include providing various psychological and emotional support activities for those undertaking EMI. Such actions would consistently follow on reports focused in emotional dimensions in the activities of both educators and students in all three case studies that should not be overlooked in utilising the potential of EMI practices, but this has yet to be addressed at large by the authors. Nevertheless, all three chapters have contributed to providing a number of sensible recommendations in managing concerns involving EMI practices in the Vietnamese HEIs.

Academic reflection through professional development is crucial in assisting teachers, students, prospective policy makers, and other major stakeholders in education to identify challenges and issues in implementing EMI in HE. These case studies have shown that a reflective approach throughout the investigations is significant as it could help into the refinement of theoretical knowledge and application of EMI in HE. These Vietnamese case studies have implied a sense of 'airy hope' in

achieving the National English Language ‘Project 2020’. However, by implementing better planning and cooperation while coordinating initiatives between stakeholders in education, Vietnam is well on its way to become a country with highly proficient English speakers.

## 18.6 CONCLUSION

These studies have provided a vignette of theoretical knowledge and practical challenges involving EMI policy making and implementation involving teachers and learners of diverse backgrounds, subjects, and educational levels. The key concerns raised were: the lack of knowledge and experiences among educators; the limited access to materials; background diversity and the importance of academic reflection in the betterment of pedagogical practice—issues that are commonly found in implementing EMI in HEIs across the globe (Tamtam, Gallagher, Olabi, & Naher, 2012). However, the ‘disagreement’ within institutional policy over pedagogical deliverance may have caused a lack of readiness in many aspects of EMI practices in the Vietnamese HEIs and raised concerns for student learning efficacy and satisfaction in achieving educational goals. This may result in a long-term detrimental effect that should be addressed immediately by all significant stakeholders in HEIs in Vietnam.

As part of the studies in *Higher Education in Market-Oriented Socialist Vietnam’s* tradition, all three chapters have situated their significance and contribution of knowledge in the midst of endless debates and scholarly discussions of EMI in HE, amid the country’s aspiration to continue moving forward with its education system, transformational development, and internationalisation opportunities. While these chapters have contributed to the existing literature, there are more relevant aspects that can be further explored to better understand and address these educational issues.

I believe the expansion of research in terms of settings, populations, and pedagogical strategies across HEIs in Vietnam can also benefit future scholarship. Moreover, as also suggested by these authors, implementing future potential research involving EMI in real settings may offer more natural insights into how theoretical explorations and implementation of EMI principles and practices can be justified.

These chapters have offered several pedagogical implications for the improvement of teacher development involving EMI at many levels, including HE as there are reports that suggest the shortcoming in

pedagogical practices and assessment processes that can become a starting point to be reviewed and resolved by policy makers and mutual stakeholders in education accordingly. This is crucial as teachers and English learners are expected to contribute to all level of education upon completing their academic courses. Thus, it is crucial to have a strong foundation of theoretical and practical knowledge for the successful deliverance of EMI in Vietnamese education as a whole.

The comparative analysis of EMI in Vietnam and Brunei indicates that the countries have both similarities and contrastive features. However, further investigation on areas such as socio-historical legacy, sociocultural aspects, and English development in both countries can establish better insights and suggestive pedagogical implications involving EMI in HE. While there are many studies of EMI in the Vietnamese contexts in the recent years, studies in relation to EMI in the context of Brunei involving student mobilities and internationalisation in HE are rather under-researched. Thus, this chapter also creates opportunities for more investigations in the near future. Perhaps this could also foster more collaborative efforts between Vietnam and Brunei in addressing issues of EMI, facilitated by the strong diplomatic ties between the two countries. The establishment of a collaborative project, the UBD-FT Global Centre between UBD and FPT University in Da Nang, Vietnam since 2017, may also provide further opportunities to examine other EMI issues within the two countries. This endeavour may also be supported by the recent establishment of the International and Comparative Education Research Group (ICE) in UBD which aims to explore more scholarship and cultivate research ideas on student mobilities and internationalisation in and out of the country.

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PART IV

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What's Next?





## Commentary: Postcards from Vietnam— Lessons for New Players in Higher Education

*Catherine Gomes*

‘New’ as a concept in terms of players, discourses, values, and practices in the higher education arena is significant. This is because the global higher education landscape is changing where dominant players rooted in the Anglosphere are now facing competition from new players coming from recently developed and developing countries outside ‘the West’. These new players are emerging from regions that are home to developed and developing nations such as those in Asia. Developed Asian countries such as Singapore, China including Hong Kong, South Korea, Taiwan, and Japan are home to some of the world’s top 100 universities, while developing countries in the Asian region such as Malaysia, India, and Vietnam have been, respectively working towards making the education sector a significant part of their national development. While developed and developing countries outside the West work towards creating higher education sectors which are often perceived as copies of the West, this collection tells us that in the case of Vietnam, the building of the

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higher education sector is one that is not sudden but in actuality developed actively over the past five decades. This chapter comments specifically on how the contributors to this collection have successfully detailed the significance of Vietnam's efforts and experiences in developing an ambitious higher education sector which aims not to simply replicate Western higher education but in some ways, to provide an alternative and viable avenue to it. By looking specifically at the challenges Vietnam has faced in developing its higher education sector, this chapter suggests that Vietnam is a prime case study for any non-Western country when embarking on this ambitious yet fundamentally significant modernity project. At the same time, this chapter acknowledges that through the prism of Vietnam, the development of higher education is not a smooth unanimous agreeable ride, but one filled with different voices and perspectives as demonstrated by various authors based in both Vietnam and overseas and of Vietnamese heritage and of non-Vietnamese nationality.

## 19.1 A CHANGING HIGHER EDUCATION LANDSCAPE

The higher education landscape in the West has been evolving (Chou, Kamola, & Pietsch, 2016). In Australia, for instance, the higher education sector has been undergoing change over the past three decades where an overreliance on full-fee paying international (Gomes, 2017a), and to some degree domestic, students to fund research and infrastructure programmes has led to large class sizes, complaints of low academic standards by teaching staff and students, and questions of the value of a university degree. The latter is largely due to three interrelated and inseparable issues: the overabundance of graduates, the linking of degrees with employability, and the decreasing availability of jobs to keep pace with qualified graduates in Australia. Similarly, in the United Kingdom, the uncertainty of Brexit has caused much contestation in the future of British higher education. A disconnected Britain and a European Union without its best-known higher education sector raises interesting and sometimes worrying questions of sustainability, staff and student mobility, and research collaboration.

Meanwhile non-Western players in Asia are investing heavily in higher education while creatively challenging old Western players. For instance, the globally top ranked Asian universities have formed a consortium to retain and attract top postgraduate students from the region and beyond

while Asian countries, regardless of their stages of development, have invested heavily in higher education development not only as a national interest but also as a measure to enter the international education market. Singapore's Global Schoolhouse project launched in the early 2000s, for example, was meant to not only make Singapore an attractive destination for international students in the region, but was also a way to realise the city-state's knowledge economy project by providing higher education avenues to its own population through state and private higher education providers (Gomes, 2017b, pp. 8–10). In addition, new players such as China have also ventured into “sacred ground” by developing English language programmes that were once the domain of the Anglosphere.

