

**Australian transnational education in Vietnam: A golden or missed opportunity?**

**A case study of two postgraduate programs**

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## **Abstract**

The last few decades have seen the expansion of Western education into Asian countries including Vietnam. Australia is one of the pioneers of transnational higher education. However, the area of Australian transnational education in Vietnam is under-researched.

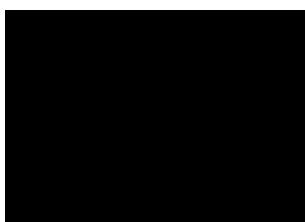
This study explores the transnational learning and teaching experiences of students and lecturers involved in two Australian transnational programs in Vietnam. The research design is conceptualised within a pragmatic paradigm, mixed methods research, and case study approach. Data collection methods consisted of a questionnaire for Vietnamese students, focus group discussions with Vietnamese students, and individual interviews with Australian/Western transnational lecturers.

The findings of my research serve as reference points for Australian universities and Vietnamese institutions, highlighting the ways they deliver Australian transnational higher education programs in Vietnam. Specifically, outcomes reveal why a particular group of Vietnamese students chose to study with the two selected Australian transnational programs, and what they and their lecturers perceived to be the key characteristics desired of transnational lecturers. My research identifies a number of similarities and tensions between student and lecturer perceptions. These may provide some guidance when preparing lecturers for transnational teaching, and students for learning in a transnational context. My research also indicates that students enjoyed and appreciated this transnational experience, but failed to maximise the benefits of this golden opportunity. Finally, my research highlights a shift from a traditional cross-cultural perspective to an intercultural perspective, which challenges the traditional East-West dichotomy and brings Vietnam and Australia closer to each other.

### **Declaration of authenticity**

I, Thi My Dung Truong (also known as Annie Truong), declare that this PhD thesis entitled “Australian transnational education in Vietnam: A golden or missed opportunity? A case study of two postgraduate programs” is no more than 100,000 words in length including quotes and exclusive of tables, figures, charts, appendices and references. This thesis contains no material that has been submitted previously, in whole or in part, for the award of any other academic degree or diploma. Except where otherwise indicated, this thesis is my own work.

Signature:



Date: 2<sup>nd</sup> August 2018

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## **Glossary**

**Australian transnational education:** The programs/courses that are delivered/assessed by an accredited/approved/recognised provider in a country other than Australia, where delivery includes a face-to-face component (DEST, 2005, p. 6).

**Collectivism:** Collectivism relates to societies in which people are part of big, strong, cohesive groups or communities, which can protect them (Hofstede & Hofstede, 2005).

**Confirmability:** This term relates to the objectivity in quantitative research in that it involves “providing evidence that the researcher’s interpretations of participants’ constructions are rooted in the participants’ constructions and also that analysis and the resulting findings and conclusions can be verified as reflective of and grounded in the participants’ perceptions” (Given, 2008a, p. 113).

**Credibility:** The methodological procedures and sources used to establish a high level of harmony between the participants’ expressions and the researcher's interpretations of them (Given, 2008a, p. 138).

**Cultural imperialism:** Domination of one culture over others through cultural forms, such as pop culture, media, and cultural products; a dimension of cultural globalisation in which unequal and uneven flow of culture and cultural forms negatively impacts local industry and culture (Sorrells, 2016, p. 255).

**Cultural values:** Ideas and beliefs about what is important to us, what we care about; what we think is right and wrong; and what we evaluate as fair and unfair; which are gained from our cultural group membership (Sorrells, 2016, p. 255).

**Culture as a resource:** This relates to the impact on “political development, economic growth, and exploitation, as well as collective and individual empowerment, agency, and resistance” (Sorrells, 2016, p. 255).

**Culture as contested meaning:** This is a cultural studies definition “that views culture as an apparatus of power within a larger system of domination where meanings are constantly negotiated” (Sorrells, 2016, p. 255).

**Culture as shared meanings:** This is an anthropologic definition of culture in which “meanings are shared through symbols from generation to generation and allow us to make sense of, express, and give meaning to our lives” (Sorrells, 2016, p. 255).

**Dependability:** This term, in place of reliability in quantitative research, refers to whether the process of the study is consistent, reasonably stable over time and across researchers and methods (Miles, Huberman, & Saldana, 2014).

**Ethnocentrism:** Idea that one’s own group’s way of thinking, being, and acting in the world is superior to others (Sorrells, 2016, p. 256).

**Exporting countries:** Countries that export TNE. For example, in my research Australia is an exporting country.

**Face:** Favourable social self-worth in relation to the assessment of other-worth in interpersonal relationships (Sorrells, 2016, p. 257).

**Hegemony:** Domination through consent, where the goals, ideas, and interests of the ruling group or class are so thoroughly normalised, institutionalised, and accepted that people consent to their own domination, subordination, and exploitation (Sorrells, 2016, p. 258).

**Host countries:** Countries that receive TNE. For example, in my research Vietnam is a host country.

**Importing countries:** Countries that import TNE. For example, in my research Vietnam is an importing country.

**Individualism:** This relates to societies that accept loose ties between individuals. Everyone is expected to look after himself/herself and his/her immediate family (Hofstede & Hofstede, 2005).

**Intercultural competence:** The knowledge, attitudes, and skills needed to engage effectively in intercultural situations (Sorrells, 2016, p. 260).

**Intercultural complexities:** The complications, subtleties, and nuances of intercultural/multicultural communication and interaction between Vietnamese transnational students and their transnational lecturers.

**Intercultural relationships:** Relationships between people from different racial, ethnic, linguistic, national, religious, class, and sexual orientation groups (Sorrells, 2016, p. 206).

**Key characteristics of transnational lecturers:** This term refers to the characteristics desired of transnational lecturers that are valued in transnational classes.

**Occident:** This refers to the countries of the West, especially European countries and America.

**Offshore students:** Transnational students studying in Vietnam.

**Onshore students:** International students studying in Australia.

**Orient:** This refers to the countries of the East, especially East Asia.

**Power distance:** The extent to which the less powerful members of institutions and organisations within a country expect and accept that power is distributed unequally (Hofstede & Hofstede, 2005, p. 46).

**Providing countries:** Countries that provide TNE. For example, in my research Australia is a providing country.

**Receiving countries:** Countries that receive TNE. For example, in my research Vietnam is a receiving country.

**Sojourners:** Voluntary migrants who leave home for limited periods of time and for specific purposes, such as international students, business travellers, tourists, missionaries, and military personnel (Sorrells, 2016, p. 265).

**Source countries:** Countries that provide TNE. For example, in my research Australia is a source country.

**Transferability:** This term, in place of generalisability in quantitative research, indicates that the results of a study can be transferred to other contexts beyond the scope of its context (Given, 2008a).

**Transnational education:** This term refers to the mobility of academic programs or providers between nations (Knight, 2016).

**Trustworthiness:** This is an important concept in qualitative research, enabling researchers to describe the goodness of research without referring to quantitative-oriented parameters (Given, 2008a).

**Uncertainty avoidance:** Uncertainty avoidance refers to the degree to which an individual of a society feels threatened by ambiguous or unknown situations (Hofstede & Hofstede, 2005).

# **Chapter 1 - Introduction**

This mixed methods research project explored two Australian transnational master's programs in Vietnam by investigating key elements of Australian transnational education (TNE) in Vietnam. It examined: the reasons for students choosing TNE; the key characteristics desired of transnational lecturers; and the intercultural complexities in transnational learning and teaching.

This chapter introduces my research and describes my interest in the research areas, as well as my personal motivations. It also presents a statement of my research, including the research questions and sub-questions. Finally, it highlights the significance of my research and presents the structure of the thesis.

## **1.1. Personal inspirations for this research**

I was born and raised in a small town in the Mekong Delta, in Southern Vietnam. My hometown is known for high rice production, but people live in poverty and have low educational levels. I witnessed many children from my hometown having to work long hours in rice fields instead of going to school. One day, on the way to school, I saw a girl from my neighbourhood, Trang, desperate to go to school but her mum could not afford her study. Trang never had the opportunity to go to school after all. I cried seeing her tears. At that moment, I realised how lucky I was. My family were able to afford education for me. They valued education for girls and supported my ambition. I promised myself I would study hard, not only for myself but also for Trang and the many other girls and boys who were not lucky enough to attend school.

That image of Trang going home in tears had a strong impact on me and has since motivated me to educate myself and conduct research in education. I also became well aware of the important role of education as the key to a better future for myself, my family, my community, and my country. In addition, I have been inspired by Ho Chi Minh, who embraced global mobility throughout his life. He was determined to go overseas to learn about other countries and to develop his knowledge and understanding to help his beloved country, Vietnam. Inspired by his journeys, I have always been interested in going abroad for my postgraduate studies, to develop my knowledge and

understanding of higher education in other countries, and to broaden my experiences and perspectives.

Upon completion of my undergraduate study, I was offered a position as an international development officer at the local university in my hometown. Working on educational projects with higher education institutions from overseas, such as the United States and Australia, and international colleagues, sparked an initial interest in the internationalisation of higher education, and the intercultural complexities of international education. Upon completion of a master's degree in New Zealand, I worked for the Southeast Asian Ministers of Education Organisation (SEAMEO) in Ho Chi Minh City as a project and research officer. My work at SEAMEO involved working with international educators and scholars from overseas, especially from Australia. This again reinforced my interest in Australian higher education and the intercultural complexities between Vietnam and Australia. During this time, I also noticed fast growing trends in TNE, and I became particularly interested in Australian TNE in Vietnam.

Regarding philosophical stances, my undergraduate study introduced me to quantitative research, while my master's study exposed me to qualitative research. Therefore, I have learnt to appreciate the strengths of both approaches and to be aware of their constraints. Moreover, the range of my work experiences as a research officer at SEAMEO led to my interest in conducting mixed methods research in international education and TNE particularly.

## **1.2. Research statement**

The rapid development of international education in recent years has led to an increased research interest in TNE (Huang, 2007; Phan, 2016; Wang, 2016). In this market, Australia is one of the most important providers, beside the United States, the United Kingdom and Canada (Huang, 2007). In fact, Australia is an active TNE player in Asia. The top five countries with Australian TNE in 2015 were: Singapore, China, Malaysia, Vietnam and Hong Kong (Australian Government, 2018). Accordingly, extensive research has been conducted on Australian TNE in Asian countries such as China, Hong Kong, Malaysia and Singapore (Chapman & Pyvis 2005, 2006a, 2012; Dobos, Chapman & O'Donoghue 2012; McBurnie & Ziguras 2001; Pyvis & Chapman 2007).

These studies have provided insights into understanding transnational learning and teaching experience in these countries. However, a review of the literature in this field has indicated that most research about TNE student experiences has focused on Australia's main importing countries (i.e., Singapore, Malaysia, and Hong Kong) (Hoare, 2012), and that little research has been done on Australian TNE in Vietnam, especially at the postgraduate level. This dearth of knowledge represents a gap in the literature, which combined with my personal and professional interests in Australian TNE in Vietnam, has inspired me to conduct a research project on this topic.

With this interest in mind, I explored two Australian transnational postgraduate programs in Vietnam. These two programs were selected because they were considered to be exemplar cases of Australian transnational master's programs. Both have been running for more than ten years in Vietnam. The aims of this research were to explore the learning and teaching experience of the transnational students and lecturers involved in these two programs and, more broadly, to improve the quality of transnational learning and teaching of Australian TNE in Vietnam. This research also aimed to build upon and validate previous research in important areas such as why students chose TNE, the characteristics of transnational lecturers, and intercultural complexities in transnational learning and teaching. Specifically, my research examined the reasons why students chose TNE over local Vietnamese programs and study in Australia. It also enquired into the key characteristics desired of transnational lecturers, from both student and lecturer perspectives. In addition, my research addressed the intercultural complexities in transnational learning and teaching experience, perceived by the student and the lecturer participants. The research process was guided by the following research questions and sub-questions:

- Why did the participating Vietnamese transnational students choose one of the two Australian transnational programs in Vietnam?
  - Why did these Vietnamese transnational students prefer Australian TNE over local Vietnamese programs?
  - Why did these Vietnamese transnational students prefer Australian TNE over study in Australia?
- What are the characteristics desired of transnational lecturers, from both student and lecturer perspectives?

- How are the intercultural complexities demonstrated in the transnational learning and teaching experience in these two programs?

To address these research questions, my research was conceptualised within, a pragmatic paradigm, mixed methods research, and a case study design. Within an overarching case study design, my research focused on two selected programs rather than multiple programs; on depth rather than breadth of study; and on multiple methods rather than one method (Denscombe, 2014). Data were collected through a student questionnaire, student focus group discussions, and lecturer interviews. Quantitative data from the student questionnaire were analysed with the use of Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) as an organising and managing tool. Qualitative data from the student focus group discussions and the lecturer interviews were analysed using thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) with the aid of NVivo 11.0 Pro Edition, and MS Excel spreadsheets as organising tools. Conceptualised within a mixed methods research study, my research combined quantitative and qualitative data to explore the research questions. It is worth highlighting, however, that as my research adopted a qualitative research and case study design as the overarching approach, it was more aligned with a qualitative, rather than quantitative research method. The findings of this research were not intended to be generalised to all Australian transnational programs in Vietnam. Rather, this research was intended as an initial exploration into this under-researched area.

It is important to define some frequently used terms and phrases in my research. The term ‘transnational education’ (or TNE as it is abbreviated throughout this thesis) refers to the mobility of academic programs or providers between nations (Knight, 2016). The term ‘offshore’ is used interchangeably with ‘transnational’ to describe the mobility of programs and providers. More detailed explanation of these terms is provided in Chapter 3. The phrase ‘key characteristics of transnational lecturers’ refers to the characteristics desired of transnational lecturers that are valued in transnational classes. In my research, these characteristics were categorised as discipline knowledge, teaching skills, cultural knowledge, and personal attributes. Finally, the term ‘intercultural complexities’ refers to the complications, subtleties, and nuances of intercultural/multicultural communication and interaction between transnational students and their lecturers in a transnational context.



### **1.3. Significance of this research**

This research is significant in the following ways.

Firstly, it has generated new knowledge and insights in the field of TNE with a focus on Australian TNE in Vietnam. My research explored salient topics in Australian TNE in Vietnam, such as why students chose TNE, the characteristics desired of transnational lecturers (from both student and lecturer perspectives), and intercultural complexities in transnational learning and teaching. Hoare (2012) insisted that most research about TNE student experiences has been small scope and, as already indicated, has focused on Australia's main importing countries, such as Singapore, Malaysia, and Hong Kong. The findings of my research, therefore, contribute to the existing literature on learning and teaching experience of Australian postgraduate transnational programs in Vietnam. In particular, the comparison of students' and lecturers' perceptions yields original findings that contributes significantly to the body of research on TNE. I believe my research findings can serve as reference points for further research, perhaps with larger samples and at different levels of university study, such as undergraduate and doctoral levels.

Secondly, my research benefited both the transnational students and lecturers involved in these two programs. Data collected from the students and lecturers helped them reflect on their learning and teaching experience and to develop an awareness of the tensions and opportunities for improvement across both groups. This research has provided recommendations and implications that the student and lecturer participants could refer to in order to enhance their transnational learning and teaching experience.

Finally, the findings of my research provided the Vietnamese institutions and Australian providers involved in these two programs with greater understanding and appreciation of their programs' strengths and weaknesses at policy and management levels.

### **1.4. Thesis structure**

This thesis comprises nine chapters.

Chapter 1 has introduced my research, including: my personal motivations for conducting this research; a statement about the research; the three research questions; the significance of this research; and the thesis structure.

Chapter 2 describes the broad research context with regards to the political, historical and cultural setting of Vietnam. This chapter also explores the history of Vietnamese higher education, including the foreign influences on its structures and approach and its contemporary context.

Chapter 3 reviews the relevant literature on TNE. It provides an outline of the general scholarship on internationalisation of higher education and TNE, and presents the literature related to Australian TNE in Asian countries including Vietnam, as well as internationalisation of higher education, and the landscape of TNE in Vietnam. This chapter also documents the reasons presented in the literature for students choosing TNE.

Chapter 4 reviews the scholarship on the impact of culture on TNE. It explores the intercultural complexities in East-West learning and teaching experience, and examines the important role of intercultural awareness in transnational teaching.

Chapter 5 describes the research methodology, including the conceptual framework, data collection methods, processes, and analysis, and ethical consideration.

Chapter 6 presents the students' experiences and perceptions regarding their reasons for choosing TNE, their perceptions of transnational lecturers' desired characteristics, and their experiences with intercultural complexities in transnational learning.

Chapter 7 reports on the lecturers' experiences and perceptions of transnational lecturers' desired characteristics, and their experiences with intercultural complexities in transnational teaching.

Chapter 8 discusses both the student and lecturer findings (presented in Chapter 6 and Chapter 7) within the context of the research literature (presented in Chapter 2, Chapter 3 and Chapter 4), and in relation to the three research questions.

Chapter 9 concludes my research by providing a summary of the major findings and a set of recommendations for improvement in the two selected programs and, potentially, future Australian TNE programs in Vietnam.

## **1.5. Conclusion**

This chapter outlined the key aspects of this study, including my personal motivations for conducting the research, a statement about the research and relevant research questions, the significance of the project, and the thesis structure. The following chapter (Chapter 2) describes the broad research context, including Vietnamese society and culture and the nature of Vietnamese higher education.

## **Chapter 2 - Vietnam as the research context**

To understand the landscape of TNE in Vietnam, it is important to present a broad picture of this country. As education in Vietnam reflects the wider social context, it is helpful to study its historical, cultural and political settings. This is explored in the first section of this chapter. The chapter then examines Vietnamese higher education in terms of its history of foreign influences and contemporary context.

### **2.1. Vietnam: The context**

Vietnam is a developing country in Southeast Asia, covering an area of 331,211.6 square kilometres. In 2015, it had a population of 91.7 million. It is bordered by the People's Republic of China in the North, and by the Lao People's Democratic Republic and the Kingdom of Cambodia in the West. There are 54 ethnic groups throughout the country, among which 86.2 per cent are Kinh. The country is divided into 63 provinces and cities directly under the administration of the central government.

Politically, Vietnam is one of the five remaining communist countries in the world, and one of the few committed to the principles of Marxism-Leninism. With such a distinctive political agenda, many aspects of Vietnamese society, including higher education, have been shaped by socialism and communism.

Economically, Vietnam has made a remarkable progress from a poor to a middle-income country within just 25 years from 1986 to 2010 (World Bank, 2012). During the 1980s, the centrally planned economy was replaced by a socialist-oriented market economy, when the nation officially adopted a policy of economic renewal ('Doi moi') in 1986 (Hayden & Le, 2013). This significant reform has resulted in remarkable advancements in the economy and other aspects of society. Hayden and Le (2013) described Vietnam as one of the fastest-developing economies amongst Southeast Asian countries.

Fry (2009) provided an overview of Vietnamese society from a foreigner's perspective. He identified five important themes, among which two themes are most relevant to education. The first relevant theme is the Vietnamese fight against foreign domination from outside invaders, namely the Chinese, Mongols, French, Japanese, and Americans.

Some of these foreign colonial regimes have left significant marks on Vietnamese education, which will be further explored in the next section. The second relevant theme relates to Chinese Confucian cultural and intellectual influences. Under Chinese governance, Vietnam has been strongly influenced by Confucianism, particularly in terms of customs and language (Fry, 2009). More importantly, during almost 1,000 years as a Chinese colony, between the first and tenth centuries, Chinese Confucianism was imposed on Vietnamese higher education. Accordingly, Chinese higher education policies have greatly influenced Vietnamese higher education in such aspects as philosophy, examination processes, education content, and teaching and learning methodologies (Vu & Marginson, 2014). These influences may therefore be evident in my research.

With its unique political, historical and economic context, Vietnam has been regarded as a special case, distinct from other countries. Vietnam has been described as an outlier (Gladwell, 2009), an exceptional country (Pham & Fry, 2011), and an ascending dragon (Kamm, 1996). An overview of this wider social context therefore provides helpful insights into understanding Vietnamese higher education.

## **2.2. Vietnamese higher education**

This section examines Vietnamese higher education in terms of its history of foreign influences and its contemporary context.

### **2.2.1. A history of foreign influences on Vietnamese higher education**

Vietnam has a long history of higher education. The Quoc Tu Giam School, established in 1076 in Vietnam, was the first university in Southeast Asia (Sagemueller, 2001). As noted earlier, some prominent foreign colonial regimes have left significant marks on Vietnamese education. Therefore, on reviewing Vietnamese higher education, it is important to take colonising effects into account. Some of the most important foreign influences on Vietnamese higher education are the Chinese, French, American, and Soviets.

### ***2.2.1.1. Chinese influences: The Confucian ideology***

One thousand years under Chinese governance had an enormous impact on Vietnam society, including its higher education. As already indicated, the most noticeable consequence of Chinese domination is the long-standing influence of Confucianism on Vietnamese culture. Noticeably, unlike its close neighbours in Southeast Asia (Cambodia, Laos and Thailand), Vietnam observes Confucian principles (Le, 1994; Tu, 1993, 1996), as does Japan, Korea and Singapore. One effect of Confucianism on Vietnamese culture is the value placed on hierarchy and power distance. Power distance refers to the degree to which members of a group expect and agree that power should be shared unequally. It also creates levels between people based on power, authority, prestige, status, wealth and material possessions (Northouse, 2007). Specifically, the Chinese Confucian philosophy has brought to Vietnam a highly bureaucratic and hierarchical structure in which age and seniority is accorded with wisdom and considered an important indicator of one's social status. Under this Confucian philosophy, Vietnamese society tends to accept that high power distance is a fundamental characteristic of an orderly structure (House, Hanges, Javidan, Dorfman, & Gupta, 2004).

Undoubtedly, these Confucian principles of hierarchical thinking and high power distance have had significant influences on the education system in Vietnam. For example, Vietnamese teachers and lecturers are usually held in high esteem by their students because they are regarded as senior and more knowledgeable. Vietnamese students are not allowed to call their teachers by their names as Western students usually do, but rather by 'Thay' (for a male teacher) or 'Co' (for a female teacher), which establishes seniority and creates a power distance between students and teachers. Vietnamese students are thus expected to admire and respect their teachers and never to question or criticise anything they say. This makes Vietnamese students reluctant to challenge their teachers or, more broadly, to think critically in their learning, a pattern that persists in Vietnamese higher education today. In addition to the teacher-student power distance, Confucianism highlights the significant role of the teaching profession and expects the students to pay great respect to their teachers (Fry, 2009). These Confucian principles have had strong impacts, and have become part of Vietnam higher education. As a student and then a professional educator, studying and working in

tertiary environments in Vietnam, I can relate totally to these Confucian principles and their implications on learning and teaching.

Another effect of Confucian influence is the great emphasis placed on learning (Fry, 2009) resulting in a thirst for further study among the Vietnamese. Tran and Marginson (2014) highlighted a long tradition of commitment and devotion to learning in Vietnam, which is part of Confucianism. One important example of commitment to learning in Vietnam is demonstrated through the life of President Ho Chi Minh, who was regarded as ‘the teacher’ of Vietnam. Born and brought up in a family with strong Confucian values, Ho Chi Minh was fully aware of the critical role of education in providing a better future for individuals, their families, their communities, and society at large (Tran & Marginson, 2014). Influenced by Confucianism and inspired by President Ho Chi Minh, I have always been committed to learning and research, and have appreciated education as a key to success.

The Vietnamese Confucian system emphasises the pedagogy of memorisation in learning (Pham & Fry, 2011). This memorisation pedagogy accounts for the rote learning style that remains entrenched in Vietnamese classroom experiences, including my own early learning experience. Furthermore, Confucianism exercises a ‘mobilising talent’ policy in which students who pass examinations are celebrated and ‘brought home in glory and with thanks’ (Pham & Fry, 2011, p. 225). While this policy encourages students to study hard to make their families proud, it highlights the belief that completing a degree purely for the sake of social respectability and status is more important than the achievement of the degree itself. This trait still remains in Vietnamese education today (Pham, 2006). More detailed accounts of Confucian influences on Vietnamese learning and teaching will be provided in the next chapter (Chapter 3).

#### ***2.2.1.2. French influences: The institutional model***

European influences on Vietnamese higher education can be traced back to 1858 with the governance of the French colonial regime in Vietnam. Like previous rulers, the French imported academic models to Vietnam. This led to the introduction of institutional models, the use of French (instead of Chinese) as a foreign language of instruction, and training lecturers in France and using a European curriculum (Ziguras

& Pham, 2017). Other impacts of the French on Vietnamese higher education included the establishment of the University of Indochina (now Vietnam National University, Hanoi) in 1906 (Chalapati, Chalapati, & Weibl, 2015). By the 1920s, French imperialists had restructured Vietnamese education to serve colonial imperatives (London, 2011). Ziguras and Pham (2017) observed that although much of the content of Vietnamese higher education has changed significantly since the period of French governance, its institutional model has changed little from the French academic model of the 1920s.

#### ***2.2.1.3. American influences: Decentralisation***

Significant influences of American colonialism in the south of Vietnam include the decentralisation of education management and testing mechanisms. Educational changes in South Vietnam after 1965 were thought to be guided by an American philosophy of democratic decentralisation and pragmatic approaches (Nguyen, 2003). Furthermore, between 1963 and 1964, American authorities implemented objective tests in place of traditional essay-based tests in examination. However, this initiative did not work because of strong criticism from teachers and the lack of enabling structures during that period (Vu & Marginson, 2014).

#### ***2.2.1.4. Soviet influences: An emphasis on political subjects and a theory-based focus***

Concurrent with the American influences in South Vietnam before 1975, the Soviets were influencing education in North Vietnam. In fact, from 1975 until the economic reform of 1986 ('Doi Moi'), both North and South Vietnam were influenced by the Soviet model of higher education (Tran et al., 1995). Soviet influences on Vietnamese higher education were significant, with the application of socialist centrally planned models in institutions (Ziguras & Pham, 2017). Additionally, Vietnamese higher education shifted towards a focus on natural and social sciences, especially courses related to heavy industry. The Soviet system also separated teaching from research components in Vietnamese higher education institutions, which resulted in the establishment of research-focused institutions outside of universities. The curriculum and programs of most universities followed Soviet models (Vu & Marginson, 2014). Importantly, subjects of a political nature, such as Marxism, Leninism, and Ho Chi



Minh thought, were made compulsory for all students (Tibbetts, 2007). This emphasis on political subjects in Vietnamese higher education is reviewed in detail in the next section.

Amongst these foreign legacies, it is fair to say that the most profound influences on Vietnamese higher education were Chinese and Soviet because of their respective cultural and political affiliations with Vietnam. Vu and Marginson (2014) described the Confucian ideology as the foundation of Vietnamese education. Such a long period of Chinese governance imprinted long-lasting Confucian values on Vietnamese culture, including learner and teacher behaviours in class. Vietnamese teaching and learning practices have been shaped to align with a Confucian teacher-centred approach, in which teachers are given the highest possible respect and authority in the classroom while learners are expected to listen passively and to copy exactly what the teacher has said. Politically, Vietnam is currently a socialist communist country, and Soviet influences are evident in higher education through: the emphasis on political subjects and a theory-based focus in the curriculum, as well as research institutes separated from universities.

In summary, this section has reviewed the significant Chinese, French, American and Soviet influences on Vietnamese higher education. The next section describes the contemporary context of Vietnamese higher education.

### **2.2.2. Contemporary Vietnamese higher education**

After independence and liberation in 1975, the Vietnamese higher education system was unified. However, during the eleven-year period between 1975 and 1986, Vietnam adopted a centralised planned economy and, as a consequence, fell into a serious socio-economic crisis. Life became extremely hard and, accordingly, education stagnated (Pham & Fry, 2002).

In 1986, a profound socio-economic policy change, usually referred to as ‘Doi moi’, was introduced. This transformed Vietnam from a centrally planned to a market economy. In response, Vietnam’s higher education system adopted significant education reform policies to accommodate the new socio-economic direction (Fry, 2009).

The contemporary higher education system in Vietnam consists of undergraduate, master, and doctoral levels (Hayden & Le, 2013). Undergraduate education is provided by a college or a university. Students may be admitted upon the completion of an upper-secondary school diploma, a vocational training (intermediate) qualification, or a college vocational training qualification. Full-time undergraduate students are usually required to have completed the national university entrance examination. They complete their undergraduate studies in at least four years. Master's degree education may be offered by a university, an academy, or in collaboration with a research institute. Students must undertake an entrance examination. Completion of education at the master's level requires one to two years of study. Doctoral level education may be provided by a university, an academy, or an approved research institute. Students admitted to a doctoral program usually have two to four years to complete their study and must undertake an entrance examination before they commence their studies (Hayden & Le, 2013).

In Vietnam, the state exercises tight control over higher education, governing it through various ministries, including the Ministry of Education and Training (MOET), the Ministry of Finance, and the Ministry of Planning and Investment. As the most important actor, MOET works with the other two ministries to manage higher education. They allocate enrolment quotas and control the maximum range of tuition fees for public higher education institutions. In addition, MOET is responsible for the curriculum framework and supervises the national entrance examinations for admission to universities/colleges. It is also in charge of the quality and accreditation of the higher education system (Do & Do, 2014).

Higher education enrolments in Vietnam have expanded substantially in the last few decades. Enrolments increased from 918,228 to 2,162,106 over ten years from 2001 to 2011. The number of higher education institutions has doubled since 2001, with 163 universities and 223 colleges established by 2011. Higher education institutions are not equal in size in terms of student enrolments. In 2011, there were 16 key public universities, which attracted one-third of all higher education enrolments. At the same time, there were some very small-scale universities and colleges with small numbers of enrolments (Hayden & Le, 2013)

Vietnam's higher education system has undergone dramatic changes during the past decade and improvements have been reported. However, problems remain. A variety of studies by both Western and Vietnamese scholars have commented on the challenges facing Vietnamese higher education. Vallely and Wilkinson (2008), from a Western perspective, discussed the challenges of Vietnamese higher education in terms of autonomy, merit-based selection, international connections and standards, accountability, and academic freedom. They described Vietnamese higher education as being in crisis (Vallely & Wilkinson, 2008). From a Vietnamese perspective, Ngo (2011) described a set of key challenges that Vietnamese higher education was facing in terms of administration, finance, pedagogy, and politics.

Administratively, the state exercises tight control on almost all aspects of higher education. However, this management is still considered inadequate and stagnant (Nguyen, 2009) and has created considerable debate, particularly with respect to the enrolment quotas allocated to each institution (Ngo, 2011). Financially, Vietnamese higher education appears to be stuck between a socialist ideology that considers a university to be a welfare institution, and a neoliberal ideology that perceives the university as a profit-making business (Ngo, 2011).

As indicated, pedagogically, Vietnamese education has observed deep-rooted Confucianism, which emphasises memorisation in teaching and learning. Moreover, the system stresses theory over practice, a heritage from the Soviet model. Memorisation and a theory-based focus has resulted in a teacher-centred pedagogy that has discouraged students' active engagement in the learning process (Ngo, 2011). Hoang (2007) observed that in Vietnam, knowledge imparted by the teacher is considered indisputable. It is still common to see a teacher talking and students writing in a Vietnamese class, with examinations mainly involving copying what the teacher has said. This has resulted in rote learning and cheating in examinations (Tran & Marginson, 2014).

As noted above, politically, Vietnamese higher education reflects the Soviet model. As Doan (2005) observed, Vietnamese higher education remains strongly ideological in that the idea of promoting socialist thoughts and socialist principles is as important as developing intellectual ability. Accordingly, 25 per cent of the Vietnamese higher

education curriculum is devoted to compulsory subjects associated with politics (Tran, Le, Nguyen, 2014; Valley & Wilkinson, 2008). This political determination was legalised in the Education Law of 1998. In addition, subjects of a political nature, such as Marxist-Leninist philosophy, Marxist political economics, scientific socialism, Ho Chi Minh thoughts, and the history of the Vietnamese communist party are considered compulsory courses and account for 23 credits hours, or 12 per cent of total study hours in the undergraduate curriculum (Doan, 2005). Ngo (2011) provided a specific example of the standard Bachelor of Business Administration curriculum issued by MOET in 2004, which included 25 compulsory courses of a political nature out of 52 credits (Ngo, 2011). This is intended to equip students with knowledge and understanding of the Vietnamese political and economic context and, importantly, to nurture them as supporters of the existing structure (George, 2010).

At the postgraduate level, Marxist-Leninist philosophy remains a compulsory subject. The underpinning ideology is that Marxist sciences are regarded as the base for all sciences, and that Marxist philosophy on scientific research helps to guide study methods (Doan, 2005). Ngo (2011) noted that the weight of subjects of an ideological and political nature is even higher for social sciences programs, as Marxism-Leninism is considered a foundation in social sciences. Consequently, research in social sciences must refer to Marxist ideologies. It is, therefore, common practice for many research theses, dissertations and papers in Vietnam to include long discussions of strategies and principles quoted from the Vietnamese Communist Party's documents (Doan, 2005).

With an over-emphasis on political subjects, this socialist curriculum has been questioned. Common criticisms included the claim that these subjects do not respond to the needs of contemporary Vietnam and that teaching methods of these subjects are outdated (Harman & Nguyen, 2010). As Tran (1999) noted, "Vietnam is probably the only country in the world that both embraces market economics and adheres to Marxism-Leninism. How can an education system, guided by two contradictory philosophies develop in a consistent manner?" (p. 2). Moreover, students claim that these political subjects are neither practical in their pursuit of knowledge, nor relevant to their academic interests and future employment. In addition, some students find what they learn about socialist principles in the classroom contradicts real life in Vietnamese society. For instance, they experience a market economy in real life while being taught

about a socialist society that maintains social equality for every individual (Doan, 2005). This over-emphasis on political subjects appears to have discouraged Vietnamese academics from pursuing postgraduate education inside Vietnam and motivated a large number of them to seek overseas study. They claim that the compulsory political subjects are irrelevant to their study and time-consuming (Doan, 2000).

Hayden and Le (2013) discussed two of the most salient challenges facing Vietnam higher education: quality and research capacity. They described the quality challenge as a major official concern. Similarly, Do and Do (2014) expressed their concerns about the quality in Vietnamese higher education. With the rapid growth in the number of higher education institutions and enrolments, along with ineffective policies, the quality of higher education has suffered. Many universities are struggling to keep up with the minimum quality criteria set for a higher education institution. For example, a large number of Vietnamese academic staff are yet to obtain a postgraduate degree, especially a doctoral degree. Furthermore, graduates lack soft skills (e.g., communication and teamwork) upon graduation and require retraining in order to apply knowledge and skills in workplace contexts (Do & Do, 2014).

The second urgent challenge facing Vietnamese higher education is the research capacity of higher education institutions. Vietnamese universities are mainly teaching institutions, with little focus on research. Research institutes are separate from universities, a legacy of the Soviet model. Another reason for low research productivity at universities is low academic salaries. Lecturers are under pressure to work outside to complement their basic academic income, and thus they have little time for, or commitment to, research (Hayden & Le, 2013).

In response to these challenges, MOET adopted a resolution in 2005 called the Higher Education Reform Agenda (HERA). According to HERA, by 2020, the higher education system should be three to four times larger than at present, with better management. HERA also proposes that higher education institutions become more flexible in course transfer, more equitable, more research-oriented, and more open to international engagement (Hayden & Lam, 2007).

In addition to HERA, the Vietnamese National Assembly passed the Law of Higher Education in 2012. This has acted as a legal framework for higher education activities, which have expanded enormously in recent years. This law was issued in response to challenges in higher education management: quality assurance and accreditation; accountability and the autonomy of tertiary institutions; management of foreign-invested educational activities; and TNE programs with international institutions (Do & Do, 2014).

### **2.3. Chapter conclusion**

This chapter has provided a brief overview of the historical, cultural and political setting of Vietnam and its contemporary higher education system. The chapter is important because it has provided an overall picture of the unique context of Vietnam, and highlighted some significant cultural, pedagogical and political influences on Vietnamese higher education, which will be discussed in succeeding chapters.

The next two chapters (Chapter 3 and Chapter 4) provide a review of the literature upon which my research has been founded. It is important to note that the scholarship in these literature review chapters helped shape my research directions in transnational education. In other words, my research and its findings built on and validated previous research discussed in these two chapters. To be specific, the next chapter (Chapter 3) investigates the concepts of internationalisation and TNE in general, followed by an introduction of Australian TNE in Asia. The chapter then examines internationalisation of higher education and TNE in Vietnam, and reviews the literature regarding the reasons for students choosing TNE.

## **Chapter 3 - Transnational education**

This chapter presents the relevant literature on TNE, divided into three main sections. The first section examines general scholarship on internationalisation of higher education and TNE, including definitions; rationales; benefits and risks; and the role of English language. The second section focuses on the literature related to the settings of my research: Australian TNE in Asian countries including Vietnam; internationalisation of higher education in Vietnam; and TNE in Vietnam. The final section highlights the reasons why students choose TNE.

### **3.1. Internationalisation of higher education and transnational education**

This section reviews the literature on internationalisation of higher education and TNE in general terms. The section defines internationalisation of higher education and TNE, and then examines the rationale to explain their implementation. This section also presents the benefits and risks associated with internationalisation of higher education and TNE. Finally, the section describes and critiques the role of English language in internationalisation and TNE.

#### **3.1.1. Internationalisation of higher education**

Internationalisation has been one of the most important influences on higher education in the last few decades, transforming it worldwide. In addition to shaping higher education, internationalisation itself has changed significantly (Knight, 2012). Accordingly, there have been various definitions of internationalisation. For instance, Maringe, Foskette, and Woodfield (2013) defined internationalisation as a process of creating value under influences of globalisation forces through which educational institutions seek to generate more global value to their various constituencies.

However, some definitions of internationalisation have created limitations in the scholarship. Ryan (2011) observed that literature around internationalisation in higher education within Western academic contexts emphasises the processes instead of its nature and purpose. The most commonly used definition of internationalisation in Western institutions is that stated by Jane Knight from University of Toronto, Canada. She defined internationalisation as “the process of integrating an international,

intercultural or global dimension into the purpose, functions or delivery of post-secondary education” (Knight, 2004, p. 11). In contrast, from non-Western perspectives, a leading educational scholar in China, defined internationalisation as:

the exchange of culture and values, mutual understanding and a respect for difference.... The internationalisation of education does not simply mean the integration of different national cultures or the suppression of one national culture by another culture. (Gu, 2001, p. 105)

It is worth noting that the notion of ‘internationalisation’ is defined differently in Western and non-Western contexts. For Western scholars, the focus is on process, while for the non-Western scholars, the focus is on the exchanges of culture and values, mutual understanding, and respect for differences. Embracing both Western and non-Western perspectives, I describe internationalisation as a process of integrating global dimensions and exchanging cultures and values. Internationalisation requires mutual understanding and respect for differences, and involves intercultural complexities, subtleties, and nuances of intercultural/multicultural communication and interaction between people from different cultures and countries.

### **3.1.2. Transnational education**

To understand TNE, it is important to understand the different terminology used to describe it. A decade ago, four main terms were frequently used to describe the mobility of programs and providers. These were: borderless education, transnational education, offshore education, and cross-border education. These terms were different in meaning but were used interchangeably in practice (Knight, 2005). Now, cross-border higher education and TNE are the two most commonly used terms. The term ‘cross-border higher education’ highlights the significance and implications of borders for educational policy and regulations. It is thus a popular term among international organisations such as the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). The term ‘transnational education’ refers to the mobility of education programs or providers between nations and differs from international education which involves the movement of students towards education programs and higher education institutions (Knight,



2016). Among the two terms, ‘transnational education’ (or TNE) is more relevant to my research, and therefore has been used throughout my thesis to ensure consistency.

Having experienced an ‘explosive’ growth in the last two decades (Sharma, 2015), TNE has become an increasingly important feature of internationalisation (Leung & Waters, 2017). A review of the relevant literature identifies various definitions of TNE. For example, it can be defined basically as

the delivery of higher education programmes in a different country from the one where the awarding/overseeing institution is based. This means that students can study towards a foreign qualification without leaving their country of residence although TNE often does involve some short-term study in the awarding country. (British Council, 2014, p. 4)

The British Council’s (2014) definition is simple to understand, but it is restricted to the delivery mode only. Francois (2016) argues that, this definition, like most existing definitions of TNE in the literature, fails to denote the philosophical and pedagogical implications of TNE. She asserted that TNE can be defined through multiple perspectives: philosophical and pedagogical. The philosophical perspective of TNE acknowledges the potential to promote transcultural understandings and, accordingly, aims to develop students’ transcultural knowledge and skills. With these they can solve problems at different levels (e.g., local, regional, national, and transnational levels) and critically study and analyse TNE programs. The pedagogical perspective of TNE stresses its academic implications, including the curriculum and instructional approaches that enhance transcultural understandings (Francois, 2016). Francois’ (2016) multi-perspective definition of TNE is helpful to educational research because it elaborates on the philosophical and pedagogical implications of TNE.

As with TNE terminology, a great diversity in TNE classification or typology also exists. For instance, Huang (2007) identified three distinguishing categories of TNE based on the import-export balance of higher education in host countries: import-oriented, import and export, and transitional (host countries refer to countries that receive TNE). He characterises these three categories of TNE using Asian countries as examples. The import-oriented category (applicable to developing countries such as

Vietnam and Indonesia) refers to TNE in which receiving countries tend to import educational programs and institutions from other countries, specifically from Western countries (receiving countries refer to countries that receive TNE). By introducing TNE programs, those receiving countries accept Western academic standards, conventions and norms. The import and export category involves host countries importing higher education services from other Western countries, as well as exporting their higher education activities to other countries. Examples in this category are Singapore and Hong Kong, which import higher education from Australia, the United Kingdom, and the United States and at the same time export their higher education to mainland China and other countries in Asia. The transitional category (applicable to China and Japan) involves host countries that predominantly import more higher education activities than they export, although are making great efforts to export their higher education activities to other countries (Huang, 2007).

Based on the legal status of TNE in receiving countries, Huang (2007) distinguished between two major types of incoming foreign higher education activities in Asia: an incorporated/domestic-oriented type and an extracurricular/overseas-lead type. In the first type, the incoming TNE activities can cater to the domestic market and contribute more to national economic development and internationalisation of higher education in the host countries. These activities are recognised as integral to the higher education system and are strictly monitored and regulated by national legislation and policy in the host country. Examples of this type are evident in China, Malaysia and Vietnam. In the second type, the incoming foreign higher education is not regarded as integral to the national higher education system of the host country. Rather, TNE services are considered extracurricular activities and completely separated from the national higher education activities. This category of TNE can provide local students with general education or preparative education that may help them later in their higher education studies at home universities or abroad. Until 2005, Japan was a typical example of this category type (Huang, 2007).

Within Huang's (2007) classification frameworks as discussed above, Vietnam TNE is described as falling within the import-oriented category, importing educational programs from other countries, mainly from Western countries, and tending to accept Western academic conventions. Furthermore, TNE in Vietnam is recognised as an

integral part of the country's higher education system and is strictly supervised and managed by the Vietnamese Government. More detailed descriptions of Vietnam TNE are provided later in this chapter.

Huang (2007) provided helpful frameworks for categorising TNE among Asian countries at the national level. However, his frameworks fail to acknowledge the complexities of different types of TNE delivery within a country like Vietnam. Responding to the diversity of TNE delivery modes, Francois (2016) recommended an alternative typology: distance models, in-country models, and blended models. Distance models refer to the mobility of transnational programs, with no physical contact between the students and the sending institutions. In-country delivery models involve the incoming institutions establishing a physical presence in the host countries to deliver TNE programs. Blended models are TNE services that include a short-term physical presence with the incoming institutions or some student mobility (Francois, 2016).

According to Francois' (2016) TNE classification framework, the two programs examined in my research belonged to the blended model, because they involved transnational lecturers flying to Vietnam for a short-term period (e.g., ten days or two weeks) to teach students in Vietnam. More detailed descriptions of the two programs are presented in the next chapter.

### **3.1.3. Why internationalisation of higher education?**

It is important to identify what drives a country, sector, or higher education institution to invest in internationalisation because this helps determine the kinds of benefits and outcomes expected from that investment (Knight, 2012).

Scholars have identified different rationales for adopting internationalisation. In general, these can be grouped into four aspects: academic, economic, political, and social/cultural (Knight & De Wit, 1999). These are summarised as follows:

- Academic rationales include: to add an international dimension to research and teaching; to extend academic horizons; to build institutions; to promote profile and status; to enhance the quality of education; and to maintain international academic standards.

- Economically, internationalisation is meant to generate revenue; to enhance economic growth and competitiveness; to extend the labour market; and to promote financial incentives (Knight & De Wit, 1999). Economic rationales have been identified as the main motive for internationalisation of higher education. In fact, Altbach and Knight (2007) described earning money as the key motivation for all internationalisation projects in the for-profit sector and for some non-profit institutions with financial problems.
- Political rationales include promoting foreign policy; peace and mutual understanding; and national and regional identity.
- Socially and culturally, internationalisation can help promote national cultural identity, to develop intercultural understanding, to enhance citizenship development, and nurture social and community development (Knight & De Wit, 1999).

The above four-dimension framework (Knight & De Wit, 1999) provides a macro picture, but fails to distinguish between rationales at different levels. Knight (2008) proposed a two-level framework: at national and institutional levels. At the national level, internationalisation can help develop human resources; build strategic alliances; generate income; promote commercial trade; build the nation and institution; and enhance social cultural development and mutual understanding. Institutionally, rationales include to: promote international branding and profile; enhance educational quality; maintain international standards; generate income; develop staff and students; build alliances; and produce knowledge.

While there has been much documented in the literature about the rationales for adopting internationalisation, little is known about how these rationales are prioritised at different universities. Different universities may prioritise different rationales. Their framework of rationale prioritisation can serve as predictors of their approaches to internationalisation, as well as predictors of the associated benefits and risks (Maringe, Foskett & Woodfield, 2013).

### **3.1.4. Why transnational education?**

Higher education institutions first became interested in TNE in the 1980s when governments cut the disbursement in higher education. Then during the early 1990s, TNE activities began to develop as a legitimate segment of higher education. TNE was expected to help with realising the internationalisation goals of higher education institutions and to generate more revenue (Burgess & Berquist, 2012).

Naidoo (2015) identified four reasons for the growth of TNE: mutual understanding, skilled migration, revenue generation, and capacity building. Firstly, mutual understanding highlights the academic, cultural, social and political aspects of education internationalisation, rather than its economic aspects. This concept focuses on building relationships between countries through networks of academic, political and business elites. Secondly, in terms of skilled migration, internationalisation is meant to attract students to the source countries (source countries are those that provide TNE) rather than take transnational programs to receiving countries. However, TNE can serve as a “feeder strategy” (Naidoo, 2015, p. 7) to stimulate student mobility to the source country. Thirdly, the revenue generation rationale promotes the market and trade aspects of TNE. It implies income is a significant rationale for enrolling international students. Finally, the capacity building rationale focuses on responding to the unmet demands of the local education system (Naidoo, 2015). This rationale is particularly significant in countries like Vietnam, where the higher education system fails to meet the demands of higher education.

Phan (2016) also identified specific and abstract reasons for the development of TNE. Phan’s specific reasons were: generating revenue, broadening participation and access to higher education, and privatising higher education. Abstract reasons were: promoting an individual’s international perspectives, empowering women, increasing competitiveness in higher education, and preparing students to be globally minded, employable and intercultural individuals (Phan, 2016). In addition, a report by the British Council (2013) concluded that the drivers for the growth of TNE include increases in developing countries’ incomes, advancements in technology and the significant role of intercultural skills in this globalised age. As exporting countries are usually developed countries, while importing countries are developing nations, it is

understandable that the reasons for adopting TNE are different between exporting and importing countries (in my research Australia is considered an exporting country, while Vietnam is an importing country). Exporting countries are often driven by generating revenue or prompting international research connections, while importing countries are often motivated by enhancing domestic capacity of the education system.

### **3.1.5. Benefits of the internationalisation of higher education and transnational education**

Internationalisation including TNE has undoubtedly brought various benefits to higher education institutions. Survey results in 2005 and 2009 conducted by the International Association of Universities (IAU) identified the most highly ranking benefits of internationalisation. These included: students and staff being more internationally oriented and aware; improved academic quality; and strengthened research capacity and knowledge production (Knight, 2012). It is encouraging to note that the top benefits of internationalisation and TNE related to academic gains, rather than economic profits.

Maringe, Foskett and Woodfield (2013) suggested broader benefits of internationalisation in terms of the value added to institutions. These were: strategic and symbolic value; knowledge creation; cultural integration value; and global market value. Firstly, investment in internationalisation demonstrates that universities are globally competitive, aware of the dynamics of higher education markets, and able and willing to collaborate with other institutions. Therefore, international university status would bring both strategic and symbolic benefits to their institution. Secondly, having international students and staff at the university provides multiple perspectives in resolving problems. In other words, international students and staff can contribute to the intellectual capital of the university. Thirdly, universities involved in internationalisation are aware that divisions such as East-West, developed-undeveloped, or rich-poor are retrogressive, so they encourage different cultures to integrate. This enhances their cultural integration value. Finally, universities engaged in internationalisation promote their global market value through the development of curriculum and skills that responds to global needs and changes, and through research and teaching collaborative partnerships with other international institutions (Maringe,

Foskett & Woodfield, 2013). It is reassuring to observe that Maringe and his colleagues did not list revenue generation as a benefit of internationalisation.

### **3.1.6. Risks of internationalisation of higher education and transnational education**

While internationalisation and TNE have offered higher education many benefits, they have also presented some unintended consequences, or risks that deserve close attention. According to the results from a survey conducted by IAU in 2005 and 2009, the top risks of internationalisation included commodification and commercialisation of education programs; a growth in number of low-quality providers, and ‘brain drain’ (Knight, 2012). Maringe, Foskett and Woodfield (2013) also pointed out four main risks associated with the internationalisation of higher education: commodification of higher education; erosion of educational quality; the dominance of Western hegemony; and ‘brain drain’. The first three risks are closely relevant to TNE and the scope of my research. Therefore, they will be reviewed carefully in the succeeding section.

The first risk relates to the commodification and commercialisation of higher education. The process of higher education internationalisation and TNE has developed alongside the Western concept of marketising education, which has been officially legitimised by the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade in Services (GATTs). Under GATTs, education is regarded as a tradable product and service that can be bought and sold between countries (Maringe, Foskett & Woodfield, 2013). As a commodity, like any other product, education has become profit-driven (Gibbs, 2011). As a result, education has become commercialised, which means the main purpose and goal of education is to generate revenue rather than to educate people. This is an important topic in internationalisation and particularly in TNE.

The second risk relates to the quality of education. Internationalisation has put pressure on the quality of education in terms of increasing enrolments, stagnating staff numbers, and financial cuts to universities (Maringe, Foskett & Woodfield, 2013). Knight (2012) highlighted serious issues related to the quality of academic programs; the integrity of providers; the recognition of credentials, such as fake degrees and accreditations; and academic credentials that are earned but not recognised, as a result of being issued by non-regulated, untrustworthy institutions.

The third risk concerns the dominance of Western hegemony in internationalisation and TNE. Western hegemony is defined as a process in which Western ideas, knowledge, culture, language, and practices are exported to other countries and are regarded as superior (Maringe, Foskett & Woodfield, 2013). Matthews and Sidhu (2005) described the international education industry in the Australian context as “largely commercial, self-interested and, by default, imperializing” (p. 62). Furthermore, Tran and Nyland (2013) noted that international students tend to be considered the ‘other’ in the present curriculum of both Australian higher education and vocational education. This is a salient issue in internationalisation and has been documented extensively in the literature (Nguyen & Tran, 2018; Ryan, 2011; Tran & Nguyen, 2015). Three decades ago, Altbach (1989) noticed the Western impact on Asian higher education:

Every academic institution in contemporary Asia has at its roots one or more of the Western academic models. Patterns of institutional governance, the ethos of the academic profession, the rhythm of academic life, ideas about science, of examination and assessment, in some cases, the language of instruction, and a myriad of other elements are Western in origin. Indeed, it can be said that the Western idea of the university is perhaps the most successful of all Western concepts in terms of overseas impact, certainly much more than the ‘Westminster’ parliamentary pattern. (p. 12)

This risk of imperialism is also obvious in TNE. Scholars have adopted different terms to discuss this topic, such as cultural imperialism (Djerasimovic, 2014; Francois, 2016), linguistic imperialism (Francois, 2015), and colonialism (Shams & Huisman, 2012; Welch, 2011). Like the notion of imperialism in internationalisation, the idea of cultural imperialism in TNE refers to a situation where one educational or cultural discourse imposes dominance over another, which is supported by those who willingly or unintentionally allow for such dominance (Djerasimovic, 2014). In addition, Francois (2015) observed that TNE, facilitated by linguistic imperialism, represented a push for cultural imperialism. Language is one of the most powerful elements through which to pass cultural values from one society to another, and TNE programs do not use the language of the host country, but rather, that of the providing country. This has resulted in linguistic imperialism and, more broadly, in cultural imperialism in receiving countries involved in TNE (Francois, 2016).



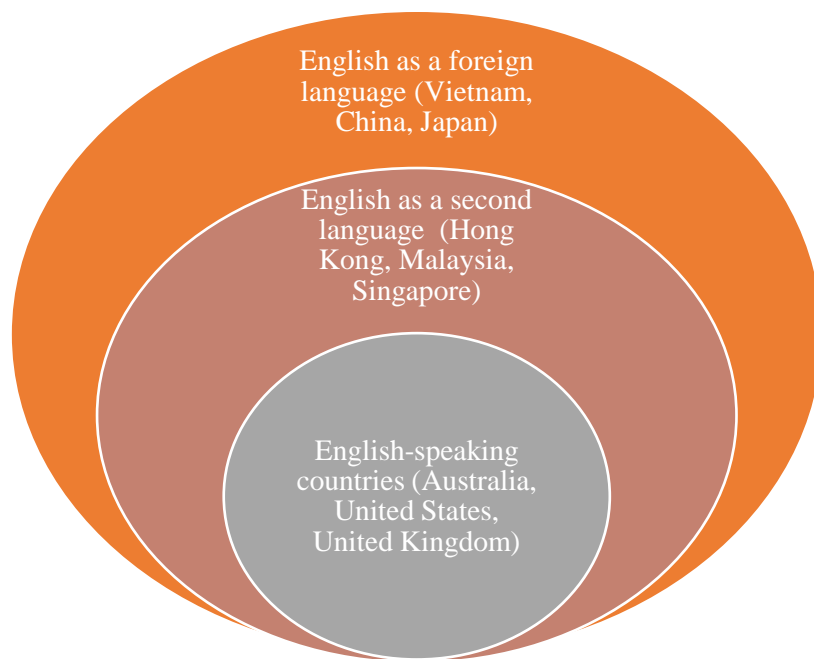
### **3.1.7. The role of English language in the internationalisation of higher education and transnational education**

With approximately 400 million native speakers and around 950 million second language speakers, English has been considered “an essential ticket to future success” (Wallace, 2016, p. 227). The economic, political, and socio-cultural aspects of internationalisation have promoted the use of English as the common language for communication among people who have different mother tongue languages. Simply put, English has become the lingua franca in internationalisation (Wilkins & Urbanovic, 2014). Further to this, Phan (2016) claimed that internationalisation has been equated with “Englishisation” (p. 16) and that English has been accepted as an international language, a global language, a world language, and a language of international/intercultural communication. Accordingly, much of the internationalisation of higher education has been shaped by this role of English (Phan, 2016). Without doubt, English has been marketed as “one of the most appealing elements and a must tick of the internationalisation of higher education”, an element that would “earn a nation competitive advantage and modernisation as well as bring about jobs, status, knowledge and access” (Chowdhury & Phan, 2014, p. 8).

For many Asian nations, including Vietnam, English has become a language of education (Phan, 2016). In recent years, with an increasing number of people learning English in higher education (OECD, 2012), the tendency in many Asian countries has been for students to choose English-medium programs in their own countries rather than studying overseas in an English-speaking country, such as the United Kingdom or Australia (Wallace, 2016). Possible reasons for this trend may include financial considerations, family commitments, resistance to Western cultural values, and the issue of ‘brain drain’ resulting from students staying abroad upon completion of their studies (Wallace, 2016.). With many Western universities aiming to expand their educational markets beyond national borders via the provision of TNE, countries in Asia have witnessed the increasing growth of English-speaking campuses in their region. One of the main selling points of TNE is that the curriculum is delivered through the medium of the English language, with all assessment being monitored by the parent institution and the degree being granted by the parent institution in the West (Wallace, 2016). So, the increasing dominance of English in Asian countries, including Vietnam, has helped

the expansion of TNE in this region. As Kell and Vogl (2010) observed, “the role of language, and more particularly the status of English as the dominant language of globalisation and education, has much to do with the shaping of the practice of transnational education” (p. 5).

On discussing the international role of English in Asia, it is important to cite Kachru’s (1986) original work, in which he proposed a three-circle framework of English: the inner, outer, and expanding circle. Fundamentally, the Inner Circle refers to English-speaking countries such as Australia, Canada, the United Kingdom, and the United States. The Outer Circle consists of countries where English is considered a second and/or official national language, such as Hong Kong, India, Malaysia, Singapore, and the Philippines. Many of these countries used to be colonised by English-speaking countries. The Expanding Circle includes countries where English is used as a foreign language, such as China, Japan, and Vietnam (refer to **Figure 3.1**).



