

## **The Internationalization of the Professoriate in Vietnam: A State of Flux**

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### **Abstract**

In recent years, changes in the delivery and instruction of higher education have markedly increased academic staff anxiety and uncertainty. Academic instructors have traditionally facilitated discussion and imparted their disciplinary knowledge to students by means of lectures, seminars, and tutorials. Generally speaking, students of the past were considered polite and formal, academic staff were held in high regard for their intellectual prowess, and universities enjoyed considerable prestige within the wider community. This has all changed.

In Vietnam at present, the professoriate is going through a major transformation due to the urgency in facilitating academic staff development. Seasoned academic staff are not up-to-date with the latest in curriculum design and delivery; the appointments of instructors holding terminal degrees is still way below international standards, and research outputs continue to be poor. At the same time, higher education enrolments in Vietnam have more than doubled in the last decade, and the provision of higher education has increased from 153 to 369 over the same period, suggesting that Vietnam is going through major expansion.

This paper discussed how Vietnam can learn from the ongoing international higher education reforms to understand how to tackle issues pertaining to the professoriate. While international donations and expert advice are welcomed, the Vietnamese higher education setting and context require local knowledge in facilitating change. Examples of best practice are investigated within the Vietnamese context with the objective of finding pathways toward tangible academic staff development for entrants into the academic profession.

### **Introduction**

Internationalization is now a widely recognized phenomenon in higher education. About half of the research universities of United State mention internationalization in their strategic plan (Siaya & Hayward, 2003). "Internationalization has been very prominent at regional and international level. The Bologna process and Lisbon strategy in Europe are the clearest examples, with the first drawing more than 40 countries into a voluntary process to create a European Higher Education System (EHES) based on a common framework for the recognition of awards. Bologna has become a basic for similar efforts elsewhere in the world, such as the Enlaces initiative in Latin America and the harmonization strategy in the African Union" (Altbach, Reisberg, & Rumbley, 2010). As Albach, Biddle and de Wit suggest "internationalization covers a wide range of services, from study abroad and greater recruitment of international students, to distance education and combinations of partnerships abroad, internationalized curriculum, research and scholarly collaboration, and extracurricular programs to include an international and intercultural dimension" (cited in Stromquist, 2007, p. 82).

For many years, discussions of internationalization were dominated by the issue of student mobility. UNESCO estimates that in 2007, there were more than 2.8 million internationally mobile students, an increase of some 53 percent over the estimated figure of 1.8 million in 2000. Attracting

these students to universities in many countries has become “growth industry”, with more than 7.2 million students expected to be studying outside their home countries by 2025 (cited in Altbach, et al., 2010). However, it is not only the international flows of student but also of academic staff (AS) that define the phenomenon of internationalization of HE. There is a trend away from permanent relocation and long – term exchange towards short, quick visits. Although international AS flows is weaker than international student flows, it is still a growing trend deserving attention. As Teichler (1999, p. 21) said “Internationalization of HE can be viewed as a trend: unresistable, as those who resist fall behind. Or it can be viewed as a challenge, which might or might not be taken up, and which might be taken up differently”. Enders and Fulton (2002, p. 1) contend that “internationalization is contributing to, if not leading, a process of rethinking the social, cultural and economic roles of HE and their configuration in national systems of HE”.

Internationalization is in part response to globalization. Mills and Blossfeld (2005) suggest that globalization is best seen as four interrelated structural shifts that have occurred since the 1980s : (i), internationalization of markets and declining importance of borders for economic transactions; (ii), tougher tax competition between countries; (iii), rising worldwide interconnectedness through new Information and Communication Technologies; and (iv), the growing relevance and volatility of markets. Altbach et al. (2010) warn that “We live today in the midst of a serious global economic crisis that will have repercussions in society at large and within higher education in ways that are not yet clear. Many countries and universities will experience financial problem, with profound consequences to higher education in the short and perhaps the medium term, although the impact will vary worldwide”. Despite of the continuous argument about good and bad effects of globalization, it still exists as an obvious truth, an unresistable trend, having lasting impact on modern society; forcing people as well as organizations to integrate with it and to make use of all advantages that it can generate.

