Chapter 6
School–University Partnerships in Vietnam: Insights, Reflections, and Recommendations

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Introduction

Schools and universities have a long history of partnerships for a variety of educational purposes. School–university partnerships are advocated as "the most frequently recommended approaches to educational reform" (Dyson, 1999, p. 411). A school–university partnership tends to be defined as a "planned effort to establish a formal, mutually beneficial inter-institutional relationship" (Goodlad, 1991, p. 59). The overarching aim for most school–university partnerships is to minimise the gap between theory and practice in teacher education (Walsh & Backe, 2013; Walsh et al., 2000). School–university partnerships are reflected in various activities (e.g. teacher education and educational research) between stakeholders from both schools and universities on a collaborative basis (Carriuolo, 1991; Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1998; McLaughlin & Black-Hawkins, 2007).

The past decades have witnessed an increase in school–university partnerships, alongside the process of massification of higher education in many countries. This increase has been documented in the publications on school–university partnerships in several specific contexts, for example, Australia (Green et al., 2020) and the UK (Handscomb et al., 2014). In response to this burgeoning of partnerships, a good

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range of studies on these partnerships within and across countries are needed to inform the stakeholders (i.e. policy makers, schools, and universities) of the strategies to improve the quality and effectiveness of partnerships and to address inherent challenges and tensions in initiating, implementing, and sustaining partnerships. This range of studies should include general analyses of policy and practice to provide a landscape of current partnership forms and case-based research on specific partnerships to enable more specific understanding.

Our local knowledge in Vietnam suggests an emergence of various partnerships between universities and schools in the past two decades, arguably reflecting the expansion, massification, and diversification of the country's higher education system (Mok, 2008; Phan & Doan, 2020; see also World Bank, 2020). The study, which this chapter is based on, was conducted to provide a broad understanding of school–university partnership forms documented in the system-level policies of Vietnam, and those forms enacted at the institutional level. This study complements case-based research to enrich insights into school–university partnerships in Vietnam. The current chapter aims to address the following two research questions:

- What forms of school–university partnerships are currently documented in Vietnam's system-level policy?
- What forms of school–university partnerships are implemented at the institutional level?

Addressing these questions is significant in evidencing forms of school–university partnerships in policy and practice in Vietnam. The chapter will also discuss the issues and challenges associated with these partnership forms and accordingly make recommendations to capitalise on the expertise and resources of schools and universities to achieve mutual goals. The next section presents an overview of the aims, characteristics, and challenges of school–university partnerships, drawn from the extant international literature.

School–University Partnership: Aims, Characteristics, and Challenges

A school–university partnership in teacher education aims to address a gap between pre-service teacher preparation and school realities. A school–university divide was considered as an original problem in teacher education (Krichevsky, 2021; Yan & He, 2021). This disconnection is exemplified in misalignments between coursework in pre-service teacher education programmes and the fieldwork in school settings, and between professional knowledge and technical skills required to practise teaching in real classrooms (Grossman, 2010; Krichevsky, 2021). There have been concerns about pre-service teachers' inadequate preparation for complex processes and practices such as classroom management, building professional relationships, lesson plan,

delivery of teaching, and development of a professional identity (Farrell, 2012; Yan & He, 2021).

