

# Chapter 2

## Vietnamese Government Policies and Practices in Internationalisation of Higher Education



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### Introduction

In the global knowledge economy, universities are becoming more important as they assume a mediating role in transnational relationships and the flow of people, information, knowledge, technology, products, and financial capital (OECD 2009). At the same time, governments are placing more emphasis on the internationalisation of their higher education systems. Internationalisation is regarded as one of the tools to promote the competitiveness of higher education, and improve domestic universities so as to fulfil needs for economic development as well as economic competitiveness (Lane 2015; Owens and Lane 2014).

In Vietnam, the government expects its higher education system to serve national socio-economic development goals and global economic integration. The government also places emphasis on internationalisation activities and initiatives in its strategies and agenda to reform the higher education system. This comes from the awareness that, in order to reap the most benefits of globalisation, the country needs to move from a passive position to a more active and proactive approach in internationalising its higher education system.

This chapter offers an analysis of Vietnam's government policies and practices in the internationalisation of higher education in the globalised context. Based on the

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analysis of policy documents and case study of specific internationalisation programs and universities, the chapter shows that despite the government's growing awareness of the crucial role of internationalisation in higher education reform, many internationalisation policies do not seem to be consistently and effectively translated into practice, especially when delineation is made between the system and the institution levels. Overall, internationalisation activities and programs remain fragmented, ad-hoc and imbalanced across faculties within an institution as well as across different institutions and regions. Although internationalisation has contributed to diversifying the system in terms of forms of institutions, programs, activities, and curricula, there is a prevalent isomorphic trend at the institution level. Institutions behave in a mimicking fashion and seek legitimacy through internationalisation without necessarily improving performance or quality.

The chapter starts with a brief overview of the literature on higher education internationalisation and the prevalent characteristics of internationalisation in Asia. The second section analyses the evolvement of Vietnamese government policies in internationalisation, identifying the major activities and priorities in the government's policies. The next section details internationalisation activities at three levels: the students, the institutions, and the government. This is followed by an analysis of the effectiveness of the government policies manifested in those activities. The final section showcases new positive developments in the internationalisation of Vietnamese universities, and highlights the role of the universities in their innovative engagement in internationalisation.

## **Overview of the Literature on Internationalisation of Higher Education**

### ***Defining Internationalisation in Higher Education***

According to Knight (2012), the term “internationalisation” is commonly used to describe the international dimension of higher education, ranging from international activities, academic programs and research initiatives, to branch campuses, development projects, and regional knowledge hubs. Such diversity in internationalisation is captured in Knight's (2004) definition of internationalisation. Knight (2004) defines internationalisation in higher education as “the process of integrating an international, intercultural, or global dimension into the purpose, functions or delivery of post-secondary education” (p. 11). There are three important aspects in Knight's definition. First, it is emphasised that internationalisation is an ongoing effort. Second, it not only involves the integration among nations, it also recognises cultural diversity and worldwide scope. Third, the process of integration is manifested in multiple aspects of postsecondary education, including the roles, missions, characteristics, and program offerings in the higher education system as a whole and in a higher education institution in particular.

Knight (2012) also identifies two pillars of internationalisation, “internationalisation at home” (or “campus-based internationalisation”) and “cross-border education” (p. 34). The two pillars are closely related to each other. The former refers to campus-based strategies to integrate international, intercultural, and comparative perspectives into the campus and the student experience, which is sometimes referred as “traditional internationalisation” (Altbach and Knight 2007, p. 293). Examples of internationalisation at home are new programs with international themes, foreign language study, international student and diaspora academics engagement, and international conferences. Cross-border education indicates “the movement of people, programs, providers, policies, knowledge, ideas, projects, and services across national boundaries” (p. 36). Other terms that are used interchangeable are transnational, offshore, and borderless education. Knight (2012) emphasises the shift in cross-border education trends, from focusing on student mobility to program and provider mobility, and from development cooperation (aid) to competitive commerce (trade).

### ***Globalisation and Internationalisation***

Altbach and Knight (2007) make a distinction between globalisation and internationalisation. The former refers to the reality of the twenty-first century, whereas the latter denotes policies and practices that emerge in such a context. In other words, “internationalisation is seen as something higher education institutions do while globalisation is something that is happening to them (Mitchell and Nielsen 2012, p. 3).

According to Altbach and Knight (2007), elements of globalisation play an important role in the internationalisation of higher education. Globalisation has facilitated the increasing global capital investment in knowledge industries, including higher education and advanced training. Such investments contribute to the emergence of the knowledge economy, the growth of the service sector, and the increasingly important role of knowledge products and high-skilled workforce in economic development (Altbach and Knight 2007).

In such a context, international higher education is seen as a tradeable commodity in services (Altbach and Knight 2007). The World Trade Organization (WTO) offers a regulatory framework for international trade in education through the General Agreement on Trade in Services (GATS). WTO member countries can decide to enter certain provisions in GATS. Trade in education under GATS is facilitated through four modes: cross-border supply of the service, consumption abroad, commercial presence of the provider in another country, and presence of persons in another country to provide the service (Varghese 2007).

## ***Rationales for Internationalisation***

It is important to identify the driving forces for internationalisation as they influence the outcomes of the process (Knight 2012). Knight and de Wit (1999) categorise the rationales for internationalisation into four groups: social/cultural, political, academic, and economic. As internationalisation is becoming more complex and involving multiple actors, Knight (2008, cited in Knight 2012) updates the categorisation into two levels, the national level and the institutional level. At the national level, the rationales for internationalisation include human resource development, strategic alliances, commercial trade, nation building, and social cultural development. At the institutional level, higher education institutions participate in the internationalisation process for the purposes of international branding and profile, income generation, student and staff development, strategic alliances, and knowledge production. In terms of forms of internationalisation, at the national level, government is often involved in areas such as student exchange programs, marketing campaigns, cultural centres at colleges and universities, and importing institutions. At the institutional level, higher education institutions that have emerged into international actors often engage in areas such as international branch campuses (IBCs), joint and double degree programs, international consultancies, research sites and outreach offices, and accreditation (Lane 2015).

