

**QUALITY ASSURANCE OF SOFT SKILLS COURSES:
A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF TRAINING ORGANISATIONS
IN VIETNAM AND AUSTRALIA**

Submitted by

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Student Declaration

I, Thi Thu Hien Le, declare that the Master of Education by Research thesis entitled **Quality assurance of soft skills courses: A comparative study of training organisations in Vietnam and Australia** is no more than 60,000 words in length including quotes and exclusive of tables, figures, appendices, bibliography, references and footnotes. 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: 18 November 2018



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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ADB	Asian Development Bank
AFTA	ASEAN Free Trade Area
ANTA	Australian National Training Authority
AQTF	Australian Quality Training Framework
ASEAN	Association of Southeast Asian Nations
ASQA	Australian Skills Quality Authority
AVETRA	Australian Vocational Education and Training Research Association
CEO	Chief Executive Officer
CICIC	Canadian Information Centre for International Credentials
FDI	Foreign direct investment
HE	Higher education
HRD	Human resource development
HRM	Human resource management
IIEP	International Institute for Educational Planning
MNC	Multinational company
MOET	Ministry of Education and Training
MOLISA	Ministry of Labour Invalids and Social Affairs
NCVER	National Centre for Vocational Education Research
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
PD	Professional development
PE	Private enterprise
QA	Quality Assurance
RTO	Registered training organisation
SME	Small and medium enterprise
SOE	State-owned enterprise
TEQSA	Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency
TVET	Technical vocational education and training
UNESCO	The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation
VET	Vocational education and training
WB	Work Bank
WTO	World Trade Organisation

ABSTRACT

Recent studies have shown that there is an increasing concern that a majority of university graduates in Vietnam are reported as not meeting the requirements of the employers in terms of technical and social or workplace soft skills. This means that enterprises have to invest considerable time and resources in training new employees in order to ensure that they will be capable of fulfilling their work. Meanwhile, there has been an increasing number of training organisations providing programs on generic skills (or soft skills) development to respond to the needs of people wanting to improve these skills for increased employability. However, the monitoring of quality among the many training providers in Vietnam is complex because it is not clear who is the regulating body of these companies. This raises the issue of whether the quality of these training centres/programs is, in fact, assured and, moreover, how they are assured.

To explore this issue, this study examines how quality is assured through case studies of some selected training providers in Hanoi, Vietnam and how these organisations address quality assurance and the requirements of the regulating entities. It also aims to investigate and compare the practices and models of quality assurance in some training providers in Melbourne, Australia that provide similar training courses. By doing so, the study aims to identify the various and advantageous features of quality assurance in training providers.

Case study methodology is employed as the principal research approach in this study. By using open-ended, face-to-face interviews with training managers, staff and trainers of selected training providers, the exploratory aspects of the research questions are addressed. Semi-structured interviews are employed in order to ensure the issues under investigation remain the focus of enquiry. This research is informed by the comparative education methodology in selecting organisations to study and the direction that the data is analysed and discussed. In presenting the data, each organisation is presented individually, and then cross-case comparison and discussion are drawn based on the analysis of variables.

The thesis argues that despite the high demand and importance of short soft skills courses, the quality of this kind training courses is not sufficiently assured, and these courses do not receive much attention from formal education systems in both Australia and Vietnam.

Nonetheless, training providers have contributed their own efforts to maintain and enhance the quality of their training courses. Both Australian and Vietnamese organisations have their own advantageous approaches which the counterparts can learn from.

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

This chapter provides an introduction of the research into the quality and quality assurance of short training courses by making a comparison between the case studies of training organisations in two countries Vietnam and Australia. It begins by describing the background and context from which the thesis idea was generated. It then moves to present the problem statement and significance of the study, the research questions, the objectives of the study and an outline of the research methodology. Finally, an overview of the thesis is provided to orientate the readers as to how the thesis flows. The focus of the study is to compare the similarities and differences in the quality assurance issues in providing short courses in management and generic/soft skills in some selected training organisations in two countries.

1.1 Background of the Study

Globalization, increased competition and the fast-changing workplace have made human resources one of the most important factors in the existence of modern businesses (Chatzimouratidis, Theotokas, & Lagoudis, 2012). One of the most important elements for human resource development is training, which is a process designed to improve the knowledge, skills and attitudes of trainees, thus enhancing the performance of people at an organisation (Ghufli, 2012; Sardar, 2010).

The concept of ‘human resource development’ (HRD) has been debated over the years within the fields of HRD academics. This debate relates to its multi-disciplinary and multidimensional nature (McGuire, 2011). However, there are core beliefs of the concept of HRD which emphasise that learning and development help individuals grow; and that the performance of organisations can be enhanced through training and development activities (Swanson & Holton, 2001 in McGuire, 2011). Such common principles can be found in some definitions such as the one by Gilley and Egglund (1989). They define HRD as “organised learning activities arranged within an organisation to improve performance and/or personal growth for the purpose of improving either the job, the individual and/or the organisation” (Gilley & Egglund, 1989, p.5 in Jorgensen & McGuire, 2011, p.7). Conceptually similar, Mercadal (2015) defined HRD as an organisational framework or set of the systems to support

employees to improve their knowledge and skills both personally and professionally (Mercadal, 2015). ‘Training’ is an important HRD activity which reinforces human resource management in an organisation (Bhattacharyya, 2015). Training and development are parts of a broader human resources system including selection, performance appraisal and promotion (Jørgensen & McGuire, 2011; Sachau, 2014). Buckley and Caple (2004) defined ‘training’ as a systematic process and effort to build knowledge, skills and improve attitudes through learning experience to perform effectively in a range of tasks. In the workplace, it supports an individual to gain the capacity to fully implement a task or job (Buckley & Caple, 2004). Training can narrow the gap between existing skills and the skills needed to rapidly deploy new technologies and maybe the main mitigation factor to combat the obsolescence of skills (Messinis & Olekalns, 2008).

Professional development (PD) is a related concept which is defined as a process that helps people to acquire new knowledge and skills to be more capable at work (Mosby, Inc. 2009 in Lauer et al., 2014). PD is considered as a very important factor for success in some industries such as business, education and human services. Although there are different definitions about PD and delivery systems, the key concept is the training of adults and it is being developed to build positive changes in attitudes, knowledge, skills or behaviours (Lauer, Christopher, Firpo-Triplett, & Buchting, 2014).

There has been an increase in the awareness of the role of training and it has been shown that training could improve organisational performance since trained employees contribute to many aspects of an organisation’s performance and efficiency with such indicators as sales, productivity, market share and reputation of organisations (Becker & Gerhart, 1996; Bhattacharyya, 2015; N. T. Nguyen, Truong, & Buyens, 2010; Sardar, 2010). However, there are also criticisms about training programs by researchers in the training field that they are time-consuming and economically inefficient. Training only proves to be fully effective if it is conducted properly and the quality of training is assured (N. T. Nguyen et al., 2010).

Regarding common types of training, according to Laker and Powell (2011), there are two types of training in HRD including hard skills and soft skills. Definitions of the terms hard skills and soft skills have been discussed extensively in training and development literature (Lake & Powell, 2011; Kantrowitz, 2005; Weber et al., 2009). From human resource development perspective, hard skills refer to “technical skills that involve working with

equipment, data, software, etc.,” and soft skills refer to “intrapersonal skills such as one's ability to manage oneself as well as interpersonal skills such as how one handles one's interactions with others” (Laker & Powell, 2011, p.112). Kantrowitz (2005) defined soft skills as an interpersonal skill of an individual and is required when technical skills and knowledge are used in an organisation. Similarly, Weber et al (2009) stated that hard skills are relating to technical issues and knowledge to do a job. Soft skills are related to communication and people skills needed to apply the technical and knowledge in the job (Weber et al., 2009). Soft skills are believed to be more transferable than hard skills. Training of hard/technical skills is different from soft skills and trainers of the technical skills are normally not familiar with the methods of soft skills training and vice versa. There is a growing acknowledgment that only technical skills are not enough for success at the workplace, even for technical positions. In order to be successful beyond the initial level, proficiency in soft skills is normally required (Laker & Powell, 2011). This is why there is a growth of soft skills training course demands and supplies in the training industry.

Another similar notion to soft skills is known as generic skills. However, the notion of generic skills is quite complicated and there hardly any common agreements of what these skills are and how to recognise them in reality. It is evidenced that practitioners do not use the same terms to mention generic skills. While there are still some doubts of the transferable nature of generic skills in the literature, many argue that their transferability is the value of generic skills (Clayton et al., 2003). The term referring to generic skills differs from country to country. The range of terms includes: ‘key competencies’, ‘soft skills’, or ‘employability skills’ (Australia); ‘key skills or ‘core skills (United Kingdom); ‘essential skills’ (New Zealand); and ‘necessary skills’, ‘employability skills’ or ‘workplace know-how’ (United States) (Clayton et al., 2003, p. 60). In general, these terms refer to the transferable skills needed in the workplace which support employee to perform their jobs well.

Even though there has been debate around what these terms mean and include, practitioners share the same understanding about the key concept. According to Clayton et al. (2003), although most practitioners may not use the same term when referring to generic skills, they understand the concept and are aware of the key competencies. Terms such as ‘work readiness’, ‘professional skills’, and ‘employability skills’ are often utilised to referred to skills regarding values, attitudes and other capabilities related to work. Despite various terminologies, viewpoints and the applying of the concept, research has proved that industry

highly values generic skills. They are considered to be very important to the effective performance at work as well as lifelong learning (Clayton et al., 2003, p.60).

The terms soft skills and generic skills are sometimes used interchangeably (Watty et al, 2012). The training courses that this study explores are soft skills or generic skills which are evidenced to be a major trend in training and development.

Recently in Vietnam, there has been an increase in the number of training organisations providing programs on generic skills (or soft skills) development to respond to the needs of people who wish to improve these skills for increased employability. These training providers also target the organisations seeking external training providers to train their employees (Tu, 2013). This type of training provider is becoming increasingly prevalent: by searching the term “training courses in leadership Vietnam”, Google gave 28.400.000 results in 0.51 seconds; the majority of those courses are provided by private training companies. Likewise, with the terms ‘training courses in soft skills Vietnam’, Google gave 465.000 results in 0.52 seconds (Google, 2016). This indicates the huge number of this kind of training program. However, it is not clear which entity is responsible for regulating the quality of content and delivery methods in training centres (Tu, 2013). This raises the issue of whether the quality of these training providers/programs is assured and how they are assured? To explore this issue, this study examines how quality is assured through a case study of two selected training providers in Hanoi, Vietnam and how these organisations address quality assurance and the requirements of the regulating entities.

In order to provide a comparison, the same Google search for Australia with the key word “training courses in soft skills Australia” has been done and given a very impressive result, with 121,000.000 results in 0.62 seconds (Google, 2019). Statistically, the number of training organisations in Australia is huge. Under the Australian Skills Quality Authority (ASQA)’s management, there are around 5000 registered training organisations (RTOs) (ASQA, 2019). Besides ASQA, there are a number of training providers registered with Victorian Registration and Qualifications Authority (VRQA) and Training and Accreditation Council Western Australia (TACWA) (VRQA, 2019). These facts reflect a well-developed training industry in Australia.

This research aims to investigate and compare the practices and models of quality assurance of the two training organisations in Vietnam and two registered training organisations in Melbourne, Australia that provide similar training courses. By doing so, the study aims to examine and compare the features of quality assurance in training providers in the two countries.

1.2 Problem Statement and Significance of the Research

Recent studies have shown that in Vietnam there are some big gaps between employer needs and graduate competencies. The gaps are often claimed due to students lacking soft skills (or generic skills (Clayton, Blom, Meyers, & Bateman, 2003; Tran, 2013). More specifically, Nguyen and Truong (2007) reported that most graduates have limited capability to fulfil professional work, meet requirements of discipline at work and teamwork (N. T. Nguyen & Truong, 2007).

To try to solve the problem, private and state-owned companies in Vietnam began to invest more in staff training (N. T. Nguyen & Truong, 2007). On the other hand, Individual graduates, being aware of the skills gap and the requirements of employers for such skills, have to acquire these skills in training centres (Tran, 2013).

However, the quality of training in many training providers and the monitoring of quality is complex in Vietnam because it is not clear who the regulating body of these courses or organisations, in fact, is (Tu, 2013). In Vietnam, technical and vocational education is complicated and managed by both the Ministry of Labour, Invalids and Social Affairs (MOLISA) and the Ministry of Education and Training (MOET) (Asian Development Bank, 2014). The technical and vocational programs are operated by vocational colleges, vocational secondary schools and vocational training centres. These entities are under the management of MOLISA. Besides, other vocational providers including technical (professional) secondary schools are under MOET management (ADB, 2014). The professional training programs/generic skills courses are operated by either private training organisations or training centres under corporations and are not mentioned in the regulating scopes of these two Ministries (MOET, 2015; MOLISA, 2012).

Even though there is evidence of the development of this sector, the literature on training and development in organisations in Vietnam is limited. Goodwin, O'Connor, and Quinn (2014) reported that while the open trade between Vietnam and Western countries has been

established since the Innovation policy (known as *Doi Moi*) since 1986, there has been little discourse about employment and training in Vietnam (Goodwin, O'Connor, & Quinn, 2014). There are some studies about training and human resource development, but these studies are limited within the scope of some specific companies and the issues are quite general (H. D. Le, 2013; Pham Anh, 2014). The literature on training issues in Vietnam in general and quality assurance issues in particular is not comprehensive.

In a different context, the Australian vocational education training sector, dominated by registered training organisations (RTOs) with an estimated number of 5000 RTOs (ASQA, 2019), is regulated by the Australian Skills Quality Authority (ASQA) with a very clear statement of quality: "Australia Skills Quality Authority promotes quality training so that students, employers, and industry have confidence in Australia's training sector" ("ASQA", 2016). However, in the regulating scope of ASQA, only vocational education and training (VET) programs and vocational accredited courses are mentioned. The quality of the VET sector and RTOs has drawn much attention from literature (Agbola & Lambert, 2010; AVETRA, 1999; Harris, 2015; Mitchell, Chappell, Bateman, Roy, & NCVER, 2006; NCVER, 2016). This study, however, explores quality assurance practices from a quite different angle; that is how the quality is assured in the training providers which provide short, non-accredited generic skills courses. It also examines what challenges these RTOs face, how they respond to factors which influence the Quality Assurance (QA) process and how they address the quality requirements of government.

This research adopts case study research design informed by comparative education methodology. Comparative education explores education in one country with data and information derived from reality and context in another country or countries (Bray, Adamson, & Mason, 2014a). In this case study research, the four cases are presented and analysed individually, and the cross-case similarities and differences are analysed and discussed. This study into the quality assurance of non-accredited training in vocational education and training will contribute to understanding and potentially improved practices in the sector. Through the findings of this study, training providers in Vietnam and Australia can be aware of quality assurance practice in the other country and may benefit from learning of the experiences across the border.

1.3 Research Question

This study compares the quality assurance processes employed by training providers for short generic skills/soft skills courses in Vietnam and Australia. The key research question is:

How is the quality of soft skills (generic skills) courses provided by training organisations in Vietnam assured in comparison with that in Australia and what can Vietnamese training providers learn from Australian RTOs in quality assurance of these courses and vice versa?

In order to answer the key question, the following sub-questions were developed:

- 1. What is perceived quality assurance in the researched organisations?*
- 2. How do training providers in Vietnam and Australia assure the quality of short professional development/generic skills courses?*
- 3. What practices of quality assurance are effective for these organisations?*

1.4 Aims of the Research

The research aimed to investigate the quality assurance (QA) practice in two training institutions in Hanoi, Vietnam which provide non-accredited soft skills courses in the business sector. It also aimed to explore how these organisations address the issues of quality requirements such as government policies and regulations. In addition, the research investigates the practices and models of quality assurance in two training providers in Melbourne, Australia, which provide similar courses and on a basis of comparison, to discover what would be effective approaches to be applied to the researched training providers. This study explores the place of non-accredited, non-formal courses in the education and training sector and how they address quality.

The notion of quality assurance has been discussed widely in the literature. For international agencies, the definitions of quality assurance in education are often referred to the process and approach to monitor, review and maintain the education programs and institutions to be compliant with established Standards from regulatory bodies (CICCI, 2010; OECD, 2010; Tuck, 2017; UNESCO, 2016). However, there are other different understandings relating the notion of quality such as meeting customer satisfaction, continuous improvement or improving accountability of stakeholders involved (Harvey & Green, 1993; Harvey & Newton, 2007).

Watty (2003) suggested that “quality is a concept and like other concepts, including conflict, dissatisfaction, guilt and forgiveness, it is not always observable” (Watty, 2003, p.215).

Lemaitre also stated that “definitions of quality are never neutral, or innocent” (Lemaitre, 2002, p.34). More detailed definitions and explanation of these terms will be presented in Chapter 3.

Literature Review.

The study examines the quality and quality assurance concepts perceived by the studied organisations and their associated dimensions. The key variables for assessment are the concepts of quality, the approaches to quality, and the methods of assuring quality.

By comparing the key variables, the research concludes with recommendations for training providers to learn from the different yet effective features and appropriate practices of quality assurance for generic (soft skills) courses that providers in other countries process. By the completion of the research, it is hoped that the findings can contribute to the development of human resources in Vietnam since training is an important human resource development activity which reinforces human resource management (HRM) in an organisation (Bhattacharyya, 2015); and vice versa, Australian organisations can also benefit from the findings of this study.

1.5 The Research Methodology

This research adopts a qualitative approach to explore the social context of the research problem. The case study methodology is employed as the principal research design of this study and is informed by comparative education methodology. The study uses face-to-face interviews as a data collection method and coding was employed to analyse the data.

The case study research design is informed by the comparative methodology in selecting organisations to study in two different countries and the direction of how the data is analysed and discussed. In presenting the data, each organisation is presented individually, and then Vietnamese cases and Australian cases are compared; discussion is drawn based on the analysis of variables. The differences and similarities in quality assurance concepts, approaches and methods in Vietnamese and Australian cases are identified and explained.

When exploring the issue of quality assurance practice and modelling in Vietnamese training organisations, the researcher aims to identify any gaps and/or shortcomings which may persist.

Benchmarking with a different system/model, such as the regulatory framework for vocational training in Australia, is employed to provide a comparison with the Vietnamese training organisations. Australian training organisations are chosen to benchmark with Vietnamese training organisation for that reason.

As the research design of the study is case study and due to the limited scope and timeline of a Master thesis, a small number of sample (4 organisations) have been selected, two from Vietnam and two from Australia. The two selected training providers in Vietnam include one non-government international training organisation and one private training company. The two selected providers in Australia include one private training organisation and one dual sector training organisation, which is a department under a dual university providing both higher education and vocation training. The Vietnamese organisations have been selected and invited to participate in the research through personal contacts and reference. The reason being Vietnamese people are reluctant to provide meaningful information to strangers whatever the purposes are. This is a cultural issue. Australian organisations have been selected by direct contact to appropriate organisations which provide similar courses to Vietnamese organisations.

In order for readers to have an overview of the thesis to follow, the next section will outline the flow of the thesis.

1.6 Organisation of the Thesis

This thesis consists of seven chapters and four appendices.

Chapter One – Introduction

This chapter provides readers with an overview of the thesis and how it flows. It also includes the rationale for the study, the significance of the research, the research questions and summary of methodology.

Chapter Two - Background and Context of the Study

This chapter provides readers with a broad overview of the context of the study by exploring the socioeconomic development of Vietnam, training and education system and issues in

training sectors of Vietnam. A similar background of the Australian education system is also provided in this chapter.

Chapter Three – Literature Review

This chapter reviews the literature that informs the study. It is divided into 5 parts. The first part reviews human resource development and training. The second part explores training and development issues in Vietnam. The third part focuses on literature in the training sector in Australia. The fourth part examines the quality assurance concepts the fifth part examines the Quality assurance concepts and issues in different educational contexts.

Chapter Four – Methodology

This chapter describes the research methodology, data collection technique, data reporting and analysis methods.

Chapter Five - Data Analysis and Findings

This chapter reports on the findings of data analyses for the study. It also responds to the research questions presented in Chapter 1.

Chapter Six – Discussion

This chapter discusses the results of the study. Findings from the study are compared to the literature and conclusions are drawn.

Chapter Seven – Conclusion

This final chapter summarises the thesis, makes recommendations, discusses the limitations and implications of the research, and suggests possibilities for further research on this issue.

1.6 Chapter Conclusion

This chapter has provided an introduction of the research with rationale, objectives of the research, research question, presentation of the methodology and structure of the thesis. The research question on the quality of providers of non-accredited generic soft skills courses has arisen from the recent trend of the professional development training in soft skills/generic skills in Vietnam; the demand for this kind of course seems prevalent as the labour force is reported as not meeting the industry requirements. The enormous results from Google search for this

type of course is one example of the development of soft skills training courses in Vietnam and Australia. The issue of quality assurance came up as it is proved that training is only fully effective if the quality of training is assured.

By comparing organisations in two countries, this study aims to discover what would be effective approaches to be applied to the researched training providers.

The next chapter will present the background and context of the study.

CHAPTER II

BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT OF THE STUDY

To begin the research, this chapter provides an overview of the countries and the social, economic and educational contexts where the study takes place. It describes Vietnam's economy, education system and human resource management and development practices in Vietnamese organisations and how all these aspects have affected training and development issues, especially generic/soft skills short training courses in the business and management field.

It also gives a brief overview of Australia's current education system including those of VET and the contexts that providers of generic/soft skills short training courses in Australia, fit in. The overview provides readers with an understanding of the background against which the training providers operate.

2.1 The Vietnamese Context

Vietnam is a Southeast Asian country which has borders with China to the north and Laos and Cambodia to the west. The country also has a 4,550-kilometer-long land border and faces the Eastern Sea (South China Sea) and Pacific Ocean (N. T. Nguyen & Truong, 2007). In 1986, the Vietnamese government determined to restructure the economy toward market-orientation to attract foreign investment, promote private companies and explore globalism opportunities (Lim, 2014; D. T. N. Nguyen, Teo, & Ho, 2017).

From 1994 to 2003, Viet Nam has undergone dramatic changes in the institutional, economic environment and the legislative system, which have affected the management of Vietnamese organizations. In this period, Vietnam joined some international association including the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), the ASEAN Free Trade Area (AFTA) and the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) (D. T. N. Nguyen et al., 2017).

Since 2003, Vietnam has entered into a low and medium income country range with remarkable improvements in the economy and the lives of Vietnamese people, which include the increase in international trade, foreign direct investment (FDI), exporting and better access to primary education and health services (Quang, Thang, & Rowley, 2008). Joining the WTO

in 2006 created opportunities for Vietnamese organisations to increase their competitiveness. Globalisation requires Vietnamese organisations to explore and apply the advanced management practices that already characterised multinational organisations to improve national, local and workplace-specific productivity and competitive advantage (Vo & Bartram, 2012, in Nguyen et al., 2017).

2.1.1 The Education System in Vietnam

The education system in Vietnam comprises all levels from pre-school education to doctorates. This range spans kindergarten, primary schools, secondary school, tertiary education, postgraduate and doctorate education (N. T. Nguyen & Truong, 2007; Xuan, 2016). Since 2016, the Vietnamese Government has approved the National Education Framework (*Khung co cau he thong giao duc quoc dan*), which consists of formal education (*giao duc chinh quy*) and continuing education (*giao duc thuong xuyen*). Importantly, these two streams are taught in parallel in all levels of education. It is the basis for the fundamental reform of education and training (Xuan, 2016) and in theory, this will lead to better capacity and capability in learners, that is, future workers. This new framework is in the process of planning for implementation.

Before this framework is introduced and approved, the education system was not much different in terms of the levels of education. There were 4 main levels in the education system including kindergarten, primary, secondary and tertiary education. However, the previous system is different to the extent that it consisted of the two main streams: academic and professional education. This system is still current. The system is illustrated in the figure below.

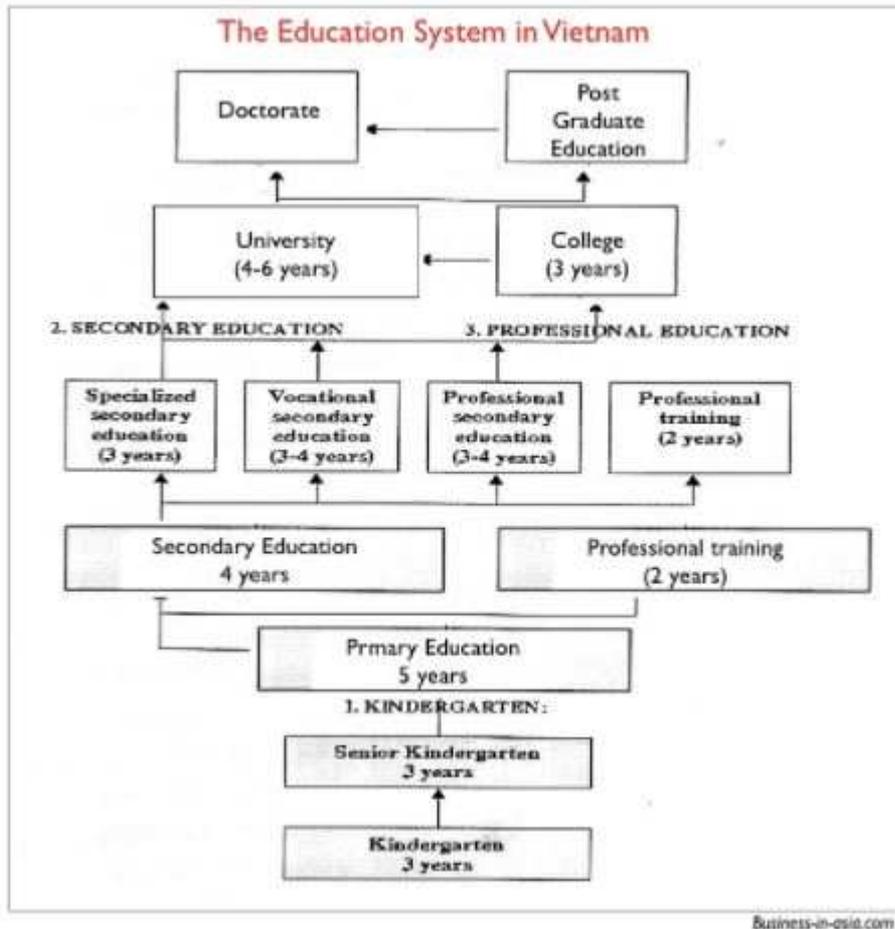


Figure 1. The Education System in Vietnam (From Business in Asia.com (Runckel, 2017)).

Previously, before the economic reform, known as *Doi Moi*, took place in 1986, the education system had been predominated by government schools. However, since the 1990s, there have been substantial changes in the education system, with many private schools competing in the market; different types of informal education emerging; open learning and distance education impacting the way people learn and the media used for pedagogy. Most notably, joint ventures with foreign institutions have taken hold within the education system owing to the perception that the names of overseas institutions bring prestige and quality (N. T. Nguyen & Truong, 2007; Rowley & Truong, 2009; Xuan, 2016).

Before the 1990s, the private schools were permitted with the condition that they were non-profit. Recently, the law has changed, and private schools can make profit. Private schools are mainly primary and secondary ones, however, there are a number of recognised private universities in tertiary education (EP-Nuffic, 2015).

The reason for this change is that the Vietnamese Government's preference is higher education. They tend to facilitate for more students to access higher education, through permitting the establishment of educational providers in under-developed areas and the formation of private for-profit colleges. For example, in 2006, Hoa Sen Private University was established, and in 2008 Van Xuan Private University was founded, and many more private universities have been opened recently. Higher education tends to be more international. Many higher education institutions in Vietnam collaborate with foreign partners in the forms of joint ventures and sandwich programs, which is a kind of exchange programs between two providers (EP-Nuffic, 2015).

In terms of education management mechanisms, since 1990, the Ministry of Education and Training (MOET) has been managing all types of education in Vietnam. Today, the Ministry of Education and Training tasks include approving new schools or mergers of existing educational institutions, developing new textbooks and submitting guidelines for students to the National Assembly, issuing certificates and qualifications. Although the majority of higher education providers are managed by the Ministry of Education and Training, some schools (especially professional schools) belong to other ministries (EP-Nuffic, 2015).