In 2005, Australian Department of Education, Science and Training sent its schools a poster that included the following “We will be alive in 2050! My school says we need to be global citizens...Wherever we live and work, in Australia or internationally, the setting will be multi – national, multi – culture and multi - faith” (cited in Lefrere, 2007). The States do not wait until students enter university to remind them that, in the future, they will be global citizens. McIntosh (2005, p. 23) proposes that global citizenship means “the ability to see oneself and the world around one, the ability to make comparisons and contrasts, the ability to see ‘plurality’ as a result...and the ability to balance awareness of one’s own realities with the realities of entities outside of the perceived self”. In the opening of the 19<sup>th</sup> Congress of the African National Congress Youth League in 1996, mentioning about globalization of education in South Africa, the deputy president said that “At last we have joined the march with the rest of the world where our destiny is in our own hands” (cited in Kishun, 1998). In any case, it cannot be denied that globalization has

great impact on HE field. It brings both threats and opportunities for each education system, each university. And maybe, the winner is the one who can turn threats into opportunities.

A significant feature of the globalization of HE has been the setting up of offshore campuses in foreign countries by many universities and private providers of HE (Van Damme, 2001). It has been argued that these providers play an important role in addressing the unmet demand in a number of developing countries; bringing healthy opportunities and innovation; and providing “education of high quality. If they do not, their students will walk out” (Alderman, 2002). While some researchers consider globalization a greater incentive to enhance quality and widen access to HE, Van der Wende and Westerheijden (2001) argued that there has been little opportunity to test such claims in a “free market”. Endorsing this idea, Lieven and Martin (2006) carried out a case of British overseas provision in Israel and conclude that “markets in HE will tend to operate for profits not quality”. However, an offshore campus, including twinning programs and franchised operations, is a popular trend in many countries now. The Australian Vice – Chancellor’s Committee found that 34 of Australia’s 38 universities report offshore programs with a total of 493 individual degree, degree and similar programs in 24 countries (cited in Blight, Davis, & Olsen, 2000, p. 102). As a consequence of this trend, there is a “war of all against all” with increasing materialism, competition between students for place in high – status institutions and competition between institutions for resources and prestige (Lefrere, 2007).

### **Vietnamese Higher Education at a glance**

Vietnamese HE system is experiencing major reforms and developments. However, it is difficult to understand these reforms without understanding the historical context of the political structure that has shaped it.

One of the heritages that no visitors can ignore when visiting Hanoi is ancient Temple of Literature. This Vietnamese first university reminds people about Chinese influence on Vietnamese HE. Reaching Vietnam about 2000 year ago, Confucianism spread through the whole country its influence to every area of society, from political activities, military affair to morality, literature, architecture and examination. Confucianism touched people from every stratum and still permeates in current society.

French colonial also left its mark on Vietnamese higher education. In the Eighteenth Century, Alexander de Rhodes, a French Jesuit priest, introduced a roman script to Vietnam and thus set the platform for the Quoc Ngu. The French wanted to use this to extend their influence. However, the meritocratic scholar official classes restricted moderately because of the insistence on retain the older Chinese script. From the latter half of nineteenth century, when French gradually extended their control over the country, they also extend their hegemony, making the influence

from the Western paler. The French introduced some Universities, Colleges and produced a small number of local graduates.

Another influence that should not be underestimated is the post-war influence of Socialist countries. There were two parallel systems of HE after the establishment of two Vietnam's in 1945. In the North, both classical mandarin era and French colonialism had impacts to the socialist area. At that time, strongly motivated by nationalist aspirations, the use of Vietnamese as the language of instruction was extended by great effort. The assistance of socialist states, Eastern bloc neighbors as well as People's Republic of China helped Vietnam in the reform of HE system. However, the most impressive reform at that time was the foundations of many specialist institutions following the Soviet model, from fine arts to agriculture, forestry and pharmacy, medicine. Within the socialist world, there is a specific form of cooperation which helped Vietnam in development of HE in the North. Prior to 1976, a Soviet-sponsored organization, the Council of Mutual Economic Assistance offered opportunities for thousands of Vietnamese people to take higher degrees in socialist states. Between 1955 and 1975, a substantial number of 30, 775 Vietnamese student went abroad to study (Dang, 1997), contributing to a swifter development of human resource than would ever have been before. As a result of this influence, individual ministries established and have their responsibilities for controlling their own institution which also serve their own needs of training. This model persists today with 13 ministries having their own institutions (Hayden & Lam, 2007). However, these narrow and specialized institution were not always equipped student enough skill and knowledge to meet the needs of transitional economy. In the South of Vietnam, the United States 's influence rose after the Second World War with the wane of French. Signs of US influence are the foundation of large comprehensive institution, the first private HE institution as well as community colleges in the early 1970s.