At the national level, Lane (2015) also offers a set of rationales for government involvement in internationalisation which includes economic competitiveness, public diplomacy, and national security. However, Lane's categorisation seems to come from the perspective of developed countries such as the U.S. The countries using educational programs as a public diplomacy tool are those with economic resources and political interest in maintaining and increasing their global influence. Similarly, national security is seen as a concern in countries that receive major in-flow of international students. Nonetheless, the economic competitiveness rationale identified by Lane seems relevant to both developing and developed countries and overlaps with the rationales at the national level identified by Knight. Internationalisation helps increase countries' economic competitiveness through the contributions of international talents to the countries' economy, facilitating foreign direct investment, and fostering innovation (Lane 2015). Therefore economic competitiveness is one of the important driving forces for internationalisation, especially in the context of globalisation and the emergence of the knowledge economy (Owens and Lane 2014).

## ***Internationalisation of Higher Education in Asian Countries***

Internationalisation of higher education in Asia can be categorised into three distinctive types: import-oriented, import and export, and transitional (Huang 2007). According to Huang (2007), in import-oriented country systems, such as Vietnam and Indonesia, higher education internationalisation occurs mostly through

importing foreign educational programs and institutions, especially those from Western countries, as a way to introduce advanced standards and norms to the countries' higher education system. The import and export systems includes Hong Kong and Singapore which not only import education activities from Australia, the United Kingdom, and the U.S. but also export their higher education activities to other Asian countries, especially mainland China. The transitional type is salient among countries such as China and Japan which are import intensive but in recent years have made strong efforts in increasing their export activities and influence on other countries (Huang 2007). Also according to Huang (2007), the rationales for internationalisation in Asian countries are influenced by the countries' national policies and strategies. He identifies three salient governmental approaches among these countries: the government-regulated approach (China, Malaysia, and Korea), the market-oriented approach (Hong Kong), and the transitional approach, moving from state-controlled to market oriented (Japan and Taiwan).

## **Vietnam's Higher Education Internationalisation: Government Policy**

Internationalisation, referred as "integration" in Vietnamese policy discourse, has become one of the priorities in Vietnamese higher education development and reform (Tran et al. 2014). Since the country transformed from central planning to a market oriented economy through the *Đổi Mới* policy in the mid-1980s, Vietnamese higher education internationalisation policies have evolved alongside and in conjunction with other socio-economic areas. In 1996, a decade after *Đổi Mới*, the need for international economic integration was first mentioned in the Communist Party of Vietnam's (CPV) eighth national congress. Five years later, the CPV's ninth national congress marked the transition from recognising the need for integration to emphasising active and proactive participation in international economic integration. It was not until the CPV's tenth national congress in 2006 that international integration was expanded beyond the economic area to include other areas such as education. This set the stage for the country's accession to the World Trade Organization (WTO) and entrance into the General Agreement on Trade in Services (GATS) in 2007.

Vietnam's government rationales for internationalisation of higher education can be described as two stages, integration with socialist countries prior to the *Đổi Mới* period and global integration after *Đổi Mới* (T. P. Nguyen 2014). Indeed, as noted by Huang (2007), from 1945 to the 1980s, influenced by the Cold War, internationalisation of higher education in Asia saw the division of countries into two groups, one following the Soviet Union model and the other following the American model. Table 2.1 illustrates the shift in the Vietnamese government rationales for

**Table 2.1** Vietnam's government approach to internationalisation of HE (Source: Authors compiled from T.-P. Nguyen (2014))

Integration among socialist countries	Global integration
The mission of international cooperation in higher education is to train human resources according to state planning and the demands of state agencies and state owned companies.	International cooperation serves to train a wide range of human resource demands, supply high quality graduates for the country's socio-economic organizations.
	Current international cooperation and integration is charged with high quality human resource with international standards who can work in home country or abroad.
International cooperation framework is limited in ODA projects that have close relation to UNESCO and non-profits.	The framework is expanded to include educational competitions and for-profits as Vietnam joined the WTO and signed GATS.
	WTO accession and GATS help promote transnational education and create legal basis and resource to enhance international cooperation and integration.
International cooperation and international integration in education based on a simplistic equality rationale resulting in a level approach and reluctant to stratification.	International cooperation with priorities, accepting stratification, emphasising on effective international competitiveness.
Education is a pure social welfare.	Education is a prioritised area of development with comparison to the region and the world.
Assessment of achievement based on comparing with the country's own past.	Assessment of quality relative to international standards.
Indifference to international integration. Neither encourage nor discourage.	Proactive and active in international integration with strategic planning.
Focus on external influence on international cooperation.	Pay attention to creating internal impetus for international cooperation.
Cooperation, if any, only pays attention to pure academic and scientific matters.	Cooperation expands to more complex and sensitive matters such as social equality, gender equality, religions, sovereignty, and human rights.
Cooperation is done by state management agencies.	Delegate and allow more institutional autonomy in international integration.

internationalisation, from a reluctant, passive, and simplistic approach to proactive engagement and strategic planning.

The transformation of the Party's rationale is reflected in the country's policy agenda for higher education reform. Along with the accession into the WTO and commitments to educational trade in GATS, over the past decade Vietnamese internationalisation policies have moved from one-sided reactive integration in the face of globalisation to a more proactive approach, including ambitious goals and strategies to bring higher education to world level.

The Higher Education Reform Agenda (HERA) 2005 lays out strategies to comprehensively and fundamentally reform the higher education system in the 2006 to

2020 period.<sup>1</sup> HERA 2005 expects higher education reform to correspond with the country's socio-economic development strategies and meet the demand for a high-skilled workforce and international economic integration. By 2020 Vietnam's higher education is expected to achieve high competitiveness, attain regional standards, and approach world advanced standards, including the establishment of a few world-class universities. In general, internationalisation in higher education is specified in three areas: preparation for implementing international agreements and commitments, internationalisation at home, and cross-border higher education.