It is against this background that Vietnam presents itself as an example of how a country forges its own mark as a new player in the global higher education space. While the national development of higher education is seen on the one hand to replicate Western structures, this is only one of the steps, as authors in this collection tell us. Phan reminds us in the introduction of this collection that while the ‘climate of globalisation, reform and change’ in Vietnam's commitment to higher education is often called ‘new’, ‘Western’, and ‘international’, these values are not altogether new, but based on policies which were developed as far back as the 1950s. Illuminating this point, Hayden and Le-Nguyen (Chapter 2) provide a snapshot of education reform in Vietnam by tracing policy shifts over the decades which have informed Viet Nam's current higher education sector. Meanwhile Nguyen (Chapter 4) maps the history and current leanings of Vietnamese government initiatives and investment in research development and capabilities building, which form the cornerstone of Vietnam's current higher education sector.

Vietnam's building up of its higher education sector, as demonstrated in this volume (see Chapters 2 and 3) is based on a balletic to and fro process of adaption and review. However, as the authors in this collection also point out, the road to achieving this has been paved with challenges that are unique to the contemporary time period and to Vietnam itself. Whereas any new player building up its higher education sector faces a variety of challenges, this chapter comments on reputation and with identity—two of which thematically appear in a number of author observations and analyses.

## 19.2 CHALLENGES

In his writing about semi-elite universities in Vietnam, Chau (Chapter 8) observes that the issue of quality confronts any new players outside the usual Western markets. Here new players also realise that they are ‘bit’ players whose quality of education is questionable in the global arena (Neubauer & Gomes, 2017). A key issue about quality lies in language. For Vietnam to be considered a serious higher education player, it needed to move its medium of instruction from Vietnamese languages to English so as to have broad appeal within Vietnam as well as an attraction for potential international students and research collaborators. Pham and Doan (Chapter 14), Vu (Chapter 15), Truong, Ngo and Nguyen (Chapter 16), Nonaka (Chapter 17), and Noorashid (Chapter 18) provide a broad spectrum of the issues that arise because of the use of English as a medium of instruction (EMI) in Vietnam. Pham and Doan (Chapter 14), for instance, brings up the important topic of English language use between students, instructors, and higher education institutions. English as a medium of instruction thus creates assumptions about what EMI ‘is supposed to be’ and ‘what the university expects’, as well as assumptions about the EMI learning challenges for students. While also acknowledging that Vietnamese higher education institutions may have rushed into using English as a medium of instruction, Vu (Chapter 15) rightly points out that this has also created a space for opportunity. Hence while these authors may be critical of certain aspects of Vietnam’s push to invigorate and develop its higher education sector, they also see positives. The opportunity to innovate learning and teaching in English, for instance, is a clear positivism which can develop in this environment created by Vietnamese higher education institutions.

While new players to the higher education sector do face an uphill task with achieving reputation since they inadvertently come from developing countries, they are also able to work around this by becoming transnational higher education destination hosts to offshore institutions (Phan, 2017) and set up semi-elite universities built on an American (Ivy League) model (Chau, Chapter 8). However, this reliance on the American model and in the broader sense, the adoption of neoliberalism through the commercialisation of higher education institutions as demonstrated by Pham’s Chapter 9 describing the uniquely Vietnamese phenomenon of mergers and acquisitions of higher education institutions, creates the unexpected issue of identity felt by Vietnamese

educators and researchers. Ngo (Chapter 3) in particular, describes the feeling of unease in her own sense of national identity. Growing up in a socialist country with a cultural history of Confucianism has been challenging for academics who struggle with a seemingly about-turn in relation to Vietnam's desire to build up its higher education sector to acceptable world standards. New players thus need to take heed in these issues of identity which can play a significant role in the way instructors, students, and institutions respond to the building up of the higher education sector.

### 19.3 CONCLUSION

Recently I attended a conference on international education in Australia featuring a panel discussing the English language within a postcolonial framework. The speakers rightly pointed out that English, while historically the language of colonisers, it is also the language that is used to denigrate native languages and dialects. Doing so, as the speakers argued, made them feel as if their native languages were not only second class and devalued, but on a meta level so are the cultures they are born in. One speaker, a former international student in Australia who was raised in South Asia explained how she was forced to communicate in English while studying in a private high school back in the country of her birth. That experience, she explained, made her feel ashamed of her native tongue ironically in her own home country. Another member of the panel, a high level Executive of an Australian university, told the audience that Australian First Peoples (Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders) were still reeling from the British invasion and colonisation of their land. She further explained how Non-First Peoples in Australia need to remember that they are only guests whether they are citizens, permanent migrants, or temporary ones such as international students.

This vignette strikes a chord with Vietnam's experience in developing in the higher education sector. While such postcolonial discussions, though significant and important to be made, may be somewhat lost in a today's tide of rapid global change in which transnational exchanges encountered have shifted considerably. In Melbourne, for instance, the Victoria State Library—a repository of the colonial history of this Australian state—is now colonised by international students. The ethnographic landscape of the users of this library has changed significantly

with not only many ethnicities represented, but also various languages and accented English being spoken. Today at least five million students are pursuing higher education outside their home countries, a number which is estimated to grow to eight million by 2025. For over four decades, Australia, the US, the UK, and New Zealand have dominated the highly lucrative international education market as destination sites with institutions also branching transnationally into source countries themselves. The chapters in this book respond to Vietnam's emergence as a force to be reckoned with as a new player to watch in the higher education sector.

Authors in this collection—through the lens of the higher education sector in Vietnam—reveal that the education landscape is changing and evolving. So while this chapter may be titled 'Postcards from Vietnam: Lessons for New Players in Higher Education', the lessons learnt from Vietnam's higher education journey are applicable for established players as well.

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# Engaging (with) New Insights: Where to Start to Move Scholarship and the Current Debate Forward

*Phan Le Ha and Dang Van Huan*

## 20.1 THE REVISED HIGHER EDUCATION LAW 2018 AND INSTITUTIONAL AUTONOMY/UNIVERSITY AUTONOMY

Close to the end of December 2018, at the annual *10<sup>th</sup> Engaging With Vietnam* conference (EWV) taking place in Ho Chi Minh City and Phan Thiet, Vietnam, several hard-hitting panels on Vietnam's higher education were heated and further energised by the amended Higher Education Law which had freshly been passed by the Vietnamese National Assembly and would go into effect on July 1, 2019. This revised law is significant because it includes an important element

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concerning institutional autonomy. Under this revised law, ‘university leaders in Vietnam will have more freedom to set institutional policy in areas such as student enrolments, curriculum development and senior management’ (Marklein, 2019). A higher level of institutional autonomy had been delegated to 23 public universities on a pilot policy under the Degree called 77 during 2014–2017 before it became officialised in the revised law in 2018 (Phan Le Ha, EWV conference notes, January, 2019).