In technical vocational education and training or TVET (ADB, 2014; EP-Nuffic, 2015), the governance system is quite complicated. Multiple entities manage TVET providers. The authorities manage public training institutions include:

- (i) MOLISA (Ministry of Labour Invalids and Social Affairs);
- (ii) MOET (Ministry of Education and Training);
- (iii) Various line ministries, including Industry and Trade; Agriculture and Rural Development; Transport; Construction; Defence; Health; Culture, Sports and Tourism;
- (iv) Viet Nam Labour Federation;
- (v) Viet Nam Women's Union;
- (vi) Cooperatives Alliance;
- (vii) State-owned enterprises; and
- (viii) Provincial, city, and district governments (ADB, 2014, p.19).

The cross-management of the education system in general and TVET in particular is shown in the table below:

Level	MOET	MOLISA/GDVT
Bachelor's degree	Universities, polytechnics	
College level	Professional colleges	Vocational colleges
Secondary level	Technical (professional) secondary schools	Vocational secondary schools
Elementary level		Vocational training centers [*]

GDVT = General Directorate of Vocational Training; MOET = Ministry of Education and Training; MOLISA = Ministry of Labour-Invalids and Social Affairs.

* Proposed by the Ministry of Labour-Invalids and Social Affairs.

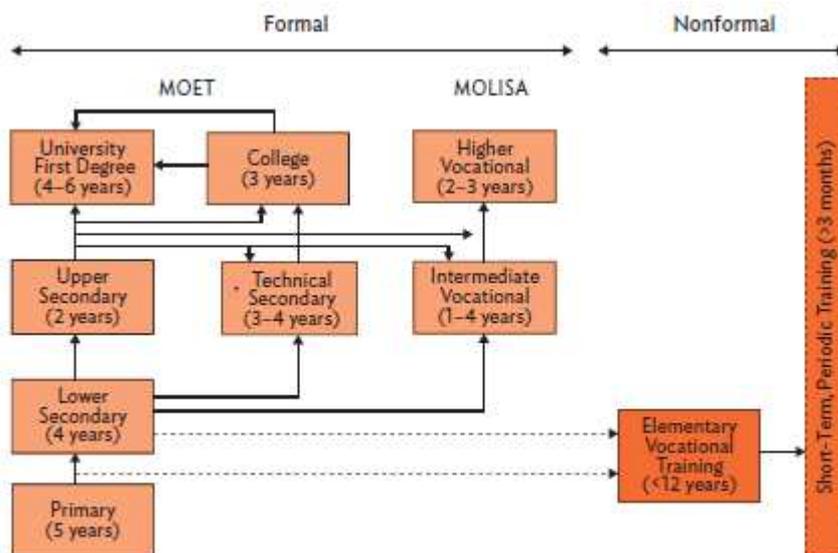
Source: Asian Development Bank.

Figure 2. Technical and Vocation Education and Training in Vietnam – An Assessment (ADB, 2014, p.20).

In general, the work involved in managing vocational education and training is shared between the two ministries: MOLISA is responsible for strategies, policies, the execution and management of TVET institutions at the elementary level; and MOET is responsible for the management of professional secondary schools and colleges. To be more specific, Vietnam has two separate systems for TVET: one is under MOLISA and the other is under MOET.

Institutions under MOLISA include vocational training centres providing elementary vocational training; vocational secondary schools providing vocational secondary education; and training colleges which offer higher vocational training. The training institutions under the MOET include providers of short vocational training courses, technical secondary schools, and technical colleges (ADB, 2014; Vi Hoang, 2016; Vu et al., 2015).

The shared job of managing TVET is shown in the figure below:



MOET = Ministry of Education and Training; MOLISA = Ministry of Labour-Invalids and Social Affairs.
 Source: Ministry of Labour-Invalids and Social Affairs (MOLISA).

Figure 3. The Shared Job of Managing TVET (ADB, 2014, p.21).

Private vocational providers have been licensed in Vietnam since 1998, which now accounts for a major portion of the vocational training providers in Vietnam. Private providers often deliver courses which are at low cost including ICT, business and language. The legal mechanism for private institutions is considerably supportive. Private providers may set their tuition fees, as long as they notify the relevant state agency and go through the registration system such as public providers. Private training institutions have to teach the same programs as public schools (ADB, 2014; EP-Nuffic, 2015).

2.1.2 Business Environment and Human Resource Development and Training in Vietnam

Although Vietnam's reform has had a major influence on economic development, the recent history of communism has thwarted the growth of private sector managers. Transitioning from a 'controlled economy to a market-oriented economy' (Kent, Baughn, & Dao, 2005, p.167), it is evidenced that a number of Vietnamese managers do not have the capability and support they need to compete in the global marketplace (Kent, Baughn, & Dao, 2005). Being a member of ASEAN, Vietnam has the similar problem of having a shortage of middle management and engineers and the case of Vietnam is even worse than other ASEAN members. For example, in

2007, more than 70% of Japanese businesses in Vietnam reported that they had experienced a shortage of middle-management staff (Lim, 2014).

While the Government of Vietnam has implemented policies and developed support schemes to improve the education and training system; it is still necessary to improve the quality of Vietnamese labour force of different levels. It is reported that up to 80% of graduates need some kinds of employment training in order to perform specific job tasks (Thang Ngoc, Quang, & Buyens, 2011). The reasons for that stem from both supply and demand. Vocational training is reported to be short of resources including facilities and practical programs. Students are in favour of tertiary education more than vocational training despite the unemployment rates are relatively high among higher education graduates (Thang Ngoc, Quang, & Buyens, 2011). Further, under the increasing demands of companies, not only the new graduates but also the existing employees need some kinds of training to be qualified to fulfil the jobs. This is because over time, organisations, technologies, equipment, knowledge and people change and therefore employees will be required to acquire new information and skills to respond to the changes in their workplace successfully. This is believed to create competitive advantages for business (Munoz & Munoz, 1999; Truitt, 2011).

The concepts and practices of modern human resource management, along with other management techniques, were only introduced into Vietnam when it started to move to a free market economy in the late 1990s (Rowley & Truong, 2009). To become more competitive, many private enterprises have actively started to apply basic human resource management techniques, such as training and development (T&D), effectively linking employee compensation to company performance (Rowley & Truong, 2009).

In addition to the above, foreign investment flow has provided a new trend within the business picture of Vietnam by introducing western management principles in the workplace for local businesses to benchmark and follow-up. As businesses in developing and transitional economies face the challenges in competing in the international market-oriented systems, they pay more attention to training and human resources development to keep pace and even survive (Kent et al., 2005). The demand for effective human resource management and human resource development has been apparently urgent since Vietnam joined the WTO in January 2007. It was expected an increase in FDI and international trade, which in turn led to much greater

growth in demand for labour, especially in the upper segment of the market (Rowley & Truong, 2009; Thang Ngoc et al., 2011).

On the other hand, the restructuring of state-owned enterprises (SOEs) and the development of newly established private enterprises (PEs) require a higher number of skilled employees and competent managers to run the business in a competitive environment of a globalised market.

Unfortunately, not much attention has been paid to preparing and developing employees for their actual job requirements as many domestic firms still consider training and development as a cost rather than an investment for survival and success (Rowley & Truong, 2009). The majority of local companies in Vietnam recognise the vital role of training and development for their successful performance but face with challenges in financing these activities and lack resources to implement them. Companies are reluctant to either finance training activities or subsidise the hours when employees are absent while they are taking training sessions.

Business owners often prioritise to buy advanced equipment and expand the plant rather than investing in training and human development (Thang Ngoc et al., 2011). It is a global trend that when facing financial hardship, organisations tend to decrease their training budgets as training is considered the unnecessary opulence (Grohmann & Kauffeld, 2013). Quang et al. (2008) reported that in a survey of 679 owners of small and medium enterprises (SMEs), most managers expressed a high demand for management and technical training. However, only about half of these companies had sent staff off-site for courses.

Training and development in Vietnam vary between various groups of organisations. The group of joint ventures and foreign-owned companies, multinational companies (MNCs) often offer more training to their staff. According to Thang and Quang (2007), foreign investors are aware of the shortage of skills of labour in the market and prioritise training. It is evidenced that MNCs spend more on training activities than small and medium enterprises and state own companies (Cox & Warner, 2013). Regarding training at management level, these companies often collaborate with education providers and training companies to deliver short courses for their managerial staff (D. T. N. Nguyen et al., 2017). In these companies, managers and technical/professional staff are offered more training opportunities from external providers rather than internal training. Internal training is often designed for administrative, sales, and production staff. Internal training can be the employees' choice to meet their personal development needs or mandatory requirements for their jobs. Many training programs are

organised in other countries or are conducted by foreign trainers to provide Vietnamese managers with international knowledge.

The second group is state-owned enterprise (SOEs) which are now paying more and more attention to training their employees. Zhu and Verstraeten (2013 in Nguyen et al. 2017) reported that, recently, under great pressure to change in order to compete with other types of enterprises, SOEs have started to provide training to around 52 percent of their employees (L. A. Nguyen, Dao, & Nguyen, 2017).

The third group is small or medium enterprises (SMEs) private companies that often lack internal resources to train their employees. Although SMEs identified a relation between higher expenditure on training and the higher efficiency, they put limited resources into training (Cox & Warner, 2013). Many of them are dependent on government programs for leadership training (D. T. N. Nguyen et al., 2017). With the predominance of small and medium enterprises in the private sector, the Vietnamese government has prioritised the development of leadership skills for business leaders in SMEs by organising and funding management and leadership training for these companies through some government training agencies (L. A. Nguyen et al., 2017). Although accounting for nearly 97% of the total number of companies in the country and accounting for 46% of national GDP, small and medium enterprises in Vietnam are small and fragile, especially compared to SOEs. Private enterprises, including SMEs, are not operating in a fair environment, because SOEs are still considered the main driver of national economic development and are enjoying incentives such as easy access to finance (Le, 2015). Small and medium enterprises also face a number of challenges including financial limitation, outdated technology, unsteady markets and fierce competition. During the 2009-2012 economic downturn in Vietnam, these challenges have been exacerbated with 7,000 small and medium enterprises were disbanded and 3,000 companies stopped operating (Le, 2015). This provides an explanation as to why SMEs put limited resources into training.

However, there is a trend now that SMEs appear to be starting to pay increasing attention to managerial and leadership training. Dang (2013) in Nguyen et al. (2017) reported that in a survey of 45 SMEs in Hanoi, 60 percent of them offered training programs for the middle and senior management. Training programs focus primarily on basic management skills including business planning and marketing management, meanwhile the personal skills are not paid attention to (L. A. Nguyen et al., 2017). It is evidenced in a research study that whilst most of

the SMEs offer some kinds of training for staff, most of the training is informal (Cox & Warner, 2013).

In recent years, some large size private companies such as Techcombank, Vinamilk, FPT, Vingroup have begun to invest more resources into training and development. These businesses are growing rapidly and are starting to make up the list of the 500 largest companies in Vietnam. Leadership development is considered important and being a priority for the overall growth and development of business in these companies. These companies even establish their own training institutions to develop talent pools (L. A. Nguyen et al., 2017). Vietnamese organisations are giving training and development more attention, but they continue to address the short-term needs rather than developing a long-term strategy. The HRM practices focus more on training functions rather than development functions (D. T. N. Nguyen et al., 2017).

In general, the majority of organisations in Vietnam do not adequately invest in in-house training but outsource to vocational schools, and tertiary providers to train their employees (L. A. Nguyen et al., 2017). Therefore employees tend to seek personal development in training centres, vocational schools and tertiary institutions (Cox & Warner, 2013).

This overview of the Vietnamese education and human resource development and training sector in which the providers of training courses operate provides an understanding of the context of the study. From this overview, it is obvious that the demand for short training courses in management and business fields, both in terms of professional development and personal development, is very high and the market for this kind of course is quite huge in Vietnam. Professional development means developing one's skills and enhancing the knowledge to perform well in the jobs. Personal development refers to developing the required skills for both workplace and personal life in general (Matthews, 2014). Providers who offer short training courses are prevalent.

The next sections will outline a different picture of the Australian system in which providers of short training courses are placed and managed.

2.2. The Australian Context

2.2.1 Education System

In order for readers to understand the context of the study, this section will describe the Australian education system that providers of generic/soft skills short training courses in Australia operate in. Of the two training providers participate in this training, one is a private training organisation in the VET sector, the other is a Department of a dual university, which offers both higher education and vocational training. Therefore, this section will focus on both higher education and the VET sector. These two sectors have the majority portion of people participating in education and training (NCVER, 2016). Not only describing the important characteristics of these two sectors, this part also identifies their regulating bodies.

2.2.2 Higher Education Sector

The Australian higher education sector contains 43 universities of which 37 are public universities, 4 private and 2 overseas institutions; 125 non-university providers, which provide higher education to 1.4 million students (Department of Education and Training, 2015; Robinson, 2018). The universities are divided into different categories according to their profiles and positions. Some of the categories are: (i) the Group of Eight which consists of the eight oldest universities in Australia, all being established before the 1950s; (ii) the Innovative Research Universities include the universities established between the 1960s and 1970s having a research focus; (iii) the Australian Technology Network includes the universities being established during the 1980s and originally formed as institutes of technology); (iv) the Regional Universities include the universities established between the 1950s and the 1990s and are based in regional areas; and a loose alignment of what had been identified as the New Generation Universities (the universities established in the 1990s from the amalgamations of colleges of advanced education) (Demediuk & van Gramberg, 2011; Gardner & Robinson, 2018; Universities Australia, 2018).

Some Australian institutions label themselves and are known as dual sector universities, including Charles Darwin University, Swinburne University of Technology, Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology, the University of Ballarat and Victoria University. The key points “defining dual sector universities are that they have substantial student load in both vocational

education and higher education, and they undertake substantial research and award research doctorates” (Demediuk & van Gramberg, 2011, p.100).

The higher education sector is regulated by Tertiary Education and Standards Agency (TESQA), which is an Australia’s independent quality assurance and regulatory authority for higher education (Department of Education and Training, 2015; TESQA, 2018).

2.2.3 Vocational Education Sector

According to ASQA 2018, the Vocational education and training (VET) is highly regarded and considered to play an important role in the Australian economy in terms of both national workforce development and export industry (ASQA, 2018). By delivering training packages developed by the industry, the VET sector ensures that Australia has a well-trained and skilful workforce. The VET sector provides students with qualifications and skills for all employment types. Australia's VET industry is well known for providing quality programs (ASQA, 2017).

VET providers are various in types which include government technical and further education (TAFE), private providers, community organisations and training centres. Besides, some higher education institutions and schools also offer VET programs. Vocational education and training are offered throughout Australia and the Government work together with training providers and industry to ensure consistent training programs are provided across Australia. (ASQA, 2018).

TAFEs are government-owned, funded and operated and they have semi-independent statutory authority (Coates et al., 2013). TAFEs are expected to provide a wide range of non-profit courses with high quality in order to meet the needs of industry and community.

In contrast, private training providers are owned and managed by individuals, private companies or not-for-profit organisations. They can also be the subsidiaries of dual sector education providers. They vary in size, which can be small providers having minimal staff and enrolling only several hundreds of students or large multinational companies (Coates et al., 2013). Private RTOs are a very diverse group including training providers under enterprises, community providers, industry institutes and other private and for-profit training companies. Private RTOs offer various VET accredited and non-accredited courses under Australia Qualifications Framework.

The VET sector is regulated by the Australian Skills Quality Authority (ASQA), which was established in July 2011 to “maintain the strength and reputation of the VET sector, both nationally and internationally” (ASQA, 2017, p.5). ASQA is the national regulator for:

- registered training organisations (RTOs), providers that deliver VET qualifications and courses
- providers that deliver VET courses to overseas students
- accredited VET courses
- certain providers that deliver English Language Intensive Courses to Overseas Students (ELICOS) (ASQA, 2017, p.5).

In addition to ASQA, some states including Victoria and Western Australia have their own regulators for RTOs that deliver courses under state registration only. These two state regulators, namely the Victorian Registration and Qualifications Authority (VRQA) and the Western Australia Training and Accreditation Council (TAC), are responsible for regulating providers operating in these two states and provide training to domestic students only (Korbel & Misko, 2016).

All regulatory authorities apply a strict risk-based audit approach that adheres to all RTOs in the initial registration, scope extension and continuing in order to ensure the quality and maintain the prestige of the Australian VET at international standards. During the past five years, registered VET provider number was stable, nonetheless, there has been an increased number of provider registration was cancelled by regulatory agencies thanks to the rigorous regulatory requirements (Korbel & Misko, 2016).

In terms of shared participation in the Australian education system, the number of VET providers is at least 35 times more than the number of higher education providers and the number of VET students is three times more than the number of higher education students in Australia. As of 2015, there were about 4.5 million students enrolled in VET compared to 1.4 million enrolled in HE (Fowler, 2017). In comparison with other countries, Australia also has more VET providers, based on the ratio of working-age-people number and VET providers (Korbel & Misko, 2016).

In regard to employability, on average, more than 80% of adults having tertiary education are employed, compared to more than 70% of people with upper and post-secondary education who are employed. On average, adults with tertiary education also have the higher income of 60%, compared to adults with a high school education level. Generally, employment rate and income are proportional to people's education and skill levels; but the labour market still considers diplomas or degrees as the main indicator of workers' skills (Noonan, 2016). Despite lower employability rates, the participation rates in VET are more than in tertiary education and there is a trend of switching the enrolment from higher education to VET while maintaining the same overall level of university participation (Noonan, 2016). NCVER's report on the total of VET students and courses shows a percentage of 46.1% of the Australian population in the age range of 15 – 19 years old participating in VET in 2017 (NCVER, 2018).

In terms of funding for the VET sector, before the 1980s, the main fund for VET was from Government. Since the late 1980s, the Australian VET sector has undergone major reform, with the significant renovation is the introduction of competitive training market, which drove VET towards competition, supply and demand (Anderson, 2005). The promotion of fee-for-service courses in the Australian VET sector was introduced in the early 1990s initiated by the policies which focused on user choice and directed funding to approved providers (Atkinson & Stanwick, 2016). The reduce of places for Government funding in the VET sector and high expense for operation have resulted in many institutions offering 'fee for service' or full fee-paying programs (Chapman et al., 2008). This enabled employers and individuals to have more choice of course and providers (Atkinson & Stanwick, 2016). Recently, full fee service and/or fee-paying in VET is associated with internationalism in VET as the Australian VET has been attracting international students to both TAFE and private training organisations (Pasura, 2017; Tran & Dempsey, 2017).

Providers in the VET sectors deliver both accredited and non-accredited courses (Harris, Simons, & McCarthy, 2006). Accredited VET courses are courses that are nationally recognised and regulated by ASQA and RTOs can issue VET qualifications and Statement of Attainment when students complete (ASQA, 2019). Non-accredited courses are a part of the VET sector but not linked to accreditation of regulators. Non-accredited courses are delivered mainly by private RTOs. It is reported that 25% of students in private RTO studied non-accredited courses (Harris et al., 2006). This indicates that non-accredited short courses fall under the umbrella of VET sector since they are provided by RTOs in VET Non-accredited

courses can be English language courses, literacy courses for adults (Dymock, 2007) or short courses that provide specific knowledge and skillset to help people develop workplace skills (Training Connections Australia, 2019; Training Services Australia, 2019).

This overview showed the background in which the training providers of non-accredited short courses operate. Non-accredited short courses are provided by RTOs together with VET accredited courses and are under the same umbrella with accredited courses in the VET sector.

The analysis of Vietnamese and Australia background showed the extensive existence of non-accredited short training courses in both Vietnam and Australia.

2.3. Chapter Conclusion

This chapter outlined the Vietnamese and Australian contexts where the providers of non-accredited soft skills courses operate in. The education systems are far different between Vietnam and Australia in terms of attention and investment in the VET sector from the Government. While the Vietnamese Government's priority is higher education, this sector does not seem to meet the labour force demands and requirements from the industry. Meanwhile, the Australian Government has the vision and mechanism to make the VET sector become an important driving force for the workforce development. Therefore, necessary regulatory frameworks have been implemented to ensure the proper operation within the sector. The background contexts must have some implications on the operations of the training providers. In order to see how the contexts have impacted on the quality assurance approach of the training providers, Chapter V Finding and data analysis will present the detailed analysis and explanation about this linkage.

The next chapter (Chapter III) will review the literature relating to the study.

CHAPTER III

LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter reviews the relevant literature relating to the research. As the focus of the research is to explore and compare the quality assurance of short training courses provided by training organisations in Vietnam and Australia, the chapter reviews the literature relating to objects of study and the background context of the research. As such, the literature in the following areas is reviewed: human resource development and training and the practices of training and development organisations in Vietnam and registered training organisation in Australia. The next section examines the quality assurance issues in different contexts including higher education and vocational education. The purpose of reviewing quality assurance concepts in two different contexts is to have a broader view of quality assurance in education. This chapter has five sections addressing the above areas accordingly.

3.1 Literature on Human Resource Development and Training

3.1.1 Concepts of Human Resource Development and Training in Organisations

The literature on human resource development (HRD) and training in organisations emphasises the important role of training to improve the organisations' and individuals' performance and it also reviews the different training approaches.

One of the main themes in the literature is the role of training in the improvement of organisations' performance and the awareness of organisations about that important role. The efforts to bring the objectives of the organisation and each employee closer together and enhance the skills of employees to produce a more valuable and skilled workforce has manifested in the 21st century, with the focus on skills development and employee training (Mercadal, 2015). Sachau (2014) reported that the twenty-first century has nurtured the knowledge-based economy, in which knowledge is considered a fuel for the economy as goods and services. Employees no longer do the same task every day; instead, they perform the work that requires learning new skills. In the knowledge economy, the training of employees requires a broad approach, from technical skills to cultural awareness to working with colleagues and partners in other countries (Sachau, 2014). In the knowledge-based economy, organisations are not reluctant to invest significantly in training with an expectation of a return

on that investment (Czeropski, 2012). Similarly, Chatzimouratidis et al. (2012) stated that globalisation and continuously rising competition and rapid change have made human resources crucial for the survival of enterprises. Contemporary CEOs and managers have realised that 'lifelong learning' should be a mandatory policy (Chatzimouratidis et al., 2012).

Lardinois (2011) suggested that lifelong learning is important for workers irrespective of age and qualification. In order to maintain the lifelong learning of staff, both employers and workers need to highly value skills and are mutually responsible for continued learning at the workplace (Lardinois, 2011). Training and development programs in organizations bring many benefits for each of their employees, departments and the whole organizations (Carnevale & et al., 1990; McGuire 2011; N. T. Nguyen et al., 2010). Training and development develop the knowledge, skills, abilities and behaviours of employees (Carnevale & et al., 1990; N. T. Nguyen et al., 2010) and increase motivation, job satisfaction and morale among employees (Chatzimouratidis et al., 2012; Truitt, 2011). Training activities have been proven to create a positive influence on the performance of individuals and teams in business (Lauer et al., 2014). Through training, employees can acquire new technologies and adapt to fast-changing work environments. Companies also benefit from increased innovation (Sung & Choi, 2014), increased productivity, improved products and services quality, resulting in higher financial gains and reduced employee turnover (Chatzimouratidis et al., 2012). Training can be a manager's most effective strategic tool for enabling employees to take charge of change (Munoz & Munoz, 1999).

Besides emphasizing the role of training and life-long learning, the literature in the field also reported on the trend of training sources that organisations are using. Companies can provide training for their own staff or outsource from external providers. Employers and training institutions are partners in the process of providing training, either for current or new employees. The employers that use training services offered by outside providers are small and do not have a training department. The training industry responds to the needs of employers and provides training tailored to specific employers' needs. In America, large companies outsource nearly 40 per-cent of formal training to external training providers, medium companies use more training services from outside providers than large companies, and small employers tend to outsource all the formal training to external providers (Carnevale & et al., 1990). The training industry has multi-faces. Because its main feature is to provide training to meet the needs of employers, the training sector includes all organizations, businesses and

individuals that perform that role, which can be consultants, educational institutions, community organizations, companies selling training courses, professional associations, trade union and government organisations (Carnevale & et al., 1990). This thesis will examine the training providers which are referred to as external providers in Carnevale et al. (1990), that is the organisations which provide training courses to companies in demand.

The literature about training and development in organisations is linked to the business field rather than education. There is not much literature discussing the pedagogy and the role of short training courses in the formal education system.

3.1.2 Forms and Types of Training

This section will review forms and types of training in order to provide readers with an understanding of the broader picture of this field and the position of the training courses that this study is exploring. Sachau (2014) identifies some common forms of training programs for employees. Some programs which are often referred to as ‘training program’, are designed for new employees who need new knowledge and skills to perform their new jobs or positions. Other programs which are often referred to as ‘development programs’ are designed to for employees to improve the performance in their current jobs. Amongst the common forms of training, on-the-job training, apprenticeship, simulation training and programmed instruction are the most widely used and all forms have their own advantages depending on the purpose and conditions of organisations (Sachau, 2014).

Based on how training is organised, Carnevale et al (1990) categorised the following forms of employer-provided training. It can be formally face-to-face delivered in a classroom environment, designed and provided by internal staff or external training providers or consultants. It can be delivered through online or blended mode with interactive video or other computerized delivery systems. It can also be on-the-job training and offered through apprenticeship programs which are unstructured and informal where more senior staff show others the best way to perform a certain task (Carnevale et al., 1990). Each form of training has its own advantages and effectiveness. This study will focus on classroom-based delivery courses, not because this is the most effective way of training but because this is the dominant type of training that the case studies are delivering.

One of the trends in the training field now is companies prefer short term training programs. According to Sprague (2015), due to changes in the nature of labour, the nature of training changed accordingly. Lengthy apprenticeships were not necessary when limited skills are required to work on a factory assembly line (Sprague, 2015). In fact, short-term training programs with effective content and methods can result in positive outcomes for participants (Lauer et al., 2014). Both employees and managers required a certain level of training, both in manufacturing skills and in management and soft skills. There is a trend to train future leaders of modern organisations. The training services can be provided by internal corporate divisions or external training and consultant firms or to provide workers with necessary knowledge and skills to perform their tasks (Sprague, 2015; Sung & Choi, 2014). An example of the above trend is the United States: an estimated two thousand corporate training programs are currently provided within larger companies in the US, which is nearly equal to the number of the nation's colleges and universities (Sprague, 2015).

Regarding training and development methods and techniques, Lauer et al. (2014) examined some types of face-to-face group training that were named by various terminologies, such as 'workshop', 'in-service' and 'training session'. According to Lauer et al., many factors have implications for training design and outcomes, which can include the appropriateness of time, learning objectives and alliance with the training needs of participants, practical activities for participants to practise, group discussions, homework and tasks and participant-centered approach (Lauer et al., 2014).

Chatzimouratidis et al. (2012) examined the most important techniques and methods in human resource training and development. These are 'on-the-job training', 'mentorship', 'apprenticeship', 'vestibule training/simulators', 'web-based learning', 'instructor-led classroom training', 'programmed self-instruction', 'case studies/role-playing' and 'systematic job rotations and transfers' (Chatzimouratidis et al., 2012, p.663). Among these methods and techniques, 'vestibule training/simulators' and 'mentorship' have the best results, and they should be the first choices when the employees need motivation and when time constraints are an issue. 'Web-based learning' and 'On-the-job training' are ideal when the cost of training should be reduced. 'On-the-job training' is also appropriate "for improving the motivation of employees" as well as being time-efficient (Chatzimouratidis et al., 2010, p.689). The selection of appropriate training methods should depend on the priority of the decision-makers and available resources (Chatzimouratidis et al., 2012). There is a growing trend of utilising online

approaches in training (Czeropski, 2012). Rodriguez and Armellini (2014) reported that using online courses for corporate training has been a priority for corporate organisations and the research has shown that “meaningful learning can be achieved as long as courses are designed with at least a high level of one of three types interactions: learner-content, learner-teacher or learner-learner” (Rodriguez & Armellini, 2014, p.51). Hilliard (2015) also wrote that blended training is expanding globally. Blended training or learning is the combination of face to face and online and mobile teaching and learning methods (Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, 2012). More and more training and development organisations are using blended learning as a choice of training and educational tool for delivering managerial training to solve the problems of funding and time constraints. Blended learning is becoming a growing trend in training organisations (Hilliard, 2015) and new varieties, such as flipped learning, which is a type of blended learning but instruction and homework components are reversed (Flipped Learning Network, 2014); continue to appear. However, face to face short training courses delivered in the classroom is still a common form of training for organisations, especially in management and soft skills training (Bhattacharyya, 2015; Chatzimouratidis et al., 2012; Lauer et al., 2014).

The focus of this thesis will be classroom-based training courses that external training providers deliver as this is a common trend.

3.1.3 Types of Training: Hard Skills, Soft Skills, Generic Skills

As the main focus of this thesis is the quality assurance of soft/generic skills courses offered by training providers, this part will review the relevant literature to give the readers an overview of hard skills, soft skills and generic skills.