**Figure 3.1. Kachru's three-circle framework of English**

*(Kachru, 1986)*

In recent years, however, the borders between these circles have been adjusted due to changes in the national language education policies in different countries (Phan, 2016). For example, Malaysia, since its independence, has moved back and forth between the

Outer Circle and the Expanding Circle. In this country, the status of English is vague because of the dominance of Bahasa Malaysia (Ali, Hamid, & Moni, 2011) and the competition from neighbouring countries in attracting international students (Altbach & Knight, 2007). Singapore, on the other hand, has been consistent with its English-language policy, which emphasises the important role of English in its educational and administrative system together with other official languages (Chew, 2007). With a commitment to developing the overall level of English competence among their citizens, Japan and Korea have largely invested in English-language education to compete with other Asian countries (Phan, 2013; Rivers, 2011; Sungwon, 2007). Initiatives have been proposed to turn Korea from an expanding circle country to an outer circle country, which means changing the role of English in this country from a foreign language to a second language (Phan, 2016).

Like other countries in the region, Vietnam is endeavouring to promote the use of English in society as well as throughout its national educational system. The demand for English competence has become profound in Vietnam over the last three decades since the country implemented the open-door policy. This allowed the nation to widen its economic relations with other countries. This demand has become even more pressing since Vietnam joined the World Trade Organisation in 2007 (Truong & Tran, 2014). At the moment, English is still a foreign language in Vietnam but is increasingly gaining status. The government has instigated an ambitious language initiative to introduce English at Grade 3 (aged 8) throughout the country by the year 2020 (Nguyen, 2011). To realise this policy, the government has mobilised \$US 2 billion for the National Foreign Language Project 2020, which aims at promoting English-language education at all levels of the national educational system (Phan, Vu, & Bao, 2014). In the context of TNE in Vietnam, English language is a desirable outcome for many transnational students and they are happy to “pay a premium to be taught by foreign instructors and gain the benefit of being highly functional in a second language” (Nguyen & Shillabeer, 2013, p. 638).

In summary, this section has introduced the notion of internationalisation of higher education and TNE in terms of definitions, rationales, benefits and risks, and the role of English language. The following sections focus on the literature related to the settings

of my research: Australian TNE in Asia, including Vietnam; internationalisation of higher education in Vietnam; and TNE in Vietnam.

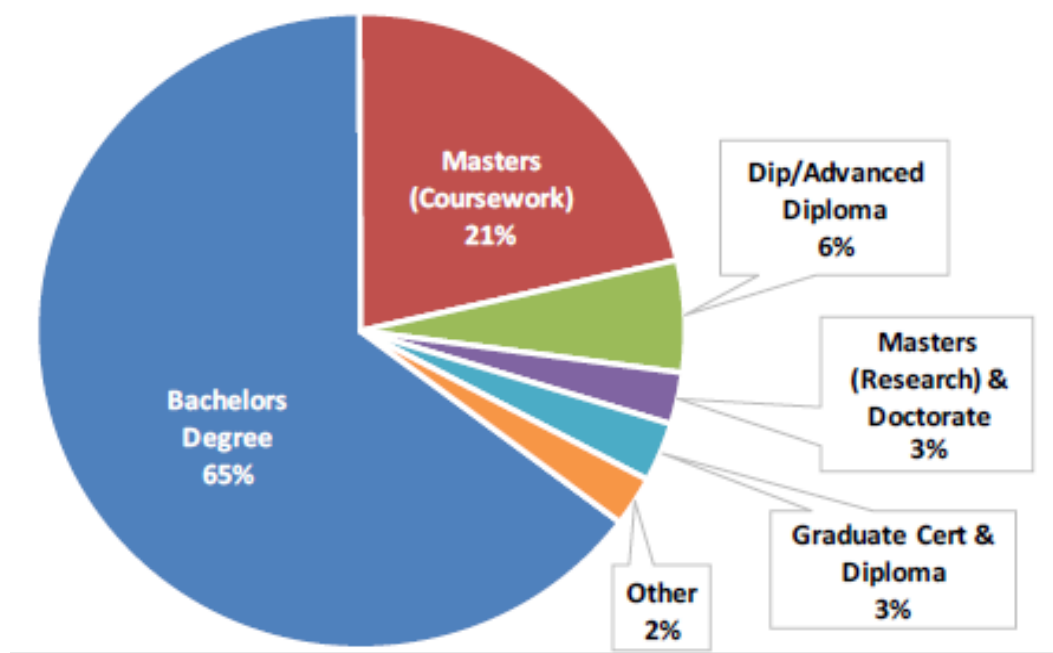
### **3.2. Australian transnational education in Asia**

The Australian Department of Education Science and Training (DEST) defined TNE as “the programs/courses that are delivered/assessed by an accredited/approved/recognised provider in a country other than Australia, where delivery includes a face-to-face component” (DEST 2005, p. 6). Specifically, an Australian transnational or an offshore program is conducted based on a formal agreement between an Australian higher education institution and an overseas university or organisation. This program can be taught partly or completely offshore. Completing such a program results in a recognised higher education qualification. The Australian university is responsible for developing the program and monitoring the academic standards (Universities Australia, 2014). It is worth mentioning that in this section the term ‘transnational education’ is used interchangeably with the term ‘offshore education’.

TNE has become an important business for Australian higher education institutions over the last few decades. For example, in 2016 there were 391,136 international students studying in Australian higher education, among which around 29% were involved in Australian TNE (Australian Government, 2018). On the global market, Australia is one of the pioneers of TNE and is a leading provider of TNE programs. All Australian universities are involved in TNE to a greater or lesser extent, to promote their international programs and to generate revenue (Marginson, 2006). It was projected that by 2025 about 44 per cent of international students at Australian universities will be studying offshore (Heffernan & Poole, 2005). Given such a significant impact on Australian education, the Australian Vice-Chancellors’ Committee (AVCC) has committed itself to the rule that “the provision of education services to international students, both onshore and offshore, by Australian universities, brings with it the ethical commitment that quality education be provided and that value be given for the investment made by international students” (AVCC, 2002, p. 1).

The most popular modes of delivery for Australian TNE are international branch campuses (also known as offshore campuses), twinning arrangements, and distance learning programs (British Council, 2015).

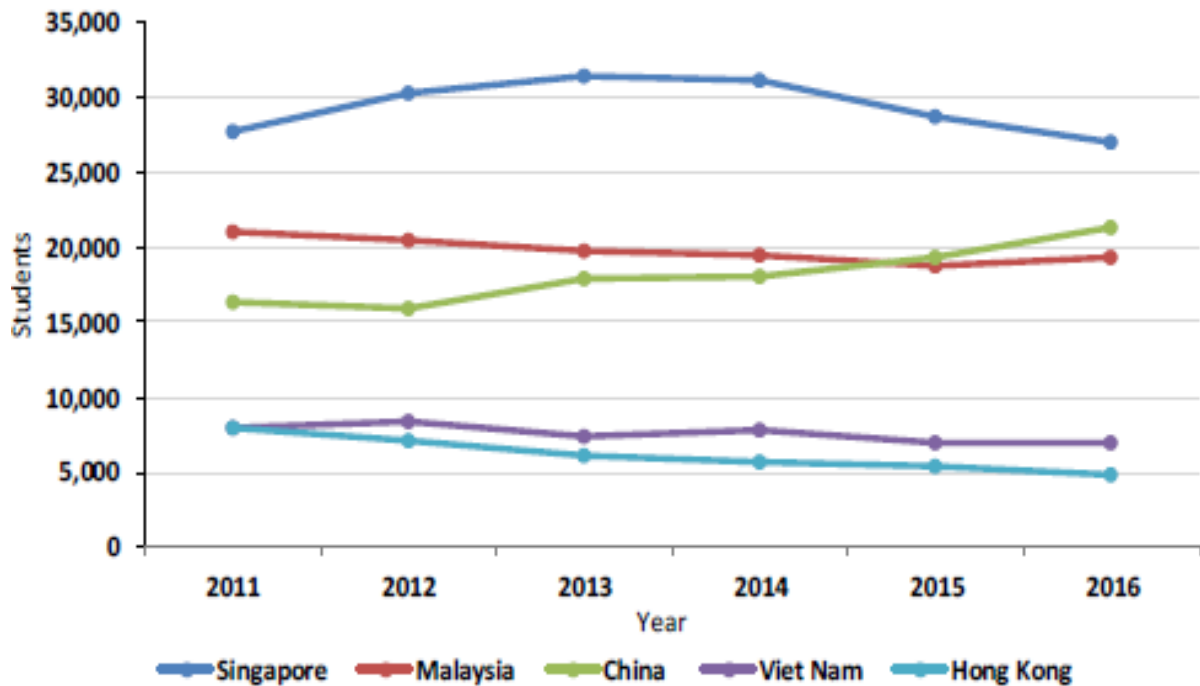
Data from the Australian Government (2018) showed that in 2016, most Australian TNE programs were at bachelor's level (65%), followed by master's level by coursework (21%). The advanced diploma/diploma level accounted for 6% while master's (by research) and doctorate levels contributed 3% (refer to **Figure 3.2**). The most popular fields of study among transnational students were: management and commerce (62%); engineering and related technologies (9%); society and culture (7%); and information technology (7%) (Australian Government, 2018).



**Figure 3.2. Transnational students by level of study in 2016**

*(Australian Government, 2018, p. 1)*

The top five countries receiving Australian TNE in 2015 were Singapore, Malaysia, China, Vietnam and Hong Kong. The following chart summarises the number of transnational students by country from 2011 to 2016 (refer to **Figure 3.3**). The countries represent the nationality of transnational students, not necessarily where they studied. For example, in an Australian university campus in Singapore, 76% of the students were from Singapore while the remaining were from other countries. Most Australian transnational students were aged between 20 and 24 years in 2016. Moreover, there were more female transnational students (52%) than male (49%). (Australian Government, 2018).



**Figure 3.3. Transnational students by country from 2011 to 2016**

*(Australian Government, 2018, p. 1)*

Among the top five countries receiving Australian TNE in the last five years, Hong Kong, Singapore and Malaysia fall into the Import and Export category, China within the Transitional category and Vietnam within the import-oriented category (Huang, 2007), as explained earlier in this chapter. Lim and Shad (2017) described Hong Kong, Singapore and Malaysia as maturing markets for TNE, while China and Vietnam were considered emerging markets.

Hoare (2012) observed that most research about TNE student experiences has been small in scope and focused on Australia's main importing countries: Singapore, Malaysia, and Hong Kong. These countries have become "hotspots" of TNE (Naidoo, 2009, p. 321). In fact, the three maturing markets of Hong Kong, Singapore and Malaysia declared their ambitions to become educational hubs in the region in the early 2000s, to attract regional students pursuing higher education services in their own countries. In this position, they are competing with Australian universities. This makes it harder for Australian TNE to thrive in these maturing markets (Lim & Shah, 2017). The emerging markets of China and Vietnam, on the other hand, are starting to grow their TNE size and potential. With a fast-growing economy, China demands increased

skilled labour but has limited capacity to provide higher education to the population. This makes China an important market for TNE services from Western countries, including Australia. In recent years, however, increasing interest in TNE from different Western countries has made TNE highly competitive in China (Lim & Shah, 2017). Furthermore, China is also planning to make itself a regional educational hub. For example, with the introduction of the 'Study in China program' in September 2010, China declared its intention to become the largest country destination for international students in Asia by 2020 (Pan, 2013). Vietnam, the only import-oriented country among the five, is becoming an attractive market for Australian TNE.

In brief, this section has examined Australian TNE in Asian countries, including Vietnam. The following sections present an overview of the internationalisation of higher education and TNE in Vietnam.

### **3.3. Internationalisation of higher education in Vietnam**

The notion of the 'internationalisation of education' is relatively new in Vietnam (Tran, Marginson, Nguyen, 2014). Generally, this refers to the promotion of academic mobility, and international cooperation and integration. Internationalisation of higher education in Vietnam has numerous drivers, such as capacity building at the individual and institutional levels; increased access to higher education; enhanced academic quality; and promoted mutual understanding through political and cultural exchange (Dang, 2011). Nguyen and his colleagues (2016) identified two main drivers for internationalisation of higher education in Vietnam. Firstly, there is a need for internationalised human resources in Vietnam. In fact, many Vietnamese students study overseas to become more employable. Secondly, internationalisation of higher education generates revenue for Vietnamese universities, and cooperation with foreign institutions brings benefits to a Vietnamese economy in transition. Some of these benefits include exposure to global research and innovation; enhanced mobility for students and staff; international accreditation and credit transfers; autonomy of institutions; academic freedom; and international projects and programs (Nguyen et al., 2016).

MOET in Vietnam has recognised the significance of the internationalisation of education in its Strategy for Education Development for Vietnam 2011-2020. In this

national policy document, MOET identifies the enhancement of international cooperation in education as one of eight important goals for the growth of Vietnamese education by 2020 (MOET, 2012; Tran et al., 2014). To be specific, there are three key targets for internationalisation in this national policy document:

- Increasing the number of staff and students studying overseas, prioritising those from major universities, research centres and important science and technology disciplines with the use of state funding. Encouraging and supporting Vietnamese citizens to pursue overseas study through self-funding.
- Promoting cooperation with foreign institutions to build Vietnamese institutions' capacity in management, teaching, research, technology transfer, and staff professional development. Increasing the number of scholarships for students to pursue study overseas.
- Encouraging international organisations, groups, individuals and the overseas Vietnamese to invest in and support education, to participate in teaching, research and technology transfer, and to contribute to education reforms. Building modern universities and research centres to attract domestic and international scientists to join teaching and research activities (MOET, 2012, pp. 14 -15).

These three targets for internationalisation in Vietnam focus mainly on building academic and research capacity for Vietnamese universities and research centres. Three aspects of internationalisation are suggested to realise these targets: staff and student mobility, the expansion of international cooperation, and the development of key research centres. Noticeably, in all these targets and aspects, MOET seems to describe its role mainly as the receiver and importer of education (Tran et al., 2014). Moreover, internationalisation is still regarded as a marginal rather than a central activity of higher education, and as a goal rather than a process. Throughout Vietnam, internationalisation activities are fragmented, inconsistent and ad hoc (Tran et al., 2014). To make internationalisation of higher education successful in Vietnam, Nguyen et al. (2016) argued that local institutions must embrace a vision that incorporates strategic and operational plans, and provide financial administrative support to facilitate that vision. Importantly, this vision and related strategies and plans must be communicated with, and understood by all departments across the institution. In addition, the main driver of



success for internationalisation of higher education in Vietnam would be the building of international cooperation, including research and teaching partnerships and joint or double degree programs (Nguyen et al., 2016).

### **3.4. Transnational education in Vietnam**

Compared to other Asian countries, Vietnam is a relatively new player in TNE, but this country is going through a period of significant transnational higher education expansion emanating from the West (Nguyen & Shillabeer, 2013). As mentioned earlier in this chapter, TNE in Vietnam is categorised as import-oriented because this country imports educational programs from other countries and accepts their academic norms, conventions and standards (Huang, 2007). Moreover, TNE in Vietnam is described as incorporated/domestic oriented because it is considered an integral part of and officially incorporated into Vietnam's higher education system. It is also monitored and regulated by Vietnam's national legislation and policy (Huang 2007).

There are two popular categories of TNE programs in Vietnam (Bui & Nguyen, 2014). The first category is branch campuses of Western higher education institutions in Vietnam, such as RMIT Vietnam. These campuses are Western-designed, with modern teaching and learning equipment. In these programs, Vietnamese students are taught Western-imported curriculum, with English as the medium of instruction, and are granted international degrees by the Western providers upon graduation. These degrees are similar to those granted in the parent institution. The second category is joint training programs. Vietnamese students enrolled in these joint training programs initially study in Vietnam with an option transfer to Western institutions for the remaining semesters or continue their study in Vietnam. One advantage of these joint training programs over the branch campuses is the more affordable tuition fees and study expenses (Bui & Nguyen, 2014). Among these two popular categories of TNE in Vietnam, my research focuses on the second. Consequently, the two programs in this study were selected from the joint training programs that were active during the data collection phase of my research.

According to Dr. Quang Hung Pham, the Director General of Vietnam International Education Cooperation Department (VIED), by June 2016 approximately 88 Vietnamese institutions were collaborating with 255 foreign providers from 33 foreign

countries to deliver joint training programs in Vietnam. It is estimated that there are around 467 joint training programs in Vietnam, with 255 undergraduate programs, 200 master's programs, and 12 doctoral programs. However, Dr Pham emphasised that only half of these were currently running or active, as of June 2016. French-speaking and English-speaking countries such as France, the United States, the United Kingdom, and Australia are dominant players in the joint training programs in Vietnam (Nguyen & Tran, 2018).

With a focus on joint training programs with Australia at the master's level, my research identified seven such programs in Vietnam that were active during the data collection phase of my research (November 2015 to August 2016). The two predominant disciplines of these programs at that time were education and business (VIED, 2015). Therefore, I selected one program from the education discipline and the other from the business discipline for research.

#### **3.4.1. Benefits and challenges.**

Transnational higher education in Vietnam has offered many benefits, including increased student accessibility to higher education, increased student and academic mobility, and greater variation and uniqueness of programs (Nguyen & Shillabeer, 2013). At the same time, there are issues to be addressed. Nguyen, Nhan and Vu (2013) identified two main issues. These concerned the decision-making process and quality assurance. The practice of power centralisation allows the decision-making process and authority in transnational higher education in Vietnam to stay with governmental bodies like the MOET. However, these high-level organisations have failed to properly assume full responsibility for transnational higher education programs in Vietnam. The second issue concerned the quality of transnational programs, which is reported to be lower than the quality of programs in the home branch of the institution. In addition, Vietnam still lacks an official and independent quality assurance framework to assess and evaluate these transnational programs (Nguyen, Nhan & Vu 2013). Furthermore, Phan (2016) observed that some TNE in Vietnam has been described in social media articles as shameful, chaotic and dishonest, and as an ornament for those who seek promotion and power. In particular, Phan (2016) argued that TNE in Vietnam has been associated with issues such as low teaching and learning quality, low quality students, non-

accreditation, profit orientation, and the perception that the admission into and exit from these institutions, particularly in terms of English language requirements and academic performance, lack rigour. With mediocre quality and a profit orientation, TNE in Vietnam has been depicted as targeting the rich-in-money but poor-achieving students. In addition, foreign institutions involved in TNE in Vietnam have been portrayed by social media as unaccredited and unrecognised but marketed to Vietnamese students and parents as well-known and reputable universities and colleges (Phan, 2016). These issues have made TNE in Vietnam problematic, and it is therefore necessary that more research, such as this study, be conducted in this area to aid quality improvement and the sustainability of these programs.

#### **3.4.2. The regulatory environment of the transnational education in Vietnam**

In 2012, the Vietnamese National Assembly issued the Law on Higher Education, which has provided regulatory guidelines to support transnational higher education activities. Specifically, Article 45 (Vietnamese National Assembly, 2012) provided basic regulations on joint training activities in Vietnam. Some of the most important regulations related to defining a joint training program; its curriculum and delivery; criteria; approval; and information disclosure. This is summarised as follows:

- Specifically, a joint training activity is defined as one that involves the development and implementation of a joint training program between a Vietnamese higher education institution and an overseas higher education institution in order to award degrees or certificates without establishing new legal entities.
- The curriculum of a joint training program is provided by the foreign institution or formulated by both parties. A joint training program is delivered completely in Vietnam or partially in Vietnam and partially overseas.
- The Vietnamese institution involved in a joint training activity must meet the criteria concerning teaching staff; facilities and equipment; curriculum and teaching content; legal status; quality assessment certification issued by foreign quality assessment agencies, or by the MOET of Vietnam; and the training license in the associated areas.

- The MOET shall approve the joint training programs at undergraduate (college and university) and postgraduate levels (master and doctoral).
- The Vietnamese institutions must publicly disclose information about the joint training program(s) they are involved in on their websites and media.

(Vietnamese National Assembly, 2012).

Another important decree regarding joint training activities issued in 2012 was the Decree No.73/2012/ND-CP on Foreign Cooperation and Investment in Education, signed by the Prime Minister of Vietnam at that time, Dr Nguyen Tan Dung. This decree has elaborated on some aspects of the Higher Education Law 2012 in terms of joint training activities. For example, Article 10 in the decree expanded on the requirements of Vietnamese and foreign teaching staff involved in joint training programs. Furthermore, Article 11 provided more detailed information about the conditions of facilities and equipment. Article 12 added requirements about the medium of instruction in these joint programs. Some other relevant regulations on joint training programs in Vietnam include circular No.34/2014/TT-BGDDT issued on 15<sup>th</sup> October 2014, guiding the implementation of decree No.73/2012/ND-CP, and the joint circular No.29/2014/TTLT-BGDDT-BTC-BLDTBXH issued on 26<sup>th</sup> August 2014, providing financial guidelines.

In summary, the sections above have reviewed the literature related to the settings of my research: Australian TNE in Asia, including Vietnam; internationalisation of higher education in Vietnam; and TNE in Vietnam. The following section will examine the existing literature on reasons for students choosing TNE.

### **3.5. Students choosing transnational education**

This section examines the reasons for students choosing TNE. It first introduces the Push-Pull model regarding international student destination choice, and then reviews reasons why students, particularly in Asian countries, choose TNE.

#### **3.5.1. A push-pull model**

One of the earliest research studies about international student destination choice was conducted by McMahon (1992). She employed two models to investigate the factors

that influenced the outgoing flow of students from 18 third world countries and the incoming flow of students from these 18 countries to the United States during the 1960s and early 1970s. The first model involved 'push' or outbound factors that promoted international study, while the second model involved 'pull' or inbound factors that attracted students to come to a country for their education (McMahon, 1992). A decade later, Mazzarol and Soutar (2002) adopted the push-pull model to explore the likely factors that influenced international student choice. Push factors refer to the reasons of a country that encourage students to undertake international education. Pull factors include the reasons that make a country attractive to international students (Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002). Conducted on behalf of Australian Education International, Mazzarol and Soutar (2002) examined a total of 2,485 students from four countries (Indonesia, Taiwan, India and China) from 1996 to 2000 to determine their motivations for going to Australia to study. Their findings emphasised the importance of the push-pull model in the research of international student destination choice (Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002). Accordingly, their research has been one of the most highly cited studies in this field (Chen, 2007; Cubillo, Sánchez, & Cervino, 2006; Li & Bray, 2007; Wilkins, Balakrishnan, & Huisman, 2011).

While the basic Push-Pull model is a significant explanatory mechanism in international student choice research, it does have some limitations (Li & Bray, 2007). Both push and pull factors are external forces that influence student choice, but this influence depends largely on the personal characteristics of the students, such as their socio-economic status, academic ability, gender, age, motivations, and aspirations. In other words, individual students may respond to different push and pull factors in different ways (Li & Bray, 2007). Building upon the basic push-pull model, various scholars have developed more elaborate models of international student choice. For example, Cubillo et al. (2006) investigated personal reasons, country and city image, institution image, and program evaluation. Chen (2007) added student characteristics (socio-economic background, personal preferences and academic ability) and influences from others (family, teachers and employers) to the traditional push-pull model. Similarly, Li and Bray (2007) refined and extended the one-way push-pull model into a two-way push-pull model by adding reverse push-pull factors, including pull factors at home and push factors outwards. They also examined internal factors, such as family background,

academic characteristics, perceptions and motivations, in addition to the external factors of the two-way push-pull model (Li & Bray, 2007).

Although the push-pull model was originally adopted in international student destination choice research, it has been widely applied in TNE (Ahmad & Buchanan, 2016; Bui & Nguyen, 2014; Fang & Wang, 2014; Francois, 2016; Levatino, 2017; Mok & Han, 2016). For example, Francois (2016) borrowed the push-pull model to explain the current expansion of TNE activities in higher education. She argued that the emergence of TNE was facilitated not only by globalisation in higher education, but also by a push-pull interaction in both developed and developing countries. Simply put, there are transnational push forces in providing countries and transnational pull forces in receiving countries, both of which concurrently promote the growth of TNE.

Transnational push factors in developed countries include funding cuts; privatisation; demographic shifts; cultural imperialism; transnational capitalist elites; transcultural understanding; and internationalisation. Transnational pull factors in developing countries include demographic shifts; lack of access to higher education; design for Western-based education; and the quest for global opportunities (Francois, 2015, 2016).

In short, the push-pull model by Mazzarol and Soutal (2002) provides a helpful framework for exploring the students' reasons for enrolling in TNE. Therefore, this model was used in my research to examine the reasons why Vietnamese students select Australian transnational programs in Vietnam rather than study in Australia, or enrol in a Vietnamese institution that provides the same courses.

### **3.5.2. Students choosing transnational education**

This section reviews previous research on students' reasons for enrolling in transnational programs, particularly in Asian countries such as Vietnam, China, Singapore, and Malaysia.

With a focus on TNE in Vietnam, Bui and Nguyen (2014) explored the factors students rated as important in their choice of a TNE program in Vietnam. They first conducted a survey with 333 Vietnamese undergraduate students enrolling in four transnational programs of different disciplines. They then followed up with individual interviews with ten randomly selected students who completed the survey. Their findings showed

that these students chose TNE for two main pull reasons: obtaining an international qualification and improving English language competence (Bui & Nguyen, 2014). Similarly, Ly, Vickers, and Fernandez (2015) conducted an exploratory, descriptive qualitative study with graduate students from Master of Business Administration (MBA) TNE programs in Vietnam. They enquired into the quality of MBA transnational programs in Vietnam and the extent to which these programs met with TNE graduate students' needs and expectations. They found that students' main reasons for choosing MBA transnational programs included: opportunities to study overseas; enhancing research skills; developing communications skills; improving English skills, specifically writing and speaking skills; and promoting problem-solving and decision-making capabilities (Ly et al., 2015).

With a focus on TNE in China and Singapore, Wallace and Dunn (2008) investigated 26 undergraduate students from an Australian transnational program in China and another 37 undergraduate students from an Australian transnational program in Singapore, to explore their transnational learning experience. The main reasons for choosing TNE included: obtaining an international qualification; enjoying credit transfer; their home country not offering that type of degree; and failing to get admission into a similar degree in their home country (Wallace & Dunn, 2008). Fang and Wang (2014) conducted a more elaborate study on Chinese students' choice of TNE in comparison with local and overseas higher education. They initially conducted individual interviews with 30 undergraduate students from three different TNE programs and then distributed 962 questionnaires (receiving 831) (Fang & Wang, 2014). Applying the push-pull model in analysing their findings, they indicated that the major pull factors of TNE included: foreign culture and foreign teaching methods; advanced foreign knowledge and concepts; improved foreign language ability and cross-culture communication; degrees of Chinese partner universities; opportunities to study abroad; location of programs; and degrees of foreign partner universities. On the other hand, the major push factors of local higher education included lack of access to local higher education institutions; lack of access to major fields; low language training at local higher education institutions; low internationalisation levels; and family influence. The major push factors away from overseas higher education included high costs and strict requirements in terms of English language capacity. Additionally, Fang and Wang

(2014) found that these Chinese students regarded TNE as a “second choice” (p. 491) compared with local higher education and overseas higher education. The disadvantages of TNE compared to overseas higher education concerned the poor quality of teachers; the low ranking of foreign partner universities; the narrow range of major choices; limited progress of English language capacity and limited understanding of foreign culture due to the absence of an authentic environment; limited training on soft skills and adaptation ability; little help for immigration; and low social recognition (Fang & Wang, 2014). Recently, Mok and Han (2016) carried out case studies using a questionnaire to explore Chinese students’ motivations in choosing TNE. They found that the main reasons for student choice with TNE included: the quality of education; the reputation of the foreign provider and expertise of staff; the qualifications recognised by future employers; the quality of courses; the English environment; and opportunities to study abroad.

With a focus on TNE in Malaysia, Chapman and Pyvis (2013) conducted a study with both undergraduate and postgraduate TNE students of an Australian university’s offshore campus in Malaysia. Their study examined what students were seeking from Australian TNE and how their choices influenced their educational experiences. They found that the first and foremost reason for student choice with TNE was to obtain an international education. Noticeably, Chapman and Pyvis (2013) indicated that the Malaysian and non-Malaysian students participating in the study had different motivations in acquiring international education from TNE. Specifically, the Malaysian students sought an international qualification to qualify for employment. They considered an international education “a passport to employment, usually with multinational corporations operating in Malaysia” and “providing a competitive edge in the job market” (Chapman & Pyvis, 2013, p. 38). This employment-driven motivation is referred to as ‘positional investments’ (Chapman & Pyvis, 2013). By contrast, the non-Malaysian group looked for an international education in order to develop their perspectives, dispositions and attitudes from exposure to and immersion in international education. In other words, they regarded international education as a means to transform themselves. Therefore, they made ‘self-transformative investments’. From these findings, they proposed another framework for examining TNE student choice: the ‘positional/self-transformative investments’ framework (Pyvis & Chapman, 2007). This



framework provides a helpful platform to investigate TNE graduate students' life and work outcomes (Robertson, Hoare, & Harwood, 2011).

More recently, Ahmad and Buchanan (2016) investigated determinants of student destination decisions for TNE in one Asian education hub, Malaysia. Adopting a qualitative exploratory approach, they interviewed 19 undergraduate and five postgraduate students from three international branch campuses based in Kuala Lumpur. The three providing institutions included one Australian university, one from the United Kingdom and one from India. The students came from a wide range of countries such as Iran, Indonesian, Singapore, China, India, Botswana, Yemen, Iraq, Vietnam, Oman, Mauritius, Cambodia and Nigeria. Their findings showed that the reasons for enrolment in TNE in Malaysia among students from the Gulf region differed from those of Asian students. The former made their decision based on four important factors including: low tuition fees and reasonable living costs; the reputation of Malaysia as a country with minimal cultural differences; political stability and safety with a friendly learning environment and English being widely spoken; and diverse multicultural experience. The latter decided to study in Malaysia because it was close to home; there were similarities in culture, language, religion and climate; living costs and tuition fees were lower when compared to those of the West; and there were easy visa and immigration processes (Ahmad & Buchanan, 2016).

In 2014, the British Council conducted a large-scale study to provide an understanding of the impacts of TNE on host countries and to promote awareness of these implications from the host country perspective. This study involved ten host countries of TNE: Botswana, Egypt, Mauritius, Mexico, Hong Kong, Turkey, Jordan, UAE, Malaysia, and Vietnam. Their report showed that the TNE students' main reasons for choosing TNE included improving professional skills for career development; the specific qualifications on offer; improving intercultural competence; the prestige of the TNE institution/overseas education system; and improving their English language skills (British Council, 2014).

Based on the above discussion, there seems to be significant diversity in TNE enrolment trends among different groups of students in some Asian countries (e.g., undergraduate students and postgraduate students; students from English speaking countries and

students from non-English speaking countries). For undergraduate students from non-English speaking countries, it appears that the most dominant reasons for enrolling in TNE are to obtain an international education/qualification and improve English language competency. Postgraduate students seem to be driven more by career-related motivations, such as professional and soft skills for career development.

This section has introduced the push-pull model as a framework for understanding TNE enrolment. It has also presented the common reasons why students, particularly in Asia, choose TNE.

### **3.6. Chapter conclusion**

This chapter has reviewed the relevant literature in the field of TNE to provide a detailed background for my research. In particular, it has examined the broad scholarship on the internationalisation of higher education and TNE (i.e., definitions, rationales, benefits and risks, and the role of English language); Australian TNE in Asia, including Vietnam; and the internationalisation of higher education and TNE in Vietnam. This chapter has also investigated the reasons why students choose to enrol in TNE, using the push-pull model.

The next chapter (Chapter 4) explores the influences of culture on TNE. It examines the intercultural complexities of East-West learning and teaching experience and reviews the role of intercultural cultural awareness in transnational teaching.

## **Chapter 4 - Culture and transnational education**

This chapter examines the impact of culture (simply defined as ideas, values, beliefs, customs, and social behaviours of certain people or groups) on TNE. It has two main sections. The first section explores the intercultural complexities in East-West learning and teaching experience: culture and international intercultural relationships; postcolonial perspectives; cultural dimensions; cultural influences on learning and teaching; the influences of Confucian and Western values on learning and teaching; comparing Confucian and Western academic values; and bridging the East-West dichotomy. The second section explores the role of intercultural awareness in transnational teaching: intercultural competence; preparing lecturers for teaching transnationally; the characteristics desired of transnational lecturers; and intercultural dialogue for transnational teaching.

### **4.1. Intercultural complexities in East-West learning and teaching experience**

As discussed earlier in Chapter 1, the term ‘intercultural complexities’ in my research refers to the complications, subtleties, and nuances of intercultural/multicultural communication and interaction between transnational students and their transnational lecturers. Learning and teaching in a transnational context usually involves students and lecturers working with people of different nationalities and from different cultural backgrounds. Within these intercultural interactions, culture can have significant influences on the transnational learning and teaching experience. It is, therefore, important to explore the notion of culture and its relevant aspects (e.g., international intercultural relationships; and cultural dimensions and their influences on learning and teaching) in order to understand the intercultural complexities in transnational learning and teaching experience.

This section examines the notion of culture and international intercultural relationships. It then presents certain cultural dimensions that are relevant to a TNE context and their influences on learning and teaching. This section also reviews the Confucian and Western values and their influences on learning and teaching.

#### **4.1.1. Culture and international intercultural relationships**

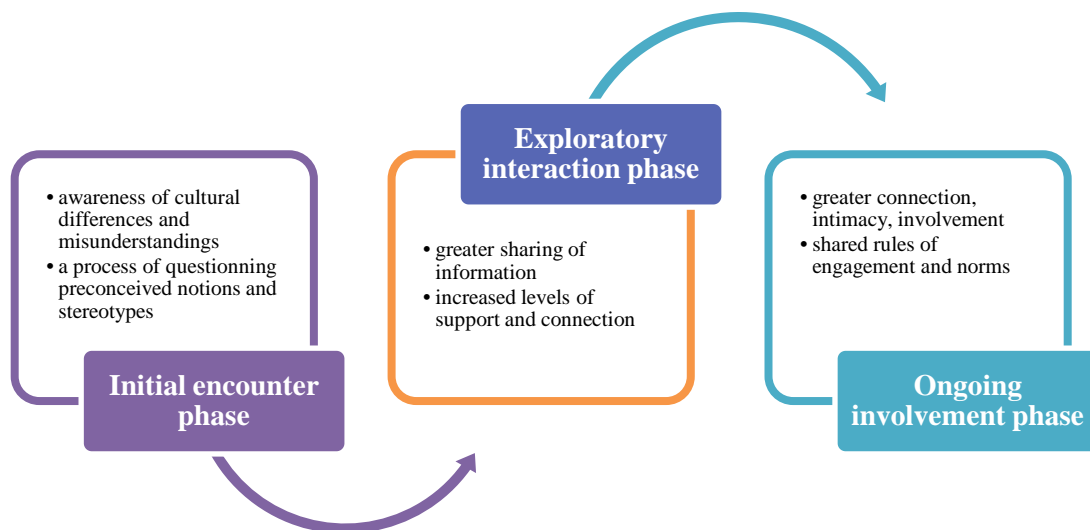
In order to support my research, I examined a number of definitions of culture in the literature. For example, Hofstede and Bond (1988) defined culture as “the collective programming of the mind that distinguishes the members of one category of people from those of another” (p. 6). Culture serves as a conceptual bridge between macro and micro, and between institutions and people (Fang, Grant, Xu, Stronge, & Ward, 2013). Essentially, culture refers to people’s ways of thinking, their ways of acting, and the material objects that shape their minds and form their behaviours (Fang, Xu, Grant, Stronge, & Ward, 2016). In my research, I adopted Sorrells’ (2016) definition of culture as a resource in the context of globalisation as I found it most useful in my research context.

Sorrells (2016) provided more sophisticated definitions of culture than earlier scholars, involving anthropologic, cultural studies, and globalisation definitions. From an anthropological perspective, culture is conceptualised as “a system of shared meanings” (p. 5) through symbols that are passed from generation to generation. This system enables people to communicate, find meaning in, and understand lives. In cultural studies, culture is viewed as “a site of contestation” (p. 7) in which meanings are constantly negotiated. In the context of globalisation, culture is regarded as a resource to develop the economy and to address social problems. Sorrells (2016) emphasised the importance of these three definitions of culture (e.g., culture as shared meanings, as contested meaning, and as a resource) in studying culture in the context of globalisation. Her multi-perspective definitions of culture, especially the definition of culture as a resource in the context of globalisation, have provided my research with more nuanced approaches to exploring the intercultural complexities in transnational learning and teaching experience.

Intercultural relationships, in broad terms, can refer to relationships between people from different races, ethnicities, linguistic backgrounds, nationalities, religions, classes, and sexual orientations. Accordingly, there are different types of intercultural relationships, including: interracial intercultural; interethnic intercultural; international intercultural; and interreligious intercultural (Sorrells, 2016). Among them, the notion of international intercultural relationships, which refers to relationships that develop

among people across national cultures and borders, is most relevant to TNE and my research. Therefore, the term ‘intercultural relationships’ used in this section refers to international intercultural relationships.

Sorrells (2016) proposed that intercultural relationships develop in three phases: an initial encounter phase; an exploratory interaction phase; and an ongoing involvement phase. In the initial encounter phase, people challenge assumptions and stereotypes, and acknowledge and learn from each other’s differences. In the exploratory interaction phase, people share more information, and increase support and connection. In the ongoing involvement phase, people engage and build greater connections and involvement (refer to **Figure 4.1**). Sorrells’ (2016) three-phase process of intercultural relationship development was helpful to my research because it provided a framework to examine the relationships between the students and lecturers being researched, and more broadly, between the transnational lecturers and the local Vietnamese culture.



**Figure 4.1. Intercultural relationship development process**  
(Sorrells, 2016)

#### 4.1.2. Postcolonial perspectives

Edward Said’s work on Orientalism (1978) is considered pioneering in the development of postcolonial theory. According to Said (1978), Orientalism is “a style of thought

based upon an ontological and epistemological distinction made between the Orient and (most of the time) the Occident” (p. 2). He described the relationship between the Occident and Orient as “a relationship of power, of domination” (Said, 1978, p. 5), and as a relationship between the strong and the weak. Rizvi and Lingard (2006) examined Said’s work on Orientalism, saying that for him the Orient is seen as “separate, eccentric, backward, silently different, sensual, and passive” (p. 296), and that the Orientals are “the conquerable, the inferior, or those in need of Western guidance and patronage” (p. 296) whose values are judged and compared to those of the West.

Undoubtedly, Said’s work has been influential in cross-cultural studies and inspired further research in postcolonialism. His accounts of Orientalism, however, appear to promote the dualism of West/East, and fail to bridge the East-West dichotomy. His concept of dualism set limits on our thinking about internationalisation (Cousin, 2011). In fact, his ideas have met with strong criticism. For example, Bhabha (1994) argued that colonial discourses are more ambivalent and less resolute. Bhabha conceptualised identity and difference as overlapping and migratory, and emphasised the ‘in-between’ and ‘liminal negotiation’ of cultural differences. In Bhabha’s terms, cultural identities are not pre-given nor scripted; rather, they involve the continuing encounters and exchanges of cultural performances that create mutual recognition and appreciation of cultural difference (Rizvi, Lingard, & Lavia, 2006). Similarly, Midgley (1981) refused to see cultures as “sealed boxes”, but rather “a fertile jungle of different influences” (p. 179). In the context of TNE, students (especially those from previously colonised countries) should not be treated as “cultural dupes, incapable of interpreting, accommodating and resisting dominant discourses” (Rizvi et al., 2006, p. 256). The relationships between the students and lecturers in a transnational context are complicated and multi-dimensional (Wang, 2016), and involve processes of negotiating, recognising and appreciating cultural differences.

#### **4.1.3. Cultural dimensions**

There has been outstanding work on cultural dimensions. One example is the cultural framework proposed by Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner (2011). They claimed that culture consisted of seven cultural dimensions: universalism versus particularism; individualism versus communitarianism; neutral versus emotional; specific versus

diffuse; achievement versus ascription; attitudes to time; and attitudes to the environment. However, among those authors who work on cross-cultural study, Dutch social psychologist, Hofstede, is recognised among the top 100 most cited authors in the Social Science Citation Index for developing a framework of cultural dimensions. This framework is well known as Hofstede's cultural dimensions (Fang et al., 2016). Between 1968 and 1972, Hofstede conducted a large survey study with more than 116,000 employees, from 50 countries, in one large multi-national corporation, IBM, in order to investigate how people from different countries perceive and interpret the world. He found four primary cultural dimensions: power distance; individualism versus collectivism; masculinity versus femininity; and uncertainty avoidance (Hofstede, 1983). In 1991, Bond and his colleagues from the Asia-Pacific region carried out a study comparing the values of female and male psychology students from each of the ten national or ethnic groups in their regions (Bond, 1992). Their data led Hofstede to add a fifth dimension to his cultural framework: long-term orientation versus short-term orientation. In 2010, Hofstede added a sixth dimension: indulgence versus restraint.

Despite its popularity, Hofstede's cultural framework has been criticised (Baskerville, 2003; Dennehy, 2015; Eldridge & Cranston, 2009; Gilmartin, 2013). The potential problems of applying Hofstede's cultural dimensions include the risk of labelling societies to fit into fixed 'pigeon-holes'. Moreover, while the cultural framework enables comparison of people's behaviours from various national cultures, it does not allow for the possible behavioural adaptations of people in cross-cultural situations. In fact, people may behave differently among foreigners compared to when they are among people of their own nationality (Eldridge & Cranston, 2009). For example, Vietnamese people may interact differently with foreign friends in order to accommodate their perceived expectations of those friends. Additionally, the concept of 'national culture' in Hofstede's framework has been challenged (Dennehy, 2015). Some countries are in fact combinations of cultures/nations. Many countries, such as Australia, have become more multicultural. This may suggest that Hofstede's work is outdated (Gilmartin, 2013). In a similar vein, his notion of a hegemonic national culture has been questioned. Social cultures can vary substantially due to shared socio-economic backgrounds, age and ethnicity (Dennehy, 2015). Furthermore, there have been some epistemological doubts about the ability to measure cultures (Baskerville,

2003) and the interpretation of the results (McSweeney, 2002). Sorrells (2016) pointed out that using frameworks of cultural dimensions based on national culture may result in overgeneralisation and stereotyping. In a learning and teaching context, Hofstede's cultural dimensions have been criticised as contributing to the stereotyped views of students from Confucian heritage cultures by providing a framework to map the general attributes of cultures and societies (Ryan & Slethaug, 2010).

Despite this criticism, Hofstede's framework of cultural dimensions is comprehensive and useful in intercultural studies because it helps to generate understanding of the influences of national culture on interpersonal communication (Sorrells, 2016).

Therefore, Hofstede's framework has been utilised in my research as a broad map to explore intercultural complexities between a Confucian heritage culture like Vietnam and a Western culture like Australia. Among the six cultural dimensions of Hofstede's framework, only three cultural dimensions (i.e., power distance; individualism/collectivism; and uncertainty avoidance) are relevant to the educational context of my research. Therefore, only these three cultural dimensions and their influences on learning and teaching are reviewed in detail in the following section.

#### **4.1.4. Cultural influences on learning and teaching**

The first cultural dimension relates to power distance, which is "the extent to which the less powerful members of institutions and organisations within a country expect and accept that power is distributed unequally" (Hofstede & Hofstede, 2005, p. 46). This concept of power distance has significant implications for learning and teaching beliefs. Students from low power distance cultures are expected to self-direct their learning through the teacher's facilitation; students from high power distance cultures are more likely to accept knowledge from the teacher and less likely to challenge or disagree with the teacher. These students see their teacher as a truth holder (Francois, 2015). Differences in learning and teaching beliefs in a low power distance culture and a high power distance culture are summarised in the following table (refer to **Table 4.1**).



**Table 4.1. Differences in learning and teaching between low power and high-power distance**

<b>Low power distance</b>	<b>High power distance</b>
Students treat teachers as equal.	Students give teachers respect even outside of class.
Teachers expect initiative from students in class.	Teachers should take all the initiative in class.
Teachers are experts who transfer impersonal truths.	Teachers are gurus who transfer personal wisdom.
Quality of learning depends on two-way communication and the excellence of students.	Quality of learning depends on the excellence of teachers.

*(Hofstede & Hofstede, 2005, p. 57)*

The second cultural dimension concerns individualism and collectivism. Individualism relates to societies that accept loose ties between individuals. Everyone is expected to look after himself/herself and his/her immediate family. Conversely, collectivism relates to societies in which people are part of big, strong, cohesive groups or communities, which can protect them (Hofstede & Hofstede, 2005). In a collectivist society like Vietnam, teaching and learning focus on group integration; in an individualist society like Australia, students are encouraged to work independently (François, 2015). Moreover, students from collectivist cultures only speak up in class when authorised by the group; students from individualist cultures are expected to speak up individually in class. The whole purpose of education in a collectivist society is learning how to *do*, in an individualist society it is learning how to *learn* (Hofstede & Hofstede, 2005).

The third cultural dimension is uncertainty avoidance. Uncertainty avoidance refers to the degree to which an individual feels threatened by ambiguous or unknown situations (Hofstede & Hofstede, 2005). In strong uncertainty avoidance cultures, students prefer clear structures, guidance and rules; in weak uncertainty avoidance cultures, students enjoy being flexible, creative, innovative and are willing to think ‘outside of the box’ (François, 2015). In other words, students from high uncertainty avoidance societies are comfortable learning in a structured environment and concerned with the right answers. Teachers are, accordingly, expected to have all the answers. In contrast, students from low uncertainty avoidance societies are comfortable with a less structured environment

and concerned about good discussions and interaction. It is acceptable for teachers to say, 'I do not know' (Hofstede & Hofstede, 2005).

A review of the three cultural dimensions above (i.e., power distance; individualism/collectivism; and uncertainty avoidance) provided a broad map for my research, enabling an exploration of intercultural complexities between a Confucian heritage culture like Vietnam and a Western culture like Australia. The following sections examine Confucian and Western values in detail and their influences on learning and teaching.

#### **4.1.5. Confucian values and their influences on learning and teaching**

Confucius, a famous wise Chinese philosopher, was a high civil servant in China around 500 BC. His teachings focused on practical moral lessons, referred to as Confucianism. Confucianism consists of principles in life based on the lessons he observed from Chinese history (Hofstede & Bond, 1988). Confucianism can be broadly described as a worldview, a political and scholarly ideology based on his teachings (Goldin, 2011). Hofstede and Bond (1988) highlighted the four main principles in Confucianism. Firstly, the stability of a society is based on unequal relationships between people, including ruler/subject, father/son, older brother/younger brother, husband/wife, and older friend/younger friend. These relationships are built on mutual and complementary obligations in which the junior respects and obeys the senior while the senior protects and takes care of the junior. Secondly, the family is the prototype of all social organisations. In other words, a person is not just an individual; rather, he/she is a member of a family. Accordingly, people are expected to restrain their individuality to maintain the harmony in the family. Harmony is achieved by maintaining an individual's face, which represents one's dignity, self-respect and prestige. Therefore, social relations should be managed in a way that keeps everyone's face (Hofstede & Bond, 1988). Thus, Confucianism formulates an individual not just as a detached entity, but rather as part of his/her social relationships. One needs to fulfil his/her roles in these relationships to maintain harmony and the stability of a society (Yao, 2000). Thirdly, virtuous behaviour consists of treating others as one would like to be treated oneself: a basic human benevolence. Finally, virtue with regard to one's tasks in life consists of trying to acquire skills and education, working hard, not spending more than necessary,

being patient, and persevering. Outstanding consumption and losing one's temper are discouraged. Everything should be in moderation (Hofstede & Bond, 1988).

Confucianism influences the education beliefs of students from Confucian countries such as Vietnam, China, Korea, and Japan in the three following ways (Kang & Chang, 2016). Firstly, the teacher plays a significant role in an individual's growth. Therefore, it makes sense to study the teachers' role in the current research and the student perceptions of them. In a Confucian culture, a teacher is not only a lecturer, he/she is also seen to have a moral role as a parent. Teachers have a collective responsibility to teach students to strictly follow the social rules and to behave themselves in a socially accepted manner (Watkins & Biggs, 2001). A teacher is regarded as the absolute authority and the source of the truth and correct answers (Liu, Hodgson, & Lord, 2010; Nguyen, 2017; Thompson & Ku, 2005). This image of the teacher relates to the Confucian principle of unequal relationships between people and the high power distance referred to in Hofstede's cultural framework (Hofstede & Hofstede, 2005). This belief, however, has recently been challenged. In a study of students from Confucian countries, including China, Vietnam, Singapore, Thailand, and Korea, who were studying in Australia, Tran (2013) argued that younger generations, influenced by information technology and globalisation, are more flexible than previous generations in terms of the maintenance of cultural values. These students challenge the traditional belief that teachers are the absolute authority or fount of knowledge. Nevertheless, it is still widely believed that students should respect their teachers (Tran, 2013). Accordingly, students from Confucian countries are not comfortable challenging and confronting their teachers in the classroom and tend to be on the receptive side of learning (Kang & Chang, 2016).

Secondly, with a great emphasis on harmony, a conflict is regarded as undesirable in a Confucian society (Hofstede & Bond, 1988). Similarly, conflict is seen as an ineffective learning behaviour in a classroom and should be avoided. If learning is uncertain or ambiguous, conflict is more likely to occur among students and Confucian students will feel less comfortable and confident about their learning (Kang & Chang, 2016). Therefore, the teacher from a Confucian culture is expected to cater to the class as a group and to highlight the main points for the students in order to avoid ambiguity. Students are not expected to disturb the class by asking questions, allowing the teacher

to focus on the main points for the whole class (Chen & Bennett, 2012; Nguyen, 2017). This relates to a strong uncertainty avoidance culture, as presented in Hofstede's framework (Hofstede & Hofstede, 2005).

Finally, the emphasis on collectivism in Confucian culture highlights the significance of one's diligence in academic studies and fosters the belief that all students, regardless of their diverse natural abilities, can do well academically if they work hard (Chen & Bennett, 2012). Moreover, Fang (2007) found that students from a Confucian culture focus on learning achievement and success. Accordingly, they tend to spend more time on those tasks closely related to their learning achievement and less on enjoyable activities, which are perceived to be less relevant to learning success (Fang, 2007). Collectivism in Confucianism also discourages classroom behaviours such as 'the nail that sticks up' (Uzuner, 2009), showing off or appearing smart (Al-Harthi, 2006). With a focus on Vietnamese learning tradition, Yates and Nguyen (2012) described the Vietnamese culture of learning as one in which knowledge is provided by the teacher, and students listen and do not talk to each other in class.

Based on work by Chen and Bennette (2012) and Liu, Liu, Lee, and Magjuka (2010), Kang and Chang (2016) identified the following learning preferences of students from Confucian culture: they value the curriculum that is heavily loaded with content knowledge; they like to learn in a well-structured and transparent environment where learning is pre-sequenced by the teacher; they consider the textbooks and required learning materials as the main resources for all learning activities and assessments; they expect the teachers to provide clear criteria so that they can evaluate their learning processes; and they regard examinations as the significant way to measure their academic performance (Chen & Bennett, 2012). Applying Hofstede's cultural framework, Confucian culture seems to fit the description of high power distance, collectivism, and strong uncertainty avoidance (Kang & Chang, 2016).

Confucianism was introduced to Vietnam through Chinese domination of the country. The influence of Confucianism on Vietnamese society has been described as "a comprehensive initiation into the scholarship, political theories, familial organisation patterns, bureaucratic practices, and even the religious orientations of Chinese culture" (Woodside, 1971, p. 7). Similarly, Dam (1999) observed that despite the disappearance

of Confucianism, the significant and long-established influence of Confucian ideology and values will remain in Vietnamese society.

In contemporary Vietnamese society, Confucianism is still widely represented in society and in the education system in particular. This is evident in the present system of moral education in Vietnam, in which traditional morality consists largely of Confucian values and beliefs (Doan, 2005). The Education Law of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam, for example, aims to teach children the values of good behaviour, respect and, love, particularly with regard to their grandparents, parents, teachers, older people; to love sisters, brothers and friends; to be sincere, confident, appreciative of beauty, and eager to learn (Vietnamese National Assembly, 2005). These Confucian values have shaped learning and teaching in Vietnam. As a student and then a professional/ educator studying and working in tertiary environments in Vietnam, I understand and relate to these Confucian values and their influences on learning and teaching practices.

#### **4.1.6. Western values and their influences on learning and teaching**

Western culture can be traced back to classical Greece, where society valued “personal freedom, individuality, and objective thought” (Nisbett, 2011, p. 18). In a Western society, the relationship between an individual and the community is considered relatively weak; individuals are expected to take care of themselves and their immediate families. Personal interests are placed above group interests. If there is a conflict of interest, it is up to the individual to decide which interests to prioritise and which to compromise. Applying Hofstede’s cultural framework, Western culture fits the description of low power distance, individualism, and weak uncertain avoidance (Kang & Chang, 2016).

Western culture influences learning and teaching in the following two ways. Firstly, learning is regarded as an essential element of personal development. Students are expected to self-direct and be responsible for their own learning (Rogers as cited in Kang & Chang, 2016). Students are encouraged to ask questions and challenge their teachers and peers, as this is considered an indicator of good learning and will result in the construction of knowledge within groups (Al-Harthi, 2006; Liu et al., 2010; Thompson & Ku, 2005). Western classrooms value discussion and interaction and foster real life, practical and problem-solving skills (James, as cited in Kang & Chang, 2016).

Secondly, Western culture enhances a constructive approach rather than a deconstructive approach to learning and engagement. It emphasises collaboration and constructivism, which creates the potential to promote critical and reflective thinking skills (Chen & Bennett, 2012). Students are expected to learn actively and acquire new knowledge based on previous knowledge and through social interaction with others, such as teachers and peers (Huang, 2002). In this sense, both teachers and students work together to create a learning community. The teacher's role is to facilitate discussions and interaction in the classroom, and is regarded as one source of information among others (Kang & Chang, 2016).

Based on work by Al-Harthi (2006), Liu et al. (2010), and Liu and Schwen (2006), Kang and Chang (2016) described some characteristics of Western teaching pedagogy-oriented courses. These are: the curriculum is open with different sources for course content and with several perspectives to ensure balanced points of view; there is a focus on a student-centered learning approach and a priority on individual learner's needs; assessments emphasise evaluating learning processes and skills (analytical and critical thinking rather than rote memorisation and repetition); and learning is supposed to promote individual development.

#### **4.1.7. Confucian and Western academic values**

The influences of culture on scholarship and learning have been well documented in the literature. For instance, Ryan and Slethaug (2010) examined the literature in this area and classified some Confucian and Western academic values. Similarly, Kang and Chang (2016) provided some comparisons between Confucian culture and Western culture in terms of ideology, relevance to Hofstede's cultural framework and implications on learning and teaching (refer to **Table 4.2**).

**Table 4.2. Differences in learning and teaching between Confucian and Western cultures**

	<b>Confucian culture</b>	<b>Western culture</b>
Ideology	Social hierarchy, social harmony, and interests of family/community.	Equality, personal freedom, individuality, and objective thought.

Relevance to Hofstede's cultural framework	Collectivism, high power distance, strong uncertainty avoidance, normative virtues, social obligations, suppressing gratification of needs.	Individualism, low power distance and weak uncertainty avoidance, pragmatic virtues, relatively free gratification of basic and natural human drives.
Implications for learning and teaching	See instructor as the absolute authority or a 'parent'. Younger generation views instructors differently. Students avoid conflict and uncertainty. Group's interests and needs are prioritised. Value well-structured and transparent learning environment, appreciate learning that is pre-sequenced by the teacher. Value detailed feedback, explicit grading criteria and specific reading materials from the teacher.	See instructor as facilitator. Students are self-directed learners who construct knowledge by challenging the teacher and peers. Open curriculum that includes multiple sources and perspectives. Encourage dialogue and interaction. Emphasise pragmatism, real life, practical and problem-solving skills. Value activities that foster critical and reflective thinking skills rather than rote memorisation and repetition.
Academic values	'Surface' or rote learners. Dependence on the teacher. 'Follow the master'. Respect for the teacher. Harmony. Passive learners. Achievement of the group. Respect for historical texts.	'Deep' learners. Independent learners. Critical thinking. Student-centered learning. Adversarial stance. Argumentative learners. Achievement of the individual. Constructing new knowledge.

*(Kang & Chang, 2016, p. 790) and (Ryan & Slethaug, 2010, p. 43)*

The work of Kang and Chang (2016), and Ryan and Slethaug (2010) highlighted the stereotypes associated with Confucian and Western academic values. Wang (2016) described this stereotype-oriented perspective as a traditional cross-cultural approach that tends to focus on stereotyped differences between invariable cultures and to map differences between cultures to promote cross-cultural understanding. This approach is connected to the polarisations of 'the West and the rest', 'West and non-West', and 'East and West' (Cousin, 2011). In other words, the cross-cultural approach creates a 'self and others' perspective that implies a "deficit mindset of framing inferior 'others', as well as patronising views about voice and knowledge ownership" (Wang, 2016, p.

229). Accordingly, the West and Asia are often described at the extreme points of the cultural spectrum in the literature (Phan, 2016).