If institutional autonomy/university autonomy was already in the reform agenda discussed in the very first volume on Vietnam HE published in English (Harman, Hayden, & Pham, 2010), a decade later this topic remains central in scholarly debates and critiques of HE and educational issues in this market-oriented socialist country (Chapter 2 by Hayden and Le-Nguyen; Nguyen & Shah, 2019). Specifically, several chapters have drawn our attention to the hard-to-resolve paradox embedded in Vietnam’s centralised authority in university governance and its pronounced reform regarding institutional autonomy. This paradox is further captured in Marklein’s assessment of the situation right after institutional autonomy was officially added to the revised law at the end of 2018:

*While the changes emphasise the “right of a higher education institution to determine its own objectives and select a way to implement its objectives”, the Communist Party-led government remains a central figure in key decisions, a carry-over of the Soviet-style approach in which the university operates as a state agency under the control of the government. (Marklein, 2019)*

Let us now pay specific attention to the revised law, as we continue our discussion in this chapter.

### ***20.1.1 What Is New in the Revised Higher Education Law 2018?***

The revised Higher Education Law 2018 is a big step from the Higher Education Law 2012 in renovating higher education policy. The presentation delivered by Dr. Nguyen Thi Kim Phung—Director of Higher Education Department, Ministry of Education and Training (MOET)—at the MOET Conference on December 27, 2018 specifically identifies the following key dimensions/aspects:



- i. Identify and specify comprehensive autonomy for HE institutions; delegate overseeing right from state agencies to university councils; specify accountability of university's leaders including the rector and the chair of the university council.
- ii. Create a level playing field for public and non-public higher education institutions in applying for state funds for research and joining public-funded training programmes for faculty; allow private universities to become comprehensive, multi-sector universities like some public ones.
- iii. Allow universities to set tuition fees for their own programmes without having to follow any imposed ceiling level.
- iv. Foster quality control by implementing the Vietnamese Qualification Framework and applying programme standards for academic programmes in different fields; and establish accreditation organisations that are independent from universities and public agencies in terms of institutional arrangements.

It is undeniable that the revised HE Law demonstrates a much clearer change in policy beliefs and conceptualisation from state leaders behind the change, including Deputy Prime Minister Dr. Vu Duc Dam who is in charge of the education sector, Minister of Education and Training—Dr. Phung Xuan Nha, and Chairman of the National Committee for Culture, Education, and Youth Affairs—Dr. Phan Thanh Binh. Specifically, the following aspects demonstrate this spirit of change:

- i. Institutional autonomy is an irresistible trend in higher education development in the world; and Vietnam ought to follow this trend if it does not want to be left behind;
- ii. Institutional autonomy is the best way to solve the existing problems of HE and the best solution to cultivate strengths and motivate universities' executives and faculty in HE institutions;
- iii. By delegating governance rights to the university council along with strict oversight, information transparency, and a more effective accreditation system, the State can control education quality and ensure the accountability of top university executives.

One important note is that after the revised HE Law was ratified, a new degree called Degree No. 99 was promulgated at the end of 2019.

This Degree not only concretises certain terms in the revised law but also provides specific guidelines to the implementation of the law especially on how to realise institutional autonomy.

### 20.1.2 *Concerns and Skepticisms*

The legalisation of institutional autonomy in the revised Higher Education Law 2018 together with the dissemination of Degree No. 99, while bringing about eagerness, excitement, and optimism, has also been received with concern and skepticism regarding implementation in actuality. In this section, we deliberately bring into the discussion fresh writings in both English and Vietnamese and from local sources, particularly those that have been published since 2019, so as to grasp a sense of the current and what Vietnamese policy makers, critics, administrators, academics, and scholars are concerned about and discussing/debating. Noticeable are Do (2019)—an independent critic and scholar of education, Hayden and Le-Nguyen (Chapter 2, this edited volume), Nguyen and Shah (2019), Tran (2020)—a respectable educator and former Minister of Education and Training, Vu, Cao, and Luu (2019)—a group of lecturers from Hanoi University of Engineering (Trường Đại học Xây dựng), and other news reports on institutional autonomy available on Vietnam’s official outlets including [giaoduc.net.vn](http://giaoduc.net.vn)<sup>1</sup> and [vietnamnet.vn](http://vietnamnet.vn).<sup>2</sup> In the following, we engage with the main arguments expressed in these writings, which we see as having captured a good range of perspectives, critiques, and sentiments of the on-going debates.

It is collectively agreed among the above references that the delegation of institutional autonomy to universities comes with conditions. Specifically, according to the revised Higher Education Law and Degree No. 99, if an institution wants to exercise its institutional autonomy, it must meet the following key requirements:

<sup>1</sup><https://giaoduc.net.vn/chu-de/tu-chu-dai-hoc/1301.gd>, accessed on January 31, 2020.

<sup>2</sup><https://vietnamnet.vn/tu-chu-dai-hoc-tag61448.html>, accessed on January 31, 2020.

- i. it has already established its university council based on the regulations in the Law and Degree (e.g. number of members, representation ratio, etc....);
- ii. it has already been accredited by a recognised accreditation organisation;
- iii. it has already had an internal set of operational rules and its own quality assurance policy;
- iv. it has already had a clear policy on delegating autonomy to individual faculty, staff, and units; and
- v. it has to publicise all the necessary conditions in place to assure quality and provide transparent information on operational results and outputs of the university.

In reading these conditions, questions after questions have come to our minds, and some of these are also raised in the abovementioned sources. *First*, we wonder how institutions know that they already meet these requirements. And who can verify that they meet all of these requirements? And if the line ministries are the agencies that verify these conditions/requirements/standards, then that would add other types of red tape and controls. This is of course not ideal and could result in more problems and eventually could defeat the purpose of institutional autonomy. *Second*, we also ask how the central government can make sure that line ministries and provincial governments implement the Law and Degree in the same way that the Ministry of Education and Training does. If not the line ministries, then who would oversee the implementation of the revised Law and its Degree to ensure the right spirit of policy renovation in these legal documents to be achieved?

*Third*, regarding university councils—a core element in institutional autonomy—the State has expressed its desire to give more power to the chairperson of the university council within an institution; but can the chairperson, in reality, realise his/her power when he/she is nominated and is informally supported by the rector or president of that university? How about conflicts of interest? Because of potential conflicts and avoidance of complications, there is a good chance that the university council might be formed for symbolic reasons, if it is formed at all. *Fourth*, at the same time, based on what has happened at those universities that have already established their university councils, there is a tendency for the party secretary of a university to also be appointed the chairperson of the university council. This again presents obvious conflicts of interest

whereby the chairperson has to follow the rules of the Party, meanwhile he/she needs to fulfil his/her role as the chair of the university council. How could this be done decently? *Fifth*, ideally and in the light of institutional autonomy, the university council is taking the governance role of state agencies in overseeing the operation of the university and the performance of university executive, following the model of US universities. It is, however, difficult to establish and assure an autonomy culture throughout the university, when typically students, faculty, and administrative staff are unaware of their rights and when institutions do not have clear internal policies to protect their rights in the governance of the university.