As mentioned in Chapter 1, two types of training frequently discussed in HRD literature, are hard skills and soft skills training (Laker & Powell, 2011). Soft-skills training has received more attention in recent times than hard-skills training in the HRD literature. There is a debate around the categories of soft skills, however, there are some common opinions on the categories of soft skills. Weber et al. (2009) identified 4 categories of soft skills including i) leadership/people/relationship skills which associated with negotiating with others, team working; ii) communication skills both verbal and non-verbal; iii) management/organisation skills; and iv) cognitive skills and knowledge which relating to creative thinking, decision

making and problem solving (Weber et al., 2009). Likewise, James and James (2004) explained that soft skills include some career attributes that individuals may have such as team skills, communication skills, leadership skills, customer service skills, and problem-solving skills. Lake and Powell (2011) also agreed that the soft skills areas include leadership, interpersonal skills, communication and conflict management, self-management, emotional intelligence, etc., (Laker & Powell, 2011).

This study will examine the providers that deliver the short training courses which have been categorised as soft skills such as leadership skills, organisation skills, interpersonal and communication skills, conflict management, customer service, problem-solving and decision-making skills. The terms soft skills and generic skills are used interchangeably in this study.

3.2 Training and Development in Vietnam

In order to understand the training and development issues in Vietnam, it is necessary to have an overview of the education system in Vietnam and how the vocational sector and corporate training and development fit in the system.

In Vietnam, the concept that the university's mission is preparing graduates for the workplace has been long established (Tran, 2013; Trung & Swierczek, 2009). Research into training and development in Vietnam focuses predominantly on the link between the shortage of a skilled workforce and the inappropriateness of the university curriculum. There are some big gaps between the employer needs and graduate competencies and the gaps are often claimed as due to students' lack of soft skills (or so-called generic or employability skills) (Tran, 2013; Trung & Swierczek, 2009).

Even though the Vietnamese Government considered vocational training important in the education system, only 20% of people at a working age have attended in vocational training and up to 80% of graduates need to be retrained in order to meet work requirements. The low percentage of people attending VET is attributed to its lack of linkage to the needs of industry and the preference of Vietnamese people for tertiary education rather than vocational education (N. T. Nguyen & Truong, 2007). Generally, there is a persistent gap between the outcomes of the education and training system and the demands of corporations (Cox & Warner, 2013; N. T. Nguyen & Truong, 2007; Trung & Swierczek, 2009).

Types of training which are demanded by corporates, such as soft skills (or generic skills), are operated by either private training organisations or training centres under corporations (Tu, 2013, Nguyen & Truong, 2007). Corporates tend to provide training for both current and new employees in technical issues, problem-solving skills, working behaviour motivation and some other soft skills (N. T. Nguyen & Truong, 2007; Trung & Swierczek, 2009). As described in the Chapter 2-Background, besides some leading businesses having their own training departments or training centres, a large proportion of corporates outsource to external training providers. The external training providers are selling their training courses to these organisations as fee-for-service courses. The focus of this study is these external training organisations.

Regarding the financial issues of training programs in organisations, most of the training programs are self-funded by corporates, Government funding is very limited. It is reported that Government funded a few training programs to develop HR skills in small and medium enterprises with short training programs from 5 days to two weeks in legislation, company strategies, HRM, marketing, and finance (N. T. Nguyen & Truong, 2007; Trung & Swierczek, 2009). Almost all the courses provided by training providers are fee-for-services courses, which means the training providers sell their courses as services and products. The organisations that this study is going to examine are this type of providers.

Even though there is evidence of the development of this sector, the literature on training and development in organisations in Vietnam is limited. Goodwin, O'Connor, and Quinn (2014) reported that there has been little discourse about employment and training in Vietnam (Goodwin et al., 2014) except for some multinational companies.

Cox and Warner (2013) explored how multinational companies in Vietnam adapt their training and development policies of the mother companies to the host countries. In the investigated multinational companies in Vietnam, training and development activities are conducted by experts from home countries or other international experts with the focus on both production and management levels (Cox & Warner, 2013).

In general, the training and development issues in Vietnam, especially the quality assurance of training, are not well addressed by literature.

3.3 Training Sector in Australia

The literature relating to training in Australia discusses extensively about private Registered Training Organisations (RTOs) and vocational education and training (VET). RTOs are being concerned with the issues such as the impact of policy on VET structural reforms, the quality of training and assessment and qualifications of VET professionals.

Having a long history, VET in Australia has gone through many significant some milestones. Agbola and Lambert (2010) reported a historical overview of VET in Australia with some milestones such as the Kangan Report 1974, the Kirby Report 1985, Australia Reconstructed Report of 1987, The Deveson Report of 1990 and The Finn Review of 1991. According to Agbola and Lambert (2010), the previous 15 years before 2010 had been a turbulent period in the VET sector with many structural innovations led by political policies. One of the most significant reforms is the introduction of a competitive model where the public and private training providers compete for funding. In order to maintain the quality of training in such a competitive environment, many managing organisations have been established such as the Australian Quality Training Framework (AQTF), the Australian National Training Authority (ANTA) and the Australian Skills Quality Authority (ASQA) (Agbola & Lambert, 2010; Harris, 2015).

Also concerning the quality of VET, Harris (2015) examined the quality of the Australian VET sector in terms of its vision, goal, scope, driving force and quality of teaching and learning and concluded that quality of VET system relies heavily on the trainers. VET practitioners have debated whether they are well enough equipped to interpret the standards and apply them to their business of lecturing. While they are the most important determiners of quality in VET, they are the least cared for (Harris, 2015). Lack of support for lecturers and teachers in implementing the demands of policy remains, perhaps, the greatest challenge to QA in the sector today.

High quality is a concern and an urgency for VET practitioners. The environment for vocational education and training has changed and requires VET practitioners to develop new skills to meet the needs of industry and individuals. The Governments of Australia, England and Scotland are all of the same mind that a high-quality VET sector is demanded to respond to the needs of new skills, new market environments, new contexts and the ever-increasing

expectations of clients (Mitchell et al., 2006). According to Williams (2010), a lot of literature has been addressing the issues of what appropriate qualifications for VET trainers should be. The issues have been debated among education professionals and policymakers. In general, VET trainers need both an educational background and current vocational skills to become effective trainers (Williams, 2010). Redmond (2017) also mentions that VET practitioners are the educators who have qualifications and high levels of expertise in a vocational or professional field and have at least the entry-level qualification the Certificate IV Training and Assessment, which means they need competence in both vocational and teaching areas (Redmond, 2017). A challenge for VET practitioners is that they have to ensure the currency of knowledge and skills in both vocational industry and educational field (Tyler & Dymock, 2017).

Australia may have a very strong VET system yet recently there has been a debate in Australia focusing on the skill shortages that attribute to fast changes in the needs for new skills (Messinis & Olekalns, 2008). It is reported that new Australian graduates are lack of some core skills. Similarly, in the UK, data also suggested that the so-called 'overeducated' often have lower numeracy skills than the ones who have just sufficient skills to meet job requirements (Messinis & Olekalns, 2008). The reason could be highly educated workers, even having 'overeducation', still lack job-specific skills, while 'undereducated' staff need to acquire new knowledge and skills on the job to recompense for the shortage of official education. These insights show that the complementarity between formal education and training at the workplace is very important (Messinis & Olekalns, 2008). These also show the demand for employer-training of work-related skills.

Currently, the place of generic skills within vocational education and training (VET) is widely discussed in Australia and overseas. Various concepts of generic skills such as core skills, key skills, essential skills, necessary skills and employability skills are broadly discussed, however the concepts have not been well understood (Clayton et al., 2003). According to Clayton et al. (2003), as modern technologies and the transition to knowledge-based and globalisation have become prevailed, it has been widely acknowledged that the modern workplace is distinguished by continuous change. One of the implications of this change is that continuous learning has been recognised as a method to preserve employability. In order to enhance dimensions such as learning and innovation, it is believed that more attention should be paid on

generic skills within the training process (Clayton et al., 2003). This is also in line with the argument of this thesis.

3.4 Quality Assurance Concepts and Approaches

There have been extensive debates on quality assurance issues in the literature. There is not a unique definition and understanding of quality and quality assurance, and the different understandings and expectation of quality have resulted in tension between the stakeholders involved in the quality process such as the tension between academics and management; and between accountability and continuous management. This will be discussed further in the section of quality assurance in different contexts.

According to the International Institute for Educational Planning-IIEP/UNESCO (2011), different quality assurance agencies have different definitions of quality and varying methodologies to assess it. The concept of ‘quality’ historically originated from the manufacturing sector with the focus on ‘zero defects’ of product, then moved to service business sector with a shift from ‘zero defect’ product to ‘zero defections’ of customer or ‘customer satisfaction’. In education, different stakeholders have different views of quality; this concept will have different meanings to different people. Any definition of ‘quality’ must reference the context in which it is used (IIEP, 2011).

Definitions of ‘quality assurance’ in education by international agencies are often referred to as standards. As defined by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation-UNESCO (2016), quality assurance is “the systematic review of educational programmes to ensure that acceptable standards of education, scholarship and infrastructure are being maintained” (“UNESCO”, 2016). Tuck (2007) defined quality assurance as “processes and procedures for ensuring that qualifications, assessment and programme delivery meet certain standards” (Tuck, 2017, p.12).

The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) in 2010’s *Glossary of Key Terms in Evaluation and Results Based Management*, defines ‘quality assurance’ as follows: “Quality assurance encompasses any activity that is concerned with assessing and improving the merit or the worth of an intervention in the field of VET or its compliance with given standards” (OECD, 2010, p.31). According to the Canadian Information Centre for International Credentials (CICIC) website, paragraph 3:

quality assurance relates to the achievement of educational program standards established by institutions, professional organisations, government, and/or standard-setting bodies established by the government. Quality assurance mechanisms are the processes by which the achievement of these standards is measured ("CICIC", 2016).

It can be seen from the above definitions of ‘quality assurance’ that, theoretically, quality assurance is associated with monitoring and maintenance of programs and institutions to achieve established standards. This is also, somewhat dangerously and possibly encouraged by vested interests in governments, a populist notion of ‘quality’.

However, ‘quality’ is not a simple, clear-cut concept which is agreed by all the stakeholders. According to Prisacariu and Shah (2016), ‘quality is a slippery and vague concept’, thus, it is ‘difficult to find agreement on a single definition’ (p.154). Since it is difficult to define the concept, it is impossible to achieve a global acceptance on the concept of quality. Instead, the definition is the negotiation and agreement between stakeholders involved (Prisacariu & Shah, 2016). Hence, rather than trying to look for a universal definition of the concept, different interpretations of quality have been utilised depending on the contexts (Prisacariu & Shah, 2016).

Vroeijenstijn (1992, in Watty, 2003) stated that different people may have an interest in quality, but not everyone shares the common understanding about it. Likewise, Harvey and Green (1993) emphasised on the implication of different perspectives on quality of different stakeholders in quality assessments, and the importance of the understanding about different concepts to explain for their opinions in the quality issue (Harvey & Green, 1993), Harvey and Green (1993) suggested that “this is not a different perspective on the same things but different perspectives on different things with the same label” (Harvey & Green, 1993, p.10). Harvey and Green identified five categories of concepts of quality:

- Exception: distinctive, embodied in excellence, passing a minimum set of standards.
- Perfection: zero defects, getting things right the first time (focus on process as opposed to inputs and outputs).
- Fitness for purpose: relates quality to a purpose, defined by the provider.

- Value for money: a focus on efficiency and effectiveness, measuring outputs against inputs (Harvey & Green, 1993, p.10).

“Value for money is one definition of quality that judges the quality of provision, processes or outcomes against the monetary cost of making the provision, undertaking the process or achieving the outcomes” (“Quality Research International”, 2018).

Definitions of quality are varied; quality assurance approaches are also diverse. According to Harvey and Newton (2007), in general, “there are four broad approaches to quality assurance: accreditation, audit, assessment and external examination (or external review of service)” (Harvey & Newton, 2007, p.227). Kis (2005) also summarised three approaches on quality assurance: accreditation, audit, assessment (Kis, 2005). Harvey and Green (1993) and Green (1994) in IIEP (2011) have also listed five approaches to quality: “quality as *exceptionality*, quality as *conformance to standards*, quality as *fitness for purpose*, quality as *effectiveness in achieving institutional goals* and quality as *meeting customers’ stated or implied needs*” (IIEP, 2011, p.10). Different systems focus on different objects, ranging from institution, subject and program, to the provision of service, learner or learning outcomes.

The key points of quality assessment can also be varied from regulation and financial control issues to the students' experience, curriculum development, learning content and teacher competence. The methods also vary yet the process is common, starting with self-assessment and shadowed by peer review (Harvey & Newton, 2007).

Below is the summary of different approaches to quality assurance by Harvey and Newton (2007):

Approach	Accreditation	Audit	Assessment	External examination
Object	Provider	Program	Learner	Output

Focus	Governance & regulation	Curriculum design	Learning experience	Medium of delivery	Student support
	Content of program	Financial viability	Qualification	Admin support	Organisational Process
Rationale	Accountability		Control	Compliance	Improvement
	Self-assessment	PIs	Peer visit	Inspection	
Methods	Document analysis	Stakeholder surveys	Direct intervention	Proxy delegate	

Figure 4. Approaches to Quality Assurance (Adapted from Harvey & Newton, 2007, p.227)

This table shows different approaches to quality assurance for different objects; different rationales linked to corresponding methods; for example, the accreditation approach targets providers and focuses on governance and regulation. With accountability as the reason behind quality assurance, the methods of self-assessment are mainly based on document analysis (Harvey & Newton, 2007). Since 1990, ‘accountability’ has been a broadly used term for all public services including education and it is identified as a main objective of external quality approaches. ‘Accountability’ is an inclusive term “for various compliance, control and value-for-money expectations” (Harvey & Newton, 2007, p.228). From a top-down perspective alone, it serves the supposed purpose but does not necessarily mean not a quality destination. As argued by Harvey and Newton (2007), there is an illusory tension between ‘accountability’ and ‘improvement’ as accountability systems are not likely to result in continuous improvement because the continuous improvement necessarily comes from a culture of change and ownership (Harvey & Newton, 2007).

Quality assurance can be conducted by internal resources in the organisation (students, staff, and employers) or external bodies (stakeholders, funding organisations, and external QA agencies) or governments, depending on the approaches to quality assurance (IIEP, 2011).

As Watty suggested:

quality is a concept and like other concepts, including conflict, dissatisfaction, guilt and forgiveness, it is not always observable' and 'deconstructing the abstract concept of quality helps to reveal its dimensions and we may better understand how different stakeholders think about quality (Watty, 2003, p.215).

Therefore, it is critical for this study to deconstruct the concepts of 'quality' perceived by different stakeholders in different contexts in order to identify the associated dimensions of 'quality' and 'quality assurance'. For this study, the concepts of 'quality' are not established standards or government requirements, and 'quality' is what the researched organisations believe it is.

Because of its complexity and vagueness, it is necessary to review the concept of 'quality assurance' in education and how it is formulated in different contexts in order to better understand it. The following section will examine the concept of 'quality assurance' in the context of higher education and vocational education and training (VET).

3.5 Quality Assurance in Different Educational Contexts

3.5.1 Quality Assurance in Higher Education

Discussing the development of quality assurance in higher education, Yin Cheong Cheng (2003) introduced the concept of 'triplization'. According to Cheng, since the beginning of the 21st century, numerous educational reforms have been generated in the Asia-Pacific region and extended to other regions as the result of such factors as economic globalisation, advancements in information technology, global market competition and socio-political demands. The reforms have led to different strategies in the employment of quality assurance in education.

The first wave of reforms is *internal quality assurance* within schools, aiming at improving schools' performance in terms of teaching and learning methods and processes. These changes are mostly top-down government policies. The second wave of reforms is *interface quality* which focuses on the effectiveness of schools in response to stakeholders' requirements, market competition with a goal of ensuring accountability, apparently to the public. Some typical characteristics of interface quality assurance are monitoring and self-evaluation at the institution level, the participation of parents and community in school governance, stakeholders' satisfaction surveys and performance-based funding. The third wave is *future quality assurance*, which purports to review education towards future challenges to ensure the compatibility of education to the future. Within this paradigm, students and learning are expected to be individualised, localised and globalised, which are collectivised as 'triplization' (Cheng, 2003, p.23). Cheng believed that "if an education institution can ensure internal quality, interface quality, and future quality, they are in control of total quality assurance in education" (Cheng, 2003, p.23).

According to Lemaitre (2002), quality assurance is associated with three main concepts: *accountability, compliance and improvement*. Accountability means institutions should be accountable for where and how they spend funded money. Evaluation demands compliance with the requirements of policymakers, external stakeholders and sponsors. Improvement means acquiring inputs, improving the process and raising the outcomes to the expected standards (Lemaitre, 2002). Accountability has been widely used for all public services including education and it is seen as the main purpose of any external quality process. Accountability is also linked with the fitness-for-purpose definition of quality (Harvey & Newton, 2007; Maria João Rosa, 2014).

Discussing the main outcomes and impacts of quality assurance in education, Stensaker (2008) pointed out that there are four main impacts of quality assurance: *power, professionalization, public relation* and *permeability*. Quality assurance is closely related to *power* as "quality processes support the development of a stronger institutional leadership" (Askling, 1997 in Stensaker, 2008, p.5). The same argument has also been claimed by Lemaitre (2002) that quality assurance is "about balances of power, within higher education and between higher education and other social actors" (Lemaitre, 2002, p.34). The impact of quality assurance also increases the *professionalisation* of the work related to quality. In a competitive environment,

quality assurance can also have an influence on *public relations*, as shown in the fact that many institutions use measures of QA as a tool for marketing (Stensaker, 2008).

Stensaker (2008) stated that that quality assurance in education initially emphasised the link between quality assurance processes and the regulation of higher education. More recently the emphasis shifted to methodological factors before turned to human factors and accountability, and this remains prevalent in current literature. Amaral (2014) suggested that initially ‘quality’ used to be a major concern of the academics exclusively, then gradually became a focus of public attention in the 1980s and 1990s, with *quality improvement* and accountability being the key focuses of quality evaluation (Amaral, 2014).

As mentioned from the beginning of this section, the different expectations of quality have led to the tension in different stakeholders. Harvey and Newton (2007), revealed that there are uncertain tensions between accountability and continuous improvement. They write:

accountability is about value for money and demonstrating fitness for purpose, while continuous improvement in teaching and learning is about improvement of the student experience, and empowering students as lifelong learners (Harvey & Newton, p.232).

In fact, accountability systems are unlikely to result in continuous quality improvement since improvement results from a culture of change and insider ownership while compliance procedures do not nurture this (Harvey & Newton, 2007). This is a function of power and true leadership, not mere management, a structure that often excludes academics. Amaral (2014) also stated that whenever academics have a stronger voice, the balance will be in the side of improvement, and vice versa, the stronger role of government will lead to stronger attention to accountability (Amaral, 2014). Moreover, accountability tends to demotivate academic staff and place an added burden on the staff involving innovation and quality initiatives. Accountability requires them to respond to external scrutiny while not having the trust and their values not being acknowledged by senior managers and external bodies (Harvey & Newton, 2007). QA is more and more interspersed with other processes in organisations; however, its outcomes do not reveal the value of external quality assurance towards teaching and learning (Stensaker, 2008).

The different understandings and perspectives of the term 'quality' have also resulted in the tension between universities' managers, quality management bodies and academics. Vidovich and Currie (1998, p.196) in Anderson (2006) argued that the notion of 'quality' in higher education is 'quality as accountability to stakeholders' and that this has replaced 'quality as excellence' as traditionally presented in universities (Anderson, 2006, p.166). In academic research, staff perceptions of quality and the processes around it in the Australian universities, Anderson (2006) reported the issues of academics' resistance to the 'managerial' plan in higher education. Possible explanations for the hostile reactions of scholars is that the notion of quality relating to power, different understandings of the notion of 'quality', concern about the effectiveness of the quality process and the quantification of its mechanism and the time spent to comply with quality requirements (Anderson, 2006). In fact, "academics tend to see quality assessment and assurance as being accountability-led as opposed to improvement-led" (Newton, 2000 in Rosa, 2014, p.184). It is, therefore, "alien to the core values of academic culture" such as self and collegial accountability and self-improvement (Laughton, 2003, p.317, in Rosa, 2014). They seem to be skeptical of both internal and external quality assessments since these processes tend to "generate reports but do not engage with the heart of the academic endeavour" (Harvey, 2009, p.1, in Rosa 2014).

Academics also show concern about the way quality assurance is implemented, which is administrative or managerialist, a cost burden and time-consuming and it distracts their focus from teaching and researching, which are the more important aspects of academic life. Moreover, academics are often unhappy with quality assurance processes, which are realised that not fully reliable and unable to achieve the nature of the educational process. Moreover, academic staff have been facing a decrease in their status and social class (Halsey, 1992, in Rosa, 2014). Their positions are being switched from professionals into employees while the newly appeared 'professionals' are managers, regardless of being academics or not (Maria João Rosa, 2014).

In general, in higher education, "there is an apparent movement from quality assessment as a tool for improvement to accreditation as a tool for customer protection and accountability" (Amaral, 2014, p.14). As mentioned in the previous section, 'quality' is a complex and vague concept, in order to better understand the concept of quality assurance in education and how it is affected. It is necessary to examine it in different contexts. This section gives an overview of how 'quality' is formulated in a broad education context. The next section will analyse the

concept of ‘quality assurance’ in vocational education and training contexts. Because of its complexity and vagueness, the concept of quality assurance in education needs to be understood in different contexts.

3.5.2 Quality Assurance in Vocational Education and Training

In the context of the VET sector, quality is often linked to the regulatory framework. Misko (2015) defines ‘quality’ as:

the level of excellence in training delivered by public and private training and assessment providers. It necessarily includes both quality management concepts as well as regulatory frameworks (Misko, 2015, p.12).

Misko states that the effective regulation system is the most important factor of ‘quality’ in VET systems and vocational qualifications (Misko, 2015b). Agbola and Lambert (2010) also expressed a similar perspective by saying that:

the AQTF which serves as an integral component within the VET sector, supported by the federal and state governments, provides a strong platform that guarantees quality in the VET sector and also provides a sound mechanism for meeting the needs of society (Agbola & Lambert, 2010, p.346).

The important connection between regulation and quality is a common characteristic of VET sectors in many countries. Misko (2015) examined the quality assurance and regulations in New Zealand, the USA and some European countries, and suggested that practices in other countries can be applied to the VET regulatory and quality assurance in Australia.

Although the regulatory systems may differ in detail, the issues of VET regulation in Australia are similar to those of other countries. The issues are *initial provider registration and accreditation*, *qualification framework*, *the combination of internal review* (institutional self-assessment) and *external reviews* (by auditing and third-party assessment). It is apparent that the focuses of many quality systems cover the same issues: business and financial management; staff competence for management and operation; qualification and quality of trainers and assessors; the information provided to students before enrolment process to ensure

students can make informed decision about the selected courses; and transparent marketing strategies without misleading information. There is a clear trend in increasing the transparency of information which helps stakeholders make informed decisions (Misko, 2015b).

Misko (2015) emphasised that the standards of the quality assurance frameworks for Australia, United Kingdom, Canada (Ontario), Singapore, New Zealand, and Germany had similar issues, which include:

probity and financial accountability; health and duty of care; user protection; quality improvement and system effectiveness; social and economic objectives; quality of the qualification and the training outcomes; recognition of the quality of a VET provider or sector and its products; and recognition of the quality of a VET system and its products (Misko, 2015a, p.31).

Lambert and Agbola (2010) reviewed the international experiences of VET quality assurance issues in OECD countries and this throws light on the Australian and Vietnamese cases. The challenges that the VET industry in OECD countries are facing are similar since these countries experienced the same changes, including the changes in technologies, work types and evolving understandings of adult education. These countries are also seeking solutions to competing goals while balancing between the individuals' and society's needs; as well as the stability and flexibility in educational frameworks. The growing attention in VET quality has been common to most OECD countries (Agbola & Lambert, 2010).

Discussing the trends in quality assurance in VET, Misko (2015) reported that the traditional approach to quality has been using an inspection system, in which government inspectors come to inspect the training providers. Such inspections evaluate training institutions in terms of implementing the defined curriculum, administrative procedures and assessment structures. This inspectorial approach is gradually being superseded or combined with a quality assurance approach, which includes regulation and accreditation of the training providers and of the bodies responsible for awarding qualifications and its products; and recognition of the quality of a VET system and its products (Misko, 2015a).

All the above perspectives from researchers seem to link quality assurance in VET to the regulatory framework. Having a different opinion from an insider perspective on training

providers, Chasovschi and Vlad (2015) argued that quality assurance systems should be intertwined into all operational activities and all phases of the product lifecycle. This lifecycle involves the stages during market research as well as product development, product distribution, non-stop monitoring of price and user evaluation. Student satisfaction depends on multiple factors including the organisation of the training programs, the facilities and resources, training contents and materials, training methods and competencies of trainers, satisfaction with trainers and participants' motivation (Chasovschi & Vlad, 2015). This study will explore the perspectives from some insiders of the VET system, which are the managers and trainers of training organisations to see whether they share the same opinions.

Non-accredited courses are a part of the VET sector. Non-accredited courses are delivered mainly by private RTOs. It is reported that 25% of students in private RTO studied non-accredited courses (Harris et al., 2006). In terms of the quality of non-accredited courses, based on the Survey of Employer Use and Views of VET, a quite high proportion of employers satisfied with the VET system, especially with unaccredited training (Harris, 2015).

From the literature, it is evident that a common trend of quality assurance in the higher education and vocational sector is the movement from accreditation and compliance to customer protection and learner satisfaction.

3.6 Chapter Conclusion

This chapter has reviewed the literature that informs the study. By exploring the studies on human resource development and training, it provides readers with an understanding of the important role and position of training in an organisation. With that important role in labour force development, training and development should get adequate attention from policymakers and regulators to ensure efficient and proper operation. However, in reality, whether this sector in Vietnam and Australia have effective regulation mechanisms; and which system is better, are the questions that this study is seeking to answer and will be explained in Chapter V and Chapter VI.

The chapter has also explored the concepts and approaches of quality assurance in general and, more specifically, the quality assurance concepts in different contexts including higher education and vocational education to identify how and by what factors the quality assurance

concepts are formulated and affected. By doing so, the chapter provided a summary of different perspectives and trends in quality assurance in education.

Understanding that the concept of quality assurance is dependent on different stakeholders and different contexts, for this study, quality concepts are not established standards or government requirements; rather, 'quality' is what the researched organisations believe it is. In this research, quality assurance will reflect the policies, implementation strategies and operational activities within the organisations to monitor and manage their perceived quality. The Australian and Vietnamese education systems that the researched organisations are operating have shown the differences as discussed in the previous Chapter, these differences must have had some influences in the viewpoints and approach of quality assurance that organisations in these two countries process.

The next chapter will discuss the methodology employed in this study.

CHAPTER IV

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This chapter provides the research design used for this study and the methods employed to collect and analyse the data. This chapter is presented in three main sections. The first section describes the role and position of myself as the researcher addressing the questions as to ‘who I am in this research?’ and ‘what is my relationship with the researched topic?’ The second section explains why I chose the qualitative research design and selected a case study methodology informed by education comparative study. The third section describes the methods for data collection and analysis.

4.1 Author’s Self-positioning

I am writing this part of the chapter with the first-person voice to explain my role in this study to “acknowledge(s) the humanity of self and others and implies relationship, mutuality, and genuine dialogue” (Patton, 2002, p.64). Being reflexive, I brought to this study my assumptions and background and see myself as a human instrument to “undertake an ongoing examination of what I know and how I know it” (Patton, 2002, p.64).

My position in this study is primarily that of the researcher, and I bring many perspectives to this research, all of which are informed by my experience and the experiences of those around me. One of the perspectives is that of my previous position in Vietnam as a training and development professional. This position gave me the insights and understanding of the training and development issues in Vietnam, which is what I know. My current job as a quality assurance coordinator at an RTO in Australia also gives me knowledge, with a solid underpinning for understanding how the quality assurance system works for RTOs in Australia. Bringing these aspects of background and into the study, I will now examine the assumptions I hold. The training providers in Vietnam are assumed to implement quality assurance activities according to the Law on Vocational Training 2014 (Vietnam National Assembly, 2014). This law regulates the training providers to organise quality assurance periodically on facilities and vocational curricula.