Specifically, first, the government undertakes to develop international integration strategies and higher education competitiveness in order to implement international agreements and commitments. Second, internationalisation at home encompasses the implementation of programs with English as the language of instruction, attraction of international students, learning from advanced programs in the world, reaching agreements on degree equivalences with international higher education institutions, encouraging joint programs and faculty exchange, facilitating the return of Vietnamese diaspora, and increasing study abroad programs. Third, in promoting cross-border higher education, the government is committed to creating the conditions and mechanisms for international investors and high-ranking universities in the world to open international branch campuses in Vietnam or cooperate with local universities.

Subsequent government policies and Party guidelines concerning the internationalisation of higher education have been consistent with the agenda set in HERA 2005. Both the government's 2012 strategies for education development in the period of 2011–2020<sup>2</sup> and the 2013 CPV's resolution on fundamental and comprehensive reform of education and training<sup>3</sup> reinforce HERA 2005's areas of internationalisation. These strategies aim at expanding and improving the effectiveness of international cooperation in education. Besides increasing the budget for sending faculty in key universities and national research institutes to study abroad, the government also identifies sciences and technology as areas of priority, and encourages local universities to cooperate with international institutions to improve capacity in management, training, research, and technology transfer. Importantly, the government will focus on establishing a small number of modern universities and research centres to attract Vietnamese and international researchers and scientists.

As part of implementing HERA 2005, in 2013 the government developed a plan for international integration in education and vocational training by 2020.<sup>4</sup> The plan details specific goals to be reached in two periods, 2014–2015 and 2016–2020 (Table 2.2).

Since the early 2000s, the government has opened up the higher education system to foreign investment and cooperation, albeit with reluctance, as part of the

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<sup>1</sup>Resolution No. 14/2005/NQ-CP by the Government dated November 2, 2005

<sup>2</sup>Decision No. 711/QĐ-TTg by the Prime Minister, dated June 13, 2012

<sup>3</sup>Resolution No. 29-NQ/TW by the 8th plenum of the CPV's 11th Central Committee dated November 4, 2013

<sup>4</sup>Decision No. 2448/QĐ-TTg by the Prime Minister dated December 16, 2013

**Table 2.2** Higher education internationalisation goals set by the government 2013 (Source: Authors compiled from government's strategic plan for higher education international integration 2013)

Types of Internationalisation	2014–2015	2016–2020
Mobility of students and faculty	Send 3000 university lecturers to study abroad at master's and doctoral level	Send 7000 university lecturers to study abroad at master's and doctoral level
	Receive about 300 international students and 300 international lecturers and researcher annually	Receive about 500 international students and 400 international lecturers and researcher annually
	Students in the 3 excellent universities are able to continue studying or work in countries in the region and the world.	Students in the 5 excellent universities are able to continue studying or work in countries in the region and the world.
Internationalisation at institutional level	Have about 50 programs accredited by international accreditation agencies	Have about 150 programs accredited by international accreditation agencies
Internationalisation at the national level	Have at least 3 “excellent universities” established	Increase the number of “excellent universities” to 5 institutions

agenda to encourage foreign investment<sup>5</sup> and to promote the “socialization” policy in education.<sup>6</sup> Foreign investment and international cooperation was restricted to fields such as sciences and technologies, economic management, and languages. It was not until 2012 did the government create a more comprehensive regulatory framework in foreign investment and cooperation in education<sup>7</sup> in order to implement its commitments in GATS. Specifically, Decree 73 removed the field restrictions in the previous regulations and provided regulations on internationalisation in higher education in the forms of foreign direct investment, joint venture with Vietnamese entities, foreign universities' branch campuses in Vietnam, and foreign representative offices.

The Vietnamese government's policies on internationalisation of higher education now encompass a diversity of activities and forms, which is manifested at three levels of internationalisation: the student level, the institutional level, and the governmental level. The following section will detail internationalisation at the three levels in four broad categories: (1) student mobility at the student level, (2) advanced programs and (3) joint/twinning programs at the institutional level, and (4) the establishment of excellent universities by the government in cooperation with foreign governments.

<sup>5</sup> Decree 06/2000/NĐ-CP by the government dated March 6, 2000 on foreign investment and cooperation in health care, education and training, and scientific research.

<sup>6</sup> Decree 18/2001/NĐ-CP by the government dated May 4, 2001 on establishment and operation of foreign educational and cultural institutions in Vietnam.

<sup>7</sup> Decree 73/2012/NĐ-CP by the government dated September 26, 2012 on foreign investment and cooperation in education, commonly known as Decree 73. This decree replaces the two previous decrees.



## Internationalisation at Three Levels: Student, Institution and Government

### *Student Level: Student Mobility*

Research evidence suggests that Vietnamese student mobility has been closely shaped by the historical, political, economic and social circumstances of the nation (Welch 2010; H. L. Pham and Fry 2004; Tran et al. 2014). France, China, America, Russia and the former Eastern European bloc were among the key host countries for Vietnamese students and scholars prior to *Đổi Mới* (D. T. Nguyen and Sloper 1995; Welch 2010; Tran et al. 2014). The historical trend of student mobility in Vietnam prior to *Đổi Mới* was largely driven by the political agenda of different parties at a specific historical stage and the purposes for mobility might contradict one another due to different parties' conflicting agenda. Tran et al. (2014), for example, pointed out that "during the French colonial period the mobility of scholar and student served different purposes, depending on whether the process was initiated by the French coloniser or the Vietnamese nationalists" (p. 131). The French government, as the coloniser of Vietnam at that time, provided educational mobility for Vietnamese young men in order to teach them about French civilisation and thus to serve colonial aspirations. In contrast the Vietnamese nationalists used educational mobility as a vehicle to educate young Vietnamese so as to serve the liberation of Vietnam from the French colonial regime (Tran et al. 2014). Between 1955 and 1975, more than 50 per cent of 30,775 Vietnamese international students studied in the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) (Dang 1997, p. 11, cited in Welch 2010, p. 201) via various scholarship schemes. The USSR, led by Russia, was a key ally in providing economic and military support for Northern Vietnam's government during the Vietnam war. Prior to the reunification of the country in 1975, the US-backed government of South Vietnam granted study-abroad scholarship for 6000 Vietnamese students (Green, 1973, cited in Pham and Fry 2004) and the United States offered additional scholarships enabling Vietnamese students to study in U.S. higher institutions.