The debates so far over institutional autonomy have covered all aspects of autonomy, including curriculum and training, budget and planning, student selection and staff hiring, quality assurance, and governance. One very important issue, fundamental to autonomy, is academic freedom, but this very concept has only been raised by Do (2019) and Tran (2020) from within Vietnam. Both these authors have made a strong case for academic freedom to be taken seriously if institutional autonomy is to be implemented. Without academic freedom, Do (2019) argues, institutional autonomy is misguided and thus would get nowhere. Sharing this viewpoint, Tran (2020) also assures universities and their leaders that academic freedom is the way to go and thus it should not be feared and censored. Neither should it be treated as an ideologically/politically sensitive and dangerous value. In this very spirit, we strongly recommend that future debates on institutional autonomy engage in-depth with Marklein and Mai (Chapter 11), who offer insightful accounts and discussion of the construction, deconstruction, and reconstruction of academic freedom in Vietnam's higher education.

Another expressed concern relates to the ways in which institutional autonomy has been implemented in the 23 piloted universities, whereby an institution, in order to be granted (partial) autonomy, must become financially independent. Hayden and Le-Nguyen (Chapter 2) call this exchange 'the price of autonomy'—a charge also shared by Do (2019).

*The [23] universities concerned may set their tuition fee levels, within ceiling levels set by the Government, which enables them to function more like public corporations. As public corporations, however, they are subject to many laws and regulations that do not fit well with the circumstances of a university. They also find that being financially self-sufficient limits their capacity*

*to exploit many of the other freedoms supposedly available to them. ... [T]he kind of autonomy given so far to 23 'autonomous' public universities is problematic. Though now authorised to make decisions about their priorities and use of resources to an extent previously unimaginable, these universities have also been 'cut adrift' financially from public funding. This situation means that they now depend heavily on an unpredictable marketplace for income from student tuition fees. This model of institutional autonomy will not suit most public universities in Vietnam. Furthermore, it will encourage a trend already evident across the sector, that is, for universities to become preoccupied with making money.* (Hayden and Le-Nguyen, Chapter 2)

In an alarming manner, Do (2019) and Hayden and Le-Nguyen (Chapter 2) have expressed their strong concerns about social equity, educational values and ethics-related issues and about the danger of public higher education becoming obsessed with profit-making instead of serving the public—a core mission of the State, particularly a socialist state like Vietnam.

While sharing the above concerns, Tran (2020) and Vu et al. (2019), in a more optimistic light, have also emphasised their positivity about Vietnamese universities' capabilities in taking advantage of the new opportunity to realise their aspirations to become high quality HE institutions that are internationally compatible. These authors also recognise positive values in the market logic and, hence, see the HE market as a necessity for quality and competition for good quality to be enabled and ensured. This argument clearly reflects the welcoming reception of neo-liberal ideology in Vietnam's HE. Such reception is further evident in Tran's (2020) recommendation that both public and private HE institutions in Vietnam have multiple owners from Vietnam and overseas; and such owners can be the government or any government bodies and private agencies. This way, he argues, could blur the divide between the public and the private sectors within HE and thus inspire all institutions to compete for a good cause.

Thus far we can argue that research and empirical data are needed more than ever to examine the concerns and skepticisms as well as the potential success and opportunities put forth in the above references. While it is still too early to have empirical data, given that the revised law was only passed at the end of 2018, we wonder about the cases of those 23 public institutions that have participated in the government's pilot project on university autonomy. How about other universities that, since

the beginning of the last decade, have already opted for partial autonomy such as Hanoi University of Technology, among others? In a later section of this chapter, we will get back to the case of Hanoi University of Technology; but for now, let us continue with our line of inquiries.

## 20.2 INSTITUTIONAL AUTONOMY: NUANCES, DISPARITIES, AND HIERARCHIES

In light of our earlier discussion and engagement with the surveyed literature and debates regarding institutional autonomy, we argue that institutional autonomy bears different meanings and different implications for different segments, even different players, within Vietnam HE. Likewise, the extent to which ‘the university operates as a state agency under the control of the government’ (Marklein and Mai, Chapter 11) depends on the specific university and its status in Vietnam. Therefore, there is no uniform formula or prescription for institutional autonomy and state control, so to speak. University autonomy, for the most part, goes hand in hand with the market logic, as confirmed by the surveyed literature; and hence many public and government-funded institutions have found it challenging to have to generate income and to maintain training programmes that are struggling to enrol students in an increasingly competitive HE market. In the same vein, it is not rare to find institutions in Vietnam that are not in favour of institutional autonomy and are still dependent on government funding and government mandate for all their operations. These institutions are passive, unconfident, backward-looking, weak and thus likely to lose out in this autonomy era, as Tran (2020) insists.

Another point to highlight is that within the public HE segment, well-established public universities are often in a better position to enjoy institutional autonomy in decision making regarding finance and budget, planning, recruitment, hiring, research, programme and curriculum development, internationalisation, and so on. They are often more ready and eager to join the market, largely because their existing reputation, status, networks, and infrastructures and facilities are already far superior to those of many other local institutions. This argument can be supported by the case of Hanoi University of Technology—one of the first public universities in Vietnam allowed to/opted to exercise partial institutional autonomy since 2011. The university has now entered a new stage, whereby full institutional autonomy is in place.

A recently published interview with Associate Professor Dr. Hoang Minh Son, President of Hanoi University of Technology (HUT), sheds light on this university's experiences with institutional autonomy over the last decade (Hoang, 2020). President Son openly shared with the public examples of success, challenges, opportunities, and obstacles regarding the implementation of university autonomy. The experience of HUT seems to prove the positive outcomes of institutional autonomy: it has enabled the university to become one of the only three Vietnamese institutions included in the World University Rankings 2019 by Times Higher Education, in which it is ranked 4th in Southeast Asia for the science and technologies specialisation, only after two universities in Singapore and one university in Malaysia. At the same time, HUT's experience has also pointed to many challenges and undesirable outcomes accompanying autonomy such as having to always run full speed to make sure employees are paid and programmes enrol students while having to deal with internal income disparity and external competition for resources and revenues. In the process, most importantly as shared by President Son in the interview mentioned above, the university has learnt a great deal about being autonomous and has been able to create more harmony among its varied units and programmes via, for instance, financial distribution and strategic investments in high powered disciplines, research strengths, and international partnerships.

Engaging (with) institutional autonomy proactively and equitably is a key principle and practice that has not only helped strengthen HUT and increase its attractiveness to potential talents but has also made the university cope with brain drain issues stimulated by the market and better opportunities from overseas. In concrete terms, President Son has revealed that between 2015 and 2019, less than 20 academics in leadership positions and/or with Ph.D. left HUT to join industry and local private HE institutions. However, in this same time period, more than 50 HUT academics sent overseas for PhD have not returned upon completion or are unlikely to return once completed. President Son acknowledges that HUT is aware of the growing competition to attract and retain talents when the private HE sector is becoming more aggressive in recruiting and when other countries are investing in new talents. In this very context, HUT has responded to and played along with the market logic and has created its own distinction and comparative advantages. He has attributed much of HUT's success to its proactive taking ownership of institutional autonomy.