Instead of seeing this perception as a limitation of the reliability or validity of the study, reflexivity is seen a commitment to acknowledge and questions the role the researcher plays in the processes of data collection and analysis. Reflexivity does not neglect the potential bias in the researcher's study on social life; rather, it accepts the presence of any bias and displays that acknowledgment the research process of researchers (Patton, 2002). Therefore, through the reflexivity of quality assurance experience that I have, I build upon the existing understandings of the knowledge of QA by exploring the similarities and differences of QA processes between Vietnam and Australia. Through the research questions of (i) how the quality of soft skills (generic skills) courses provided by training organisations in Vietnam is assured is in comparison with that in Australia, and (ii) what the Vietnamese training providers can learn from the Australian RTOs in quality assurance of these courses, I want to shed light on one of the important aspects of vocational training sector in Vietnam. Additionally, I want to interact with the participants to find out the answers properly.

In order to conduct the research successfully, the researcher needs philosophical worldviews as well as distinct methods or procedures. Although philosophical worldviews play a silent role in scientific research, they have a major impact on research practice and need to be recognised (Creswell, 2014). According to Creswell (2014), there are four philosophical worldviews. These philosophical worldviews are post-positivist, social constructivist, transformative and pragmatist.

I bring constructivism, or social constructionism (Creswell, 2014) into this study.

Constructivism is a theory explains how people acquire knowledge and learn. It suggests that humans construct knowledge and meaning from their experiences and previously acquired knowledge. New information is linked to prior knowledge and experience (Bada, 2015; Creswell, 2014). This worldview is in line with the research purposes and the research question. Based on my purpose to understand quality assurance through the participants' views, I align myself with the naturalistic constructivist worldview. Researchers possessing this view often explore the world they are living in to get to know the context of the research participants (Creswell, 2009). This paradigm is often seen as the approach to qualitative research. Working broadly within a social constructionist framework was the most effective approach to understand the views and perspectives that affect the personal worlds of my research participants. I will use the prior knowledge of the training industry in Vietnam and VET sector

in Australia that I process to understand and analyse the insights that the participants in my study provide to me, to unpack the assumption and to answer to my research question.

4.2 Design of the Study

Because of the choice of social constructivism, qualitative methodology is employed as the principal research design of this study. According to Merriam (2014), qualitative research aims to respond to different questions from quantitative methods. It is also explained that “qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005, p.3 in Merriam, 2014). Qualitative methods bring in the emotional link between researchers and research participants which may help the researchers better understand the aspects of social life which have been previously neglected or hidden (Merriam, 2014).

A qualitative case study is “an intensive, holistic description and analysis of a single, bounded unit” (Merriam, 2014, p.203) and it offers a tool to explore complex social phenomenon containing multi-variables which are potentially important for the understanding of the phenomenon (Merriam, 2014). It is widely used to explore people’s experiences and perceptions (Creswell, 2009). The case study design is suitable for an exploratory study (Clarke & Dawson, 1999; Creswell, 2009; De Vaus, 2001). Since this study will be exploring the issues of quality assurance in a selection of training providers in Vietnam and Australia to answer the stated research questions which are unknown, a case study will be an appropriate research design.

A case study focuses on a single unit, a single example, and may or may not be generalisable. However, a lot can be learned from a specific case (Merriam, 2014) and its typical features may be applicable to similar or analogous cases. Erickson (1986 in Merriam, 2014) also claims that what is learnt in a single case can be transferred to another case in a similar situation. Readers will decide what can be applied in their contexts, not the researchers.

Case study design accommodates a variety of data collection methods (Clarke & Dawson, 1999; De Vaus, 2001). Any data collection method can be used with the case study design provided that it is practical and ethical. One of the distinguishing characteristics of the case study is that multiple methods of data collection are often utilised (De Vaus, 2001). For this study, semi-structured interviewing is employed as the data collection method.

The main concern regarding the validity of the case study approach is the power of generalisation or external validity. However, the case study differs from other designs in its general theoretical direction: construction of theory rather than statistical validation on the subjects studied (De Vaus, 2001).

This research is informed by the comparative education approach, which is appropriate for the studies which aim to explore the educational matters in a comparative setting (Manzon, 2011 in Bray et al, 2014). In the comparative study, it is essential to identify the 'unit of analysis' which refers to the major entity under investigation and "answers the question 'who' or 'what' is being analysed. The most common units of analysis are individuals, groups, organisations, social artefacts, and social interactions" (Manzon, 2014, p.98). The units of analysis in this study are multilevel: organisations (training providers) and individuals (managers, trainers). Multilevel analysis can potentially attain the multifaceted and comprehensive analysis of educational phenomena as opposed to a single level analysis. The latter can neglect the recognition of the ways the issues in lower levels of education systems may be influenced by issues at higher levels and vice versa (Bray et al., 2014a).

There are several research studies which apply the comparative education approach to the field of vocational education and training. In a 2014 study, Pham compared two vocational training colleges in Vietnam in terms of their activities in accreditation (Pham, 2014). Huber (2010) comparatively applied the principle of choice that was implemented in Germany in 2008 to Australian New Apprenticeships in 1998 in terms of vocational education and training (Huber, 2010). Raffe et al. (1999) made a comparison of the quality assurance differences among what they called "home internationals" in England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland in the UK. (Raffe, Brannen, Croxford, & Martin, 1999). Their research placed quality assurance of vocational education within the entirety of the system of these four countries. Billing (2004) offered a comparative analysis of national external quality assurance frameworks in the contexts of commonality and diversity (Billing, 2004). However, the context of this research was higher education.

Alongside the educational comparative approach within my methodology is the qualitative collection of person-centred data. Among existing studies, no other researcher has utilised this blend, making my own small-scale study a fresh contribution in terms of the lenses it uses to investigate quality assurance across several Australian and Vietnamese cases. Pham (2012)

applied mixed methods in her research about the perceptions of institutional staff on the influence of accreditation, while Huber (2010) utilised qualitative frameworks in his explorative study. Raffe (1999) used qualitative methods in the study of the divergence and convergence of the four educational systems including vocational education in the countries of England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, while Billing (2004) applied quantitative methods in his research by using the European survey to investigate the general model of quality assurance which had been applied throughout European countries. Against this backdrop, I present a comparative study applying qualitative methods in naturalistic contexts to explore the current quality assurance activities in specific VET environments in Vietnam and Australia.

The research design of this thesis is case study informed by the education comparative study approach, which is, the Discussion will be presented following the comparative study approach. The comparative study literature analyses and compares the two 'units of analysis': observational and explanatory (Manzon, 2014). "*Observational unit* refers to the unit used in data collection and data analysis, while *explanatory unit* refers to the unit that is used to account for the pattern of results obtained" (Manzon, 2014, p.98). In this study, the observational units are the concepts of quality, the approaches and practices of quality assurance. The 'explanatory units' are the political and social contexts that the studied organisations are operating in. According to Fairbrother (2014), cultural, political and social contexts play an important role in comparative education and education cannot be de-contextualised from its context and background.

According to Bray (2004), "instructive analysis can be made when the units for comparison "have sufficient in common to make the analysis of their differences meaningful" (Bray, 2004, p.248). Therefore, developing specific parameters of similarity that units can be compared against is a condition for a meaningful comparison (Manzon, 2014). In these case studies, units of comparison are four organisations in two countries which have the commonality in the type of courses they provide (non-accredited short generic courses in the business sector) as this is the key issue in the research question. Apart from that, the four organisations share the same client cohort (both individuals and corporates). These commonalities form the basis for the comparison.

A Note on Ethics

My Ethics application, number HRE16-284, was accepted and deemed to meet the requirements of the National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC) 'National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research (2007)' by the Victoria University Human Research Ethics Committee in 2016. This provided approval for the conducting of the semi-structured interviews in Vietnam and Australia. Interviews were conducted in English with Australia informants and in Vietnamese with Vietnamese interviewee. The Vietnamese interviews then were translated into English by a TESOL background PhD student studying at Victoria University.

Participants received plain English/plain Vietnamese Participant information sheets, and voluntarily signed consent forms. Their identities are protected in my presentation of the findings via the use of pseudonyms and the non-disclosure of institutional names.

4.3 Data Collection

4.3.1 Sample Selection Strategy

Given the focus of the research is the quality of short soft skills (generic skills) courses provided by training organisations in Vietnam and Australia, I made a list of organisations that provided soft skills (generic skills) courses and narrowed down to a shortlist list based on strategies related to logistics.

For the Vietnamese organisations, I used contacts from my own networks as I have been working in the training sector in Vietnam. The strategy to ask for references from personal contacts ensured cooperation from local private companies, which are always cautious about research and investigation. Given Vietnamese culture, which tends to show only the good side and tries to avoid discussing negative issues with strangers, the use of a personal reference would make the interviewees feel more comfortable and open to share more comprehensive information.

In my selection of the interviewees, I used 'purposeful sampling' (Mertens, 2005, p.317) to select participants. I believed that the senior staff with many years of experience would be willing to share meaningful information. Purposefully, I focused on the senior staff who are in

managerial positions and who would be trusting of my position as a researcher of Vietnamese origins with experience in the sector and a willingness to bring insights back into that sector.

For the Australian organisations, I developed a list of training providers which provided short generic courses, professional and personal development courses in management and business. I sent e-mails to the organisations on the list and followed up with phone calls. Besides, I also used my contacts to find relevant people in organisations providing the kinds of short non-accredited courses that I wanted to study. This was important as Australia is a very much a culture of ‘mateship’ and insidersness. After a lot of effort to contact and arrange times as they are all very busy, I found four (4) people from two (2) organisations who were willing to participate.

The sample size is quite small due to a number of reasons. First, the targeted participants of the study are management level and senior staff of training providers, who are quite difficult to approach. Therefore, the number of interviewees who agreed to participate is much smaller than those were invited. Secondly, the scope and limited timeline of a Master thesis do not require a very big number of samples. Besides, as Yin (1993, 2009) and Creswell (2014) suggested there are not acceptable numbers of participants to be interviewed in quantitative research. Rather, researchers should gather information from different aspects of the cases. Thus, the small sample is appropriate for case study design and quantitative research.

Even the number of Vietnamese participants is different from the Australian participants, the number of organisations is the same, and the main unit of this study is organisations. The research design of this study is the case study of these organisations, informed by comparative education methodology. In these case studies, units of comparison are four organisations in two countries which have the commonality in the type of courses they provide (non-accredited short generic courses in the business sector) as this is the key issue in the research question.

4.3.2 Data Collection Methods

The key source of data for this study is interviewing a cross-section of stakeholders in education and training organisations in both Vietnam and Australia. Ten people have been interviewed including six people of different positions in two training organisations in Vietnam and four people from two training organisations in Australia.

Interviewing is appropriate for qualitative research (Creswell, 2009). Because of the need for an in-depth understanding of the context of quality assurance issues, the interview is a suitable method. In-depth and semi-structured interviews have advantageous features that allow participants to mention the unexpected but important information for the understanding of the research units that the researchers may not have thought of (Seidman, 2006). Patton (2002) also explained that:

We interview people to find out from them those things we can't directly observe... We cannot observe the situations that preclude the presence of an observer. We cannot observe how people have organised the world and the meanings they attached to what goes on in the world. We have to ask people about those things. The purpose of interviewing, then, is to allow us to enter into the other person's perspectives (p.340).

Interviewing allows the researcher to explore relevant information and quickly clarify important issues. By using open-ended face-to-face interviews with CEOs or training managers, professionals and trainers of selected training providers, the exploratory aspects of the research questions are addressed. Semi-structured interviews are employed in order to retain the focus of the research issues and to allow interviewees to add details they consider apposite.

A semi-structured, in-depth interview has been recognised as an appropriate method for collecting data for qualitative research (Flick, 2009). It enables the researcher to have the flexibility to rearrange questions during an interview and enables the participants to elaborate on their views. This method also allows the language to be adjusted to suit different backgrounds of participants and give researchers the opportunity to clarify any unclear information in participants' responses.

According to Merriam (2014), unlike survey research which places the importance on the number and representativeness of the sample, in case study interviewing, the important issue is selecting the respondents who have the potential of contributing to the emergent understanding of the researched topic. As such, respondents are selected by referral of the key person who is the personal contact of the researcher. Preliminary conversations were conducted to decide

whether the respondent was appropriate for the in-depth interview and to ensure their willingness.

Patton (2002) emphasised the importance of neutrality in the success of an interview while keeping the rapport:

At the same time that I am neutral with regard to the content of what is being said to me, I care very much that that person is willing to share with me what they are saying. Rapport is a stance vis-à-vis the person being interviewed. Neutrality is a stance vis-à-vis the content of what that person says (Patton, 2002, p.365).

Seidman (1991) in Merriam (2014) also suggested that the interviewer should have enough distance with the interviewees to ask real questions and to explore the assumptions. All these issues are taken into consideration when conducting interviews.

Interviewees are initially contacted by e-mail and followed up with phone calls to make the appointments for interviews. Below is the table summarising the demographic information of the interviewees:

Pseudonym	Gender	Year of Experience	Position	Training organisation type
Vietnam				
Huong	Female	13 years	Program officer	Non-government training organisation
Ngan	Female	13 years	Team leader	
Mai	Female	7 years	Trainer cum senior manager	
Hoa	Female	24 years	Deputy Director	

Thuy	Female	19 years	Deputy Director	Private training organisation
Thu	Female	18 years	Trainer	
Australia				
Max	Male	5 years	Manager and founder	Private training organisation
Steve	Male	5 years	Trainer	
Sarah	Female	8 years	Senior consultant	Dual sector training organisation
Peter	Male	Not specified	Trainer	

Figure 5. Demographics of Participants

The interviews started with a brief introduction to the study and the processes and general discussion to make the interviewees comfortable. The interviews were recorded, and notes were taken. Despite participant information forms having been explained and consent forms having been signed, there were some concerns about the reluctance or shyness of respondents to be recorded; however, research has shown that most interviewees tend to forget that they are being recorded after some initial wariness (Merriam, 2014).

Several strategies were employed to ensure the interviews collected relevant and sufficient data. The strategies included using clear and straightforward language in the questions; explaining and clarifying with the interviewees when necessary to ensure both interviewees and research understood each other correctly. The responses were recorded and later were transcribed into texts. Data analysis used thematic analysis approaches as described by Ryan and Barnard (2003). Each company data set in each country is analysed separately before a cross-case comparison is performed.

Different sets of questions are used for managers and trainers as their role in the quality assurance process are different. However, the main points are the same. The interview questions start exploring about the participants such as the duration they have been working in the organisation, in the current position and their main tasks. Then the questions focus on their opinion about quality and how quality is assured in their organisation. The last part of the interview, participants are asked about the regulation and regulators and the challenges they face in the quality assurance process. Full sets of interview questions are included in Appendix 3.

4.3.3 Data Analysis and Discussion

My case study research design is informed by the comparative education methodology in selecting organisations to study and the ways which the data will be analysed and discussed. In presenting the data, each organisation will be presented individually, and then cross-case conclusions will be drawn based on the analysis of variables. The differences and similarities in quality assurance concepts, approaches and methods in the two cases will be pointed out and explained.

According to Manzon (2014), the comparative study literature differentiates the two meanings of the unit of analysis: observational and explanatory. “*Observational unit* refers to the unit used in data collection and data analysis, while *explanatory unit* refers to the unit that is used to account for the pattern of results obtained” (Manzon, 2014, p.98). In this study, the observational units are the concepts of quality, the approaches to quality and the methods. These are the key variables for the study.

Comparative education investigates education in one country by drawing data and phenomenon from the context and situation in another country, or countries (Bray et al., 2014a). The comparative education field has seen significant development in the 21st century along with the spread of advanced technology. Originally, comparative education was known for the four steps of its comparison model including description, interpretation, juxtaposition and comparison attributed variously to Bereday (1964) or Hilker (1962) (Adick, 2018; Manzon, 2014, 2018). According to Manzon (2014), the two main purposes of such comparisons are to extract and enact interpretive and causal-analytic data, and it is Bereday’s approach that is described as interpretive (Manzon, 2014).

This approach also understands the importance of context in creating specific meanings.

Fairbrother (2014, p. 75) suggests:

Qualitative researchers in comparative education share a strong belief in the importance of cultural, political and social contexts, and the position that education cannot be decontextualised from its local culture.

Therefore, this study will examine the quality assurance of training providers with reference to the cultural, political and social contexts. The political and social context will be used as explanatory units to explain the differences between the quality assurance practices between studied organisations. As Manzon (2014) further explained, for lower level units such as individual, classroom, and school should be examined in a context of the higher levels of the structure such as system, state, etc. By this way, the studies can present a comprehensive picture with a clear link of the micro and macro levels (Manzon, 2014).

According to Manzon (2014), a condition for a comparative study is to set up the dimensions for the primary comparison of the selected units of analysis. Similarly, Bray (2004) recommended that “instructive analysis can be made when the units for comparison have sufficient in common to make analysis of their differences meaningful” (Bray, 2004, p.248). Therefore, developing particular parameters of commonality for cases to be compared against is a condition for a valid comparison (Manzon, 2014). The units of comparison for this study will be two organisations which have the commonality in legal identity (private), clients (both individuals and corporates) and the courses they provide (non-accredited short courses in the business sector).

The concepts of quality are adopted from Harvey and Green (1993)'s five categories of notions of quality as ‘Exception’, ‘Perfection’, ‘Fitness for purpose’, ‘Value for money’ and ‘Transformation’ (Harvey & Green, 1993, p.10). As Vroeijenstijn (1992) stated that different parties may have interest in quality, but not share the same understanding about it; Harvey and Green (1993) also suggested that the different concepts of quality from various stakeholders will likely influence the assessments of quality, and it is important to understand these different views to understand their opinions relating to the quality issue (Watty, 2003). Therefore, the most important variable in this study will be the concept of quality.

In presenting and analysing data, this study will adopt Bereday’s approach as presented in his classic book, *Comparative Method in Education* (Bereday, 1964; Bray et al., 2014a; Manzon, 2014; Wojniak, 2018) with the four-step method of comparative analysis consisting of description, interpretation, juxtaposition, and simultaneous comparison. This model, which has been widely cited, is used to compare education in two countries. As it only explores two countries, the model allows a substantial depth of analysis (Bray, Adamson, & Mason, 2014b). Bereday’s model is summarised as follows:

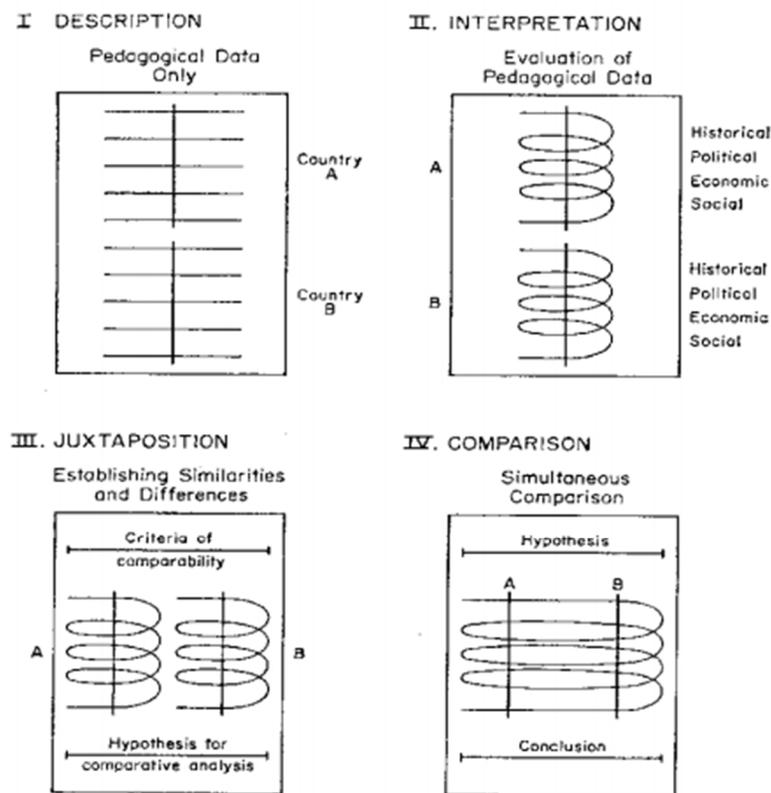


Figure 6: Bereday’s Model of Comparison. Source: Bereday (1964, p. 28); Mazon (2014, p. 99)

Adapted from Bereday’s model, the structure of data analysis and discussion is presented as follows:

Vietnamese organisations	
Introduction of Organisation 1 (Case One)	
Introduction of Organisation 2 (Case Two)	
Theme 1	Comparison of two Cases

Theme 2	Comparison of two Cases
Theme 3	Comparison of two Cases
Theme 4	Comparison of two Cases
Theme 5	Comparison of two Cases



Australian Organisations	
Introduction of Organisation 3 (Case 3)	
Introduction of Organisation (Case 4)	
Theme 1	Comparison of two Cases
Theme 2	Comparison of two Cases
Theme 3	Comparison of two Cases
Theme 4	Comparison of two Cases
Theme 5	Comparison of two Cases



Cross-countries comparison	
Theme 1	Comparison of Case studies in two countries and explanation
Theme 2	Comparison of Case studies in two countries and explanation
Theme 3	Comparison of Case studies in two countries and explanation

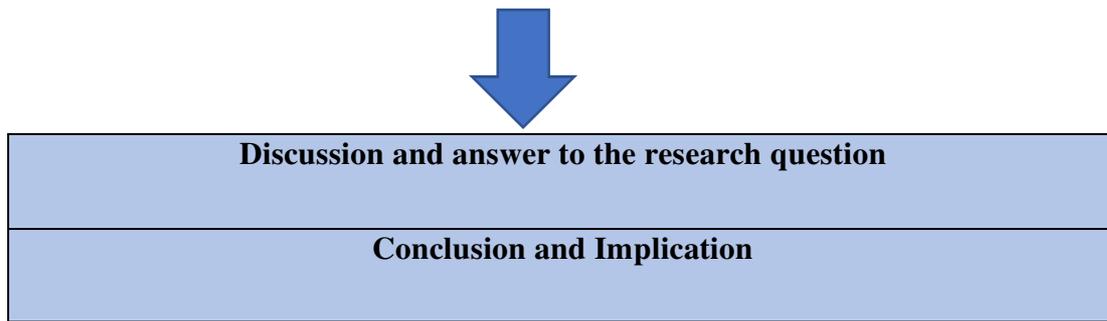


Figure 7: Data Collection and Analysis in the Current Study

4.4 Chapter Conclusion

This chapter has presented the research design and data collection and analysis methods of this study. It began with the author's self-positioning view which impacted on the research. It was followed by the research design rationale and then I explained the data collection and analysis methods used in the study.

The position of the author in this study is primarily as a researcher. However, other perspectives have been brought into the research which reflected the author's prior knowledge and experience as a training and development officer and a quality assurance professional. The author used prior knowledge to understand and explore the issues that the research question is seeking to answer.

This thesis employed the case study research design informed by the education comparative study approach in discussing and presenting data. It adopted Bereday's approach (Bereday, 1964; Bray et al., 2014a; Manzon, 2014; Wojniak, 2018) in presenting and analysing data, which means the flow of analysis and discussion will start from description to interpretation, then juxtaposition, and simultaneous comparison. That is to say, the study will describe cases in Vietnam and Australia separately, interpret the themes arisen then compare cases within each country before comparing between two countries. This will be presented in detail in the next Chapter.

CHAPTER V

FINDINGS AND DATA ANALYSIS

This chapter presents the findings of the research questions set out in Chapter I. The chapter will introduce the case study and provide a short description of each of the companies and participants who participated in the study and the themes arisen from the data. Due to the small size of the sample, all the analyses and discussion in this thesis cannot be generalised in a larger context without further study.

Data collection for this research was conducted in Hanoi, Vietnam in December 2017 and Melbourne, Australia in June 2018. Following the sample selection strategy set out earlier in Chapter IV, four training providers were chosen, two in Vietnam and two in Australia.

Data for the case studies were collected during company visits and interviews with staff, who are involved in training others in quality assurance processes. In order to achieve diversity in the units of research, the two selected training providers in Vietnam are of different types: one is a private company, and the other is an international non-government organisation (NGO), which is a branch of an overseas institution. These two providers have different business registrations. However, both provide short training courses in soft/generic skills. Relevant documents relating to business and training activities were also gathered from the two organisations.

The interviews in Vietnam were conducted in Vietnamese and translated into English. The translation was checked by one of my colleagues who is Vietnamese original, has TESOL qualification and is doing his PhD in education.

The real names of the companies and people interviewed were not revealed to preserve anonymity and the confidentiality of their operational strategies. In this research, the companies are coded by the researcher as Case One, Case Two, Case Three and Case Four and the informants are provided with pseudonyms.

The structure of data analysis part is adapted from Merriam (2014) and is modified accordingly for the relevance with the purpose of this research (Merriam, 2014). A brief introduction of the

company and its business areas will be presented. Then the emerging themes based on the interviews with the case informants, are consequently developed and discussed.

5.1 Data in Vietnam

5.1.1 Case One Introduction

Case One is a private company which was established in 2009 in Ho Chi Minh City but it operates nationwide and has a branch in Hanoi. The company registered its business with Ho Chi Minh City Department of Planning and Investment as a private training and consultancy limited company. The company has around 20 admin staff. They do not have full-time trainers; all the trainers are on a contracted basis. Its main business areas include management consultancy, agriculture, environment and technology consultancy, tutoring services, job finding services, teaching foreign languages, public speaking, life skills, foundation courses (university preparation) and delivering non-accredited short courses (from company registration license).

In their marketing materials, they provide short courses in the following areas:

Areas of training	Number of courses	Duration
Office Administration	6 courses	2 – 3 days
Human Resource Management	7 courses	2 – 3 days
Legal Issues in Business	5 courses	2 – 3 days
Marketing, Sales and Customer Services	7 courses	2 – 3 days
Leadership and Management Development	5 courses	2 – 3 days
Finance	5 courses	2 – 3 days
Personal Effectiveness Enhancement	6 courses	2 – 3 days
Production and Logistics	6 courses	2 – 3 days
Foreign Trade	4 courses	2 – 3 days
Computer Skills	3 courses	2 – 3 days

Figure 8: Programs Offered in Case 1

Case One provides both public courses which are open to individuals who are interested and in-house customised training programs for senior management level, middle management level and staff level on all the above-mentioned areas for companies on requests. Their clients include companies, non-profit and non-government organisations and state-owned companies. More specifically, their targeted company clients are foreign-owned companies who receive FDI (foreign direct investment); emerging Vietnamese private companies whose names are quite well-known in Vietnam.

Interviewees from Case One include one program officer, one team leader and one trainer cum senior manager. All of them are directly involved in some or all processes of training delivery and quality control.

Huong is a program officer who has been working in the company since it is founded. Before working in this company, she had worked for 13 years in a foreign higher education provider in Vietnam. The nature of her job is to manage the training quality, develop training programs and manage trainers. Ngan, the second informant is a team leader in charge of in-house training programs. She manages a team which promotes, coordinate and organises training programs to organisations and businesses. Mai, the third informant is a trainer who has been working for the company for 7 years and she is also a founder of the company. She delivers soft skills/generic skills courses and she also involves in some managing job at the company.

5.1.2 Case Two Introduction

Case Two is an international non-government training provider established in 1993 under the memorandum of agreement between the Ministry of Education and Training of Vietnam and an international institution based in Thailand which provides higher education for the region. It is a branch of the foreign Institute in Vietnam with the following missions:

- To provide innovative and progressive training programs and services
- To assist Vietnamese educational organisations through institutional development services, collaborative training and research programs.

More specifically, in terms of training activities in its scope, the Case Two is to organise training course, either independently or jointly with other institutions, in the field of

management, agricultural technology, industrial technology, and other subjects as the organisation may consider relevant to the development of the country.

Case Two has the head office in Hanoi and satellite offices in the middle and south of Vietnam. Its operation is throughout the country.

Unlike Case One, Case Two did not register its business with the Department of Planning and Investment as it is not a private company. However, similar to Case One, Case Two also provides short courses in the following areas:

Areas of training	Number of courses	Duration
Engineering and Technology	7 courses	2 – 3 days
Management and Business including Human Resource Management, Management Development, Office Administration and Personal Development	6 courses	2 – 3 days
Environment and Development	4 courses	2 – 3 days
Language Training and Education Management		2 – 3 days

Figure 9: Programs Offered in Case 2

Case Two also provides public training courses to individual trainees and customised training courses for businesses. They also design and organise training-study tours for local companies to other countries and vice versa. Their targeted groups of clients are government agencies including Ministries, Departments; foreign companies; banks; local and international non-government organisations (NGO) and private companies.