#### **4.1.8. Bridging the East–West dichotomy**

While the above classifications and comparisons between Confucian and Western cultures may provide some helpful references to explore intercultural complexities on learning and teaching in a transnational classroom, it is critical not to fall blindly into the Confucian-Western dichotomy. Osland and Bird (2000) observed that while stereotyping may be helpful to some extent, it fails to address the complications within cultures. Stereotyping tends to regard cultures as static rather than dynamic and complex (Wang, 2008). Wang (2016) advocated a shift from the traditional cross-cultural approach to an intercultural approach that emphasises dynamic interactions between hybrid cultures. In other words, it is important to avoid describing the paradigms of Eastern and Western scholarship in completely binary terms, such as surface/deep or dependent learners/independent learners (Ryan & Louie, 2007). In fact, such dichotomies can be misleading. They fail to consider the diversity and complications within educational systems (Ryan & Louie, 2007) and the current vigorous and rapidly changing nature of cultures in dynamic Asian countries such as China and Vietnam (Ryan & Slethaug, 2010; Ryan, 2011). These dichotomies also result in stereotypes of Asian students as passive learners lacking critical thinking skill, defined as the opposite of students with Western academic values (Ryan & Slethaug, 2010). These East-West polarised views in the literature tend to position Confucian and Western scholarship as binary differences and to emphasise differences between cultures (Ryan, 2011). This polarised perspective, in my opinion, is less than helpful in exploring intercultural learning and teaching experience as it focuses on differences that are commonly associated with problems to be solved. As Ryan (2011) argued, it is time for Western educators to bring about a new and refreshing approach that portrays Asian students not as ‘problems’ to be fixed but rather as ‘assets’ to internationalisation. This new approach moves beyond the problematisation of Asian students to the opportunities they can offer, and recognises Asian students’ perspectives, knowledge and attitudes as resources for learning about other academic cultures (Ryan, 2011). In the context of Australian TNE in Vietnam, this approach of portraying Vietnamese students as assets



and resources will open up a golden opportunity for Australian/Western lecturers to better understand their students and to enhance their intercultural experience.

In summary, this section has explored the intercultural complexities in East-West learning and teaching experience. It has examined the notion of culture and international intercultural relationships; postcolonial perspectives; certain cultural dimensions relevant to a TNE educational context and their influences on teaching and learning; and Confucian and Western values and implications for learning and teaching. The following section reviews the role of intercultural awareness in transnational teaching. It first introduces the notion of intercultural competence and its impact on transnational lecturers, and then reviews the frameworks for teaching transnationally.

## **4.2. Intercultural awareness and transnational teaching**

Teaching transnationally involves lecturers teaching in a foreign context and working with learners from other cultures. Transnational lecturers, therefore, need to develop the intercultural competence to interact with people from different cultural backgrounds (Gopal, 2011). Chen (2016) defined intercultural competence as one's capacity to work with people from different cultures, to understand and respect different cultural values and beliefs, and to act appropriately in these intercultural situations. In this section, I explore the notion of intercultural competence in terms of its influences on transnational teaching, particularly for transnational lecturers.

### **4.2.1. Intercultural competence**

Based on the findings of their research work, Deardorff and colleagues proposed models of intercultural competence that emphasise the following components: attitudes, knowledge and comprehension, and skills, (Deardorff, 2006; Deardorff, 2009; Deardorff & Jones, 2012).

The first component concerns attitudes that imply respect, openness, curiosity, and discovery. Openness and curiosity involve a willingness to take risks and to get out of one's comfort zone. In addition, curiosity lays the groundwork for more creative ways to generate opportunities from differences. Openness helps people see things from more than one perspective, which is significant when accommodating cultural differences

(LeBaron, Pillay, Arai, Carstarphen, & Bhangoo, 2006). As LeBaron et al. (2006) observed, “dialogue with genuine curiosity is a precondition for... addressing cultural conflicts” (p. 94). The second component of intercultural competence relates to knowledge and comprehension. This implies cultural self-awareness, or the impact of one’s culture on one’s identity and world conception; culture-specific knowledge; and socio-linguistic awareness. It is interesting that within this component, all intercultural scholars agreed on the importance of understanding the world from others’ perspectives (Deardorff & Jones, 2012). The third component relates to skills, which include observation, listening, evaluating, analysing, interpreting, and relating.

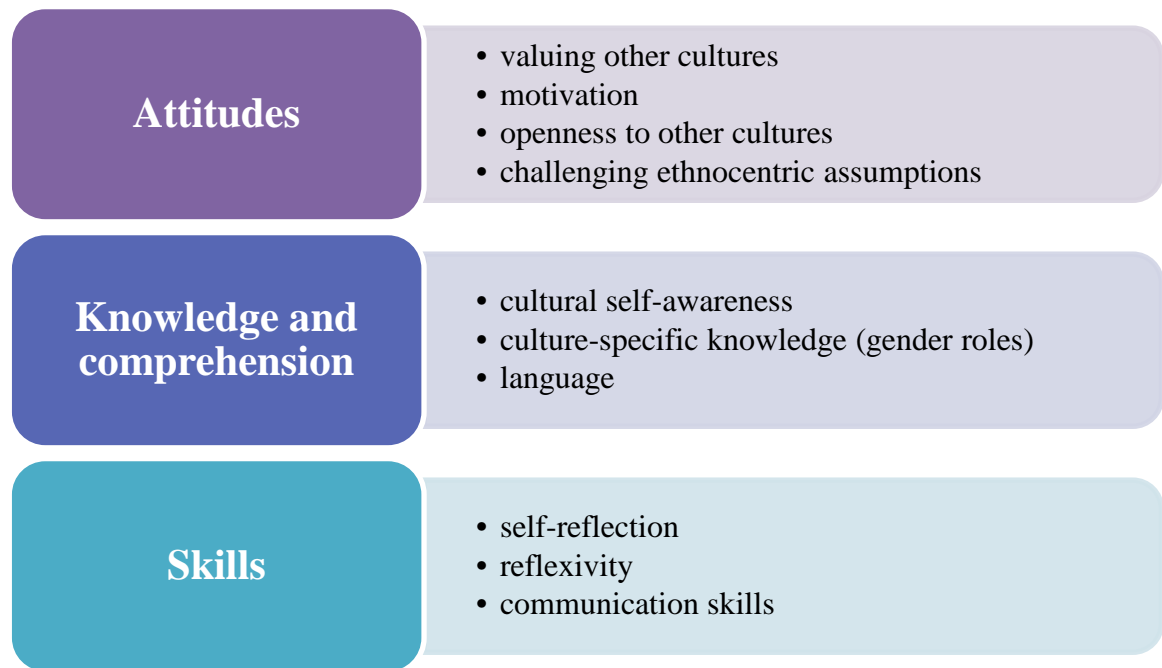
There has been some criticism of the concept of intercultural competence that only emphasises attitudes, knowledge and comprehension, and skills. For instance, Gopal (2011) claimed that Deardorff’s intercultural models need to go further, to consider one’s ability to adapt to other cultures, to navigate his/her feelings, to learn intercultural sensitivity, and to manage conflicts. These, argued Gopal (2011), are the basic factors for developing intercultural competence. Moreover, as Spitzberg and Changnon (2009) observed, most intercultural competence models and related assessments have been developed from Western or Anglo perspectives. It is, therefore, challenging to determine the extent to which such perspectives may affect the focus. For example, with an emphasis on individuality, Western perspectives would tend to highlight assertiveness skills, whereas Eastern perspectives with a value of collectivism would highlight empathy, sensitivity, and conformity (Spitzberg, 1994).

Another point of criticism by Dervin and Suomela-Salmi (2010) suggests the concept of interculturality rather than intercultural competence, by highlighting the process of acquiring awareness and sensibilities through life-long learning instead of through efforts to measure competence. Intercultural competence involves a process of measuring things such as attitudes, knowledge, skills, and differences. It also tends to imply that individuals should obtain certain attributes to become intercultural rather than to question power relations among actors and agencies in society (Dervin & Risager, 2014). On the other hand, interculturality is a “fluid process of being and becoming as well as describing an existing context and situation” (Jin, 2017, p. 309).

Despite some criticism, Deardorff's models of intercultural competence have provided broad maps for intercultural studies. As Gopal (2011) pointed out, Deardorff's process model of intercultural competence with its three main components (i.e., attitudes, knowledge and comprehension, and skills) is helpful for providing a framework to prepare faculty to teach transnationally.

#### 4.2.2. Preparing lecturers for teaching transnationally

Adapting the three core components (i.e., attitudes, knowledge and comprehension, and skills) of Deardorff's process model of intercultural competence into the context of TNE, Gopal (2011) proposed a framework to prepare lecturers to teach transnationally. This framework is shown below (refer to **Figure 4.2**).



**Figure 4.2. Framework for preparing lecturers to teach transnationally**  
(Gopal, 2011)

Within the attitude component, Gopal (2011) suggested that transnational lecturers need to value other cultures; to examine their intrinsic motivation for teaching transnationally; to be open to other cultures; and to challenge their ethnocentric assumptions. When lecturers prepare to teach transnationally, it is important for them to learn to respect and value other cultures (Deardorff, 2009). Teaching in a foreign

country may become difficult for transnational lecturers as they must adjust to the new teaching context without the usual support network of colleagues, family and friends (Bodycott & Walker, 2000; Debowski, 2003). The success of intercultural competence depends greatly on the transnational lecturer's ability to see other cultures in a positive way (Hiller & Woźniak, 2009). In addition to respecting other cultures, it is also critical to examine what intrinsically motivates lecturers to teach transnationally (Gopal, 2011). As Bennett (2009) noted, motivation is the place to begin developing intercultural competence. Some motivations to teach transnationally may include enthusiasm and curiosity to learn about other cultures (Gopal, 2011). Opdal (as cited in Gopal, 2011, p. 375) defined curiosity as "being open and having a sense of wonder beyond the limits of what is accepted understanding, even if it causes a feeling of being overwhelmed". For curiosity to grow, we need to suspend assumptions and judgements and to keep our minds open to different perspectives (Bennett, 2009). Moreover, motivation can facilitate shifts in internal frames that enhance intercultural adaptability. These shifts then anticipate the appropriateness and effectiveness of behaviours (Spitzberg & Changnon, 2009). For example, if a transnational lecturer naturally enjoys being in a new cultural context, his/her internal enthusiasm will influence his/her transnational teaching in a positive way. Lecturers' motivation to teach transnationally will have a great impact on how they will feel about their transnational teaching experience (Gopal, 2011).

Another aspect of attitudes concerns openness to other cultures. As Bennett (2009) argued, intercultural competence requires suspending assumptions and keeping our minds open to multiple perspectives. Transnational lecturers can ask themselves questions like 'What do I see here? What might it mean? What else might it mean? What might others think it means?' which may help promote their own perceptions and cultural humility. Openness to other cultures enables them to recognise that their way is not the only way and should not be seen as pre-eminent in a TNE context (Bennett, 2009).

The last aspect within attitudes relates to challenging ethnocentric beliefs (Gopal, 2011). Sorrells (2016) described ethnocentrism as an inward-looking and nearsighted view that can blind people and even countries to the benefits of wider perceptions. In a transnational context, ethnocentrism may hinder learning and communication, resulting

in misunderstandings. It may also lead to conscious and subconscious distance when interacting with others from different cultural backgrounds. Therefore, transnational lecturers must be aware of the inclinations to create differences in accordance with their values, beliefs and perceptions, which can result in binary thinking of ‘us’ and ‘them’ (Gopal, 2011).

Within the knowledge and comprehension component, Gopal (2011) asserted that it is critical for transnational lecturers to examine their cultural self-awareness; to develop culturally specific knowledge, such as the perception of gender roles in other cultures; and to understand the use of language in other cultures. Cultural self-awareness refers to the process of “becoming aware of how the culture(s) we are raised in contribute to our individual identities, our preferred patterns of behaviour, our values, and our ways of thinking” (Paige & Goode, 2009, p. 336). Cultural self-awareness is the foundation for developing intercultural competence as it enables an individual first to comprehend their own cultural systems, then recognise other cultural practices and prepare themselves for cultural challenges (Paige & Goode, 2009). In TNE, the ability of transnational lecturers to understand their cultural beliefs and expectations and to recognise cultural differences provides a strong basis for teaching transnationally (Gopal, 2011).

The next aspect of knowledge and comprehension concerns the roles of gender in different cultures. Teekens (2003) claimed that gender roles have an impact on our behaviours and social role patterns and that different cultures hold different views on the role of gender.

The third aspect of knowledge and comprehension relates to the use of language in different cultures (Gopal, 2011). Language is one critical medium through which cultural meanings are shared and disclosed (Smith, Paige, & Steglitz, 2003). Whorf (as cited in Smith et al., 2003), stated that language is used not only to express meaning but also to shape people’s ideas and thinking processes. Language conveys much more than what is said, it implies cultural assumptions (Teekens, 2003). In other words, the way language is used carries messages about a culture. For instance, language style (direct or indirect communication, how people get the point), language use (colloquial and connotative functions of language), and the use of restricted codes (heavily reliant on cues of the social context) or elaborated codes (heavily reliant on explicit

communication of information), illustrate the close connection between language and culture (Smith et al., 2003). Therefore, to a large extent, teaching in a transnational classroom involves working with language issues. Paige and Goode (2009) noted that people who are not able to speak the language of the host culture would have more stressful intercultural experiences. Accordingly, transnational lecturers who know the language of the host culture will feel more comfortable with their transnational teaching experience (Gopal, 2011).

The third component of Gopal's (2011) framework relates to skills that transnational lecturers need when teaching interculturally. This involves self-reflection, reflexivity, and communication skills. Reflection in teaching as a means of professional development is not a new concept. Thirty years ago, Boud, Keogh, and Walker (1985) described reflection as a process that involves returning to the experience, attending to the feelings, and then re-evaluating the experience. Reflection that considers different cultural reference frames and recognises one's own and others' perspectives would help people to behave in meaningful and responsible ways in an intercultural context (Sorrells, 2016). Mezirow (1991) identified three levels of reflection: content, process, and premise reflection. Content reflection describes the issues associated with the question 'What do I know?' while process reflection relates to the question 'How do I know my method of problem-solving works/if I am effective with what I do?', and premise reflection makes people question the assumptions underlying their knowledge (Kreber, 2004, pp. 30-31).

Adapting Mezirow's (1991) three levels of reflection in a transnational context, Smith (2009) discussed how content, process and premise reflection help transnational lecturers to develop professionally, not just in transnational classes but also back home. Specifically, content reflection occurs when transnational lecturers question themselves about their roles and relationships in a transnational class. For instance, transnational lecturers may not feel comfortable with being seen as the truth-holder of all knowledge by their transnational students (Smith, 2009). Process reflection, in a transnational context, pertains to how well a transnational lecturer negotiates and adjusts to the cross-cultural differences. Crabtree and Sapp (2004) provided a nice example of a transnational lecturer's engagement in process reflection. In their analysis of transnational teaching experience in Brazil, the two American lecturers realised how

much the different assumptions of time, social interactions and student-teacher relations between themselves and their Brazilian students affected learning and teaching quality. They then made a series of adjustments to these differences, such as joining students during coffee breaks and starting conversations about class materials in a more personalised manner (Crabtree & Sapp, 2004). Premise reflection, which relates to awareness of why we perceive/do things the way we do, helps to transform perspectives (Mezirow, 1991). In TNE, premise reflection may lead transnational lecturers to raise critical questions as to why they and their institution are involved in TNE (Smith, 2009). For example, an Australian lecturer who had been involved in transnational teaching in Hong Kong expressed his/her concerns as follows:

One of the things that certainly I question every now and again is should we be up there teaching .... I think we do bring very much a Western way of operating, and I'm not sure, I don't think that should be the dominant or only way of operating ... and every time I go up there to teach, I think, you know, is this the right thing to be doing. (Leask, 2004, p. 5)

The second aspect within the skills component of Gopal's (2011) framework is reflexivity. Reflexivity denotes the ability of people to examine their interpretations and actions in a critical way (Littlejohn & Domenici, 2007). When we are reflexive, we are conscious of how our interpretations and actions affect and are affected by others. We become aware of the contexts that shape our rule sets and look for other contexts and rules for interpretations and actions in the situation (Littlejohn & Domenici, 2007). In other words, reflexivity is an important skill, as it allows transnational lecturers to explore the different ideologies of other cultures. If transnational lecturers are not provided with opportunities to learn and practice reflexivity during their professional development, it is likely they will have trouble understanding different cultural situations. This may result in a negative transnational teaching experience in the host country (Gopal, 2011).

The last aspect within this skills component is communication skills. Good communication skills not only benefit transnational teaching in the host country, they are also an essential attribute to have in this global age. The ability to negotiate with different cultures requires good communication skills (Gopal, 2011). Littlejohn and

Domenici (2007) noted that effective communication can bridge differences and produce a collective meaning. This is helpful for discussions of challenging topics in a transnational classroom.

### **4.2.3. Characteristics desired of transnational lecturers**

Leask (2008) noted that transnational teaching requires additional skills beyond those needed when teaching in your own country. In other words, the differences between home teaching and transnational teaching are significant and involve the entire scope of skills and knowledge desired of lecturers. It would be a mistake to assume that lecturers who are experienced and effective in their home classrooms will be immediately so in transnational classrooms (Leask, 2008).

In an effort to define the characteristics of transnational lecturers, Leask and her colleagues (Leask, 2008; Leask, Hicks, Kohler, & King, 2005) conducted two research projects that examined transnational students and staff in Australia, Hong Kong and Singapore. The purpose of this work was to identify the expectations transnational students have regarding the knowledge, skills and abilities of their teachers. They identified 16 key characteristics of transnational lecturers through literature reviews and survey and interview data. These 16 characteristics were categorised into four aspects (discipline knowledge; cultural knowledge; teaching skills; and policy and procedural knowledge) and three types (universal, hybrid, and unique). Universal characteristics mean they are good characteristics in any teaching context; hybrid characteristics refer to characteristics needed in both an onshore and a transnational context, requiring some new and specific skills and knowledge from the transnational lecturers; unique characteristics represent those important in a transnational context, but irrelevant to an onshore context (Leask, 2008) (refer to **Table 4.3**).

**Table 4.3. Leask's (2008) key characteristics of transnational teachers**

<b>Category</b>	<b>Key characteristics of a transnational lecturer</b>	<b>Type</b>
Discipline knowledge	Knowledge of the discipline and related professions in the local context, as well as more broadly in an international context.	Hybrid
Cultural knowledge	An understanding of local culture(s), including the political, legal and economic environment.	Hybrid



	An understanding of how the teacher's own culture affects the way they think, feel and act.	Hybrid
	An understanding of how culture affects how we interact with others.	Hybrid
	An understanding of the social, cultural and educational backgrounds of students.	Hybrid
Teaching skills	The ability to evaluate feedback from students.	Universal
	The ability to include local content in the program through examples and case studies.	Hybrid
	The ability and flexibility to change the teaching approach to achieve different course objectives.	Universal
	The ability to adapt learning activities in response to the needs of offshore students.	Unique
	The ability to use different modes of delivery to assist student learning.	Universal
	The ability to provide timely and appropriate feedback on student performance.	Universal
	The ability to engage students from different cultural backgrounds in discussion and group work.	Hybrid
	The ability to reflect on and learn from teaching experience.	Universal
	The ability to communicate with other staff teaching on the program.	Hybrid
Policy and procedural knowledge	An understanding of the accrediting institution's policies and procedures.	Universal
	An understanding of the local provider's policies and procedures.	Unique

*(Leask, 2008, p. 123)*

Leask's (2008) work on the characteristics of transnational lecturers has provided insights into understanding the specific skills, knowledge and abilities needed for teaching in a transnational context. The work also provided my research with a conceptual framework for exploring the Vietnamese students' perceptions of the key characteristics desired of their transnational lecturers. To be specific, my study adopted the first three categories (i.e., discipline knowledge, cultural knowledge and teaching skills), with characteristics classified as hybrid and unique as the conceptual framework.

The characteristics shown in the following table have been embedded in the student questionnaire (refer to **Table 4.4**).

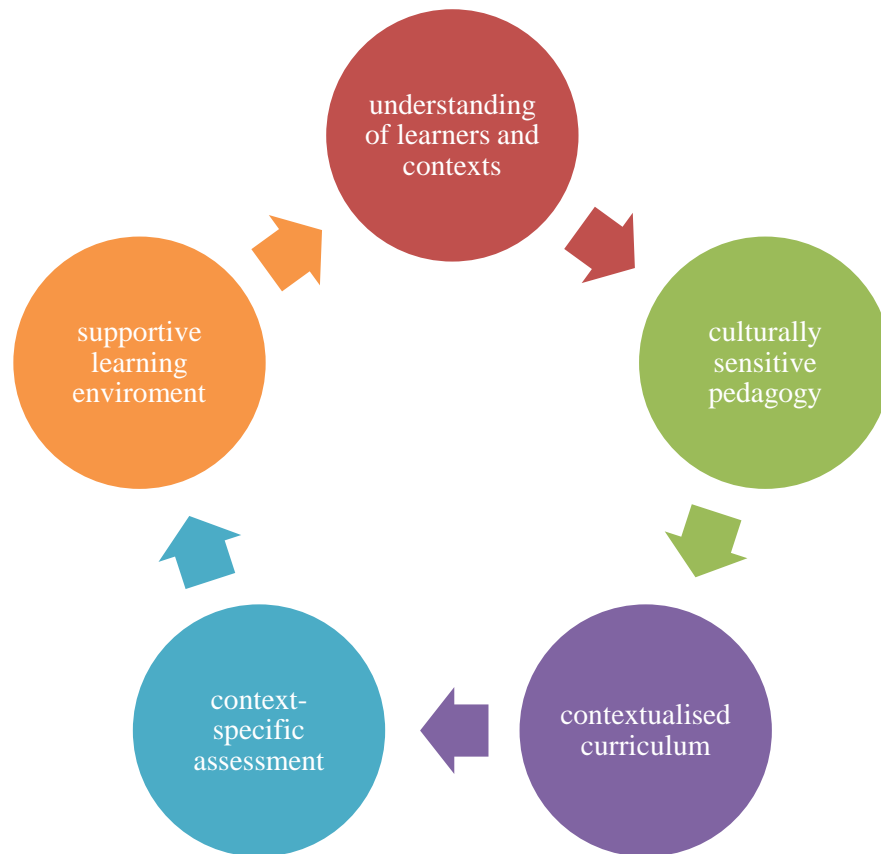
**Table 4.4. Key characteristics of transnational lecturers used in the student questionnaire in my research**

Category	Key characteristics of a transnational lecturer	Type
Discipline knowledge	Knowledge of the discipline and related professions in the local context, as well as more broadly in an international context.	Hybrid
Cultural knowledge	An understanding of local culture(s), including the political, legal and economic environment.	Hybrid
	An understanding of how the teacher's own culture affects the way they think, feel and act.	Hybrid
	An understanding of how culture affects how we interact with others.	Hybrid
	An understanding of the social, cultural and educational backgrounds of students.	Hybrid
Teaching skills	The ability to include local content in the program through examples and case studies.	Hybrid
	The ability to adapt learning activities in response to the needs of offshore students.	Unique
	The ability to engage students from different cultural backgrounds in discussion and group work.	Hybrid
	The ability to communicate with other staff teaching on the program.	Hybrid

#### **4.2.4. Intercultural dialogue for transnational teaching**

In an effort to shift from a traditional cross-cultural perspective, which highlights differences between cultures, to an intercultural dialogue perspective, which emphasises interaction between cultures, Wang (2016) proposed the intercultural dialogue framework for transnational teaching and learning. Her work was informed by the existing relevant literature and her extensive teaching and research in cross-border educational leadership development between Australia and China. She defined intercultural dialogue in a transnational context as “an open and respectful exchange of

views and interaction between and among students and teachers with different backgrounds and heritage on the basis of mutual understanding and respect” (Wang, 2016, pp. 229-230). Her intercultural dialogue framework for transnational teaching and learning consists of five key components: understanding of learners and contexts; culturally sensitive pedagogy; contextualised curriculum; context-specific assessment; and supportive learning environment. This is illustrated below (refer to **Figure 4.3**).



**Figure 4.3. Intercultural dialogue framework for transnational teaching and learning**

*(Wang, 2016)*

The first component concerns an understanding of learners and contexts, as well as their cultural and learning traditions. Within a critical postcolonial perspective (Cousin, 2011; Singh, 2009), it is not appropriate for Western lecturers to impose Western ideas and knowledge on transnational learners from developing countries such as Vietnam.

Rather, Western lecturers need to understand the characteristics of their transnational learners, who come from different cultural and linguistic backgrounds, as well as their prior learning experience. Importantly, they need to recognise the impact of culture and prior learning experience on learning preferences. This requires transnational lecturers to be flexible reflectors who can accommodate the needs of learners from different cultures and critical helpers who can facilitate student learning. For example, as already discussed, learners from Confucian heritage cultures such as Vietnam value harmony in society and thus tend to avoid challenging and questioning their teachers in the classroom. This has resulted in them being stereotyped as uncritical, passive or quiet (Turner, 2006). In order to design teaching strategies and pedagogy, transnational lecturers need to be aware of this cultural trait and how it may influence the way learners behave in the classroom.

The second component of the intercultural dialogue framework relates to a culturally sensitive, participatory pedagogy. This is a dialogue-based and culturally responsive approach associated with adult learning theory (Knowles, Holton, & Swanson, 1998) and transformative learning theory (Mezirow, 2000). It allows deep learning through contextual understanding, critical reflections and re-evaluation of prior beliefs among students. Specifically, transnational lecturers can ask students to relate to their own cultural traditions and local contexts, as well as critically reflect on Western ideas. This culturally sensitive and participatory pedagogy can be achieved by adopting mini-lectures, learning teams, interactive activities, and online reflections.

The third component of the framework is a culturally responsive, contextualised curriculum. This should promote meaningful, relevant, deep learning for transnational students through their immersion in culturally relevant beliefs and contextualised learning. The curriculum is contextualised by integrating carefully designed resources and activities that are linked to the learners' workplace, and examples related to learners' professional contexts. Transnational lecturers may use Western course materials but should acknowledge the limitations of Western perspectives and include intercultural perspectives to increase the relevance to the local context.

The next component of the framework emphasises innovative, authentic and context-specific assessments that encourage problem-solving and creativity. Authentic

assessments allow students to display their knowledge and skills in meaningful contexts. For example, transnational lecturers can ask students to write a case study on a problem in their real workplace and then attend to specific questions. Authentic assessments help to promote students' transferable skills.

The last component highlights a supportive and safe learning environment that respects and values different perspectives. A safe learning environment can be created by setting rules for respectful discussions and providing forums for the exchange of different perspectives. Furthermore, transnational lecturers need to provide particular support for learners from non-dominant backgrounds. For example, in a male-dominated culture, transnational lecturers need to attend to the gender dynamics in the classroom, acknowledge the female students' opinions and experiences, and encourage them to challenge their male counterparts' perspectives (Wang, 2016).

#### **4.3. Chapter conclusion**

This chapter has reviewed the relevant scholarship on the impact of culture on TNE. It has examined the intercultural complexities in East-West learning and teaching experience and explored the important role of intercultural awareness in transnational teaching.

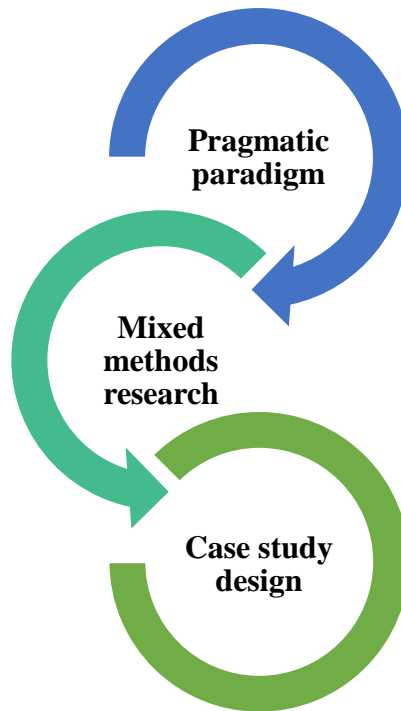
The next chapter (Chapter 5) presents this study's research design. This is conceptualised within a pragmatic paradigm and mixed methods research that incorporates a case study design. The next chapter also describes the data collection methods and process of the study, followed by an explanation of how trustworthiness was achieved. Finally, the chapter reports on data analysis and the ethical consideration of my research.

## **Chapter 5 - Research methodology**

This chapter presents my research methodology. Firstly, it introduces the conceptual framework of the project, including the case study design, pragmatic paradigm, and mixed methods research. This chapter also elaborates on the data collection methods: the questionnaire for the Vietnamese students, focus group discussions with the Vietnamese students, and individual interviews with the lecturers. It then describes the data collection process for the research. Next, it explains how trustworthiness was achieved in this research. Finally, the chapter reports how data was analysed and how relevant ethical issues were attended to in my research.

### **5.1. Conceptual framework**

This research was conceptualised within a pragmatic paradigm that incorporated mixed methods and a case study design (refer to **Figure 5.1**). Data collection methods included a questionnaire for the Vietnamese students (student questionnaire), focus group discussions with the Vietnamese students (student focus group discussions), and individual interviews with the lecturers (lecturer interviews).



**Figure 5.1. The conceptual framework of my research**

### **5.1.1. Pragmatic paradigm as philosophical foundations**

A paradigm is defined as “a general philosophical orientation about the world and the nature of research that a researcher brings to a study” (Creswell, 2014, p. 6). It consists of overarching philosophical assumptions, concepts, or beliefs that guide a researcher’s thinking and doing in research (Mertens, 2015). In my research, the adopted paradigm represents my “philosophical worldview” (Creswell, 2014, p. 5) or my ways of thinking about and looking at the world. A paradigm is shaped by the researcher’s discipline, beliefs and past research experiences (Creswell, 2009) and orients their research actions. It was, therefore, important to clearly indicate the paradigm adopted in my research to give readers a clear sense of how I positioned myself as a researcher and what I thought about the world and the nature of research.

Within educational research, I found it most useful to understand a research paradigm from a fundamental triad of philosophy of knowledge concepts: ontology, epistemology, and methodology (Morgan, 2014; Punch & Oancea, 2014). Ontology concerns the question of what the nature of the world knowledge is and what there is

that can be known about it; epistemology involves the nature of the relationship between the knower and what can be known; and methodology is about how the researcher goes about finding out what can be known (Morgan, 2014). In my research, a paradigm indicated what the world knowledge meant to me as the researcher (ontology), what the relationship was between myself as the researcher and the topic of my research (epistemology), and how I found answers to my research questions (methodology).

In order to appropriately address my research questions, a pragmatic paradigm was adopted. Pragmatism as a research paradigm can be philosophically understood as an ontological, epistemological and methodological stance. Ontologically, I agree with pragmatist researchers who argue both that there is a single real world out there and that all individuals have their own unique ways of interpreting that world (Mertens, 2015). In other words, I believe all world knowledge is socially constructed but different individuals might find certain versions of that social construction more likely to match their experiences and beliefs (Morgan, 2014). Epistemologically, I concur with pragmatists who indicate that all world knowledge is based on experience (Morgan, 2014). Like them, I do not position myself as a distanced researcher (Mertens, 2015) or outsider. Rather, I bring myself into the research experience and make it unique. As a pragmatist researcher, I have chosen to study what is interesting and valuable to me and to the field of TNE; I am free to conduct my research in different ways that I believe are most appropriate; and I am free to utilise the results in ways that can bring positive consequences within my value system (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 1998). Methodologically, pragmatism is considered the philosophical underpinning for the practice of mixed methods research (Creswell, 2014; Denscombe, 2008; Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004). Pragmatism is outcome-oriented (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004) and places a strong emphasis on research questions (Shannon-Baker, 2016). The pragmatic paradigm enabled me to select methods or to combine methods in a way that provided the best opportunities to answer my research questions (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004). In adopting a pragmatic approach, I was able to focus my research on what I wanted to do and thus produce one certain form of knowledge rather than knowledge about the nature of research methods themselves (Morgan, 2014). Like other pragmatist researchers, I am not concerned about which methods are used, as long as the methods adopted can help me answer what I want to know (Feilzer, 2010).



It is, however, worth noting that pragmatism as a philosophical stance adopted in my research is different from an “expedient” (Denscombe, 2008, p. 274) or “what-works” (Mertens, 2015, p. 39) form of everyday pragmatic behaviour. Denscombe (2008) reported on occasions when pragmatism is treated as expedient or an a-paradigmatic stance in underpinning the practice of mixed methods research. This is not the intention of employing pragmatism in my research. Pragmatism as a research paradigm in my research was carefully and thoughtfully selected based on the research questions, on my own personal experiences and beliefs, and on my professional experiences and expertise. It required me to have a strong understanding and knowledge of the ontological, epistemological and methodological stance of pragmatism, as well as familiarity with qualitative, quantitative and mixed methodology and analysis (Feilzer, 2010). In fact, I have had previous experiences in using both qualitative and quantitative approaches. Specifically, I utilised a quantitative approach in my undergraduate thesis to investigate teaching techniques used in mixed ability classes at a high school in Vietnam. For my master’s degree, I adopted a qualitative approach to explore professional development practices among middle level managers of a university in Vietnam. I was also involved in an international research project about basic education in Singapore, Thailand and Vietnam, in which both qualitative and quantitative approaches were employed. I was, therefore, confident in adopting pragmatism and mixed methods research for this current study.

Pragmatism was selected as the paradigm for my research for the following reasons. Firstly, it allowed me more flexibility in selecting investigation techniques to find answers to my different research questions, and in collaborating with other researchers, regardless of philosophical assumptions (Onwuegbuzie & Leech, 2005). Secondly, as a pragmatist researcher with a positive attitude towards both qualitative and quantitative approaches, I was more able to use qualitative data to elaborate on quantitative findings (Onwuegbuzie & Leech, 2005). For example, my focus group discussions with students helped extend and provide insights into the quantitative findings about why they wanted to study an Australian TNE program in Vietnam and how intercultural complexities influenced their learning experience. On the other hand, the quantitative data from students helped identify prominent areas that needed exploring further in the focus group discussions. Thirdly, the use of pragmatism enabled me to combine empirical and

descriptive precision (Onwuegbuzie, 2003), and to utilise a bi-local lens from both qualitative and quantitative approaches, rather than a single lens in my investigation. This resulted in a holistic understanding of the research inquiry.

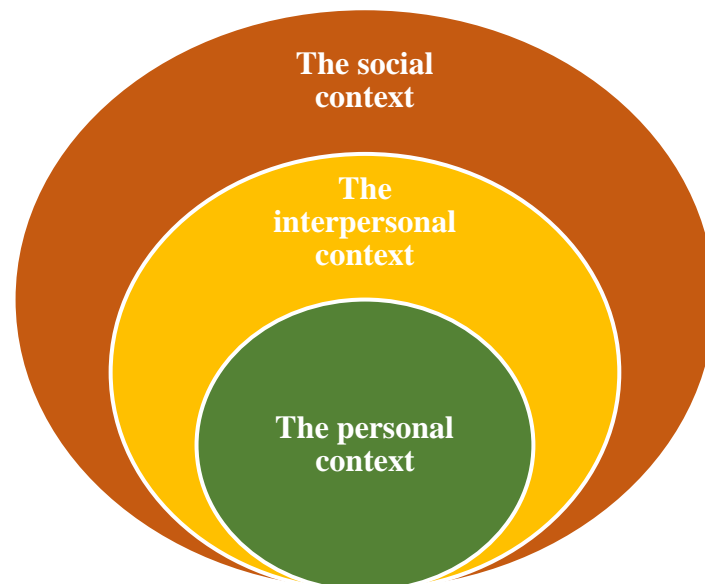
The use of pragmatism in my research has offered me opportunities to find the best approaches to answer my research questions. It allowed me to apply abductive reasoning, which means moving back and forth between different approaches to theory and data (Morgan, 2007). Specifically, the results from the quantitative approach in my research served as inputs to the aims of the qualitative approach. In terms of the relationship to the research process, I maintained a balance between subjectivity in my own research reflections and objectivity in data collection and analysis (Shannon-Baker, 2016). This is referred to as intersubjectivity by Morgan (2007). With a pragmatic worldview, I utilised transferability in my research to consider research implications. I did not intend to make the distinction between knowledge that is either context-dependent or generalised. Rather, I was interested in investigating whether the knowledge I produced in my research could be transferred to other situations and how to make the most appropriate use of that knowledge in other settings (Morgan, 2007; Shannon-Baker, 2016).

### **5.1.2. Mixed methods research**

Aligned with the pragmatic paradigm was a mixed methods research approach. Mixed methods research is defined in diverse ways in the literature (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011; Johnson, Onwuegbuzie, & Turner, 2007). However, it is best to define mixed methods research in my study within a socio-ecological framework, including social context, interpersonal context, and personal context. This socio-ecological framework for the field of mixed methods research was recommended by Plano Clark and Ivankova (2016), who defined mixed methods research as

a process of research in which researchers integrate quantitative and qualitative methods of data collection and analysis to best understand a research purpose. The way this process unfolds in a given study is shaped by mixed methods research content considerations and researchers' personal, interpersonal and social contexts. (p. 4)

In other words, mixed methods research is best understood within three different layers including: the personal, interpersonal and social context of the researcher (refer to **Figure 5.2**). The first layer is the personal context, which refers to the philosophical assumptions, theoretical models, and background knowledge that impact mixed method research practice. The second layer is the interpersonal context, which entails research ethics and the researchers' relationships with study participants, research teams, and editorial and review boards that influence mixed methods research practice. The third layer, the social context, includes the institutional structures, disciplinary conventions and societal priorities that shape mixed methods research practice (Plano Clark & Ivankova, 2016).



**Figure 5.2. The socio-ecological framework for the field of mixed methods research**  
(Plano Clark & Ivankova, 2016)

Applying Plano Clark and Ivankova's (2016) socio-ecological framework to my research provided an overview of different influences at social, interpersonal, and personal levels on how mixed methods research was designed and conducted in this research (refer to **Figure 5.3**). Specifically, the social context of my research was embedded in the education field, the acceptance of mixed methods research, Victoria University (VU) support, and the broader context of Australia. The interpersonal context involved obtaining the approval for conducting this mixed methods study from the VU Human Research Ethics Committee; developing trustworthy and ethical

research relationships with my participants to conduct both quantitative and qualitative methods; and receiving support from my supervisors in adopting a mixed methods research approach. The personal context of my research included my philosophical beliefs in pragmatism and in the benefits of combining different research methods; my knowledge of TNE; my long-standing interest in Australian TNE in Vietnam; my extensive training in quantitative, qualitative and mixed methods research; and my previous academic and professional experiences with conducting both quantitative and qualitative methodologies. Specifically, I worked extensively with the quantitative approach during my undergraduate study in Vietnam and adopted the qualitative approach in my postgraduate study in New Zealand. Therefore, I have learnt to appreciate the strengths of both approaches, as well as to be aware of their constraints. Moreover, my range of work experiences as a program and research officer at SEAMEO have led me to be interested in conducting mixed methods research in international education.

### My social context

- Education field
- Acceptance of mixed methods research
- Victoria University support
- Australia

### My interpersonal context

- Research ethics of my project
- Research participants of my project
- My supervisors

### My personal context

- Pragmatism
- My knowledge of TNE
- My interest in Australian TNE in Vietnam
- My training in quantitative, qualitative research and mixed methods research
- My previous academic and professional experiences with conducting both quantitative and qualitative methodology

### Mixed methods in my research

- Rationales: Triangulation, complementarity, different research questions, explanation
- Mixed methods case study design
  - Sequential quan → QUAL
  - Quan methods: Student questionnaire → QUAL methods: Student focus group discussions
  - QUAL methods: Lecturer interviews

**Figure 5.3. Applying the socio-ecological framework by Plano Clark and Ivankova (2016) in my research**

Different authors have discussed various reasons for mixing methods. In this research, methods were mixed for the four following reasons, which corresponded with four of the 16 possible reasons for doing mixed methods research suggested by Bryman (2006). The first reason was to triangulate. Quantitative and qualitative research were combined in my research to triangulate findings so that they could be mutually corroborated. The

second related to completeness, which refers to the use of both quantitative and qualitative results, thus bringing together a more complete and comprehensive account of the research and a better understanding of the research inquiry. The third reason was to respond to my different research questions. The quantitative approach helped answer my first research question concerning the main reasons why students enrolled in the transnational programs under research, while the qualitative approach examined how intercultural complexities influenced their learning experience. In addition, methods were combined to expand on unexpected results. Specifically, the use of a qualitative approach in my research helped elaborate on surprising and interesting points revealed in the quantitative results (Bryman, 2006). In other words, the use of mixed methods research allowed me to collect more data for my study than would have been gathered using either a quantitative or a qualitative approach alone. I was free to utilise all appropriate data collection methods available rather than being limited to specific data collection tools associated with either a quantitative or qualitative approach (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011).

Different types of mixed methods are used in research. Teddlie and Tashakkori (2009) introduced five families of mixed methods designs: parallel mixed design; sequential mixed design: conversion mixed design; multi-level mixed design; and fully integrated mixed design. Morgan (2014) categorised mixed methods research into four designs based on sequence and priority: preliminary qualitative input design; preliminary quantitative input design; follow-up qualitative extension design; and follow-up quantitative extension design. More recently, Plano Clark and Ivankova (2016) discussed three basic mixed methods designs: concurrent quan + qual design; sequential quan → qual design; and sequential qual → quan design. However, I found the earlier work of Creswell and Plano Clark (2011) the most useful for understanding different mixed methods designs. They suggested six major mixed methods research designs: convergent parallel design; explanatory sequential design; exploratory sequential design; embedded design; transformative design; and multi-phase design. My research employed embedded design: the quantitative approach was incorporated within the traditional qualitative approach of case study in order to enhance the application of the case study for investigating the two programs under research. The employment of mixed methods case study design in my research was helpful as it allowed me to

combine different paradigms and approaches to investigate the two complex programs (Luck et al., 2006). It also helped me enrich qualitative case descriptions with quantitative information (Curry & Nunez-Smith, 2015). Incorporating a quantitative approach into my mixed methods case study provided more comprehensive descriptions at the macro level of the context under research and enabled triangulation of my interpretations about the two programs (Plano Clark & Ivankova, 2016). More discussions of the case study design are provided in the succeeding section.

In my mixed methods case study, it was important to define the sequence and priority of the two approaches. The qualitative approach played a primary role in my research, while the quantitative approach played a supplemental role. Moreover, the collection and analysis of the supportive secondary quantitative data took place before the data collection and analysis of the predominantly qualitative data and was intended to enhance the application of the qualitative data. Because the current research project was conceptualised within the mixed methods case study, the philosophical foundations of this conceptual framework were established by the primary qualitative approach, whereas the supplemental quantitative approach was used in service to the primary one (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011). As a pragmatic researcher, I appreciate and acknowledge the strengths of both quantitative and qualitative research. However, in the current study, with qualitative research and case study design as the overarching approach, I was more aligned with the qualitative research. This emphasised the exploration of human experiences through the collection and analysis of data expressed in words using open-ended questions (Plano Clark & Ivankova, 2016).

### **5.1.3. Case study**

As one of the most frequently used qualitative research strategies in educational research, case study has attracted diverse views regarding its definition and design (Yazan, 2015). Simons (2009) defined case study as “an in-depth exploration from multiple perspectives of the complexity and uniqueness of a particular project, policy, institution, programme or system in a ‘real life’ context” (p. 21). With a focus on singularity and in-depth inquiry, a case study looks at something in its completeness from many different angles (Thomas, 2016). It emphasises relationships and processes within the case. Researchers who choose to do case studies are not only interested in

investigating what is going on within the case, but also in explaining why things happen in a particular way (Denscombe, 2014). Expanding on Simons' (2009) work, Thomas (2011) highlighted that case study should not be considered as a method in and of itself. Rather, case study should be seen as a design that may include different methods. Stake (2005) insisted that:

Case study is not a methodological choice but a choice of what is to be studied. If case study research is more humane or in some ways transcendent, it is because the researchers are so, not because of the methods. By whatever methods, we choose to study the case. We could study it analytically or holistically, entirely by repeated measures or hermeneutically, organically or culturally, and by mixed methods - but we concentrate, at least for the time being, on the case. (p. 443)

As a researcher in education, I agree with the above scholars (Simons, 2009; Stake, 2005; Thomas, 2011) that case study does not have to be limited to a research method. Rather, case study should be seen as a design that incorporates a number of methods. In my research, case study was employed using mixed methods. Creswell and Plano Clark (2011) defined this design as a mixed methods case study, which was discussed earlier in this chapter.

It is important to clarify whether a case study entails a singular case only or both singular and multiple cases. In some disciplines, such as anthropology and political science, single case studies compared with multiple case studies were classified as having different methodologies and different sets of rationales (Eckstein, 1975; Lijphart, 1975). However, Yin (2014) argued that a single case study and multiple case study are variants under the same methodological framework of case study design and thus no major distinction existed between the two. Similarly, Stake (2000) identified a multiple case study, which he called a collective case study, as one type among the three within the case study design. I agree with Yin (2014) and Stake (2000) in that I did not intend to methodologically distinguish between the two. In my research, I investigated one case study consisting of two Australian transnational master's programs in Vietnam.



The case study design was carefully considered and selected as the most appropriate for my research for the following reasons. Firstly, it enabled me to gain a holistic, analytical and in-depth account of each program (Thomas, 2016). Secondly, it allowed me to unravel the subtleties and intricacies of the complex transnational learning and teaching experience within the two programs under research and helped me understand how different aspects of these programs were interconnected and linked together (Denscombe, 2014). The case study design enabled me to find answers to the question of how and why certain occurrences happened, rather than just what those occurrences were. In other words, it enabled me to reach the ‘how’ and ‘why’ insights rather than just the ‘what’ insights. Thirdly, the case study design encourages the use of multiple methods and a variety of data (Denscombe, 2014; Yin, 2014) which is consistent with the adoption of the mixed methods used in this research. The case study design is aligned with my research in that it focuses on: a few instances rather than many instances; on depth of study rather than breadth of study; on the particular rather than the general; on the relationships rather than the outcomes; on a holistic view rather than isolated factors; and on multiple methods rather than one method (Denscombe, 2014).

The case study design can be employed in research for a variety of purposes. Denscombe (2014) suggested six possible purposes, four of which correspond to the purposes of my research. These are: description, exploration, explanation, and comparison. My research aimed at describing what was happening in relation to the transnational learning and teaching experience in these two programs and exploring how these occurrences happened that way. It also focused on explaining the relationships among different factors that impacted those transnational experiences. Beyond that, my research was instrumental (Stake, 2000; Thomas, 2016) because the two programs were investigated as a means to an end. I examined them to understand what makes Australian TNE at the master’s level successful (or not) in Vietnam.

Having selected a case study design for my research, I was aware of the point at which the case study design is most vulnerable to criticism, which is the issue of generalisations made from its findings. One typical question could be: ‘This study is based on only one case (or a few cases), so how can we generalise from its findings?’ Different advocates of case study research have responded differently to such criticism. Lincoln and Guba (2009) critically challenged the whole classic idea of generalisability

and concluded that “the only generalization is: There is no generalization” (p. 27). Alternatively, Denscombe (2014) argued that a case study should not be considered part of a survey sample. Metaphorically speaking, a case study is not one piece of a cake whose function is to show the content of the whole cake. Rather, a case study is designed to analyse situation and to acquire certain concepts or propositions that might explain what is happening and why it is happening that way within the context under research. In other words, findings from a case study can be used for developing theories. Yin (2014) added that a case study, like an experiment, is generalisable to theoretical propositions and not to populations. It does not represent a sample. The point of conducting a case study is “to expand and generalize theories (analytic generalizations) and not to extrapolate probabilities (statistical generalizations)” (Yin, 2014, p. 21). It is within this analytic aspect that findings from a case study can be generalisable. In the current study, generalisation was not intended for the inquiry process. I did not intend to generalise the findings from the ~~two cases~~ two programs under research to the whole population. Rather, I employed a case study design that provided rich analytical insights into the two programs. I agree with Thomas (2016), who insisted that exploring something in its completeness and looking at it from many angles, as case study design enables us to do, is the essence of good science. Therefore, I was confident in adopting a case study design for my research.

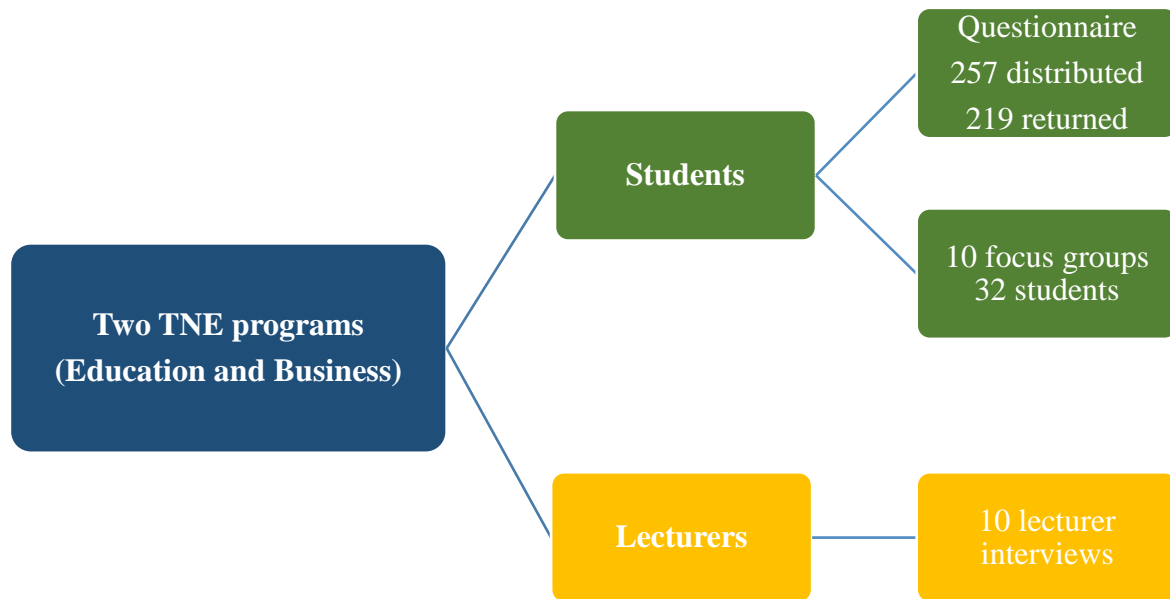
Although I did not intend to generalise the findings from my research to the whole population, I did aim at providing opportunities for others to transfer the findings to other settings. Denscombe (2014) referred to transferrable findings when he asserted that it is possible to transfer findings from a case study to other settings because each case, although unique in some respects, is also a single example of a wider category of things. Put simply, it is one of a type (Ragin & Becker, 1992). How far findings from a case study can be transferred to other examples within the category is dependent on how relevant it is to other examples of its category. It is, therefore, important for this thesis to include sufficient details about how the case compares with others within the category. This will allow readers to assess the extent to which the findings can be transferred to settings that are familiar to them (Denscombe, 2014).

Another important point worth highlighting in my research is that the two programs under research were not randomly selected; instead, they were selected based on

specified criteria and attributes. Thomas (2016) suggested three case types: key case, outlier case, and local knowledge case. A key case refers to a good example, a classic or exemplary case among others. An outlier case shows something interesting because it is different. A local knowledge case refers to the situation where the researcher is familiar with context and interested in finding out more about some aspects of that case. The two programs selected in my research were key cases. They were considered as two exemplar cases of Australian transnational programs at the master's level in Vietnam. Both programs were long-standing, with one program majoring in education and the other in business. These were two predominant disciplines at the time of collecting data. In fact, there were seven Australian transnational master's programs operating in Vietnam during the data collection period from November 2015 to August 2016. Three of them majored in education and the other four in business (VIED, 2015). It is important to stress that this information was correct at the time of the data collection process and might have changed. Both programs were located in a large city in Vietnam. More details of the selection criteria will be provided later in the data collection process section.

## **5.2. Data collection methods**

Data collection methods adopted in my research included a questionnaire for students, focus group discussions for students and semi-structured individual interviews for lecturers (refer to **Figure 5.4**). The combination of different data collection methods enabled me to find the best answers to my research questions. The following section describes each data collection method in detail.



**Figure 5.4. Data collection methods of my research**

### **5.2.1. Student questionnaire**

In my research, a questionnaire was employed to collect quantitative data from the students across both programs (refer to Appendix 1: Student questionnaire, English version). A questionnaire is defined as “any structured research instrument which is used to collect social research data in a face to face interview, self-completion survey, telephone interview or web survey” (Bulmer, 2004, p. 3). A questionnaire is designed to directly ask the respondents for information about the research topics that can be used later as data for analysis in a research project. A questionnaire consists of a written list of questions that remains the same for all respondents (Denscombe, 2014). It is helpful to note all the questionnaire respondents were the Vietnamese students of the two programs under research. Therefore, the term ‘respondents’ used throughout this thesis refers to the Vietnamese students who responded to the questionnaire.

It was appropriate and productive to adopt a questionnaire as a data collection method in my research for the following reasons. Firstly, a questionnaire allowed me to collect data from a large number of students (Denscombe, 2010) from different classes within these two programs. These classes operated in different locations and at different times. Secondly, conducting a questionnaire enabled me to obtain straightforward, brief and

uncontroversial information (Denscombe, 2014) from the students in terms of their reasons for choosing an Australian transnational program, their anticipated outcomes upon graduation, and their challenges in the course. In addition, a questionnaire worked well as all the respondents were able to read and understand the questions (Denscombe, 2014). Furthermore, the questionnaire was a useful tool for collecting factual and attitudinal information from the respondents about their social characteristics, present and past behaviour, attitudes, beliefs and reasons for action related to the research problem (Bulmer, 2004). Adopting a questionnaire enabled me to collect data at a certain point in time, which involves “describing the nature of existing conditions, or identifying standards against which existing conditions can be compared, or determining the relationships that exist between specific events” (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2013, p. 256).

The student questionnaire in my research was designed in English (refer to Appendix 1: Student questionnaire, English version) and then translated from English to Vietnamese to ensure the student respondents understood the questions completely (refer to Appendix 2: Student questionnaire, Vietnamese version). As a fluent bilingual speaker of English and Vietnamese, I translated the questionnaire myself. I have an undergraduate degree in TEFL (Teaching English as a Foreign Language) and previously worked as an English-Vietnamese translator/interpreter. I was, therefore, confident and comfortable translating the student questionnaire from English to Vietnamese.

One important principle when using a research questionnaire is to pilot it first to confirm that it operates properly before distributing it more broadly. Researchers are advised to pilot the questionnaire with a minimum of five to ten people (Johson & Christensen, 2014). In a small-scale research project like mine, I piloted the student questionnaire with three Vietnamese colleagues who were doing educational research in Australia like myself. They were invited to complete the Vietnamese version of the student questionnaire in an allocated time and to note any confusion. They were also invited to provide feedback on how to make the questionnaire easy to understand and student friendly. They suggested clarifications in some questions and different word choices to make things clearer. After revising the student questionnaire as per their

feedback, I distributed it to 257 students in nine classes in the two programs (education and business); 219 of these students returned the questionnaire.

After collecting the quantitative data from the student questionnaire, I conducted the focus group discussions with students to elaborate on some of the main points identified from the questionnaire results. Among 219 students who returned the questionnaire, 32 volunteered to participate in focus group discussions. In total, ten student focus group discussions were conducted across both programs. The following section describes the student focus group discussions in more detail.

### **5.2.2. Student focus groups**

In my research, the focus group discussions with students were designed to collect qualitative data (refer to Appendix 7: Student focus group guiding questions, English version) after the quantitative data were collected from the student questionnaire. A focus group discussion is “a special qualitative research technique in which people are informally ‘interviewed’ in a group discussion setting” (Neuman, 2011, p. 459). With the researcher as a moderator or facilitator, the group explores participants’ ideas, attitudes and perceptions about certain issues related to the research topic. Denscombe (2014) suggested three distinctive characteristics of focus group discussion: a focus to the session which is something all participants share in common; the researcher as facilitator rather than a leader in group interaction; and the emphasis on the group dynamics and interaction within the group that elicits information.

I employed focus group discussions as they had many features that were helpful to my research. Firstly, the natural setting in a focus group session allowed the students to freely express their opinions. Secondly, data from focus group discussions provided me with a ‘window’ into how people talked about the questionnaire topics and helped me interpret the quantitative data from the questionnaire. Thirdly, participants explained their answers to each other, which created great interaction within the group and rich data (Neuman, 2011). In other words, the focus group approach was an inexpensive, data-rich, flexible, stimulating, and elaborative method (Punch, 2009). By inviting students with similar backgrounds into a focus group discussion, I provided an opportunity for them to engage in meaningful conversations about the topics I wished to investigate (Given, 2008b). They allowed me to investigate the participants’ reasoning

and to explore the underlying factors as to why they thought and felt the way they did (Denscombe, 2014). In the focus group discussion, participants shared their experiences and thoughts and at the same time compared what they said with what other members had shared. This sharing and comparing process was very helpful to my research because it enabled me to hear and understand different responses on my research topic. Focus groups provided data not only on what the participants thought but also on why they thought that way (Morgan, 2006).

The focus groups were conducted in my research following the quantitative phase of questionnaire data collection and were intended to illuminate and elaborate on that quantitative data (Barbour, 2007). As previously mentioned, 32 students volunteered to participate in a total of ten student focus group discussions (two to five per group) across both programs. Moreover, they lasted from 45 to 60 minutes, in recognition of the busy timetable of the student participants. Each focus group discussion was recorded with permission from all student participants. In each focus group discussion, the student participants were asked some guiding questions and follow-up questions about their transnational learning experience. Specifically, the guiding questions included: the reasons why they decided to study in an Australian transnational program in Vietnam; the characteristics desired of transnational lecturers; the intercultural complexities they experienced during their transnational learning; some aspects of the transnational program that they enjoyed; some challenges they had during their transnational learning and how they overcame them; and what advice about this transnational program they would give to the Australian university and the Vietnamese institution offering it (refer to Appendix 7: Student focus group guiding questions, English version and Appendix 8: Student focus group guiding questions, Vietnamese version).