### 20.3 ‘NEW PLAYERS’ IN VIETNAM HIGHER EDUCATION: PRIVATE HE AND INSTITUTIONAL AUTONOMY

At the same time, we argue that the increasing participation of diverse ‘new players’ in Vietnam HE (see Part II this volume, and Phan, 2017, 2018) has also presented a stark hierarchy among institutions in terms of autonomy. Vietnam is witnessing the fast rising status of semi-elite private HE institutions, according to Chau (Chapter 8). These institutions include Hoa Sen University, Van Hien University, Duy Tan University, Hong Bang University, and Thang Long University. They are supported by strong investors and talented administrators and represent a new wave of leaders, all of whom have utilised institutional autonomy in efficient and creative manners. This has made a positive difference as well as having justified their high tuitions. Society has not only received them more and more positively but has also showed faith in their autonomous, innovative and responsive curricula and extra curricula. As Chau (Chapter 8) has discussed, these institutions are way far ahead of most other private HE institutions in the nation. When they achieve this status, their autonomy tends to be strengthened; and this, in turn, benefits them even further. A hierarchy is, hence, maintained.

Alongside this semi-elite group of private HE institutions is the recent emergence of high-end elite private universities. In the overall HE picture of Vietnam, the level, range, scope, and scale of autonomy enjoyed by these privileged elite institutions such as Vin University (VinUni, established in 17/12/2019) and Fulbright University Vietnam (FUV, established in 2016)—the newest HE actors joining the sector—are incomparable and unimaginable in this socialist state. FUV (based in Ho Chi Minh City) and VinUni (based in Hanoi) declare themselves to be private, independent, non-profit (VinUni),<sup>3</sup> non-profit/not-for-profit (FUV),<sup>4</sup> and English-medium universities. These universities do not seem to be bound by the state ideology and appear to have full freedom at all levels of operation, including governance, facilities, curriculum, recruitment and tuition, teaching and learning. Both these universities have stated on their websites that they enjoy full academic freedom and autonomy. FUV has been the first institution that has officially identified

<sup>3</sup><https://www.timeshighereducation.com/unijobs/minisites/vin-university/>, accessed on January 28, 2020.

<sup>4</sup><https://fulbright.edu.vn/>, accessed on January 28, 2020.



itself as a liberal arts university since Doi Moi in Vietnam; while VinUni identifies itself as an elite university that focuses primarily on business, engineering and technology, and health sciences.

Both FUV and VinUni are closely connected with the United States, but in different ways. In 2014, the US Congress officially allocated funding to create an American-style university in Vietnam, hence FUV. Former President Obama was supportive of this initiative and announced its establishment in 2016 during his visit to Vietnam. Several US war veterans as well as the Harvard Kennedy School have been behind this FUV project. On the contrary, the establishment of VinUni has entirely been through the financial and political power of Vingroup—one of the largest private corporations in Vietnam. VinUni involves a collaboration of Vingroup with Cornell University and the University of Pennsylvania.

We wonder if these US links may have contributed to the highest level of autonomy and academic freedom FUV and VinUni have claimed to enjoy. And we also wonder if the revised law passed at the end of 2018 has enabled this full level of autonomy to be put in practice by those institutions that are ready to go full swing with it. As such, Vin University has become the very first Vietnamese university that has appointed a non-Vietnamese to be its President<sup>5</sup> and has all its curriculum entirely developed by two American universities. This is unheard of in the history of Vietnam HE since Doi Moi.

The extracts below from Vin University's job advertisement placed on Times Higher Education for several key positions gives a good sense of its autonomy<sup>6</sup>:

*The formation of the Vin University Project has resulted from the collaboration of Vingroup with Cornell University and the University of Pennsylvania. Cornell provides academic consulting on Management, Engineering and Technology; and Penn focuses on the Health Sciences disciplines. Both Cornell University and the University of Pennsylvania are distinguished Ivy League institutions based in the United States of America. Cornell is involved in every aspect of the development of Vin University from infrastructure and*

<sup>5</sup>[https://cafebiz.vn/chiem-nguong-co-so-vat-chat-sieu-hien-dai-tai-dai-hoc-tinh-hoa-vinuni-20200115103212229.chn?fbclid=IwAR1S\\_BsIMpqFC\\_teQnkEX8J-7Ykr7Q-C7yEiQM4p2kRSQrORWYX\\_mwo1yNv0](https://cafebiz.vn/chiem-nguong-co-so-vat-chat-sieu-hien-dai-tai-dai-hoc-tinh-hoa-vinuni-20200115103212229.chn?fbclid=IwAR1S_BsIMpqFC_teQnkEX8J-7Ykr7Q-C7yEiQM4p2kRSQrORWYX_mwo1yNv0), accessed on January 29, 2020.

<sup>6</sup><https://www.timeshighereducation.com/unijobs/minisites/vin-university/>, accessed on January 28, 2020.

*campus planning to curriculum development and faculty hiring. Cornell's SC Johnson College of Business is providing extensive academic advisement in a variety of areas, drawing from a wealth of faculty expertise at multiple colleges and units at Cornell University. Penn's medical and nursing schools are functioning in a similar fashion to guide the formation of health science education at Vin University and to interface with Vinmec, Vingroup's outstanding health system which currently encompasses 7 hospitals throughout Vietnam.*

Whether or not the US-backed nature of VinUni and FUV has helped them in their claims of autonomy and academic freedom deserves more scholarly examination. The subsequent section provides more nuances to institutional autonomy and the role played by new 'actors' in HE.

#### 20.4 THE CONTINUING BATTLE BETWEEN THE SOVIET TRADITION AND THE US-STYLED MODEL IN VIETNAM HIGHER EDUCATION

Another important theme that runs across several chapters in Parts I, II, and III of the book is the continuing battle in Vietnam HE between the deeply rooted former Soviet educational tradition and the more recently introduced Western values, in which Western values have most often been conflated with the US model or US-styled model. The blanket denigration of the Soviet model in education and its undesirable legacies is not new in Vietnam, as one of us (Phan Le Ha) has argued (Phan, 2012). In particular, the Harvard Kennedy School Report on Vietnam HE produced by Vallely and Wilkinson (2008) has been enthusiastically cited as the authoritative source for justification of criticisms of Vietnam's HE. The influence of the Soviet model and its many accompanying problems on Vietnam HE was excessively criticised and condemned in this report. The Soviet model was projected as a kind of cancerous disease that had been gradually killing (higher) education in Vietnam. The recommendation of the American model would then be offered as alternative and ways forward, assuming that the American model is unified, unproblematic, and uncontested, as Phan (2012) shows. Likewise, Douglas's (2016) recent book on flagship university models clearly points to many problems associated with the widely promoted US model as the singular uncontested model. This promotion is often accompanied by the lack of understanding of the range of US universities and their hugely diverse qualities, roles, and missions.