Interviewees from Case Two include two Deputy Directors: one is in charge of long-term development projects, while the other is in charge of short-term training and a contracted trainer.

Hoa is the first Deputy Director of the organisation. She has been working for the organisation for 24 years and has been in many different positions. Currently, she is in charge of long-term development projects and study tour training. Thuy is the second Deputy Director who has been working at the organisation for nearly 20 years. She is in charge of short training courses. The third informant is Thu, the contracted trainer who has been teaching for 15 years. Thu has been a freelance trainer for many years. Besides working with Case Two, she also delivers training courses for other training providers.

5.1.3 Perceptions of Quality

5.1.3.1 Case One

When being asked about the perception or definition of quality in short training courses, all the informants link the quality to client expectations, course objectives, client satisfaction and applicability of the program. This is similar to the notion of *interface quality* mentioned by Cheng (2003, p.23), which focuses on the effectiveness of schools in response to stakeholders' requirements, market competition to ensure accountability, apparently to the public (Cheng, 2003).

Ngan, the team leader, who is in the administration side of the training process said:

Our quality of training is...Firstly, we must design the training contents to meet the needs and expectations of trainees. Secondly, trainees... in the training process...must take part actively and engaged in the training activities.... And the third point of quality is...we want that after the training courses, trainees can apply the knowledge they learn in their work.

In her statement, Ngan mentioned quality as meeting the requirements, engagement of participants and the applicability of the training course.

Similarly, Mai, the trainer who directly delivers the training courses mentioned that:

Being a trainer, I think quality means...firstly the content should meet the requirements and the objectives of the courses. Secondly, the delivery methods must be attractive so that the participants will actively involve in the whole courses... My perception of

quality is: contents must meet the course objectives and the delivery method must be vivid and attractive.

Using different expressions, however, both the administrator and the trainer consider the quality as meeting clients' and trainees' needs and expectations in terms of training contents and delivery methods. From the administrator's point of view, the team leader also thought of quality as the applicability of the knowledge and skills that trainees learnt in their work. The team leader is the one who is responsible for interface quality and has the accountability for the training course to the clients, therefore she is interested in what the trainees can apply after they attend a training course.

It is noteworthy that for all the interviewees, their clients and trainees are different. For them, clients are purchasers or companies who order and pay for the training courses for their employees meanwhile the trainees are staff being sent to training classes.

The perception of quality as meeting objectives and judging the quality of outcomes and processes versus the monetary cost is the reflection of quality concepts of *fitness for purpose* and *value for money* described by Harvey and Green (1993, p.10). This is also in line with the widely known concept of quality as customer satisfaction in the service sector (IIEP, 2011).

Sharing the same perception of quality, Huong, the most experienced staff, however, is very sceptical when she mentioned: "In fact, training quality is a concept which can be understood differently by different people at different positions". Furthermore, she explained that:

For our clients who are in charge of training management, they are very concerned about how the trainees can apply what they learn to their jobs or the trainees' satisfaction about the course. They consider that the quality... for trainees, maybe quality means the courses that are fun to learn. For the training company, we need to meet the requirements of the purchasers, which means the company who order training courses, the trainees and make sure the courses follow...provide the right knowledge.

Huong, the program officer who designs the training course, and manages the quality and trainers, has a broader view of quality. She sees the quality from a training provider's view, the client's view and trainee's view. For her, quality is the combined views from all stakeholders who are directly involved in a training course. She mentioned that for trainees the course is fun

to learn. This has the underneath implication that the course is designed with contents and delivery methods that attract trainees and motivate them.

However, amongst the stakeholders she mentioned, no regulators or authorities were referred to. None of the interviewees mentioned about standards and frameworks which are presented broadly in international VET quality literature. Even when one of the informants pointed out different parties directly involved in a training course, she missed out the regulators or authorities in the perception of quality. There seem missing of a top-down system. This will be explained further in the next section.

5.1.3.2 Case Two

All the informants link the perceptions of quality to the course evaluation and forms of feedback; in other words, the clients and trainee's satisfaction, which is in line with the internal quality management system in vocational training providers described by Chasovschi and Vlad (2015). According to Chasovschi and Vlad (2015), student satisfaction depends on multiple factors including the arrangement of the training programs, the facilities and resources, training contents and materials, training methods and competencies of trainers, satisfaction with trainers and participants' motivation (Chasovschi & Vlad, 2015).

Thuy, the Deputy Director who is in charge of short course training, explained that:

We have two types of evaluations when the course finishes. The first is trainee's evaluation of trainers. The other is the trainer's evaluation of trainees. This is the two-way evaluation. Normally we have a regulation that the training course with the evaluation grading ranges from 8 out of 10, the course is considered satisfactory. Secondly I think that....the fact that our company can keep clients coming back to use our services, that is one of the....criteria to evaluate the quality of our services whether it is good or not...Especially for the long-term clients, whom we have worked with for many years, we ourselves have to improve continuously, change continuously because each year their demand is higher than last year.

In her conversation, Thuy mentioned the 'regulation'. This is their internal regulations for evaluating the course. For this provider, the quality of a course depends on the two-way evaluation from the trainer and trainees. Meanwhile, the quality of a training provider is

reflected by the loyalty of clients who keep coming back to use their services. This can be explained by the fact that the training providers have to compete to attract clients.

They also saw quality as continuous improvement as one of the requirements from the long-term clients. Continuous changes and improvement under the emerging of advanced technologies and the transition to knowledge-based and international economies is a trend of the contemporary workplace as described by Clayton et.al. (2003). However, this kind of 'continuous improvement' that driven by external stakeholders is not a destination of quality as argued by Harvey & Newton (2007). This concept of quality again is similar to accountability and value for money (Harvey & Newton, 2007).

Similarly, Hoa, the Deputy Director in charge of developmental projects also pointed out that:

Quality of the course is determined by the ability to meet clients' needs...And regarding the management of the training quality, we have always followed procedures when developing training materials, procedures to evaluate the service of training, services such as refreshments... the content material, and make improvements from there.

Hoa discussed the company's procedures for developing training materials and evaluating the training services. 'Quality' is understood as meeting internal procedures. Hoa and Thuy both refer to internal regulations and procedures to manage their own process.

Thu, the trainer, explained her perception of quality through evaluation results and her observation of trainees' participation and changes. Her evaluation of learners' satisfaction and changes are the reflection of Level one (Reaction) and Level two (Learning) in Kirkpatrick's Four Level framework of evaluation (Bates, 2004; Kirkpatrick, 1998; Kirkpatrick & Kirkpatrick, 2006). Based on this model, training evaluation begins when a training programme has occurred and finished. The four levels include Reaction (level 1), Learning (Level 2), Behaviour (Level 3) and Result (Level 4). Evaluation at Reaction level seeks participants' opinions and feelings about the training programme they have just participated. Evaluation at Learning level is conducted to measure the changes in knowledge, skills, and attitudes after the training (Bates, 2004; Kirkpatrick, 1998; Kirkpatrick & Kirkpatrick, 2006).

Eh...it is very hard to say because we don't have any standards to compare. I just look at the end-of-course evaluation forms from the trainees and I look at the changes...as

normally...at the end of the course or end of the day, we often have the...so call...lesson sum-up ...Then we listen to trainees' feedbacks or we look at the approaches they participate in the practical activities ...then we can see the before and after...especially some very clear skills such as Communication Skills or Presentation Skills or ToT (Train the trainers), we can see very clearly how the trainees have changes and their satisfaction when they complete the end-of-course evaluation forms and...next time the training organisations will invite me to deliver the training again.

The trainer explicitly mentioned that ‘we don’t have any standards to compare’ which is consistent with other informants’ perceptions of quality which is only tied within internal company system.

5.1.4 Regulation and Regulating Bodies

5.1.4.1 Case One

Case One is a private company registered their business with Ho Chi Minh City Department of Planning and Investment. One of the functions of this Department is business registration as specified below:

To receive and appraise the business registration documentation of the State companies according to the provisions of law; be responsible for the procedures for business registration; business suspension; to business certificate granting, business supplement, change, re-issue and revoke business registration certificates and operation registration certificates of branches or representative offices in their respective localities; to coordinate with the branches, districts and district-level of People's Committees in inspecting, monitoring and handling according to its competence violations of the latter's business registration in localities; to collect, store and manage information on business registration in accordance with the provisions of law (Ho Chi Minh City Department of Planning and Investment, 2018).

All businesses need to register with the provincial Department, regardless of their business activities and areas. Case One’s main business areas, as stated in their certificate of registration, is consultancy and training. They registered as any other companies in any other business sector as mentioned by Huong, the program officer:

They (training companies) register with the Provincial Department of Planning and Investment like any other companies.

She explained further:

To be honest, the short training area is floating in Vietnam now. There are not any regulating bodies in charge of this area. Therefore, the training market is quite chaotic. One person can be a training company. Whatever courses they offer, clients will have to accept it without having something to compare and benchmark with. And there are no authorities to control it. Currently, in Vietnam, there are no regulations. Ministry of Education and Training is not managing short training area because this is non-credited training.

Huong explicitly revealed a lack of an authority which regulates providers of short training courses in Vietnam. More than 20 years of experience in the education and training sector has given her a broad understanding of the system. She sees the training sector as 'flooding' and 'chaotic' as nobody manages and controls it. She also mentioned MOET who should be responsible for managing education and training system but is currently out of the loop of managing training companies. Literature has mentioned the role of MOET as the main authority to manage the Vietnamese education system since 1990 (EP-Nuffic, 2015).

Nonetheless, as can be seen in the literature on the Vietnamese education system, the system is quite complex with the cross management of MOET and MOLISA in vocational education and training (ADB, 2014; EP-Nuffic, 2015). Case One's focus is as a private training company, but it is not under the management of either MOET or MOLISA. While MOET and MOLISA step in each other feet in managing vocational schools at some levels, they leave the providers of non-accredited training courses to Department of Planning and Investment who has nothing to do with regulating training areas. The reason may be that this type of company is not categorised as a vocational training provider. In Case One's certificate of registration, the business category code is left blank with the note that "business activities codes are not matched with Vietnam economic areas" (*Nganh nghe chua khop ma voi he thong nganh kinh te Vietnam*).

Ngan, the team leader who is in charge of in-house courses, also confirmed the same fact about the lack of regulating bodies. When being asked whether her company have a regulating body or an authority managing her organisation, she said:

No. According to the Vietnam Law on Enterprises, we can open a private company. Currently, in Vietnam, there are private companies, foreign companies, branches of foreign companies. We are a private company...Nowadays, the majority is private companies in Vietnam...There are no guidelines and regulations about quality assurance.

Likewise, Mai (trainer) said that “I only know there is a quality control process from the company” when being asked about regulating bodies. She implied that there is no external quality control authority.

The lack of a regulator explains for the fact that none of the interviewees referred to /raised? regulating standards or framework when being asked about their perception of quality.

5.1.4.2 Case Two

Unlike Case One in terms of business type, Case Two is an international non-government training organisation. It was established under the memorandum of agreement between an international institution and MOET in 1993. That was the time Vietnam started dramatic innovation in the institutional and economic environment, together with the rapid development of the legislative system and major changes in the education system with many private schools and foreign institutions entering the market (N. T. Nguyen & Truong, 2007; Rowley & Truong, 2009; Xuan, 2016). During that time this training organisation established and developed.

Even though there is a clear bond to MOET, when being asked about their regulator, Thuy, the Deputy Director said:

No, we are a financially independent entity, we are in control of our own training content, the quality, our own finance and human resources...similar to other companies. And we have the permission of the Ministry of Education and Training to operate in Vietnam. And we pay tax as required.

She affirmed further:

...As I mentioned, we have never seen regulations... by any bodies. We can say our regulator is MOET as we registered with MOET, MOET can be our regulator. But we have never seen any regulations from MOET regarding the training quality for short courses.

Thuy is very firm about the fact that her organisation doesn't have any regulators who control or manage them. Even she mentioned MOET as the authority who approved their operation in Vietnam, she was not certain about MOET being their regulator. She said "MOET can be our regulator" but expressed that she has never seen any regulations by any bodies. In fact, MOET cannot be considered their regulator if there is not any regulations or standards from this authority to manage this organisation.

Hoa, the other Deputy Director, also asserted that her organisation has no regulating authority. Hoa's and Thuy's statements are consistent with what Huong mentioned about the training sector as being 'floating' and the missing of MOET's management role in this sector.

This explains for all interviewees' view of quality when they only mentioned of their internal regulations and procedure in the quality process.

5.1.5 Training Process and Quality Assurance

5.1.5.1 Case One

All the informants were quite clear and consistent about the training process of their company. All the training courses start with the training needs assessment step. This process is described in many training, development and human resource management books. Ngan, a team leader, described the first step as follows:

Firstly, we will go through a process of training needs assessment ...of the client company. We analyse by using questionnaires or interviewing some important positions. For example, for some technical courses, we will have to interview thoroughly some key positions in charge of technical issues in the companies in order to identify the needs... what they want to learn....Regarding soft skills courses, often we will send them questionnaires to analyse the training needs....

The training needs analysis is conducted by using questionnaires or interviewing or using both tools depending on the course and the positions. This step is done by the staff from training the company.

Likewise, Huong also explains the first step in any course is designing the training courses based on clients' requirements:

Before we conduct any training course, there is a step namely training design. For public courses, we have standardised templates and fixed duration. For in-house courses, we base on clients' requirements to design the appropriate courses. When we design, the contents depend much on clients' requirements through training needs analysis of trainees or their direct supervisors at work.

Case One provides two types of courses, which are public and in-house. However, the training needs assessment is only conducted for in-house courses as they are ordered by a specific client for their staff. As Huong mentioned, “for public courses, we have standardised templates and fixed duration”; “for the in-house course, we base on client's requirements to design the appropriate courses”.

The next step in the training process is to design the content and deliver the course. Ngan described:

Then we will work with trainers so that they design the contents to meet the needs and requirements that the clients request... and then we deliver the training courses...In the process of implementing the training courses, we work closely with trainers to make sure that apart from the right contents and knowledge, there should be proper training methods to improve the attractiveness of the courses to trainees.

The designing and developing course contents involve both managing/administration staff and trainers and trainers have a more substantial role in this process.

Mai, the trainer-cum-management member of the company added one more step before the training design:

The initial objectives are set by the client. I am talking about in-house courses. Based on those objectives, our company will go through the materials of the training course

and we consult with the clients to adjust the objectives and then we agree on common objectives. The objectives first come from clients then are negotiated between the two sides.

Mai, who is in a managerial position, mentioned about the negotiation for an agreement of the common objectives. This is their strategy to reach the achievable objectives.

The perception of quality results in the way Case One monitors and controls the quality of training courses. Bearing in mind the concept of quality as meeting objectives, client's satisfaction and program applicability, Case One has developed their own procedure to ensure their quality. Mai described their quality assurance process as follows:

My company has a Research and Development unit. This unit is in charge of developing materials. They ensure we have sufficient reference materials for trainers. That is the first point. The second point is the company conduct training needs analysis in reality and thoroughly. Through this step, we can pretty much ensure the quality of training. The third point is, in all our training programs, we have a training assistant to support trainers to facilitate the training activities which help to improve the quality. The fourth point is after the training, our company collaborate with clients to re-evaluate the training programs and revise the next programs. Those are steps to assure the quality of training.

Huong attested that their company has its own documented internal regulation by saying that, "in fact, for my company, all the internal regulations are documented. All staff are trained about the procedures". She shared the same view with Mai about clients being the drive for quality: "And one important thing is that it is the clients who manage the quality of training. They always demand, and our staff have to follow".

Huong explained further:

For my company, all the procedures are standardised, and we have done and documented it. It means that there are some tasks we must follow, for example, conducting training needs analysis before the training takes place in order to design the training to meet clients' needs. The second point is trainer recruitment and orientation for the course...to ensure the content is delivered properly with the proper

methods. The third point is the collaboration with clients after the training to ensure that the knowledge and skills are applied to work.

Likewise, sharing about her company's quality process, Ngan said they have a system in place and mechanisms to manage quality:

I think...our organisation developed a system similar to ISO...follow all steps...what to do before training, what to do during training, what to do after the training...And then they have a mechanism to manage...And we have to follow the regulations.

All the interviews showed that despite lacking the government regulating system and standards, the company has developed its own internal quality procedures to manage the course quality. However, in reality, they face a lot of challenges in implementing the policy and procedures. This will be explained in the next section.

5.1.5.2 Case Two

Case Two is different from Case One in terms of business type; the staff interviewed shared similar information about their process of training. According to Thuy, there are three main steps in their training process: pre-training analysis, during-training and post-training. Thuy also explained that the first step is training needs analysis. This step is described in detail as follow:

We divide...there are three stages in any training courses. They are...pre-training, during training and post-training, after the training finishes...We always identify the needs and the expectations of the buyers of the courses, what they really need after the course finishes and the reasons why they want to have that training course. The reason why they need to organise the training well reflect what they are lack...After we understand the needs of the payers or sponsors of the course, then we work with trainees. As from the expectations ...we need to identify the gap between the leaders' expectation and the reality, the current level of the staff...we identify the gaps...we call it training needs assessment.

In the step of training needs analysis, Thuy mentioned the gap between the management's expectation and current level of staff which is the main target of the training needs. The gaps

identification is discussed much in development and training books (Craig, 1987; Salas & Cannon-Bowers, 2001).

She explained further:

After we have identified the competency gap between the expectations and reality, we design the training program based on what they have already known and what they need to know. Normally if we work with long-term clients, we will consult them the long-term direction as we can't change their staff competency within a training course or some days of training from the current level to the expected level of leaders. For the long-term clients, we will advise them the roadmap to train their employees from one level to another. That is the pre-training process.

Having a lot of experience in the training industry and being in a managerial position of a leading business in the field, Thuy said she not only helps clients identify the training needs but also help them to develop their human resources. This is consistent with her confirmation previously that they improve continuously to meet the demand of their long-term clients.

Following the training needs analysis, Thuy said that the next step is conducting the course:

Regarding the during-training process, we monitor closely to manage the quality of trainers' delivery of training as long as the evaluation of trainees. As in my opinion, there is no best trainer, there are no bad trainees either. It is the appropriateness and relevance of the trainer and the group of trainees, they are in the same mode of communication. That is what we consider more important. Because sometimes the trainer is very good but trainees are very different and they don't like the trainer then the training quality is not met. We as the training provider have the bridging role between the trainer and trainees. We understand trainers and we understand trainees and connect between the two. We have to evaluate and give timely feedback to trainers to adjust the content of the training.

In her statement regarding the conducting of the course, Thuy greatly emphasised the importance of an appropriate trainer to the success and the quality of the course. This, again reflects her opinion of quality as client satisfaction as the appropriate trainer who is 'in the same mode of communication' with trainees can make them happy. This also reflects the

important role of trainers in the training process. This will be discussed more detailed in the next section.

The last step, Thuy emphasises, is evaluation and reporting:

Then when the course finishes, we conduct the evaluation to see whether they understand the training contents, whether they satisfy with the course and their expectation for the next. And then we send the report to the payers or sponsors we will consult with them what the next steps, and what the next training should be.

From Thuy's description, their internal quality assurance process is embedded in all the training processes from the first step to the last step. As in Case One, Thuy also attested that her organisation has developed the internal procedures for controlling quality, mainly based on clients' satisfaction.

Hoa, the second Deputy Director shared the same information about the internal system to control and manage the quality in her company:

When we execute the course, there are stages of evaluation that could be done, during the training, after the training; evaluating during the training to ensure that the content and the training pace is suitable for the trainees, modifying the course if needed; evaluating after the training to determine if the client's objectives have been satisfied, whether there were parts of the course that were too lengthy or parts that were not long enough, etc.; those post-training evaluation could be used by us to improve the quality of training for future courses.

Despite the internal quality control system is being implemented, Case Two also faces a lot of challenges in quality assurance of their courses. This is explained in the following section.

5.1.6 Challenges in Quality Assurance

5.1.6.1 Case One

The interviewees had different views on the challenges they face in the quality assurance process depending on their positions. Ngan, from the position of a team leader managing in-house courses, has the difficulties in liaising between clients and trainers, especially when

conducting the training needs analysis because the trainer is not the one who directly conducts training needs analysis. She admitted:

I think that (challenges are)...communication skills when doing the training needs analysis skills...because sometimes, two parties do not understand each other, they do not make it clear...Then when we work with trainers, two parties do not understand each other...Sometimes the requirements of clients are more than the expectations and experience of trainers...so it is very difficult...

She also mentioned the challenge coming from the client's side when they do not support their staff to fully attend the training course:

Then the next difficulty is some companies they don't have the specific regulations that force trainees to participate in the whole courses...even though they send their staff to training but they still prioritise work...thus on many occasions, staff participate in training but they still need to pay attention to their work...then it influences our training quality.

Meanwhile, Huong saw the challenge from a different angle which is directly relating to her job of managing trainers. Most of the trainers who deliver the short courses for Case One are freelancers who are contracted on course by course basis. Huong said:

It is very much challenge on trainer management. As for a private company, our own trainers are minimal. For many courses, we have to contract external trainers, freelancers. Managing freelancers is really challenging when we ask them to follow our training procedures and regulations and use our materials.

Despite having internal procedures and “all the procedures are standardised and documented” as Huong claimed, she admitted that while trainers are contracted on course by course basis, it is really difficult to bond them with all the regulations of the company as they are not company's personnel, let alone no external regulation is in effect.

From the trainer's point of view, Mai said she faced some certain challenges. The lack of a framework or curriculum leaves trainers like her having no guidelines to follow. Involving in designing the training content, they have to decide on their own the materials they use for the training courses:

To be honest, yes. The first is training materials. In terms of management course, there are many things which are not right or wrong. Selecting the right contents and materials to include in a training course that meets the requirements of the clients is one of the challenges.

The second challenge Mai mentioned is the fact that companies in Vietnam do not have a system to manage their outsourced training which leads to overlapped training:

The second challenge is the fact that training in Vietnam is quite common for big companies, and trainees take part in many training courses every year and pick up the knowledge here and there. And they often tend to compare. If the trainers give different information or the knowledge different from what they have learned before, they will react and lost time in discussion. In fact, the trainer must be experienced in order to handle it.

Mai's statement supported Huong's judgement of the training market in Vietnam as being 'chaotic'.

5.1.6.2 Case Two

Case Two's interviewees have some different points of view relating to the challenges they face in ensuring quality for the short training courses. The different views are also explained by the positions and work experience of the interviewees.

They said that the main challenge is the lack of a standard to benchmark with and this led to other difficulties that they face. Their perception of quality is the client's satisfaction, but this notion is very vague and subjective:

Well, in fact that is a difficulty, as I have mentioned before, ourselves...in the company, we have the internal procedure but don't have any standard to benchmark with... Client satisfaction is a vague concept. As for some clients, they don't have many chances to attend training, they are easier than others. Many others, even we try much but they have been trained too much so they are very difficult. There are no standards so it very difficult for us. Using trainee's evaluation, in my opinion, is not a really good criterion because trainees' evaluation at the end is very subjective. Secondly, sometimes they are reluctant to lose others' face, that is Vietnamese culture. They don't want

others to lose face, thus sometimes they may not satisfy but they still give a high rate so that everyone is happy. And they may highly evaluate because if they don't, then next year their HR won't send them to training again (laugh). In general, it is really a challenge to us.

According to Thuy, since there are no standards of regulations, all the subjectivity and vagueness of the clients' satisfaction can be used to judge the quality of a course, which is not reliable. Being a manager, this is really a challenge for her to maintain the reputation of her organisation.

Similarly, Thu confirmed the missing of a standard to benchmark with. Additionally, the lack of a set curriculum gives the trainer too much flexibility and require them to prepare for unexpected situations during the training course. Thu explained:

I can say... it's very difficult because it is very risky as we don't know where to benchmark...depending totally on the feedbacks and information from the training companies. As I have already mentioned, sometimes the flexibility...I only have the way ...that when I design the training course, I have to prepare very board contents...much more than what I required to do, for example, in some cases it is not the same as I thought, I have the plan B to switch to. This is heavily based on experience, the more year you teach, the more you know or you have more experience in your pocket to prepare. Let's say, for example, some cases I am teaching one content but the trainees they ask very broadly as my trainees they have many years of experience in managerial positions, they ask more deeply about the difficult skills ...This is what even the training provider they don't expect, then at that time I need to have something ready in hand... even something outside the approved contents to handle.

The significant role of trainers in the quality process has been revealed in the previous section when Thuy mentioned the appropriateness of the trainer, which makes the course a success. In Thu's comments, it is more clearly seen that the trainer has a lot of flexibility to decide the course contents and, therefore, decide the quality of the course.

Hoa, from the point of view of a manager, also realised the obstacle of managing freelance trainers who work for different providers. Even her organisation has its own policy and procedures "with systems ensuring quality control having already been in place and reviewed

over and over again; the staff apply these quality procedures very accurately”, the challenge persists as trainers are not organisation’s permanent employees:

There are certain difficulties, for example, our team of trainers - because we do not have a team of permanent trainers, we need to invite freelancer trainers to participate. Although we control the quality of the training through our coordinators, we still have to depend on that source of trainers...and that source of external is being quite competitive; they work for us and then they work for other organisations, so that is definitely one challenge to note about.

It can be explained that even though administrative/managing staff are the ones who understand and control the quality of the course based on internal regulations and they “apply these quality procedures very accurately” (Hoa), trainers are given too much flexibility to design and decide the course contents as mentioned by Thu. Therefore, the quality of the course is hard to control. Thu, the freelance trainer, once again verified that by saying:

I deliver the training for many training organisations in Vietnam...then I realise that the capability of controlling the lecture contents of training organisations in here is very...low...Most of the time, they let trainers design the training contents by themselves...Trainers mostly based on their experience of teaching in different places.

To sum up, all the informants see the challenges in the quality assurance process in their organisations from their own experiences and positions. However, both Case One and Case Two face the issues of managing freelance trainers. Even though they both have their own internal policies and procedures, the fact that they give the trainers who are outsiders too much freedom to decide what and how to teach impacts a lot to their quality process. This is explained in the following section.

5.1.7 Trainer Autonomy

5.1.7.1 Case One

According to Smith (2003), the concept of teacher autonomy has many dimensions, being ‘self-directed professional action or development’, and ‘freedom from control by others’ (R. C. Smith, 2003, p.3). All the informants in Case One explicitly or implicitly admit that trainers have freedom from control by others in deciding what and how to teach the course they are in

charge. The degree of trainer autonomy is very high, and trainers have a lot of freedom within their classroom in Case One situation.

Mai, the senior trainer when expressing the challenges she faces in ensuring the quality of the training courses she delivers, said that she is the one who decides and select the contents and materials for the course and it is very difficult for her as sometimes she cannot decide between too many choices. She said:

The first is training materials. In terms of management course, there are many things which are not right or wrong. Selecting the right contents and materials to include in a training course that meets the requirements of the clients is one of the challenges.

Ngan, the team leader of the in-house training group also explained that trainer is the one who designs the contents of the course. After conducting the needs analysis, the training coordinator will liaise with trainers and trainers will design the training content based on training needs results. Ngan said:

...Then we will work with trainers so that they design the contents to meet the needs and requirements that the clients request... and then we deliver the training courses...In the process of implementing the training courses, we work closely with trainers to make sure that apart from the right contents and knowledge, there should be proper training methods to improve the attractiveness of the courses to trainees.

It can be clearly seen that the role of trainers in training design and delivery is very significant, yet Case One's trainers are mostly contracted on course by course basis. Trainers are not the company's personnel, who have the obligations to follow company policies and procedures. This results in the biggest challenge that Huong admitted when she expressed about the issues she faces in terms of ensuring quality training to be implemented throughout the company:

Yes... And it is very much on trainer management. As for a private company, our own trainers are minimal. For many courses, we have to contract external trainers, freelancers. Managing freelancers is a real challenge when we ask them to follow our training procedures and regulations and use our materials.

Even though the company has its own regulations and policies on quality assurance, giving trainers too much flexibility and autonomy in their teaching activities and recruiting freelance

trainers have created a very weak point in their quality process. Let not alone there is not a standard and regulator to benchmark. This leaves Case One company with a lot of challenges in their quality assurance process.

5.1.7.2 Case Two

Sharing a similar opinion as Mai, Thu the trainer who works with Case Two also expressed that training providers almost depend on trainers' expertise and experience to design and deliver the courses. Trainers are free to deliver the contents they think appropriate to the trainees:

Most of the time, they (training providers) let trainers design the training contents by themselves...Trainers mostly based on their experience of teaching in different places... As indeed, most training organisations depend on the trainers' capability of developing and adjusting the training lesson...Training organisations mostly do nothing in this process of controlling the quality of training.