After *Đổi Mới*, there was a massive growth in outbound mobility in Vietnam. In 2013, Vietnam had 125,000 students studying overseas, 15 per cent more than in 2012 (An 2015). Four important background factors shaped this growth. First, the Vietnamese government promoted study-abroad more actively than before because of international integration imperatives. The aspiration for international integration for enhancing the nation's diplomatic, economic, and social development was all the stronger after the long period of warfare followed by the post-victory embargo imposed by the American government. Second, economic growth and government's plan for industrialisation and modernisation of the country after the Vietnam war created a critical need to augment the supply of educated and skilled human capital. Study-abroad was seen as a practical response to this human resource need, a strategic vehicle enabling the nation to catch up with regional and national developments. Thus outbound mobility is positioned by the Vietnamese government's

Strategy for Education Development (2011–2020)<sup>8</sup> as a strategy to help Vietnamese nationals develop skills, knowledge, and attributes at universities in advanced countries around the world. Third, the growth in outbound mobility has been made possible by strategic policies to encourage both self-funded and scholarship funded overseas study. Accordingly, approximately 90 percent of Vietnamese international students are self-financed (Clark 2013). Fourth, there has been a significant growth of middle class families in Vietnam who can afford investment in study abroad for their children. The outbound mobility trend also has the additional benefit of easing the pressure on the domestic tertiary sector, where there is an unbalance between supply and demand (Tran et al. 2014; Nguyen and Tran 2017; Tran and Marginson 2018a, b).

The US, China and Australia are the most popular host countries for Vietnamese students. In 2014, there were 30,121 Vietnamese students enrolled in Australian education (AEI 2014). Figures from the Institute for International Education (IIE) 2012 and Australian Education International 2013 suggest the majority of Vietnamese university students in the USA and Australia are undertaking undergraduate studies (72% and 65% respectively) (Ziguras and Pham 2014). Approximately 27 per cent of Vietnamese international graduates migrate to the host country or another country (Docquier and Rapoport 2012). Vietnamese students engage in study-abroad programs across different educational levels from schooling to doctorate. According to Tran et al. (2014), the Vietnamese government's main initiative to promote staff and students' overseas study includes the project "*Training scientific and technical cadres in overseas institutions with the state budget*," often referred as "Project 322" and its replacement, Project 911. Project 911 aims to fund academics in Vietnamese higher education institutions to pursue doctoral study at a cost of 14,000 billion VND, of which 64 percent is for overseas study, 14 percent for "sandwich" program,<sup>9</sup> 20 percent for in-country study, and 2 percent for resource (Nguyen 2012). As such, Project 911 aims to provide about 10,000 awards for doctoral studies overseas. In addition to the government and provincial scholarships, a significant number of Vietnamese doctoral students enrolled in overseas institutions are funded via scholarship programs such as the Fulbright Program, the Vietnam Education Foundation – VEF (US), Australian Award Scholarships – AAS, Endeavour Program (Australia), Eiffel (France), Erasmus Mundus (Europe), the World Bank and the Asian Development Bank (H. Pham 2011).

### *Institutional Level*

*Advanced program:* The interface between Western and Vietnamese ways of 'doing' and 'thinking' has been regarded as fundamental to the design and implementation of *Chương trình tiên tiến* (the advanced program). Under the increased pressure to

<sup>8</sup> Decision No. 711/QĐ-TTg by the Prime Minister, dated June 13, 2012

<sup>9</sup> *Sandwich programs* are programs offered by local universities but involve a component of study abroad

enhance human resource capacity for Vietnam in line with national, regional and international developments and to increase its labor force's international competitiveness (T. T. H. Pham 2006; Tran et al. 2018), the Vietnamese government initiated the advanced program in 2006. Advanced program offerings have been core to the Ministry of Education and Training (MOET)'s internationalisation agenda as reflected in the Strategy for Education Development for Vietnam 2011–2020.<sup>10</sup> This program aims to offer 'advanced' education and training in chosen disciplines at selected universities in accordance with the world standard and accordingly ensure the quality of teaching and learning be internationally and regionally recognised. To achieve this aim, MOET has been determined to increase the use of English as the medium of instruction for advanced programs. These programs are designed by importing the curriculum of universities ranked in the top 200 in the world. These programs give students access to materials and contents from the most innovative programs in well regarded universities. These programs are also aimed to produce graduates who are more proficient in English than those enrolled in mass programs or *Chương trình Đào tạo Đại trà*. Advanced programs are expected to assist institutions in building their own capacities and bringing the quality of selected programs closer to regional standards.

However, Tran et al. (2014) argue that "there are a couple of critical issues regarding these advanced programs that need significant research and investment to ensure its missions be effectively realised" (p. 99). First, the advanced programs have been fragmentally and inconsistently implemented, concentrated in only some specific disciplines within selected universities. There has been little evidence regarding the impact of the advanced programs on the entire enterprise of selected universities (see also chap. 4 by Tran et al. 2018). Second, only high academically achieving students are selected into these programs, thus raising a serious question concerning access and equity. The notion of education as either local or global has been challenged by authors such as Shams and Huisman (2012) who endorse a hybrid approach that does not lead to a polarised view of global education. Designed to be hybrid programs that marry core elements of 'American'/'Anglo-Saxon' programs and Vietnam's local demands, the reality of such hybridity has been questioned (Tran et al. 2017). For example, based on research on internationalisation in Vietnamese higher education, Nguyen (2009a, b) notes aspects of curriculum content, pedagogy, structure and educational management of the advanced programs have been largely borrowed from partner foreign universities. The hybrid aspect is less apparent than the borrowed aspect.