For the convenience of the student participants, all documents related to the focus group discussions were translated from English to Vietnamese. These documents were: the participant information sheet (refer to Appendix 3: Information to student participants, English version and Appendix 4: Information to student participants, Vietnamese version); the consent form (refer to Appendix 5: Consent form for student participants, English version and Appendix 6: Consent form for student participants, Vietnamese version); and the guiding questions of the focus group discussions (refer to Appendix 7: Student focus group guiding questions, English version and Appendix 8: Student focus

group guiding questions, Vietnamese version). Furthermore, Vietnamese was used throughout the focus group discussions for convenience and to ensure the comfort of the student participants.

Being fluent in Vietnamese and familiar with their contexts, I was able to build a good rapport with the student participants. Furthermore, I established a sense of trust within each focus group discussion by ensuring confidentiality. Before each session, I assured the participants that the information to be shared during the session would be treated confidentially. As Denscombe (2014) argued, confidentiality is an important factor in making a focus group discussion successful because it helps participants feel safe and comfortable while sharing their experiences and feelings.

In addition to the student questionnaire and the student focus group discussions, individual interviews with lecturers were conducted in my research. The following section presents more detailed information about those interviews.

### **5.2.3. Lecturer interviews**

Individual interviews with lecturers were conducted in my research to collect qualitative data from the lecturers and add richness to the research. An interview in research is an interchange of opinions between two people talking about a topic of common interest. Interviewing is in fact a professional interaction with a structure and purpose decided by the researcher as the interviewer. Interviewing involves a careful questioning and listening approach with the aim of obtaining information that will be used later for research (Kvale, 2007). Interviewing is a powerful data collection method in qualitative research because it can reach the depth that other methods cannot (Wellington, 2015). Interviewing people allows us to access the participants' perceptions, meanings and construction of reality. Interviewing is considered one of the most powerful ways for people to understand others (Punch, 2009).

Interviews were conducted to collect qualitative data from lecturers to inform the second and third questions of my research (refer to Appendix 11: Lecturer interview guiding questions). My aim was to explore their transnational teaching experience in Vietnam. The use of interviews in my research was rewarding as it enabled me to understand in depth the lecturers' opinions, feelings, emotions and experiences



(Denscombe, 2014). Interviewing the lecturer participants allowed me to access their lived world through the expression of their perspectives, opinions and experiences in their own words (Kvale, 2007). Moreover, it is important to acknowledge I found that interviewing the lecturers was one of the most enjoyable and interesting activities in my research process. In addition to the depth of information they provided, I personally enjoyed the interaction I had with them. It was a fascinating opportunity to hear from lecturers who talked at length about their teaching experience in my home country, Vietnam. I was intrigued by their thoughtful reflections and insightful comments about intercultural complexities between Vietnam and Australia, which has always been one of my long-standing interests in research. Denscombe (2014) listed the therapeutic nature of interviews as one of its advantages. He explained that interviews can be a rewarding experience for participants because people tend to enjoy the opportunity to talk about their ideas to a researcher whose purpose is to listen and take note without any judgement (Denscombe, 2014). In my research, this therapeutic nature worked the other way as well. I found it a greatly rewarding experience at both at a personal and an academic level.

Interviews are most commonly categorised into three subtypes: structured interviews, unstructured interviews, and semi-structured interviews (Denscombe, 2014; Thomas, 2013; Wellington, 2015). Structured interviews involve minimised flexibility and maximised standardisation. In a structured interview, all participants are asked the same questions in the same order in a standardised manner (Punch, 2009). A structured interview is not much different from a questionnaire conducted face-to-face with a respondent (Denscombe, 2014). At the other extreme, unstructured interviews are non-standardised, open-ended, and in-depth interviews (Punch, 2009). In an unstructured interview, the focus is on the participants' thoughts. The researcher starts the session by introducing the topic and then lets the participants develop their own ideas and line of thought (Denscombe, 2014). In this regard, the directions of the interviews might be unpredictable, and the data might be difficult to analyse later (Wellington, 2015). A compromise can be reached between the two extreme positions; that is, semi-structured interviews. In a semi-structured interview, the researcher still has a list of questions to be answered but he/she is prepared to be flexible with the order and, importantly, to let the participants develop their ideas and expand their answers (Denscombe, 2014).

Among the three subtypes of interviews, the semi-structured worked best for my research as it offered me flexibility with a focus. The semi-structured interviews allowed my participants to express their additional thoughts and feelings about the questions while still allowing me to focus the interviews on certain topics. Specifically, I conducted ten semi-structured interviews with ten lecturers involved in the two Australian transnational programs in Vietnam. The use of semi-structure interviews allowed me to obtain rich data about the participants' transnational teaching experience, with a focus on certain important aspects of my research, particularly the characteristics desired of transnational lecturers, and the intercultural complexities between Vietnam and Australia.

It is important to note that no identifying information about the participants or the two programs under research is revealed throughout this thesis. All names used are pseudonyms. The interviews were recorded with their permission and transcribed verbatim. In each interview, the lecturer participant was asked some guiding questions and follow-up questions about their transnational teaching experience. Specifically, the guiding questions included: when they began teaching in a transnational program in Vietnam; some aspect of transnational teaching experience that they enjoyed; their pre-departure and on-going professional development activities for transnational teaching in Vietnam; the characteristics desired of transnational lecturers; the intercultural complexities they experienced during their transnational teaching in Vietnam; some challenges they had during they transnational teaching and how they overcame them; and what advice about this transnational program they would give to the Australian university and the Vietnamese institution offering it (refer to Appendix 11: Lecturer interview guiding questions). Each lecturer participant was provided a copy of their interview transcript to confirm accuracy. They were invited to revise the transcript if necessary before it was analysed as data for my research.

### **5.3. Data collection process**

The two programs in my research were carefully selected among those approved to operate in Vietnam. As mentioned above, the two programs in my research were selected because they were key cases. A key case refers to a good example, a classic or exemplary case among others (Thomas, 2016). In other words, they were considered

two exemplar cases of Australian TNE programs at the master's level in Vietnam. As already indicated, both programs were established and one majored in education and the other in business.

It is important to understand the legal background of TNE programs in Vietnam. Every year the VIED under the MOET updates the list of transnational programs approved by MOET to operate in Vietnam. This list is updated in June every year and has been considered the official patent for transnational programs in Vietnam. During the data collection period, the patent issued on 10 June 2015 (VIED, 2015) was referred to because it was the most updated during that period. According to this patent, there were seven Australian TNE master's programs with legal approval to operate in Vietnam during that time. Three of them majored in education and the other four in business. As my research employed a case study design with the use of key cases, I decided to select one established education program and one established business program from the list. Both of them were located in a large city in Vietnam.

With my ethics application being approved on 25 November 2015, my data collection process officially started from 25 November 2015 and lasted until 26 August 2016. This included distributing the questionnaire to the Vietnamese students, as well as conducting focus group discussions with the Vietnamese students and individual interviews with the lecturers. The questionnaire and focus group discussions were administered in Vietnam, while the individual interviews took place both in Vietnam and Australia to maximise the convenience and availability of the lecturers. The two programs under research were delivered via a burst mode approach in Vietnam at different times of the year. The following table (refer to **Table 5.1**) provides a summary of my data collection process and timelines.

**Table 5.1. Summary of my data collection process and timelines**

<b>Timelines</b>	<b>Activities</b>
25 November 2015	My ethics application approved by VU
December 2015	Contacted the coordinators of the two programs
January 2016	Came to Vietnam the first time for data collection

	Distributed the student questionnaire to 257 students of the two programs Collected 219 student questionnaires Returned to Australia
January-May 2016	Analysed the student questionnaire data Developed the student focus group questions
May-June 2016	Came to Vietnam the second time for data collection Conducted ten focus group discussions for both programs with 32 student participants Conducted four individual interviews with four transnational lecturers in Vietnam Returned to Australia
July-August 2016	Conducted six individual interviews with six transnational lecturers in Australia

To start with, I contacted the coordinators of the two selected programs to express my interest and provide information about my research, but only the education program coordinator was willing to help. The business program coordinator was reluctant, saying that TNE was a very competitive area and at that time they were struggling to compete with other bigger and stronger programs. He was worried my research might have some negative influence on the number of enrolments in their incoming intakes. It is worth noting that in Vietnam ethical procedures for facilitating research differ from those in Australia. This means that in some studies in Vietnam the real identity of the institutions and individuals might be revealed, thus causing concern for potential research participants. He expressed such concerns, so I explained to him VU ethics approval process and sent him my candidature proposal and ethics application, both of which had been approved.

I was fortunate to receive approval from the coordinators of both programs as a result of being introduced to them through my social and professional contacts. In Vietnam, it is common practice that if you have people who can introduce you to an institution/organisation, then the staff there will typically be more open and supportive. If you approach the institution as an outsider, requesting support, it is often more difficult to gain approval to conduct research. In Vietnam, this phenomenon is known as ‘contact culture’.

After I had obtained approval from both programs, I returned to Vietnam for the first time in January 2016 to collect data. Following an introduction by my professional

contacts, I was warmly welcomed by the staff of both programs. In fact, the coordinators and support staff of the education program were very happy to coordinate with me during my data collection process. They asked me to provide them with brief profile information about myself and details about my research for their reference. As stated earlier, all the information had been translated from English to Vietnamese. In addition, all conversations were conducted in Vietnamese. When I went to the education program classes to talk about my research, the coordinator arranged for a staff member to come along and introduce me to the students. I negotiated with the lecturers, seeking their permission and arranging times to administer the questionnaire to their students. The lecturers were very helpful. They allowed me 15-20 minutes before the break to distribute and explain the questionnaire to the students and answer any questions. I also explained the aim of the focus group discussions and invited the students to register a suitable time if they were interested. I made it clear that participation in both the questionnaire and focus group discussions was completely voluntary and confidential. With the support of the coordinator and staff from the education program, I developed a good rapport with the students in this program. Therefore, the questionnaire response rate with the education program was very high, and a number of students expressed their interest in sharing their experiences with me in the focus group discussions.

The coordinator and staff from the business program were less helpful. They provided me with the timetable of the classes and let me approach the students and lecturers by myself. They did not introduce me to the students and lecturers. With limited support from the coordinator and staff in this program, I achieved a smaller response rate both for the student questionnaire and the student focus group discussions.

It was interesting reflecting on my data collection experiences with these two programs. Although I followed the same recruitment procedure and data collection process for both programs, the experiences were so different: a high questionnaire response rate and high interest in focus group discussions within the education program; and a low questionnaire response rate and low interest in focus group discussions within the business program. The level of support from the coordinator and staff, which impacted on the rapport developed between the students and myself, explains this difference. This point relates to the contact culture discussed earlier. Moreover, I was allowed access to all classes of the education program that were running at that time, while for the

business program I was permitted limited access to certain classes. Another reason might have been the structure of the course itself. The education program was a research-oriented education course, so the students in this program were more familiar with research and thus more likely to participate. On the other hand, the business program was a traditional coursework business course without any research component. This may have impacted the number of students expressing interest in participating in the research.

After collecting the student questionnaire data, I read through it and highlighted important points and surprising responses that needed further elaboration. Based on the quantitative data and the relevant literature, I developed some guiding questions for the focus group discussions and scheduled times with the students who had registered. Again, all questions and forms were in Vietnamese to minimise any language confusion.

I returned to Vietnam the second time to collect additional data in May 2016. I conducted ten focus group discussions for both programs, with 32 student participants in total. Each focus group consisted of between two and five students and lasted for about one hour. Before each session, I carefully and thoroughly explained the purpose of the focus group discussions, as well as the benefits and potential risks to participants. I emphasised again that participation was completely voluntary and confidential. I also invited students to read the consent form and sign it. I made sure I explained the participants' rights and the ethical issues involved in the research, to ensure they understood and felt comfortable participating. I strived to create a friendly, informal environment to encourage the students to freely discuss issues, express their opinions, and interact with each other. I adopted this focus group approach as a data collection method because it is socially oriented. It enabled me to study the participants in a more natural and relaxed setting when compared with one-to-one interviews (Marshall & Rossman, 2006). As stated earlier, the focus group discussions were recorded with permission from all participants. The audio recordings were transcribed for further analysis.

At this time, I also introduced myself and my research to the lecturers who were teaching in these two programs, inviting them to participate in my research. As with the

recruitment of students, I managed to recruit more lecturers in the education program than in the business program. This was because the education program coordinator introduced me to all lecturers in this program, while the business program only introduced me to some lecturers who he thought would make 'suitable participants'. On reflection, the difference between the support offered in the education program compared with the business program resulted in a significant gap between the data sets of the two programs. This significant gap made the comparison of data across the two programs problematic and ultimately led me to decide not to compare the data across the two programs.

Ten lecturers were willing to participate in my research. I arranged a place and time for an interview that was convenient for them. Four of them were happy to be interviewed when they were in Vietnam while the other six preferred to be interviewed upon their return to Australia. Each individual interview lasted from 20 to 45 minutes, and the language used was English. Before each interview, the lecturers were informed that their participation was voluntary and confidential. As stated previously, the interviews were recorded with their permission and transcribed verbatim, with an opportunity for participants to revise the transcript if necessary.

#### **5.4. Trustworthiness in my research**

Criteria for judging the quality of quantitative and qualitative research are very different. In quantitative research, quality is assessed in terms of validity, reliability, generalisability, and objectivity (Denscombe, 2014; Marshall & Rossman, 2011). However, these terms make little sense in qualitative research and thus have been challenged. Qualitative researchers argue the philosophical foundations of qualitative research are so different from those of quantitative research that a different set of criteria must be used to determine quality in qualitative research (Denscombe, 2014; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Mertens, 2015). In other words, the criteria for quality in a study are, and should be, determined by the paradigm underpinning that study. Qualitative researchers have therefore developed their own language with regards to the virtues of a qualitative study. The umbrella term for quality in qualitative research is trustworthiness or rigour (Given, 2008a; Marshall & Rossman, 2011; Williams & Morrow, 2009). Trustworthiness is an important concept in qualitative research as it enables researchers

to describe the goodness of research without referring to quantitative-oriented parameters (Given, 2008a).

Although my study employed mixed methods research, using both quantitative and qualitative approaches, it was more aligned with, and underpinned by, qualitative research. Accordingly, I adopted the term ‘trustworthiness’ to describe the quality of my research throughout this thesis.

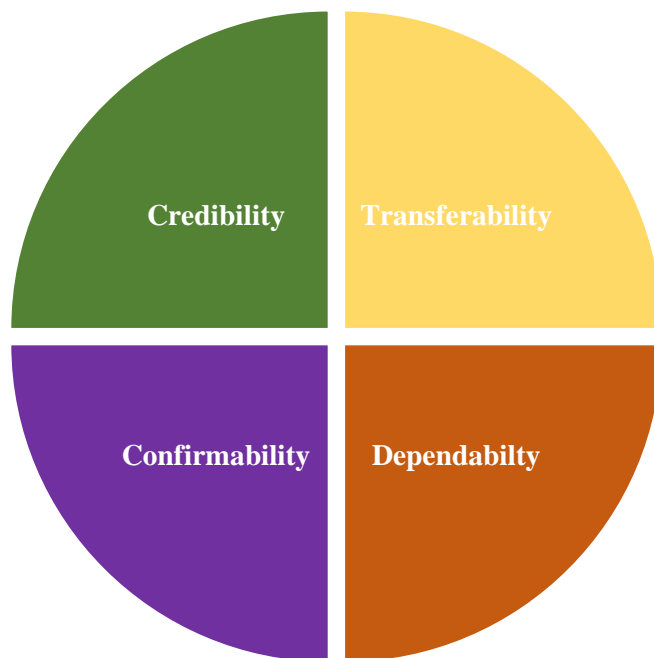
Williams and Morrow (2009) suggested that there are three aspects of trustworthiness in qualitative research: integrity of the data; balance between reflexivity and subjectivity; and clear communication and application of findings. Data integrity refers both to the adequacy (Morrow, 2005) and the dependability (Patton, 2002) of the data. Williams and Morrow (2009) claimed that qualitative researchers can achieve and maintain data integrity by articulating their methods and analysis strategies clearly. Moreover, qualitative researchers need to demonstrate that they have collected sufficient quality and quantity of data. This matter of data adequacy is usually thought of as a sample size issue, but the trustworthiness of the data means more than this (Yeh & Inman, 2007). Researchers should attempt to collect rich data by ensuring a diversity of demographics and perspectives in the sample of participants (Williams & Morrow, 2009). Balancing reflexivity and subjectivity highlights the balance between what participants share and the ways researchers interpret the meaning of the sharing (Williams & Morrow, 2009). Thus, as a researcher, I kept my own perspectives separate from the participants’ stories.

Another critical standard within research trustworthiness concerns the ability of researchers to clearly communicate what has been found and why it matters. In addition to clear writing and presentation of the study, researchers need to demonstrate that their research makes some potential contribution to the development of society and community in certain ways. Furthermore, they need to demonstrate that they have answered the research questions posed from the beginning of the study and, equally importantly, they need to tie the findings to the existing literature (Williams & Morrow, 2009). With a focus on the under-researched topic of Australian TNE in Vietnam, the findings of my research add fundamental knowledge and understanding to the existing literature in the field. These insights contribute to enhancing the quality of TNE within the two programs under research and beyond. Moreover, during the research process,



every methodological choice (research paradigm, research methodology, and data collection methods) was made with great care and consideration to ensure that my research questions would be appropriately addressed.

Another qualitative researcher, Tracy (2010), presented an expansive and flexible model that included eight key markers of quality in qualitative research. These are: worthy topic; rich rigour; sincerity; credibility; resonance; significant contribution; ethics; and meaningful coherence. More recently, some qualitative researchers discussed the concept of trustworthiness in depth, based on previous work by Lincoln and Guba (1985). They developed a framework of trustworthiness consisting of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Denscombe, 2014; Mertens, 2015; Miles, Huberman, & Saldana, 2014). I found reassurance in adopting this framework in my research as it provided me with a comprehensive understanding of trustworthiness (refer to **Figure 5.5**).



**Figure 5.5. Aspects of trustworthiness of my research**

### **5.4.1. Credibility**

Credibility is defined as “the methodological procedures and sources used to establish a high level of harmony between the participants’ expressions and the researcher's interpretations of them” (Given, 2008a, p. 138). In other words, credibility is the extent to which a qualitative researcher can demonstrate that his/her data are accurate and appropriate (Denscombe, 2014). Credibility can be achieved by the following three strategies: prolonged engagement, member checks, and triangulation (Mertens, 2015; Rossman & Sharon, 2017).

Prolonged engagement, also referred to as ‘being there’ (Rossman & Sharon, 2017), basically means the close and deep involvement between the researchers and the researched. This requires researchers to spend sufficient time with participants to make sure that the data obtained are more than just a snapshot view of the phenomenon under study (Rossman & Sharon, 2017). In my research, I strived to establish prolonged contact and engagement with the coordinators, students and lecturers of the two programs under research. In fact, I returned to Vietnam twice to collect data and spent considerable time familiarising myself with the two programs.

The second strategy to ensure credibility is known as member checking (Mertens, 2015) or respondent validation (Denscombe, 2014). Basically, researchers seek verification from participants about what the latter have shared. This entails researchers returning data and findings to participants to check factual accuracy and confirm the researcher’s understandings of the data (Denscombe, 2014). This allows participants to elaborate on, correct, extend, or argue about the data (Rossman & Sharon, 2017). Cho and Trent (2006) described this as “an interactive process between the researcher, the researched, and the collected data that is aimed at achieving a relatively higher level of accuracy and consensus by means of revisiting facts, feelings, experiences, and values or beliefs collected and interpreted” (p. 321). Member checking can be formal and informal (Mertens, 2015). In my research, after the interview recordings had been transcribed, I sent a copy of each transcript to the relevant participant for their verification and

revision before analysing them as data for my research. This helped ensure a balance between reflexivity and subjectivity, and thus trustworthiness of my research, as discussed by Williams and Morrow (2009).

The third strategy to ensure credibility is triangulation. Triangulation is defined by Neuman (2011) as “the idea [of] looking at something from multiple points of view” (p. 164). Denscombe (2014) identified four types of triangulation: methodological triangulation (between methods); methodological triangulation (within methods); data triangulation (use of contrasting sources of information incorporating informant triangulation, time triangulation, and space triangulation); and investigator triangulation (use of different researchers). In my research, I employed methodological triangulation between methods and data triangulation (by employing a questionnaire and focus group discussions). Specifically, I first administered the questionnaire to the students to collect data about their reasons for study, the characteristics desired of transnational lecturers, and intercultural complexities in transnational learning. I then conducted focus group discussions with them to elaborate on prominent themes within those topics. The combination of these two methods enhanced the credibility of the data and findings of my research. Additionally, a specific aspect of data triangulation was used in my research: informant triangulation. I compared data from different informants (students and lecturers) about intercultural complexities in learning and teaching and about their perceptions of what makes a good transnational lecturer. This approach ensured data integrity, an aspect of trustworthiness suggested by Williams and Morrow (2009), which was discussed earlier in this section.

#### **5.4.2. Transferability**

Transferability, as opposed to generalisability in quantitative research, means that the results of a study can be transferred to other contexts beyond the scope of the initial research (Given, 2008a). Qualitative researchers can increase the transferability of a study through thick description (Given, 2008a; Mertens, 2015). Denzin (1989) defined thick description as “deep, dense, detailed accounts” (p. 83). This involves the researcher providing readers with an extensive and detailed description of the context under research and the participants. This thick description helps readers understand the research setting and the participants, and thus enables them to make judgements about

the transferability of the findings to other settings (Given, 2008a; Mertens, 2015). In my research, transferability was an important aspect of the case study design, which was discussed and reflected on earlier in this chapter. The use of a case study design in my research allowed me to obtain thick descriptions of the two programs under research. I increased transferability by providing sufficient details about the context of the two Australian transnational programs under study, as well as the research participants. This has helped provide readers with enough information so that they can determine whether the findings of my research would be transferable to their own contexts.

### **5.4.3. Dependability**

Dependability, as opposed to reliability in quantitative research, refers to the consistency and stability of the research process over time and across researchers and methods (Miles et al., 2014). Although written for qualitative research, this definition by Miles and his colleagues was coined from a very quantitative oriented perspective. It concerns consistency and stability over time, both of which are not relevant in qualitative research. In fact, Denscombe (2014) insisted that in qualitative research, the researcher's self is closely associated with the research instrument, and is sometimes an integral part of the research process. Consequently, it is impossible to expect consistency across researchers. Furthermore, Mertens (2015) contended, change is expected in qualitative research, so it makes little sense raising the question of stability over time in a qualitative study. However, she emphasised that while change is expected in qualitative research, it should be tracked and made publicly inspectable (Mertens, 2015). In order to address dependability, the researcher needs to present an explicit reflexive account of methods, analysis and decision-making processes to explain the lines of enquiry that resulted in particular findings and conclusions (Denscombe, 2014). Essentially, the researcher needs to provide adequate and relevant methodological information so that others can replicate the study (Given, 2008a). To make sure my research was dependable, I always recorded my thoughts and reflections about the research design, including research procedures and methods. I also ensured all alterations to, and evolutions of, the research design were trackable in my research notebook. In addition, I audio-recorded the monthly meetings with my supervisors, during which I discussed my research progress and ideas. These records helped me to attend to the dependability in my research.

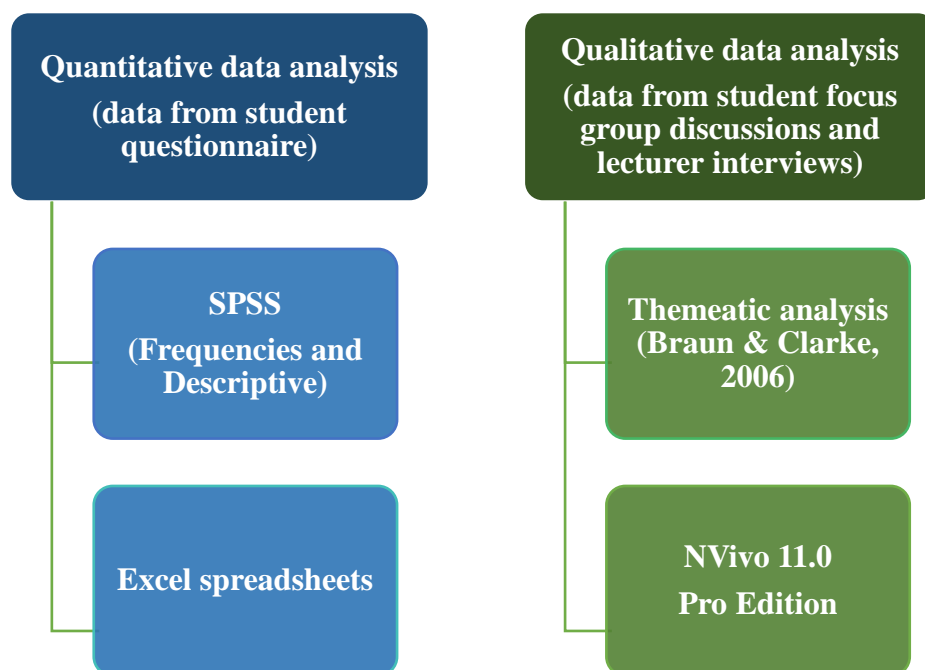
#### **5.4.4. Confirmability**

Confirmability relates to the objectivity in quantitative research, which involves “providing evidence that the researcher’s interpretations of participants’ constructions are rooted in the participants’ constructions and also that analysis and the resulting findings and conclusions can be verified as reflective of and grounded in the participants’ perceptions” (Given, 2008a, p. 113). Confirmability refers to the extent to which the findings of the study are based on the research purpose and researcher bias (Given, 2008a). Confirmability means that the data and their interpretation are not imagined by the researcher (Mertens, 2015). Denscombe (2014), however, presented an interesting perspective on confirmability in qualitative research. He proposed two possible positions that a qualitative researcher can take regarding confirmability. The first position involves the researcher suspending his/her personal identity, values and beliefs during the research process so that his/her investigation is not influenced by personal prejudices. By contrast, the second position allows the researcher to celebrate the extent to which their self is intertwined with the inquiry process. The idea behind this position is that the researcher’s self can provide privileged insight into the topic under research and thus should be considered as a valuable resource to the research rather than a limitation (Denscombe, 2014). My research was, in fact, aligned with the second position. I believed my role as the researcher in this qualitative research project was crucial for unravelling the intercultural complexities of transnational learning and teaching experience. My personal identity as a Vietnamese student studying in Australia; my cultural insights of both Vietnam and Australia; my exposure to the education systems of both countries; and my previous work experience with international education were all extremely helpful in fully exploring areas that would remain elusive to researchers with a different self. Another researcher from a different cultural, professional and educational background would approach the same topic under research in a very different way and might not be able to reach the different layers of intercultural complexities of transnational learning and teaching. It is, however, important to highlight that I analysed the data with an open mind and was prepared to consider alternative and competing explanations of that data (Denscombe, 2014). Furthermore, I accounted for any biases I might have had during the inquiry process by being upfront and open about them. I also adopted appropriate qualitative

methodological choices to attend to those biases. In addition, I made the research process as transparent as possible by providing clear descriptions of the data collection process and data analysis (Given, 2008a). This ensured the findings of my research were grounded in the perceptions shared by the participants, thus observing confirmability.

### 5.5. Data analysis

As there were two sets of data (quantitative data and qualitative data) in my research, different strategies and tools were used to analyse the data sets (refer to **Figure 5.6**).

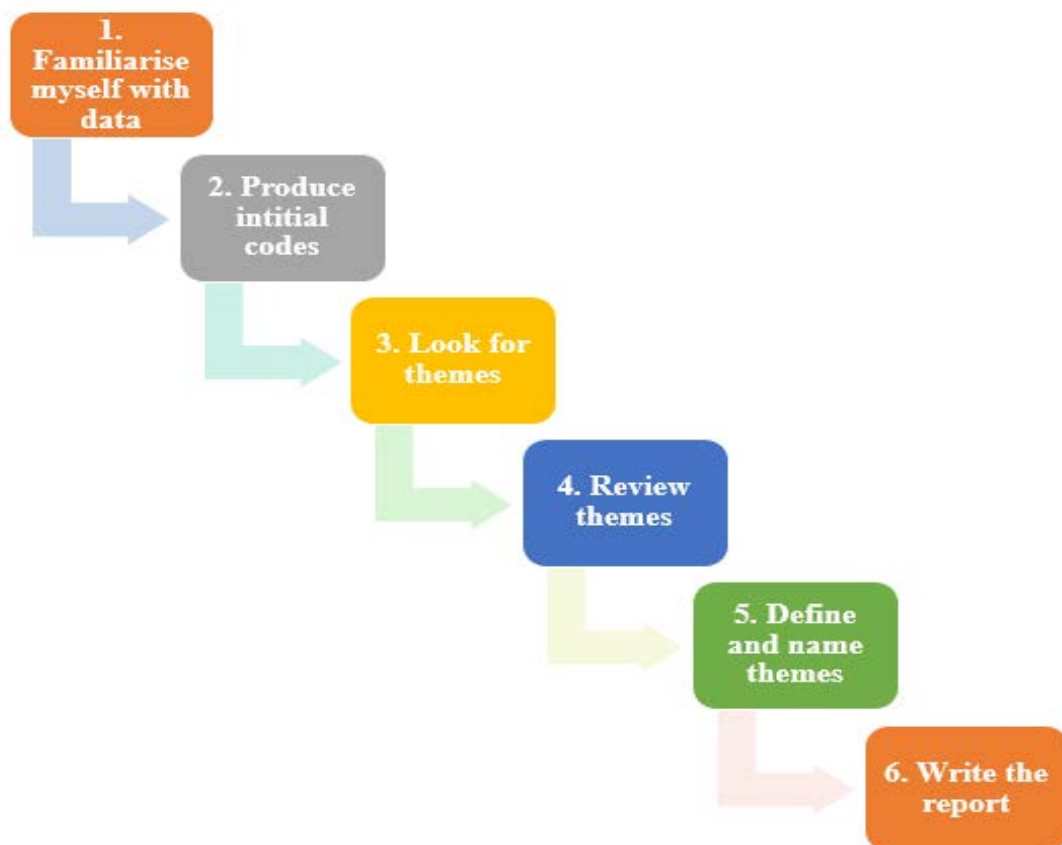


**Figure 5.6. Data analysis strategies and tools of my research**

For the analysis of quantitative data from the student questionnaire, SPSS was employed. The results from the questionnaire were numerically coded on a question-by-question basis. The resulting data was then entered into the computer and analysed using SPSS. Specifically, I used the descriptive statistics technique of SPSS (frequencies and descriptive) to summarise the students' learning experience and perceptions: their reasons for studying in a transnational program; their perceptions of

transnational lecturers' desired characteristics; and the intercultural complexities they experienced in their transnational learning.

For the analysis of qualitative data (i.e., focus group discussions, and individual semi-structured interviews), thematic analysis was utilised. Thematic analysis is a method to identify, analyse and report patterns or themes in the data, as suggested by Braun and Clarke (2006). It entails a careful and focused process of re-reading and reviewing the data (Bowen, 2009). The thematic analysis involves a six-step process that requires moving back and forth throughout the phrases (Braun & Clarke, 2006). I followed these steps for the qualitative data analysis of my research (refer to **Figure 5.7**).



**Figure 5.7. Applying the six-step thematic analysis approach in my research**  
(*Braun & Clarke, 2006*)

Firstly, I familiarised myself with the data by reading them carefully and actively. Secondly, I coded interesting aspects of the data systematically and meaningfully by

writing notes on the texts being analysed, highlighting potential items with coloured pens or using post-it notes to mark interesting features of the data. Next, I continued to analyse the data but at a wider level of themes, rather than codes. I classified different codes into potential themes by using visual tools. At the same time, I thought of the relationships between codes, themes and different levels of themes. Fourthly, I reviewed themes and checked if the themes worked in relation to the coded extracts and the entire set of data before working on a thematic map of the analysis. I then considered how each theme related to the research questions and other themes. Moreover, I thought about naming the themes in a concise, meaningful manner that related directly to the content of the theme. Finally, I ensured the thematic analysis was presented concisely, coherently, logically and interestingly, with vivid examples, quotes or extracts that clearly demonstrated the main points. Importantly, I presented arguments related to the research questions rather than just describing data.

In addition to thematic analysis, NVivo 11.0 Pro Edition was employed to assist with the qualitative analysis of my research. NVivo 11.0 Pro Edition, a product of QSR International, provides researchers with a set of tools to assist with the organising of qualitative data (Bazeley & Jackson, 2013). NVivo was very useful to me in organising my qualitative data in the following five ways: managing data, managing ideas, querying data, visualising data, and reporting from the data (Bazeley & Jackson, 2013). Firstly, using NVivo was helpful in organising and keeping track of the many data records, such as the transcripts of interviews (student focus group discussions, and the lecturer interviews), and for evolving ideas during the inquiry process. Secondly, NVivo assisted me with managing ideas by providing quick access to the related conceptual and theoretical knowledge. Thirdly, using NVivo prompted me to ask simple or complicated questions of the data, as well as to obtain relevant data and information to answer those questions. Fourthly, the use of NVivo enabled me to easily visualise my data, such as showing the content/structure of the cases, ideas or concepts, and the relationships among different patterns or themes. Finally, using NVivo assisted me in reporting from the data. I used the contents of the qualitative database, including the original data sources and ideas developed from them, and processes through which some themes/patterns were identified (Bazeley & Jackson, 2013).



## **5.6. Ethical consideration**

Ethical consideration is an important aspect of any research project. As Rossman and Sharon (2017) insisted, “an unethical study is not a trustworthy study” (p. 51). My research involved direct and interpersonal interaction with humans and therefore I thoroughly attended to relevant ethical issues to ensure the ethical, appropriate and professional conduct of my research. The ethical aspects identified in my research included informed consent, confidentiality, and reciprocity.

### **5.6.1. Informed consent**

Informed consent involves a researcher explaining the purpose of a study to participants, including the main features of the design and possible risks and benefits from their participation in the research project (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015). Cohen et al. (2013) suggested that informed consent implies four factors: competence, voluntarism, full information, and comprehension. Competence requires researchers to ensure that consent has been obtained from mature, responsible and psychologically capable people after they have been given relevant information. Voluntarism means that participants can choose whether or not to take part in the research and that they are aware of the potential risks (Cohen et al., 2013). Full information entails the researcher providing participants with relevant information in writing, in a simple and clear manner. Comprehension implies that participants fully understand the research study, including its procedures, purpose, conduct and potential risks (Cohen et al., 2013).

In my research, the notion of informed consent was addressed thoroughly. Participants in my research were either master’s level students or transnational lecturers, so they were all mature, responsible and psychologically capable. They were provided with relevant information about my research via emails before my arrival, as well as in person on my arrival, including an outline of the procedures, purposes, conduct, potential risks and benefits of the research. It was also emphasised that participation in my research was voluntary; they could choose to participate in my research or not. Furthermore, I clarified any confusion with them to ensure they fully understood my research.

### **5.6.2. Confidentiality**

Confidentiality in research ethics refers to the agreement between the researcher and the participants about how the data will be handled. Most often it involves the researcher not disclosing the participants' identifying information without their permission (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015). Rossman and Sharon (2017) suggested two aspects of confidentiality in research ethics: protecting the identity of the participants; and holding in confidence their contributions by not sharing this with others using their real identity. The principle of confidentiality is very important because a breach might result in participants becoming involved in undesirable situations. Moreover, assurances of confidentiality can influence the participants' decision to participate in the research.

As discussed earlier in this chapter, there are different ethical procedures for facilitating research in Vietnam that may allow the real identity of institutions and participants involved in research to be revealed. This might cause concern for those considering participation, and result in their reluctance to take part in research. In my research, therefore, I observed strict confidentiality. I kept all the information and data provided by the participants confidential, ensuring that it was only accessible to myself and my supervisors. Importantly, only I knew the real identity of the participants. I never discussed data with anyone else other than my supervisors. Even when I discussed my data with my supervisors, the real identity of participants was unknown to them. Moreover, the identity of the two programs being researched remained confidential, and the city in Vietnam remained anonymous in this thesis. In addition, all names used in my thesis are randomly selected pseudonyms. Furthermore, I clearly explained the principles of confidentiality to my participants before collecting data, so they felt free to answer my questions.

### **5.6.3. Reciprocity**

Reciprocity, in a social context, entails the balanced interaction of give and take between people (Given, 2008a). In other words, reciprocity highlights the need for mutual benefit in human interactions, and operates in all aspects of social life. Research is no exception. In fact, research is and should be a two-way process (Rossman & Sharon, 2017). In research, the notion of reciprocity concerns the role of the researcher in terms of his/her wish to give something back to the participants during the interview

process (Mertens, 2015). Although research relationships do not have to be reciprocal, it is good ethical research practice for the researcher to think about what he/she takes from the participants and what he/she can give back to them (Given, 2008a). In fact, the notion of reciprocity in research describes “the respectful nature of good research relationships and exchanges that are essential” (Maiter, Simich, Jacobson, & Wise, 2008, p. 307) in all types of research. As a researcher in education, I concurred with these authors. Research relationships should be reciprocal in order to make the interaction fair and to build the rapport with participants. From a Vietnamese cultural point of view, I believed it was fair, appropriate and ethical to give something back to my participants after they had given me time in their already very busy lives to share their experience with me.

I developed two different reciprocal relationships for two groups of participants in my research (TNE lecturers and Vietnamese students). For the lecturers, I adopted the notion of reciprocity by highlighting that my research provided them with an opportunity to reflect on their transnational teaching experience and to raise their concerns. Moreover, I assured them that I would send them the findings of my research after examination.

For the Vietnamese students, I used another reciprocal strategy that I thought would benefit them most. After the conduct of focus group discussions, I offered to share my own experiences about doing research and applying for scholarships to study overseas. With my experiences as a New Zealand Development Scholarship awardee for my master’s degree by research in New Zealand, and a VU International Postgraduate Research Scholarship awardee for my doctoral study in Australia, I was willing to answer their questions about how to apply for scholarships. Besides, as a doctoral student with previous academic and professional experience in research, I was happy to respond to their queries. It is, however, important to mention that I clarified with them that in these sessions I would share my own personal experiences from a peer position rather than a teaching position, and thus it was up to them to relate that information to their own situations. There were no definite right or wrong answers. This strategy worked very well with my student participants as it provided them with more immediate and practical benefits from participating in my research. In fact, two students who participated in these sessions with me went on to be successful with their scholarship

applications for doctoral studies in Australia and New Zealand. They said that the information and personal experiences I shared with them in these sessions gave them confidence and inspiration.

### **5.7. Chapter conclusion**

This chapter has introduced my research design, including descriptions of the conceptual framework consisting of pragmatic paradigm, mixed methods research, and case study design. It has also presented the data collection methods (student questionnaire, student focus group discussions, and lecturer interviews), and the data collection process. In addition, this chapter has explained how trustworthiness was achieved in my research in terms of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Moreover, it highlighted the data analysis procedures and how ethical issues had been attended to in my research with respect to informed consent, confidentiality, and reciprocity.

The next chapter (Chapter 6) presents the student findings, including the quantitative data from the student questionnaire and the qualitative data from the student focus group discussions across both programs. To be specific, the next chapter reports on the student findings in terms of main reasons for students choosing TNE, students' perceptions of important characteristics desired of transnational lecturers, and intercultural complexities in transnational learning.

## **Chapter 6 - Student findings**

This chapter reports on the student findings concerning their transnational learning experience. These findings emanate from the quantitative data from the student questionnaire and the qualitative data from the student focus group discussions across both programs: education and business program. Two sets of data (i.e., quantitative and qualitative) are combined and presented under main themes in this chapter. The term ‘student respondents’ refers to the students who responded to the questionnaire while the term ‘student participants’ refers to the students who participated in the focus group discussions. As mentioned earlier in Chapter 5, the difference between the support offered in these two programs resulted in a significant gap between the data sizes of the ~~two cases~~ two programs, which made it irrelevant to compare data across those ~~cases~~ programs. Instead, the focus is on developing the findings in depth to support the case study.

There are five sections in this chapter. The first section introduces the demographic information of the questionnaire respondents in terms of gender, age, nationality, previous English-medium instruction, and employment status. The second section identifies the main reasons for students’ choosing one of these two Australian transnational programs, as opposed to local programs in Vietnam. The third section describes the Vietnamese students’ reasons for choosing to study an Australian transnational program in Vietnam rather than studying in Australia. The fourth section details what the students perceived as important characteristics of transnational lecturers. The final section describes the influences of intercultural complexities on student learning experience.

### **6.1. Student profiles**

As outlined in the previous chapter, the student questionnaire was distributed to 257 students from nine classes in the two programs: education and business. Two hundred and nineteen students returned the questionnaire, giving a response rate of 85.2%. Among these 219 students, 32 volunteered to participate in student focus group discussions. Ten student focus group discussions across both programs were conducted to elaborate on the student questionnaire results.

The student demographic information in this section is based on the quantitative data from the student questionnaire. Data on student demographic attributes provided important references to discuss and explain their responses (discussed later in Chapter 8). For example, student gender and age data assisted in explaining cultural implications of their responses. Moreover, student nationality and previous experience with English-medium instruction data enhanced my understanding of the impact of languages on their transnational learning experience. Similarly, information about students' employment was used to unravel commitment-related implications in their responses.

Student profiles were described in terms of gender, age, nationality, previous English-medium instruction, and employment status. Results under each demographic attribute are presented in the following sections.

#### **6.1.1. Gender and age**

Most of the student respondents (84.9%) were female with the remainder (15.1%) being male. The majority of the student respondents were aged between 23 and 40. More than half of them (67.6%) were from 23 to 30 years of age and more than a quarter of them (27.9%) were from 31 to 40 years old.

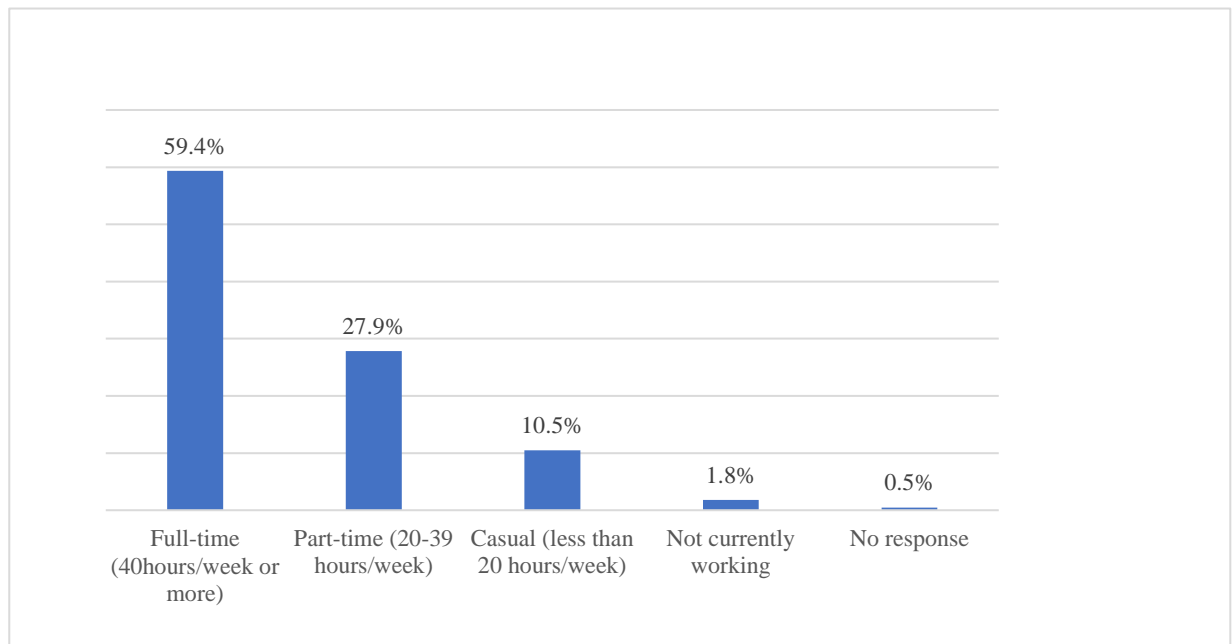
#### **6.1.2. Nationality and previous English-medium instruction**

Most of the respondents were local, with 97.3% reporting to be Vietnamese and 2.7% not responding to the question. More than half of the respondents (67.6%) reported that they had previously studied in English-medium programs. For about one third of them (30.6%), this was the first time they were taught completely in English.

#### **6.1.3. Employment**

The following chart (refer to **Figure 6.1**) documents the employment status of the students during their candidature. More than half of the respondents (59.4%) were involved in full time employment when they studied. Slightly more than a quarter of respondents (27.9%) were engaged in part-time jobs, and 10.5% of them were working casually. A small percentage (1.8%) of respondents indicated that they had no working commitments while studying. It is important to note that many student participants, especially those from the education program, worked at universities as lecturers.

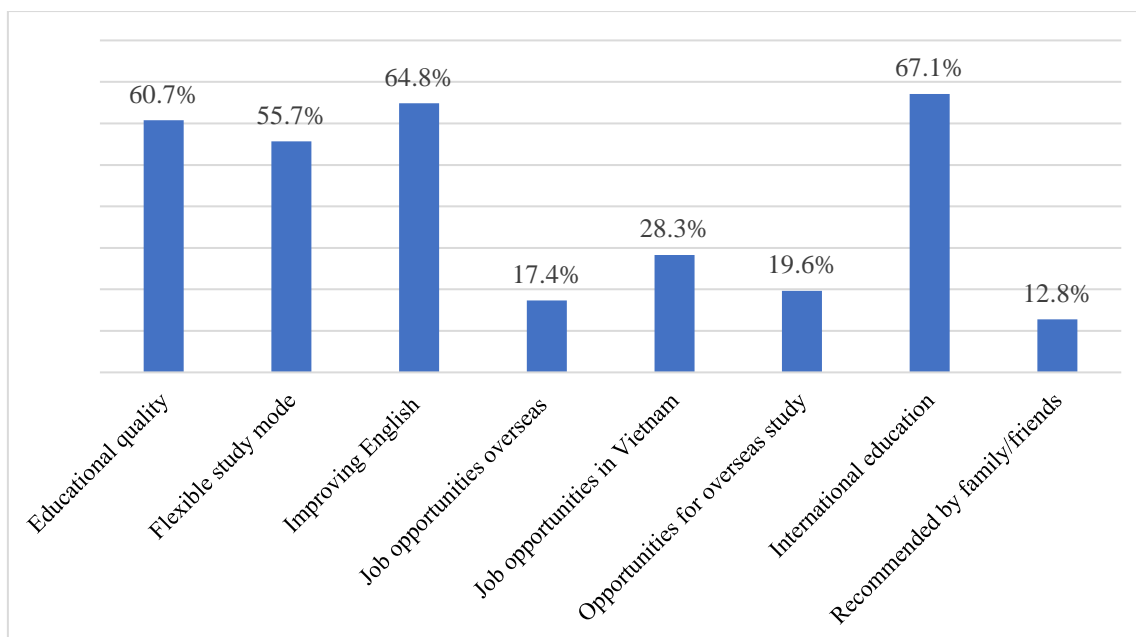
Therefore, they referred to universities as their working contexts. In other words, universities were considered work contexts for these student participants.



**Figure 6.1.** Employment status of students – Student questionnaire results

## 6.2. Choosing a transnational program over a local Vietnamese one

In the student questionnaire, respondents were invited to identify reasons why they chose a transnational program rather than a local Vietnamese one. The questionnaire results indicated four common reasons: gaining an international education (67.1%); English language competence (64.8%); educational quality (60.7%); and flexibility and fast-track delivery (55.7%). Four less popular reasons related to: job opportunities in Vietnam (28.3%); opportunities for overseas study later (19.6%); job opportunities overseas (17.4%); and recommendations from family/friends (12.8%). The chart below (refer to **Figure 6.2**) provides a summary of this quantitative data.



**Figure 6.2. Reasons for students choosing TNE over a Vietnamese local program – Student questionnaire results**

### **6.2.1. International education**

The student questionnaire results above indicate that the most common reason for students choosing a transnational program instead of a local Vietnamese one was to obtain an international education. In the focus group discussions, the student participants elaborated on specific reasons as to why an international education was important to them. They emphasised the importance of having an international degree as they believed it would offer them better job opportunities, better opportunities to pursue doctoral studies overseas later, and enhanced personal development in terms of understanding international perspectives. Each of these benefits is presented and illustrated with quotes from the student participants in the following sections.

#### ***6.2.1.1. Better opportunities to find jobs***

Some student participants believed an international master's degree would make it easier for them to find a job than if they obtained a Vietnamese master's degree. Others believed an international degree would be valued more highly than a Vietnamese degree within their professional contexts. Some participants explained:



I chose to study in a transnational program because I was told that graduating from a Vietnamese program would make it hard to find jobs. We Vietnamese usually think highly of international and Western conventions. With an international degree, it would be easier for me to find good jobs and it looks cooler on me too. (Student 26)

I believe an international degree carries more value than a Vietnamese one. That is one of the most important reasons why I decided to study in a transnational program. In this age, everyone needs to get a master's degree. Particularly, working in a university context like myself, people think differently between an international degree and a Vietnamese one. (Student 32)

#### ***6.2.1.2. Better opportunities to pursue doctoral studies overseas***

Other students regarded an international master's degree as a stepping stone to do doctoral studies overseas later. They believed studying in a transnational program, especially with a research focus like the education program would make it easier for them to get admission, and even scholarships, to do doctoral study later. Some students elaborated:

Obtaining an international degree is of course important to me. My long-term plan is to apply for doctoral study overseas, so obtaining an international degree now would be of great help. (Student 24)

Most people who study a master's degree would wish to pursue a doctoral degree later, especially among lecturers like myself. Obtaining an international degree like this will help a lot when I apply for a scholarship to do a doctoral degree overseas later. (Student 8)

It is quite important for me to have an international degree. I do not have a specific plan yet, but I might want to pursue doctoral studies abroad at some stage in the future. I do not want to do a philosophy degree in Vietnam .... I want to get a scholarship to do a PhD overseas. I think having an international master's degree would be one

advantage for me over other applicants with a Vietnamese degree when I apply for the scholarship. (Student 31)

#### **6.2.1.3. *International perspectives***

Some student participants discussed the benefit of being exposed to an international education. They wanted to learn new things and experience a new teaching and learning environment. They hoped their study in a transnational program would provide opportunities to develop international perspectives. Some participants elaborated:

I would like to be exposed to international education because I want new experiences. I have done a Vietnamese master's program before, so I decided to study in this program to experience a new teaching and learning approach. Also, there is more cultural exchange in this transnational course. I get to know more about the outside world than studying in a local Vietnamese program. (Student 24)

I was studying in a Vietnamese educational context for 12 years from K1-12 and then another four years for my undergraduate study, so I am so familiar with the Vietnamese approach. Now I would like to experience a transnational program to see how different it is. (Student 19)

In short, the main reason for students choosing TNE over a local Vietnamese program related to obtaining an international education and, more specifically, an international qualification. Student participants in focus group discussions believed an international qualification would benefit them in seeking employment, applying for doctoral studies, and in developing international perspectives.

The following section presents the second reason why students preferred TNE over a local Vietnamese program.

#### **6.2.2. English language competence**

According to the student questionnaire results, the second most common reason why these students wanted to study in a transnational program rather than a Vietnamese

program was to improve their English language skills, reported by 64.8% of the respondents. The data from the student focus group discussions clarified why improving English language competence was important to students. Some student participants believed a transnational classroom would provide an authentic English-speaking environment for them to practise English. They highlighted that a transnational program provided them with opportunities to learn about Western culture, to build their confidence in using English, and to practise using common English academic terms. More broadly, they believed it would enhance their career development. Some student participants expanded:

This transnational program provides me with an authentic English-speaking environment. There are also programs in Vietnam where lecturers speak English but I think my English skills will be much improved if I can study with English native speakers. This authentic English-speaking environment makes me feel like I am learning overseas although I am still in Vietnam. (Student 17)

Learning with English native speakers is very helpful to improving my English skills. Besides, I can learn about their culture, of course not everything, but at least I am exposed to their culture. This will help me in my job. (Student 24)

I want to learn to speak English naturally and fluently and to express myself in English confidently. That would help my job as an English teacher. (Student 25)

I want to learn English academic terms that are used commonly in learning, teaching and research to apply into my teaching job. (Student 23),

In summary, many students chose TNE because they wished to be immersed in an authentic English-speaking context in which they could practise communicating in English. The student participant quotes above emphasised the desire to improve English language competence, and more widely, to enhance their career prospects.

The following section introduces the next reason for choosing a transnational program, which concerns educational quality.

### **6.2.3. Educational quality of transnational education compared to that of local programs**

The student questionnaire results suggested that educational quality was the third most common reason for the choice of a transnational program over a Vietnamese one, as reported by 60.7% of the questionnaire respondents. In the student focus group discussions, the participants provided specific reasons for their choice by comparing the educational quality of transnational programs with local Vietnamese programs. They raised concerns about the entrance to, and curriculum of, local Vietnamese programs and, more broadly, the general perceptions of educational practices in Vietnam.

#### ***6.2.3.1. Entrance to, and curriculum of, local Vietnamese programs***

In student focus group discussions, some participants were concerned about the entrance examinations and curriculum of local Vietnamese programs. They described these programs as impractical and irrelevant because of an over-emphasis on political and philosophical subjects in entrance requirements and curriculum. Some student participants justified their choice as follows:

I had done a lot of research into this transnational program and some Vietnamese programs before I decided to take this transnational one. The entrance examination of the Vietnamese programs requires three subjects: philosophy, another foreign language (excluding English), and one major-related subject. I could not cope with philosophy and another foreign language, so I decided to go with this transnational program which just required an IELTS-type test for entrance. This option suits me much better. (Student 21)

I found the curriculum of this transnational program more practical and useful to me. Some colleagues of mine who have studied in a Vietnamese program told me that their course lasts two years but during the first whole year they just studied general philosophical and

political subjects such as philosophy and Marxism-Leninism. They only studied specialised subjects in the second year, which was very short. In this transnational course, we only study specialisation-related subjects, so we do not have to waste time. (Student 20)

The curriculum of local programs is heavy and irrelevant to my major .... Some of my colleagues who are enrolled with a local program have to study another language (other than English) such as Chinese, Japanese, French or Russian, which is very challenging .... Moreover, they are required to study philosophy which I find irrelevant. Philosophy is just not relevant or helpful to my current teaching job. (Student 24)

#### ***6.2.3.2. Perceptions of educational practices in Vietnam***

In addition, some student participants shared their perceptions about educational practices in Vietnam. They expressed their concerns about some current unhealthy practices in the country's education system, such as lack of transparency and integrity in assessment and reporting. They hoped to avoid those practices by studying in a transnational program. Some student participants provided details:

I did not choose a Vietnamese program because of some possible unhealthy practices that still occasionally occur in Vietnam education .... I was told about how much students need to prepare to get a pass under the table and how much money to do a dissertation. (Student 5)

The tuition fee of a Vietnamese program is not as much but the expenses under the table might cost students much more. (Student 18)

In the Vietnamese education context, sometimes some students who had not studied hard enough still got passed by their teachers. It is kind of 'part of Vietnamese thinking'. I do not like it. I want to study for real. (Student 2)

In brief, the students were concerned about the educational quality of local Vietnamese programs in terms of an over-emphasis on politics/philosophy in entrance and

curriculum, and the lack of transparency in assessment. These concerns deterred students from studying in local Vietnamese programs, and at the same time, pulled them towards TNE.

The following section elaborates on the fourth most common reason for student choice with TNE which relates to TNE's flexibility and fast-track delivery.