The HE reform agenda in Vietnam has been, to a significant extent, to eliminate the Soviet model remnants in university structure, research, teaching and curriculum. All this has given way to the promotion of America's liberal arts education in Vietnam; and the establishment of FUV and VinUni is perhaps among the most powerful outcomes of the winning side in this battle. Ngo (Chapter 7) argues that this promotion is not only uncritical but also shows the ignorance and lack of knowledge on the part of its supporters when it comes to the term *liberal arts education* itself and the philosophical underpinnings behind the term.

The revised Higher Education Law 2018 and Degree No. 99 have demonstrated a big shift from the Soviet model to a Western (US) Model by promoting the following signals:

- i. Emphasise institutional autonomy as a key condition for HE development;
- ii. Emphasise the role of university councils, not bureaucratic organisations, as the most important entity which leads HE institution development;
- iii. Encourage and identify pathways for transforming specialised universities (Soviet model) into comprehensive, multi-sectoral ones (Western model);
- iv. Apply a performance-based funding mechanism instead of the political will of administrative agencies and create a level playing field for public and private HE institutions.

Alongside the above shift towards a more Western/US-styled HE, the existence of the socialist legacy remains strongly embedded in both Vietnam's legal documents and in its practice regarding reform implementation. *Most noticeably*, in late 2019, the Ministry of Education and Training in collaboration with the Central Propaganda Committee of the Party (Ban Tuyen Giao Trung Uong) adopted a new curriculum and textbooks for political and ideology courses for HE. This very act reflects the Party's will to reinforce compulsory education for all Vietnamese students throughout its entire HE system which also includes foreign-owned and foreign-backed institutions. Therefore, in principle, US-backed VinUni and FUV as well as foreign-owned RMIT Vietnam (a branch campus of RMIT university in Melbourne, Australia) will also have to follow this regulation. In practice, these universities, nevertheless, may have come up with 'creative/innovative' courses

and/or programmes that somehow incorporate these political and ideology courses in their curricula. This very aspect invites scholarly attention.

Another observation regarding the socialist legacy in university governance and autonomy is that, while the revised law and Degree No. 99 emphasise the important role of the university council in institutional autonomy, when it comes to practice, the theoretically independent role of the chair of university council, nonetheless, is supposed to be the party secretary of the same HE institution. This means that the university council in public institutions should be under the leadership of the Party.

Under the revised law, those HE institutions which can meet all the conditions for attaining autonomy, are supposed to be able to exercise comprehensive autonomy including opening new degree programmes. However, the socialist legacy mandates that for training programmes in education, health and security and defense areas, HE institutions still need to seek approval from the Ministry of Education and Training in advance.

In terms of research, the Soviet model remains strong in that research institutions still exist independently as part of the higher education system. They are still not merged with universities, despite endless critiques and evidence of low productivity (see Chapter 4).

The tension between the demand for a market-oriented HE system and the mandate to maintain the socialist legacy still remains, if not growing more fierce. The biggest challenge to balance is that the actual socio-economic, political, and cultural conditions of contemporary Vietnam do not yet allow the fulfilment of a Western-styled/US-styled model.

## 20.5 FROM HERE: ENGAGEMENT AND REFLEXIVITY IN PRACTICE, POLICY, AND SCHOLARSHIP

At this point, we find ourselves needing to stop and reflect on several questions Ortega raises in her commentary (Chapter 13, this edited volume): *What might be replaced and sacrificed as Vietnamese higher education becomes more 'autonomous' and 'privatised'? How do these changes reveal themselves in the way colleges and universities operate, and in how teaching and learning occur within the classroom?* Ortega alludes to attempts to answer these questions that could help 'identify what universities must fight to maintain in order to fulfill the purpose of higher education for the society it is meant to serve'.

Institutional autonomy and privatisation are the two very aspects central to neoliberal ideology that are prevalent in global HE these days. One outcome of the embrace of these aspects has been the emergence of elite and semi-elite private HE institutions in Vietnam (Chau, Chapter 8) and the increasing practice of mergers and acquisitions (Pham, Chapter 9). The achievement of elite and semi-elite status is getting more and more grounded in the society. The implementation of institutional autonomy in the entire HE system is expected to create a sterner hierarchy among HE institutions in the years to come, particularly with the growing participation of private corporations and wealthy individuals in HE institutions. Likewise, the introduction of English as a medium of instruction (EMI) degree programmes (see Part III in this edited volume) is likely to rocket them ahead and to play a key role in their attracting students and investments. All these characteristics, happenings, and prospects are, at the same time, at odds with Vietnam's socialist state ideology. Keeping in mind that Vietnam is a socialist country committed to providing education as a public good to its people, as emphasised by Hayden and Le-Nguyen (Chapter 2), Ngo (Chapter 3), and Felix (Chapter 6), these questions raised by Ortega are fundamental and deserve rigorous engagement.

Nonetheless, with all the above issues at hand, 'new' players, 'new' values and discourses, 'new' practices, and 'new' flavours have collectively necessitated a 'new' status, 'new' order, 'new' challenges, and 'new' aspirations in Vietnam in general and Vietnam's HE in particular. These 'new' elements all demand engagement and reflexivity at all levels and via practice, policy, and scholarship. Reflexivity, a key concept in Felix's commentary chapter (Chapter 6), ought to be engaged regularly and rigorously and put in frequent practice as Vietnam's HE is progressing in the light of reform and new aspirations brought together by all kinds of forces from within and beyond its geographical borders.

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## Afterword: Challenges Facing Vietnamese Higher Education

*Fazal Rizvi*

The first visit I ever made to Vietnam was in 1998. I went there in my capacity as a newly appointed Pro Vice Chancellor (International) at RMIT University in Melbourne Australia to look over the conditions pertaining to Vietnam's system of higher education and to explore the possibilities of establishing a campus in Ho Chi Minh City. I was to report back to the Vice Chancellor on the challenges RMIT University was likely to face in proceeding with such an ambitious project in a country that was committed to socialist principles, had a reputation of being highly regulated and bureaucratic and was suspicious of private sector investment in higher education, especially from an overseas university.

During my visit what I found in Vietnam was a society deeply weary of outsiders, economically impoverished, with a poor infrastructure. After the Asian economic crisis of 1997, many building projects that were financially backed by various Asian countries had been half completed and had seemingly been abandoned, including Ha Noi's new airport. The shelves in many shops were half empty, and most roads were

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in a desperate need of repair. The per capita income was barely \$1000 per year, and there did not appear to be a large middle class, which could afford to pay the amount of fees that RMIT University would have had to charge to make its investment financially viable.

I visited a number of universities and colleges and found them lacking in the necessary resources needed to provide effective education. The classes were large and the quality of teaching poor. A small number of individuals carried out exemplary pieces of research, but there was next to no systematic research culture. I was told that for every dozen or so students who had qualified for a place in higher education only one was available. There was clearly a hugely unmet demand, with lack of policy clarity as to how it might be met in a system of higher education that was supposedly free. I was told that most young people in Vietnam had difficulty scratching out a living for themselves and their family, and that most could not be expected to pay tuition fees to attend a private university that could not guarantee them a well-paying job anyway.