The historic decision made in 1986 namely *Doi moi* (economic renovation) by communist Party of Vietnam replaced the central planning in the Soviet tradition. In 1993, the Government issued decree 90 signaling committeemen to a unification and restructuring HE reform agenda. As the consequence of these landmark policy directions, the system underwent significant and immediate reform. A unified national system of large, comprehensive, research-oriented universities was established, making the existence of the Soviet model of small, specialized institution abandoned. The government also introduced elements of market demand by allowing public HE institution to levy tuition fees within limits, introducing two new sectors of HE, a semi-public sector and non-public sector. The acceptance of having non-public sector marked significance because this is the first time it had officially sanctioned within the HE system. *Doi moi* process witnessed the significant change in increasing the size as well as the diversity of HE system as can be seen in the table 1 below. Table shows that HE institutions increased from 153 in 1999 to 369 by 2008. The highest increase was in colleges where the number of colleges nearly tripled. There has also been a sharp

increase in the number of non-public colleges where the number in 2008 was nearly five times within 10 years.

**Number of Higher Education Institutions in Vietnam**

SCHOOL YEAR	1999-2000	2000-2001	2001-2002	2002-2003	2005-2004	2004-2005	2005-2006	2006-2007	2007-2008
Higher Education Institutions	153	178	191	202	214	230	255	322	369
Universities	69	74	77	81	87	93	104	139	160
Public Institutions	52	57	60	64	68	71	79	109	120
Non Public Institutions	17	17	17	17	19	22	25	30	47
Colleges	84	104	114	121	127	137	151	183	209
Public Institutions	79	99	108	115	119	130	142	166	185
Non Public Institutions	5	5	6	6	8	7	9	17	24