#### **6.2.4. Flexibility and fast-track delivery**

According to the student questionnaire results, the fourth most common reason for students choosing TNE related to the flexibility and fast-track delivery of the transnational programs, as reported by 55.7% of the questionnaire respondents. In the focus group discussions, the participants clarified that the time arrangements of the transnational program were important to them, given that they were still working either full-time or part-time while studying. Some participants valued the burst mode delivery of TNE because it allowed them to work while studying. Moreover, others just wished to get a degree quickly, so they could move on with other commitments. Some student participants provided further explanations:

My biggest reason for studying in this transnational program was to get a degree quickly and on time. I would like to get a master's degree as quickly as possible. The strength of this program is that it is delivered in burst mode within two years and with a fixed schedule. This is helpful for me to organise my commitments. Time is my biggest concern. (Student 31)

I want to get a postgraduate degree quickly so that I can move on with other commitments. I have postponed getting married to complete this course. It is an intensive course but very fast too, so it works for my situation. (Student 32)

This program is very fast. The reason most of us wanted to study with this program was because it is very fast. We just have to go to class several times in a year during the burst mode deliveries. We do not have to quit our current jobs. (Student 3)

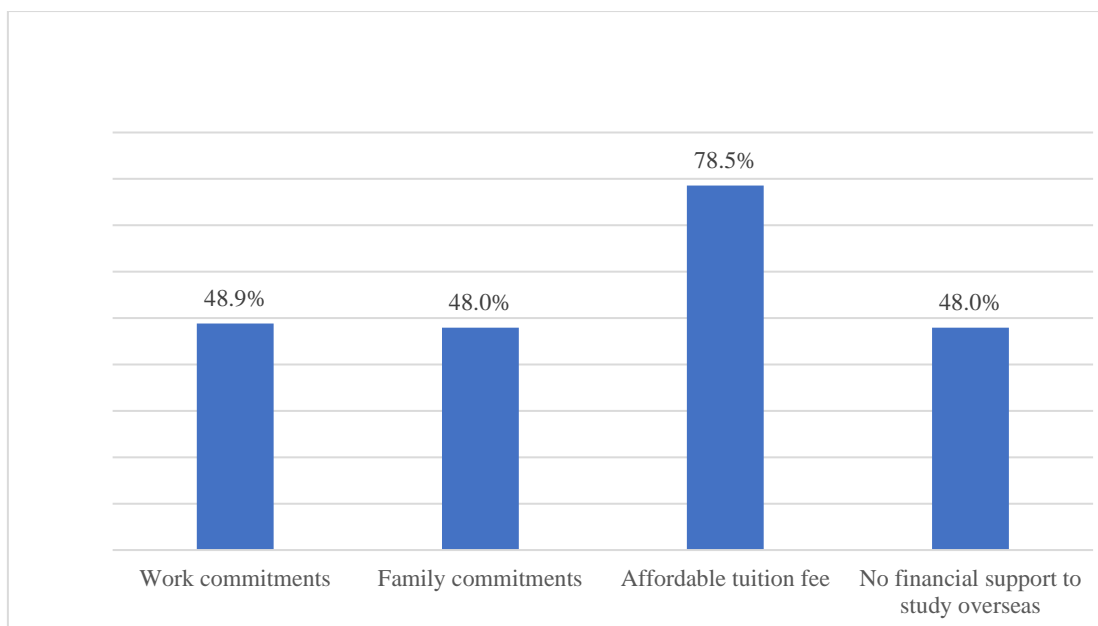
In short, some students chose a transnational program because its flexibility and fast-track delivery allowed them to work while studying. Others studied in a transnational program to get a postgraduate degree quickly, thus enabling them to move on with other commitments in their lives.

In summary, the above sub-sections have presented the four main reasons for students choosing a transnational program over a local Vietnamese program: an international education, including an international degree; English language competence; better educational quality (compared to local Vietnamese programs); and flexibility and fast-track delivery. Among these most common reasons, three (international education; English language competence; and flexibility and fast-track delivery) represented the pull factors of TNE, and one (educational quality) represented a push factor away from local Vietnamese programs. The succeeding section elaborates on the reasons why these students preferred TNE over studying in Australia.

### **6.3. Choosing a transnational program in Vietnam over studying in Australia**

In this section, the term ‘to study offshore’ refers to studying in a transnational program in Vietnam while ‘to study onshore’ means studying at a home campus in Australia.

In the student questionnaire, the student respondents were invited to identify reasons why they chose to study in a transnational program in Vietnam rather than studying in Australia. The questionnaire results identified the affordability of transnational program tuition fees as the most common reason (78.5%), followed by work commitments (48.9%), family commitments (48.0%), and no scholarships to study overseas (48.0%) (refer to **Figure 6.3**).



**Figure 6.3. Reasons for students choosing TNE over studying in Australia (Student questionnaire results)**

In general, these four reasons could be divided into two groups: financial reasons (affordable tuition fees and lack of financial support to study overseas) and commitment-related reasons (work and family commitments). Each of these groups is discussed in the following sections.

### **6.3.1. Financial reasons**

The student questionnaire results suggested that cost was the most important reason why these students decided to study in a transnational program in Vietnam rather than studying in Australia.

In the student focus group discussions, some participants agreed that they selected TNE for financial reasons, not being able to afford to study in Australia. By studying in a transnational program in Vietnam, they could get an international degree but at a much more affordable price. Some participants explained their choice:

I want an international degree at an affordable cost. My family want me to get a master's degree quickly. This transnational program is the best option for me. (Student 5)



I definitely prefer studying overseas, but I decided to study in a transnational program in Vietnam because it is more affordable and it is quick. (Student 7)

Other students added that they would prefer studying in Australia if they could afford to do so. Some clarified that a scholarship would certainly help them to study in Australia, but they found it difficult to get one to study abroad. Some stated they did not have access to scholarship information, especially those from small cities:

We do not have much access to scholarship programs. I am from a small city [AAA] where there is little information about scholarship programs. If you want information, you have to go to an agent and you have to pay a bit for that. Moreover, some scholarship programs do have some information sessions but these sessions usually take place in big cities, not in small cities. (Student 25)

I do not have enough information about scholarships. I often get information about scholarships on the internet by myself without anyone guiding or supporting me. I also call the scholarship programs directly to get information .... I find scholarships out of my reach. (Student 27)

To be awarded with a scholarship requires a lot of factors including both academic performance and involvement in extra-curricular activities. Vietnamese students tend to focus too much on academic study and lack involvement in extra-curricular activities. Those who are interested in applying for scholarships usually have to do research by themselves without any support from universities. In general, applying for scholarships is very difficult. Scholarships are only for those who are extremely excellent and very proactive. (Student 23)

### **6.3.2. Commitment-related reasons**

According to the student questionnaire results, the other main reasons for students choosing to study in a transnational program in Vietnam rather than studying in

Australia related to work and family commitments. In the student focus group discussions, some participants explained that they did not want to study overseas and compromise their current job stability, considering the highly competitive job market in Vietnam at the moment. Additionally, many female students, especially those with young children, found it hard to think of moving away from their family. Therefore, studying in a transnational program in their home country suited them. They were able to maintain their employment and take care of their family while studying. They considered TNE a win-win option for them.

To sum up, the above section has presented the two main reasons for students choosing to study in a transnational program in Vietnam rather than studying in Australia: financial reasons and commitment-related reasons.

The next section presents the findings related to what the students perceived as important characteristics for transnational lecturers. It reports on both quantitative data from the student questionnaire and the qualitative data from the student focus group discussions.

#### **6.4. Key characteristics of transnational lecturers**

This section describes what students perceived as important characteristics desired of transnational lecturers. The student questionnaire results are presented first, followed by the student focus group discussion data.

##### **6.4.1. Perceptions of key characteristics from the quantitative data**

The following table (refer to **Table 6.1**) was used in the student questionnaire to obtain student perspectives about the key characteristics desired of transnational lecturers. The students were asked to circle the number that represented, in their opinion, the level of importance of a characteristic. As mentioned earlier in Chapter 4, this framework of transnational lecturers' key characteristics was adapted from Leask (2008) and Leask et al. (2005). Their work identified 16 key characteristics desired of transnational lecturers. These 16 characteristics were divided into four categories (discipline knowledge, cultural knowledge, teaching skills, and policy and procedural knowledge). Based on their research, I developed a set of transnational lecturers' characteristics and included

this in the student questionnaire as part of my research. My framework included nine out of the 16 characteristics proposed by Leask and her colleagues. These nine characteristics were selected because they were related to a transnational context and were thus relevant to my research. Moreover, these nine characteristics belonged to discipline knowledge, cultural knowledge, and teaching skills categories. Based on their experience, the students rated the nine lecturer characteristics that they thought were important in supporting their learning.

**Table 6.1. Nine key characteristics desired of transnational lecturers included in the student questionnaire**

Category	Item	Characteristics of a transnational lecturer	The extent of importance				
Discipline knowledge	A	Knowledge of the discipline and related professions in the local context as well as more broadly in an international context.	1	2	3	4	5
Cultural knowledge	B	An understanding of local culture(s) including the political, legal and economic environment.	1	2	3	4	5
	C	An understanding of how the teacher's own culture affects the way they think, feel and act.	1	2	3	4	5
	D	An understanding of how culture affects how we interact with others.	1	2	3	4	5
	E	An understanding of the social, cultural and educational backgrounds of students.	1	2	3	4	5
Teaching skills	F	The ability to include local content in the program through examples and case studies.	1	2	3	4	5
	G	The ability to adapt learning activities in response to the needs of transnational students.	1	2	3	4	5
	H	The ability to engage students from different cultural backgrounds in discussion and group work.	1	2	3	4	5
	I	The ability to communicate with other staff teaching on the program.	1	2	3	4	5

Notes: 1: not important      2: little important      3: rather important      4: important  
5: very important

*Leask (2008)*

The quantitative results from the student questionnaire were analysed using the Frequencies under Descriptive Statistics in SPSS. The results below (refer to **Table 6.2**) suggested that the discipline knowledge category (refer to Item A) was the highest rated characteristic. (Note: 1<sup>st</sup> being the most important and 9<sup>th</sup> the least important)

**Table 6.2. Significance of nine transnational lecturers' key characteristics (results from student questionnaire)**

Category	Item	Key characteristics of a transnational lecturer	Mean	Explanation of mean
Discipline knowledge	A	Knowledge of the discipline and related professions in the local context as well as more broadly in an international context.	4.43	Rated 1 <sup>st</sup>
Cultural knowledge	B	An understanding of local culture(s) including the political, legal and economic environment.	2.90	Rated 9 <sup>th</sup>
	C	An understanding of how the teacher's own culture affects the way they think, feel and act.	3.67	Rated 6 <sup>th</sup>
	D	An understanding of how culture affects how we interact with others.	3.78	Rated 4 <sup>th</sup>
	E	An understanding of the social, cultural and educational backgrounds of students.	3.69	Rated 5 <sup>th</sup>
Teaching skills	F	The ability to include local content in the program through examples and case studies.	3.63	Rated 7 <sup>th</sup>
	G	The ability to adapt learning activities in response to the needs of transnational students.	4.19	Rated 2 <sup>nd</sup>
	H	The ability to engage students from different cultural backgrounds in discussion and group work.	3.85	Rated 3 <sup>rd</sup>
	I	The ability to communicate with other staff teaching on the program.	3.44	Rated 8 <sup>th</sup>

The table above highlights that the student respondents believed that a transnational lecturer needs to demonstrate knowledge of the discipline and related professions in the local (Vietnamese) context, as well as more broadly in an international context. Within the teaching skills category, the two most important characteristics were the ability to adapt learning activities in response to the needs of transnational students (Item G), and the ability to engage students from different cultural backgrounds in discussion and group work (Item H). In the cultural knowledge category, the student respondents highly valued transnational lecturers with an understanding of how culture influences interactions with others (Item D), and an understanding of the social, cultural and educational backgrounds of their students (Item E).

The following section examines the qualitative data arising from the student focus group discussions as it relates to perceptions of the characteristics desired of transnational lecturers.

#### **6.4.2. Perceptions of characteristics from the qualitative data**

In the student focus group discussions, the participants expanded on the student questionnaire results. They provided specific examples regarding their perceptions of transnational lecturers. It is important to note that the student focus group data identified one category (i.e., personal attributes) that was additional to the framework proposed by Leask and her colleagues (Leask, 2008; Leask et al., 2005). Accordingly, the responses from the student participants discussed in the sub-sections below are classified into four main categories: discipline knowledge, teaching skills, Vietnamese cultural knowledge, and personal attributes.

##### ***6.4.2.1. Discipline knowledge***

The student participants highlighted that it was important for transnational lecturers to demonstrate strong discipline knowledge. They explained that this could be demonstrated through the lecturers' publications in the discipline. Some participants elaborated:

Transnational lecturers need to have a profound knowledge of their discipline. For example, they have published books. If they have had some publications, it would give them more credit in their teaching... we students would admire him/her and we would be like 'Oh, his/her book is very good'. That would inspire us to study more. (Student 28)

Transnational lecturers need to have detailed knowledge and experience in teaching the subject. For example, if Teacher A is teaching us a research-related subject, he needs to have a lot of experience in doing research himself. I actually googled him and found that he had published many books already. (Student 18)

Other participants clarified that discipline knowledge did not mean theoretical knowledge only. It also included the application of practical knowledge to their working contexts:

Theoretical knowledge is of course important for transnational lecturers, but theoretical knowledge alone is not that effective. I would love them to impart practical knowledge as well. I like the applicability of knowledge. For example, I can apply what I learnt here in class in the morning into my work in the afternoon.

Theoretical knowledge is important for students but knowledge that can be applied in our own contexts is much more important. (Student 4)

Transnational lecturers must have practical knowledge. This course must provide practical knowledge that can be applied by us in our local contexts. It might be a bit difficult to apply specific Western models into our Vietnamese context, but at least we can try. (Student 6)

In short, the student participants indicated that discipline knowledge was an important characteristic of transnational lecturers, demonstrated via publications, and strong practical teaching knowledge relevant to the field.

#### ***6.4.2.2. Teaching skills***

In addition to discipline knowledge, the student participants insisted that transnational lecturers need to be able to deliver their knowledge in a way that Vietnamese students can understand. Transnational lecturers need to speak clearly and slowly and to be mindful of the language they are using. Some students gave the following examples:

Transnational lecturers need to demonstrate discipline knowledge, but that does not mean we students can learn all of their knowledge. What matters here is the way they deliver their knowledge in class; the way they communicate their knowledge to us. They need to ensure we understand the language they use. (Student 1)

The way lecturers impart knowledge to us is very important. They need to speak slowly, use simple language, no slang nor idioms. Also, they need to try explaining complex ideas in different ways. (Student 22)

Other student participants suggested that transnational lecturers need to be specific with their examples, expectations and directions. They explained:

They need to deliver lectures and communicate in a way that it is easy for us to follow. There is a language barrier here, so they need to give very specific examples to help us understand better. (Student 29)

Some lecturers are very knowledgeable, so they tend to explain too much, a bit like beating about the bush. They need to go straight to the main point so that we can understand it better. (Student 19)

I want the transnational lecturers to be specific about their expectations. If they hold high expectations, then they need to give us specific and clear requirements and directions about how they want things to be done. (Student 26)

Other student participants added that transnational lecturers need the ability to relate or connect their lectures, lessons and examples to Vietnamese contexts. They stated that this would help them feel more familiar and engaged in class. They shared their views:

Transnational lecturers need to relate their lectures and lessons to Vietnamese settings in their teaching. They are teaching Vietnamese students in Vietnam, so it is important to connect to Vietnamese contexts. (Student 17)

I can give a very specific example. The transnational lecturer can include some pictures/photos about Vietnam, if they are relevant to the topic. This would make us feel more engaged. (Student 23)

In brief, the student participants expected transnational lecturers to demonstrate certain teaching skills to support their learning: delivering in an understandable manner;

providing specific examples and directions; and connecting their lessons to Vietnamese contexts.

#### ***6.4.2.3. Vietnamese cultural knowledge***

The student participants expected transnational lecturers to be familiar with Vietnamese culture. They stressed that transnational lecturers must know their students' learning styles and cultural backgrounds. Some student participants explained further:

I think it is important for transnational lecturers to understand the local culture. There is a saying 'When in Rome, do as the Romans do'. There is no doubt about their knowledge and qualifications. However, teaching Vietnamese students in a Vietnamese context does require the lecturers to adjust their styles a bit because Vietnamese students are different from Western students. For example, we are not familiar with self-study. Besides, sometimes we behave differently from Western students in class. We tend not to ask many questions because culturally we are expected to be 'nice students' in class.  
(Student 30)

An understanding of Vietnamese culture is an important characteristic of transnational lecturers. If the transnational lecturers are aware of Vietnamese students' learning attitudes and styles, then they know what to expect and how to deal with that. (Student 15)

Understanding the local culture is very important. Australian transnational lecturers are familiar with Western teaching and learning approaches in Australia. Here when the lecturer asks questions, the class is often quiet. If the lecturer is not aware of Vietnamese culture, he/she might feel uncomfortable and offended, if we Vietnamese students do not appear to respect him/her. If he/she understands the culture, he/she would feel more comfortable with that. This will make the class environment better. I think this is important. (Student 11)



Other student participants added that transnational lecturers should demonstrate some background knowledge of the host country, Vietnam. They explained that if transnational lecturers knew relevant information about Vietnam, then they would have things in common with their students and topics that they could then discuss together. Other student participants suggested that transnational lecturers would benefit from learning some basic Vietnamese language phrases and sentences:

In my opinion, the most important characteristic for transnational lecturers is having basic knowledge about the country in which they teach. For example, a bit of knowledge about the politics and society. This shows their effort and interest in understanding our country and culture. They might learn some basic Vietnamese sentences to talk to Vietnamese students too. I would much appreciate that. (Student 5)

If the transnational lecturers can show a bit of knowledge about our country and culture, we would feel we have things in common with each other. Then we can open up ourselves and interact better with each other. (Student 6)

In summary, the student participants believed that transnational lecturers should have some understanding of, and familiarity with, Vietnam and its culture. They should also be willing and able to develop an understanding of local students' learning styles and cultural backgrounds.

#### ***6.4.2.4. Personal attributes***

In addition to the above categories, the student participants identified a number of personal attributes that they believed transnational lecturers should be able to incorporate in their teaching. For example, some rated a lecturer's willingness to support them as an important attribute, as shown in the following quotes:

We would appreciate a lecturer who is always willing to support us. For example, when we have a question, he/she would be willing to answer us. This would encourage us to open up and ask more

questions. Also, he/she would provide us with more materials for our study. (Student 16)

A lecturer needs to be willing to help us. He/she needs to guide us in accessing resources or materials to support our learning. Assisting us in improving our presentation and writing skills is also important. (Student 20)

Other student participants expected their transnational lecturers to be friendly and approachable, believing that this would make the classroom environment more comfortable. They believed that their lecturers should be approachable and open about themselves both academically and personally:

They need to be approachable and open about themselves. I would appreciate if they shared with us their stories as well. It is better than just reading the theories. If we just read books and listen to lectures, it is very tiring. (Student 5)

I love English so I like to talk to the lecturers a lot. If they are friendly and approachable, I would feel very comfortable talking to them. (Student 3)

Another personal attribute reported to be an important characteristic of transnational lecturers was a sense of humour. Some participants clarified that using a sense of humour in lectures could create better connections between transnational lecturers and their students, allowing them to open up to each other, and lead to more effective student engagement.

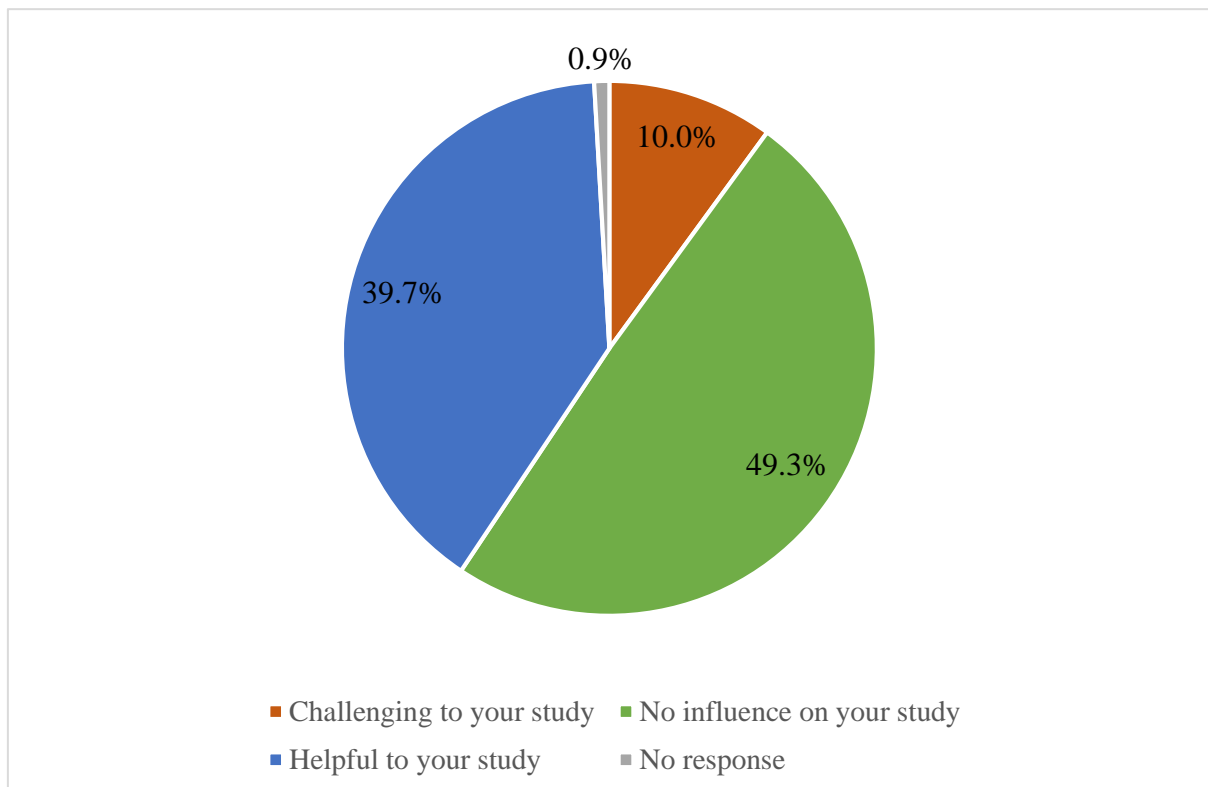
In summary, the quantitative and qualitative data highlighted that the students expected transnational lecturers to demonstrate discipline knowledge, teaching skills, Vietnamese cultural knowledge, and certain personal attributes.

The next section examines the influences of intercultural complexities on the students' learning experience.

### 6.5. Intercultural complexities in transnational learning

The term ‘intercultural complexities’ in my research refers to the complications, subtleties, and nuances of intercultural/multicultural communication and interaction between Vietnamese students and their transnational lecturers. This section first reports on the quantitative data regarding the influences of intercultural complexities on the students’ transnational learning experience. It then introduces comments that arose from the student focus group discussions, providing specific examples of intercultural complexities in their transnational learning.

The quantitative data from the student questionnaire suggested that most student respondents from both programs responded positively to cultural differences. Specifically, more than a quarter (39.7%) said the intercultural complexities were helpful to their studies, while almost half of the students (49.3%) stated that intercultural complexities had no influence on their study (refer to **Figure 6.4**).



**Figure 6.4. Influences of intercultural complexities on student learning (Student questionnaire results)**

In the student focus group discussions, participants expanded on specific dimensions in which they experienced intercultural complexities. These dimensions were: student-lecturer relationships in class; freedom of speech in class; and critical thinking skills. The following sub-sections present more detail from the student focus groups to elaborate on each of these dimensions.

#### **6.5.1. Student-lecturer relationships**

Some student participants reported that they enjoyed more equal and relaxed relationships with their lecturers in class. In contrast to a traditional Vietnamese classroom, transnational students did not feel distant from their lecturers. This helped them feel comfortable in engaging with their lecturers. Some participants elaborated:

At first, I thought of the transnational lecturers as really superior but now I see them as my senior peers. They are very friendly and fair. We can ask them anything. In our Vietnamese culture, there is some distance or hierarchy between lecturers and students, but the transnational lecturers treat us very equally. We can call them by their first names. (Student 2)

Unlike a Vietnamese classroom, lecturers are very friendly to students in this transnational classroom .... There is less emphasis on seniority between our lecturers and us. This makes the classroom comfortable. (Student 28)

#### **6.5.2. Freedom of speech in class**

Some student participants stated that lecturers gave them the freedom to express their opinions in class, and they were allowed to be different. This is evident in the following:

I like it that this transnational course is highly individualistic. The lecturers do not intend to mould us. They just provide us with the frame and the methodology and allow us to do our own ways. Therefore, we feel we have freedom in our study. (Student 2)

Studying in this transnational class, I am not restricted in my thinking. I have freedom. I can talk to the lecturer about an argument that I might not agree with him/her without fear of penalty. (Student 4)

Another aspect of freedom of speech relates to an absence of the ‘right-wrong attitude’ in class. Some student participants commented that they were encouraged to speak without worrying about what other people might think. The focus was on their individual thoughts and development rather than on what the rest of the class might think. Some elaborated:

When in a Vietnamese class, before saying something in class, I was always worried whether it would be judged right or wrong by the lecturer and other classmates. I guess it was because I was exposed to that kind of attitude in my previous studies. Studying in this course, I am set completely free from that right-wrong attitude. I am no longer like that. I am now an individual with my own thinking. It has a positive influence on my thinking. I like it very much. (Student 1)

I was shy in class before but now I just say what I understand without worrying if they say I am right or wrong. I just say what I think. (Student 27)

### **6.5.3. Critical thinking amongst students**

In addition to the above-mentioned dimensions of intercultural complexities, some student participants experienced intercultural complexities in relation to critical thinking skills. Many student participants indicated that they had not practiced this skill before with any frequency, but in a transnational program, lecturers asked them to think critically. Some student participants found it hard and confusing at first because they had not been exposed to this concept. They explained:

There is one skill that most lecturers in this transnational course require us to have. That is critical thinking skill. This is a very active skill. It is difficult for us. We are not used to it. We were learning with Vietnamese lecturers before and we have already developed a non-

critical mindset. Now the lecturers in this course ask us to think critically. It is confusing for us. (Student 14)

I knew about the concept of 'critical thinking' before but only in this course do I actually do it .... It is a bit difficult but I am learning. (Student 27)

Although many student participants found critical thinking challenging at first, they soon realised that this skill was important for their learning. Thinking critically helped them to look at things at a deeper level, from multiple perspectives, and to connect things together. It was not only helpful in their study but in other aspects as well. Some participants explained:

One thing I have learnt from this course is critical thinking. When I was studying in a Vietnamese classroom before, it was mainly passive learning, nothing much critical. Basically, in a Vietnamese class we were provided with some theories which were considered as standards and we just applied them without any critical thinking. We did not look at them from other perspectives nor did we put them in a different context to see if they still worked. Now I am encouraged to think critically in class, and I have learnt so much from it. I have changed my thinking. I have learnt to look at things from different perspectives. (Student 25)

Thinking critically helps us to look at things at a deeper level. Critical thinking goes beyond knowing to understanding. Before I just knew things, but if I think critically, I can understand things. It changes from knowing to understanding .... When we understand things, we can analyse other related things too. We can apply critical thinking in many different aspects of life. (Student 21)

#### **6.5.4. Cultural differences or individual differences?**

Although many students highlighted the cultural differences in their transnational learning experience, and preferred Western learning and teaching conventions, it was

interesting to note that some student participants insisted these differences were individual rather than cultural. In other words, they did not see differences as cultural differences among their transnational lecturers. These student participants elaborated:

I think it depends on the individual transnational lecturers. Some lecturers make me feel comfortable and open but some others make me reluctant to talk to them. So, it just depends on them individually. But in general, they are quite approachable and easy going. (Student 5)

I find the relationship between students and transnational lecturers is not determined by cultures but rather by individual characteristics. We can't generalise that all foreign teachers would be better than Vietnamese teachers. Some Vietnamese teachers are very kind and understanding towards their students, and at the same time, not all foreign teachers would understand their students .... I believe it depends a lot on the lecturers individually. (Student 19)

In summary, the student participants did experience intercultural complexities in their transnational learning. They provided instances where they noticed more equal student–lecturer relationships in class; greater freedom of speech in class; and the benefits of critical thinking. Interestingly, some student participants described these differences as individual rather than cultural. Overall, the above quotes from the student focus group discussions suggested that they had positive attitudes towards intercultural complexities.

This section has also identified an alignment between the quantitative data from the student questionnaire and the qualitative data from the student focus group discussions regarding how students responded to the intercultural complexities of transnational learning. Both sets of data indicated that students responded positively to the intercultural complexities of their transnational learning experience. In other words, the students experienced some complexities and subtleties of intercultural and multicultural communication and interaction with their transnational lecturers, and they found these intercultural complexities positive.

## **6.6. Chapter conclusion**

This chapter has presented the students' perceptions and experiences of their transnational learning. The quantitative data from the student questionnaire and the qualitative data from the student focus group discussions across both programs have been combined in this chapter to provide a detailed account of their transnational learning experience.

This chapter initially described the student profiles based on student questionnaire results. It then identified a number of reasons why students chose an Australian transnational program rather than a local program or the option to study in Australia. This chapter also examined what students perceived as the characteristics desired of transnational lecturers and, finally, the intercultural complexities that arose in transnational learning.

The next chapter (Chapter 7) presents the qualitative data collected from the lecturer interviews in terms of their transnational teaching experience. It examines their perceptions of characteristics desired of transnational lecturers, professional development for transnational lecturers, and the intercultural complexities in transnational teaching.



## **Chapter 7 - Lecturer findings**

This chapter reports on the qualitative results from the lecturer interviews regarding their transnational teaching experience in Vietnam. The term ‘lecturer participants’ refers to the transnational lecturers of the two programs who participated in the individual interviews in my research.

This chapter commences with brief profile information about the lecturer participants. It then examines what the lecturer participants perceived as the key characteristics desired of transnational lecturers. These characteristics are generally categorised into personal attributes, teaching skills, and cultural knowledge. Next the chapter explores lecturer professional development, followed by intercultural complexities in transnational teaching in terms of: hierarchical power structure; face-saving culture; critical thinking among the Vietnamese students; and, most interestingly, an emphasis on commonalities rather than differences between Vietnam and Australia.

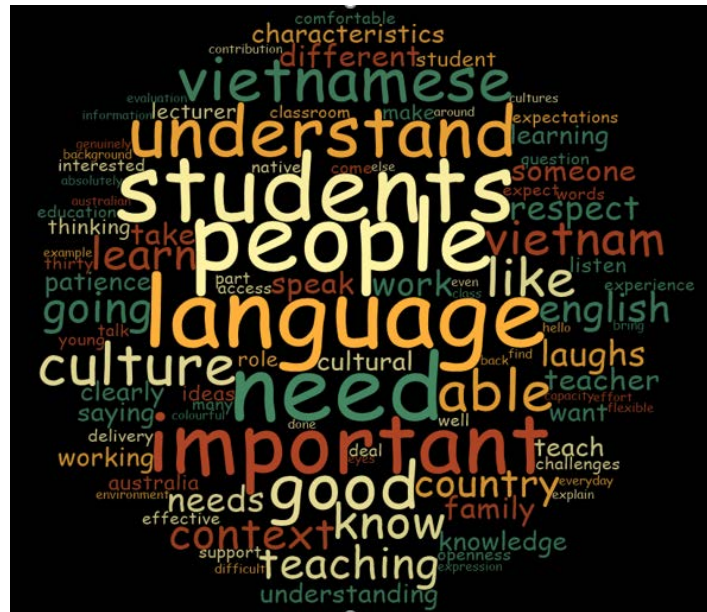
### **7.1. Lecturer profiles**

Ten lecturers accepted the invitation to take part in my research: eight from the education program, and two from the business program. There were seven female lecturer participants and three male participants, all from Western backgrounds. They all had previous experience teaching international students onshore in a Western context (e.g., in Australia or the United Kingdom), and had been involved with these transnational programs in Vietnam for more than three years. To protect the identity of the lecturer participants, I use pseudonyms throughout this chapter.

### **7.2. Key characteristics of transnational lecturers**

This section presents the lecturers’ findings in terms of what they perceived as the essential characteristics of transnational lecturers. When I used the word frequency query in NVivo (11.0 Pro Edition) to analyse the lecturer interview transcriptions, the results provided me with an overall summary of the words/phrases most frequently used by the lecturer participants regarding this topic. Some of the most common words/phrases included: people, language, students, need, and understand (refer to **Figure 7.1**). It is worth mentioning that personal pronouns (e.g., I, you, he, she, they)

articles (e.g., a, an, the), and conjunctions (e.g., and, but, or, so) have been excluded from this analysis.



**Figure 7.1. Essential characteristics of transnational lecturers – Results from NVivo word frequency query**

The qualitative data from the lecturer interviews revealed three categories of transnational lecturers' characteristics: personal attributes, teaching skills, and cultural knowledge. The following sub-sections explore each of these categories in detail.

### **7.2.1. Personal attributes**

The lecturer participants considered the following personal attributes to be important when teaching offshore: openness and willingness; patience and empathy; flexibility and creativity; and respect. Each of these attributes is discussed below.

#### ***7.2.1.1. Openness and willingness***

Some lecturer participants insisted that transnational lecturers need to be open and willing to learn when teaching in a transnational context. Specifically, they emphasised that transnational lecturers need to be willing to learn about different cultures and to communicate with students. Some lecturer participants elaborated:

I think [good transnational lecturers] are people who are very open to learning about different cultures, that's really important. I think people who are willing to engage in conversations with their students .... I think as long as there is an openness and willingness to communicate, a lot of stuff can be worked through. (Lydia)

The other point about characteristics of a good transnational lecturer is that they are willing to learn those things. (Yvonne)

It's got to be a willingness to enter into the everyday way of life of the Vietnamese people...the willingness to try to learn about the culture is important. (Nicole)

#### ***7.2.1.2. Patience and empathy***

Lecturer participants believed that transnational lecturers should be patient and empathetic towards their students. They should not act like superior figures from a Western country who would make their students follow their Western ways. Rather, transnational lecturers should be empathetic towards the students and the local culture when navigating differences and expectations. They explained:

I think every teacher really needs a good deal of patience. Don't rush; don't expect students to grasp it all at once. (Rebecca)

The other point about characteristics of a good transnational lecturer is that they are willing to learn those things. They don't think, 'I'm English' or 'I'm Australian' 'I'm coming in here, you will do it like this', but to be empathetic towards and understanding of other people's opinions and cultures and see and try and deal with problems that might arise in the gap between expectations. (Yvonne)

#### ***7.2.1.3. Flexibility and creativity***

The lecturer participants identified flexibility and creativity as important personal transnational lecturer attributes. In recognising that Vietnam's culture and context is different to Australia, lecturer participants highlighted the need for transnational

lecturers to be flexible in order to understand their students' context and needs. Moreover, transnational lecturers need to create student centred teaching strategies that enhance student learning. Some elaborated on this point:

I think you have to be flexible because you have to be able to interpret the situation that your students put forward. There is a greater diversity of contexts .... In the level we are dealing with at masters, it is not about transmission of information; it is about working with students to develop knowledge in their context. So, you have to be able to be flexible enough to understand their context and their needs so that you can help them learn what they need to learn. (Daniel)

So devising ways to get that information from them so that I can be an effective teacher requires creativity. In the last delivery in May, I used yellow stickies more than I've ever used them before. The class, at times, was a little bit quiet, so I would hand out the yellow stickies and say, 'Write your idea on there and I'm going to collect them and then I'll know something. Then I'll have an answer from you!' And then I would put the yellow stickies on the wall so they can see what everyone else has said and get them to do an activity like grouping them. Then I'd get some action and some ideas happening. (Natalia)

#### ***7.2.1.4. Respect***

Being respectful was the most common personal attribute mentioned by the lecturer participants. They insisted that transnational lecturers need to be respectful of students' ideas, culture, and what they bring to their transnational learning experience. Some lecturer participants expanded:

If we're offering a transnational education, we need to respect what they're bringing to that, in terms of their thinking. I think that's really important. (Lydia)

What I find that also makes it is a great deal of respect. We have to bring a great deal of respect, because here are people that are trying to

do everything to learn, to develop, to grow, to change, to be good for themselves, their families and their country and that is a huge effort.

(Simon)

To respect the culture in which you are working. That might seem like a small thing, but I know that there are some people who don't have a lot of respect for other cultures, and yet to work in a different setting in a different country, we do need that respect. (Nicole)

On a related note about respect, some lecturer participants thought more broadly and expressed their concerns about educational imperialism or colonisation. They insisted that it was important to avoid making TNE into some form of educational imperialism or colonisation. At the same time, they suggested that Vietnamese transnational students should not devalue their own culture and values. Some lecturer participants explained further:

For the Vietnamese people not to believe that people are better than they are. They can look to their own heritage. Sure, welcome people in as visitors, but their culture, their traditions, their understandings. They don't want to throw them away and say, 'This will be better'. There's so much there. There's just so much there that's rich .... While they're having lots of other information come in, don't take it as a form of educational imperialism. (Simon)

Thinking a bit more broadly, I think a challenge lies in the Western model of bringing education into other parts of the world .... I don't want to colonise students in Vietnam or, for that matter, in any other part of the world. I feel I always have to challenge and ask where I come from because I've been growing up with knowledge and values based in the Western academic system and I have to be very careful in what I expect my students in Vietnam, for example, to be able to do .... Obviously, the students in Vietnam are very eager to have a native speaker or someone from the Western world teaching them, but I see the challenge that they devalue their own culture and teaching culture. They just say, 'Oh, the West is so much better, and communicative

teaching methodologies are so much better than what we do'. So that is a real challenge to try and adjust that a bit so that they learn to look critically at both ways and find ways to complement both styles, both cultures, rather than dismissing their own and blindly accepting the Western sort of way. (Rebecca)

In summary, this section has presented the first category of key characteristics expected of transnational lecturers *by* transnational lecturers (e.g., personal attributes). These personal attributes are: openness and willingness, patience and empathy, flexibility and creativity, and respect. Lecturer participants also pointed out the risk of educational imperialism/colonisation in TNE.

The next section examines the second category of key characteristics: teaching skills.

### **7.2.2. Teaching skills**

The lecturer participants stated that, in addition to personal attributes, transnational lecturers needed teaching skills related to oral communication, written communication, and checking for student understanding. The following sub-sections elaborate on each of these points.

#### ***7.2.2.1. Oral communication strategies***

Many lecturer participants insisted that transnational lecturers need to be mindful about the way they speak to students in class. They indicated that transnational lecturers need to speak slowly, and to use simple standard language, instead of 'colourful language'. Yvonne explained:

I think a good transnational educator also needs to have a very clear language. They need to speak slowly. They need to speak clearly. They need to get rid of colourful language, so not use idioms and difficult language because, especially with students here in Vietnam, many of them struggle with listening to a native speaker. So delivery is important, that your delivery is slow and clear, that it uses standard language, not colloquial phrases, unless you're speaking to really

advanced learners or there is a reason to do it and you're explaining this phrase. (Yvonne)

#### **7.2.2.2. *Written communication strategies***

In addition to oral communication strategies, the lecturer participants suggested that transnational lecturers need to use written communication strategies that assist their students' learning. They explained that students need the reassurance of the written word, especially those who struggle with listening to and understanding their lecturers. One lecturer participant stressed the need and relevance of having PowerPoint slides with key ideas and concepts written on them. She insisted that this strategy helps the students understand the ideas and concepts. Another lecturer participant highlighted the need to have clear and simple language in course requirements and assignments. They elaborated:

We have the expression 'Death by PowerPoint' because there's so many PowerPoints in this world. Sometimes I think they're important for key ideas and for English as an additional language people to see those words and to practise those words, so I think a combination of some basic language techniques in the classroom are important for any discipline teacher. If a teacher is just going up and teaching accounting and doesn't stop and work on some of the language, then I think they're going to lose the students. (Natalia)

[The lecturers must] realise that explanations about things like course requirements and assignments need to be spelled out really clearly to students, that they need handouts, they need support, because they are working in a language that is not their mother tongue. They need the reassurance of the written word. That needs to be written in a way that they can understand too. Simplicity, empathy and clarity of language, I think, are the key things. (Yvonne)

### ***7.2.2.3. Checking for student understanding***

The lecturer participants indicated that transnational lecturers need to check regularly and consistently for student understanding. One lecturer realised that even if students said ‘yes’, took notes, or put their hands up, it did not necessarily mean they had understood and learnt things. Another lecturer realised that her students had not understood as much as they seemed when she read their assignments. This is evident in the following comments:

Because of that ‘respect for the teacher’ thing, sometimes they'll give me a lot of positive reinforcement and I'll think they've understood but then when I look at their assignment, I realise they haven't. It's very important to check in and keep checking in order to make sure that they do understand. (Lydia)

The classic example is ... that students simply saying yes and making notes is no indication that they're learning anything. (Sam)

In summary, this section has introduced a number of teaching skills that the lecturer participants identified as important for transnational lecturers: oral communication strategies, written communication strategies, and checking for student understanding.

The next section presents the third category of key characteristics: cultural knowledge.

### **7.2.3. Cultural knowledge: three types of knowledge**

The lecturer participants insisted that transnational lecturers need to have cultural knowledge in addition to their personal attributes and teaching skills. They explained cultural knowledge as follows: knowing Vietnamese students; knowing the students’ working contexts; and knowing the local Vietnamese culture. Therefore, the term ‘cultural knowledge’ in this chapter is used as an umbrella concept consisting of these three types of knowledge: knowledge of students; knowledge of the students’ working contexts; and knowledge of the local Vietnamese culture.



#### ***7.2.3.1. Knowledge of students***

The first type of cultural knowledge identified was knowledge of Vietnamese students. Some lecturer participants insisted that transnational lecturers need to know their students in terms of their starting points, their educational backgrounds, expectations of lecturers, and learning behaviours. They explained that knowing students assists transnational lecturers to tailor their teaching in order to meet student needs and, in some instances, explain to students why there might be some expectation differences in class. They elaborated:

I think one of the first things is that you must understand and make a point of understanding where students are coming from. What is their educational background? What do they expect of their lecturers? How do they expect to behave in the classroom? .... So, I think the first thing is to understand your students and their expectations and to be able to explain to them what you're trying to do and why you are doing it that way. (Yvonne)

The more you understand where the students are coming from, the more likely it is that you will be able to tailor the delivery, both in terms of the curriculum, its content and the way that you teach, to actually meeting their needs in a way that is still compliant with the criteria for the program. (Sam)

#### ***7.2.3.2. Knowledge of students' working contexts***

The second type of cultural knowledge concerns knowledge of the students' working contexts. Some lecturer participants stated that at this postgraduate level, transnational lecturers should know their students' working contexts, as this will enable them to connect their teaching/lessons/examples to those contexts. In my opinion, this second type of cultural knowledge is important and relevant to the two postgraduate programs being researched, as most of the students were already working while studying. Some lecturer participants explained:

I think the second thing is that you are able to know something about the context in which you're teaching. So, for example, to be able to make links to their schools, the work that they do, have an understanding of policy, the policy framework in which they work, the books that they use: the differences. So to understand the context in which those students are working will impact on what they do for you in the classroom. (Yvonne)

In the level we're dealing with at masters, it's not about transmission of information; it's about working with students to develop knowledge in their contexts. So, you have to be able to be flexible enough to understand their context and their needs so that you can help them learn what they need to learn. In your own culture, in your own space, it's a lot easier. When you go to another country, that's part of that knowledge. It's not just a cultural knowledge, it's a systemic knowledge that you've got to have as well. I think the capacity to work that out and find out how the system works and how the culture works and what people need from their education is crucial. (Daniel)

On a related note, some lecturer participants raised questions about the appropriateness of the transnational programs to the Vietnamese. They suggested the transnational courses should be tailored in a way that would maintain the Australian quality assurance standards while also meeting the needs of the Vietnamese context. Some lecturer participants elaborated:

I think some of the challenges are about the appropriateness of the programs to the Vietnamese. How are the programs in tune with what Vietnam needs? I think that question is not always asked as clearly as it should be. I think you can't just take what you have delivered in one context and just drop it into another context because there are cultural issues of appropriateness. I think the courses need to be discussed with local providers. They need to be tailored to reach the standards desired of the Australian or the UK university, whatever it is, but at the same time, meet the needs as defined by the Vietnamese context. I

think getting that right, the equivalence rather than exact parallels is really important. (Yvonne)

[There are] managerial issues and also institutional because of the apparent need for the onshore and offshore to pretty much mirror each other. Again, it's a big missed opportunity. I wonder whether the program could be tailored to better meet the realities of the Vietnamese education system .... I think there is too much focus on what I assume is the belief that this offshore program has to mirror the onshore program. (Sam)

### ***7.2.3.3. Knowledge of local Vietnamese culture***

The third type of cultural knowledge relates to the local Vietnamese culture. In this type of knowledge, the lecturer participants identified three dimensions that transnational lecturers should address: familiarity/competence with simple Vietnamese language; genuine interest in the local culture; and engagement in the real-life local culture. Each of these dimensions is discussed below.

#### *a) Vietnamese language competence*

The first dimension of knowing the local Vietnamese culture concerns Vietnamese language competence. One lecturer participant suggested that transnational lecturers should learn to speak some simple words or phrases in Vietnamese. She explained:

Then I think on top of that, it's understanding the culture and making an effort to understand some of the language and the background .... I wanted to learn how to say hello, thank you and please. So I did that before I went. In the drive on the way to the university, I would try and pick up some more words and get into teaching some things, but I was surprised that some of my colleagues didn't even know how to say 'hello'. They hadn't learned that and they'd been there a couple of times. I just thought .... I don't understand that. To me, that's not respectful. If you're going to teach in another country, you at least

need to know how to say, 'hello', 'please', 'thank you', if nothing else. (Sarah)

*b) Genuine interest in the local culture*

The second dimension relates to a genuine interest in the local Vietnamese culture. Some lecturer participants commented that transnational lecturers need to show their genuine interest by visiting some important political and historical places in Vietnam to learn more about the culture. They can then let their students know about their interest in, and respect for, Vietnam. Sarah elaborated:

A colleague I met when I was there recommended this. You must go and see Uncle Ho's grave. You must go and pay your respects and tell the students that you've done that because that demonstrates you are respectful and you're interested and you realise the importance. So I made sure I did that. I would go and see things during the day, because I had some free time, and I would say, 'Today I paid my respects to Uncle Ho' because that's a good thing to do .... Or 'Today I went to the history museum and I learned this' or 'Today I went to the women's museum. Have you been to the women's museum? It's amazing. All the amazing things women have done', or 'Today I went to the Temple of Literature'. I was genuinely interested and I also wanted to let them know I was genuinely interested and pleased to be in their country and to be learning about their culture. (Sarah)

*c) Engagement in the real-life local Vietnamese culture*

The third dimension is about engaging in the Vietnamese real-life local culture. Some lecturer participants stated that transnational lecturers should immerse themselves in the local culture. They emphasised that by genuinely participating this way, transnational lecturers could learn where their teaching contribution could be relevant, and how it would fit in the local culture. Some lecturer participants elaborated:

I think you really have to want to be involved in the country. You have to like the country, I think, because you need to immerse

yourself. If you hide in the hotel and go to class, you won't be effective. You need to be someone who goes out and immerses yourself. I think you have to genuinely participate in the culture and take opportunities. When people invite you to go and do things or to share in a cultural experience, you go. I think that's absolutely essential for anybody. You are part of that culture; you are contributing to that culture. You are not coming over and being the oracle. You are coming over and joining into something that exists and is very powerful. You have a contribution to make, but you've got to learn where your contribution works. You can't assume that your contribution is going to be definitive in itself. It has to fit and you have to know how it fits, so you have to understand the culture and understand the people or you won't be effective. So, I think that's absolutely essential. (Daniel)

It's got to be a willingness to enter into the everyday way of life of the Vietnamese people .... To spend a bit of time at Vietnamese schools would be a privilege, or Vietnamese homes, if possible. But again, how do you come into somebody's house? You can't just do that. It's a difficult thing as an outsider, but the willingness to try to learn about the culture is important. (Nicole)

In summary, this section has presented the lecturer participants' perceptions of the essential characteristics ~~require~~<sup>required</sup> desired of transnational lecturers. These characteristics were grouped in three categories: personal attributes (i.e., openness and willingness, patience and empathy, flexibility and creativity, and respect); teaching skills (i.e., oral communication strategies, written communication strategies, and checking for student understanding); and cultural knowledge (i.e., knowledge of students, knowledge of students' working contexts, and knowledge of the local culture).

The data in this section suggests that transnational lecturers need to be well prepared for teaching offshore in a country like Vietnam. The following section reports the lecturer findings with respect to their professional development activities.

### **7.3. Lecturer participants' professional development**

The lecturer participants commented that they had been provided with some pre-departure briefings before teaching offshore in Vietnam. They found that these briefings, with a focus on teaching content and logistics of the upcoming offshore delivery, were relevant. However, they identified a need for some Vietnamese cultural briefings in Australia, or even onsite in Vietnam, before the teaching started. Some participants explained:

There's no cultural awareness training or anything before you go; you just go. I thought that was a bit of a shame .... I think some sort of cultural awareness training would be really useful before people went. I think we could do more to prepare our staff to teach in Vietnam. A bit of language, teaching them about particular things to do and not to do in class would be really useful. (Sarah)

In terms of cultural understanding, no, there was very little of that .... I think it would be a good idea [to have more briefings about Vietnamese culture before departure], even just two or three hours. (Nicole)

Yes, I think [some cultural briefings] would [benefit the lecturers]. It could even be on site. Sometimes I find it difficult to have these pre-departure things removed from the culture. I think perhaps it would be beneficial to have that two or three days before the teaching starts, but on site. (Rebecca)

Some other lecturer participants added that they received informal cultural briefings from their more experienced colleagues. They found these very helpful and appreciated the peer support, as they explained:

I was very lucky the first time that I went to teach in Vietnam. There was another academic there teaching. He had been teaching there for eight years. He gave me some really good background on what was useful to do, just in conversation, whereas nobody else had. (Sarah)

The first time I went, I didn't know a lot about Vietnam. I had a couple of people who had taught on the program before and they gave me a rundown of some things to expect .... I find when you are in Vietnam, you learn from other teachers just through the conversations that you have when you get back to the hotel or when you're in the bus or when you're sitting in the staff room in the mornings. (Lydia)

In summary, this section has reported on the lecturer findings in terms of their professional development activities. They commented that they had learned about local Vietnamese culture from each other, and appreciated that learning. They suggested, however, that more cultural briefings before teaching offshore in Vietnam would be helpful.

The next section introduces the lecturer findings regarding the intercultural complexities in their transnational teaching experience.

#### **7.4. Intercultural complexities in transnational teaching**

The lecturer participants commented that they had experienced some dimensions of intercultural complexities in their transnational teaching in Vietnam. They described these dimensions in terms of the hierarchical power structure in class; the face-saving culture in class; critical thinking skills amongst Vietnamese students; and as commonalities rather than differences. Each of these dimensions of intercultural complexity is presented below.

##### **7.4.1. Hierarchical power structure**

In terms of hierarchical structure, the lecturer participants observed that students regarded lecturers as the source of information, and thus greatly depended on them. Some participants explained:

It's mostly to do with their hierarchical power structures in education. So it's to do with seeing the teacher as the source of information and not being critically reflective in the same way. (Yvonne)

Because the culture in which this is situated is so different. The Confucian heritage is a long way away and a lot has happened since; nevertheless, that sense of hierarchy, that sense of deferring to the teacher, learning information and giving it back to the teacher rather than the more combative, analytical way of thinking. (Yvonne)

They are very dependent on lecturers. If the teacher pushes them to work hard, they will work hard. If the teacher doesn't teach active, they will not work hard. (Angela)

#### **7.4.2. Face-saving culture**

The next dimension of intercultural complexities is associated with the cultural concept of face-saving in Vietnam. The lecturer participants commented that students were reluctant to speak in class, ask questions, or seek help because they feared a loss of face. Some participants elaborated:

In a classroom situation, you don't ask a direct question because [the students] will probably not answer it because the answer might be wrong and there'll be a loss of face if the answer is wrong. (Simon)

Being shy in the classroom is just an excuse for not trying to practise their English .... Maybe it connects with the idea of saving face or avoiding embarrassment or shame if they can't communicate. (Natalia)

There is that face-saving culture. So, if the student obviously struggles, you need a good deal of patience and continuous asking. Sometimes they will open up and say, 'Okay, this is difficult'. But I've also experienced cases when they don't say anything and I just need to judge them on my own, whether the student is able to successfully complete. (Rebecca)



### **7.4.3. Critical thinking amongst Vietnamese students**

The lecturer participants commented that they noticed a lack of critical thinking skills amongst their students, especially at the beginning of the course. Being aware of some of the possible reasons why their students were not able to think and reflect critically, the lecturer participants used specific strategies. They commented that the students had a very high capacity to think critically once they had overcome the initial hurdles. The following sub-sections provide more detail on this point, illustrated by lecturer participant comments.

#### ***7.4.3.1. Lack of strong critical thinking skill amongst students***

The lecturer participants reported that they found a lack of critical thinking skills amongst their students. They provided examples of students who failed to make connections between theory and practice or to make links between different ideas. Other lecturer participants observed that the students were less likely to challenge or disagree with the lecturers. The following quotes highlight these issues:

Academically, Vietnamese students find it difficult to connect theory to practice. They are quick in providing definitions but have difficulty in giving specific examples. They find it difficult to think critically. Many are weak at applying what they know into practice. (Angela)

So back to your idea of critical thinking, these are all mid-twenties and older students, so they're not eighteen-year olds who have no world knowledge. These students have some world knowledge, however a lot of them don't seem to have, what I would call, a capacity to connect the dots. So, there is this idea and there is this idea and they're not used to working out how they might link them together. This activity is critical thinking and this activity is what we want to happen in the literature review. (Natalia)

Maybe less critical in some ways .... The students wouldn't necessarily challenge you, whereas here in [Australia], sometimes students have

challenged me and said, 'I don't agree with what you're saying'. So you wouldn't get that level of challenge. (Sarah)

#### ***7.4.3.2. Possible reasons for students' lack of strong critical thinking***

The lecturer participants reported that they were aware of some possible reasons why their students did not think critically. Some commented that it was because their students had not been exposed to critical thinking practices before. They said:

[Critical thinking] is not built into their education system as indeed it isn't here: to be critical of your teachers and to be critically reflective in that way. (Yvonne)

Part of our education in Australia, I think, with the children and the teenagers, we do talk a lot about fact and fiction .... Maybe it's more natural to have those conversations in Australia as part of the learning in and outside of the classroom than it is in Vietnam. If you're not used to having those conversations, not used to questioning: is this fact or is this opinion or is this something else ... then in academia, it's not a normal habit. (Natalia)

Other lecturer participants added that language played a role in the lack of critical thinking skills amongst students. They believed the capacity to think and reflect critically depended on English language competence. They explained:

I think it's always challenging to be able to evaluate somebody's critical thinking when English isn't their first language. Lecturers can be critical of international students in terms of their level of capability and I think often it does depend on the English language skills because that's how we communicate. (Sarah)

Language does play a factor here. Their comfort with the language isn't always adequate. Their use of the language is often limited to their own teaching classrooms, so it never grows beyond the language that they need for their particular teaching environment. So, it is hard to get a good critical discussion happening. (Natalia)

Other lecturer participants elaborated on the cultural and societal reasons for their students' lack of critical thinking skills. They believed that the notion of respect in Vietnamese culture might make students reluctant to question their lecturers and to think critically. More broadly, the whole societal and political situation of Vietnam as a socialist communist country makes it difficult for Vietnamese students to question and think critically. Daniel and Natalia commented as follows:

They're very respectful initially but they are not frightened to ask questions once they feel comfortable and once they feel that that won't be seen as disrespectful. (Daniel)

Critical thinking means questioning, and that whole concept of questioning is more comfortable or less comfortable for some people in Vietnam depending on their life experiences or how they've connected with the government or how they've been brought up. It may be dependent on their parents' experiences and so wanting to have a safe and secure life might mean not questioning. (Natalia)

#### ***7.4.3.3. Strategies to enhance critical thinking among Vietnamese students***

Being aware the cultural reluctance and language barriers to critical thinking among the Vietnamese students, the lecturer participants highlighted some strategies to encourage their students to ask more questions and to think more critically. Some lecturer participants focussed on building trust with students by explaining the differences between questioning and disrespect, and using Vietnamese examples so students could relate to them. They elaborated:

So [it is about] relationship-building and creating a dialogic space, a really encouraging dialogue .... I want to have a discussion or a dialogue, so all the time trying to tease out what the students think. That develops over time (Rebecca)

But in my experience, and I said earlier about using Vietnamese examples because you give people something to relate to, you can get critical thinking in more than just one way. (Simon)

#### ***7.4.3.4. Student capacity to think critically***

The lecturer participants acknowledged that their students were capable of thinking critically after they had overcome the social and cultural barriers. In fact, some lecturer participants said they were impressed by their students' capacity to think and analyse in this way, as illustrated in the following:

I was impressed in terms of their level of analysis in their writing and in the discussion in class. I would say that they have a very high capacity to think critically and to try and apply and understand the theories in practice. (Sarah)

There's a hurdle to get over to move to a way of thinking, but once they do, it's like any other student. I find that there are some very clever people. The standard of students has improved over the years I've been there. They're just as challenging and just as critical and ... not just critical thinking but they come up with ideas, they challenge ideas and they want to discuss things in ways that I'd be impressed with here. (Daniel)

In summary, this section presented the lecturer findings regarding the critical thinking skills amongst students. The lecturer participants were aware of the lack of critical thinking skills amongst some of their students and were conscious of the reasons for this lack. They used specific strategies to help students overcome their difficulties and noticed that the students had a very high capacity to think critically once they had addressed the initial challenges.

The next section explores the fourth dimension of intercultural complexities in the transnational teaching experience: the emphasis on commonalities rather than differences.