*Joint and twinning programs:* Joint and twinning programs in Vietnam are either certificate or degree programs. These programs may use foreign curricula, or curricula jointly developed by the foreign institutions and the Vietnamese institutions. Government regulation requires that the language of instructions in these programs is English. While joint programs' degrees and certificates can be conferred by either the foreign institutions, or the Vietnamese counterparts, or both, the degrees and certificates of twinning programs are conferred by the foreign institutions. Students in twinning programs study part of the program in Vietnam and part at the

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<sup>10</sup>Decision No. 711/QĐ-TTg by the Prime Minister, dated June 13, 2012

**Table 2.3** Distribution of joint and twinning programs by source region<sup>a</sup>

Source region	Number of programs	Percentage of programs
Asia	73	26%
Australia & New Zealand	35	12%
Europe	132	47%
North America	42	15%
<b>Total</b>	<b>282</b>	<b>100%</b>

Source: Authors compiled from VIED 2015

<sup>a</sup>Note: The figures do not include joint and twinning programs in two national universities and three regional universities as these institutions are not under VIED's supervision and can implement international cooperation programs without going through VIED

foreign institution. Twinning programs are often referred as, for example, 3 + 1, 1 + 1, 1.5 + 0.5 (of which the first figure refers to the number of years students spent in Vietnamese institutions and the second denote the years spent at the foreign institutions), with the precise ratio determined by the program structure. Joint and twinning programs in Vietnam are regulated under Decree 73.<sup>11</sup> MOET's Vietnam International Education Development Office (VIED), and MOET's Department for International Cooperation, are the two central government agencies that oversee the establishment and operation of joint and twinning programs.

According to the VIED, by June 2015 there were a total of 282 joint and twinning programs offered in 82 Vietnamese universities.<sup>12</sup> The majority of these programs are at the bachelor or postgraduate level (122 bachelor programs, accounting for 43 per cent and 115 postgraduate programs, making up 41 per cent). The rest are associate degree (24 programs, 9 per cent) and certificate programs (21 programs, 7 per cent). In terms of source region, almost half of the programs are in cooperation with institutions from Europe. A quarter of the programs are with Asian countries, almost half of which are with China and the rest associated mostly with Taiwan, Hong Kong, Thailand, and Korea. Australian programs accounts for 12 percent and North America (the U.S. and Canada) 15 percent (Table 2.3).

Table 2.4 shows the distribution of joint and twinning programs by field of study. The distribution is dominated by professional programs in business, management, accounting, and finance and banking, accounting for 66 percent of all the programs. Although there are several programs in sciences and technologies, as well as social sciences and humanities (17% and 14% respectively), professional programs remain overwhelmingly predominant.

The tuition fees for joint and twinning programs range from about 25 million VND to 280 million VND per year (equivalent to about 1,200 USD and 13,000

<sup>11</sup> Decree 73/2012/NĐ-CP by the government dated September 26, 2012

<sup>12</sup> VIED 2015, accessible at <http://www.vied.vn/index.php?lang=vn#>. Note that the reported figure by VIED dated June 10, 2015 is 273 programs. However, the authors' compilation of VIED's data shows more programs (282) as VIED counted programs according to the permissions issued while one permission can include more than one program.

**Table 2.4** Distribution of joint and twinning programs by field of study<sup>a</sup>

Field of study	Number of programs	Percentage of programs
Business, Management, Accounting, Finance & Banking	185	66%
Social sciences & Humanities	39	14%
IT, Computer science, Technology, Engineering	49	17%
Others	9	3%
<b>Total</b>	<b>282</b>	<b>100%</b>

Source: Authors compiled from VIED 2015

<sup>a</sup>Note: The figures do not include joint and twinning programs in two national universities and three regional universities as these institutions are not under VIED's supervision and can implement international cooperation programs without going through VIED

USD) with an average of about 95 million VND (about 4,300 USD) per year.<sup>13</sup> Programs associated with North America and Australia (including New Zealand) tend to be more expensive with an average tuition of about 120 million VND per year (about 5,500 USD). The average tuition for programs associated with European institutions is about 90 million VND per year (4,000 USD) whereas programs with Asian institutions seem to be the lowest among the source regions with an average tuition of 68 million VND per year (3,000 USD). The tuition levels of these programs are a lot higher than private university tuition in Vietnam but lower than the cost of studying overseas, suggesting that the market for such programs in Vietnam is aimed at students whose academic achievements are not high enough to take advantage of the advanced programs or other presumably high quality public university programs, and for whom studying abroad might be an unaffordable option.

### ***Government Level: Excellent University—A Government-Led Initiative with World-Class Ambition***

The “Excellent university” (*Đại học xuất sắc*) project is an ambitious governmental project that was launched in 2006 under the tenure of former Minister of Education and Training Nguyen Thien Nhan. The primary purpose of the project is to establish institutions or upgrade existing institutions to become research universities delivering education and research of global standards with academic support from developed countries. One ultimate purpose of the project is that at least one of the participating universities would be ranked among the top 200 universities worldwide by 2020.

Under this scheme, there are four participating universities: the Vietnamese-German University established in 2008 in Ho Chi Minh City; the University of Science and Technology Hanoi or Vietnamese-French University created in 2009;

<sup>13</sup>Rough estimation by authors based on tuition information available online by 186 programs.

**Table 2.5** Universities established in the “excellent university” project

Institution	Partner country	Newly establish or upgrading from existing institution	Location	Year of establishment	Level of education	Enrollment 2015
Vietnamese-German University	Germany	Newly established	Ho Chi Minh City	2008	Bachelor Master	5000
University of Science and Technology Hanoi	France	Newly established under the auspice of Vietnam Institute of Science & technology	Hanoi	2009	Bachelor Master PhD	–
Vietnamese-Russian university	Russia	Upgraded from Le Quy Don Technical University	Hanoi	2013	Bachelor Master PhD	–
Vietnamese – Japanese University	Japan	Newly established under the auspice of Vietnam National University – Hanoi	Hanoi	2014	Master	–

the Vietnamese-Russian University upgraded from Le Quy Don Technical University in Hanoi in 2013; and the Vietnamese-Japanese University, housed within Hanoi National University established in 2014 (Table 2.5).