School–university partnerships can be school-based or university-based. The *school-based partnership* typically refers to a school–university collaboration in the design and delivery of field-based education (e.g. Herbert & Hobbs, 2018; Xu, 2009). This field-based education includes co-delivering practicum learning activities in schools for pre-service teachers. A *university-based partnership* involves secondment of practising teachers as teacher educators in teacher education programmes in a university (e.g. Bullough et al., 2004). Research (e.g. Furlong et al., 2000; Kruger et al., 2009; Ure et al., 2009) has suggested three key characteristics of successful school–university partnerships. Firstly, an effective school–university partnership is based on mutual trust between stakeholders (Kruger et al. 2009; Walsh & Backe, 2013). This mutual trust is built on a shared understanding of what constitutes effective teaching (Grudnoff & Tuck, 2003), of their respective roles (Ure et al., 2009), and of the expected positive outcomes of the partnership (Kruger et al., 2009). Secondly, effective school–university partnerships tend to be "collaborative", rather than be of merely "complementary" nature (Furlong et al., 2000). A collaborative partnership has a higher degree of positive interdependence among members than a complementary partnership. The members (i.e. teacher educators, pre-service teachers, and in-service teachers) of a collaborative partnership work together as a team to reach a common professional goal (Furlong et al., 2000). They are jointly involved in the decision-making process and share accountability, which goes beyond an emphasis on sharing resources, expertise, and facilities (Smith & Lynch, 2002) in a complementary partnership. Thirdly, an effective school–university partnership is underpinned by mutual recognition of members' efforts and contributions (Kruger et al., 2009). These three characteristics highlight the significance of developing trusting relationships, providing role clarity, promoting a sense of ownership, and sharing accountability, to enable success of school–university partnerships (McLaughlin & Black-Hawkins, 2004).

The literature (e.g. Darling-Hammond, 2014; Gutierrez & Nailer, 2020; Miller, 2001) has highlighted a number of challenges in establishing, sustaining, and levelling up a strong school–university partnership. For example, the difference in institutional priorities and cultures between schools and universities is a challenge to this professional partnership (Darling-Hammond, 2014; Ledoux & McHenry, 2008; McIntyre, 2005; Miller, 2001). While the priority of a school tends to be primarily teaching, many universities that host teacher education programmes focus their vision on research, teaching, and service. Schoolteachers and university lecturers may have different, and to some extent, conflicting beliefs in effective teaching and approaches to teacher education. Another major challenge to school–university partnerships is time constraints (Bickel & Hattrup, 1995; Gutierrez & Nailer, 2020; Ledoux & McHenry, 2008). A partnership requires substantial time from all members to support pre-service teachers' learning (Ledoux & McHenry, 2008). A greater investment in time for this partnership entails a reduction in the time for other competing tasks within the workload of university lecturers and teachers.

Methods

This book chapter draws on an analysis of policy documents and reflections on the activities of school–university partnerships of a major university in the central region of Vietnam. The analysis of relevant policies at the system/national level enabled us to have an overview as to what extent school–university partnerships are reflected in these documents. The reflections provided an idea of the forms and implementation of school–university partnerships at the university level. The first author of this chapter is a bilingual speaker of English and Vietnamese. The second and third authors are university lecturers of pre-service teacher education programmes from two major universities in education, located in the northern and central regions of Vietnam. The co-authors have participated in delivering school–university partnerships in pre-service teacher education of their respective universities.

Analysis of Policy Documents

We conducted a search of policy documents on the Vietnam Government's websites, Google, and Google Scholar. This practice identified a range of 40 documents that were publically available. These documents outline current laws, circulars, decisions, and official dispatches issued by the Vietnamese Ministry of Education and Training (MOET) in the past two decades. They were included for review because their content touches upon, of varying degrees of depth and explicitness, aspects relevant to school–university partnerships. These documents discuss the issues concerning general education in Vietnam, compulsory education, higher education, and teacher education. We categorically arranged these documents into groups of (1) graduate attributes of pre-service teacher education programmes, (2) preparation and development of teachers and school leaders, (3) research in education, and (4) community education.

Our analytical process of policy documents involved extracting all details relevant to collaborations between schools and higher institutes of education in an Excel file. We took detailed notes to ensure an appropriate understanding of contexts of extracted details. All of these details were noted in the original language—Vietnamese.

Analysis of these details uncovered four prominent themes that discuss policies on school–university partnerships: pre-service teacher education, continuing professional development, research, and community education. These themes are developed and presented in English in the subsequent parts of this chapter. The third author took a primary responsibility in searching for policy documents. Both the first and the third authors analysed the data from the final list of policy documents.