#### **7.4.4. An emphasis on commonalities rather than differences**

The last dimension of intercultural complexities in the transnational teaching experience, and also the most interesting, relates to an emphasis on commonalities rather than differences. Some lecturer participants insisted that they did not notice

significant differences when teaching in Vietnam. Rather, they found more commonalities when teaching in Vietnam and Australia. Some of the lecturer participants provided specific examples to demonstrate how Vietnamese and Australian students shared a similar subtle sense of humour and communication styles:

If I could touch on this, and this comes from because I also teach in Indochina, the Vietnamese and Australian sense of humour is very similar. The Chinese sense of humour, no; the Japanese sense of humour, no. But the Vietnamese indirect sense of humour is very similar to the Australian because the Australian sense of humour is not that direct. It's very subtle .... The Vietnamese way of doing business and their language communication is very indirect and very subtle .... As I say, I think we're more similar than we are different. (Simon)

I think the Vietnamese have got a very similar sense of humour, so I tend to use a lot of humour in my teaching and try to make things fun and enjoyable. That works. (Sarah)

Some lecturer participants commented that they did not notice many differences in the class dynamics between Vietnam and Australia. Others emphasised that the longer they taught in Vietnam, the more they realised that there were few differences between Vietnam and Australia. They elaborated:

I don't see it as cultural differences. I see that we're more alike than we're different. That's my feeling. But I can say that, from my experience. Yes, I will have more than one student that doesn't want to be involved, but that's no different to here in Australia. I can have a class of thirty or forty and I'm going to have a couple of people. It's like Vietnam. We're very close. (Simon)

I didn't find that there was a lot of difference. I found the students were willing to participate; they were mostly very attentive. What can I say? Every cohort is also different. The four different years that I've been there have been slightly different. They're the same here in

Australia. Some students are not happy to be put with other students but that's just a normal thing .... To tell you the truth, I didn't notice a lot of difference. (Sarah)

The more I teach there, the more I realise that there is no difference. I really mean that. When we've gone and had social events: the stories, the activities, they're identical. The differences are so slight: we all have the same sorts of challenges; we talk about the same sorts of relationship issues; we talk about the same things about our children; we are really so similar. The differences, they might ride a motorbike when I drive a car, are trivial. I find the more I work in Vietnam, the less I notice that there is really any real cultural difference. (Daniel)

In summary, this section reported on the lecturer findings regarding the intercultural complexities in their transnational teaching experience. The lecturer participants identified four intercultural complexity dimensions concerning teaching in Vietnam: hierarchical power structure; face-saving culture; critical thinking skills amongst students; and an emphasis on commonalities rather than differences.

## **7.5. Chapter conclusion**

This chapter has presented the lecturer perspectives in terms of their transnational teaching experience. It reported their perspectives on the key characteristics desired of transnational lecturers: personal attributes, teaching skills, and cultural knowledge. In addition, this chapter has explored some dimensions of the intercultural complexities of transnational teaching: hierarchical power structure; face-saving culture; and critical thinking skills amongst students. Most interestingly, some lecturer participants insisted that they noticed more commonalities rather than differences between the two settings of Vietnam and Australia.

The next chapter (Chapter 8) combines the student and lecturer findings, reviewing them according to three main themes aligned to my three research questions. The chapter also discusses these data within the current research literature in the field.

## Chapter 8 - Discussion of the findings

This chapter integrates the findings from both the student and lecturer participants of the two programs (i.e., the education and business programs). It discusses these findings within the context of the research literature and in relation to my three research questions.

There are four sections in this chapter. The first section provides a brief discussion of the participant profiles. The second section addresses the first research question: the reasons why students chose transnational programs rather than local Vietnamese programs, or studying in Australia. The third section focuses the second research question: the key characteristics of transnational lecturers, from both student and lecturer perspectives. The fourth section discusses the third research question: the intercultural complexities of transnational learning and teaching.

The following table (refer to **Table 8.1**) documents my three research questions, and the main themes of my research, as discussed in this chapter.

**Table 8.1. The three research questions and main themes of my research**

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**Research question 1:** Why did the participating Vietnamese transnational students choose one of the two Australian transnational programs in Vietnam?

- Why did these Vietnamese transnational students prefer Australian TNE over local Vietnamese programs?
    - ✓ International education
    - ✓ English language competence
    - ✓ Educational quality
    - ✓ Flexibility and fast-track delivery
  - Why did these Vietnamese transnational students prefer Australian TNE over study in Australia?
    - ✓ Financial reasons
    - ✓ Commitment-related reasons
- 

**Research question 2:** What are the key characteristics of transnational lecturers, from both student perspectives and lecturer perspectives?

- What are student participants' perspectives of key characteristics of transnational lecturers?
    - ✓ Discipline knowledge
    - ✓ Teaching skills
    - ✓ Vietnamese cultural knowledge
-

- 
- ✓ Personal attributes
  - What are lecturer participants' perspectives of key characteristics of transnational lecturers?
    - ✓ Personal attributes
    - ✓ Teaching skills
    - ✓ Cultural knowledge
  - How do the perspectives of student participants and the lecturer participants compare?
- 

**Research question 3:** How are the intercultural complexities demonstrated in the transnational learning and teaching experience in these two programs?

- Intercultural complexities of transnational learning and teaching experience
    - ✓ Student–lecturer relationships
    - ✓ Freedom of speech in class and a face-saving culture
    - ✓ Critical thinking among students
    - ✓ Emphasis on commonalities rather than differences
- 

## 8.1. Participant profiles

This section presents a brief discussion of participant profiles, providing some context to help better explain their responses.

Most student respondents in my research were female. The reason for this may relate to the nature of the specialisations of these two programs: education and business. In all classes in the research, the number of female students outweighed that of male students. It is, however, surprising that the nominated class president was usually a male student (in Vietnam, the class president or class monitor helps the lecturer; this is a leadership role and the holder is nominated by fellow students). This may reflect the broader Confucian male-dominated culture in Vietnam, where the status of women is seen as inferior to that of men (Truong, 2008; Truong, 2013).

All the student respondents in this research were Vietnamese. In fact, in the two transnational programs studied, all students were Vietnamese. This nationality composition of Australian transnational students in Vietnam is very different from other Australian transnational markets in Asia. Among the top five countries actively engaged in Australian TNE in 2015 (i.e., Singapore, China, Malaysia, Vietnam and Hong Kong), Vietnam is considered an emerging market, while Singapore, Malaysia, and Hong Kong are considered maturing markets. The latter have transformed themselves into



educational hubs in the region (Lim & Shad, 2017). As educational hubs, these countries attract students, especially from Asia, to local institutions as well as TNE providers. Vietnam, as an emerging educational market and a new player, however, still focuses mainly on importing TNE from Western countries, thus attracting mainly local students. This may explain why all students in the two programs in this study were Vietnamese.

More than half of the student respondents had previously studied in an English-medium program. This illustrates the fast-growing popularity of the English language in Vietnamese society as well as in its education. As Phan (2016) noted, Vietnam is determined to foster English across its educational system. The government has mobilised \$US2 billion to implement the National Foreign Language Project 2020 to promote English-language education at all levels (Phan et al., 2014). Another initiative from the Vietnamese MOET was the implementation of a project called 'Training the English-medium Advanced Programs at some selected Vietnamese universities, period 2008-2015' in 2008 (Bui & Nguyen, 2014). The purpose of this project was to upgrade the quality of Vietnam higher education to international standards, and to build national capacity for higher education (MOET, 2008). In these advanced programs, English was used as the medium of instruction (Phan, 2016).

Given that the two transnational programs being researched were at postgraduate master's level, it is not surprising that most students were working while studying, either full-time, part-time or casually. These two programs offered burst mode and/or weekend delivery, so they suited professionals who wished to continue working while studying.

As presented earlier, ten lecturers participated in my research: eight from the education program, and two from the business program (consisting of seven females and three males). All the lecturer participants were from Western backgrounds. They had all taught international students onshore (e. g. in Australia or the United Kingdom) and had been involved with these two transnational programs in Vietnam for at least three years.

## **8.2. Research question one: Why did the participating Vietnamese transnational students choose one of the two Australian transnational programs in Vietnam?**

This section addresses the first research question, examining why students chose TNE. The discussion is segmented to align to the two sub-questions: why students chose TNE over local Vietnamese programs; and why they chose TNE rather than studying in Australia.

### **8.2.1. Why did these Vietnamese transnational students prefer Australian TNE over local Vietnamese programs?**

The student questionnaire results identified four common reasons for students choosing TNE over a local Vietnamese program: international education; English language competence; perceptions of educational quality; and flexibility and fast-track delivery. The following section integrates the student questionnaire results and the students focus group data to discuss these reasons in detail.

#### ***8.2.1.1. International education***

The student questionnaire results indicated that the most common reason for students choosing TNE instead of local Vietnamese programs was to obtain an international education and, more specifically, an international qualification. This finding is consistent with those of many previous studies in the literature (Bui & Nguyen, 2014; Chapman & Pyvis, 2013; Wallace & Dunn, 2008). Bui and Nguyen (2014) examined Vietnamese undergraduate students enrolling in four transnational programs in different disciplines and found that these students chose TNE because they wanted to obtain an international qualification. Wallace and Dunn (2008), while investigating transnational undergraduate students from two Australian transnational programs (one in China and the other in Singapore), also determined that student preference for TNE related primarily to obtaining an international qualification. Similarly, Chapman and Pyvis (2013) observed that the first and foremost reason for undergraduate and postgraduate transnational students pursuing an Australian university TNE degree in an offshore campus in Malaysia was to obtain an international education.

The quantitative results from the student questionnaire suggested that the transnational students in my research desired an international education. This raised the question *why* they desired this. The qualitative data from the student focus group discussions elaborated on this point. Some student participants believed that an international education, resulting in an international degree, would offer them better employment opportunities. In other words, these student participants believed that such an education would provide them with both a “passport to employment” and a “competitive edge in the job market” (Chapman & Pyvis, 2013, p. 38). It is worth stating, however, that this opinion came from young student participants who had pursued postgraduate education straight after completing their undergraduate study. They therefore had limited experience in seeking employment. These young student participants compared the merits of a Vietnamese qualification and an international one, believing that the latter was of greater value to them. They believed in the ‘West as best’ assumption that prevails in some segments of Vietnamese society, arguing that an international education would make it easier for them to find better jobs upon graduation. Again, it is important to highlight, however, that these students had not graduated and thus had limited opportunities to test their assumption with local Vietnamese employers and the broader society.

This assumption of “inherent superiority and status of Western degrees” (Hoare, 2012, p. 275), does reflect some elements of contemporary Vietnamese society’s preference for Western conventions and lifestyles. This however may not hold true in the context of TNE and employment. It is too simplistic to equate a Western qualification with employability. In fact, this assumption has been challenged in the literature (Hoare, 2012; Phan, 2016; Ziguras & McBurnie, 2011). Hoare (2012) observed that employers in Singapore favoured graduates of local higher education institutions over TNE graduates. Hoare found that this ‘discrimination’ happened in both the government and private sectors in Singapore and disadvantaged TNE graduates in the job market. In Malaysia, the situation was more ambivalent, with employers perceiving TNE graduates as of varying quality (Cheong, Hill, Fernandez-Chung, Leong, 2016). Similarly, Phan’s research (2016) noted that employers raised some concerns about the quality of graduates from some TNE programs in Vietnam. She provided an example of one predominant TNE service provider in Vietnam whose students were found to be not as

employable as expected. This TNE service provider addressed the issue by conducting a pilot project, consisting of a series of modules, specifically to help their students with employability (Phan, 2016).

All these examples illustrate that studying in an English-medium program with a Western curriculum and Western lecturers does not automatically make TNE graduates more employable when compared to those graduating with a local Vietnamese qualification. Although the existing literature may suggest varying results concerning the employability of TNE graduates in Asia, the bottom line is that this issue needs to be carefully considered rather than naively equating an international degree with better employability opportunities.

Another reason for students desiring an international education, as identified in the student focus group discussions, related to opportunities for future education overseas. Some student participants, mainly from the education program, described their international education experience in a TNE program as a stepping stone for them to pursue doctoral studies overseas in the future. This is not surprising, given that many of the student participants were working in education-related areas where staff were encouraged to pursue doctoral degrees. This “stepping-stone strategy” (Ye, 2016, p. 100) also aligns with the findings of Fang and Wang (2014), who indicated that students in China chose TNE as a means to gain access to overseas higher education.

Some students desired an international education to broaden and develop their international perspectives. They selected TNE because they wanted to be exposed to an international context and gain a learning experience that differed from a traditional Vietnamese teaching and learning environment. One student participant said that she had already completed a master’s degree in Vietnam, but decided to enrol in a transnational program to experience new teaching and learning approaches, and to learn more about the outside world. In other words, these student participants considered an international education as a means of transforming themselves. This finding is consistent with the work of Pyvis and Chapman (2007), which indicated that non-Malaysian transnational students looked for an international education to develop their perspectives, dispositions and attitudes via exposure to, and immersion in, international education. These students made “self-transformative investments” (Pyvis & Chapman,

2007, p. 236) in their TNE. This finding highlights the priority that some students gave to experiencing a learning environment in which they developed new skills and knowledge, and transformed themselves in the process.

#### ***8.2.1.2. English language competence***

The student questionnaire results identified English language competence as the second most common reason for students choosing TNE over local Vietnamese programs. Many students hoped they would be able to enhance their English skills during their transnational studies. With English gaining an increasingly dominant status in Asia, a desire to improve English language competence is undoubtedly a strong factor attracting students to TNE. This finding is consistent with those of many previous studies (Bui & Nguyen, 2014; Fang & Wang, 2014; Mok & Han, 2016; Ly et al., 2015). For instance, in a qualitative study with graduate students from MBA transnational programs in Vietnam, Ly and her colleagues (2015) identified improving English skills as one of the main reasons for students choosing TNE. Similarly, case studies by Mok (2016) with Chinese students indicated that an English-speaking environment was one of the main motivations for students choosing TNE.

Finding this desire for English language competence in my research is unsurprising. With English gaining its increasingly important role as “a must tick of the internationalisation of higher education” (Chowdhury & Phan, 2014, p. 8) in Asia, it is understandable that many students from Asian countries, especially those from the expanding circle (discussed in Chapter 3), including Vietnam (Kachru, 1986), would wish to improve their English language competence. In fact, acquiring strong English language competence was particularly critical to the students in my research because most of them were either teaching English, working in English-related disciplines or working in an English-speaking environment. In the focus group discussions, some student participants explained that learning in a transnational program would help them communicate in English more fluently and confidently, and thus help in their work as English teachers. Other student participants wanted to learn commonly used English academic terms so they could apply them in their research and/or teaching career. In other words, for these student participants, the desire to learn English was employment-driven; it was an extrinsic rather than intrinsic motivation (Wallace, 2016).

As some student participants pointed out in the focus group discussions, it is undeniable that a transnational program could provide students with an authentic English-speaking environment where “natural and meaningful communication is generated in the second language in the same way it is mastered in the first language” (Wallace, 2016, p. 231). The two transnational programs in my study followed a Western-based curriculum, taught in English language by native lecturers, all of which created an ideal environment for practicing communicating in English. As Benzie (2010) argued, immersion within the target language environment enhances and speeds up the language learning process.

It is encouraging to see that the transnational students in this study invested their time, effort and finance to immerse themselves in an authentic English-speaking environment. This suggests that their commitment to improving their English language competence was driven by the relevance of English to their career development. However, it is a dilemma that these students typically communicated in English *only* in the classroom in the presence of a lecturer. When they did group projects outside the classroom, or even when they talked to each other during short breaks between classes, they tended to revert to their own language, Vietnamese. One lecturer participant commented that as soon as she stepped out of the classroom for a short coffee break, there was an incredible noise level of Vietnamese speaking among the students, although just minutes before they were shyly speaking English. Moreover, some student participants indicated that they spoke English in the classroom with the lecturers but as soon as they left the classroom, they returned to speaking Vietnamese.

Many student participants insisted that they chose TNE and paid higher tuition fees because they wanted to be immersed in an English-speaking environment so that they could practice communicating in English. However, they missed out on the opportunities to immerse themselves. They failed to maximise their opportunities to practise speaking English, only interacting with other students outside the classroom in Vietnamese. This finding aligns with that of Wallace (2016), who conducted a case study of 260 undergraduate Vietnamese students at one Southeast Asian offshore campus of a Western university to examine the extent to which they used their English language skills on campus outside the classroom. He found that the students tended to use their own language in most interactions, unless in the presence of a teacher and determined that their reluctance was due to two key inhibitors: peer pressure among

monolingual groups of learners and some degree of cultural resistance (Wallace, 2016). In the context of my research, a further examination is required to investigate the reasons why these students felt reluctant to speak English with their peers outside the classroom or during breaks.

### ***8.2.1.3. Perceptions of educational quality***

The third common reason for students choosing TNE over local Vietnamese programs concerns educational quality. This is consistent with the findings of other studies in the literature. For instance, Mok and Han (2016) found that one of the main reasons for Chinese students choosing TNE was the quality of education, including the reputation of the foreign institution and its faculty. In my research, the term ‘educational quality’ was explained in various ways in the student focus group discussions. A number of student participants compared the educational quality of a transnational program with a local Vietnamese one, insisting that the former was of better quality. These student participants elaborated, saying they were reluctant to choose a local Vietnamese program because of an over-emphasis on political subjects in entrance requirements and the curriculum, as well as the generally negative perception of educational practices in Vietnam. Each of these factors is presented below.

#### ***a) Over-emphasis on political subjects in entrance requirements and the curriculum***

Some student participants stated in the focus group discussions that the entrance requirements and curriculum of the local Vietnamese programs were neither practical nor relevant to their major. They explained that to be admitted to a local Vietnamese program, candidates must sit three subjects: philosophy; another foreign language (usually French or Chinese); and one subject related to their major. They felt reluctant to spend time studying philosophy and another language, neither of which were relevant to their major. Therefore, they turned to a much more appealing option, a transnational program which required an IELTS-type entrance test.

Regarding the curriculum, some student participants found that local Vietnamese programs consisted of a large component of philosophical and political subjects, such as philosophy and Marxism-Leninism, while transnational programs focused on

specialised subjects only. These student participants insisted they would learn much more in a transnational program than in a local Vietnamese one. This represents a strong push factor away from local Vietnamese programs and a strong pull factor toward TNE programs.

This reason for choosing TNE amongst the Vietnamese students is interesting. This finding is specific to the political situation in this country, so it is important to re-examine the unique political context of Vietnam before discussing it further. As previously discussed in Chapter 2, Vietnam is a socialist communist country that still adheres to orthodox Marxism-Leninism with political determination. Within such a distinctive political agenda, many aspects of Vietnamese society, including higher education, have been shaped by socialism and communism. In the higher education system, the idea of promoting socialist thoughts and principles among students is of equal importance to developing their intellectual capacity (Doan, 2005). Consequently, subjects of a political nature, such as Marxist-Leninist philosophy, Marxist political economics, scientific socialism, Ho Chi Minh thoughts, and the history of the Vietnamese communist party, are enforced in the undergraduate curriculum (Doan, 2005). At postgraduate level, Marxist-Leninist philosophy remains a compulsory subject. For social science programs, the weight of subjects of an ideological and political nature is even higher, as Marxism-Leninism is considered the foundation of the social sciences (Ngo, 2011).

In this context, the students of the two postgraduate programs in my research were reluctant to pursue postgraduate study with a Vietnamese program because of this over-emphasis on philosophical and political subjects. This finding is consistent with that of Doan (2005), who observed that students found these political subjects neither practical in their pursuit of knowledge nor relevant to their academic interests and future employment. Moreover, this finding aligns with Doan's (2000) argument that the irrelevant and time-consuming political subjects of the Vietnamese curriculum have discouraged Vietnamese academics from pursuing postgraduate education in Vietnam, motivating a large number of them to seek overseas study. In the context of my research, the over-emphasis of political subjects appears to explain why the Vietnamese students decided to choose TNE over local Vietnamese programs.



*b) Perceptions of educational practices in Vietnam*

Data from the student focus group discussions indicated that some student participants did not appreciate local Vietnamese programs because of some alleged unhealthy practices in the higher education system. Some student participants explained that in their past experiences with Vietnamese higher education, they had been told how much money a student might need to pass an exam or to improve their grades. Other student participants said they had witnessed students in a Vietnamese program pass subjects without having to study hard. As one student participant observed that in Vietnamese education context, some students who had not studied hard enough still got passed by their teachers. It is kind of ‘part of Vietnamese culture’. In other words, these student participants were concerned about the educational quality of those Vietnamese programs and opted for a transnational program. This finding is consistent with Ye’s (2016) work, which examined the reasons why Vietnamese students left Vietnam for Singapore for their higher education. She provided a quote from a transnational Vietnamese student explaining why he wanted to leave Vietnam not long after starting his university education in a Vietnamese university:

I know quite a bit about the Vietnamese education system .... The problem is that it’s not really meritocracy-based. That’s the main problem. You can bribe your grade. You can actually bribe your grade. Certain things, it’s under the table; you can go through those channels. And for me, I don’t like cheating and that sort of stuff. I find that quite disturbing, and unfair. Not just me but for people who want a conducive environment for studying ... all my friends were leaving [Vietnam]. It kind of made me anxious. (Ye, 2016, p. 98)

Although unfortunate, this finding does reflect the existence of some unethical behaviours in the Vietnam higher education system. Some scholars described these behaviours “the abuse of authority for personal as well as material gain” (Heyneman, 2004, p. 637). McCornac (2012) identified two common types of negative practices in education, the first relating to enrolment and registration and the second to exams and grades. McCornac (2008) conducted research with students, teachers and administrators on their perceptions of negative practices in Vietnam’s higher education system. His

findings showed that negative practices in Vietnamese higher education were both rampant and institutional, regarded as the norm rather than the exception. Even more disturbing was the fact that both students and faculty in that study commented that cheating is ‘just part of Vietnamese culture’ (McCornac, 2008). As Evans and Rorris (2010) observed, negative behaviours such as bribing teachers for exam answers or marks, or buying the answers to exams, are seen by many students as part of the cost of an education.

That being said, it is important not to generalise about negative practices in ~~Vietnam~~ Vietnamese education context. It is undeniable that negative practices do exist in higher education and some may see it as the norm, but that does not mean *all* students and teachers are involved in these practices. It is a choice. Moreover, these unethical practices should never be, and in fact ~~has~~ have never been, accepted in Vietnamese society, and efforts have been made to eradicate ~~it~~ them. Proliferating laws and regulations with stricter measures to address these practices have been MOET priorities, and programs have been implemented to educate society on the negative influences of these practices (McCornac, 2012). Although much more needs to be done, these initiatives show Vietnam’s determination to get rid of what is mistakenly assumed to be ‘part of Vietnamese culture’ or ‘part of Vietnamese thinking’ in all aspects of society, including education.

In the context of my research, it is encouraging that the participating students acknowledged the negative effects of unethical practices in higher education and strongly opposed these practices. It is hoped that these students, when returning to their everyday jobs, will play an important role in eliminating corruption and in promoting the idea that “education is a right and privilege that is earned, not a commodity to be sold by administrators and faculty” (McCornac, 2012, p. 273).

The discussion of the educational quality of local Vietnamese programs presented above implies that the students participating in my research expected a better quality of education in TNE programs. Quality in TNE programs, especially at the undergraduate level, has been a salient theme in the literature and attracted great attention from scholars (Lim & Shad, 2017; McBurnie & Ziguras, 2011; Phan, 2016). Experts have raised concerns about TNE. One of them is the claim made by Phan (2016) that TNE in

Vietnam is characterised by mediocrity. Although the notion of TNE quality was not the focus of my research, the open nature of my focus group discussions allowed some student participants to share their opinions on this topic. These student participants said they were aware of some current claims on social media about the low quality of TNE in Vietnam. They insisted it was only true for TNE at the undergraduate level, not at the postgraduate level. These postgraduate TNE student participants reported that they were happy about the quality of their TNE programs.

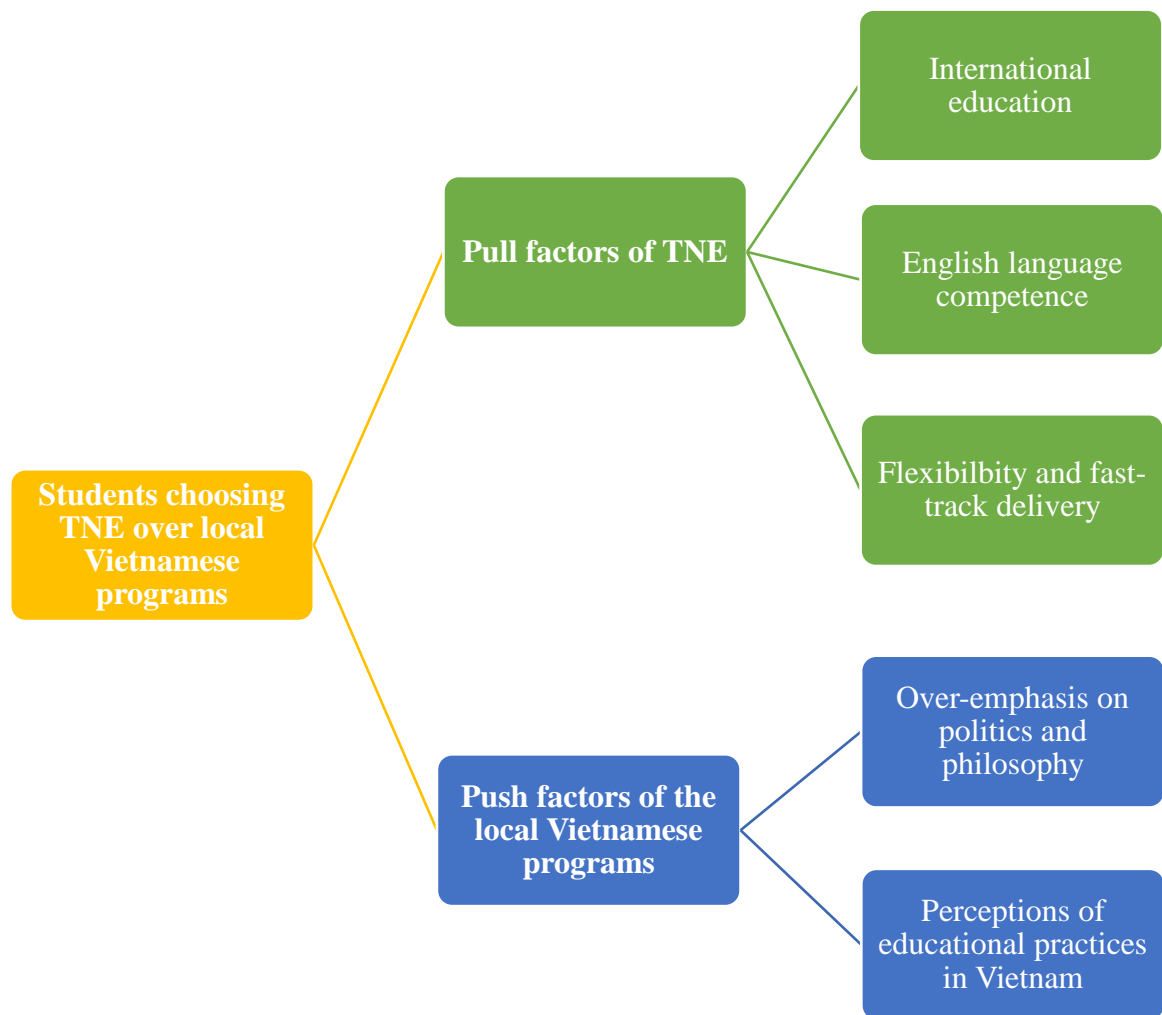
#### ***8.2.1.4. Flexibility and fast-track delivery***

The fourth common reason for students selecting TNE relates to its flexibility and fast-track delivery. As most students of the two programs under study were still working (either full-time or part-time) while studying, it was understandable that one of their most important selection criteria related to the time arrangements of the transnational program. In the focus group discussions, some student participants admitted that their biggest interest in enrolling in a transnational program was to get a degree as quickly as possible so that they could move on with other commitments. One student participant said she had postponed her marriage until she finished the course. For other student participants, a transnational program suited them best because its flexibility allowed them to continue working while studying. In other words, these students praised the TNE programs for their flexibility and fast-track delivery, and had deliberately selected them for those reasons. This finding aligns with those in previous TNE research studies (Ly, 2013; Phan, 2016). For instance, Miliszewska and Sztendur (2012) investigated 500 TNE students in eight programs offered by four Australian institutions in Hong Kong, Malaysia, Singapore and Vietnam to examine their satisfaction with TNE services. They found that some students defined program effectiveness as completing the program in a short time, or obtaining a degree quickly via an express route.

#### ***8.2.1.5. A push-pull framework for student choice of transnational education over local Vietnamese programs***

The above section discussed the four common reasons why students chose TNE programs over local Vietnamese programs: international education; English language competence; educational quality; and flexibility and fast-track delivery. Applying these four reasons to a push-pull model (Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002) provides a framework for

student choice of TNE programs over local Vietnamese programs. In this framework, three reasons represent the pull factors toward TNE (i.e., international education; English language competence; and flexibility and fast-track delivery) and two reasons represent the push factor away from local Vietnamese programs (i.e., educational quality including an over-emphasis on politics and philosophy, and generally negative perceptions of educational practices in Vietnam) (refer to **Figure 8.1**).



**Figure 8.1. Push-pull framework for student choice of TNE over local Vietnamese programs**

In summary, this section combined the student questionnaire results and the student focus group discussion data to support an analysis of the reasons why students selected TNE programs over local Vietnamese programs (i.e., international education; English language competence; educational quality; and flexibility and fast-track delivery). It also proposed a push-pull framework for student choice of TNE programs over local Vietnamese programs. The next section examines the reasons why students chose TNE over studying in Australia.

### **8.2.2. Why did these Vietnamese transnational students prefer Australian transnational education over studying in Australia?**

The student questionnaire results indicated that the students chose TNE rather than studying at a branch campus in Australia for two main reasons: finance (the affordable tuition fees of TNE, and the lack of financial support for study overseas), and commitments (work and family commitments). Each of these reasons is discussed in the following sub-sections.

#### **8.2.2.1. Financial reasons**

The first reason for students choosing TNE over study in Australia relates to finance. With the same 'end product' of an Australian degree, studying an Australian TNE program in Vietnam is undoubtedly more affordable than studying at the home campus in Australia. Students can save tuition fees and living expenses by completing TNE locally. Specifically, the recruitment information on relevant websites (for ethical reasons, these websites and references are not provided) documented a tuition fee for the transnational education program under study as approximately AUD\$7,000 for the May 2017 intake. By comparison, the tuition fee of a similar course for international students in Australia was approximately AUD\$30,000. Similarly, the tuition fee for the transnational business program was approximately AUD\$19,000 while for international onshore students in Australia was approximately AUD\$53,000. More importantly, this is the tuition fee alone, without reference to living expenses.

Given that Vietnam is a developing country, it is not surprising that finance has a great impact on student choice between studying offshore in Vietnam and onshore in Australia. For many students, TNE is preferable because it is within their financial

capacity. Enrolling in an Australian TNE program in Vietnam provides them with exposure to an Australian education without having to compromise financially. This finding is compatible with that of Ly (2013), who identified the ‘affordable cost for an international program’ as an important factor in student choice of a transnational postgraduate program in Vietnam. Similarly, O’Mahony (2014) concluded that students regarded TNE as an “affordable quality education” (p. 30). Fang and Wang (2014) also identified cost as one of the major push factors away from overseas higher education among Chinese transnational students. Their study participants stated that TNE had almost no advantage except for the low costs in comparison with overseas higher education (Fang & Wang, 2014).

On a related note, the student focus group discussion data revealed that some student participants would have chosen overseas study in Australia if they had been financially supported. They admitted that they would have preferred to study onshore in Australia rather than offshore in Vietnam. This suggests that some students considered TNE as a second choice, with many stating that studying onshore in Australia would be their first choice. The point was also apparent in the work of Fang and Wang (2014). This ‘second choice’ attitude towards TNE may have arisen from the students’ own interest in living and studying in Australia, or more sophisticatedly, from how TNE is perceived by Vietnamese society. As discussed earlier in Chapter 3, one extensive piece of research on TNE in Vietnam noted that Vietnamese society has pictured TNE as of mediocre quality and its students’ identity as “rich in money but poor in quality” (Phan, 2016, p. 133). In fact, one student of my research shared her experience of how Vietnamese society perceives TNE in comparison to overseas study:

When I told my friends that I am studying a master’s degree in Education of AAA University from Australia, they were like ‘wow’... but when I clarified that it is an Australian TNE program delivered in Vietnam, they changed their attitudes and looked confused. It is such a huge difference. (Student 2)

With regards to financial support, interestingly, some student participants asserted that a full scholarship would help their overseas study. However, winning this type of scholarship was not that easy for these Vietnamese students. Some explained they had

limited access to full scholarship programs in Vietnam and had little support in applying for scholarships. Others found scholarships out of reach and were reluctant to even try. It was encouraging to observe that after the focus group discussions had finished, many students stayed behind to talk to me about different scholarship programs related to postgraduate degrees in Australia. It is surprising that many of them were not aware of some popular Australian scholarship programs although they were based in one of the biggest and most developed cities in Vietnam. In fact, the website of the Australian Embassy in Vietnam listed several Australia scholarship schemes such as the Australia awards (Vietnam), including Endeavour scholarships and fellowships, and Australian centre for international agricultural research (ACIAR) awards. Further to that, many Australian education institutions offer scholarships to international students, especially at the postgraduate level. Moreover, Project 911 and Project 165, funded by the Vietnamese Government, provide financial support for Vietnamese citizens to study overseas, including Australia. The dilemma was that many students in my study appeared to have a psychological block that discouraged them from even trying to apply for scholarships. This was based on a lack of confidence, a fear of failure, and a belief that these scholarships were way out of their reach.

#### ***8.2.2.2. Commitment-related reasons***

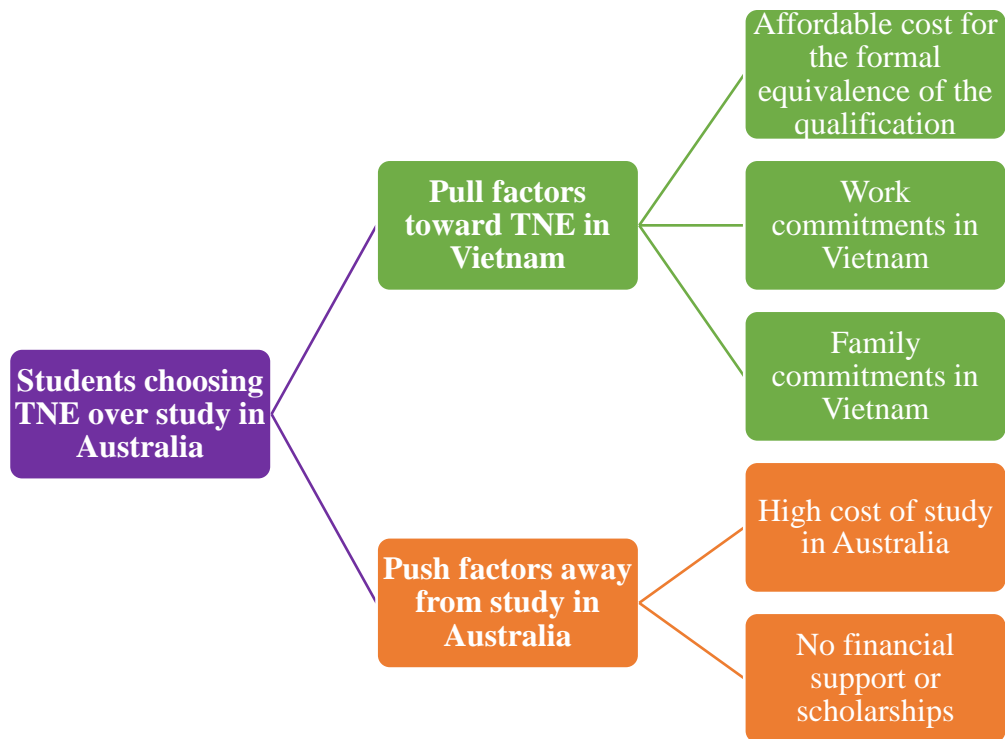
The other major reason why students chose offshore rather than onshore education was work and family commitments. As evident in the demographic data, most of the students participating in this research were still working, either full-time or part-time, during their candidature. It is, therefore, not surprising that they did not want to study overseas and compromise their current job stability. In addition, many married female students found it difficult to contemplate leaving their families. Therefore, studying in a transnational program in their home country was the best option for them. They could maintain their employment and support their family while studying. This finding concurs with that of O'Mahony (2014), who reported that TNE was considered a favourable option for aspiring students, especially women, allowing them to complete a recognised qualification within the social constraints of their culture and without separating themselves from their families. Phan's (2016) research also provided an account of a TNE student from the South of Vietnam who was reluctant to compromise her well-positioned employment and well-established family in Vietnam:

One thing we have in common is that our husbands are established in Vietnam and thus don't want to leave everything here to accompany us overseas even if we can get a scholarship to go. Another reason is that some of us are also well positioned here and going overseas for a few years will cause a lot of interruptions. (Phan, 2016, p. 141)

#### ***8.2.2.3. A push-pull framework for student choice of transnational education over study in Australia***

The above section outlined the reasons why students selected TNE over study in Australia that included financial reasons and commitment-related reasons. Based on the student findings, the pull factors toward TNE in Vietnam in my thesis were defined as factors that attracted the students to TNE at Vietnam, while the push factors away from study in Australia were defined as the factors that discouraged the students to study overseas in Australia. Applying these reasons into the push-pull model (Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002) created a framework for student choice of TNE over study in Australia. In adopting this framework in my research, I found three reasons that represented pull factors toward TNE in Vietnam (i.e., affordable cost for the formal equivalence of the qualification; work commitments in Vietnam; and family commitments in Vietnam) and reasons that represented push factors away from study in Australia (i.e., the high cost of study in Australia; no financial support or scholarships) (refer to **Figure 8.2**).





**Figure 8.2. Adopting Push-pull framework (Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002) for student choice of TNE over studying in Australia in my research**

### **8.3. Research question two: What are the key characteristics of transnational lecturers, from both student and lecturer perspectives?**

This section explores the second research question: the key characteristics of transnational lecturers from both student and lecturer perspectives. The student perspectives are presented first, followed by the lecturer perspectives. This section then presents a comparison of these perspectives across the two groups.

#### **8.3.1. Student perspectives**

This section presents both the quantitative results from the student questionnaire and the qualitative data from the student focus groups in relation to the key characteristics of transnational lecturers.

As discussed in Chapter 4, I adapted the framework of transnational lecturer key characteristics as proposed by Leask and her colleagues (Leask, 2008; Leask et al., 2005). The table below (refer to **Table 8.2**) provides a summary of the student questionnaire results regarding what the student respondents rated as most important characteristics of transnational lecturers.

**Table 8.2. The characteristics desired of transnational lecturers (Student questionnaire results)**

Category	Key characteristics of transnational lecturers	Rating by students (Student questionnaire results)
Discipline knowledge	Knowledge of the discipline and related professions in the local context, as well as more broadly in an international context	1 <sup>st</sup>
Teaching skills	The ability to adapt learning activities in response to the needs of transnational students	2 <sup>nd</sup>
	The ability to engage students from different cultural backgrounds in discussion and group work	3 <sup>rd</sup>
Cultural knowledge	An understanding of how culture affects how we interact with others	4 <sup>th</sup>
	An understanding of the social, cultural and educational backgrounds of students	5 <sup>th</sup>

The following section examines each of these three categories in detail: discipline knowledge, teaching skills, and cultural knowledge.

### ***8.3.1.1. Discipline knowledge***

The student questionnaire results indicated that discipline knowledge was considered the most important characteristic of transnational lecturers. This finding contradicts Bartram and Bailey's (2009) work. They studied international students and students from the United Kingdom in relation to their perceptions of good teaching. They reported that the students regarded teacher knowledge to be the *least* important (Bartram & Bailey, 2009). However, the current finding is consistent with Lee et al.'s (2015) research, in which Singaporean students rated teacher knowledge as an important characteristic. It is interesting to observe that the Vietnamese students in my study and

Singaporean students from Lee and her colleagues' (2015) project both rated teacher knowledge highly as an important indicator of effective teaching. This finding can be best explained from the Confucian cultural point of view. Singaporean and Vietnamese societies follow Confucianism, in which the teacher is regarded as the absolute authority and the most reliable source of knowledge and truth (Liu et al., 2010; Nguyen, 2017). Accordingly, students from Confucian heritage cultures such as Vietnam tend to expect their teachers to be highly knowledgeable in their discipline.

The qualitative data from the student focus group discussions elaborated on discipline knowledge. Some student participants provided specific examples of transnational lecturers' discipline knowledge (refer to **Table 8.3**).

**Table 8.3. Discipline knowledge (Student focus group results)**

Category	Specific examples
	Qualitative data from student focus group discussions
Discipline knowledge	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Demonstrate high publication performance</li> <li>• Demonstrate strong theoretical as well as practical knowledge (relevant to the Vietnamese context)</li> </ul>

Some student participants described lecturers' discipline knowledge in terms of research publication performance, stating that they felt inspired and excited learning with and from lecturers with strong publication records. Given the neglected research culture in Vietnam higher education (Hayden & Le, 2013), this finding is encouraging as it indicates a strong research interest among students. A possible explanation for this research interest may relate to the predominant research component of the education program. In fact, the education program followed a research-based curriculum and required students to study research-oriented subjects. Therefore, students were more likely to value research.

In addition to research and publication performance, some student participants stressed that transnational lecturers need both theoretical and practical knowledge. They explained practical knowledge as knowledge that is relevant to the Vietnamese context and, more specifically, knowledge that can be readily applied to local Vietnamese working contexts. In other words, they expected their lecturers to demonstrate strong

knowledge of their discipline in relation to Asian, or ideally, Vietnamese contexts. These student participants argued that while transnational lecturers might have strong discipline knowledge related to a Western context, this knowledge might not necessarily be relevant to an Asian context like Vietnam. As most student participants were studying while working, it is not surprising that they highlighted the relationship between classroom knowledge and their real-life working contexts.

### **8.3.1.2. Teaching skills**

The student questionnaire results indicated that the two most highly rated characteristics within the teaching skills category were the lecturer's ability to adapt learning activities in response to the needs of transnational students, and the ability to engage students from different cultural backgrounds in discussion and group work.

The qualitative data from the student focus group discussions provided some specific examples of the teaching skills category, as presented in the table below (refer to **Table 8.4**).

**Table 8.4. Teaching skills (Student focus group results)**

Category	Specific examples
	Qualitative data from student focus group discussions
Teaching skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Deliver in an understandable or comprehensible manner (speak slowly; use simple and clear language; try different ways of explaining complex ideas)</li> <li>• Provide specific examples, expectations and directions</li> <li>• Relate and connect lectures/examples to the Vietnamese context</li> </ul>

Some student participants stressed that transnational lecturers need to deliver their knowledge in an understandable (i.e., comprehensible) manner by speaking slowly, using simple and clear language in class, and trying different ways to explain complex ideas. These findings align with Alhija's (2017) research, in which students regarded the skill to teach in a clear and understandable manner as important. It is worth noting that Alhija (2017) examined students' perceptions of good teaching in a general classroom, not a transnational classroom. In a general classroom, it can be challenging for students to follow their lecturers, even in their native language, if the teacher fails to

teach in a clear and understandable manner. For transnational students learning in a foreign language, it can be even more challenging. Although the entry criteria of the transnational programs in my research required students to demonstrate a certain level of English language competence, and some students were very competent, the language barrier remains an obstacle for some transnational students (Phan, 2016; Qian, 2013). As English language is still a foreign language in Vietnam, it is not surprising that many of the student participants found it challenging to comprehend complicated concepts/theories, and requested a clear and understandable approach from their lecturers.

In addition, some student participants expected their lecturers to give specific and concrete explanations, directions and examples. This finding appears to relate to one of the cultural dimensions of the Confucian culture in Vietnam: uncertainty avoidance (Hofstede & Hofstede, 2005). This implies that a teacher from a Confucian culture like Vietnam is expected to cater for the class as a group and to highlight the main points for the students in order to avoid ambiguity (Chen & Bennett, 2012).

Finally, some student participants considered the transnational lecturer's ability to relate or connect their lectures and examples to the Vietnamese context as important. Like the postgraduate students in Chapman and Pyvis's (2005) study, these student participants became uninterested in the predominance of Western philosophies in course materials, which had little relevance to the Vietnamese context. These participants explained that they would be more engaged by examples relevant to the Vietnamese context. The inclusion of local content in programs, through examples and case studies, was also identified by Leask and her colleagues (Leask, 2008; Leask et al., 2005) as an important transnational lecturer characteristic. Similarly, the Vietnamese transnational students in Ly et al.'s (2015) study called for customised programs that could help them take on new roles and prepare them to compete successfully in the complex and dynamic environment in Vietnam.

#### ***8.3.1.3. Vietnamese cultural knowledge***

As indicated above, the student questionnaire results suggested that the student respondents highly valued transnational lecturers with an understanding of the impact of

culture on communication and interaction with others, and with an understanding of the social, cultural and educational backgrounds of students.

In the student focus group discussions, some student participants provided specific examples of cultural knowledge, as presented in the table below (refer to **Table 8.5**).

**Table 8.5. Vietnamese cultural knowledge (Student focus group results)**

Category	Specific examples
	<b>Qualitative data from student focus group discussions</b>
Vietnamese cultural knowledge	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Know Vietnamese students' learning styles and expectations</li> <li>• Know the social and political context of Vietnam, and some basic Vietnamese language</li> </ul>

Some student participants commented that transnational lecturers need to know the learning styles and expectations of Vietnamese students, which could be different from those of Western students. For instance, Vietnamese students would regard 'being quiet in class' as 'being nice students' and 'respecting the teacher', whereas in a Western context, this may mean the opposite. Kang and Chang (2016) discussed the influences of Confucian culture on students' expectations and behaviours in the classroom. They asserted that in Confucian culture, a teacher is not only a lecturer but is also seen as 'a parent' whom students look up to. Consequently, students are not comfortable questioning their teachers in the classroom (Kang & Chang, 2016), which may be labelled passive and unengaged from a Western point of view. Moreover, teachers from a Confucian culture are expected to accommodate the whole class as a group and to highlight the main points for all students. Students are not expected to 'disturb the class' by asking questions because the teachers may initially want to focus on the main points for the whole class thus potentially addressing student questions (Chen & Bennett, 2012; Nguyen, 2017).

Another example of cultural knowledge reported by the student participants related to an understanding of the social context of Vietnam. Some student participants suggested that transnational lecturers could learn some very basic phrases and sentences in Vietnamese so that they could speak to each other in Vietnamese. The student participants argued that some background knowledge, coupled with basic Vietnamese

language competence, would help lecturers connect better with students and Vietnamese culture. This finding aligns with those of Smith et al. (2003) and Teekens (2003). These scholars highlighted the connection between language and culture, insisting that language conveys much more beyond what is literally said, because it implies cultural assumptions, and shapes people's ideas and thinking. In a transnational context, Gopal (2011) observed that transnational lecturers who know the language of the host culture often feel more comfortable with their transnational teaching experience.

#### **8.3.1.4. Personal attributes**

In addition to the three categories presented above (i.e., discipline knowledge, teaching skills, and Vietnamese cultural knowledge), my research identified personal attributes as an important transnational lecturer characteristic. Qualitative data from student focus group discussions identified four personal attributes, as presented in the table below (refer to **Table 8.6**).

**Table 8.6. Personal attributes (Student focus group results)**

<b>Category</b>	<b>Specific examples</b>
	<b>Qualitative data from student focus group discussions</b>
Personal attributes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Be willing to help</li> <li>• Be friendly</li> <li>• Be approachable</li> <li>• Have a sense of humour</li> </ul>

The student participants frequently commented on qualities such as being 'willing', 'approachable', 'friendly' and having a 'sense of humour', identifying these as important characteristics of transnational lecturers. This is consistent with the work of Bartram and Bailey (2009), who found that personal qualities were important to transnational lecturers. A possible explanation for this may relate to the reasons for students choosing TNE. As discussed earlier, many students from both programs were looking for something 'international', as it would be different from the structured and formal approach that they had experienced in Vietnamese classroom. They expected a more supportive friendly learning environment, in which the lecturers were approachable and willing to support them.

### ***8.3.1.5. Summary of transnational lecturers' key characteristics from students' perspectives***

The figure below (refer to **Figure 8.3**) presents a summary of students' perspectives regarding transnational lecturers' key characteristics as discussed above.



**Figure 8.3. Summary of key characteristics of transnational lecturers – Student focus group results**

The next section discusses the lecturer participants' perspectives in terms of the key characteristics desired of transnational lecturers.



### **8.3.2. Lecturer perspectives**

The qualitative data from the lecturer interviews identified three categories of transnational lecturer characteristics: personal attributes, teaching skills, and cultural knowledge. It is important to note that in developing these categories, some characteristics did overlap (in terms of meaning and interpretation) into more than one category. The following section explores each of these categories in detail.

#### ***8.3.2.1. Personal attributes***

The lecturer participants maintained that transnational lecturers need to be open and willing; patient and empathetic; flexible and creative; and respectful. Being open/willing and respectful were the most common responses.

##### *a) Openness/willingness*

Teaching Vietnamese students in Australia where Western paradigms are dominant, is very different from teaching them in their home country, Vietnam. As Leask (2004) observed:

Teaching off-shore is an intellectual challenge and an emotional journey, one which requires academic staff, as strangers in a strange land, to come to terms with the perceptions that staff and students in (the off-shore country) have of them, with the differences and similarities ... that confront them and challenge their stereotypes and prejudices, and which can lead to feelings of frustration, confusion and disorientation. (p. 3)

In other words, transnational lecturers work in environments with varying cultures and learning and teaching expectations. They are required to be open and receptive to classroom and cultural differences and be able to demonstrate empathy. They are not expected to act as Western authority figures who impose knowledge on local students. Nor are they expected to assume that Vietnamese transnational students have similar requirements to Vietnamese students studying in Australia.

This sense of openness is an attribute that Deardorff (2009) related to curiosity in her models of intercultural competence. Openness and curiosity involve a willingness to take risks and at times step out of one's comfort zone. While curiosity can lead to more creative ways to create opportunities, openness can enable lecturers to see things from more than one perspective. This is significant when accommodating cultural differences in transnational teaching (LeBaron et al., 2006). Bennett (2009) also highlighted the relevance of transnational lecturers maintaining a sense of openness and understanding of other cultures while teaching offshore. Thus, a sense of openness encourages and enables transnational lecturers to recognise and embrace multiple approaches when engaging in transnational teaching and learning.

#### *b) Respect*

The lecturer participants identified respect as another important transnational lecturer personal attribute. Some lecturer participants stressed that transnational lecturers must demonstrate respect for both the individuality of the students and their cultures. As Debowski (2003) noted, teaching in a foreign country is challenging for some transnational lecturers as they must adjust to the new teaching context, often without the usual support networks from colleagues, family and friends. The success of intercultural competence depends greatly on the transnational lecturers' ability to embrace other cultures in a positive way (Hiller & Wozniak, 2009). As discussed in the previous chapter, intercultural competence refers to "the ability to interact effectively with people of different cultures and socio-economic backgrounds, to understand and respect values, attitudes, beliefs and mores that differ across cultures, and to consider and respond appropriately to these differences" (Chen, 2016, p.193). This finding is consistent with that of Leask (2004), who conducted research on an Australian transnational faculty teaching at a branch campus in Hong Kong. Leask highlighted the importance of valuing the ideas and opinions of those from the local culture. Similarly, Gopal (2011) identified respect and valuing of other cultures as essential attitudes that should be embraced when teaching transnationally. More recently, Wang (2016) highlighted the essential role of respect in creating a supportive and safe learning environment in a transnational classroom. She maintained that such an environment, which can be created by setting rules for respectful discussions and providing forums for exchanges of

different perspectives, is an important component of the intercultural dialogue framework for transnational teaching and learning (Wang, 2016).

When discussing respect for the local Vietnamese culture, some lecturer participants raised concerns about the educational and cultural imperialism of TNE. These participants insisted that Vietnamese people and students should not devalue their own values and culture or blindly accept Western conventions as better. They emphasised that Vietnamese students should maintain balanced perspectives about Vietnam and Australia, be able to critically reflect on ‘what is good’ and ‘what is not good’ in both cultures, and find ways of complementing both cultures. This notion of imperialism, colonialism or dominance of Western hegemony, in internationalisation and TNE, has been widely debated in the literature. In fact, imperialism has been described as one of the risks associated with internationalisation and TNE and has met with strong criticism (Altbach, 2013; Nguyen & Tran, 2018; Tran & Nguyen, 2015). For instance, Matthews and Sidhu (2005) referred to Australian international education as being commercial, self-interested and imperialising. One contributing factor to imperialism in internationalisation and TNE is the use of English language as the main instruction medium. Although the globalisation of English language brings various benefits, it does raise concerns of imperialism. Phan (2016) provided examples where literacy and academic competence are evaluated based on being literate and competent in English language only. In the context of my research, the lecturer participants appeared to be aware of the risks of educational imperialism in TNE and actively encouraged Vietnamese students and people in general to retain balanced perspectives about the unique cultures of both Vietnam and Australia. This lecturer finding of ‘cultural imperialism of TNE’ is interesting as the student participants in my thesis did not explicitly comment on this concept in their focus group discussions.

#### ***8.3.2.2. Teaching skills***

The lecturer interviews highlighted a number of teaching and communication skills that they believed were important when teaching transnational students. Some lecturer participants referred to the importance of using clear language, avoiding colourful language, and speaking slowly. Others commented on the need to present key ideas, concepts or terms in both verbal and written form, thus supporting students who may be

struggling when listening to and understanding their lecturer. As discussed earlier, English language is a foreign language in Vietnam, and it has been documented in the literature that language barriers remain a challenge for transnational students in this country (Phan, 2016; Qian, 2013). Unlike TNE in Singapore, Hong Kong or Malaysia, where English is widely spoken, Vietnam is still far behind its neighbours in respect to the use of English language in general, as well as in higher education. It is, therefore, critical that transnational lecturers deliver their lectures/presentations in clear and concise modes, both orally and in written form.

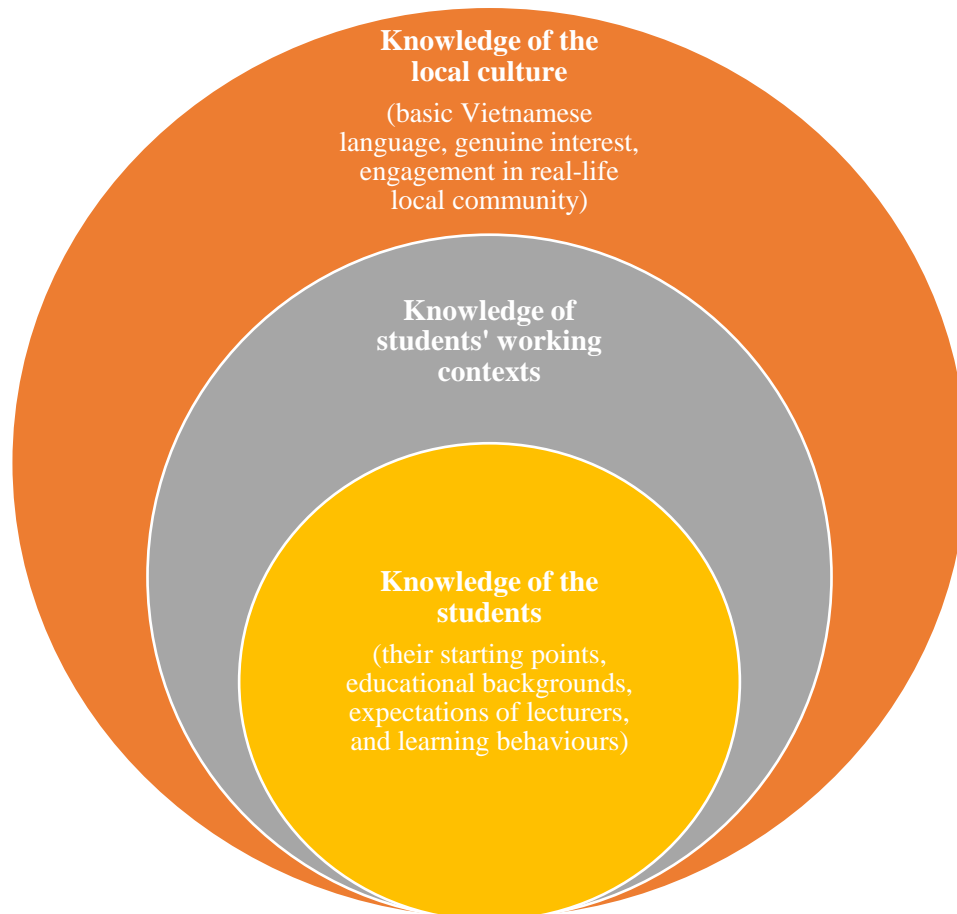
Noticeably, this finding from the lecturer participants is consistent with the students' perceptions of transnational lecturers' key characteristics, as presented earlier in this chapter. It is encouraging to learn that both the student and lecturer participants stressed the importance of transnational lecturers delivering and facilitating learning in a student-friendly manner. Both the student and lecturer participants were aware of the challenges with respect to language/communication barriers that are often prevalent in transnational classes.

Another related teaching skill concerns checking for student understanding. Some lecturer participants pointed out the importance of checking for student understanding, explaining that many students appeared to understand their class lessons based on positive signs (e.g., nodding in agreement, taking notes, saying yes), but in fact they did not. This behaviour is influenced by Vietnam's Confucian heritage culture. I have found that Vietnamese students tend to avoid seeking clarification points, are often reluctant to ask questions, and tend to express positive reinforcement even when it may not be warranted. This may lead lecturers to assume that their students have understood their presentations when in fact they are just being 'respectful' in class and may not have understood them at all. Hence the importance of checking in regularly and confirming understanding.

#### ***8.3.2.3. Cultural knowledge: Three layers of knowledge***

The lecturer participants highlighted cultural knowledge as an important characteristic of transnational lecturers when teaching offshore. They described the term 'cultural knowledge' as multi-layered. The first layer relates to a knowledge of the students (i.e., students' starting points, their educational backgrounds, their expectations of lecturers,

and their learning behaviours). The second layer concerns knowledge of the students' working contexts. The third layer relates to knowledge of the local Vietnamese culture in terms of some basic Vietnamese language, genuine interest in the local culture; and engagement in the real-life local community (refer to **Figure 8.4**).