*Business-in-asia.com*

Table 1: Number of Higher Education Institutions in Vietnam

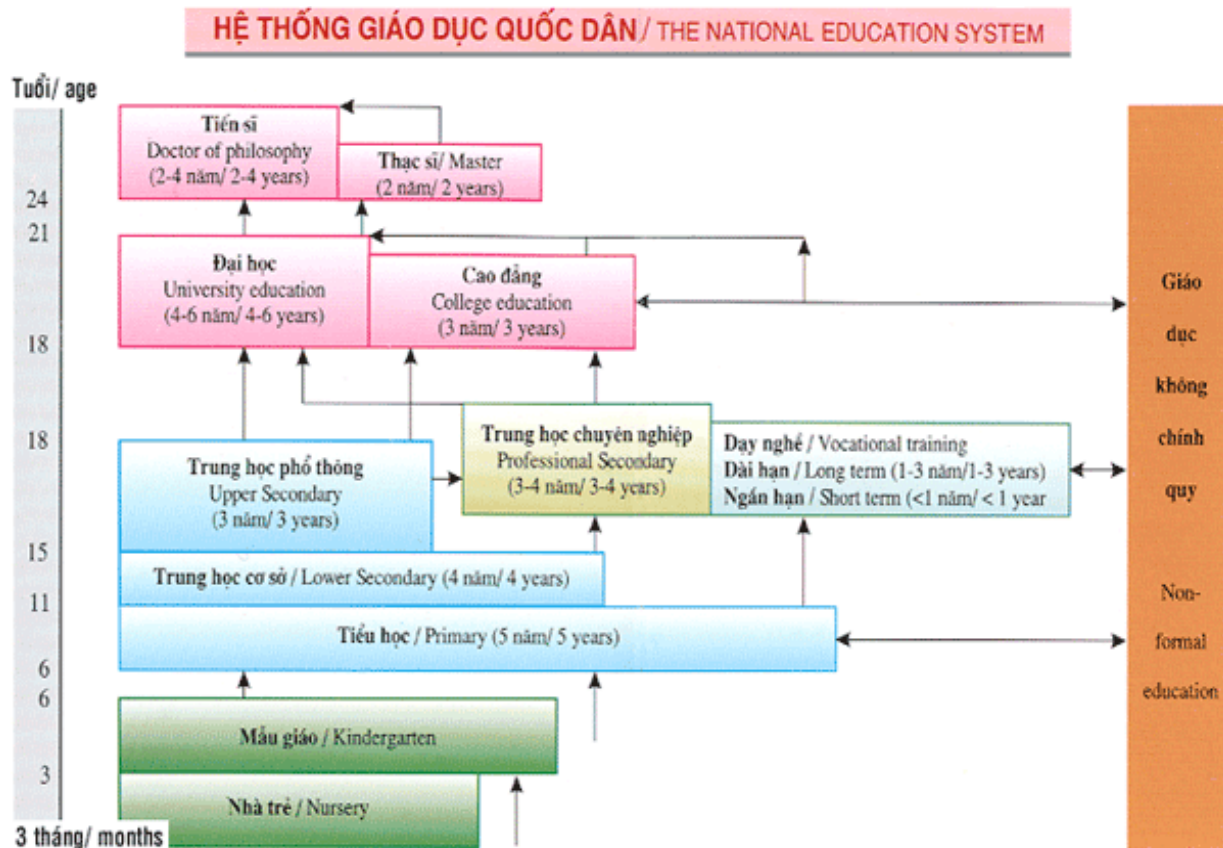
Source: [http://www.business-in-asia.com/vietnam/education\\_system\\_in\\_vietnam.html](http://www.business-in-asia.com/vietnam/education_system_in_vietnam.html)

However, HE in Vietnam still is catching up to international standards in term of quality of governance, curricula, physical infrastructure, teaching methods and AS qualification. Recognizing an urgent need of having radical reform for the system, in 2005, Resolution 14 on “Fundamental and Comprehensive Reform of Higher Education in Vietnam 2006-2020” (also known as the Higher Education Reform Agenda or HERA) was approved by the Prime Minister, shaping a vision for HE quality assurance for the next 15 years. The general aims of HERA is “to carry out fundamental change and comprehensive reform of HE; undertake a process of profound renews in the area of the quantity, quality and effectiveness in order to meet all the demands of industrialization, modernization, global economic integration and society’s demand for learning opportunities. By 2020, Vietnam aims to have a HE system that is advanced by international standard, highly competitive and appropriate to the socialist-oriented market mechanism” (Higher Education Reform Agenda (HERA), 2005). HERA “is the most ambitious and accomplished reform effort to date and represents an important commitment by the government to the HE sector” (The World Bank, 2008). Nevertheless, HERA is facing formidable challenges including the lack of effective governance system, resources. In term of professoriate, there are lacks of qualified lecturers, updated teaching methods and productive research culture. This needs urgent solutions to solve especially now that Vietnam is the member of the World Trade Organization, the challenge of improving international competitiveness becomes an even more central concern for the Government.

The current Vietnamese schooling system has four levels: pre-primary, primary, lower secondary and upper secondary. After primary or lower secondary, student can move to technical-vocational education and training. Students who pass a secondary school leaving exam can take part in another entrance exam to college and university. Provincial government or MOET established colleges. These colleges have average size of 1,500 students and tend to be specialized training institution or provincial teacher training. Universities are larger than colleges in scale and have

multi-disciplinary focus. The Prime Minister established Universities and particular ministry, specialized agency or provincial government are in charge of managing public universities.

Below is the picture of national education system along with target ages for each level.



Source: <http://edu.net.vn/data/doc/hethonggiaoduc/>

### Internationalization of Vietnamese Higher Education and academic staff development in respond to the new context

In the process of reunification, two main elements associated with the internationalization of the Vietnamese education system have emerged: (i), the brain drain and (ii), the appearance of offshore campuses.