She also explained that in many cases she had to revise the training contents and changed the lesson plans in order to make it appropriate to trainee level. The reason is the training needs assessment was not conducted properly to identify the trainees' needs.

Uhm...In fact, it all depends on experience...We actually...after we design the training content, we try to put ourselves in trainee...it all about the experience that we have.... We put ourselves in the trainees' positions. Sometimes it is very risky in the sense that we won't meet the trainees until the class starts. So sometimes we design...we just imagine...Because the training needs assessment form does not reflect all the trainee's actual situation...They may be reluctant to complete the forms, they just complete as they have to do it...Then sometimes it turns out that...when we meet the trainees, they are totally different from what we imagined about them...Then the fact that we need to adjust the lesson or content of the training is what we do very often....It is really the risk...and requires much experience and the adaptive ability of trainers...The trainers with little experience...and haven't done much...they are really...diffident with the changes. We have met...I myself when I deliver the training...I had to changes the lesson plans three times within a day because the trainees they are totally different from what we imagined about them ...and the person who did the training needs assessment and the training company itself they were not able to assess trainees.

Thu's explanation shows that she has all the freedom to design, revise and change the contents of her training course without the control of anyone if she thinks that the content is not appropriate to her trainees. She can add or remove the parts she thinks not appropriate, for example, she explained further:

...For some trainees who have been taken part in many training courses or they are in high positions, for example, we can remove some basic parts and give more practical cases.

I have to prepare very board contents...much more than what I required to do, for example, in some cases it is not the same as I thought, I have the plan B to switch to.

Even the content has been agreed after the training needs analysis, the trainer can change and adapt to suit the level of trainees, sometimes "even something outside the approved contents". This flexibility, however, causes the trainer more challenge rather than motivate her to innovate.

Thuy, the Deputy Director implicitly revealed that the success of the course depends much on trainers. As the perception of quality is client satisfaction, if the trainees are not satisfied with the trainers, the quality is not met:

As in my opinion, there is no best trainer, there are no bad trainees either. It is the appropriateness and relevance of the trainer and the group of trainees, they are in the same mode of communication. That is what we consider more important. Because sometimes the trainer is very good but trainees are very different and they don't like the trainer then the training quality is not met. We as the training provider have the role of the bridge between the trainer and trainees. We understand trainers and we understand trainees and connect between the two. We have to evaluate and give timely feedback to trainers to adjust the content of training.

Thu also affirmed the facts that for many providers she works with, trainers are not the company's personnel, they are contracted on the course basis:

And, for many training companies, the trainers are not their employees, we are all the contractors.

From the point of view of informants from both Case One and Case Two, since there is not a regulated curriculum and standards, trainers have a very high degree of autonomy and flexibility to design and deliver the course. Even both companies have their own policy and procedures in controlling quality, which quite clearly identifies the steps of the training process and person in charge, they both have the same problem of implementing the regulations when they give trainers too much freedom in deciding what they can do with the course. Depending too much on trainers' expertise and experience in quality processes is the common problem that both Case One and Case Two face.

5.2 Data in Australia

5.2.1 Case Three Introduction

Case Three is a private organisation specialising in providing professional development courses, career development, career transition, career management tools and job seeking skills coaching. The company has been established for 5 years and is based in Melbourne. Their clients are big corporations such as Woolworths and National Self Insurance. They also provide training and private coaching services to individual clients.

Case Three provides the following training courses:

Areas of training	Number of courses	Duration
One on one support: professional resume, cover letter preparation	Various	1 – 2 days
Career Management: interview support, selection criteria	Various	1 – 2 days
Communication skills	Various	1 – 2 days
Work planning and time management	Various	1 – 2 days

Figure 10: Program Offered in Case 3

Interviewees from Case Three include Max, the manager and founder and Steve, a trainer. Both of them are involved in the training process and course quality assurance.

Max is the manager and founder of Case Three. He has been with the company for 5 years. Before engaging in Case Three he worked as a Senior Careers Specialist for a big retail corporation and an insurance company in Victoria and some universities. After leaving his full-time job, he started Case Three as his own business. Max has accredited HR and Economics degree and Certificate IV in Training and Assessment.

Steve is a trainer and career coach. His job at Case There is to deliver the training courses relating to Human resource areas and provide consultancy and coaching services to people who want to improve their career and employment opportunities. Steve is working in another company and his job at Case There is casual, ad hoc based. Steve has Certificate IV in Training and Assessment and HR qualifications.

5.2.2 Case Four Introduction

Case Four is a division of Professional Development Program in a big university in Melbourne, Victoria. This university has been recognised as being in the dual sector for having considerable student number in both vocational and higher education (Demediuk & van Gramberg, 2011).

Case Four has been offering professional development to individuals and companies since 2002 to public and private businesses in the areas of Business Skills, Leadership and Management, Personal Development, Computer Skills, First Aid, Occupational Health and Safety and Quality Auditing.

In their marketing materials, Case Four provides the following short courses:

Areas of training	Number of courses	Duration
Business Essentials	12 courses	1 – 2 days
Leading and Managing	13 courses	1 – 8 days
Personal Effectiveness	10 courses	1 day

Computing Skills	4 courses	1 day
First Aids	12 courses	1 – 4 days
Work Health and Safety	6 courses	1 – 5 days
Quality Auditing	2 courses	2 – 5 days

Figure 11: Programs Offered in Case 4

Case Four provides both customised in-house short courses to businesses and public courses to individuals. Their clients are top executives and managers of businesses and organisations such as Hertz, Vision Australia and many others. For individuals, they have a range of short courses (non-accredited) and accredited certificates, diplomas, and postgraduate courses. They offer many flexible delivery options including online instruction and weekend classes.

Informants from Case Four include one senior consultant who is mainly in charge of the operating side and one trainer who provides his training services of short courses for many providers.

Sarah is a senior consultant, who has been working at Case Four for 5 months. She has been in the recruitment/education and training services industry for more than eight years. Her main jobs at Case Four is to provide consultation services to clients in developing a specific learning solution/s to meet her clients organisational strategic and learning objectives.

Peter is a Business trainer, who has been collaborating with many providers in the dual sector in delivering Business and Project Management short courses. Peter has Certificate IV in Training and Assessment and other qualifications in Business, Economics and Project Management which allow him to be a qualified trainer to deliver training in his field of expertise. Peter also has his own business which provides consultation services in the business field.

5.2.3 Perceptions of Quality

5.2.3.1 Case Three

For Max, when being asked about quality perception, he emphasised on 'engagement'. He also mentioned the relationship between engagement and learners' satisfaction:

For us, quality means...the detailed training focused on engagement. We familiarise quality with engagement... the more engaged in the subject matter the more we see this as quality training. Feedback from trainees also has suggested higher engagement is seen as higher satisfaction/quality. That's that.

Max's perception of quality, to some extents, also reflects the customer satisfaction approach of quality concepts. Max explained further that because all the training courses that his company offers are short courses which are designed and delivered based on clients' needs, his perception of quality is also relating to meeting objectives:

Ensuring the specific objectives are met via training needs analysis and high engagement with subject matter across various assessment methods to suit the short course evaluation of competence.

Max also emphasised training needs analysis as a tool to ensure the quality of training as the trainee cohort are mixed:

Given a mixed cohort of students are facilitated to, we believe that all participants benefit from quality training as training needs analysis are undertaken and training is tailored accordingly to the given strengths and areas of improvements are noted in order to engage students better....Every customer is different and so is our approach, we aim for high engagement using our expertise and tools to link to industry.

Steve, the trainer shared the view of perceptions of quality as the engagement with clients and learners. Being a trainer in human resource management and career coaching, Steve focused on employment outcomes after the training. He explained:

In my point, quality is the high level of engagement with clients, you know ...the more the participants engage the more you can deliver to them what you want to deliver. And training needs analysis can help with identifying their needs. Moreover, you must have

good expertise in the subject matter. More importantly, it is the employment outcomes of post-training. If they can achieve the desired outcomes, then you are successful.

Steve also stated that both trainer and students are benefiting from quality training if the trainer can ensure the quality of the training session, which for him is the engagement from trainees:

Both trainers and students are beneficial from training quality. High engagement level from students will lead to a higher amount of subject matter examples as responses which in turn engage trainer further.

Both Max and Steve mentioned about quality as the engagement from learners and meeting the objectives of the training courses. Their perception reflects the notion of *fitness for purpose* and *value for money* described by Harvey and Green (1993, p.10). This is also in line with the widely known concept of quality as customer satisfaction in the service sector (IIEP, 2011).

5.2.3.2 Case Four

Sarah, the senior consultant, who said that her clients at Case Four are top executives and managers of businesses and organisations in Australia, saw the quality of training programs that she is administering as the ‘transferability’ or ‘transformation’ of the trained skills to the workplace:

As a leading organisation, we always aim at the highest standards in our programs. For us, quality means the transformation of the skills to the workplace. We see the relevance of our programs to the corporations' needs and transferability as the quality. Mostly we do in-house training for clients in need. We also do training for individuals. For all the programs we aim at the transformation of the skills.

Her perception of quality as transferability has been reflected in Clayton, Blom, Meyers & Bateman (2003) which emphasised that transferability is the value of generic skills courses (Clayton et al., 2003). This is also consistent with Case Four’s business objectives. In all of its marketing materials, Case Four states that they aim to deliver practical and effective training programs customised to clients’ needs. The transferability is one of the key factors when evaluating training effectiveness (Grohmann & Kauffeld, 2013).

Sarah's view of quality is reflected as level 4 (Result) in Kirkpatrick's model of evaluation training (Kirkpatrick, 1998; Kirkpatrick & Kirlpatrick, 2006). She also mentioned that her organisation follows Kirkpatrick's model of training evaluation. This is mentioned more details in the next section.

Peter, the casual trainer, has a very learner-centred view on the quality of training of the short courses he delivers. Peter has been delivering both accredited and non-accredited short courses for providers which have both higher education and vocational programs in their scope said that quality is a rather sensitive issue and it is highly related to learners.

For me, quality means two things. First, it is the sufficiency. Making sure that the training is sufficient to the standards and the levels of learners, for example, the content is sufficient to the learners at certificate III or Diploma level... Secondly, the quality is the relevance to learners. Relevance in the sense that learners feel that they can really learn something. It is also the balance between the theory and application. If too much theory, they do not want to learn... If learners know that they are learning something that they can apply to their work, then they are motivated.

Peter's point of view is different but not contrast to Sarah's as both of them are viewing quality as beneficial to learners. With Sarah, it is the transferability and effectiveness, with Peter it is the relevance of the training programs to learners and their motivation to learn. Both of them saw training quality as being learner-centred and resulted based.

5.2.4 Regulation and Regulating Bodies

5.2.4.1 Case Three

Case Three is a private organisation (Pty Ltd company) delivering short courses and HR coaching services to businesses and individuals. The courses delivered at Case Three is non-accredited short courses specialising in human resources management and development. Max, the manager and founder of the company, has Certificate IV in Training and Assessment, which is a certificate allowing him to deliver and assess vocational courses as according to ASQA regulations. Max revealed that even his company only delivers non-accredited short courses, they have not only one regulator:

Yes, the Australian Skills Quality Authority (ASQA), and industry bodies such as the Australian Chamber of Commerce, the Australia Career Counselling, the Australian Human Resource Institute, Fair work and internal controls.

Because Case Three's main expertise is in the human resource area, besides ASQA, they have other human resource industry bodies which they have to follow their guidelines. Max said that his company has to adhere to the guidelines and regulations of the above-mentioned authorities because Australian HR area has quite strictly and transparently published rules and guidelines. When designing the training courses. Max also refers to *training.gov.au* website which is the National Register on the Australian VET sector managed by the Department of Education and Training. The webpage *Training.gov.au* is the official resources of:

1. **Nationally Recognised Training (NRT)** which consists of: Training Packages, Qualifications, Units of competency, Accredited courses and Skill sets
2. **Registered Training Organisations (RTOs)** who have the approved scope to deliver Nationally Recognised Training, as required by national and jurisdictional legislation within Australia.
("Training.gov.au," 2018).

Explaining in more details of what kinds of regulations Case Three has to adhere to maintain quality training, Max said:

For external authorities, we have to follow their guidelines and regulations. For example, with ASQA quality, we are under RTO standards...Fair work has National Employment Standards and all kinds of Awards, agreements and regulations. We also have internal disciplinary controls.

Even not mentioning quality as being compliant to standards, Max implicitly linked quality to meeting requirements from regulators.

Steve, the trainer, has Certificate IV in Training and Assessment and other qualifications which ensure he is eligible to deliver the training of vocational courses in Australia. He confirmed that is a qualified trainer in HR, Business and Economics. He understands that in order to be a qualified trainer he needs to have vocational competencies, qualifications and industry experience and skills and currency as described by ASQA (ASQA, 2018). He said that he is

well aware of and meet ASQA's requirements for trainers. Apart from that, he is a member of some industry bodies such as the Australian Human Resource Institute.

Like Max, Steve also pointed out that for his organisation, they have more than one regulator. They have to refer to different regulations and standards when designing the course, delivering or operating the company.

The good thing is... you have all the guidelines to follow. Your job is to make sure your operation is compliant. They may not check on you but in order to do well, you must follow the rules.

Steve also admitted that the company he worked with provides him with their internal discipline control policies, procedures and instructions on how to follow their process.

5.2.4.2 Case Four

Case Four is a Division under a university, even it is quite dependent from higher education Schools/Colleges within the university, Sarah mentioned that they have both ASQA and TEQSA as their regulators. When being asked about their regulations, she said:

ASQA and TEQSA. As we are a duo-organisations which having both uni courses and TAFE, we have both ASQA and TEQSA as regulators...Our audit reports are on our website, if you want to see, you can find it on our website.

Sarah kept mentioning about regulators being asked about non-accredited courses. When being asked further that whether the non-accredited courses being audited, she explained that regulators audit the overall operation of the provider and its accredited courses, the non-accredited are not in the scope of audits. However, non-accredited courses are under the same umbrella with accredited courses as they build the name of the providers. Sarah also asserted that Case Four has its own policies and procedures for quality assurance. Moreover, for short courses, they design all curricula and workforce assessment tools which are 'emotional intelligence and job suitability assessments'. They design the in-house training courses and assessment with the consultation from industry and their trainers who are qualified and have industry experience.

Case Four also purchases assessment instruments that have been tested and found to be valid and reliable such as Myers-Briggs Type Indicator and products from GENOS International and Harrison Assessments for their short courses. These suppliers, according to Case Four promotion documents, produce high-quality psychometric assessments and development programs focusing on emotional intelligence, motivation and organisational effectiveness.

Peter, the casual trainer also mention that he is aware that ASQA is the regulator for the vocational sector and he understands ASQA's requirements relating to trainers, training and assessment. He also revealed that for project management courses, he needs to have the Project Management Professional certification (PMP) in order to be a qualified professional in this field.

Discussing his role in the training process, Peter mentioned that he is also involved in writing the course and assessment when required:

When writing the course, I refer to training.gov.au as a source of reference. I also use the resources purchased from suppliers and customise to meet the needs of learners. For example, for project management courses, I used PMVOK (Project management body of knowledge) as a source of reference books. Normally I design the powerpoint presentation and use some support materials. For most providers, I have to follow their process. They order me to teach a course and I have to follow their process.

Even Peter stated that he has to follow the providers' process and procedures, but they never check on him. He can add some support materials to his training, and he is aware of compliance issues as he is a qualified trainer.

It is clear from Case Four that external regulators have their influence in the operation of Case Four and they have developed policies and procedures as well as purchase and customise the resources from professional suppliers in order to be meet their quality requirements.

5.2.5 Training Process and Quality Assurance

5.2.5.1 Case Three

Max expressed that his training courses go through several steps. The first step is undertaking training needs analysis. The second step is budgeting, the third step is planning for the date, time, location, timeframe and the last steps is training plan.

The first step is training needs analysis. This is to decide on contents, the subject matter. Then we will plan the date and time and location for the training, either at the client's venue or ours. Finally, is the training plan. The training plan is what to include in each training session, how much time allocation for each topic, what methodology should be used.

Max also explained that training needs analysis is to ensure the specific objectives are met. The subsequent steps will be conducted only after the training needs has been analysed either through questionnaires or interviews with trainees. Max mentioned that he always refers to training.gov.au when developing the curriculum.

The perceptions of quality and regulators' requirements are reflected in the training process that Case Three is conducting. On the one hand, they are responsible for the satisfaction and the 'engagement' of trainees with the subject matter, on the other hand, they refer to regulator's guidelines in order to design the training contents. The perception of quality associated with compliance is reflected in Lemaitre (2002) and Maria João Rosa (2014) as the compliance with requirements of policymakers, external stakeholders and sponsors and there is an increase in the compliance procedures and requirements, are making quality assurance become the compliance instrument in the VET sector. Even though both Max and Steve did not link quality to compliance, the practice they are doing is reflecting this.

In order to ensure the whole company follows the quality assurance process, Max affirmed that his organisation has its own policy and procedures, induction guidelines and disciplinary procedures.

We have Policy and Procedure, induction guidelines, and disciplinary procedures. All new staff will have to go through induction training including company policies and procedures. All the policies and procedures are published in our staff handbook.

Max further explained that they have the mechanism to maintain and assure the quality process by “internal audits at milestones held each quarter and professional development internal training”.

Agreeing with Max, when being asked what he does to assure the quality of his training courses, Steve also stated that even though he is engaged in the training services with Case Three on ad hoc basis, he is aware and follow company procedures in quality control.

Yeah...evaluation of feedback forms, monitoring engagement from students/ encouraging engagement, training needs analysis undertaken, ensuring strengths of the cohort are shared and balanced and correct assessment methods chosen and subject matter resources, such as visual, audio, kinesthetics...following company procedures.

Max and Steve's responses revealed that Case Three has their own policy and procedures in quality assurance. On top of that, they are subject to compliance requirements from regulators while trying to ensure clients' satisfaction.

5.2.5.2 Case Four

Sarah is quite clear about the training process in her organisation. She said that her organisation follows 5 rigorous steps in the training process. The first step is assessing training needs. In this step, Sarah and other colleagues work with clients to identify their issues, their needs and “develop specific learning solutions to meet clients organisational strategic and learning objectives”. The next steps include setting training objectives, developing training action plan, implement training and evaluating training.

Sarah said that Case Four has their operation staff and training (academic) staff who involved in different steps of the process. Sarah asserted that all steps are followed in all the training courses as this is their policy.

Regarding the quality assurance methods, Sarah mentioned that her organisation applies Kirkpatrick’s model of evaluation training (Kirkpatrick, 1998; Kirkpatrick & Kirlpatrick, 2006)

We measure customers experience and feedback. We follow Kirkpatrick’s models to evaluate clients experience with 4 levels of reaction, learning, behaviour and results...We use feedback forms and evaluate the effectiveness of training courses.

Sarah also mentioned that their programs are delivered by “industry facilitators who are experienced and qualified” to emphasise the quality assurance process that her organisation applies.

When being asked what the organisation has done to ensure the quality of training courses, Peter has a very different view of what he thinks the process should not be:

I question the quality of the providers. The providers focus too much on compliance, not quality. I think compliance cannot assure quality, it can be a part of quality, but not quality. Sometimes all they need is compliance, compliance on paperwork, on assessments...not the real quality that they want.

Peter’s view is in accordance with Harvey & Newton (2007) about the conflict between compliance and continuous quality improvement. According to Harvey & Newton (2007), accountability is an overall term for compliance, control and value-for-money expectation. It serves the supposed purpose but not a quality destination. Accountability mechanism is not likely to result in continuous quality improvement since improvement comes from the changed culture and ownership (Harvey & Newton, 2007). This is also mentioned by Maria Joao Rosa (2014) that academics are often unhappy with quality assurance mechanisms which are seen as not fully reliable, demotivated and unable to achieve the essence of the education. Moreover, academics also tend to show their doubt on quality assurance’s power to improve their direct working environment (Maria João Rosa, 2014).

5.2.6 Challenges in Quality Assurance

5.2.6.1 Case Three

Max, being the manager of a small size organisation, admitted that the challenges he faced are the ongoing changes in the departmental and government policies and regulations and competition from low-cost organisations. He explained:

Ongoing departmental/governmental change is one challenge. Government policies are changing very quickly. In order to be compliant, we have to adjust, to change our policies and training programs.... The threats from low-cost inferior training organisation is another challenge...Not everyone is doing properly. Some people are

trying to cut the corner and give low costs. This makes them more competitive in terms of costing... Another issue is the high cost to facilitate ongoing training.

Max is concerned about the continuous changes in regulators' requirements which in turn influence the organisation operations and compliance with the rules. His concerns show his perception of quality is very much relating to compliance with external regulators.

Besides, being compliant and competitive in terms of cost at the same time is another challenge as they have to adjust their policies and training plans. While all the changes result in expenses, they need to compete with other low-cost providers, who put the profit as their priority.

5.2.6.2 Case Four

Sarah said that with their system being quite clear and transparent, they hardly have any challenges in quality assurance. Besides their trainers who are organisation's personnel, Case Four also engages casual and ad hoc trainers and guest speakers who are working in the industry; however, they have a system in place to control the quality.

However, Peter's view is different from Sarah's about the challenges that providers face in quality assurance of short courses. He thought that providers do not invest sufficiently in engaging trainers in designing quality training materials:

In my opinion, the challenge is the time factor required to develop something at the quality standard. Providers are reluctant to invest in developing quality materials for the courses. They do not pay trainers for developing good training materials. They use one size fit all training materials.

Peter also concerns that the providers focus too much on compliance, not quality. As Peter's view on quality is highly related to learners, what they learn from the course, the relevance and sufficiency of the knowledge and skills, therefore he saw what the providers do in order to be compliant with requirements from regulators are not really for quality purposes. Peter's view is in line with that of Rosa & Amaral, (2014) claiming that the issuance of a growing number of compliance requirements, is transferring quality assurance into a compliance instrument. In fact, academics tend to view quality assurance as being *accountability-led* rather than *improvement-led* (Maria João Rosa & Amaral, 2014).

5.2.7 Trainer Autonomy

5.2.7.1 Case Three

Max, the manager, explained that Case Three engaged trainers on ad hoc and casual basis. Trainers' responsibility is only involved in delivering the training courses.

The curriculum is designed by the company. Trainers only deliver the subject matter that has been planned in the training plans. After the training needs analysis...and all other steps, we design the training plan and trainers to follow. In the past, I let the trainers develop the content... but now, not anymore. I found some mistakes and I stopped that. I want to make sure compliance with requirements and now all curriculums are designed by the company...I refer to training.gov.au as guidelines to develop the curriculum.

With Case Three, trainers are not given so much flexibility in designing the subject matter of the course. The trainers themselves have to meet the requirements to be qualified trainers, yet they have to follow the provider policies and procedures and the agreed training plan that the provider has prepared for the course.

Steve also agreed that he follows the company's procedures and use training curriculum and materials developed by providers to deliver the courses.

5.2.7.2 Case Four

Both informants from Case Four revealed that even though providers require trainers to have extensive expertise and experience in the areas they are delivering training, they are not given too much flexibility to design and deliver whatever they want for the course.

Sarah explained that the training action plan, which is one of the steps in the training process, is conducted before the trainer deliver the course and trainers will follow the training plan.

In many cases, trainers will involve in training action plans, but they do not do it by themselves. Normally we have pre-designed courses or customised courses. For customised courses, we could work with trainers to develop training plans.

Peter also mentioned that he sometimes involves in course designing. However, most of the time, he follows the process and materials given by providers. He may design the powerpoint presentation and add some support materials of his own, but learner books, resource and assessments come from providers. When writing his own materials, Peter refers to official resources from government or suppliers:

When writing the course, I refer to training.gov.au as a source of reference. I also use the resources purchased from suppliers and customise to meet the needs of learners. For example, for project management courses, I used PMVOK (Project management body of knowledge) as a source of reference books.

In Case Four circumstance, both provider and the trainer use the readymade resources from suppliers which are tested and verified about the reliability and validity. Therefore, the trainer autonomy is not at a high level.

5.3 Chapter Conclusion

This chapter has presented and analysed the findings from the interviews. Following the sample selection strategy and data collection methods stated in Chapter IV, six people from two Vietnamese training organisations and four people from two Australian training organisations have been interviewed. Companies marketing materials have been analysed. The data were presented and discussed within five themes including perceptions of quality, regulation and regulating bodies, training process and quality assurance, challenges in quality assurance and trainer autonomy.

The findings have revealed the significant difference between the Vietnamese Cases and Australian Cases is the regulating system and regulatory bodies. The Australian Cases have more than one regulator depending on the sector they belong to and the courses they are delivering. Even though non-accredited courses are not audited, the whole organisation operation is regulated, and these courses contribute to the quality and reputation of these organisations. Meanwhile, the Vietnamese organisations proved that they lack an official regulator, which obviously impact their perception of quality and quality assurance process. This Chapter has shown the linkage of the context to the operation of the training providers.

The next chapter will discuss more details on the similarities and differences between two countries in perceptions of quality and quality assurance practices, answer the research question, and provide further explanations of the differences.

CHAPTER VI

DISCUSSION

6.1 Chapter Introduction

The previous chapter presented the findings of this study which were obtained from interviews with ten people from four training organisations, two in Hanoi, Vietnam; and two in Melbourne, Australia.

The four organisations are different in the type of business they offer and their market segmentation, but they all deliver short generic skills courses (1-8 days) and share features related to the corporate issues such as human resourcing, leadership, management skills and the teaching and learning of soft skills for personal development.

This chapter will discuss the findings in relation to the research question and in light of the literature review. This study compares the quality assurance processes employed by training providers for short generic skills/soft skills courses in Vietnam and Australia. The research question is how the quality of soft skills (generic skills) courses provided by training organisations in Vietnam is assured and compared with the similar courses provided by Australian RTOs; which lessons Vietnamese and Australian providers can learn from each other.

The research has investigated and compared the quality assurance (QA) practices in case studies of two training institutions in Vietnam and two organisations in Australia which provide non-accredited short courses in the business sector. The findings have revealed the perceptions of quality these organisations possess and how they control the quality of the short courses and address the issues of quality requirements such as government policies and regulations.

This chapter compares and discusses the similarities and differences between the quality perceptions and practices in training providers in Australia and Vietnam, explains the possible causes for the similarities and differences by examining the political and social contexts. This

chapter also identifies the advantages and disadvantages of these practices and recommends further areas for investigation.

6.2 Perceptions of Quality and Quality Assurance Practices in Short Course Providers: Similarities and Differences

6.2.1 Perceptions of Quality

Despite the difference in the type of business and experience, with Case One being a 9-year-old private company, Case Two being a 25-year-old international non-government organisation, Case Three being a 5-year-old private training provider in Australia and Case Four, a 16-year-old provider under a public university in Australia, the perceptions of quality that the interviewees possess are mainly common. All the interviewees link the perception of quality of short courses to client satisfaction and applicability of the program. This is in line with the notion of ‘interface quality’ described by Cheng (2003, p.23). This notion maintains focal points on the effectiveness of schools or education programs in response to stakeholders’ requirements, and market competition to ensure accountability, apparently to the public (Cheng, 2003). Accountability has been widely utilised for all public services including education and it is seen as the main purpose of any external quality process. Accountability is also linked with the fitness-for-purpose definition of quality (Harvey & Newton, 2007; Maria João Rosa, 2014) and value for money described by Harvey and Green (1993, p.10). The concept of quality as customer satisfaction in the service sector has been widely accepted (IIEP, 2011). The reason for this commonality is that all the studied organisations are delivering the short courses as their services/products for profit purposes and generating income, which also means they are operating as service providers like other businesses in the service sector.

The informants from the two Australian cases focussed more on learners’ engagement and the transferability of the courses, while the interviewees from Vietnamese cases focussed more on learner evaluation and feedback. Yet, their notions of quality are all linked to course evaluation which is reflective of Kirkpatrick’s model of evaluation training (Kirkpatrick, 1998; Kirkpatrick & Kirlpatrick, 2006). Their perceptions are also in line with the internal quality management system in vocational training providers described by Chasovschi and Vlad (2015). According to Chasovschi and Vlad (2015), student satisfaction depends on multiple factors

including the arrangement of the training programs, the facilities and resources, training contents and materials, training methods and competencies of trainers, satisfaction with trainers and participants' motivation (Chasovschi & Vlad, 2015).

None of the interviewees associated quality assurance with monitoring and maintenance of programs to achieve established standards even though this notion is widely recognised by international agencies (CICIC, 2016; OECD, 2010; UNESCO, 2016). The linkages between quality assurance and standards and frameworks are mentioned broadly in international VET quality literature (Harris, 2015; Lemaitre, 2002; Tuck, 2007).