**Figure 8.4. Cultural knowledge: Three layers of knowledge**

It is encouraging that the lecturer participants indicated the importance of knowing their transnational students. From an educational perspective, it is undoubtedly critical for any lecturer to know their students, but it is even more critical for transnational lecturers to know their transnational students. As Leask and her colleagues (Leask, 2008; Leask et al., 2005) noted, it is essential for lecturers to understand the social, cultural and educational backgrounds of their transnational students. Ziguras (1999) stressed that transnational lecturers must be familiar with their students' backgrounds, assumptions and expectations. This requires transnational lecturers to familiarise themselves with the students' home country and their educational practices. Similarly, Wang (2016)

identified an understanding of learners and their contexts as her first principle in transnational teaching and learning. Wang insisted that Western lecturers need to understand their transnational students in the sense of being aware of their previous learning experiences and appreciating the different cultural and linguistic backgrounds that they bring to their learning. Importantly, transnational lecturers need to recognise the impact of culture and learning traditions on their students' learning behaviours and academic conventions (Wang, 2016).

Some may argue that Australian lecturers already know Vietnamese students because they have many Vietnamese students in their classes back home in Australia. However, this is not a relevant argument. Teaching in a transnational context requires lecturers to acknowledge the differences between teaching Vietnamese students back home in Australia and teaching Vietnamese students in Vietnam. Leask (2008) observed that the differences between home teaching and transnational teaching are significant and that transnational teaching requires lecturers to have augmented skills beyond those desired of home teaching. It should not be assumed that lecturers who have taught Vietnamese students in their home environment will necessarily be able to transition easily or successfully into a transnational context in Vietnam. In fact, one lecturer participant insisted that the most important characteristic for a transnational lecturer was to recognise that he/she was no longer teaching in his/her home environment. Another lecturer participant added that Vietnamese students in Australia are exposed to, and immersed in, a Western approach, while Vietnamese transnational students in Vietnam have limited exposure to Western approaches. Transnational lecturers need to get to know their Vietnamese students, understand their expectations and, more importantly, be able to discuss those expectations with them.

In addition to knowing the students and understanding their expectations, the lecturer participants stressed that transnational lecturers need to know their students' working contexts. These participants explained that developing presentations and discussions that are both relevant to the students' learning and applicable to their work contexts can enhance the levels of engagement in class. Knowing students' working contexts enabled lecturers to make connections with the course materials and thus make the transnational learning experience more meaningful for the students. In other words, they emphasised the need to contextualise the curriculum and course materials. This finding is consistent

with the findings of other studies in the literature. For instance, Wang (2016) highlighted the importance of a contextualised curriculum in which carefully designed resources, activities and examples are linked to the transnational learners' workplaces and professional contexts. She added that transnational lecturers may use Western course materials but need to acknowledge the limitations of Western perspectives and include intercultural perspectives to increase the relevance to local contexts (Wang, 2016). Furthermore, Qian (2013) argued that the curriculum offered by the parent institution must respond to the students' needs. If local content is not included in the course, then transnational lecturers need to create ways and means to make the curriculum relevant to the students' needs and contexts.

The third layer of cultural knowledge relates to local Vietnamese culture. Some lecturer participants highlighted the importance of being willing and able to get involved in and immerse themselves into the local community. Deardorff (2006, 2009) referred to this as curiosity and discovery, which involves a willingness to take risks and step out of one's comfort zone. Transnational lecturers, therefore, should be encouraged to engage in local communities and learn more about the culture of their students. By doing so, they can feel they are part of Vietnamese culture. They should not assume their contributions will fit immediately into local Vietnamese culture, but be open to learning how those contributions could be relevant in local contexts. By taking a proactive role as cultural learners, transnational lecturers could develop an understanding and appreciation of the local culture and send a positive message about their commitment to make transnational learning and teaching work. Sorrells (2016) described this engagement with the local culture as an ongoing involvement phase in her intercultural relationship development process. This phase, the most advanced phase in developing intercultural relationships, is usually marked by attending significant events that enhance greater connection, and involvement of the transnational lecturers with the local Vietnamese culture.

#### ***8.3.2.4. Summary of transnational lecturers' key characteristics from lecturers' perspectives***

The figure below (refer to **Figure 8.5**) presents a summary of lecturer perspectives regarding transnational lecturer key characteristics as discussed above.



**Figure 8.5. Summary of transnational lecturers' key characteristics from lecturers' perspectives**

### 8.3.3. Comparing perspectives between student and lecturer participants

A comparison between the student and lecturer participant perceptions of the key characteristics desired of transnational lecturers helped identify the alignments and tensions across the two groups. The following table outlines the key characteristics perceived by both groups and provides specific examples for each category (refer to **Table 8.7**).

**Table 8.7. Comparing the perspectives of student and lecturer participants**

	<b>Student participants' perspectives of transnational lecturers' key characteristics (Student focus group discussion data)</b>	<b>Lecturer participants' perspectives of transnational lecturers' key characteristics (Lecturer interview data)</b>
Discipline knowledge	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Demonstrate high publication performance</li> <li>- Demonstrate strong theoretical as well as practical knowledge (relevant to the Vietnamese context)</li> </ul>	Not applicable



Teaching skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Deliver knowledge/information in an understandable/comprehensible manner (speak slowly; use simple and clear language; try different ways of explaining complex ideas)</li> <li>- Provide specific examples, expectations and directions</li> <li>- Relate and connect lectures/examples to Vietnamese context (contextualise curriculum)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Deliver knowledge/information in an understandable manner (use clear language, avoid colourful language, and speak slowly)</li> <li>- Write down complex ideas</li> <li>- Check for student understanding</li> </ul>
Cultural knowledge	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Know the students (e.g., students' learning styles and expectations)</li> <li>- Know the social and political context of Vietnam</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Know the students (e.g., their starting points, educational backgrounds, expectations of lecturers, and learning behaviours)</li> <li>- Know their working contexts (contextualise curriculum)</li> <li>- Know the local Vietnamese culture</li> </ul>
Personal attributes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Be willing to help</li> <li>- Be friendly</li> <li>- Be approachable</li> <li>- Have a sense of humour</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Be open and willing</li> <li>- Be patient and empathetic</li> <li>- Be flexible and creative</li> <li>- Be respectful (be aware of imperialism)</li> </ul>

A comparison of perceptions across the two groups indicated some significant similarities in terms of communication skills; knowledge of their transnational students; and contextualisation. Specifically, both participant groups emphasised the importance of communication. They stressed that transnational lecturers need to deliver lessons/lectures in an understandable/comprehensible manner by speaking slowly, using simple and clear language, and trying different ways to explain complex concepts. Moreover, both groups insisted that transnational lecturers need to know their students in terms of their learning behaviours and their role expectations. Additionally, they both highlighted the need to contextualise the curriculum/course materials, although the two groups explained the term 'contextualisation' in slightly different ways. For instance, the student participants suggested transnational lecturers should focus on relating and connecting their lectures/examples to Vietnamese contexts. The lecturer participants indicated that transnational lecturers need to know their students' working contexts in order to make connections with the course materials and thus make the transnational learning experience more meaningful.

In contrast to these similarities, there were a number of notable differences. These related to the importance of transnational lecturers' discipline knowledge, the emphasis on cultural knowledge, and the concept of educational imperialism in TNE.

The first tension related to transnational lecturers' discipline knowledge. While the student participants perceived discipline knowledge as one of the most important characteristics of transnational lecturers, the lecturer participants did not focus extensively on this factor. As discussed earlier, this finding can be explained from a Confucian cultural perspective. Vietnamese students, under Confucian influences, still regard their lecturers as the absolute authority and the most reliable source of the truth and correct answers (Liu et al., 2010; Nguyen, 2017). Therefore, they tend to expect their lecturers to demonstrate profound discipline knowledge. This is different from a Western perspective, in which the lecturer role is primarily to facilitate student learning and, consequently, there is less focus on knowledge provision.

The second mismatch between the groups concerned cultural knowledge. While the lecturer participants talked at length about the importance of cultural aspects, the student participants did not stress this characteristic, although they did acknowledge cultural differences. This finding can be explained as part of the transnational context, with students staying in their home country and transnational lecturers coming to teach in a different environment as intercultural learners, or sojourners. Sojourners refer to people who stay in a foreign environment and culture to fulfil a specific work-related task in a defined period. In this sense, the role of transnational lecturers as sojourners is very different from that of other groups of travellers, such as tourists, migrants and refugees (Ward et al., 2001). As sojourners, transnational lecturers experience an unfamiliar cultural environment and potential cultural challenges (Hoare, 2012; Smith, 2009). Living and working in an environment that is culturally different to their own may even engender culture shock (Smith, 2014). This may explain why the lecturer participants in my research talked more about cultural knowledge than their students did.

The third tension between the groups related to the notion of 'educational imperialism' in TNE. As discussed earlier, imperialism in TNE relates to a situation where one educational or cultural discourse imposes dominance over another. Typically, in such

cases, this behaviour is supported by those who willingly or unintentionally allow for such dominance to occur (Djerasimovic, 2014). The lecturer participants in my research explicitly advised Vietnamese people against devaluing their own culture and blindly ‘worshipping’ Western conventions. They suggested a more balanced perspective that focussed on complementing and respecting both Vietnamese and Australian contexts and conventions. The student participants, on the other hand, did not explicitly comment on the concept of ‘educational imperialism’ in focus group discussions. This finding could be seen as evidence that the Vietnamese students were unaware of their unconscious privileging of Western knowledge and practices over those of Vietnam. Some student participants emphasised the relevance of, and connection to, the Vietnamese context as an important feature of transnational teaching in Vietnam. This finding may suggest that student participants were able to critically reflect on and evaluate what they had been taught and recognise its relevance to their own contexts rather than just blindly accepting Western norms. This finding is interesting, as it seems to contradict the finding about their most common reason for their selection of TNE (ie. an international qualification) and the assumption of “inherent superiority and status of Western degrees” (Hoare, 2012, p. 275) among the students as discussed earlier. It can be interpreted that these students entered TNE with some privileging of Western knowledge and practices over those of Vietnam, but soon realised they would not be able to apply the knowledge and skills if they are not relevant to the Vietnamese context.

In summary, this section has explored the student and lecturer participants’ perceptions regarding the key characteristics desired of transnational lecturers. This section has also compared the findings across the two participant groups to identify alignments and tensions. The next section examines the intercultural complexities of transnational learning and teaching.

#### **8.4. Research question three: How are intercultural complexities demonstrated in the transnational learning and teaching experience of these two programs?**

This section explores the third research question, comparing the students’ and lecturers’ perceptions of intercultural complexities in transnational learning and teaching. The quantitative data from the student questionnaires indicated that students responded

positively to the intercultural complexities in their transnational learning experience. Similarly, the student focus group data suggested that participants appreciated the intercultural complexities in their transnational learning experience. This alignment between the questionnaire and focus group data highlighted the students' positive emphasis on the intercultural complexities of transnational learning.

This section explores the main dimensions of the intercultural complexities as identified by the student and lecturer participants: student–lecturer relationships in class; freedom of speech in class and a face-saving culture; critical thinking skills amongst transnational students; and an emphasis on commonalities rather than differences.

#### **8.4.1. Student–lecturer relationships**

One of the most frequent student focus group responses concerning intercultural complexities related to student–lecturer relationships in class. Many students appreciated the friendly relationships between students and lecturers that were evident in transnational classrooms. In comparison to more traditional Vietnamese classrooms, student participants did not feel a large gap in the transnational classes between 'senior authority' and 'junior students'.

Data from the lecturer interviews showed comparable findings. The lecturer participants noticed a hierarchical structure in the relationships with their students in the classroom. For example, they found students depended on them as the source of information and did not challenge them. These findings reflect the distinctive differences between Confucian heritage and the Western classroom cultures (Francois, 2015; Kang & Chang, 2016). In fact, it corresponds to one important dimension of Hofstede's famous cultural framework (Hofstede & Hofstede, 2005); that is, power distance. Power distance refers to the socially accepted unequal distribution of power among individuals of institutions and organisations in a country (Hofstede & Hofstede, 2005). In the context of my research, Vietnam, as a Confucian heritage culture, is described as a high power distance society while Australia, as a Western culture, is considered a low power distance society (Hofstede & Hofstede, 2005). As presented earlier, a high power distance society like Vietnam tends to accept unequal status between members, to respect those in higher positions, including authority figures such as managers, teachers, and parents. A low power distance society, on the other hand, highlights equality and

self-initiative (Sorrells, 2016). This concept of socially accepted unequal status in a Confucian culture defines the relationship between students and lecturers in the classroom: students as juniors and lecturers as seniors in that power hierarchy. In other words, teachers hold the power over their students. As Watkins and Biggs (2001) noted, in a Confucian culture, a teacher is not only a lecturer, he/she is also seen as having a moral role as a parent, with a collective responsibility to teach students to strictly follow the social rules and behave themselves in socially acceptable ways. This high power distance mindset results in a structured hierarchical relationship between students and teachers in a Vietnamese classroom. In contrast, Western culture promotes the concept of teachers and students working together to create learning communities, with the teacher facilitating discussion and interaction in the classroom. This low power distance mindset constructs a more equal relationship between students and their lecturer.

#### **8.4.2. Freedom of speech in class and a face-saving culture**

Another dimension of intercultural complexities is, broadly speaking, associated with individualism-collectivism. In simple terms, individualism refers to the belief that the interests of the individual should be placed before the interests of the group, while collectivism tends to focus on the needs, interests, and goals of the group (Sorrells, 2016). In the focus group discussions, the student participants provided instances where they were encouraged to express themselves freely in class without worrying about what others may think, even if their viewpoints may contradict their lecturer's opinions. They enjoyed being free to speak and express their individual thinking. In addition, some student participants appreciated the absence of a 'right-wrong attitude' in class discussion. They were reassured by their lecturer that there were no right or wrong answers and all discussions and interactions were part of learning. This finding is congruent with the work of Chapman and Pyvis (2005), who found that postgraduate students in Singapore and Hong Kong chose TNE as it provided them with the freedom to voice their opinions.

This finding of individualism in a transnational context is not surprising, and relates to another dimension of Hofstede's cultural framework: the focus on individualism in Western culture (Hofstede & Hofstede, 2005). Individualism has been a core value of Western culture, which promotes "personal freedom, individuality, and objective

thoughts” (Nisbett, 2011, p. 18). Accordingly, students in a Western classroom are encouraged to ask questions and challenge their teachers and peers. This is considered an indicator of good learning that will result in the construction of knowledge within individuals and groups (Al-Harthi, 2006; Liu et al., 2010; Thompson & Ku, 2005). The concept of individualism contradicts the concept of collectivism, which is practiced by Confucian countries. As presented in Chapter 4, collectivism discourages free expression or behaviours of ‘the nail that sticks up’ (Uzuner, 2009), ‘showing off’ or ‘appearing smart’ (Al-Harthi, 2006) in the classroom.

By contrast, lecturer participants noticed a strong sense of collectivism among their students. This collectivism was demonstrated through face-saving behaviours. For instance, struggling students would not admit they were struggling nor seek help from their lecturers or peers, due to fear of losing face. This finding relates to the concept of face in Vietnamese society and has been documented in the literature. Face is important as it represents one’s dignity, self-respect and prestige (Hofstede, 1988). As a Confucian heritage culture, Vietnam is described as a face culture in which one’s success or failure must be seen through other people’s eyes (Kim & Cohen, 2010). As Borton (2000) observed, losing face is painful in any society, but it is unendurable in Vietnam. In an intercultural context like a transnational classroom, scholars have examined the influences of a face concept on learning behaviours, suggesting that Vietnamese students are reluctant to take part in classroom activities because they fear a loss of face (Yates & Nguyen, 2012).

#### **8.4.3. Student critical thinking skills**

One interesting intercultural complexity pointed out in focus group discussions related to students’ critical thinking skills. Critical thinking in this context refers to questioning and thinking outside the box. The student participants admitted this skill was new and challenging for them in the beginning. They had been so used to a non-critical approach in Vietnamese classrooms, and thus were confused initially by the term ‘critical thinking’. This finding, to some extent, concurs with the stereotyped views about Asian students and critical thinking in the academic English classroom; that is, students from Southeast Asia lack critical thinking skills. Turner (as cited in O’Dwyer, 2017) explained this stereotype in terms of Asian students’ Confucian inheritance, which

emphasises harmony and discourages people from expressing their individual ideas, which may clash with group norms. Students born and brought up in a Confucian culture like Vietnam learned to appreciate rigorous study, social harmony, high respect for teachers' authority, and avoidance of conflicts (Chiu, 2009). Therefore, for them, critical thinking or questioning is not the norm. Moreover, the absence of critical thinking or questioning among Vietnamese students is influenced by the broader social and political context of Vietnam. In this socialist communist country, public social and political questioning of authority is regarded as taboo. Engagement in this type of behaviour can potentially result in undesirable consequences for an individual's professional and personal safety. Accordingly, people just 'play safe' in Vietnam by avoiding such questioning.

Data from student focus group discussions highlighted that although students found critical thinking skill confusing at first, they soon appreciated its benefits. They enjoyed looking at a concept or theory from different perspectives or studying it in different contexts. Some student participants commented that this skill had changed their own thinking, not only academically but also personally, and that thinking critically has been helpful in different aspects of their life. This finding is interesting as it indicates a more open-minded and flexible attitude among these students and, more broadly, across the higher education system. As Tran (2013) noted, with the influence of information technology and globalisation, younger generations in Vietnam are more flexible than their elders in terms of maintaining cultural values. They challenge the traditional belief of seeing teachers as the absolute authority. On a broader level, although subtle, this flexible and open attitude reflects a shift in society from a rigid communist socialist position toward a more open environment in a socialist-oriented market economy.

This finding aligns with the work of Ly and her colleagues (2015), who noted that transnational students of a MBA program in Vietnam greatly appreciated the benefits of critical thinking skills that they acquired in a transnational classroom. It is interesting to note that both their study (Ly et al., 2015) and mine examined students at the postgraduate level of TNE in Vietnam. At this level, students are typically more mature and have had real-life working experiences. They are, therefore, more receptive to differences and appreciative of critical thinking. It would be interesting to investigate if

undergraduate transnational students in Vietnam, with few real-life experiences, would appreciate critical thinking as much as these postgraduate cohorts did.

Data from the lecturer interviews provided extra depth to understanding this issue. Some lecturer participants commented on an initial absence of critical thinking among their Vietnamese transnational students. They provided instances where students failed to make connections between theory and practice, or among different ideas, and where students were reluctant to ask questions. Although concerned, these lecturer participants acknowledged the possible reasons for their students' lack of critical thinking. Specifically, they pointed out three main reasons. Firstly, some noted that their students had not been exposed to critical thinking in their previous Vietnamese classroom learning experience, and thus were not used to it. Secondly, some identified language barriers as a challenge for their students, making it difficult for them to express themselves critically. In fact, they found it difficult to get good critical discussions happening among students who had limited English language competence. Finally, some lecturer participants were mindful of the influences of broader Vietnamese social, cultural and political contexts on their students' learning behaviours, specifically their ability to question and think critically, as discussed earlier in this section.

Aware of their students' weak critical thinking skills, these lecturer participants adopted a variety of strategies to encourage students to open up, to build trust amongst students, and to make it clear that questioning equated to learning rather than disrespect. They also referred to Vietnamese examples in their lectures to make it easier for students to make connections. Interestingly, most lecturer participants acknowledged that their students did have the capacity to think critically, they just needed extra time, guidance and encouragement from their lecturers to practise this skill. In other words, these students found it challenging to engage and participate in this new way of thinking at first, but with support and encouragement, they could adapt. In fact, some lecturer participants admitted they were impressed by how critical and challenging the students could become once they had overcome that hurdle.

This finding is encouraging as it challenges the long-standing stereotyped views of Western academics towards Asian students, with their alleged lack of critical thinking skills (O'Dwyer, 2017; Ryan & Slethaug, 2010). Moreover, it is refreshing to find that



lecturer participants were examining their students' critical thinking skills through different lenses, rather than from a Western-minded perspective. This suggests that they understood their students' cultural, political and social backgrounds and empathised with their students. By adopting a multi-perspective lens, the lecturers themselves provided a specific example of how to think critically.

It is interesting to find that the lecturer participants did not blindly stereotype their students as non-critical thinkers as some Western academics would. Rather, these lecturer participants appeared to recognise a range of social, political and cultural factors that influenced their student learning behaviours. They acknowledged their students' capacities to think critically once they were taught these skills and overcame the hurdle. This is encouraging for Asian students who, for such a long time in the literature, have been portrayed as passive and non-critical students as opposed to the active and critical-thinking Western students. In other words, the current finding has challenged the polarised and stereotyped views of Asian and Western students. This finding supports those of other scholars who have criticised the Confucian-Western dichotomy that stereotypes Western students as critical thinkers and Asian students as non-critical thinkers in binary terms (Ryan & Louie, 2007; Ryan & Slethaug, 2010; Ryan, 2011).

#### **8.4.4. Emphasis on commonalities rather than differences**

The most interesting and refreshing discussion point relating to intercultural complexities was the emphasis on commonalities rather than differences between Vietnam and Australia.

Data from the interviews showed that lecturer participants emphasised more commonalities than differences between Vietnam and Australia. They commented that while there were some relatively trivial differences in transnational classrooms, they did not consider these to be cultural differences. Some lecturer participants compared the students' dynamism and willingness to participate in onshore classrooms in Australia and offshore classrooms in Vietnam, stating that they were more alike than different. To be specific, in a transnational classroom in Vietnam there would always be a few students in class who would not want to participate, which was no different from an onshore classroom in Australia. Other lecturers, especially those who had been teaching

in Vietnam for a long time, provided broader examples of the society and culture. They observed that the social events people went to, the stories people talked about, the activities people did, and the challenges people had in Vietnam were similar to those in Australia. These lecturers also insisted that the more they worked in Vietnam, the less they noticed real cultural differences.

Interestingly, some lecturers said they found the Vietnamese and Australian sense of humour to be very similar; both were indirect and subtle. One lecturer provided specific comparisons between Western countries, insisting that the Australian sense of humour is similar to that of the Canada and England, but very different from the American direct sense of humour. Similarly, he insisted that Vietnam has an indirect sense of humour, compared to other Asian countries such as China and Japan. This indirect style in Vietnamese culture has been documented in the literature. Borton (2000) described indirectness as one Vietnamese cultural dimension. She observed that Vietnamese people tend to use details that might seem irrelevant to describe the context, while moving subtly toward the main point (Borton, 2000). The notion of Vietnam and Australia sharing similar senses of humour is interesting as it contradicts the polarised view of West as direct and East as indirect.

Comparably, data from the focus groups highlighted that some student participants considered any differences in transnational classrooms as individual differences rather than cultural differences. In other words, they did not see these differences as between Australian and Vietnamese cultures, but rather as individual differences that could be found in any culture. They did not generalise or develop stereotypical beliefs that certain traits were related to Australian culture and others to Vietnamese culture.

It is encouraging to find that these student and lecturer participants emphasised commonalities rather than differences when reflecting on their transnational learning and teaching experience in Vietnam. This finding reinforces Ryan's (2011) study, which indicated that rather than positioning Confucian and Western scholarships in polarised terms, views of both systems were actually similar and any differences were more likely to occur within individuals of both systems. The following quote from Professor Chang of a large university in Guangzhou, China illustrates this argument:

I think there are more commonalities between Western and CHC [Confucian Heritage Contexts] paradigms of scholarship and learning than differences. In other words, there are commonalities that good scholarship and effective learning share in both paradigms .... I believe that differences exist only amongst individual scholars whether they are Eastern or Western. (Quoted in Ryan, 2011, p. 642)

This finding provides a useful and refreshing approach to exploring intercultural complexities in a transnational context. The focus is not on differences but on commonalities. This indicates a shift from stereotypical differences between static cultures to intercultural interactions between hybrid cultural values (Wang, 2016). This view brings the two contexts of Vietnam and Australia closer to each other and challenges the East-West dichotomy. It moves our thinking beyond the simplistic perspective of seeing East and West as black and white toward a more comprehensive perspective of understanding and respecting each other for mutual growth. This reinforces Sorrells' (2016) definition of culture as a resource in the context of globalisation. It also supports the arguments that Asian students should be seen by Western teachers as 'assets' or resources in internationalisation and knowledge generation, rather than as 'problems' to be solved (Ryan, 2011).

## **8.5. Chapter conclusion**

This chapter has discussed the data arising from both student and lecturer participants in relation to my three research questions. The first research question related to the reasons why students chose transnational programs rather than local Vietnamese programs, or studying in Australia. The second concerned the key characteristics desired of transnational lecturers, from both student and lecturer participant perspectives. The third related to the intercultural complexities of transnational learning and teaching. The next chapter presents conclusions, implications, and recommendations for further research.

## **Chapter 9 - Conclusions and recommendations**

This chapter concludes my research. It provides an overview of the study, followed by a summary of major findings. The chapter then presents research recommendations, as well as ideas for further research. It also highlights the significance and contribution of my research to knowledge. Finally, the chapter presents a reflection on my research journey and concluding remarks.

### **9.1. Overview**

As noted in previous chapters, the field of TNE has developed rapidly in the past two decades (Sharma, 2015). One of the most active areas of TNE is in Asia, where the main players are: the United States, the United Kingdom, and Australia (Huang, 2007). The top five Asian countries involved with Australian TNE in 2016 were Singapore, Malaysia, China, Vietnam, and Hong Kong (Australian Government, 2018). Among these Asian countries, Singapore, Malaysia and Hong Kong are regarded as maturing markets (Lim & Shad, 2017), and thus have attracted an extensive research focus (Chapman & Pyvis 2005, 2006, 2013; Dobos et al., 2012; Hoare, 2012; Pyvis & Chapman 2007). However, there are relatively few studies on Australian TNE in Vietnam, especially at the postgraduate level. Therefore, this research has investigated two Australian transnational master's programs in Vietnam, with the aim of addressing this literature gap.

The theoretical framework for this research was developed from a review of the literature on TNE and particularly Australian TNE in Asian countries, including Vietnam. To be more specific, my research has examined three main research areas: students choosing TNE; the key characteristics desired of transnational lecturers; and the intercultural complexities in transnational learning and teaching. These three research areas corresponded to my three research questions.

My research was conceptualised within a pragmatic paradigm, mixed methods research, and case study design. Data collection methods consisted of a student questionnaire, student focus group discussions, and lecturer interviews. Although adopting both quantitative and qualitative approaches, my research was more aligned to the qualitative research. Furthermore, within the overarching case study design, the findings of my

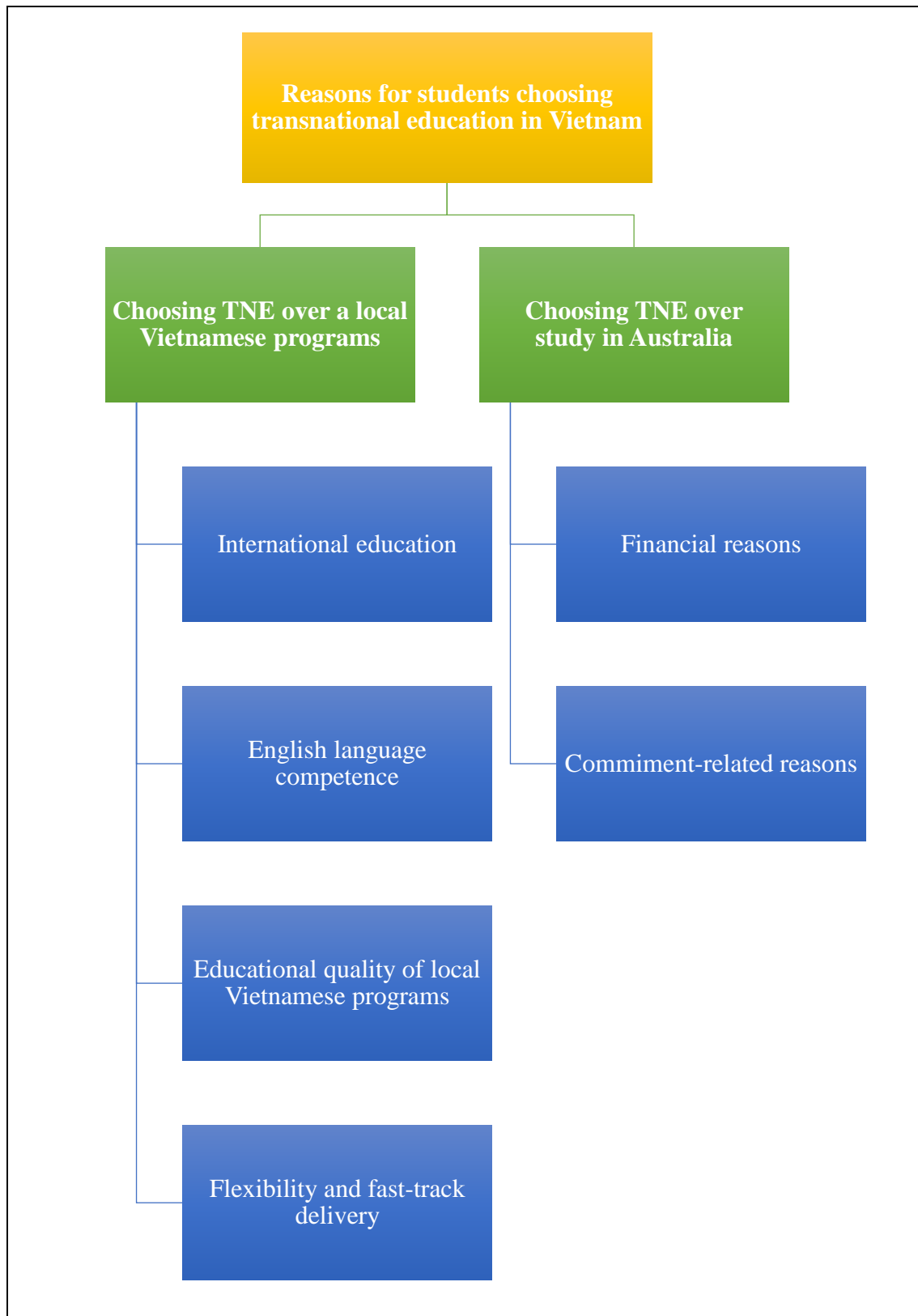
research were intended to be an initial examination of Australian TNE in Vietnam rather than generalised to all Australian transnational programs in Vietnam. The major findings of my research are summarised in the section that follows.

## **9.2. Summary of major findings**

This section presents a summary of the major findings of my research, providing insightful views on the themes embedded in the three research questions.

### **9.2.1. Reasons for students choosing transnational education**

This theme is divided into two main sub-themes. The first addresses the reasons why these students chose TNE over a local Vietnamese program; the second looks at the reasons why they chose a transnational program over studying in Australia (refer to **Figure 9.1**).



**Figure 9.1. Reasons for students choosing TNE in Vietnam**

### ***9.2.1.1. Transnational education over local Vietnamese programs***

Student questionnaire data indicated four common reasons for students choosing a transnational program over a local Vietnamese program: international education, English language competence, perceptions of educational quality, and flexibility and fast-track delivery.

The first reason for students choosing TNE instead of a Vietnamese program was to obtain an international education, specifically an international qualification. This is a key pull factor toward TNE. The student focus group data suggested that some students believed that an international degree would offer them better job opportunities than a Vietnamese qualification. However, this assumption has been challenged in the literature (Hoare, 2012; Phan, 2016; Ziguras & McBurnie, 2011).

Another reason for participating in a transnational program related to future opportunities to pursue further studies (e.g., doctoral studies) overseas. Some students, mainly from the education program, described an international education, especially with a research focus, as a stepping stone to doctoral study overseas. Other students wanted an international education to develop international perspectives. They wished to be immersed in an international education program in order to obtain new learning experiences that would be different from the traditional Vietnamese teaching and learning environment. In other words, they considered an international education as a means to transform themselves.

The second most common reason for students choosing a transnational program over a Vietnamese one related to improving their English language competence. This is another pull factor toward transnational programs. This finding is unsurprising, given the increasingly popular status of English in Vietnam. Students from the focus groups maintained that they needed strong English language competence for their work, which included teaching English, doing research in English, or working in an English-speaking environment. Accordingly, they were motivated to study with an Australian transnational program to enhance their English proficiency. However, it was noted that they only communicated in English in the classroom, in the presence of a lecturer, and returned to Vietnamese during breaks and group work projects outside class. In other words, they failed to maximise the opportunities to improve their English competence.

This finding is intriguing and has been documented in Wallace's (2016) work. The possible reasons for this reluctance to fully utilise English outside the classroom among Vietnamese transnational students appeared to relate to peer pressure among monolingual groups of learners, as well as a degree of cultural resistance (Wallace, 2016).

The third most common reason for choosing a transnational program concerned perceptions of the educational quality of local Vietnamese programs. In focus group discussions, students compared the educational quality of transnational programs with local Vietnamese programs, insisting that the former was of better quality. Students referred to instances where they witnessed, or had been told about, unethical practices in Vietnamese higher education. This is unfortunate and has attracted attention from both the public and government in Vietnam (McCornac, 2012). Although much more needs to be done, the Vietnamese Government, and society in general, are determined to eradicate these unhealthy practices in education. Students were also concerned about the over-emphasis on political subjects in entrance requirements and the curriculum of local Vietnamese programs. As a socialist communist country, Vietnam's higher education system is dedicated to promoting socialist thought and principles among students (Doan, 2005). However, students asserted that these political subjects should not be necessary, especially at the postgraduate level, and thus opted for a transnational program. This reason is interesting and unique to the social political context of Vietnam.

The fourth reason why students chose a transnational program related to its flexibility and fast-track delivery. The two transnational postgraduate programs studied in this research were flexible because they were delivered in burst mode, at weekends, or in the evenings, which suited the students' schedules. Most of the students in these programs were working full-time or part-time, so such arrangements were very important to them. Furthermore, it was expected that students would be able to complete these transnational master's courses within a year and a half or two years.

#### ***9.2.1.2. Transnational education over onshore education in Australia***

There were two main reasons why the students preferred a transnational program to a program onshore in Australia: financial and commitment-related. It was obvious that studying in a transnational program in Vietnam would be much more affordable than

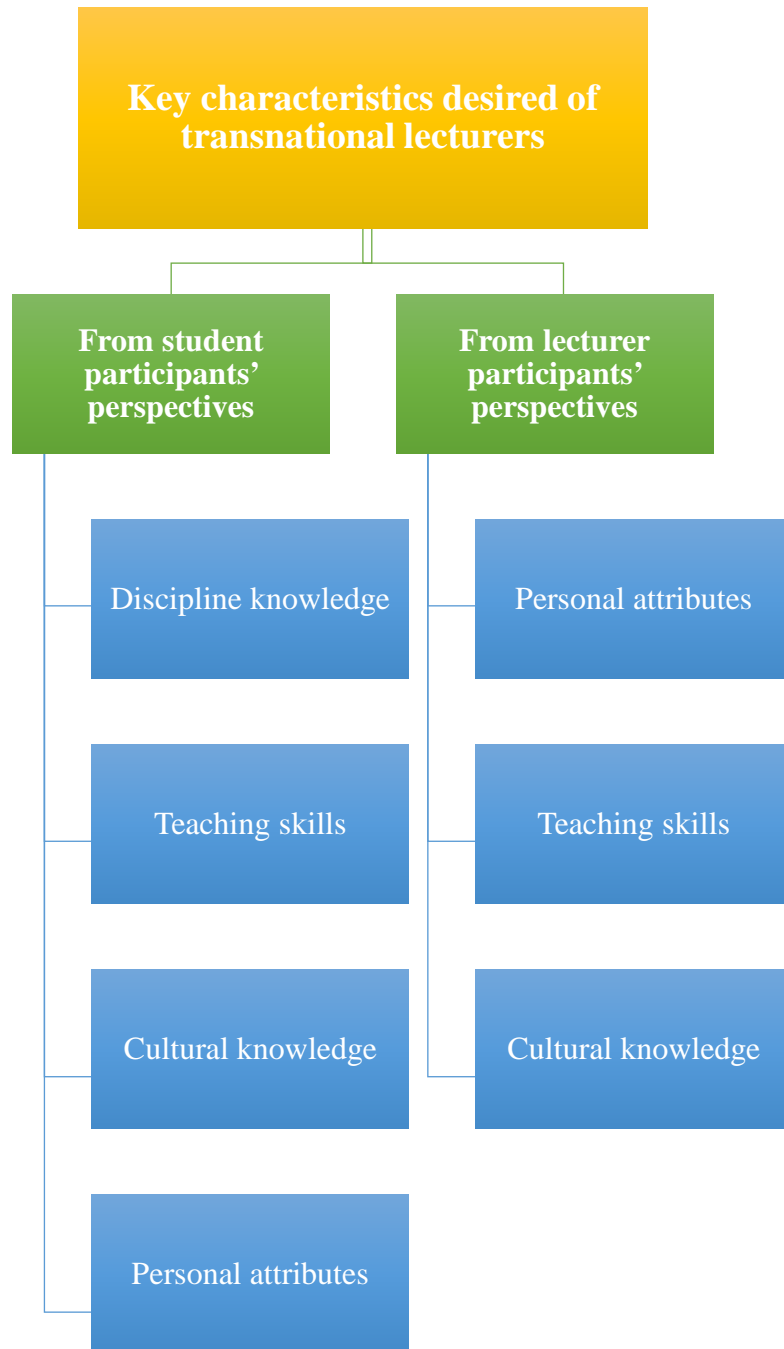


going overseas to Australia to do the same course and gaining the same Australian qualification. As Ly (2013) noted, TNE offered Vietnamese students an international program at an affordable cost. It was intriguing, however, to find that students regarded TNE as a ‘second choice’ in comparison to onshore education in Australia. This ‘second choice’ mindset was partially formed by the perception in Vietnamese society of TNE as of mediocre or poorer quality (Phan, 2016). Additionally, TNE was literally the second choice for the students because they could not afford the first choice of studying overseas in Australia. Scholarship programs funded by the Vietnamese and Australian governments, and by Australian higher education institutions provide full scholarships for Vietnamese students to do postgraduate study in Australia. Some students were aware of these scholarship programs and some were not, but both groups showed a reluctance to apply for these scholarships because of a lack of confidence.

The second reason why these students preferred a transnational program to a program onshore in Australia concerned the commitments they had in Vietnam. As most students of these two programs were working while studying, commitments played an important role in their decision to pursue their studies via a transnational program. TNE allowed them to keep their jobs and maintain their family commitments. This was particularly important for female students who had permanent work or family commitments.

### **9.2.2. The perceived key characteristics desired of transnational lecturers**

This section summarises the key characteristics desired of transnational lecturers, from both student and lecturer perspectives (refer to **Figure 9.2**).



**Figure 9.2. The characteristics desired of transnational lecturers from student and lecturer perspectives**

#### ***9.2.2.1. Student perspectives***

The student questionnaire data identified that transnational lecturers need the following characteristics (in order of importance): discipline knowledge, teaching skills, and

cultural knowledge. Data from the student focus groups provided specific examples for each category. Students defined discipline knowledge as the lecturers' research publication performance. Moreover, students expected their lecturers to have extensive content knowledge in both theoretical and practical terms. In other words, transnational lecturers should have strong practical knowledge that was relevant to their students and could be applied in their local Vietnamese working environments. Transnational lecturers were also expected to possess strong teaching skills that would enable them to deliver their knowledge in an understandable/comprehensible manner. To be specific, they needed to speak slowly, use simple and clear language in class, and use multiple ways to explain a complex concept or theory. Given that a language barrier still existed in transnational classrooms in Vietnam, this skill was critical. Furthermore, transnational lecturers were expected to be specific about their expectations and instructions to avoid ambiguity among students. In addition, transnational lecturers were expected to connect their lectures to Vietnamese contexts and provide multiple examples to support and engage their students. In terms of cultural knowledge, students expected transnational lecturers to be aware of Vietnamese academic culture as well as the Vietnamese students' learning styles. Students expected transnational lecturers to have some background knowledge of the political and social contexts of Vietnam, as well as some basic Vietnamese phrases or terms to connect with their students.

In addition to the three categories discussed above (discipline knowledge, teaching skills, and cultural knowledge), data from student focus groups provided a fourth category: personal attributes. Students expected their transnational lecturers to be willing, approachable, friendly, and have a sense of humour. Students believed that transnational lecturers who could demonstrate these attributes would be able to provide supportive and friendly learning environments for their students.

#### ***9.2.2.2. Lecturer perspectives***

Lecturer interview data highlighted three main categories of characteristics desired of transnational lecturers: personal attributes, teaching skills, and cultural knowledge. Transnational lecturers' personal attributes included: openness, empathy, patience, respect, flexibility and creativity. Among these attributes, the two most frequently commented on were being open and respectful. Transnational lecturers need to be

effective classroom teachers who can recognise and cater for multiple learning styles, cultural differences and demonstrate empathy with their transnational students. They should not think of their teaching as imposing knowledge on their transnational students, nor should they assume Vietnamese offshore students would be like Vietnamese onshore students in Australia. Rather, they need to be open to differences to accommodate their Vietnamese students' learning styles and behaviours. In addition to openness, transnational lecturers need to demonstrate respect for their students and what they bring to their transnational classrooms. At a broader level, transnational lecturers need to demonstrate respect for the local culture and the country in which they are teaching. Importantly, some lecturer participants expressed their concerns about the risk of educational and cultural imperialism in TNE. They emphasised the importance of maintaining a balanced approach in the recognition of what both Vietnam and Australia have to offer.

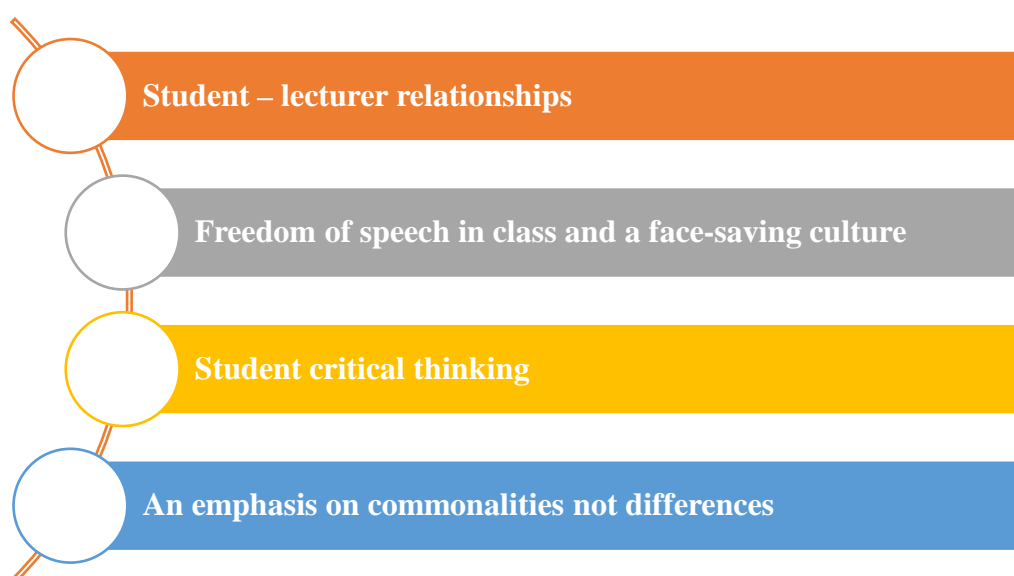
Within the teaching skills category, transnational lecturers need to demonstrate a set of teaching skills, such as delivering in an understandable/comprehensible manner (e.g., speaking slowly, using clear language, and avoiding colourful language) and having complex concepts or theories written down in handout materials, on the board or on power point slides. Furthermore, transnational lecturers need to check that their students *understand* the teaching points rather than assuming they did because of seemingly positive signs in class.

The lecturer participants referred to cultural knowledge in three layers: knowledge of Vietnamese students, knowledge of their working contexts, and knowledge of the local Vietnamese culture. Lecturer participants asserted that it was critical for transnational lecturers to understand their students' social, cultural and educational backgrounds. They need to know what their students expect in a classroom and, importantly, should be able to explain and communicate the differences in expectations between the students and themselves. Moreover, transnational lecturers need to know the students' working contexts in order to make their lectures more relevant and applicable to those contexts. Outside the classroom, transnational lecturers need to be willing to step out of their comfort zone in order to take part in the local culture. Immersing themselves within the local community and activities was strongly encouraged.

It is important to note that the lecturer findings in my research are consistent with Wang's intercultural dialogue framework for transnational teaching and learning (Wang, 2016) in that the lecturers emphasised the importance of an understanding of learners and contexts, a culturally sensitive pedagogy, a contextualised curriculum, and a supportive learning environment. However, the lecturers in my research did not specifically highlight the fifth component of Wang's intercultural dialogue framework - the context-specific assessment.

### **9.2.3. Intercultural complexities of transnational learning and teaching**

The intercultural complexities of transnational learning and teaching experience in the two programs under research were manifested in four main ways: student-lecturer relationships; freedom of speech in class and a face-saving culture; student critical thinking; and an emphasis on commonalities rather than differences (refer to **Figure 9.3**).



**Figure 9.3. Intercultural complexities in transnational learning and teaching**

#### ***9.2.3.1. Student–lecturer relationships***

In terms of the student–lecturer relationships in TNE, student and lecturer participants had contrasting experiences. The student participants noticed and enjoyed what they described as an equal and respectful relationship with their lecturers in a friendly

learning environment. They were encouraged to see themselves as equal to, and respected by, their lecturers. In contrast, the lecturer participants noticed a much more hierarchical relationship with their Vietnamese students. Moreover, they found their students appeared to rely on them as the source of information. They found that their students were reluctant to ask questions or challenge them. This finding was not surprising as it reflected broader social and cultural conventions, with Australian culture considered to be based on a low power distance mindset and a Confucius heritage culture with a high power distance mindset.

#### ***9.2.3.2. Freedom of speech in class and a face-saving culture***

Another intercultural complexity involved individualistic and collectivist thinking. The student participants enjoyed the freedom in their class to think as individuals. They were encouraged to speak their mind without worrying about what others might think, or even if their ideas contradicted those of their lecturer. The lecturer participants, in contrast, described a sense of collectivism amongst their students. They felt their students were reluctant to ask questions and seek help, perhaps because of the risk of losing face. Keeping one's face is critical in a Confucian heritage culture like Vietnam because face represents one's dignity, self-esteem and reputation (Hofstede, 1988). Losing face is painful and unendurable in Vietnam (Borton, 2000), so Vietnamese students tend to avoid speaking their mind in class. As stated earlier, this may partly explain why Asian, particularly Vietnamese, students are stereotyped as passive and quiet in class.

#### ***9.2.3.3. Student critical thinking***

Feedback from the students highlighted their concerns and perceived lack of experience in engaging in critical thinking and questioning in class. Living and being educated in a socialist communist country like Vietnam has created some student insecurity and thus a reluctance to question or think critically. However, engaging in learning with their transnational lecturers has led to students becoming more confident in critical thinking and reflection. They now found themselves applying these skills not only in their academic studies, but also in their professional and personal development. This is encouraging as it suggests a more flexible and open attitude among these student

participants in terms of maintaining cultural values and, more broadly, a shift in society's thinking from a rigid to a more open Vietnam.

Lecturer feedback was compatible with that of the students in terms of critical thinking and reflection. The lecturer participants noticed an initial lack of confidence in students when it came to critical thinking. These lecturers suggested a number of contributing factors to this lack of confidence, including the students' lack of previous exposure to this behaviour, limited language skills and, more broadly, the political culture and norms prevailing in Vietnam. Despite these factors, the lecturer participants noted that their students tended to ask more questions and think more critically as they gained greater confidence.

#### ***9.2.3.4. Emphasis on commonalities rather than differences***

Although my initial research instincts led me to explore intercultural complexities in transnational learning and teaching with an emphasis on differences, it is refreshing and exciting to find a number of commonalities instead. While acknowledging that there were a number of differences in transnational classrooms, the student and lecturer participants recognised an increasing number of commonalities between Australian and Vietnamese contexts. For example, some lecturer participants found the sense of humour in Vietnam and Australia to be similar, both being subtle and indirect. Other lecturer participants observed that the students' levels of engagement and willingness to participate in classroom discussions in Vietnam was similar to that in Australia. This finding is encouraging and provides a positive approach toward studying intercultural complexities. When the focus is on commonalities rather than differences in an intercultural context, Australian and Vietnamese cultures are brought closer together, thus challenging the East-West dichotomy.

This section has provided a summary of the major findings of my research in relation to the research questions and sub-questions. The next section presents a number of recommendations for policy and practice.

### **9.3. Recommendations**

The recommendations developed from the findings of my research are categorised into the following aspects: student motivations and initiatives; preparing students for transnational learning; preparing lecturers for transnational teaching; contextualisation of curriculum and course materials; student support; bridging the East-West dichotomy; admiration of the West within Vietnamese society; and implications for Vietnamese higher education.

#### **9.3.1. Student motivations and initiatives**

My research identified a desire to obtain a Western degree among the transnational students. Most decided to study in one of the two transnational programs simply to achieve a Western degree, without much reference to the skills and knowledge acquired during the candidature. This attitude may be related to a Vietnamese Confucian cultural trait that Pham and Fry (2011) and Pham (2006) described as a motivation to obtain degrees for the sake of social respectability and status. This motivation may potentially result in a missed opportunity for students who fail to maximise the chance to develop skills and knowledge that are far more valuable than the award of an international degree alone. These students assumed a Western degree would guarantee better job opportunities. They immediately equated a Western degree with better employability. This finding presents a mismatch between the students' assumptions and the literature in terms of transnational graduates' employability. In the literature, scholars have observed that employers in Singapore preferred graduates of local higher education institutions over TNE graduates (Hoare, 2011). Similarly, employers in Vietnam were concerned about the quality of TNE graduates (Phan, 2016). Graduates are employed based on the skills and knowledge they acquired during the learning process of earning a degree rather than on the fact that they obtained a Western qualification. It is, therefore, recommended that the transnational students of these two programs be encouraged to develop their skills and knowledge during the course to increase their employability. They should not immediately assume they will have better job opportunities just by showing employers their Western degree.

The students of the two programs appreciated the opportunities to be exposed to an authentic English-speaking environment where they could practise and improve their



English competence. However, my research found that while the students typically spoke English in the presence of their lecturer, they tended to communicate in their own language with classmates. By doing so, they failed to take advantage of the opportunities to practise speaking English as they initially intended. In other words, they were missing the opportunity to immerse themselves in an authentic English-speaking environment. It is, therefore, recommended that students overcome the challenges of peer pressure among monolingual groups and cultural resistance (Wallace, 2016) to maximise opportunities to improve their English language competence. Lecturers should encourage students to communicate in English with their peers and design activities that require and enable students to speak English to each other.

My research indicated that these students considered TNE as a second choice in comparison to onshore education in Australia. They admitted that they would prefer going to Australia to study rather than enrolling offshore in Vietnam if they had been able to afford to do so (i.e., if they could find sufficient financial support or scholarships for their studies). In fact, there are multiple scholarship programs which support Vietnamese citizens to study overseas, especially at the postgraduate level. Some scholarship programs including the Project 911 and Project 165 are funded by the Vietnamese government. There are Endeavour Scholarships and Fellowships that are funded by the Australian Government, and university-based international postgraduate research scholarships that are funded by individual Australian universities. Student participants in my research were familiar with the available scholarship programs but many of them never applied because they lacked confidence and determination. It is thus recommended that students take the initiative and become more pro-active and confident in seizing the opportunities available if they wish to study overseas in Australia.

### **9.3.2. Preparing students for transnational learning**

My research highlighted a mismatch between student and lecturer perceptions about transnational lecturer's discipline knowledge. Students valued their lecturer's discipline knowledge and publication performance as highly critical characteristics of transnational lecturers. Lecturer participants, however, did not highlight this aspect. Students saw their lecturers as authority figures, while lecturers saw themselves as

facilitators of student learning. This presents a tension between transnational students and their lecturers in terms of role expectations. At this postgraduate level, students should not rely on their lecturers as the source of truth, but see them as facilitators. Students should not see themselves as passive recipients of knowledge, but position themselves as active learners with support from their lecturers. These roles and expectations should be spelled out at the beginning of the course so that both students and lecturers are clear about what roles they are expected to play. It is recommended that Vietnamese institutions organise orientation sessions for their students before TNE course commencement to brief them on student and lecturer roles and expectations. Moreover, transnational lecturers should clarify and highlight these expectations in the first class and explain to their students why they work that way. In addition, there should be better communication between students and lecturers about how to mediate differences in expectations.

My research found that Vietnamese transnational students had the capacity to question and think critically, but they had a hurdle to overcome. They struggled at first to exercise this skill because they had not been previously exposed to it, as thinking critically is not encouraged in the wider cultural and political context of a socialist communist country like Vietnam. It is, therefore, important that Vietnamese institutions and TNE lecturers organise some pre-academic courses to prepare students with academic skills, including critical thinking.

At a broader level, Vietnamese and Australian institutions should organise some cultural briefings for Vietnamese transnational students before the course starts. These cultural briefings should be facilitated by both Vietnamese and Australian tutors/lecturers who understand the intercultural complexities of both cultures. They can brief the students using examples to explain the similarities and differences between Vietnam and Australia. They can also provide tips on how to make the best out of this intercultural learning experience. My research has highlighted the significant impact of culture on transnational learning experience. It is, therefore, important to prepare the students both academically and culturally.

### **9.3.3. Preparing lecturers for transnational teaching**

My research proposed two sets of key characteristics desired of transnational lecturers: one from student perspectives, and the other from lecturer perspectives. These two sets of characteristics provide guidelines for the selection of academic staff for transnational teaching, and for the organisation of professional development activities for academics involved in transnational teaching.

My research highlighted the importance of transnational lecturers delivering their course in an understandable/comprehensible manner. This included speaking slowly, using simple and clear language, trying different ways to explain complex ideas, writing down complex ideas, and checking regularly for student understanding. It is important for transnational lecturers to practise their communication skills before teaching transnationally. Moreover, some lecturer participants highlighted the importance of checking for student understanding because many students appeared to understand their class lessons (e.g., nodding in agreement, taking notes, saying yes) but in fact they did not. Therefore, Australian TNE institutions should organise additional resources and orientation sessions to assist their lecturers in developing their communication skills such as some explicit training in the use of clarifying questions before sending them to teach offshore.

On a related note, my research stressed that one of the main reasons for students choosing TNE was to improve English language competence. Most students in my research were working in an English-speaking context, so they enjoyed interactions and communication with English-speaking lecturers to develop their English skills. This is potentially a strong selling point for Australian transnational programs in Vietnam. The transnational lecturers, therefore, should attend to developing English language competence for their students in a transnational classroom as much as they attend to content knowledge. In fact, developing students' English language competence should be listed as one of the outcomes for students in the unit guide. Australian TNE institutions should brief their transnational lecturers on the significance of developing English competence for their students. They should also prepare the lecturers by organising additional resources and training sessions on TESOL skills (Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages).

The lecturer participants highlighted the significance of cultural knowledge in transnational teaching. They realised how important it was to know their Vietnamese students, their names, their contexts and, more broadly, the local Vietnamese culture. This is consistent with the first component of Wang's intercultural dialogue framework (Wang, 2016) about understanding transnational learners and contexts. However, there appeared to be a lack of cultural briefings for transnational lecturers about Vietnam before their departure. Their Australian institutions provided their TNE staff with some pre-departure orientation sessions that focused on content and logistical matters, but with little focus on cultural aspects. It is, therefore, recommended that Australian institutions provide cultural briefings for transnational lecturers before departure. Alternatively, Australian providers may work with Vietnamese partners to organise cultural briefings for staff on site in Vietnam before the course starts.

#### **9.3.4. Contextualisation of curriculum**

Throughout the focus group discussions, the student participants emphasised that their transnational lecturers should relate and connect their lectures and examples to a Vietnamese context. These students wanted to learn how they could apply their learning in their local environments. Therefore, transnational courses need to be tailored to reach the standards required by Australian universities, but at the same time, meet the needs as defined by Vietnamese context. It is thus important that transnational lecturers contextualise their lectures and examples to assist their students in applying their new learning, while still working to Australian requirements. In addition, lecturers need to design assessments that encourage and enable students to apply, demonstrate and reflect on their new learning within their Vietnamese working contexts. This is compatible with Wang's intercultural dialogue framework (Wang, 2016) about the importance of a culturally sensitive pedagogy and contextualised curriculum in transnational teaching and learning. One way of contextualising the curriculum is to invite Vietnamese lecturers to contribute their ideas to the curriculum design. Stronger involvement of Vietnamese lecturers in transnational programs could improve the learning and teaching experiences for both students and lecturers. TNE management teams from both Australian and Vietnamese institutions should allow the adaptation of curriculum, teaching resources, learning and teaching activities, and assessment approaches to accommodate the Vietnamese students' learning experience, preferences and context.

These adaptations would bring advantages to student learning and educational experiences (Ling et al., 2013).

### **9.3.5. Student support**

My research indicated that struggling students were reluctant to seek help from their lecturers and peers due to a fear of losing face. In the two transnational programs, there were support staff who assisted with administration and logistics, but there was a lack of academic support for students. It is therefore recommended that Australian providers and Vietnamese institutions collaborate in providing academic support for students. One way of doing this is to have local Vietnamese tutors as academic advisors on-site working collaboratively with the Australian lecturers to offer academic support for students.