Currently, there are about 15,000 Vietnamese students studying abroad each year. Among them, many student study abroad by publicly sponsored scholarship from the Vietnam government or from other countries such as Canada, United Kingdom, France, Australia, Thailand, Japan, United States, Germany or China and the other finance their own individual studies. Statistics indicated that the number of Vietnamese students studying overseas increase year by year. In 2000, there are about 1,400 students studying in Australia and by 2005, the number of students increased to 2,397 (Australian Education International (AEI), 2006). Vietnamese students studying in US in 2005/2006 was 4,597 (Institute for International Education (IIE), 2006). However, not all students who study abroad return home upon completion. Brain-drain is evident not only in Vietnam but also

in neighboring countries such as China, where recent figures indicate that, of over a million students to have studied abroad since 1978, only around a quarter have returned home (Welch & Zhang, 2005). The issue of brain drain has become a long-standing and significant. Government needs special policies to attract skilled and educated student to return home to work and to contribute to the capacity development of the nation.

It is interesting, however, that in 2005, 346 US students were studying at Vietnamese universities (Institute for International Education (IIE), 2006). Vietnamese universities now provide training for students from around 30 countries including neighbor's countries (Laos, Cambodia, and China) and from developed education systems (US, Australia, Spain, and Canada). These overseas students and the new generation of students in Vietnam are special 'customers' as "universities have also become increasingly business and customer-oriented" (Denman, 2005). This requires Vietnamese lectures to have updated knowledge, teaching methods as well as soft skills such as the diversity and intercultural communication to be competitive in the HE market.

A decade ago, Ha Noi Economics University and Ho Chi Minh Economics University established twinning program with the Institute of Social Studies in The Hague, Netherlands, Dutch, Vietnamese and international academic staff are involved in this program. Further long-standing programs between the Ho Chi Minh Open University and the Solvay Business School of the Free University of Brussels or Vietnam- Belgium master programs in Ha Noi and Ho Chi Minh City as well as other programs with US universities (Varghese, 2007) bring a lot of challenges and opportunities for Vietnamese academic staff and students. More importantly, with the recent establishment of a wholly foreign-owned university such as Australia's Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology was the government insistence on "full foreign ownership and independent international curricula so that a new university, with a technical and vocational emphasis, might quickly come into being as a model and training ground to assist the development of capacity across the education, training and research sectors" (Wilmoth, 2004, p. 4). The foundation of international campus can be seen as part of a wider strategy of internationalization by the originating university, especially universities form Australia which are known for being highly internationalized institution within a national system that itself is acknowledged worldwide for the extend of its internationalization (Welch & Denman, 1997).

In order to integrate well with the internationalization, the Vietnamese Government committed strongly to improve the education system from many aspects, especially the development of academic staff. It is widely agreed that academic staff plays an important role in HE institution and has direct impact on the quality of student learning. It seems more accurate in the countries which were permitted in Confusion such as Vietnam and other Asian countries. One of the main five objectives of Higher Education Reform Agenda is "the achievement of a marked increase in the number of qualified HE staff and managers, sufficient to ensure that the HE student-to-teacher ratio

is below 20:1 and that, by 2020, at least 60 percent of all academic staff have a masters-level degree and at least 35 percent have doctoral degree” (Higher Education Reform Agenda (HERA), 2005). In 2005, when Government promulgated HERA, a large number of academics staff does not have postgraduate degree, very few have doctorates and the qualification varies across institution as can be seen in the table 2. In 2005, about 47% of academic staff holds postgraduate degrees—most at the master’s level, indicating a slight increase from 2002. Generally, the number of academic staff with doctoral degree is one of the indicators of the quality of a HE institution. However, just a few of Vietnamese academic staff have doctorates. National universities have highest number of better qualified staff because they tend to be well-funded. Surprisingly, in 2005, private institutions also had high number of qualified staff which indicates an improvement of the private sector and account for the fact that many academic staff who work in public universities also teach at private institutions on short-term contracts.