All four institutions operate under a special regime for academic management. The foreign government partners arrange with their own universities the provision of textbook and curricula, and send professors and managers to Vietnam. The host Vietnamese faculty and students conduct internships or undertake postgraduate education.

However, there is skepticism about the success of this project. First, financial sustainability is a crucial challenge that threatens the future of these “excellent universities.” At the first stage of the project financial support appears to be adequately catered for. All four participating universities are dependent on funding by the Vietnamese and foreign governments, or loans from international financial institutions such as World Bank or Asian Development Bank. However, it is not certain whether the Vietnamese government would be able to continue to provide enough financial resources to subsidise the project in the long run. Thus, diversifying the sources of income, for example through tuition fees or R&D services, is an imperative task for participating institutions. Second, another challenge that “excellent universities” are facing is a shortage of qualified fulltime faculty. At the current stage,

all participating institutions seem to be over-dependent on their partner countries for provision of lecturers. Foreign lecturers only come to Vietnam teach on a part-time basis. In the long term, developing a fulltime faculty base, especially attracting back talents from the Vietnamese diaspora, is one of the primary priorities for “excellent universities.”

## Discussion

The previous sections presented Vietnamese government policies concerning the internationalisation of the higher education system, the implementation of such policies, and the actual practices at the student, institution, and government levels. While the government attaches importance to internationalisation in its higher education reform agenda and issues policies facilitating the internationalisation process, these policies seem to have produced mixed results.

At the student level, outbound mobility continues to increase. Along with international scholarship programs, there are several Vietnamese government-funded programs to send government employees and university lecturers to study abroad with the objective of improving government and university capacity. However, these programs are not accompanied by policies to attract the return of these students or the Vietnamese diaspora, including the creation of attractive working conditions for those who have the choice to work overseas. At the institutional level, while advanced programs increase the use of English as the language of instruction, there is little evidence of the extent to which these programs have helped improve the curricula of institutions, as most of them are borrowed from foreign programs. According to Tran, Phan and Marginson (see Chap. 4), doubt remains in the sustainability, feasibility, and practicality of internationalisation of curriculum through advanced programs.

Previous research indicates that the internationalisation of Vietnam higher education is ineffective due to the lack of competition. In this chapter, we have shown empirical evidence of a certain level of emerging market in Vietnam higher education. With the WTO accession and GATS agreement, Vietnam government seems to have adopted a market driven approach to the internationalisation of its higher education system, as higher education has become seen as a tradeable service. On the one hand, this aspect of internationalisation appears to have facilitated the inflow of international curricula into Vietnam’s universities, serving a niche market of students and families who can afford relatively higher tuition fees for in-country foreign education. Moreover, there is diversity in these programs, with a total of almost 300 joint and twinning programs at about half of Vietnamese universities, in cooperation with 32 countries, though a majority of these programs are in demand absorbing fields. Competition can be observed, though whether these programs are helping Vietnam universities to improve their own curricula and management for better education quality remains a debatable question.

On the other hand, if the Vietnamese government expects the development of these programs to help domestic universities absorb advanced knowledge and management practices from foreign countries in order to improve domestic university quality, it seems that such expectations have not been met. Furthermore, it appears that the Vietnamese government did not fully foresee the directions and impacts of joint and twinning programs. These programs mostly use foreign curricula. For the most part they have not been jointly developed by Vietnamese institutions and foreign partners. Foreign lecturers in these programs only come to teach for a short period of time and often do not collaborate with Vietnamese lecturers. Even when there are Vietnamese lecturers participating in teaching courses in these programs, it is difficult to assess whether they have learned something from these programs for adaptation in the courses they teach in Vietnamese programs. In addition, academic programs in Vietnamese universities are strictly regulated by MOET, leaving little space for program innovation and reform.

As discussed above, joint and twinning programs in Vietnam focus predominantly on demand-absorbing programs such as business administration and accounting. Accessibility to these programs is limited to a small population of elite students who can afford high tuition. Unlike advanced programs, admissions to joint and twinning programs sometimes raises questions of quality, as these programs often do not require entrance exams, and offer places on the basis of lower academic credentials than are required in other programs in Vietnamese public universities, as Nguyen suggests in Chap. 5. Furthermore, Do (see Chap. 3) points out that even when institutions take advantage of their relationship with international partners for quality assurance purposes, these efforts have not translated into establishing effective internal quality assurance system within the institutions. Meanwhile, the Vietnamese economy requires more high-skilled workforce and high level managers, while there is an oversupply of graduates in business administration and accounting (FETP 2013; Wilkinson et al. 2010). In this respect, the joint and twinning programs are not serving the country's economic development needs. This reality is similar to that of China. While the Chinese government expects joint programs to help improve the quality of domestic programs and meet the workforce demand for graduates with international perspectives and quality (Huang 2007), these programs in Chinese institutions are overwhelmingly concentrated in professional education (Ennew and Fujia 2009) and only serve a limited population of elite students (Huang 2007).

At the government level, the excellent university project ambitiously designed to create world-class universities came to its formal end in August 2015.<sup>14</sup> According to the government's announcement, no more excellence university shall be established under this scheme. Similar to the diagnosis in joint and twinning programs, these universities have not been able to develop fulltime faculty. Most of the teaching faculty are from the foreign partner institutions who only spend a short amount of time in the host institutions, resulting in a lack of commitment and limited

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<sup>14</sup>Announcement No. 292/TB-VPCP dated August 27, 2015 regarding the conclusions by Prime Minister Nguyen Tan Dung at the Government's regular meeting on excellence universities.



research activities in Vietnam. Funding is heavily dependent on external sources, mostly from foreign governments (such as Germany and France) and World Bank loans. Cost is high due to dependence on visiting teaching faculty, while their contribution is limited. Due to high tuition levels, these universities have not been able to attract the best students who would otherwise choose public institutions or study abroad.<sup>15</sup> If the world class status of research universities are signified by student selectiveness and research performance (Marginson 2006), these government-led university initiatives in Vietnam are far from achieving world class status.