Although sharing the core idea of quality assurance as client satisfaction and applicability, in this study, people in different roles have different definitions and descriptions of quality which are associated with their jobs. This is clear in Prisacariu and Shah (2016, p.154), where 'quality is a slippery and vague concept', thus, 'it is difficult to find an agreement on a single definition', and different definitions of quality are used in different circumstances. For people in managing positions like Ngan, Thuy, Huong, Sarah and Max, they are accountable for the effectiveness and success of the course to their clients and sponsors, therefore, they are more likely to link the perception of quality to meeting objectives, overall clients' satisfaction and skills transferability, more linked to value for money. In comparison, trainers like Thu, Mai, Peter and Steve tend to link quality to learners' reactions, engagement and motivation. Even though they are not contrasted in their opinions, the voice from trainers reflects a critical thought regarding the quality approach that providers are trying to achieve. This will be discussed in more details in the next section.

To sum up, the findings show that the perceptions of quality and quality assurance are not much different between Vietnamese and Australian cases even though they are operating in a very different regulatory system. The reason may be that all the researched organisations are for-profit organisations offering the same type of courses, and in a competitive environment, quality assurance can also have an influence on *public relations*, which means that many institutions use QA as a marketing and branding tool as pointed out by Stensaker (2008).

The next section will explain the most revealing difference in the findings from four case studies in two countries.

6.2.2 Regulation and Regulating Bodies

The most significant difference between Vietnamese and Australian training providers in this research is the regulatory system that they are operating in.

6.2.2.1 Vietnamese Cases

The findings from the Vietnamese cases confirmed that providers of non-accredited short courses have no regulators as one of the informants, described that the sector is being ‘floated’. While the Vietnamese education system is quite complex with the cross management of MOET and MOLISA in vocational education and training, mainly with vocational schools and colleges (ADB, 2014; EP-Nuffic, 2015), the providers of non-accredited short courses are set outside the regulation of these two authorities. Case One, a private company, is under the Department of Planning and Investment in terms of registration. However, Case One does not have a regulator controlling the quality of their courses as well as their operation except for the issues of tax responsibility, a factor linking private companies. Case Two is an international non-government training provider, established under a memorandum of understanding between MOET and its Head Institute overseas. This case also affirmed the absence of MOET’s role as a regulator in their operation. The reason may be that short course providers are not categorised as vocational training providers, although the development of this type of provider in the market recently is clearly seen (Tu, 2013, Nguyen & Truong, 2007). Over and above this, the informants stated they had witnessed fierce competition because of too many similar providers operating. In regard to this, the findings revealed that there are no proper regulators and regulations to manage this sector in Vietnam.

This relates to my argument that despite the prevailing existence of short training courses, currently there is no place for this kind of course in the formal education system in Vietnam.

6.2.2.2 Explanations

The lack of a regulatory system for short course training providers in Vietnam can be explained by several political and social factors.

In Vietnam, the concept that the university's mission is to prepare graduates for the workplace has been long established (Tran, 2013; Trung & Swierczek, 2009). Research into training and

development in Vietnam focuses predominantly on the link between the shortage of a skilled workforce and the inappropriateness of the university curriculum. Students are in favour of higher education more than vocational training although the unemployment rates among higher education graduates are very high (Thang Ngoc et al., 2011). Attention from education policymakers is drawn to higher education rather than vocational training.

On the other hand, vocational training is reported to have a lack of facilities, resources and practical programs. Apart from the management of technical and vocational education and training (TVET) being described as overly complicated, less effective and inflexible, the people in charge of the management of the system often have no or little experience of TVET. In short, they lack the vision and the managerial skills to run it (Lim, 2014). Most TVET institutions in the provinces are small and highly specialised rather than multi-disciplinary as required by the industry. The quality of the training programmes is poor, with their contents often having little relevance to the needs of the industry. Programmes are often based on the resources of the institutions and capacity, not the demands of industry, with curricula that are often impractical. There is an insufficient collaboration between TVET institutions and industry, with very few employers being involved in the development of the curriculum. TVET graduates are lack of basic knowledge and skills required and are not highly regarded by industry (Lim, 2014). In Vietnam, the perception that TVET is a low-status type of education, only being chosen as a last resort is still widespread. This perception is so ingrained in the minds of students, parents and the public (Lim, 2014). It is explained by the fact that vocational training has not received much attention from policymakers.

In the bigger picture of the socioeconomic context, there are some big gaps between employers' perceived needs and graduate competencies and the gaps are often claimed due to students lacking in soft skills (or so-called generic or employability skills) (Tran, 2013; Trung & Swierczek, 2009). The gap between the outcome of the education system and the industry requirements is claimed to be a persistent gap (Cox & Warner, 2013; N. T. Nguyen & Truong, 2007; Trung & Swierczek, 2009).

While there are demands from corporations for corporate training, they seem not be able to source it from either university or vocational schools due to the above reasons. Therefore, there has been a trend that large private and SMEs in Vietnam have started to pay increasing attention to managerial and leadership training and staff training more recently. The majority of

training programs concentrated on business management skills relating to work while personal development skills were not emphasised (L. A. Nguyen et al., 2017).

Big corporations, especially multi-national companies or foreign investment enterprises invested in training their own management and employees by inviting foreign experts to Vietnam to enable their Vietnamese managers to gain international experience (Cox & Warner, 2013). While SMEs or SOEs are following the trend, they often collaborate with domestic training companies to organise short training courses for their existing and/or potential managers (D. T. N. Nguyen et al., 2017). This kind of training seems to involve issues of businesses, not the education system. Therefore, private training providers are treated like other businesses, not as particular education and training providers/organisations. There is a lack of attention by education policymakers to this type of corporate training of short/generic skills course and training providers.

6.2.2.3 Australian Cases

In contrast, the two Australian cases confirmed that they have more than one regulator which directly or indirectly monitors their operations even though they are different in the type of business they conduct. With the Australian Skills Quality Authority (ASQA) being the national regulator for registered training organisations (RTOs), providers that deliver VET programs (ASQA, 2017), both Australian cases are under ASQA. Besides, each case has other regulators depending on their business areas. Case Three has industry bodies in human resource areas such as Australia Career Counselling, Australian Human Resource Institute and Fair work. Case Four has the Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency (TEQSA) due to its being a dual provider. Each regulator has its own regulations and/or guidelines that providers must follow such as ASQA's Standards for RTOs 2015 (ASQA, 2018).

However, unlike Vietnamese providers only provide non-accredited short courses, the two Australian training providers in this study provide both accredited and non-accredited courses. It is obvious that accredited VET courses are under strict regulations and audit of regulators. The providers acknowledged that they are having more than one regulator for the overall operations. Nonetheless, being under the same umbrella of RTO offering accredited courses, non-accredited courses are not audited, which means that even the overall operation of

providers are monitored by regulators, specific non-accredited short courses quality may not be officially regulated by external authorities.

All in all, the Australian cases revealed a significant difference in the regulating system in the VET sector compared with Vietnamese ones.

6.2.2.4 Explanations

Considering the social and political context, this can be explained by the Australian vision for vocational education and training. The vocational education and training (VET) sector plays an important role in the Australian economy in terms of both national workforce development and export industry (ASQA, 2018). The VET sector provides students with the qualifications and skills needed for all employment types. Australia's VET industry is well known for providing quality programs (ASQA, 2017).

In terms of shared participation in the Australian education system, the number of VET providers is at least 35 times more than the number of higher education providers and the number of VET students is three times more than the number of higher education students in Australia. In comparison with other countries, Australia also has more VET providers, based on the ratio of working-age-people number and VET providers (Korbel & Misko, 2016).

In terms of quality of the Australian VET sector, according to Harris (2015), there has been broad literature exploring the quality of VET with both favourable and critical arguments. On the favourable side, Australian National Training Authority (ANTA), Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, Skills Australia and other authors have claimed that the Australian VET system is of world-class and are highly evaluated. In terms of quality of non-accredited courses, based on Survey of Employer Use and Views of VET, a quite high proportion of employers satisfied with the VET system, especially with non-accredited training (Harris, 2015).

On the critical side, the Council of Australian Government (COAG), National Skills Standard Council (NSSC) and some others continuously questioned the quality of VET, especially RTOs in VET, and stated that reform should be taken towards VET. Many reports on poor quality commercial for-profit RTOs have been published in newspapers and the media (Harris, 2015; Pasura, 2014). As the responses for such concerns, there has been a series of national and state

activities aiming at regulating the quality of VET such as the formation of ASQA or the revision of the Australian Qualifications Framework. Three regulatory changes have significantly had impacts on the VET quality, which are the transformation to an industry-oriented system, the appearance of an open market for training and the introduction of the competency-based frameworks (Harris, 2015).

Regarding the positioning of generic skills in VET, since the Mayer Committee was established in the early 1990s in order to develop the notion of key skills related to employment, generic skills have been regarded as needing to be integrated on the Australian education agenda. The Meyer key competencies report has formed the current understanding of generic skills and developed a framework for incorporating them into the training system. It is reported that industry highly valued generic skills as these skills are crucial to work performance. Key generic skills have been incorporated into the training packages from the beginning, but they are mostly integrated into other competencies. Relating to the recording, reporting and certification of generic skills, although it is reported that no organizations have established formal systems to conduct this, an informal process to certify the key competencies has been provided and the students are provided with a statement of attainment for the achievement competency at all levels (Clayton et al., 2003).

This explained why the Australian cases refer to the common training package in training.gov.au when they design the curriculum for their short training courses.

The above reasoning, political and social alike, has explained both the existence and influence of a regulatory system for Australian short course providers.

6.2.3 Training Process and Quality Assurance Practice

All the four cases have a similar process in organising training, starting with training needs analysis and finishing with training evaluation. The process has been described in many human resource development and training books (Cascio, 2003; Craig, 1987; Tannenbaum & Yukl, 1992). In all four cases, management/ operation staff are involved in the training needs analysis process, setting objectives and training evaluation. However, the differences lie in the process of designing courses outlines/ curriculum. This is explained in the following sections.

6.2.3.1 The Vietnamese Cases

In the Vietnamese cases, trainers kept the primary role in designing the contents of the training course. Organisations depend greatly on trainers in this step. Depending too much on trainers in designing the training contents, because trainers are contracted and casual, may result in deepening the challenges that the Vietnamese cases face.

Without a regulating system, the Vietnamese cases depend on their own internal policies and procedures to ensure quality. They emphasise the forms of feedback and evaluation from learners/ clients during and at the end of training courses as the way to monitor and ensure quality, since quality means client's satisfaction and objective achieving.

Lacking clear and transparent regulations and guidelines also resulted in both organisations and trainers facing challenges. Depending on the trainers, the Vietnamese cases were quite passive in their quality monitoring process. Their approach is evaluating and fixing up if the feedback from learners and clients is not satisfactory both during and after the courses are complete. If the trainers do a good job, organisations have quality training courses; otherwise, they may have to adjust the content for the next courses which may not be appropriate due to there being a different cohort of trainees.

Trainers, on the other hand, have a lot of difficulties because of having too high a level of autonomy in designing and delivering training courses. Trainers have to rely on their own resources and experience to cater to the needs of trainees. There is no standardised curriculum of guidelines to help them form the basis for the courses.

This again can be explained by the lack of a regulatory system for short courses training in Vietnam. The corporate training is done by businesses at their own sake, for the purpose of training their staff, not an issue of the education system which needs attention.

6.2.3.2 The Australian Cases

In contrast, in the Australian cases, trainers are not involved very much in designing the training content and materials. The curriculum and training plans are developed by staff from providers. Providers also purchase ready-made training materials and assessment tools from suppliers and customise them to meet their needs. Trainers use the materials supplied by the

organisations and add some supplementary materials to the training, but the main resources and content are designed and provided by the organisations.

This can be explained by the fact that the Australian regulatory system for training providers has impacted on the operation of these organisations. They have to follow standards, regulations and guidelines. Therefore, they have to develop training courses which are compliant with the regulations. In fact, none of the informants in the Australian cases linked quality to the compliance with standards, and the process they implemented revealed that fact.

With the Australian cases in this study, the short courses they provided were not accredited, which means their accreditation is not the real issue in their quality assurance approach. Further, the perceptions of quality that informants possessed did not link to achieving standards, yet the processes they implemented are much associated with regulations. This is reflected in the conclusion made by Misko (2015) that the important connection between regulation and quality is a common characteristic of VET sectors in Australia and some other developed countries (Misko (2015). This is shown in the findings from the Australian case interviews.

The connection between regulation and quality is shown in the selecting of qualified trainers who meet ASQA's requirements and also in the designing of the course contents and assessment tools. When designing the training courses and assessment tools, Case Three referred to training packages on training.gov.au and purchasing the materials that have been tested and validated. They also referred to guidelines from industry bodies when developing curriculum. Case Four also purchased and customised the materials from suppliers. Further, they also depended on their experts in the industry to develop the materials.

Misko's (2015) concept of quality in Australian VET context is correct in this sense. She mentioned that quality is "the level of excellence in training delivered by public and private training and assessment providers. It necessarily includes both quality management concepts as well as regulatory frameworks" (Misko, 2015, p.12).

6.2.3.3 Commonality

The commonality between the Vietnamese cases and the Australian cases is that all the organisations have their own policies and procedures in managing and controlling quality and they all use Kirkpatrick's model of evaluation.

The Vietnamese cases used Kirkpatrick's model of evaluation training with a focus on level 1 (Reaction) and level 2 (Learning) (Kirkpatrick, 1998; Kirkpatrick & Kirlpatrick, 2006). Level 3 (Behaviour) and level 4 (Result) was only conducted upon the request of clients. Level 1- Reaction is the evaluation that seeks participants' opinions and feelings about the training programme they have just participated in. Level 2- Learning level is the evaluation conducted to measure the improvements in knowledge, skills, and attitudes after the training (Kirkpatrick, 1998; Kirkpatrick & Kirlpatrick, 2006).

Similarly, the Australian cases used Kirkpatrick's model of evaluation with the focus on levels 1 and 2. Even Sarah from Case Four explained that they care about the transferability of the knowledge and skills; and in practice, they also conduct the evaluation with level 2 by using feedback forms and assessment outcomes.

The reason for this commonality in using Kirkpatrick's model of evaluation of training is that this four-level model has become the standard in the field of training evaluation for its straightforward nature and its simplicity and practicality. Besides, the model is also recognised for its strength to measure changes in behaviours of the participants involved in the training. The four-level model has been a dominant tool for training evaluation for more than forty years after its introduction (Kirkpatrick & Kirlpatrick, 2006; La Duke, 2017; Roghayeh, 2018).

6.2.4 Challenges in the Quality Process

6.2.4.1 The Australian Cases

According to Lemaitre (2002), quality assurance is associated with three main concepts: accountability, compliance and improvement. Accountability refers to institutions' accountability for where and how they spend funded money. Compliance is meeting the requirements of policymakers, external stakeholders and sponsors. Improvement means acquiring inputs, improving the process and raising the outcomes to the expected standards

(Lemaitre, 2002). Accountability is also linked with the fitness-for-purpose definition of quality (Harvey & Newton, 2007; Maria João Rosa, 2014).

From the findings, it can be seen that, in the Australian cases, quality assurance is more linked to the issues of accountability and compliance rather than improvement. Therefore, this close link to compliance resulted in their challenges. One interviewee from Case Three admitted that the challenges they faced are the ongoing changes in the departmental and government policies and regulations. They had to be compliant with regulatory requirements, at the same time, competing with low-cost providers. This is a dilemma for them. Another interviewee from Case Four voiced that providers were not willing to invest and did not invest sufficiently in terms of time and resources in engaging trainers in designing quality training materials.

The focus on accountability and compliance rather than quality has been discussed at length in the literature. According to Harvey and Newton (2007), accountability systems are unlikely to result in continuous quality improvement since improvement results from changing culture and ownership while compliance processes do not support this (Harvey & Newton, 2007). Amaral (2014) also stated that whenever academics have a stronger voice, the balance will be in the side of improvement, and vice versa, yet the stronger role of government will lead to stronger attention to accountability (Amaral, 2014). Moreover, accountability tends to demotivate academic staff and place an added burden on the staff involving innovation and quality initiatives. Accountability requires them to respond to the external scrutiny without having trust and respect from managers and outside stakeholders (Harvey & Newton, 2007).

In the Australian cases, as the regulatory system has such strong power, let alone the fact that there is more than one regulator above each organisation, the voice of management is stronger and tends towards associating quality with accountability. With the system that providers pay too much attention to compliance since quality assurance can be used as a tool for marketing and building brand name (Stensaker, 2008), and trainers have a low level of autonomy. Hence, it seems that quality as internal continuous improvement is not clearly shown in the Australian cases.

6.2.4.2 The Vietnamese Cases

The Vietnamese cases, on the other hand, faced and continue to face a lot of challenges due to the lack of a regulatory system and clear guidelines. Since there are no standards of regulation,

the quality of a course or an institution is judged by clients' satisfaction, which is subjective and vague. It is a real challenge for the Vietnamese cases to maintain the reputation of their organisations and gain any real competitiveness in the market. Moreover, the lack of attention from the public to the short course training make it difficult for them to do a good job as clients, even though they invested in sending selected staff to training courses. Yet they did not support their entire staff to fully attend these training courses.

Apart from that, the Vietnamese cases faced the challenges in managing their trainers and having their own resources. As there are no clear regulations for short training courses, providers have their own policies in selecting and recruiting trainers based on their requirements.

However, these Vietnamese cases showed their efforts in self-improvement by continuously getting feedback from their clients and through this means to improve themselves to gain competitive advantages in the market. One interviewee from Case Two claimed that they had to improve themselves continuously, change continuously because each year the demands from their clients are higher than last year, especially for the long-term clients, whom they have worked for many years.

The role of trainers in the Vietnamese cases is more crucial in the quality process than in the Australian cases as they are more deeply involved in designing the content of the courses. Trainers reported having a high level of autonomy in developing and delivering the courses, which is, on one hand, motivated them to contribute and show their competence, yet on the other hand, gave them a lot of difficulties as they have to exploit their own knowledge, experience and resources in designing and delivering the courses. However, this is also a driving force for them to keep learning and improving themselves to be able to sustain themselves and their programs in a competitive market.

The role of trainers in the Australian cases is less significant in determining the quality of training courses than it is in the Vietnamese cases. It is in accordance to Harris (2015) statement that, despite the quality of VET system depending heavily on the teachers and trainers, and the rhetoric that they are the most important determiners of quality in VET, they are, in fact, the least cared for (Harris, 2015).

6.2.5 Responses towards Regulatory Requirements

According to Anderson (2006), even though academics are fully committed to quality, they revealed contradictory opinions about the quality process as they experienced it. The different understanding and perspective of the term 'quality' resulted in (and continues to result in) the tension between management, academics and quality control bodies (Anderson, 2006). It is widely mentioned in the literature that the issuance of more and more compliance requirements from Government is transferring quality assurance into a compliance instrument. This has been due to the growing of market-like mechanisms under the name of consumer protection (Maria João Rosa & Amaral, 2014). This opinion was voiced by a trainer in one Australian case. This trainer questioned the quality assurance practices of the providers he is working with and claimed that it focuses more on compliance rather than quality. Even though this is a minority opinion in this study, it is a critical voice and similar opinions have been widely recognised in the literature (Amaral, 2014; Maria João Rosa, 2014; Maria João Rosa & Amaral, 2014). Another response is that the ongoing changes in regulatory requirements have caused challenges for training providers as they have had to change their policies, procedures and training programs accordingly to be compliant with the requirements.

The Vietnamese cases, on the other hand, are longing for a standard or a regulation from a neutral authority to regulate them as well as a ranking system with clear criteria for providers to aim to. As for them, the quality judgement based on client's satisfaction, which is a subjective and vague concept, is not a sustainable way to maintain healthy competitiveness and the development of the sector.

6.3 Addressing the Research Question

The research question of how the quality of soft skills (generic skills) courses provided by training organisations in Vietnam and Australia is assured and what the lessons that they can learn from each other has guided the data collection, analysis and discussion.

The data analysis and discussion above have addressed the research question and sub-questions. In conclusion, the quality assurance perceptions of short course providers are similar between the Vietnamese cases and Australian cases, yet their quality assurance practices are different. Even though all the cases have their own policies and procedures to monitor quality, the Vietnamese cases rely more on trainers in their quality process and therefore are quite

passive in quality control. They tend to use customised training resources which are designed based on clients' needs. Since there are no regulators, they use internal recourses to assure quality. However, they follow an improvement-led approach to maintain their competitiveness in the market.

On the contrary, the Australian cases are dependent on regulatory requirements in their quality practice and approach. Their policies and procedures are compliant with external regulators and stakeholders. They use the trainers of accredited courses and refer to national accredited guidelines (training.gov.au) to design non-accredited courses. They tend to purchase ready-made materials for the training course which ensure to be compliant and industry responsive. Trainers have a low level of autonomy and play a less significant part in the quality process.

The quality assurance practices in both Australian cases and Vietnamese cases have their own merits and they can learn from each other to some extent. Vietnamese organisations' practices have more disadvantages due to the lack of the regulatory system, which may not ensure healthy and sustainable development of the sector. While the change in policy is a long-term and a macro issue which needs the attention and involvement of policymakers, Vietnamese organisations can, in theory, learn from Australian organisations too in developing their own resources using industry experts or purchasing training materials from well-known suppliers internationally and customise them to suit their needs in order to have more control in quality process and less dependence on trainers. Vietnamese providers should also develop more robust policies and procedures to manage contracted trainers.

Australian organisations, on the other hand, could learn from Vietnamese organisations in the way they adapt and respond to the demand of clients and improve continuously. They should also involve trainers more in the curriculum and content designing process as qualified trainers have knowledge, industry experience and training skills and they should have some ownership of their training session in order to better engage learners.

6.4 Chapter Conclusion

This chapter has discussed the findings by comparing the similarities and differences between the perceptions and practices of quality assurance in studied organisations and provided explanations in the light of literature review and under education comparative study approach. This chapter has also offered a conclusion of the findings.

It is obvious that the Vietnamese cases and Australian cases share somewhat similar perceptions of quality assurance, however, their quality assurance practices are different. This is due to the background contexts they are operating are different, with Vietnamese organisations having no regulators and Australian training providers are under strict compliance and regulating system. Therefore, the Australian cases tend to be dependent on regulatory requirements in their quality practice and approach, while Vietnamese cases tend to rely more on internal recourses to assure quality.

Nonetheless, the quality assurance practices in both the Australian cases and Vietnamese cases show their own advantages and disadvantages. The Australian cases have a well-established regulating system and standardised guidelines to benchmark. The Vietnamese cases apply the improvement-led approach to maintain their competitiveness. They can learn from each other's advantageous features.

The next chapter will look back and sum up the whole thesis and provide some insights including limitations, contributions of the thesis and recommendations for further study.

CHAPTER VII

CONCLUSIONS

7.1 Chapter Introduction

This chapter presents conclusions of the study generated from the findings analysed previously. It recalls the main parts of the study and sums up with conclusions on the important points drawn from the data analysis. Based on these conclusions, the chapter presents the limitations of the study and a summary of contributions that this study makes and identifies implications for practitioners and researchers in the field of short course training. It also suggests a number of recommendations for further research.

7.2 Conclusion of the Research

The research was proposed to address the issues of quality assurance practices in providers of short generic skills courses in Vietnam and Australia. It aimed to investigate and compare the quality assurance (QA) practices in one training institution in Hanoi, Vietnam which provides non-accredited soft skills courses in the management and business sector and one organisation in Melbourne, Australia providing the same course. On the basis of comparison, it was proposed to what would be effective approaches to be applied to the researched training providers. When it came to the data collection phase, the number of participated organisations increased to two training providers in each country, which provided the study with more data sources.

This data collection took place in Hanoi, Vietnam in December 2017 and in Melbourne, Australia in July 2018. Interviews were conducted with six people from two Vietnamese organisations and four people from two Australian organisations.

The four organisations are different in business type: Case One is a private company, Case Two is an international non-government organisation (NGO), which operates independently of a Government, Case Three is a private company and Case Four is a Division under a Dual sector University which provides both higher education vocational courses.

The six interviewees from the Vietnamese cases included four people in managerial/operational positions and two trainers. Four interviewees from the Australian cases include two people in managerial/operational positions and two trainers.

The findings have shown that the perceptions of quality and training process are not much different between the Vietnamese and Australian training providers. However, regulatory systems are very different. The quality assurance practices result from the regulatory system, thus differ accordingly.

The role of participants in Vietnamese and Australian organisations in quality assurance processes is different, especially the trainer role. The trainers in the Vietnamese cases have a more significant role in the quality process as they are involved in developing and delivering the courses. In contrast, the data suggest that trainers in the Australian cases are mostly involved in delivering the pre-planned contents only. The responses of participants towards regulatory requirements are different. The Australian cases, on the one hand, depend on government regulatory requirements in their quality practices, yet on the other hand, are voicing that the ongoing changes in the requirements resulted in a lot of challenges. There is also a voice questioning the so-called quality perception that resulted in providers focusing too much on compliance possess, raising the possibility of a clash in perceptions of what ‘quality’ means in VET education.

The Vietnamese cases are facing challenges due to the lack of a regulatory system, having to rely on themselves to sustain and compete in the market. They, therefore, really want to draw attention from policymakers and the public to set up a regulation or management mechanism to support them.

From the data analysis and discussion, the following conclusions have been drawn:

1. There should be a place for short generic courses in the formal education system

The important role of training to improve organisations’ performance and efficiency have been discussed in the literature (Becker & Gerhart, 1996; Bhattacharyya, 2015; N. T. Nguyen et al., 2010; Sardar, 2010). Research has shown that employers and industry highly value generic skills because they are crucial for workplace performance. However, although employers are willing to provide technical skills training, they are reluctant or unwilling or unable to provide

the generic skills training of their employees (Clayton et al., 2003). As a large proportion of organisations do not have their own training functions/ departments, there are growing needs and trend to outsource staff training to external training providers, especially for short generic courses in personal or professional development. There are a huge number of this type of training companies in Vietnam and prevalently not a small number of private training organisations in Australia providing short generic personal and professional development courses. These types of course have its own attractiveness and advantages to both employers and employees compared to accredited certificates or qualifications in terms of time-consuming, cost-effectiveness and customised contents.

However, despite its importance and its prevalent existence, it is obvious that non-accredited short courses have not had a place in the formal education system and have not gained sufficient attention from policymakers, both in Vietnam and Australia.

In Australia, even the organisations providing short generic courses have several external regulating authorities, the regulators, however, pay their attention to accredited courses only. Although the short courses are under the same umbrella of the accredited courses, they are not audited. It means that even the Australian organisations claim they have internal and external quality assurance systems in place, the quality of non-accredited courses is not bound to any formal regulating bodies as these courses are not formally audited by regulators. Clayton et al., (2003) also confirmed that without a national regulatory mechanism for RTOs to formally record, report and certify generic skills, it is very unlikely that RTOs will proactively do so (Clayton et al., 2003).

Even the Australian regulators have tried to improve the quality of the VET sector, many reports on poor quality RTOs have been published in newspapers such as Campus Review, The Advertiser, The Australian and Herald Sun. Some relating bodies like ASQA, the South Australian Training and Skills Commissions have also raised their voices concerning the quality of VET (Harris, 2015). ASQA audit, on the other hand, raised the concern about the quality of VET while very low percentage of RTOs (around 20%) are fully compliant with national standards and which requires a more effective regulating system (Harris, 2015). ASQA has closed many RTOs which are low quality and increased scrutiny on new applications to established RTOs (ASQA, 2018).

All in all, because of the importance and the demands of short generic courses and the fact that the quality of this type of courses is not properly assured to meet the needs of learners and employers, it is recommended that Australian policymakers should give a place for this kind of courses in formal education system by accrediting short courses. While it is reported that some generic skills have been embedded within vocational units of competency as elements or performance criteria, these skills are not included as separate courses and there is no formal system to record, report or certify these skills (Clayton et al., 2003).

One may argue that the Australian VET system has had accredited certificates ranging from Certificate I to Advanced Diploma which provide formal training to people in need. However, the short courses are different from accredited Certificates as they are much shorter, more focused on personal and professional development. It is claimed that the proportion of employers engaged in using nationally accredited training is low, only 20 – 25% of employers used accredited VET system because of low quality, not relevant skills being taught and too generic (Harris, 2015). In the meantime, around 25% of private RTOs students study non-accredited courses (Harris et al., 2006). The lack of formal reporting is mainly because of the missing of policies to require formal recognising and certifying generic skills (Clayton et al., 2003).