Most students enjoyed the flexible arrangements and fast-track delivery that TNE offered, as most of them were engaged in full-time work. It is, however, important to stress that intensive burst modes and fast-track delivery approaches should not compromise the quality of learning and teaching. In other words, the curriculum and its delivery should be designed to allow students the opportunity to digest the knowledge and reflect on their learning, rather than just overload them with heavy content knowledge. This would require the managers and lecturers of both Australian and Vietnamese institutions to work together to design the curriculum and its delivery.

### **9.3.6. Bridging the East-West dichotomy**

As indicated earlier, my research initially explored intercultural complexities in transnational learning and teaching with a focus on differences, but the input from participants in my research did not reflect an East-West dichotomy. Ryan and Louie (2007) insisted that the East-West polarised perspective can be misleading as it fails to take into account the diversity and complexities of educational systems, and the dynamic nature of fast-changing Asian countries such as China and Vietnam. The emphasis in my findings on commonalities rather than differences reinforces the notion of a shift from a traditional cross-cultural approach that focuses on cultural stereotypes and differences to an intercultural dialogue perspective that highlights dynamic interactions between hybrid cultures (Wang, 2016). This is an exciting finding. It is

therefore recommended that all stakeholders involved in TNE, such as lecturers, students, staff and managers, are careful to avoid stereotypes and the blind acceptance of East-West polarisation. Transnational lecturers should not come to Vietnam with fixed stereotypes because that may influence their attitudes towards Vietnamese students. Transnational lecturers should see their Vietnamese students as assets rather than problems to be fixed (Ryan, 2011). Australian institutions should organise some professional development for transnational lecturers to brief them on this aspect before sending them to teach in Vietnam.

### **9.3.7. Admiration of the West within Vietnamese society**

The student participants in my research appeared to be open about their admiration of Western ideas, practices, and values (ie. an international qualification as their most common reason for choosing TNE). This admiration could have resulted from the colonial relations between Vietnam and Western countries in the past. However, as some lecturer participants pointed out, Vietnamese students should not believe that Western societies are ~~unquestionably~~ better than theirs ~~in all aspects~~. They should not take this admiration of the West as a form of educational imperialism, or see themselves through a postcolonial lens in which the Orient is regarded as the inferior in need of Western guidance (Rizvi & Lingard, 2006). In other words, they should not see themselves as the weak partner in the relationship with the West (Said, 1978). As Phan (2016) observed, this open admiration may lead to an obsession with and submission to the West, which creates Vietnamese self-colonisation and lack of confidence. Rather, Vietnamese people should look to their own heritage and respect what they have achieved. It is encouraging that some student participants in my research were critical about this admiration by proposing for the curriculum to be more relevant and contextualised to the Vietnamese context. However, Vietnamese students in general should be encouraged to have a more balanced view about Western ~~society~~ education and its relevance to the Vietnamese context.

### **9.3.8. Implications for Vietnamese higher education**

My research revealed that the Vietnamese students were concerned about the quality of Vietnamese higher education. They found the local Vietnamese programs over-emphasised political and philosophical subjects in entrance requirements and the

curriculum. These political and philosophical subjects displayed the political determination of Vietnam as a communist country. However, most students found these subjects time-consuming and irrelevant to their major area of study. This finding raises concerns about the design of Vietnamese curriculum, especially at the postgraduate level. It appears that the Vietnamese postgraduate curriculum fails to meet students' needs. Therefore, it is recommended that Vietnamese higher education institutions consider revising their postgraduate curriculum in order to make it more relevant to the needs of their local students.

The Vietnamese student participants were also concerned about the lack of integrity in terms of assessment and reporting in Vietnamese higher education. In the interviews, they shared personal accounts of unethical practices, which raised concerns for them about the quality of learning and teaching. Undeniably, such practices exist in Vietnam's higher education system, but it is important not to generalise; these are exceptions rather than the norm. Strict regulations and measures have been implemented by the Vietnamese government to reduce unethical practices. Continued collaboration between the Vietnamese government and higher education institutions to reduce these instances of unethical practices should lead to greater confidence in postgraduate study in Vietnam.

#### **9.4. Recommendations for further research**

Within time and financial limitations and the scope of a doctoral research project, my thesis focused on key areas related to the research questions. However, the open nature of student focus group discussions and lecturer interviews in my research has revealed a number of areas where further investigation could be useful.

Firstly, as many student participants in my research chose transnational programs for career-driven reasons, it would be interesting to investigate the career outcomes of these TNE postgraduates. Developing a greater understanding of the impact of TNE on graduate employment and careers, and investigating what employers in Vietnam perceive of TNE graduates especially at the postgraduate level, would be worthy of further research.

Secondly, the postgraduate student participants in my research appreciated the opportunity to develop critical thinking skills. It would be worth investigating if undergraduate transnational students in Vietnam, with less real-life experience, would value critical thinking skills as much as the postgraduate cohorts.

Thirdly, during my lecturer interviews, the lecturer participants commented on different forms of TNE delivery, including online and face-to-face. Many of them preferred face-to-face delivery and advised against an online version of TNE. They argued that an online version would compromise human interaction, which they felt was an essential feature of TNE. This topic was beyond the scope of my research, but it would be interesting to examine this area, especially given the huge push in the direction toward online delivery by many Australian universities.

Fourthly, the open nature of my focus group discussions allowed some student participants to share their opinions on this topic of TNE quality. As mentioned earlier, these student participants said they were aware of some current claims on social media about the low quality of TNE in Vietnam. They insisted it was only true for TNE at the undergraduate level, not at the postgraduate level. Although it is not the focus of my research, it is a very interesting topic and worth further investigations.

Moreover, it would be interesting to investigate how exemplary transnational lecturers acquire the desired qualities, given the pathway to intercultural competence is complex, often uncertain, and subject to potential miscommunication and misinterpretation.

In addition, there are some areas in the thesis worth further investigation. For example, some student participants identified individual variation among Australian transnational lecturers, which can be incorporated into a more complex cultural framework that includes internal diversity. Another area worth investigating is why students tend to revert to speaking Vietnamese among themselves.

Finally, the focus of my research has been on two Australian transnational postgraduate programs in Vietnam. For further research, an examination of additional Australian transnational programs in Vietnam would provide a more detailed and comprehensive understanding. This research could also investigate a larger number of Australian



transnational postgraduate programs in Vietnam in different disciplines, at both the undergraduate and postgraduate levels.

### **9.5. Significance and contribution to knowledge**

My research is valuable and significant from both theoretical and practical perspectives.

Theoretically, the findings of my research have added knowledge and insights to a growing body of literature on TNE, particularly Australian TNE in Vietnam. As Hoare (2012) observed, most research about transnational student experiences has been small scope and focused on Australia's main importing countries, such as Singapore, Malaysia, and Hong Kong. The findings of my research, therefore, contribute to the existing literature on learning and teaching experience of Australian postgraduate transnational programs in Vietnam.

More specifically, my research has contributed theoretically in the following ways. Firstly, my research identified a number of key factors that led to these Vietnamese students choosing Australian TNE, with reference to the Push-Pull model (Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002). Secondly, my research has provided two sets of key characteristics expected of transnational lecturers, based on student and lecturer perspectives, which contribute to the scholarship on professional development for transnational staff. Thirdly, my research has illuminated the intercultural complexities in transnational learning and teaching, and added to the literature on intercultural interactions and communications in a transnational context. Furthermore, the findings from my research can serve as reference points for further research, perhaps with larger samples and at different levels of university study.

Practically, I believe my research was beneficial to the students, lecturers and managers of the two programs being researched. In addition, my findings should assist transnational students and lecturers in developing greater awareness of the tensions within transnational learning and teaching. Moreover, my research has enabled me to develop a set of recommendations that could enhance both policy-making and management, and improve the quality of learning and teaching in future TNE collaborations between Vietnam, Australia and beyond.

## **9.6. Reflection on my research journey**

I commenced this research fuelled by my interests in TNE and the intercultural complexities in transnational learning and teaching. This research enabled me to indulge both interests through the examination of two Australian transnational programs in Vietnam. I have valued the opportunity to contribute to the existing literature of TNE and to highlight the practical implications of my findings for university policy and practice, both in Vietnam and Australia. My knowledge and understanding of TNE and the intercultural complexities involved in transnational learning and teaching has been enhanced significantly through constant reflection, particularly during the data analysis phase.

Reflecting on my research journey, it has been an enriching and enjoyable experience. Although the data collection was tiring, time-consuming and expensive, requiring me to return to Vietnam several times, it was very rewarding. I personally enjoyed the interactions with the Vietnamese transnational students, and the conversations with the Australian/Western transnational lecturers. My own experiences as a Vietnamese student/professional studying and working in Western contexts like New Zealand and Australia, have provided me with a unique intercultural lens to conduct this research. Born and raised in Vietnam, I totally relate to the Vietnamese Confucian values and the communist political complexities indicated by the students. Likewise, my previous working experiences with international colleagues, and my own experiences of living and studying in New Zealand and Australia, has enabled me to develop greater understanding and appreciation of the lecturers' expectations when they came to teach in a foreign country like Vietnam. I imagine my data analysis and findings would have been differently shaped without my unique personal and professional experiences with Vietnam and Australia.

## **9.7. Concluding remarks**

TNE has experienced incredible growth in recent years (Sharma, 2015) and is becoming an increasingly important feature of internationalisation (Leung & Waters, 2017). Within this context, Vietnam is going through a period of significant expansion in transnational higher education from the West (Nguyen & Shillabeer, 2013), including Australia.

With a focus on two Australian transnational master's programs in Vietnam, my research has explored the transnational student experiences and has documented the main reasons for students choosing TNE. My research has also identified two sets of transnational lecturers' key characteristics, based on both student and lecturer perspectives. Furthermore, my research has explored the intercultural complexities involved in transnational learning and teaching.

The findings of my research confirmed that the students selected a transnational course because of the pull factors of TNE, the push factors of the local Vietnamese programs, and the push factors of study in Australia. My research identified a number of similarities and tensions between students and lecturers in terms of key characteristics expected of transnational lecturers. These similarities and mismatches have provided guidelines for preparing staff before teaching transnationally, and for preparing students before learning in a transnational context. My work has called for more student support structures to be put in place and more contextualisation of the curriculum/course materials, with the expectation that this will make future transnational learning experiences more meaningful for students.

In general, the student and lecturer participants of my research had positive learning and teaching experiences, and enjoyed the intercultural complexities in this transnational context. For the student participants, it is fair to say that studying in a transnational program was the best option available, or a golden opportunity for them to get an international education without having to compromise other important commitments in their lives. However, my research identified some dilemmas and challenges that possibly prevented the students from making the most out of this golden opportunity. For example, many students appeared to miss out on the opportunity to further improve their English competence possibly because of peer pressure among monolingual (Vietnamese) groups of learners and cultural resistance (Wallace, 2016). Moreover, some did not seem to realise the added value of this intercultural experience to their professional and personal development. Some seemed to focus more on receiving an international degree than developing skills and knowledge during the learning process. At a broader level, my research identified a dilemma about contextualisation of curriculum. Some lecturer participants questioned the appropriateness of dropping an Australian curriculum into a context like Vietnam. Without the stronger involvement of

local (Vietnamese) providers in designing the curriculum, a golden opportunity for an enhanced experience for students and transnational programs will be missed.

On a cultural note, my research highlighted a shift from a traditional cross-cultural perspective focusing on cultural differences to an intercultural perspective emphasising intercultural interactions. When the focus of intercultural complexities in TNE is shifted away from differences and towards commonalities, it challenges the traditional East-West dichotomy, and brings the complementary cultures of Vietnam and Australia closer together.

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## Appendices

## **Appendix 1: Student questionnaire, English version**

Dear students,

I am Annie Truong (Truong Thi My Dung), a PhD student of the College of Arts and Education at Victoria University, Melbourne, Australia.

This questionnaire aims at collecting data for my doctoral study “Australian transnational education in Vietnam: A golden or missed opportunity? A case study of two postgraduate programs”. The data collected will be used for research purpose only. All the information provided in this questionnaire will be kept confidential and the findings will be presented in such a way that you and your institution cannot be identified.

If you agree to participate in my study, please complete this questionnaire. It will take you approximately 20 minutes.

Following this questionnaire, there will be focus group interviews in which you can elaborate on your transnational learning experiences and perspectives. If you are interested in participating in the focus group interviews, please indicate your interest at the end of the questionnaire and provide your contact details.

Thank you for your participation.

## **I. GENERAL INFORMATION**

1. Gender: ☐ Female ☐ Male
  
2. Age range:  
☐ 18-22 ☐ 31-40 ☐ > 50  
☐ 23-30 ☐ 41-50
  
3. Your nationality:  
☐ Vietnamese  
☐ Others (Please specify):
  
4. What is your current job?
  
5. What was your major before you enrolled in this program?
  
6. Have you had previous educational experiences with English as the language of instruction?  
☐ Yes  
☐ No
  
7. Your current employment status  
☐ Working full-time (40 hours/week or more)  
☐ Working part-time (20 hours – 39 hours/week)  
☐ Working casual (less than 20 hours/week)  
☐ Not working at the moment  
☐ Others (Please specify):

## **II. TRANSNATIONAL PROGRAM BETWEEN AUSTRALIA AND VIETNAM**

8. How long have you been involved in this Australian transnational program?  
☐ Less than 1 year

- ☐ 1-2 years
- ☐ More than 2 years

9. Why did you choose to study in a transnational program over one offered by a local higher education institution? You can tick (✓) more than one response.

- ☐ Better quality of education
- ☐ Course not offered by a local Institution
- ☐ Flexible learning path (e.g. part-time or online)
- ☐ Opportunity to improve language skills
- ☐ Seeking to improve employment and career prospects abroad
- ☐ Seeking to improve employment and career prospects at home
- ☐ As the starting point to improve opportunities for further study abroad
- ☐ Unable to obtain a place in the preferred local university/institution
- ☐ Wanted to obtain an internationally recognized degree
- ☐ Recommendations from parents/friends

10. Why did you choose to study in a transnational program and not at the main campus of the university abroad?

You can tick (✓) more than one response.

- ☐ Difficulty with obtaining visas or study/work permits in the source country
- ☐ Employment constraints for moving to another country
- ☐ Family constraints for moving to another country
- ☐ Language constraints
- ☐ Flexible learning path (e.g. part-time or online)
- ☐ Lower cost than study abroad
- ☐ No desire for study abroad
- ☐ To maintain closer links to local employment opportunities
- ☐ Failed to get admission into a course abroad

☐ No scholarships for study abroad

11. Why did you choose to study in a transnational program with Australia over one with other countries like US, UK, New Zealand, Canada, etc.

You can choose MORE THAN one response.

- ☐ Lower tuition fees
- ☐ Good reputation of Australian higher education
- ☐ Wanted to obtain a degree from an Australian university
- ☐ Personal interest in Australia
- ☐ Recommendation of parents/friends
- ☐ Others (Please specify):

12. What are your anticipated goals/outcomes upon graduation from this Australian transnational program?

You can choose MORE THAN one response.

- ☐ Personal development
- ☐ Professional development
- ☐ Academic development
- ☐ Building your prestige/self-esteem/reputation
- ☐ Improving employment and career prospects abroad/with international companies
- ☐ Improving employment and career prospects with international companies in Vietnam
- ☐ Career advancement in my current employment
- ☐ Going overseas to study for a further qualification
- ☐ Others (Please specify):

13. Do you have difficulties in managing among study, work, family, social activities and other commitments?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

14. Please rank the following commitments from **1 to 4** in the order of importance to you

1: Least important

4: Most important

\_\_\_\_\_ Study

\_\_\_\_\_ Work

\_\_\_\_\_ Family

\_\_\_\_\_ Social activities

15. How important are the following characteristics of a transnational lecturer?

1: not important    2: little important    3: rather important    4: important    5: very important

	Characteristics of a transnational lecturer	The extent of importance				
a	knowledge of the discipline and related professions in the local context as well as more broadly in an international context	1	2	3	4	5
b	an understanding of local culture(s) including the political, legal and economic environment	1	2	3	4	5
c	an understanding of how the teacher's own culture affects the way they think, feel and act	1	2	3	4	5
d	an understanding of how culture affects how we interact with others	1	2	3	4	5
e	an understanding of social, cultural and educational backgrounds of students	1	2	3	4	5
f	the ability to include local content in the program through examples and case studies	1	2	3	4	5
g	the ability to adapt learning activities in response to the needs of offshore students	1	2	3	4	5
h	the ability to engage students from different cultural backgrounds in discussion and group work	1	2	3	4	5
i	the ability to communicate with other staff teaching on the program	1	2	3	4	5

16. Are cultural differences in teaching and learning styles positive or problematic for you as learners? Please choose one response.

☐ Cultural differences in teaching and learning styles are problematic to me

☐ Cultural differences in teaching and learning styles do not matter to me

☐ Cultural differences in teaching and learning styles are positive to me



17. Being a student in this Australian transnational program, how have you developed personally, professionally and academically?

For each statement, please circle one response that best represents your opinion.

1: strongly disagree      2: disagree      3: neutral

4: agree      5: strongly agree

		The extent you agree				
a	You have become more aware of the cultural differences especially those between Vietnam and Australia	1	2	3	4	5
b	You have been able to explore Western thinking, practice and perspectives and been encouraged to question, debate and critique current thoughts	1	2	3	4	5
c	You have been more self-confident in communicating in English	1	2	3	4	5
d	You believe that your studies in this transnational program are giving you the necessary content knowledge, skills and perspectives to work effectively overseas or international context.	1	2	3	4	5
e	Overall, this transnational learning experience has made you become more international	1	2	3	4	5

18. Do you have enough face-to-face interaction with your transnational lecturers?

☐ Yes

☐ No

19. Would you like to have more face-to-face interaction with your transnational lecturers?

☐ Yes

☐ No

20. What are THREE aspects of learning in an offshore program in Vietnam that you enjoy the most?

.....  
 .....  
 .....

21. What are the THREE most significant challenges/difficulties have you had being in an offshore program in Vietnam?

.....  
 .....  
 .....

22. How satisfied are you with the following facilities and services offered to you as a student of this transnational program? Please circle one response that best represents your opinion.

1: Very unsatisfied      2: Unsatisfied      3: Neutral

4: Satisfied      5: Very satisfied

	Facilities and services	Your extent of satisfaction				
a.	access to computers to do assignments and to research	1	2	3	4	5
b.	guidance about how to avoid plagiarism	1	2	3	4	5
c.	guidance about how to reference appropriately and correctly	1	2	3	4	5
d.	access to the Australian library resources such as online journal articles, e-books, etc.	1	2	3	4	5
e.	access to academic support when you have difficulties with your study	1	2	3	4	5
f.	Overall, how satisfied are you with the facilities and services offered to you as a transnational student in this program?	1	2	3	4	5

23. To what extent do you agree with the following statements?

Please circle one response that best represents your opinion.

1: strongly disagree      2: disagree      3: neutral

4: agree      5: strongly agree

	Statements	The extent you agree				
a	I am satisfied with the facilities	1	2	3	4	5
b	I am satisfied with the teaching staff in general	1	2	3	4	5
c	I am satisfied with the administrative staff	1	2	3	4	5
d	I am satisfied with the curriculum	1	2	3	4	5
e	Overall, I am satisfied with this program	1	2	3	4	5
f	I will recommend this program to my friends	1	2	3	4	5

24. Do you propose anything to improve your transnational learning experiences in this program?

.....  
.....  
.....

Following this questionnaire, there will be focus group interviews in which you can elaborate on your transnational learning experiences and perspectives. If you are interested in participating in the focus group interviews, please indicate your interest below and provide your contact details.

I would like to participate in the focus group interviews:    ☐ Yes                      ☐ No

+ Mobile phone:

+ Email address:

## **Appendix 2: Student questionnaire, Vietnamese version**

Các bạn sinh viên thân mến,

Tôi tên Annie Trương (Truong Thi My Dung), hiện đang là nghiên cứu sinh của Khoa Giáo Dục và Nghệ Thuật trường Đại học Victoria, Melbourne, Úc.

Bản câu hỏi này nhằm mục đích thu thập số liệu cho đề tài nghiên cứu Tiến sĩ của chúng tôi với tựa đề “Australian transnational education in Vietnam: A golden or missed opportunity? A case study of two postgraduate programs”. Số liệu thu được chỉ phục vụ cho mục đích nghiên cứu. Tất cả thông tin thu thập được từ bản câu hỏi này sẽ được bảo mật. Chúng tôi sẽ không tiết lộ các thông tin cá nhân và tên chương trình của các bạn.

Nếu các bạn đồng ý tham gia đề tài nghiên cứu của chúng tôi, xin vui lòng trả lời các câu hỏi dưới đây. Sẽ mất khoảng 20 phút.

Giai đoạn tiếp theo của việc thu thập số liệu là phỏng vấn nhóm. Chúng tôi sẽ phỏng vấn các bạn về kinh nghiệm học tập của các bạn trong các chương trình liên kết đào tạo với Úc tại Việt Nam. Ngôn ngữ phỏng vấn là tiếng Việt. Mỗi nhóm phỏng vấn từ 3-4 người. Địa điểm phỏng vấn là ở Trường ĐH Hà Nội. Thời gian phỏng vấn từ 45’ - 60’.

Cảm ơn sự tham gia của các bạn.

## I/ THÔNG TIN CHUNG

1. Giới tính: ☐ Nữ ☐ Nam
2. Độ tuổi:  
☐ 18-22 ☐ 23-30 ☐ 31-40 ☐ 41-50 ☐ > 50
3. Quốc tịch:  
☐ Việt Nam  
☐ Quốc tịch khác (Vui lòng nêu rõ):
4. Nghề nghiệp hiện nay của bạn là gì?
5. Bằng cử nhân của bạn chuyên ngành là gì?
6. Trước đây bạn có từng theo học một chương trình giảng dạy bằng tiếng Anh không?  
☐ Có  
☐ Không
7. Tình trạng nghề nghiệp hiện nay của bạn:  
☐ Đi làm toàn thời gian (40 tiếng/tuần hoặc hơn)  
☐ Đi làm bán thời gian (20 – 39 tiếng/tuần)  
☐ Đi làm thời vụ (ít hơn 20 tiếng/tuần)  
☐ Không đi làm  
☐ Ý kiến khác (Vui lòng nêu rõ):

## II/ CHƯƠNG TRÌNH LIÊN KẾT ĐÀO TẠO

8. Bạn đã theo học chương trình liên kết này bao lâu?  
☐ Ít hơn một năm  
☐ Từ 1 tới 2 năm  
☐ Hơn 2 năm

9. Tại sao bạn đăng ký học chương trình liên kết đào tạo với nước ngoài mà không đăng ký học chương trình tương tự do một trường Việt Nam tổ chức? Bạn có thể chọn (✓) **NHIỀU** lựa chọn.

- ☐ Chất lượng giáo dục của chương trình liên kết tốt hơn
- ☐ Trường ở Việt Nam không có khóa học này
- ☐ Chương trình liên kết đào tạo có hình thức học linh hoạt (học bán thời gian hoặc học trực tuyến)
- ☐ Có cơ hội nâng cao các kỹ năng ngoại ngữ
- ☐ Trong tương lai dễ kiếm việc làm ở nước ngoài hơn
- ☐ Trong tương lai dễ kiếm việc làm ở Việt Nam hơn
- ☐ Tìm kiếm cơ hội đi học nước ngoài
- ☐ Không xin được vào học ở Trường Việt Nam
- ☐ Muốn có bằng cấp quốc tế
- ☐ Theo ý kiến gia đình/bạn bè
- ☐ Ý kiến khác (Vui lòng nêu rõ):

10. Tại sao bạn đăng ký học chương trình liên kết với Úc ở Việt Nam mà không đăng ký học chương trình tương tự tại cơ sở chính ở nước Úc? Bạn có thể chọn (✓) **NHIỀU** lựa chọn.

- ☐ Gặp khó khăn trong việc xin thị thực sang Úc và giấy phép để làm việc ở Úc
- ☐ Vì lý do công việc nên không đi ra nước ngoài học được
- ☐ Vì lý do gia đình nên không đi ra nước ngoài học được
- ☐ Hạn chế về ngoại ngữ
- ☐ Chương trình liên kết có hình thức học linh hoạt hơn (học bán thời gian hoặc học trực tuyến)

- ☐ Chi phí theo học chương trình liên kết ít hơn so với học ở nước ngoài
- ☐ Không thích đi học nước ngoài
- ☐ Muốn học ở Việt Nam để có nhiều thông tin về cơ hội việc làm
- ☐ Không xin được giấy nhập học ở Trường Úc
- ☐ Không có học bổng để đi học nước ngoài
- ☐ Ý kiến khác (Vui lòng nêu rõ):

11. Tại sao bạn chọn học chương trình liên kết với Úc mà không học chương trình liên kết với các nước khác như Mỹ, Anh, New Zealand, Canada, v.v... ? Bạn có thể chọn (✓) **NHIỀU** lựa chọn.

- ☐ Học phí chương trình liên kết với Úc thấp hơn chương trình liên kết với các nước khác
- ☐ Uy tín về chất lượng của nền giáo dục Úc
- ☐ Muốn có bằng do trường Úc cấp
- ☐ Tôi thích nước Úc
- ☐ Theo ý kiến gia đình/bạn bè
- ☐ Ý kiến khác (Vui lòng nêu rõ):

12. Bạn mong đợi sẽ đạt được gì khi hoàn thành khóa học liên kết với Úc? Bạn có thể chọn (✓) **NHIỀU** lựa chọn.

- ☐ Nâng cao nhận thức, phát triển bản thân
- ☐ Nâng cao kiến thức chuyên môn, nâng cao kỹ năng nghề nghiệp
- ☐ Nâng cao kiến thức học thuật
- ☐ Xây dựng uy tín
- ☐ Tìm được việc làm ở nước ngoài
- ☐ Tìm được việc làm ở các công ty nước ngoài tại Việt Nam
- ☐ Thăng tiến trong công việc hiện tại
- ☐ Tiếp tục đi học ở nước ngoài để lấy bằng cấp cao hơn
- ☐ Ý kiến khác (Vui lòng nêu rõ):

13. Bạn có gặp khó khăn trong việc cân bằng giữa việc học, công việc, gia đình và các mối quan hệ khác không?

- ☐ Có

☐ Không

14. Vui lòng điền số từ 1 đến 5 theo thứ tự quan trọng đối với bạn

1: Ít quan trọng nhất

5: Quan trọng nhất

\_\_\_\_\_ Việc học

\_\_\_\_\_ Công việc

\_\_\_\_\_ Gia đình

\_\_\_\_\_ Các mối quan hệ xã hội (bạn bè, v.v...)

\_\_\_\_\_ Các mối quan hệ khác

15. Theo bạn, các kiến thức/kỹ năng dưới đây của giáo viên nước ngoài giảng dạy trong chương trình liên kết có tầm quan trọng như thế nào? Đối với mỗi phát biểu, vui lòng KHOANH TRÒN một trong các con số từ 1 đến 5.

1-Không quan trọng    2-Ít quan trọng    3-Khá quan trọng

4-Quan trọng    5-Rất quan trọng

	Kiến thức/kỹ năng mà giáo viên nước ngoài cần phải có	Mức độ đồng ý của bạn				
a	Kiến thức chuyên môn về lĩnh vực giảng dạy và các lĩnh vực có liên quan trong bối cảnh ở Việt Nam cũng như trong bối cảnh quốc tế	1	2	3	4	5
b	Hiểu biết về văn hóa Việt Nam bao gồm các lĩnh vực như chính trị, pháp luật và kinh tế	1	2	3	4	5
c	Am hiểu rằng văn hóa sẽ ảnh hưởng tới lối suy nghĩ, cảm nhận và hành động của giáo viên.	1	2	3	4	5
d	Am hiểu cách mà sự khác biệt văn hóa sẽ ảnh hưởng tới cách giao tiếp với mọi người	1	2	3	4	5
e	Hiểu biết về hoàn cảnh xã hội, văn hóa và giáo dục của sinh viên	1	2	3	4	5
f	Khả năng đưa kiến thức địa phương ở Việt Nam vào chương trình giảng dạy thông qua các ví dụ và nghiên cứu trường hợp	1	2	3	4	5
g	Khả năng điều chỉnh các hoạt động giảng dạy và học tập để đáp ứng các nhu cầu của sinh viên Việt Nam	1	2	3	4	5
h	Khả năng thu hút học sinh có nền văn hóa khác nhau tham gia vào cuộc thảo luận và làm việc nhóm	1	2	3	4	5
i	khả năng giao tiếp với các giáo viên khác cùng giảng dạy trong chương trình	1	2	3	4	5



16. Sự khác biệt văn hóa trong việc dạy và học giữa bạn và giáo viên nước ngoài ảnh hưởng đến việc học của bạn như thế nào? Vui lòng chọn (✓) **MỘT** lựa chọn.

- ☐ gây khó khăn cho việc học của bạn
- ☐ không ảnh hưởng gì đến việc học của bạn
- ☐ giúp ích cho việc học của bạn

17. Theo học chương trình liên kết này đã giúp bạn phát triển như thế nào? Đối với mỗi phát biểu, vui lòng **KHOANH TRÒN** một trong các con số từ 1 đến 5.

1-Hoàn toàn không đồng ý    2-Không đồng ý    3-Trung bình

4-Đồng ý    5-Hoàn toàn đồng ý

		Mức độ đồng ý của bạn				
		1	2	3	4	5
a	Bạn nhận thức rõ hơn về sự khác biệt văn hóa giữa các quốc gia đặc biệt là giữa Úc và Việt Nam					
b	Bạn được tiếp xúc và khám phá cách suy nghĩ và các quan điểm của các nước phương Tây; bạn được khuyến khích đặt câu hỏi, tranh luận và phê bình các suy nghĩ và quan điểm đương đại.					
c	Bạn đã tự tin hơn trong giao tiếp bằng tiếng Anh					
d	Bạn tin rằng việc học trong chương trình liên kết này đem lại cho bạn những kiến thức và kỹ năng cần thiết giúp bạn làm việc hiệu quả ở nước ngoài hoặc trong các bối cảnh quốc tế.					
e	Nhìn chung, việc học ở các chương trình liên kết này giúp bạn phát triển kiến thức và hiểu biết về quốc tế hơn.					

18. Theo bạn, thời gian học với giáo viên nước ngoài trong chương trình này có đủ không?

- ☐ Có
- ☐ Không

19. Bạn có muốn có thêm thời gian học với giáo viên nước ngoài không?

- ☐ Có
- ☐ Không

20. Vui lòng liệt kê **BA** khía cạnh mà bạn thích nhất về việc học chương trình liên kết này?

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21. Vui lòng liệt kê **BA** khó khăn của bạn trong chương trình liên kết này?

.....

.....

.....

22. Mức độ hài lòng của bạn đối với chương trình liên kết này. Đối với mỗi phát biểu, vui lòng KHOANH TRÒN một trong các con số từ 1 đến 5.

1: Rất không hài lòng      2: Không hài lòng      3: Trung bình      4: Hài lòng      5: Rất hài lòng

	Các tiêu chí	Mức độ hài lòng của bạn				
a.	Truy cập vào máy tính để làm bài tập và nghiên cứu	1	2	3	4	5
b.	Các hướng dẫn về làm thế nào để tránh đạo văn	1	2	3	4	5
c.	Các hướng dẫn về làm thế nào để trích dẫn chính xác	1	2	3	4	5
d.	truy cập vào các tài nguyên thư viện của Úc như bài báo trên tạp chí trực tuyến, sách điện tử, vv	1	2	3	4	5
e.	Các dịch vụ hỗ trợ học tập khi bạn gặp khó khăn trong việc học	1	2	3	4	5
f.	Nhìn chung, bạn hài lòng với những tiện nghi và dịch vụ trong chương trình liên kết này?	1	2	3	4	5

23. Bạn vui lòng cho biết mức độ đồng ý của mình đối với các phát biểu dưới đây.

Đối với mỗi phát biểu, vui lòng KHOANH TRÒN một trong các con số từ 1 đến 5

1-Hoàn toàn không đồng ý      2-Không đồng ý      3-Trung bình

4-Đồng ý      5-Rất đồng ý

		Mức độ đồng ý				
a	Tôi hài lòng với các dịch vụ của chương trình liên kết này	1	2	3	4	5
b	Tôi hài lòng với đội ngũ giáo viên giảng trong chương trình liên kết này	1	2	3	4	5
c	Tôi hài lòng với các nhân viên hành chính trong chương trình liên kết này	1	2	3	4	5
d	Tôi hài lòng với chương trình giảng dạy	1	2	3	4	5
e	Nhìn chung tôi hài lòng với chương trình liên kết này	1	2	3	4	5
f	Tôi sẽ giới thiệu chương trình này với bạn bè và người thân	1	2	3	4	5

24. Bạn có đề xuất gì để nâng cao chất lượng dạy và học của chương trình liên kết đào tạo này không?

.....

.....

.....

Giai đoạn tiếp theo của việc thu thập số liệu là phỏng vấn nhóm. Chúng tôi sẽ phỏng vấn các bạn về kinh nghiệm học tập của các bạn trong các chương trình liên kết đào tạo với Úc tại Việt Nam. Ngôn ngữ phỏng vấn là tiếng Việt. Mỗi nhóm phỏng vấn từ 3-4 người. Địa điểm phỏng vấn là ở Trường ĐH Hà Nội. Thời gian phỏng vấn từ 45' - 60'.

Nếu bạn nào muốn tham gia phỏng vấn nhóm, xin vui lòng điền vào thông tin liên lạc dưới đây.

Tôi muốn tham gia vào phỏng vấn nhóm: ☐ Có ☐ Không

Điện thoại:

Địa chỉ email:

CHÂN THÀNH CẢM ƠN

### **Appendix 3: Information to student participants, English version**

#### **INFORMATION TO PARTICIPANTS INVOLVED IN RESEARCH**

##### **Student focus groups (English version)**

###### **You are invited to participate**

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You are invited to participate in a research project entitled “Australian transnational education in Vietnam: A golden or missed opportunity? A case study of two postgraduate programs”.

This project is being conducted by a student researcher, Annie Truong (Truong Thi My Dung) as part of a PhD study at Victoria University under the supervision of Dr. Gwen Gilmore and A/Prof. Bill Eckersley from College of Arts and Education.

###### **Project explanation**

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This study aims to explore the teaching and learning experiences of the Australian transnational Master programs in Vietnam. Specifically, this research will investigate the teaching experiences of Australian academics, the learning experiences of students who are involved in the Australian transnational programs in Vietnam, and the benefits and challenges of these programs.

###### **What will I be asked to do?**

---

If you agree to participate in my research, I will interview you for about 45 minutes in a focus group. I would like to record the interview with your permission, and I will ask you to give consent and sign a written form prior to the interview.

Your participation in this project is completely voluntary. If you take part in the study, you have the right to refuse to answer any particular question, and to withdraw from the study before data analysis has commenced. You can ask any further questions about the study that occur to you during your participation and you will be given access to a summary of findings from the research when it is concluded.

###### **What will I gain from participating?**

---

Student participants will be able to share their transnational learning experiences and perspectives in Vietnam. They can identify strengths and challenges of these programs in order to help enhance the quality of these programs under research. Moreover, the participants will be given access to a summary of findings from the research when it is concluded.

### **How will the information I give be used?**

---

The information collected will be used to write a research report for my thesis and an electronic copy of the thesis will be lodged in the Victoria University Research Repository. It is also possible that articles and presentations may be outcomes of the study. All the information about you and your responses will be kept confidential and only me and my supervisors can access it. The findings will be presented in such a way that you cannot be identified. Also, the programs and institutions will be anonymous. The notes, documents and recordings will be stored for a period of 5 years before they are destroyed.

The transcriptions of your responses will be provided to you to confirm accuracy and you can add more details where relevant.

### **What are the potential risks of participating in this project?**

---

It is possible that a student participant might feel uncomfortable about sharing their opinions or disagreeing with other student participants during the focus group interviews.

I will address this by reminding the participants that information shared will be confidential and will be de-identified (using pseudonyms) to ensure confidentiality. They will be reminded that the information shared will be kept to that meeting.

### **How will this project be conducted?**

---

If you agree to participate in my research, I will interview you for about 45 minutes in a focus group. I would like to record the interview with your permission, and I will ask you to give consent and sign a written form prior to the interview. The interview will last approximately 45 minutes.

Your participation in this project is completely voluntary. If you take part in the study, you have the right to refuse to answer any particular question, and to withdraw from the study before data analysis has commenced. You can ask any further questions about the study that occur to you during your participation and you will be given access to a summary of findings from the research when it is concluded.

### **Who is conducting the study?**

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Chief Investigator: Dr. Gwen Gilmore, College of Arts and Education, Victoria University, Melbourne, Australia

Associate Investigator: A/Prof: Bill Eckersley, College of Arts and Education, Victoria University, Melbourne, Australia

Student Investigator: Annie Truong (Truong Thi My Dung), College of Arts and Education, Victoria University, Melbourne, Australia

Any queries about your participation in this project may be directed to the Chief Investigator listed above.

If you have any queries or complaints about the way you have been treated, you may contact the Ethics Secretary, Victoria University Human Research Ethics Committee, Office for Research, Victoria University, PO Box 14428, Melbourne, VIC, 8001, email [researchethics@vu.edu.au](mailto:researchethics@vu.edu.au) or phone (03) 9919 4781 or 4461.

## **Appendix 4: Information to student participants, Vietnamese version**

### **THÔNG TIN CHO NGƯỜI THAM GIA NGHIÊN CỨU**

**(Phỏng vấn nhóm với sinh viên)**

#### **Mời tham gia nghiên cứu**

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Chúng tôi mời bạn tham gia vào đề tài nghiên cứu của chúng tôi mang tên “Australian transnational education in Vietnam: A golden or missed opportunity? A case study of two postgraduate programs”.

Đề tài này là một phần của chương trình nghiên cứu tiến sĩ do nghiên cứu sinh Annie Truong (Trương Thị Mỹ Dung ) thực hiện tại Đại học Victoria, Melbourne, Úc dưới sự giám sát của TS. Gwen Gilmore và PGS. TS. Bill Eckersley từ khoa Giáo dục của Trường Đại học Victoria.

#### **Thông tin về đề tài**

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Đề tài này nhằm mục đích tìm hiểu kinh nghiệm giảng dạy và học tập ở các chương trình liên kết đào tạo với Úc. Cụ thể, đề tài sẽ tìm hiểu kinh nghiệm giảng dạy của các giảng viên Úc tham gia trong chương trình, kinh nghiệm học tập của sinh viên theo học các chương trình này tại Việt Nam, và những lợi ích và thách thức của các chương trình này.

#### **Tham gia vào đề tài này, bạn sẽ phải làm gì?**

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Nếu bạn đồng ý tham gia nghiên cứu của chúng tôi, tôi sẽ phỏng vấn bạn theo nhóm trong khoảng 45 phút . Nếu các bạn đồng ý, tôi sẽ ghi âm lại nội dung các cuộc phỏng vấn. Trước khi tham gia buổi phỏng vấn nhóm này, các bạn sẽ ký tên vào giấy xác nhận các bạn đồng ý tham gia phỏng vấn.

Sự tham gia của bạn trong dự án này là hoàn toàn tự nguyện. Khi bạn tham gia vào nghiên cứu này, bạn có thể không trả lời những câu hỏi bạn không thoải mái, và rút khỏi nghiên cứu trước khi chúng tôi phân tích dữ liệu. Trong thời gian tham gia nghiên cứu, bạn có thể hỏi chúng tôi nếu bạn có bất kỳ thắc mắc nào về nghiên cứu. Bạn sẽ có thể đọc được các kết quả nghiên cứu của chúng tôi khi đề tài hoàn thành.

### **Bạn sẽ được gì khi tham gia nghiên cứu của chúng tôi?**

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Tham gia đề tài này bạn sẽ có thể chia sẻ kinh nghiệm học tập trong các chương trình liên kết với Úc ở Việt Nam. Bạn có thể nhận thấy được các thế mạnh cũng như thách thức của các chương trình này nhằm giúp nâng cao chất lượng dạy và học. Hơn nữa, Bạn sẽ có thể đọc được các kết quả nghiên cứu của chúng tôi khi đề tài hoàn thành.

### **Chúng tôi sẽ sử dụng thông tin do các bạn cung cấp như thế nào?**

---

Thông tin do các bạn cung cấp sẽ được sử dụng để viết một báo cáo nghiên cứu cho luận án của tôi và một bản điện tử của luận án sẽ được nộp ở trường Đại học Victoria. Thông tin cũng sẽ được sử dụng để viết các bài báo và các bài thuyết trình về kết quả nghiên cứu. Tất cả các thông tin cá nhân về bạn và các câu trả lời của bạn sẽ được giữ bí mật và chỉ có tôi và các giáo viên hướng dẫn của tôi có thể truy cập. Danh tính của các bạn sẽ không bị tiết lộ trong các kết quả nghiên cứu. Ngoài ra, tên chương trình và tổ chức các bạn theo học sẽ được ẩn danh. Thông tin và bản ghi âm sẽ được lưu trữ trong vòng 5 năm.

### **Những lo ngại có thể có khi bạn tham gia dự án?**

---

Trong buổi phỏng vấn nhóm, có khả năng bạn sẽ cảm thấy không muốn chia sẻ ý kiến của mình hoặc không đồng ý với các bạn sinh viên khác cùng tham gia trong buổi phỏng vấn nhóm.

### **Đề tài này sẽ được thực hiện như thế nào?**

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Nếu bạn đồng ý tham gia nghiên cứu của chúng tôi, tôi sẽ phỏng vấn bạn theo nhóm trong khoảng 45 phút. Nếu các bạn đồng ý, tôi sẽ ghi âm lại nội dung các cuộc phỏng vấn. Trước khi tham gia buổi phỏng vấn nhóm này, các bạn sẽ ký tên vào giấy xác nhận các bạn đồng ý tham gia phỏng vấn.

Sự tham gia của bạn trong dự án này là hoàn toàn tự nguyện. Khi bạn tham gia vào nghiên cứu này, bạn có thể không trả lời những câu hỏi bạn không thoải mái, và rút khỏi nghiên cứu trước khi chúng tôi phân tích dữ liệu. Trong thời gian tham gia nghiên cứu, bạn có thể hỏi chúng tôi nếu bạn có bất kỳ thắc mắc nào về nghiên cứu. Bạn sẽ có thể đọc được các kết quả nghiên cứu của chúng tôi khi đề tài hoàn thành.



### **Ai thực hiện đề tài này?**

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Chủ nhiệm chính đề tài: TS. Gwen Gilmore, Khoa Giáo dục, Trường Đại học Victoria, Melbourne, Australia

Thành viên nghiên cứu: P.GS. Bill Eckersley, Khoa Giáo dục, Trường Đại học Victoria, Melbourne, Australia

Nghiên cứu sinh: Annie Truong (Truong Thi My Dung), Khoa Giáo dục, Trường Đại học Victoria, Melbourne, Australia

Mọi thắc mắc về việc tham gia dự án này, vui lòng liên hệ Chủ nhiệm chính đề tài nêu trên .

Nếu bạn có bất kỳ thắc mắc hoặc khiếu nại, vui lòng liên hệ với thư ký Ban Các Quy tắc Đạo Đức trong Nghiên Cứu, Ủy ban Đạo đức Nghiên cứu Nhân, Văn phòng Nghiên cứu, trường Đại học Victoria , PO Box 14.428 , Melbourne , VIC , 8001, hoặc email [researchethics @ vu.edu.au](mailto:researchethics@vu.edu.au) hoặc điện thoại +61 (03) 9919 4781 hoặc 4461.

## **Appendix 5: Consent form for student participants, English version**

### **CONSENT FORM FOR PARTICIPANTS INVOLVED IN RESEARCH**

#### **(Student focus groups, English version)**

#### **INFORMATION TO PARTICIPANTS:**

We would like to invite you to be a part of a study into entitled “Australian transnational education in Vietnam: A golden or missed opportunity? A case study of two postgraduate programs”. This study aims to explore the teaching and learning experiences of the Australian transnational Master programs in Vietnam. Specifically, this research will investigate the teaching experiences of Australian academics, the learning experiences of students who are involved in the Australian transnational programs in Vietnam, and the benefits and challenges of these programs.

If you agree to participate in my research, I will interview you in a focus group. I would like to record the interview with your permission, and I will ask you to give consent and sign a written form prior to the interview. The focus group interview will last approximately 45 minutes.

Your participation in this project is completely voluntary. If you take part in the study, you have the right to refuse to answer any particular question, and to withdraw from the study before data analysis has commenced. You can ask any further questions about the study that occur to you during your participation and you will be given access to a summary of findings from the research when it is concluded.

#### **CERTIFICATION BY SUBJECT**

I, .....(participant’s name) of ..... (participant’s suburb)  
certify that I am at least 18 years old\* and that I am voluntarily giving my consent to participate in the study: “Australian transnational education in Vietnam: A golden or missed opportunity? A case study of two postgraduate programs” being conducted at Victoria University by: Dr. Gwen Gilmore.

I certify that the objectives of the study, together with any risks and safeguards associated with the procedures listed hereunder to be carried out in the research, have been fully explained to me by:

Annie Truong (Truong Thi My Dung) and that I freely consent to participation involving the below mentioned procedures: Focus group interviews

I certify that I have had the opportunity to have any questions answered and that I understand that I can withdraw from this study at any time and that this withdrawal will not jeopardise me in any way.

I have been informed that the information I provide will be kept confidential.

Signed:

Date:

Any queries about your participation in this project may be directed to the researcher

Dr. Gwen Gilmore, MOB: +61 452 432 640

If you have any queries or complaints about the way you have been treated, you may contact the Ethics Secretary, Victoria University Human Research Ethics Committee, Office for Research, Victoria University, PO Box 14428, Melbourne, VIC, 8001, email [Researchethics@vu.edu.au](mailto:Researchethics@vu.edu.au) or phone (03) 9919 4781 or 4461.

## **Appendix 6: Consent form for student participants, Vietnamese version**

### **GIẤY XÁC NHẬN ĐỒNG Ý THAM GIA NGHIÊN CỨU**

**(Phỏng vấn nhóm với sinh viên)**

#### **THÔNG TIN CHO NGƯỜI THAM GIA NGHIÊN CỨU:**

Chúng tôi mời bạn tham gia đề tài nghiên cứu của chúng tôi mang tên “Australian transnational education in Vietnam: A golden or missed opportunity? A case study of two postgraduate programs”.

Đề tài này nhằm mục đích tìm hiểu kinh nghiệm giảng dạy và học tập ở các chương trình liên kết đào tạo với Úc. Cụ thể, đề tài sẽ tìm hiểu kinh nghiệm giảng dạy của các giảng viên Úc tham gia trong chương trình, kinh nghiệm học tập của sinh viên theo học các chương trình này tại Việt Nam, và những lợi ích và thách thức của các chương trình này.

Nếu bạn đồng ý tham gia nghiên cứu của chúng tôi, tôi sẽ phỏng vấn bạn theo nhóm trong khoảng 45 phút. Nếu các bạn đồng ý, tôi sẽ ghi âm lại nội dung các cuộc phỏng vấn. Trước khi tham gia buổi phỏng vấn nhóm này, các bạn sẽ ký tên vào giấy xác nhận các bạn đồng ý tham gia phỏng vấn.

Sự tham gia của bạn trong dự án này là hoàn toàn tự nguyện. Khi bạn tham gia vào nghiên cứu này, bạn có thể không trả lời những câu hỏi bạn không thoải mái, và rút khỏi nghiên cứu trước khi chúng tôi phân tích dữ liệu. Trong thời gian tham gia nghiên cứu, bạn có thể hỏi chúng tôi nếu bạn có bất kỳ thắc mắc nào về nghiên cứu. Bạn sẽ có thể đọc được các kết quả nghiên cứu của chúng tôi khi đề tài hoàn thành

#### **XÁC NHẬN CỦA NGƯỜI THAM GIA NGHIÊN CỨU**

Tôi tên.....

Địa chỉ: .....

Tôi xác nhận tôi trên 18 tuổi và tôi tình nguyện tham gia đề tài nghiên cứu mang tên “Australian transnational education in Vietnam: A golden or missed opportunity? A

case study of two postgraduate programs” do TS. Gwen Gilmore trường Đại học Victoria, Melbourne, Úc làm chủ nhiệm đề tài.

Tôi xác nhận rằng Cô Annie Truong (Truong Thị Mỹ Dung) đã giải thích cho tôi hiểu rõ các mục tiêu, nội dung, các lo ngại kỳ rủi ro và cách thức tiến hành nghiên cứu của đề tài này. Tôi tình nguyện tham gia phỏng vấn nhóm.

Tôi hiểu rằng tôi có cơ hội để đặt câu hỏi liên quan đến đề tài và tôi có thể rút khỏi nghiên cứu này bất cứ lúc nào và việc rút khỏi nghiên cứu sẽ không gây bất kỳ khó khăn nào cho tôi.

Tôi hiểu rằng thông tin tôi cung cấp sẽ được giữ bí mật.

Ký tên: .....

Ngày: .....

Mọi thắc mắc về việc tham gia đề tài, vui lòng liên lạc Chủ nhiệm đề tài, Tiến sĩ Gwen Gilmore, ĐT : +61 452 432 640

Nếu bạn có bất kỳ thắc mắc hoặc khiếu nại, vui lòng liên hệ với thư ký Ban Các Quy tắc Đạo Đức trong Nghiên Cứu, Ủy ban Đạo đức Nghiên cứu Nhân, Văn phòng Nghiên cứu, trường Đại học Victoria , PO Box 14.428 , Melbourne , VIC , 8001, hoặc email researchethics @ vu.edu.au hoặc điện thoại +61 (03) 9919 4781 hoặc 4461

## **Appendix 7: Student focus group guiding questions, English version**

1. Why did you decide to study in a transnational program in Vietnam?
2. What are the three most important characteristics that a transnational lecturer needs to have? Why?
3. What intercultural complexities have you experienced during your transnational learning in Vietnam?
4. What are some aspects of being involved in a transnational program in Vietnam that you enjoy the most? Why?
5. What are some challenges/difficulties have you had during your transnational learning in Vietnam? Why?
6. How have you overcome those challenges/difficulties?
7. What advice about this transnational program would you give to the Australian university and the Vietnamese institution offering it?

## **Appendix 8: Student focus group guiding questions, Vietnamese version**

1. Tại sao bạn đang ký học chương trình liên kết đào tạo ở Việt Nam?
2. Người giáo viên giảng dạy trong các chương trình liên kết đào tạo cần phải có những tố chất gì?
3. Bạn gặp những khác biệt văn hóa gì trong quá trình học với giáo viên nước ngoài?
4. Những đặc điểm nào của chương trình làm bạn hài lòng? Tại sao?
5. Bạn có gặp những khó khăn hay trở ngại gì trong quá trình học không? Tại sao?
6. Bạn khắc phục những khó khăn và trở ngại này như thế nào?
7. Bạn có đóng góp ý kiến gì cho trường Úc và trường Việt Nam để thúc đẩy các chương trình này thành công hơn?

## **Appendix 9: Information to lecturer participants**

### **INFORMATION TO PARTICIPANTS INVOLVED IN RESEARCH**

#### **(Interviews with Australian academics)**

##### **You are invited to participate**

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You are invited to participate in a research project entitled “Australian transnational education in Vietnam: A golden or missed opportunity? A case study of two postgraduate programs”.

This project is being conducted by a student researcher, Annie Truong (Truong Thi My Dung) as part of a PhD study at Victoria University under the supervision of Dr. Gwen Gilmore and A/Prof. Bill Eckersley from College of Arts and Education.

##### **Project explanation**

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This study aims to explore the teaching and learning experiences of the Australian transnational Master programs in Vietnam. Specifically, this research will investigate the teaching experiences of Australian academics, the learning experiences of students who are involved in the Australian transnational programs in Vietnam, and the benefits and risks of these programs.

##### **What will I be asked to do?**

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If you agree to participate in my research, I will interview you for about 45 minutes. I would like to record the interview with your permission, and I will ask you to give consent and sign a written form prior to the interview.

Your participation in this project is completely voluntary. If you take part in the study, you have the right to refuse to answer any particular question, and to withdraw from the study before data analysis has commenced. You can ask any further questions about the study that occur to you during your participation and you will be given access to a summary of findings from the research when it is concluded.

##### **What will I gain from participating?**

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Academic participants will be able to share their experiences and perspectives about their teaching overseas in Vietnam. They can identify strengths and challenges of these programs in order to help enhance the quality of these programs under research.

Moreover, the participants will be given access to a summary of findings from the research when it is concluded.

### **How will the information I give be used?**

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The information collected will be used to write a research report for my thesis and an electronic copy of the thesis will be lodged in the Victoria University Research Repository. It is also possible that articles and presentations may be outcomes of the study. All the information about you and your responses will be kept confidential and only me and my supervisors can access it. The findings will be presented in such a way that you cannot be identified. Also, the programs and institutions will be anonymous. The notes, documents and recordings will be stored for a period of 5 years before they are destroyed.

The transcriptions of your responses will be provided to you to confirm accuracy and you can add more details where relevant.

### **What are the potential risks of participating in this project?**

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It is possible that an academic participant might feel uncomfortable with some interview questions.

### **How will this project be conducted?**

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If you agree to participate in my research, I will interview you for about 45 minutes. I would like to record the interview with your permission, and I will ask you to give consent and sign a written form prior to the interview. The interview will last approximately 45 minutes.

Your participation in this project is completely voluntary. If you take part in the study, you have the right to refuse to answer any particular question, and to withdraw from the study before data analysis has commenced. You can ask any further questions about the

study that occur to you during your participation and you will be given access to a summary of findings from the research when it is concluded.

### **Who is conducting the study?**

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Chief Investigator: Dr. Gwen Gilmore, College of Arts and Education, Victoria University, Melbourne, Australia

Associate Investigator: A/Prof: Bill Eckersley, College of Arts and Education, Victoria University, Melbourne, Australia

Student Investigator: Annie Truong (Truong Thi My Dung), College of Arts and Education, Victoria University, Melbourne, Australia

Any queries about your participation in this project may be directed to the Chief Investigator listed above.

If you have any queries or complaints about the way you have been treated, you may contact the Ethics Secretary, Victoria University Human Research Ethics Committee, Office for Research, Victoria University, PO Box 14428, Melbourne, VIC, 8001, email [researchethics@vu.edu.au](mailto:researchethics@vu.edu.au) or phone (03) 9919 4781 or 4461.

## **Appendix 10: Consent form for lecturer participants**

### **CONSENT FORM FOR PARTICIPANTS INVOLVED IN RESEARCH**

#### **(Interviews with transnational lecturers)**

#### **INFORMATION TO PARTICIPANTS:**

We would like to invite you to be a part of a study into entitled “Australian transnational education in Vietnam: A golden or missed opportunity? A case study of two postgraduate programs”.

This study aims to explore the teaching and learning experiences of the Australian transnational Master programs in Vietnam. Specifically, this research will investigate the teaching experiences of Australian academics, the learning experiences of students who are involved in the Australian transnational programs in Vietnam, and the benefits and challenges of these programs.

If you agree to participate in my research, I will interview you for about 20 minutes. I would like to record the interview with your permission, and I will ask you to give consent and sign a written form prior to the interview.

Your participation in this project is completely voluntary. If you take part in the study, you have the right to refuse to answer any particular question, and to withdraw from the study before data analysis has commenced. You can ask any further questions about the study that occur to you during your participation and you will be given access to a summary of findings from the research when it is concluded.

#### **CERTIFICATION BY SUBJECT**

I, .....(participant’s name) of .....(participant’s suburb)

certify that I am at least 18 years old and that I am voluntarily giving my consent to participate in the study: “Australian transnational education in Vietnam: A golden or missed opportunity? A case study of two postgraduate programs” being conducted at Victoria University by: Dr. Gwen Gilmore.

I certify that the objectives of the study, together with any risks and safeguards associated with the procedures listed hereunder to be carried out in the research, have been fully explained to me by:

Annie Truong (Truong Thi My Dung) and that I freely consent to participation involving the below mentioned procedures: Focus group interviews

I certify that I have had the opportunity to have any questions answered and that I understand that I can withdraw from this study at any time and that this withdrawal will not jeopardise me in any way.

I have been informed that the information I provide will be kept confidential.

Signed:

Date:

Any queries about your participation in this project may be directed to the researcher

Dr. Gwen Gilmore, MOB: +61 452 432 640

If you have any queries or complaints about the way you have been treated, you may contact the Ethics Secretary, Victoria University Human Research Ethics Committee, Office for Research, Victoria University, PO Box 14428, Melbourne, VIC, 8001, email [Researchethics@vu.edu.au](mailto:Researchethics@vu.edu.au) or phone (03) 9919 4781 or 4461.

## **Appendix 11: Lecturer interview guiding questions**

1. When did you begin your involvement in the delivery of offshore program in Vietnam?
2. What are some aspects of being involved in an offshore program in Vietnam that you enjoy?
3. What types of professional development activities did you have before and during your transnational teaching in Vietnam?
4. In your opinions, what are the key characteristics desired of transnational lecturer? Why?
5. What intercultural complexities have you experienced during your transnational teaching in Vietnam?
6. What are some challenges/difficulties have you had during your involvement in a transnational program in Vietnam?
7. How have you overcome these challenges/difficulties?
8. What advice about this offshore program in Vietnam would you give to the Australian university and the Vietnamese institution offering it?