## Showcase Success Stories

Although government policies directed at enhancing the internationalisation of Vietnamese higher education seem to have been ineffective, internationalisation success stories can be found in Vietnam higher education. Although these initiatives are not the direct results of government policies, they have received strong support from the government or taken advantage of the supportive policy environment. This section showcases three examples of such programs: the Fulbright Economics Teaching Program, the Center for Molecular and Nano-architecture (MANAR) at the Ho Chi Minh City National University (VNU-HCMC), and the FPT University.

### *Fulbright Economics Teaching Program*<sup>16</sup>

Established in 1994 with core funding by the U.S. Department of State,<sup>17</sup> the Fulbright Economics Teaching Program (FETP) is a joint program between the Harvard Kennedy School (HKS) and the University of Economics Ho Chi Minh City (UEH) to provide public policy research and education for Vietnam. FETP initially offered the one-year post graduate certificate program in applied economics for Vietnamese government officials, which, in 2008, replicating the Harvard Kennedy School's master in public policy program (MPP), evolved into a full fledged MPP with curriculum advised by Harvard Kennedy School faculty and degree conferred by UEH. The name of the Program conveys its core mission: to teach Vietnamese policy makers about the market economy. In the past two decades,

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<sup>15</sup>This diagnosis was presented to the government at its regular meeting on the excellence universities, serving as one of the bases for the abortion of the project. This information was provided by Dr. Vu Thanh Tu Anh, Research Director at the Fulbright Economics Teaching Program in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam.

<sup>16</sup>With supports from the U.S. Department of States and Harvard, FETP has gone through an institutional transformation, serving as a core for the development of the Fulbright University Vietnam (FUV). It is now the Fulbright School of Public Policy and Management (FSPPM) within FUV.

<sup>17</sup>Approximately 1.9 million U.S. dollars per year

FETP has established itself as a center of academic excellence with a proven track of record, offering the first public policy program and, by far, the only full time masters program in Vietnam.<sup>18</sup>

The FETP experience shows that building a Vietnamese academic institution of excellence requires what can be summarised as “localising the global knowledge to serve the Vietnamese society.” The process took place in three main areas—curriculum development, faculty development, and research, during which teaching and research responsibilities initially carried out by Harvard Kennedy School have gradually been transferred to FETP through the building of a core fulltime faculty base and the development of FETP-based research capacity. During the first five years, the one-year program in applied economics was offered with text-book based economic courses using Asian development cases. The lead instructors were foreign faculty (with in-class Vietnamese interpretation) while Vietnamese faculty served as co-instructors and tutors. During this period, research activities were based at Harvard Kennedy School and carried out by the then Harvard Institute for International Development (HIID) researchers as part of the institution’s policy consultancy services. During the next five years, the teaching program evolved into a one-year program in applied economic for public policy with policy-focused economic courses using case studies from Vietnam. The teaching teams now included Vietnamese faculty joining foreign faculty as lead instructors, and young Vietnamese faculty as co-instructors and tutors. Since 2008, with the inception of the two-year Master in Public Policy, the teaching component has been expanded to policy-focused and case-based courses in policy analysis, management, leadership, and law with full-time faculty consisting of both foreign and Vietnamese instructors. The research component has now become FETP-based, with key activities including the case program, policy paper series, and policy dialogue with the Vietnamese government.

In the hindsight, a number of factors made this process of localising the global knowledge possible: a proven track of record, transparency, commitment, partnership, and investment in human capital. First, FETP, with the credibility of Harvard Kennedy School’s overseas policy consultancy, has been able to build a proven track record of engaging in critical and contributing policy dialogs with the Vietnamese government. Second, transparency has proved to be one of the most important factors that helps build trust in the government. This has eventually earned FETP a level of academic autonomy uncommon to other Vietnamese academic institutions. FETP ensures its transparency in several ways. For example, all of its teaching materials and research are accessible to the public online through its OpenCourseWare. Third, institution-building requires an extended time horizon: the current FETP is a result of two decades of continuous commitment. Fourth, the partnership support from key stakeholders has been essential. Besides the administrative role, the role of Harvard Kennedy School’s academic support in developing FETP’s academic capacity is clearly key to FETP’s academic excellence. Last but not least, investment in individuals is critical. FETP’s human capital is a result of continuous efforts in attracting, retaining, and developing talents.

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<sup>18</sup> See more at <http://www.fetp.edu.vn/en/>

### ***Center for Molecular and Nano-Architecture (MANAR) at the Ho Chi Minh City National University (VNU-HCMC)***

The Center for Molecular and Nano-architecture (MANAR) was established in 2011 at the Ho Chi Minh City National University (VNU-HCMC) in collaboration with Professor Omar M. Yaghi's research group, previously based at the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA) but currently at the University of California, Berkeley (UC Berkeley) following Professor Omar M. Yaghi's move to UC Berkeley. MANAR offers Master's and Ph.D. programs in the design, synthesis, and structural characterisation of novel materials. Regarding research, the Center focuses on areas such as materials science, inorganic chemistry, and nanotechnology, with research specifically aiming at developing new crystalline, porous materials for clean energy storage and generation, elimination of environmental pollutants, biomedicine, and catalysis applications.<sup>19</sup>