**Table 2: Proportion of Academic Staff with Advanced Qualifications by Type of Institution (%)**

Type of Institution	Percentage with Postgraduate Degrees			
	2002		2005	
	Doctorate	Masters	Doctorate	Masters
<b>Public Institution</b>	11.4	30.8	13.1	32.7
<b>Semi-public Institutions</b>			19.6	35.4
<b>Private Institutions</b>	8.94	18.28	23.7	32.1
<b>National Universities</b>	25.6	43.3	31.6	32.4
<b>Regional Universities</b>	7.95	44.5	8.6	42
<b>University</b>	15.4	34.34	18.2	35.1
<b>College</b>	1.1	20.1	1.9	25
<b>Total</b>	11.3	30.24	14.4	32.7

*Source: MOET University Surveys 2002&2005*

Across the whole HE sector, there is only 15% of the academic staff holding doctorates. As the consequence, the number of doctoral student can enroll as well as quality of their study is constrained. In addition, it also has influence on research, an increasingly important academic activity in HE institution. To address this situation, Vietnamese Government sends students abroad through many schemes. For example each year, 322 scholarship program send around 450 of the brightest students to America, Australia, China, Singapore and other Western countries at annual cost of 100 billion Vietnamese dong (Higher Education Reform Agenda (HERA), 2005). Many other country-specific programs also exist such as Training Vietnamese Citizens in the Russian Federation under the Debt Processing Agreement, Vietnamese-American Education Foundation



Project, and Australian Scholarships for Development in Vietnam Program to help improving qualification of academic staff. In addition, The Ministry of Education and Training offers scholarships to support up to 20,000 PhD trained staff by 2020 with 10,000 trained in Vietnam and rest abroad as evidence that academic staff development in higher education is seen to be of a high priority in this sector. HE institutions themselves also need to invest in the development of academic staff in order to achieve high quality status. It can be said that, there still have many problems related to academic staff quality such as high teaching load, high student number, low salaries, lack of appropriate working conditions and cumbersome procedure for promotion and it requires further development of effective and appropriate policies and training programs.

For Vietnam, the internationalization is a key driver to improve the quality of domestic HE in general and academic staff in particular. While it increased competitions, it also opens up further opportunities for academic staff development. Internationalization is a push factor that can force academic staff to change, to catch up with new, modern knowledge and teaching method if they want to integrate with other developed education systems. Internationalization is also the way academic staff prepares for their student to work in an international and multi-cultural environment. It is clear that Vietnam becomes increasingly integrated to the international community, for example the accession to membership of UN Security Council that helps to enhance the international partnership with universities from Australia, Europe and North America. In addition, the Government believes that HE is a pillar of the twenty-first century knowledge economy. HE institution are the keys for producing highly skill personnel, a great concern for the development of Vietnam's economic. In a report about strategic choice for Vietnam's higher education, Dr Nguyen Thien Nhan, Deputy Prime Minister, former Minister of Education and Training noted that Viet Nam now belongs to the leading group of exporting nations. However, the biggest challenge for investors is that it is difficult to find professionals and highly skilled workers in the workforce. The objectives stated in the 2001-2010 Education Development Strategy (Nguyen, 2007) reads as follows: "to provide high quality human resources in line with the socio-economic structure of the industrialization and modernization of the nation; enhance the competitiveness in fair co-operation for Vietnam in its international economic integration". In order to respond to the requirements of human resources and workforce requirement, which are the decisive factors for the country's development in the period of industrialization and modernization; it is necessary to create radical and overall changes in higher education, especially in academic staff development.

At World Conference on Higher Education, Adanusa (2009) emphasized that "Academic staff are at the heart of the public mission of higher education. No institution or system can be successful without a talented and committed professoriate. Higher education institutions and systems must offer academic staff adequate salaries, full-time career opportunities with appropriate job security and tenure, an effective voice in academic governance, and firm guarantees of academic freedom".

Under the pressure as well as the opportunities that internationalization brings, and with the support from Government and other organizations and projects, Vietnamese academic staffs are engaging with a change process to integrate with other modern education systems in the world. What is urgently required is a study that examines the attitudes of academic staff and HE leaders to engage with this change agenda and what they see as the priorities, challenges and opportunities

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