Analysis of Secondary Data from a University of Education

The second sources of data were obtained from Hue University of Education, Hue University (HUEdu). HUEdu is a major provider of teacher education in the central region of Vietnam. Founded in 1957, HUEdu is home to 12 academic departments, 29 undergraduate programmes, and 11 postgraduate programmes (HUEdu, 2021a). In the academic year of 2020–2021, HUEdu had a population of 2,992 full-time undergraduate students, 7000 part-time undergraduate students, 928 postgraduate students, and 57 doctoral students (HUEdu, 2021b).

The second author was a full-time lecturer at HUEdu at the time of this research. The author collected secondary data relevant to the collaborative activities of HUEdu and schools. These data included information on the university's website, curricula of study programmes, and accessible reports. The second author collected all secondary data from HUEdu. The first and second authors subsequently synthesised and analysed relevant details from these sources of data in Vietnamese. We presented three themes in English to highlight HUEdu's partnership areas and activities with schools: practicum-based learning, continuing professional development, and educational research. These themes are discussed in the next parts of this chapter.

Policy on School–University Partnerships in Vietnamese Higher Education

This section outlines four forms of school–university partnerships based on an analysis of the relevant policy documents.

Partnership in Pre-service Teacher Education

School–university partnerships in Vietnamese higher education are reflected in curriculum development and teaching practicums associated with pre-service teacher education.

Curriculum development. MOET requires pre-service education programmes to consider the practice and working environments in schools (MOET, 2018b, Chapter 3, Article 7, Sections 3a and 3b). This process of pre-service teacher education is expected to elicit feedback from stakeholders including academics, teachers, and employers [schools] (Section 3e). The "regular evaluation and updates of course content, modules, and teaching methods should be based on innovations in the specialised field and requirements of employers [schools]" (Section 3i).

Schools play a critical role in providing feedback on the quality of the teaching workforce and needs of pre-service teachers. An effective school–university partnership in Vietnamese higher education is central to the process of reviewing and

improving the quality of pre-service teacher education programmes. The need for this partnership is implied in the guidance of evaluation of pre-service teacher education programmes issued by Department of Educational Testing and Accreditation (2016).

Practicum. The mandate for incorporating teaching practicums into pre-service teacher education programmes is communicated in the policy documents of MOET (e.g. MOET, 2021, Article 4, Section 1a). A teaching practicum is a compulsory element and detailed in MOET's frameworks for pre-service teacher education programmes (MOET, 2003, Article 4, Section 1). In four-year programmes, the universities are required to organise teaching practicums for their teacher candidates in the second and third years. The responsibilities of universities as providers of pre-service teacher education programmes and of schools are outlined in Article 6 (MOET, 2003). More specifically, the providers of pre-service teacher education programmes are held responsible for "organising, planning, and monitoring the processes and activities of teaching practicum" (MOET, 2003, Article 6). The schools or educational organisations, selected as sites for teaching practicums, are required to support implementation of teaching practicum activities in their establishment (MOET, 2003, Article 6). These processes and activities of teaching practicums are required to be "periodically reviewed, evaluated, and improved" (MOET, 2020b, Article 13, Section 3).

The school–university partnership for teaching practicums is featured in evaluation of pre-service teachers' performance in four aspects, namely (1) subject-specific teaching, (2) classroom management as a homeroom teacher, (3) a report of their practicum experience, and (4) teamwork and citizenship/discipline (MOET, 2003, Article 14 and Article 17). This policy document (MOET, 2003) specifies a mentor of pre-service teachers participates in the practicum site evaluation aspect (1), (2), and (3), while a university lecturer in charge of that group of pre-service teachers plays a supporting or moderation role and records evidence of practicum work. Both the university teacher and teacher mentor play a moderation role in the peer-evaluation of aspect (4).

Partnership in Continuing Professional Development

School–university partnerships aim to support professional development for in-service teachers in schools. This expectation is outlined in a number of MOET policy documents (e.g. MOET, 2018a, 2019a, 2019b). These documents state the significance for allocating high quality human resources for teacher professional development and learning, through explicit statements on criteria for selecting university lecturers in training school leaders and core/senior schoolteachers. These selection criteria prioritise experience in curriculum and textbook development, teacher education, and in-depth understanding of contemporary school curriculum (MOET, 2019a).