Unlike other international cooperation programs in Vietnam, the MANAR initiative is not a formal university-to-university collaboration. While the Center is hosted at VNU-HCMC and receives financial support from the Vietnamese government, its partner is not UCLA or UC Berkeley but the institutions' individual professor, Prof. Omar M. Yaghi, a highly cited scientist in novel porous material design (Service 2012). VNU-HCMC, in the search for an international partner to establish a chemistry research center for the institution, was able to enter an arrangement with Professor Yaghi, in which VNU-HCMC would establish MANAR as satellite labs for Yaghi. In exchange, Prof. Yaghi provides his expertise and network in research and mentorship in the Center's research and training programs (Service 2012). VNU-HCMC has secured a total investment from the government of about 62 billion VND (approximately 3 million U.S. dollars) to build two labs at MANAR (VNU-HCMC Science and Technology Council 2014). Notably, the Center's collaborations are not limited to Yaghi's research group. It also collaborates with research groups at other Vietnamese institutions, including HCMC University of Technology and HCMC University of Natural Sciences (VNU-HCMC Science and Technology Council 2014). In terms of training, following a global mentoring model in which postgraduate students receive mentorship from international researchers, MANAR promises to offer its students with opportunities to collaborate with scientists from UC Berkeley, Korea Advanced Institute of Science and Technology (KAIST, Korea), King Fahd University of Petroleum and Minerals (KFUPM, Saudi Arabia), and National Institute for Material Science (NIMS, Japan).

MANAR was established as part of the VNU-HCMC's strategies in creating excellent centers to improve its research and training capacity and internationalisation (VNU-HCMC Science and Technology Council 2014). As such, MANAR enjoys high autonomy in its research agenda, finance, organizational structure, staff and researcher recruitment, and domestic and international cooperation. The MANAR experience offers important insights for effective internationalisation,

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<sup>19</sup> See more at <http://www.manar.edu.vn/about-manar/about-manar.html>

including the institutional leadership's vision in achieving its educational goals; identification of research agenda that helps solve the country's challenges; development of human resources, including attracting capable researchers and securing international scientists' supports; and flexible management structure (VNU-HCMC Science and Technology Council 2014).

### ***FPT University: A Born-International Institution***

FPT University was established by Vietnamese ICT-based Corporation FPT in 2006. Unlike most of other private higher education institutions in Vietnam which are owned by family business or former senior higher education leaders and senior governmental officers, FPT University is a for-profit and corporate-owned institution with shareholders similar to private companies. Another crucial feature that makes FPT University different from other universities and colleges in Vietnam is that it can be characterised as a "born-international institution."

Along with the globalisation and internationalisation of the parent company, FPT University's board of rectors envision globalisation and internationalisation as key strategies when competing with "senior" institutions with more than 50 year history such as Vietnam National Universities or Hanoi University of Science and Technology, and foreign universities such as RMIT Vietnam University or British University Vietnam.

The internationalisation of FPT University can be observed in relation to four aspects. First, since its establishment, the University has always used foreign textbooks and materials developed in, for example, the U.S., the United Kingdom, Japan, or India. With this adoption, it can ensure that its students will be trained in terms of the world's state-of-the-art knowledge. Second, FPT University's internationalisation is manifested in its international staff. Indeed, it might be the first Vietnamese higher education institution to actively hire fulltime foreign lecturers. Foreign lecturers are currently delivering approximately 7 percent of the overall teaching workload at FPT University. Third, since 2012, FPT University has been following the QS star system as a tool to benchmark itself against international counterparts. In fact, FPT University is one of the first two institutions in Vietnam to be rated by QS (the other is the Ho Chi Minh City-based Ton Duc Thang University). FPT University is now rated 3 stars under QS rating system and is striving to obtain 4 stars in the near future. Finally, international students are considered one of the most important international factors at FPT University. In 2013, the institution opened the so-called FPT University's Global Office, aiming specifically to recruit international students to study at FPT University. By the end of 2015, there were approximately 400 international students studying at FPT University, one third of whom were fulltime and the rest studying as part of study-abroad programs and international student exchange programs.

In the long term, FPT University expects to open an offshore campus, either in neighboring ASEAN countries such as Laos or Myanmar, or in Africa where cooperation with local partners has already been established.

## Conclusion

The chapter presented Vietnamese government policies and practices in the internationalisation of the higher education system and evaluated the effectiveness of these policies as reflected in four internationalisation activities at three levels—individuals, institutions, and government. The chapter has shown that these activities seem to offer little impact on Vietnamese higher education with regards to helping improve domestic universities' educational quality. In other words, empirical evidence provided in the chapter suggests that internationalisation activities in Vietnam higher education are developing in a direction that either does not meet the government's expectation or is not foreseen by the government. The Vietnamese government treats these activities as one of the tools to help the higher education system contribute more effectively to the country's economic development and meet high-skilled workforce demands. However, without policies in place to attract and retain talents, or incentives to drive internationalisation at the institution level so that it contributes to expected outcomes, internationalisation activities are mostly concentrated in demand-absorbing professional fields and cater for a small population of elite students. The government-led initiative to establish world-class universities also came to an end in government's realisation of its ineffectiveness.

However, there are new developments in internationalisation, with success stories that can be observed at institutional level. Although the programs showcased in this chapter are not a direct result of government policies, their success can be partly credited to the supportive environment, and to the government's financial support as in the case of MANAR. One important insight offered by these stories is the important role played by the government in facilitating initiatives at institution level. The government, after all, cannot afford to directly involve itself in all aspects of internationalisation, but it can provide incentives, either in the form of financial support or greater institutional autonomy to higher education institutions, in order to drive the internationalisation activities toward the desired goals.

The chapter reaffirms that the Vietnamese government has moved from a passive approach to a proactive approach in internationalisation of its higher education system in order to take advantage of globalisation and the global knowledge economy. Evidence from the analysis suggests that the Vietnamese government needs to reposition the role it plays in the internationalisation of higher education in order to develop its higher education system in particular and in the country's economic development in general. Repositioning includes recognising the roles played by individual institutions and focusing more on creating a supportive environment and incentives for individuals and institutions to engage in and take advantage of internationalisation, in a way that meaningfully contributes to improving the country's higher education system and better meeting the socio-economic demands placed on it.

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