Ironically, however, many in Vietnam appeared confident about the future of the country and its system of higher education. Among the people I consulted there were some who were surprisingly energetic about the possibilities of reform that had been initiated more than a decade earlier, the so-called *Doi Moi* Reform, often translated in English as Economic or Open Door Reform. They had put their faith in the potential of economic liberalization, and viewed the problems associated with the Asian economic crisis as temporary. They viewed higher education as a solution to many of the nation's social and economic problems. Even members of the communist party did not express any major ideological objections to market-oriented overseas investment in higher education.

After my visit to Vietnam I reported to the Vice Chancellor at RMIT University that while I was impressed with the level of enthusiasm, energy, and optimism that I found in the country, an investment into developing a campus there was financially risky and organizationally complex. He considered my advice seriously, but with the foresight I clearly did not possess, he decided nonetheless to go ahead with the project. His decision was further boosted by a major grant that the University was able to secure from the Atlantic Philanthropy, as well as a loan from the Asian Development Bank. After some hesitation, the Vietnamese Ministry of Education too supported the project and agreed to facilitate all the necessary approvals.



Over the next three years, while I was not directly involved in overseeing the development of the RMIT's Vietnam campus, I made a number of visits to Vietnam, with more than a keen eye on the impediments the University faced in working on a fledgling project that was not only difficult to navigate technically but was also politically contentious in Vietnam. Three years later, I left RMIT to take up an academic appointment at the University of Illinois in the United States, but continued to hear about the remarkable progress the University was making in setting up the campus, enrolling its first cohort of students in 2002. It had overcome many of the doubts I had about its feasibility. Furthermore, it was able to overcome various bureaucratic roadblocks and political opposition. The project was also successful in generating the kind of enthusiasm and support that is essential for a transnational project of such great complexity.

Twenty years later, the Ho Chi Ming campus of RMIT Vietnam now enrolls over 6000 students in a whole range of disciplines. The University has also established an additional campus in Ha Noi. Furthermore, RMIT Vietnam now operates within Vietnam's higher education space that has been transformed into a confident and forward-looking system. In 2015, I had an opportunity to visit Ha Noi to attend the 7th *Engaging with Vietnam* conference, and what I witnessed there was a country that was much more prosperous than I had experienced 18 years earlier. At the conference itself, there were robust discussions about the achievements and the future of higher education in Vietnam, which displayed the kind of confidence that was inconceivable at the turn of the century. The speakers at the conference considered issues and challenges the country still faced in ways that were not only descriptive but also analytical and critical, but always with a remarkable degree of assurance in the country's future. This is clearly evident in the chapters that are included in this volume co-edited by Phan Le Ha and Doan Ba Ngoc, many of which were first presented at one of the annual *Engaging with Vietnam* conferences.

Of all the achievements of Vietnamese higher education, the growth in its gross enrolment ratio (GER) in less than two decades is perhaps the most widely noted with much admiration. In 2000, fewer than 4% of its population attended an institution of higher education in Vietnam. Vietnam's GER is now nearly 30%, enabling its system of higher education to be classified as 'massified'. An explanation for this significant achievement of course lies in Vietnam's booming economy, following its

market reforms that have involved moving from a command-style economic system to a more open capitalist system without the socialist government relinquishing political control. Over the past two decades, the average growth in GDP in Vietnam has only been surpassed by China, and the country has rightly been referred to as a newly industrialized ‘tiger cub’. Rapidly growing participation rates in higher education have not only driven Vietnam’s growing economy that has needed more skilled workers, but they have also been one of its outcomes. Increasing levels of prosperity have created a strong middle class that aspires to higher levels of education, as the chapter by Ngo (Chapter 3) indicates.

The rapidly growing economy is however not the only factor contributing to the development of Vietnam’s system of higher education. Educational reforms have also been crucial. The Vietnamese government has long recognized that the modernization of its education system is essential. In the early 2000s, it laid out its ambitious plans for reform in its ‘Comprehensive Reform of Higher Education in Vietnam 2006–2020’, which stressed the need to advance human capital development, boost enrolments in higher education, and modernize its system of teaching and research to meet the needs of the country’s industrialization in a global environment. It established a very ambitious set of targets and performance indicators, not only for higher education but also for Vietnam’s secondary system, most notably in relation to high school graduation examinations and university admission.

Among Vietnam’s goals for reform, internationalization of its system of higher education features prominently. Its internationalization policies, as a number of chapters in this collection have shown, include attempts to expand English-language education in Vietnam (see, in particular, Chapter 14 by Pham and Doan, Chapter 15 by Vu, Chapter 18 by Noorashid), strengthen its curriculum to meet the needs of Vietnam’s participation in the global economy and promote transnational cooperation and exchange with countries like Australia, the UK, France, the US, Japan, and Germany. It has also promoted the idea of Vietnamese students and scholars going abroad to study (see Chapter 16 by Truong, Ngo, and Nguyen), while simultaneously seeking to increase the number of foreign students and researchers in Vietnam. To do so, and perhaps following the example of RMIT’s experiences in Vietnam, it has made it easier for overseas institutions to set up campuses and other forms of operations.

As a result, even though very few reputable foreign institutions have established actual branch campuses in the country so far, collaborative ventures have grown steadily, including Vietnamese-German University, Vietnam Japan University, and the Fulbright University Vietnam, a non-profit university recently set up with support from the US Congress. At the programme level, while government-approved transnational educational programmes have existed in Vietnam for a long time, the number of such programmes has increased significantly in recent years, with universities from countries like France, the UK, and Australia being the main partners in twinning agreements and transnational degree programmes. Almost as remarkable has been the growth in the number of private English language centres in Vietnam, as the chapter by Pham and Doan (Chapter 14) notes, with more than 2000 such centres established in just the past two decades.

In this collection, many of these developments are critically examined, since none of them has been without its problems. At the broadest level, this examination shows that the problems of reform have not only been practical and technical but also political and conceptual. To develop its reform agenda, Vietnam has inevitably borrowed policy and ideas from around the world, some from the international students who have come back home from completing their graduate studies study abroad, while others from global policy entrepreneurs who invariably promote a particular set of neoliberal ideas about how aims and governance of higher education should be conceptualized and put into practice. Vietnam has thus got caught up within a globally circulating discourse of educational reform, as well as an emerging neoliberal system of higher education in which the global mobility of students and scholars is encouraged and the value of higher education is mostly defined in terms of a market rationality, even when, as the chapter by Ngo (Chapter 7) suggests, models such as the American liberal arts programme are imported into Vietnam.

At the same time, however, Vietnamese government remains committed to socialist values, with a governance system that is highly centralized. While it allows private investment in higher education, as well as private-public partnerships, it wishes to keep a tight control over developments. And there lies its dilemma. As the chapter by Marklein and Mai (Chapter 11) suggests, academic freedom is difficult to achieve in a system of higher education where the state has an inordinate amount of power, and when a coherent political narrative of Vietnam's future and the role of higher education in realizing it is not readily available.