MOET has requirements and guidelines for continuing professional development for school teachers (MOET, 2018a, 20/2018/TT-BGDĐT; MOET, 2019b).

These documents highlight a need for collaboration between university teachers and core/senior school teachers in delivering professional development programmes for school teachers from January 2020 until the present (). For example, MOET (2019b, Article 9, Section 1) says: "Facilitators/Speakers of continuing professional development events are educators from providers of professional development, experts, educational managers, and core teachers". Universities of Education are the key providers of professional development for teachers and school leaders in Vietnam (MOET, 2019b). Programmes and activities for professional development are jointly designed, planned, and implemented by relevant organisations, such as universities, the bureaus of education at the provincial level, and schools.

Partnership in Research

Undertaking research is compulsory within university lecturers' professional remits (MOET, 2020i). The MOET's documents specify the activities for research for lecturers. These activities include leading and participating in research projects, evaluation of projects, conferences and seminars, international collaborations, and evaluating students' research projects (MOET, 2020i, Articles 5 and 6). There is no formal requirement for university lecturers to do research in partnership with schools specified in these policy documents.

Research is an optional activity for schoolteachers and leaders in Vietnam. The guidelines on professional standards for schoolteachers (MOET, 2018a, 2020g, 2020h) emphasise teachers' roles in teaching, duty care, and partnerships with stakeholders within and beyond schools in their local area. MOET encourages individual teachers, teams, and schools to propose and implement initiatives on the voluntary basis to enhance learning and teaching quality (MOET, 2020f, Article 3, Section 1). These successful initiatives are instrumentally rewarded (MOET, 2020f, Article 5, Section 1d). In summary, school–university partnership in research is not a compulsory activity mentioned in MOET's policy documents.

Partnership in Community Education

In terms of partnership in community education, MOET (2017, Chapter 1, Article 2) outlines the roles of parties in joint training at the higher education level. This partnership comprises three parties: (1) lead educational institution, (2) coordination institution, and (3) support institution. Lead education institutions (1) organise the processes of enrolment, course delivery, assessment of learning outcomes, and certification. Coordination institutions (2) directly participate in joint training that involves co-delivery of required courses and administration. These coordination institutions could be local universities and colleges in the area. Support institutions (3) are the local schools that provide physical structures, such as study sites and teaching and

learning facilities. This tripartite partnership aims to support development of human resources for the socio-economic advancement of local areas.

School–University Partnership in a Vietnamese University

This section presents partnership activities between HUEdu and schools, grouped into three main categories as follows.

Practicum-Based Learning

In alignment with MOET's policies, HUEdu incorporates practicum-based learning into its curriculum for pre-service teacher education. This practicum-based learning is implemented in formal partnership with the schools mainly in Hue and the central region of Vietnam. The pre-service teacher education programme normally lasts four years on a full-time basis. The practicum-based learning has two stages: practicum 1 ('kiến tập sư phạm' in Vietnamese) and practicum 2 ('thực tập sư phạm').

Practicum 1 occurs in the third year of the programme and normally involves 90 h within four weeks for pre-service teachers' practicum-based learning in schools. During their first practicum, groups of pre-service teachers are allocated mentors who could be schoolteachers and/or university lecturers. These mentors support pre-service teachers with building competences (defined as knowledge, skills, and qualities) in subject teaching, classroom management, teacher teamwork, and administrative work. Pre-service teachers have opportunities to do classroom observation and to participate in a number of activities in schools (HUEdu, 2017, pp. 6–8).

Practicum 2 is conducted in the final year of the pre-service teacher education programme and lasts 7 weeks. Prior to practicum 2, HUEdu normally invites representatives from partner schools to present an overview of their schools with their pre-service teachers. During Practicum 2, pre-service teachers are grouped into 2–3 members and mentored by schoolteachers. These mentors guide pre-service teachers with lesson plans, subject teaching, classroom management, assessment, and other professional practices. The mentors are requested to observe their mentees' teaching and offer feedback. Some departments of HUEdu require their lecturers to observe and give feedback on their pre-service teachers' classroom teaching.

In addition to the two aforementioned formalised partnerships, some departments in HUEdu established collaborations with schools to support their pre-service teachers with opportunities for field trips. These collaborations tend to be temporary and based on the professional relationships between the departments, or their academic members and schools. These field trips are an optional element to promote experiential learning and are designed to support pre-service teachers' preparation for formal practicums. These field trips are organised as a part of learning and teaching in

the courses of psychology and counselling in schools and HUEdu's early childhood education.

These partnerships promise benefits for pre-service teachers' professional learning and student learning. Schools, as study sites, provide opportunities for pre-service teachers' observation and practice. For reciprocity, the lecturers of HUEdu share expertise with the in-service teachers of these schools and act as advisors to professional projects in schools. Several departments of HUEdu have some limited remuneration for these schools. However, there are challenges in sustaining these partnerships as a result of weak resources, inclusive of insufficient funding.

Continuing Professional Development

In recent years, schools have established collaborations with HUEdu to support teacher professional development and implementation of educational reforms. Some primary schools invited HUEdu's lecturers to coach their teachers and school leaders on implementation of the national new curriculum (2018). HUEdu lecturers conducted a series of seminars and workshops to support these schools. These professional events included an introduction to new textbooks issued in 2018, promotion of experiential learning in primary schools, teaching reading in primary schools, emotional management for teachers, and counselling for students.

Educational Research

Research projects in HUEdu tend to be linked with school settings. The implementation of these research projects requires collaborations with schools. These schools supported research groups to recruit participants (i.e. teachers, school leaders, students, and parents) for their projects. The participants involved in the activities of data collection, such as survey, interviews, group discussions and implementation of interventions. HUEdu invited representatives from schools to participate and share their professional experience in seminars and conferences. Two examples are presented as follows.

HUEdu, in collaboration with three primary schools in Hue province, conducted a series of activities to support an initiative of promoting "children's reading at home" and professional practicum for pre-service teachers of primary education programmes, within a community-based learning project. These activities involved participation of many teachers, school leaders, and students. This project established a fan page called "Zỏ Zỏ" that has drawn attention from many primary school students in Hue and other provinces. The project team has conducted sessions of professional sharing with primary schools.

A project on developing indicators to measure citizens' satisfaction with educational services involves participation and collaborations of ten schools from the preschool level to college level in Hue and Quang Tri provinces. Within this project, the research team from HUEdu organised two national conferences. Attendants from five schools in the central and southern regions of Vietnam made presentations in these conferences.

Discussion of Insights and Issues

The analyses of policy documents and partnership activities from HUEdu highlight some insights and issues for reflection and discussion. Our analyses of the policy documents uncover four key forms of school–university partnerships: preservice teacher education, in-service teacher education, research, and community education. At the institutional level, the data highlight three forms of partnerships in pre-service teacher education, continuing professional development, and educational research. The partnership in pre-service teacher education is clearly a predominant form, featured in the policy at the national system and implemented at the institutional level, as compared with the other forms of partnership. The partnership in pre-service teacher education is evident through collaborative activities between university lecturers and schoolteachers in supporting pre-service teachers' practicum-based learning.

The predominance of partnership in pre-service teacher education, as compared with other forms of school–university partnerships, reflects a tendency in other national contexts (Jones et al., 2016). Indeed, an overview of the international literature shows that most of the research on school–university partnerships has focused on partnership in pre-service teacher education, particularly in practicum-based learning for pre-service teachers (e.g. Green et al., 2020; Gutierrez & Nailer, 2020; Herbert & Hobbs, 2018).

A critical consideration of these insights underscores some noteworthy issues. Firstly, the entire practicum time in Vietnam's pre-service teacher education programmes arguably remains limited in quantity. The data from MOET's current policy documents and HUEdu indicate that most four-year pre-service teacher education programmes provide two compulsory practicums, with a total of around 11 weeks. A review by Darling-Hammond (2014) suggested 30 weeks of supervised practicum and teaching opportunities for teacher candidates in each pre-service teacher education programme.