Perhaps such conceptual clarity and coherence is too much to ask for because the ideological principles of socialism, neoliberalism, and market rationality invariably exist in tension with each other. Most that can be expected is an attempt at reconciliation of these ideologies in ways that are tentative, provisional, incomplete, and opportunity-driven.

In many ways, the analysis presented in these chapters hints at this conclusion, without ever being explicit. And perhaps their attempt to work through these tensions is the major strength of this collection. Each of the chapters shows how the challenges facing Vietnamese higher education are linked to the tension between Vietnam's commitment to socialism and its reliance on market principles to pursue its programme of educational reforms. So, for example, Vietnam appears to have accepted the neoliberal idea that growth in GER in higher education is the essential for economic prosperity and for social and political confidence among its people. The expansion of its system of higher education is thus considered as necessary for it to take advantage of the global flows of capital, the shifting modes of production, and the global supply chains.

Not surprisingly therefore Vietnam has not only been prepared to allocate large sums of public money into higher education, but also to facilitate greater private investment in the development of new universities and colleges. It has encouraged the public to view an investment in higher education as an outlay that is likely to bring good returns to both individuals and the nation. This line of argument already posits a particular view of society and the role of individuals in it. It presupposes that individuals are ultimately self-seeking economic subjects. It embraces an imaginary of modernity from the perspective of the Western traditions of Enlightenment, rather than a standpoint located in either socialist or Confucian traditions, both of which underline the importance of collective action.

Many of the tensions inherent in the reform agenda in Vietnamese higher education are thus linked to the difficulties that the nation has faced in reconciling the global and the local, the imperatives of its cultural traditions and the dictates of the market, and the principles of neoliberalism and socialism. In a rush to reform, the Vietnamese state has taken its people into an ideological journey that encourages them to imagine that there is no necessary conflict across these competing ideologies. Furthermore, perhaps in the speed with which the Vietnam system of higher education has grown has been too rapid, and its form too ad hoc. Has the system been able to cope with the pace of change?

While it is clear that Vietnam's relentless drive towards massification of higher education has been fueled by student demand, it is equally clear that the nation has not adequately addressed the issues of supply. From my perspective, while the increase in GER in Vietnam is truly remarkable and impressive, it appears to have been driven by opportunism and policy mimicry, rather than orderly and efficient processes of policy analysis and development. As a result, the system appears ill-prepared for rapid expansion, in terms of providing appropriate levels of support, resource allocation, and capacity building. The system still lacks appropriately trained academic staff, or indeed clearly any defined and funded strategies to prepare the academic staff to adequately look after the needs of new cohorts of students many of whom come from families without traditions of higher learning.

The Vietnamese government has 'soaked up the growing student demand' by allowing the entry of a range of private providers, with varying degrees of commitment, expertise, and resources to provide quality higher education, as the chapter by Chau (Chapter 8) indicates. The approval and quality assurance processes to which these hastily established private institutions are subjected have been at best uneven. Like other countries in the Global South, Vietnam has considered the use of technology as a way of meeting the growing demand for higher education at a reasonable cost, only to realize that online learning can often be much more expensive and complex if it is to be done properly. Lacking established pedagogic traditions, expertise in this area cannot be developed cheaply and quickly without sacrificing quality, to make online learning systems attractive to students and sustainable.

In recent years, new universities in Vietnam, both public and private, have been created as a result of re-badging or rebranding or amalgamating the existing technical schools, polytechnics, and teachers' colleges, without any substantial shifts in the ways in which they are expected to operate, or the type of students they recruit. As the chapter by Pham (Chapter 9) suggests, the challenges of amalgamation in Vietnam are considerable. The amalgamated institutions are often grossly underfunded, and are widely regarded as 'overcrowded factories'. They lack the libraries and laboratories that any decent institution of higher education should possess. Few have programmes of professional development for their teachers, so that they possess an advanced level of knowledge in their subject area, as well as a scholarly disposition. In this way, the coherent and serious programmes for capacity building of its institutions of higher education remain underdeveloped in Vietnam.

In the haste to expand its system of higher education, without any substantial focus on capacity building, curriculum options at most private universities in Vietnam are understandably narrow, restricted to subjects that do not require expensive laboratories, extensive libraries, and highly qualified staff. For example, programmes in Business and Management, which are assumed to be cost-effective and affordable to many new students, have experienced explosive growth, while the number of programmes in much-needed STEM areas has been limited. As a result, there has been an oversupply of graduates in some areas, while a severe shortage exists in others. Many graduates moreover do not possess the knowledge and skills that employers consider necessary in the changing labour market geared towards the global economy. The students are often unable to secure a job in their area of study, creating a risk, in the longer term, of a legitimization and motivation crisis among graduates.

Nor will these graduates be able to make the kind of contribution to national economic development that Vietnam hopes from its institutions of higher education. Hence what the chapters in this collection show is that growth in student numbers in higher education is not inevitably a good thing. Much depends on what its purposes and outcomes, the ways in it is organized and coordinated, and the contribution it is able to make to the development of the knowledge and skills needed in a country as diverse and complex as Vietnam. An increase in GER in higher education may thus be necessary but is not sufficient to drive either economic or social prosperity.

In their chapter in this collection, Hayden and Le-Nguyen (Chapter 2) provide a comprehensive review of the reform agenda for higher education in Vietnam, acknowledging its many achievements, beyond a massive increase in the number of young people who now enrol in an institution of higher education in Vietnam. However, they also point to many challenges that lie ahead. These include the need to rethink and reform the curriculum and to improve the quality of teaching and learning and the conditions under which academics are expected to work. In the area of research, major efforts are needed to make academics more research-active so that the research productivity of Vietnamese higher education can be increased. Also necessary are improvements in governance and management practices, with attempts to eradicate the levels of corruption that persist in the system. To become globally integrated, Vietnam also needs to rethink its internationalization agenda, beyond the issues of mobility of

students and staff, to the ways in which its universities might develop more robust, sustainable, and equitable partnerships with universities around the world.

In my view, however, these challenges should not be interpreted in purely technical and administrative terms, but more broadly in relation to the deeper questions about the purposes of higher education, which should lie at the heart of the debates over higher education expansion and reform. These debates should focus not only on the imperatives of economic growth but also on social and cultural development, the kind of society Vietnam might imagine for itself. It needs to be acknowledged moreover that genuine reform in Vietnam cannot be realized by relying on markets alone, but will demand serious discussions at all levels of society about how the nation might work towards its own definition of modernization, forged out of the competing ideologies that will continue to shape the future of Vietnamese higher education. The legacies of colonialism and the negative aspects of the external global forces cannot simply be wished away in Vietnam. Nor is it desirable for Vietnam to abandon its commitment to its traditional and socialist values. If this is so then the basic ideological challenge that Vietnam faces is to craft a system of higher education that points to a new assemblage across these multiple values and interests.



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*Phan Le Ha and Doan Ba Ngoc*

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The original version of this book was inadvertently published with an error in the author's family name in the citation and running head. This has been corrected. The corrections to the book have been updated with the changes.

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C1



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