Secondly, the data in this paper suggest that the partnership in pre-service teacher education between schools and universities seems to be of a "complementary" tendency rather than a "collaborative" nature (see Furlong et al., 2000). We found little evidence of the roles and practices of the key partnership members (i.e. university lecturers, schoolteachers, and pre-service teachers) in collaboratively designing, delivering, and evaluating practicum-based learning opportunities. This issue identified in our research corroborates the findings of Nguyen (2020). Based on an analysis

of empirical data on a school–university joint exercise on practicum learning linked with a Vietnamese university, Nguyen (2020) described this exercise as a "separatist" partnership (see Smith et al., 2006), "characterised by marked division of labour, and insufficient communication between the partners" (Nguyen, 2020, p. 1).

Thirdly, the collected data indicated that the partnership in pre-service teacher education is mainly school-based and tends to use schools as a site for practicum-based learning. The university-based partnership could be further optimised to bridge a theory–practice gap. As noted earlier in Section "School-University Partnership: Aims, Characteristics, and Challenges", the university-based partnership involves practising teachers and school leaders in participating in the process of designing, delivering, and evaluating curricula and courses for pre-service teacher education programmes (Bullough et al., 2004).

Fourthly, the other forms of school–university partnerships of continuing professional development, research, and community education appear to be encouraged, with varying degree of explicitness, in Vietnam's education policy. However, we found few support mechanisms outlined in the reviewed policy documents to promote these partnerships. At the institutional level, most school–university collaborations, if any, in the areas of continuing professional development and research are based on the efforts and limited resources of one-time projects, individuals, departments, or universities. As noted earlier in Section "School-University Partnership in a Vietnamese University", the limited resources in funding, time, and expertise challenge the development, sustainability, and scale-up of these partnerships.

Conclusions and Recommendations

The aforementioned insights and issues, alongside evidence from the literature, enable us to propose the following recommendations to support development of innovative school–university partnerships in Vietnam and similar national contexts. It requires a strong partnership of policy, research, and practice to implement these recommendations.

The first recommendation is to strengthen support, at both the institutional and system levels, for school–university partnerships in continuing professional development, research opportunities, and community development. This support should include clearer policy guidance, stronger funding, and appropriate time structure for stakeholders to participate in partnership activities. Supporting these partnerships is essential, given that there is evidence (e.g. Burns et al., 2015; Green et al., 2020; Maheady et al., 2016) on the benefits of these partnerships for both schools and universities.

The second recommendation is to improve the balance in school–university partnerships to establish mutually beneficial relationships, more firmly and sustainably. As discussed earlier in this chapter, most school–university partnerships in Vietnam have been driven by the needs of universities in using schools as practicum sites for pre-service teachers and research sites for academics. This imbalance could be

addressed, to some extent, by authentically involving schoolteachers and leaders in the process of co-designing, co-delivering, and co-evaluating pre-service teacher education, professional development, research activities, and programmes. Importantly, time and recognition within the workload structure should be considered to encourage participation in partnerships.

The third recommendation is to systematically review the policies and implementation of current formalised school–university partnerships in pre-service teacher education to inform the process of improving the quality and effectiveness of these partnerships. This review should include evaluation of practicum-based learning of pre-service teacher education programmes in Vietnam. The evaluation needs to look into both the quality and quantity of practicum-based learning opportunities since these two factors are equally important in developing pre-service teachers (Gutierrez & Nailer, 2020). Future research should develop a context-sensitive framework to support universities and schools to conduct periodic developmental evaluation of their partnerships.

To conclude the chapter, we wish to argue that these partnership models are inter-related and complementary to one another other. The complementary nature of these partnership forms remains unclear, theoretically and empirically. Future research could probably explore, in depth, as to how each of these forms or models should be designed and implemented to effectively complement each other to transform teaching, schooling, teacher education, professional development, research, and community service.

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