In Vietnam, the missing of a formal regulating authority for short training course providers is obvious. The providers of short training courses are left outside the regulations of authorities and are not included in the VET system. While the organisations are struggling to maintain and develop their business by focusing on clients as a driving force for quality, and they have been successful for quite some time, they are looking for a formal system to regulate the short training courses. While there are national law and framework for vocational training, the non-accredited short courses fall outside of this framework. Even the private companies are considered businesses, as they provide training, they should be under the management and regulation of an authority under the Ministry of Education and Training. In addition, this type of courses should be incorporated in formal tertiary curriculum or being accredited as standalone short courses certificates.

2. What can Vietnam learn from Australia?

In Australia, even the non-accredited short courses are not directly monitored by regulators, they are delivered by organisations whose overall operations are regulated by certain regulating authorities. It means that at least some types of monitoring have been indirectly applied to this kind of courses. For example, the trainers claimed to have certain qualifications in order to deliver the courses. In addition, there is a strong link between the non-accredited courses and accredited VET courses when the participants explained that they referred to requirements of Training packages on training.gov.au to design the courses. Meanwhile, in Vietnam, there is neither regulating bodies nor any guidelines for the short training courses. There is also no prevalent link between the corporate training sector and the VET sector. Therefore, Vietnamese system can learn from Australia system to some extends.

The Vietnamese education system can learn from Australia in designing a competency-based framework for vocational education and training. While the competence-based received controversy debates on its effectiveness and was claimed to have created vague training guidelines and assessment process and dependence on quality trainers and resources (Harris, 2015), this framework including training packages published in the National Register, also known as training.gov.au, has provided Australian RTOs with specific guidelines on elements, performance criteria and required outcomes for each unit of competency. This creates a standard and guidelines for training providers to refer to when they design and implement the vocational courses and non-accredited short generic courses.

Vietnam can also learn from Australia in terms of regulating system with a separate regulator clearly responsible for regulating training providers. This could be a separate authority under the Ministry of Education and Training. The current overlap in managing VET system between MOET and MOLISA has led to the ineffectiveness of VET system; therefore VET is not highly regarded by industry and the perception that VET is a low-status type of education, only being chosen as a last resort is still widespread (Lim, 2014). There is insufficient co-operation between VET institutions and industry, with very few employers being involved in the development of the curricula (Lim, 2014). Vietnam can learn from Australian in regards to getting employers involved in the development of VET curricula.

While the suggestions at macro level which can lead to changes in policy is long terms, Vietnamese training providers can learn from Australian organisations by conducting the professional exchange of staff; purchasing standardised training materials; investing in training their trainers and designing their own curriculum with the involvement of industry expert in order to not depending too much on trainers in quality assurance.

3. What can Australian training providers learn from Vietnamese ones?

Australian providers can learn from Vietnam in the efforts they make to maintain the quality and to take the customer as the driving force for quality. The two organisations in this research have been operating for many years. For them, to maintain quality means to maintain their business as they are competing with other providers by their reputation. There are no regulators who audit and put the sanction on their business, but in order to compete in a fierce market, they need to continuously improve their products and process. Their existence to date has proven this.

The Australian providers have many more advantages compared to the Vietnamese organisations in terms of regulations and support from the government. However, as analysed in the discussion chapter, the Australian providers focus much on compliance. As short training courses are highly customised and the majority of courses are designed to meet the needs of clients, the quality assurance approach that the Australian organisations process which heavily relies on compliance, not learner-focused, is not really appropriate. Even though the training providers in the research claimed that their perceptions of quality are much related to customer satisfaction and value for money as identified by Harvey and Green (1993), they put compliance as a priority. The perception of quality as continuous improvement mentioned by Harvey and Newton (2007) is not mentioned by the Australian providers in this research. Even if the regulating activities are in place, when quality is associated with compliance rather than continuous improvement, there is a tendency that academics staff /trainers feel to be demotivated as they have been placed an added burden. Improvement results from changing culture and ownership while compliance procedures do not support this (Harvey & Newton, 2007).

While the demands from employers are changing and increasing very fast at the speed of technology and workplace changing, the perception of quality related to compliance is not

really appropriate. Rather, quality of short course training should be related to continuous improvement from internal, and with the involvement of trainers/academic staff as they play a key role in the quality of short courses.

This section has presented the main conclusion of the thesis with the emphasis on the argument that there should be a place for non-accredited short courses in the formal education systems in both Australia and Vietnam. Vietnamese education policymakers should pay attention to the short training sector and this sector is left unattended at the present. Australia has already had a regulatory system in place for the VET sector, nonetheless, the non-accredited short courses are not formally recorded and reported. These courses should be officially monitored and regulated. The Vietnamese and Australian providers can learn from each other the advantageous features in their quality assurance practices.

From the argument, the thesis proposes some implications for policymakers, managers and practitioners of short course training providers. The next section will outline some limitations, implications and recommendations for future research.

7.3 Limitations of the Study

This study has several limitations. First, the research is conducted within a very particular context of four providers of short generic skills courses, two in Vietnam and two in Australia. The scope of this research was small with the focus on four providers and a number of interviewees within the four selected organisations. Therefore, the interpretation of the findings is indentured to the specific contexts of studied organisations. While generalisation was not a goal of this study, the findings may provide some insights into other relevant research. this is a repetition of an earlier statement.

Secondly, the limitations in data collection also exist. Self-report is one potential limitation as the study depended on participants providing honest information on their perceptions and experience of quality and quality assurance practice within their organisation(s). With a different level of involving in quality process and experience of participants, their responses are subjective and relevant to their knowledge and understanding and their willingness to share the opinion.

The literature review also identified another limitation that affected this study. Even though there is evidence for the development training sector in Vietnam, the literature on training and development is still developing. Goodwin, O'Connor, and Quinn (2014) reported that there has been little discourse about employment and training in Vietnam (Goodwin et al., 2014). Therefore, an understanding of the extensive picture cannot yet be clearly provided.

This small pilot study makes a unique contribution to the field. Although having some limitations, the findings of this study have contributed to the body of knowledge in the training and development and quality assurance fields. This is explained in the next section.

7.4 Contributions of the Research

Even though there is some evidence about the development of the short course training sector in Vietnam, the literature on training and development in organisations in Vietnam is limited. The findings of this study have contributed to the body of knowledge in the training and development field in Vietnam. Because the literature on training and development in Vietnam is limited, the findings of this study play an important role in providing insights for further research in the field.

In addition, the quality of the Australian VET sector has drawn much attention from the literature. However, the majority of the literature in the Australian VET sector relates to accredited training providers (Agbola & Lambert, 2010; AVETRA, 1999; Harris, 2015; Mitchell et al., 2006). This study, however, has explored and described the quality assurance practices in Australian VET from a quite different angle, that is, how the quality is assured in the providers of short, non-accredited generic skills courses. It also identified the challenges these organisations face, how they respond to and address the quality requirements from the government.

This study also provided valuable insights into perceptions of quality and quality assurance in the contexts of short course training providers, which contributes to the literature of quality assurance in education.

More importantly, this study has raised the awareness of the relevant policymakers and professionals of the important role and high demand of short generic training courses and the need to place this kind of course in the formal education system in order to properly regulate

and manage their quality. There should be a balancing combination of regulation and continuous improvement.

The insights and the findings of this study contribute to understanding and may potentially improve practices in the sector and contribute to the change on education regulatory system in Vietnam and Australian, which is the intended purpose of this study.

The study also has some implications for training provider managers and practitioners and education policymakers.

7.5 Implications

This study has some implications for training managers and practitioners. By being aware of quality assurance practices the other providers are implementing, they can improve the operation of their institutions by learning from other institutions across the border through the findings of the study.

This study also has some implications for education policymakers in Vietnam, who may not be aware of the development of the short course training sector and the needs for a management mechanism for the sector. It is hoped that more attention will be paid to this sector and a regulatory system will be initiated. The findings of the study provided Vietnamese education policymakers with the insights of Australian vision and attention in the VET sector and how the regulatory system impacts on training providers. It also argues that even the regulating system is in place in Australia for all providers in general, there should be a place for non-accredited courses in the formal education system.

7.6 Future Research

Given the limitations of this study as previously explained, future research with a broader scope should be undertaken. Due to the time and scope limitations of the Master thesis, a large participant sample size and data were not possible or viable. Hence, data from the learners and employers' viewpoint was not gathered. Future research could replicate this study using a larger sample size; conduct research in a different context or collect data from more diverse sources such as perspectives from learners and employers to see how the perception of quality of the

training course impacts the end-users of the process. Future research could also compare Vietnamese training providers with providers from other countries.

7.7 Chapter Conclusion

This last chapter has presented the key conclusions of the study, addressed the research question, pointed out the limitations and main contributions of the research as well as recommended areas for future research. The thesis has fulfilled the objectives set out from the beginning and made an essential contribution to the body of knowledge in the fields of quality assurance, vocational education and training, training and development and non-accredited training.

This study with the intended aim to fulfil my desire to explore the quality assurance process in Vietnam and Australia has challenged my assumption and prior knowledge. My position of researcher in this study has accomplished, but my other position as a training and development professional and a quality assurance coordinator persist. I am now aware of the conflict between compliance and continuous improvement and eager for the balance combination of regulation and continuous improvement. I also want to raise the voice for the role of non-accredited courses in the formal education system both in Vietnam and Australia. The insights gained from the research has shed light on my own reflection and understanding of aspects of the vocational training sector. I hope that this study will potentially improve practices in the sector and contribute to the change in the education regulatory system in Vietnam and Australia when it comes to the targeted readers.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1: Information for Participants



INFORMATION TO PARTICIPANTS INVOLVED IN RESEARCH

You are invited to participate

You are invited to participate in a research project entitled “**Quality assurance of soft skills courses: A comparative study of training organisations in Vietnam and Australia**”

This project is being conducted by a student researcher Hien (Thi Thu) Le as part of a Master course at Victoria University under the supervision of Dr Margret Malloch and Dr Martin Andrew from Victoria University.

Project explanation

This study will examine how quality is assured through a case study of a selected training provider in Hanoi, Vietnam and how this organisation addresses quality assurance and the requirements of the regulating entities. It will also investigate and compare the practices and models of quality assurance in one registered training organisation in Melbourne, Australia that provides similar training courses. By doing so, the study aims to identify the various and advantageous features of quality assurance in training providers.

What will I be asked to do?

You are invited to participate in the project, firstly by signing a consent form to show your willingness.

You will be invited to participate in an interview to give your opinion about how quality assurance of short courses is implemented in your organisation.

What will I gain from participating?

The project offers an opportunity for you to share your experience about the quality assurance practices in your organisation so that other organisations can learn from.

How will the information I give be used?

The information collected will be analysed to identify the features of quality assurance in training providers and recommend some solutions to assure and enhance the quality of training for short courses. The final results will contribute to a thesis for a Master of Education degree and may be submitted for publication.

What are the potential risks of participating in this project?

The risk of the study is minor since your names and those of your organisations are kept anonymous and personal details are regarded as strictly confidential.

The participants have the right to withdraw from the project at any time.

How will this project be conducted?

The research will study two training organisations which provide short training courses in generic skills (soft skills), one in Hanoi Vietnam and one in Melbourne, Australia. Participants who are CEOs, training managers, trainers and participants of these two organisations will be invited to open-ended, face-to-face interviews to explore the quality assurance practices in their organisations.

Who is conducting the study?

The research is conducted by:

Dr Margaret Malloch, Director, Research Training, College of Education, Victoria University

Dr Martin Andrew, Senior Lecturer, College of Education, Victoria University

Ms Hien Le, research student at College of Education, Victoria University

Any queries about your participation in this project may be directed to the Investigators 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 or phone (03) 9919 4781 or 4461.

Vietnamese version:

THÔNG TIN DÀNH CHO NGƯỜI THAM GIA NGHIÊN CỨU

Anh/Chị được mời tham gia nghiên cứu

Anh/Chị được mời tham gia vào một dự án nghiên cứu “**Quản lý chất lượng các khóa đào tạo ngắn hạn kỹ năng mềm: Một nghiên cứu so sánh giữa các tổ chức đào tạo tại Việt Nam và Australia**”.

Nghiên cứu này được thực hiện bởi chị Lê Thị Thu Hiền cho khóa Thạc sỹ nghiên cứu tại Đại học Victoria, Melbourne, Australia dưới sự hướng dẫn của TS. Margret Malloch và TS. Martin Andrew tại đại học Victoria.

Giới thiệu về dự án

Dự án nghiên cứu này sẽ tìm hiểu vấn đề quản lý chất lượng đào tạo của các khóa đào tạo ngắn hạn tại Việt Nam thông qua nghiên cứu một tổ chức đào tạo tại Hà Nội. Nghiên cứu cũng sẽ tìm hiểu cách tổ chức này đáp ứng các yêu cầu về quản lý chất lượng của các cơ quan quản lý. Bên cạnh đó, dự án cũng nghiên cứu một tổ chức đào tạo cung cấp các khóa đào tạo tương tự tại Melbourne, Australia và so sánh cách thức quản lý chất lượng của hai tổ chức. Bằng cách đó, nghiên cứu sẽ chỉ ra những cách thức quản lý chất lượng hiệu quả có thể áp dụng cho các khóa học ngắn hạn.

Anh/Chị sẽ được yêu cầu làm gì?

Khi tham gia vào dự án, việc đầu tiên là Anh/Chị sẽ ký vào Giấy chấp thuận để xác nhận mình đồng ý tham gia.

Sau đó, Anh/Chị sẽ tham gia vào một cuộc phỏng vấn, trong đó người nghiên cứu sẽ hỏi Anh/Chị về vấn đề quản lý chất lượng đào tạo khóa ngắn hạn tại công ty của Anh/Chị

Tôi sẽ được gì từ việc tham gia?

Dự án cung cấp cho Anh/Chị một cơ hội để chia sẻ kinh nghiệm và hiểu biết của mình về quản lý chất lượng đào tạo các khóa học ngắn hạn để các tổ chức đào tạo khác có thể học hỏi.

Thông tin tôi cung cấp sẽ được sử dụng như thế nào?

Thông tin thu được sẽ được phân tích để chỉ ra những đặc điểm của mô hình quản lý chất lượng đào tạo khác nhau giữa hai nước và có thể đề xuất mô hình/ giải pháp nhằm đảm bảo và quản lý chất lượng đào các khóa ngắn hạn. Kết quả sẽ được in trong luận án Thạc sỹ nghiên cứu về Giáo dục và có thể được xuất bản.

Tham gia dự án nghiên cứu có thể tiềm ẩn rủi ro gì?

Rủi ro khi tham gia dự án nghiên cứu này là rất nhỏ vì tên Anh/Chị và tổ chức của Anh/Chị được giữ bí mật và không được công bố trong luận án.

Anh/Chị có quyền rút khỏi dự án nghiên cứu bất cứ lúc nào.

Dự án được thực hiện như thế nào?

Dự án sẽ nghiên cứu hai tổ chức đào tạo cung cấp các khóa đào tạo ngắn hạn về kỹ năng mềm, một tại Hà Nội và một tại Melbourne, Australia. Những người tham gia là giám đốc đào tạo, quản lý và giảng viên của hai tổ chức này sẽ tham gia vào các cuộc phỏng vấn trực tiếp với người nghiên cứu về vấn đề quản lý chất lượng đào tạo.

Ai sẽ thực hiện nghiên cứu?

Nghiên cứu được thực hiện bởi:

TS. Margaret Malloch, Giám đốc Chương trình đào tạo nghiên cứu, Khoa Giáo dục, Trường Đại học Victoria.

TS. Martin Andrew, Giảng viên chính, Khoa Giáo dục, Trường Đại học Victoria.

Chị Hiền Lê, sinh viên nghiên cứu tại Khoa Giáo dục, Trường Đại học Victoria.

Bất kỳ câu hỏi nào về việc tham gia dự án này, Anh/Chị có thể chuyển trực tiếp tới các thành viên trong nhóm nghiên cứu ở trên.

Nếu Anh/Chị có bất kỳ phản ánh/khiếu nại gì về cách Anh/Chị đã được đối xử, Anh/Chị có thể liên hệ địa chỉ sau: Ethics Secretary, Victoria University Human Research Ethics Committee, Office for Research, Victoria University, PO Box 14428, Melbourne, VIC, 8001, email researchethics@vu.edu.au hoặc điện thoại (03) 9919 4781 or 4461.

Authorised translation by:

Le Duc Cuong, PhD student (Vietnamese national)

College of Education, Victoria University

Appendix 2: Consent Form



CONSENT FORM FOR PARTICIPANTS INVOLVED IN RESEARCH

INFORMATION TO PARTICIPANTS:

We would like to invite you to be a part of a study into the quality assurance of soft skills courses in training organisations in Vietnam and Australia.

This study will examine the quality assurance practices in one selected training provider in Hanoi, Vietnam and one RTO in Melbourne, Australia and recommend some solutions to assure and enhance the quality of training for short courses.

RISKS

The risks of being involved in the study are minor since your names are kept anonymous and personal details are regarded as strictly confidential. Your organisations will be referred to in generic terms and not by name. Please note that you have the right to withdraw from the project at any time.

There will be no financial costs to be charged for your participation in this study. You will not be reimbursed or paid for the participation in this study.

If you agree to participate in this study, you will be invited to an open-ended, face-to-face interview with the researcher lasting about 30 minutes. Audio-recordings will be made of this conversation. Transcripts of the interview will be sent to you for your consent before being used as the data of the project, and you will have a chance to check the transcripts for accuracy, and to add to them if you desire.

CERTIFICATION BY PARTICIPANT

I, _____

of _____

certify that I am at least 18 years old* and that I am voluntarily giving my consent to participate in the study: **Quality assurance of soft skills courses: A comparative study of training organisations in Vietnam and Australia** being conducted at Victoria University by Drs.

Margaret Malloch and Martin Andrew and Ms. Hien Le.

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 Ms Hien Le and that I freely consent to participation involving the interview.

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.

My signature below indicates that I agree to participate in this study.

Participant's Signature

Date

Any queries about your participation in this project may be directed to the researcher: Dr Margaret Malloch, Marg.Malloch@vu.edu.au

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 or phone (03) 9919 4781 or 4461.

Vietnamese version:



BẢN THỎA THUẬN CHO NGƯỜI THAM GIA THAM GIA NGHIÊN CỨU

THÔNG TIN CHO NGƯỜI THAM GIA:

Chúng tôi muốn mời Anh/Chị tham gia vào một nghiên cứu liên quan đến quản lý chất lượng đào tạo các khóa ngắn hạn về kỹ năng mềm của các tổ chức đào tạo tại Việt Nam và Australia.

Nghiên cứu sẽ tìm hiểu cách thức quản lý chất lượng đào tạo tại một tổ chức đào tạo ở Hà Nội và một tổ chức đào tạo tại Melbourne và đề xuất một số giải pháp quản lý và nâng cao chất lượng đào tạo các khóa ngắn hạn.

RỦI RO

Rủi ro khi tham gia dự án nghiên cứu này là rất nhỏ vì tên Anh/Chị và tổ chức của Anh/Chị sẽ được giữ bí mật. Trong luận án, tên Anh/Chị và tổ chức của Anh/Chị không được công bố mà chỉ dùng danh từ chung. Anh/Chị có quyền rút khỏi dự án nghiên cứu bất cứ lúc nào.

Sẽ không có chi phí tài chính được trả hoặc hoàn trả cho Anh/Chị khi tham gia vào nghiên cứu này.

Nếu Anh/Chị đồng ý tham gia vào nghiên cứu này, Anh/Chị sẽ được mời đến một cuộc phỏng vấn mở, trực tiếp với nghiên cứu viên trong khoảng 30 phút. Cuộc phỏng vấn sẽ được thu âm. Sau đó, nội dung của cuộc phỏng vấn sẽ được gửi lại cho Anh/Chị xem xét và chấp thuận trước khi được sử dụng làm dữ liệu của dự án. Anh/Chị có cơ hội để kiểm tra lại nội dung phỏng vấn và thêm thông tin vào đó nếu Anh/Chị mong muốn.

XÁC NHẬN CỦA NGƯỜI THAM GIA

Tôi, _____

Công tác tại _____

Xác nhận rằng tôi trên 18 tuổi * và tôi tự nguyện đồng ý tham gia vào nghiên cứu: Quản lý chất lượng của các khóa đào tạo ngắn hạn kỹ năng mềm: Một nghiên cứu so sánh các tổ chức đào tạo tại Việt Nam và Australia” được thực hiện tại Đại học Victoria bởi TS. Margaret Malloch, TS. Martin Andrew và Chị Hiền Lê.

Tôi xác nhận rằng các mục tiêu của nghiên cứu, cùng với bất kỳ rủi ro nào và biện pháp bảo vệ liên quan với các thủ tục được liệt kê ở dưới để thực hiện nghiên cứu, đã được giải thích đầy đủ cho tôi bởi Chị Hiền Lê và tôi hoàn toàn đồng ý tham gia vào cuộc phỏng vấn.

Tôi xác nhận rằng tôi đã có cơ hội để hỏi bất kỳ câu hỏi nào và tôi hiểu rằng tôi có thể rút khỏi nghiên cứu này bất cứ lúc nào và việc này sẽ không gây nguy hiểm cho tôi trong bất kỳ cách nào.

Tôi đã được thông báo rằng thông tin tôi cung cấp sẽ được giữ bí mật.

Chữ ký của tôi dưới đây chỉ ra rằng tôi đồng ý tham gia vào nghiên cứu này.

Chữ ký người tham gia

Ngày

Bất kỳ câu hỏi nào về việc tham gia dự án này có thể được chuyển trực tiếp tới TS. Margaret Malloch, Marg.Malloch@vu.edu.au

Nếu Anh/Chị có bất kỳ phản ánh/khiếu nại gì về cách Anh/Chị đã được đối xử, Anh/Chị có thể liên hệ địa chỉ sau: Ethics Secretary, Victoria University Human Research Ethics Committee, Office for Research, Victoria University, PO Box 14428, Melbourne, VIC, 8001, email researchethics@vu.edu.au hoặc điện thoại (03) 9919 4781 or 4461.

Authorised translation by:

Le Duc Cuong, PhD student (Vietnamese national)

College of Education, Victoria University

Appendix 3: Interview Questions

1. For CEO/ managers:

1. How long have you worked for your organisation?
2. How long have you worked in this position?
3. What courses does your organisation provide?
4. Who are your clients?
5. Can you describe the process of organising training courses in your organisation?
6. Can you tell me what 'quality' means in the context of your work and how your organisation support quality?
7. Quality has benefit for a range of people. Who do you think will have benefit from quality training and how they benefit?
8. In the context of short training courses, what is quality?
9. What does your organisation do to assure the quality of your training courses?
10. What is your regulating body?
11. What kind of regulation does your organisation have to follow in terms of quality assurance?
12. What do you do to ensure the whole organisation follow the quality process?
13. How do you address the quality requirement of regulating bodies?
14. What challenges does your organisation face in the quality assurance process?

2. For trainers:

1. How long have you worked for your organisation?
2. How long have you worked as a trainer?
3. What training courses do you deliver?
4. What is your role in the training process (eg. developing course material, delivering training, assessing trainee)
5. Can you tell me what 'quality' means in the context of your work and how your organisation support quality?
6. Quality has benefit for a range of people. Who do you think will have benefit from quality training and how they benefit?
7. In the context of short training courses, what is quality?
8. What does your organisation do to assure the quality of your training courses?
9. What do you do to assure the quality of your training courses?
10. What kind of regulation does your organisation have to follow in terms of quality assurance?
11. How do you address the quality requirement of regulating bodies?
12. What challenges does your organisation face in the quality assurance process?

Vietnamese version:

Câu hỏi phỏng vấn:

1. Dành cho CEO/ Giám đốc đào tạo:

1. Anh/Chị đã làm việc trong tổ chức/công ty này bao nhiêu lâu?
2. Anh/Chị đã làm việc tại vị trí hiện tại bao nhiêu lâu?
3. Công ty của Anh/Chị dạy những khóa ngắn hạn gì?
4. Ai là khách hàng của công ty Anh/Chị?
5. Anh/Chị có thể miêu tả quy trình tổ chức và thực hiện các khóa đào tạo của công ty mình?
6. Anh/Chị có thể cho biết công ty Anh/Chị quan niệm thế nào là chất lượng đào tạo và công ty Anh/Chị đã làm gì để nâng cao chất lượng đào tạo?
7. Chất lượng mang lại lợi ích cho nhiều người. Anh/Chị có thể cho biết ai là người hưởng lợi từ chất lượng đào tạo và lợi ích như thế nào?
8. Như thế nào là chất lượng đối với các khóa đào tạo ngắn hạn?
9. Công ty Anh/Chị đã làm gì để đảm bảo chất lượng đào tạo khóa ngắn hạn?
10. Cơ quan/tổ chức chủ quản của công ty Anh/Chị là ai?
11. Công ty Anh/Chị phải tuân thủ những quy định cụ thể nào về bảo đảm chất lượng đào tạo?
12. Anh/Chị làm thế nào để cả công ty của mình đều tuân thủ quy trình đảm bảo chất lượng đào tạo?
13. Anh/Chị làm thế nào để bạn giải quyết/đáp ứng các yêu cầu chất lượng của các cơ quan chủ quản?
14. Công ty Anh/Chị gặp phải những khó khăn gì trong quá trình thực hiện và quản lý chất lượng đào tạo?

2. Dành cho giảng viên:

1. Anh/Chị đã làm việc trong tổ chức/công ty này bao nhiêu lâu?
 2. Anh/Chị đã làm công tác đào tạo bao nhiêu lâu?
 3. Anh/Chị dạy những khóa ngắn hạn gì?
 4. Vai trò của Anh/Chị trong quá trình đào tạo là gì (phát triển tài liệu đào tạo, trực tiếp đào tạo, đánh giá học viên...)?
 5. Anh/Chị có thể cho biết công ty Anh/Chị quan niệm thế nào là chất lượng đào tạo và công ty Anh/Chị đã làm gì để nâng cao chất lượng đào tạo?
 6. Chất lượng mang lại lợi ích cho nhiều người. Anh/Chị có thể cho biết ai là người hưởng lợi từ chất lượng đào tạo và lợi ích như thế nào?
 7. Như thế nào là chất lượng đối với các khóa đào tạo ngắn hạn?
 8. Công ty Anh/Chị đã làm gì để đảm bảo chất lượng đào tạo khóa ngắn hạn?
 9. Anh/Chị làm thế nào để đảm bảo chất lượng đào tạo?
 10. Công ty Anh/Chị phải tuân thủ những quy định cụ thể nào về bảo đảm chất lượng đào tạo?
 11. Anh/Chị làm thế nào để bạn giải quyết/đáp ứng các yêu cầu chất lượng của các cơ quan chủ quản?
 12. Công ty Anh/Chị gặp phải những khó khăn gì trong quá trình thực hiện và quản lý chất lượng đào tạo?
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Authorised translation by:

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Appendix 4: Sample Interview Transcript

Researcher (R): Good afternoon. Thank you for attending a research project Quality Assurance of short training courses in soft skills – a comparative study of training organisations in Vietnam and Australia. I have explained to you the purpose of the interview and given you the information sheet and consent form and you agreed to participate, but you can withdraw at any stage as you like. Can we start now?

Participant (P): Sure

R: How long have been working for this company?

P: I have been working here...until now... for nearly 20 years...19 years

R: 19 years. What specific position in your company are you in?

P: Currently I am the Deputy Director

R: In charge of training?

P: Yea, in charge of training...short training courses in soft skills in the organisation.

R: How long have you been in this position?

P: Right when I started working for this company, I worked at short training course Section, starting at the staff role, then Head of the Section and then Deputy Director.

R: What sort of short courses does your company provide?

P: My company provides a lot of short training courses, my section offers short training courses in management, business administration, and soft skills and personal skills development.

R: Who are your company's clients?

P: We... the first group of clients that we target is local and foreign companies. That is our first target group. Then...we also target government management group...it means that senior officials from Ministries, Departments...they also send staff to our training courses...Private companies, foreign companies, banks. Besides, many non-government organisations NGO or INGO, they also...when they need management skills, they also come to us.

R: Can you please describe the procedure to organise and implement the short training courses at your company?

P: We divide...there are there stages in any training courses. They are...pre-training, during training and post-training, after the training finishes...We always identify the needs and the expectations of the buyers of the courses, what they really need after the course finishes and the reasons why they want to have that training course. The reason why they need to organise the training well reflect what they are lack of...After we understand the needs of the payers or sponsors of the course, then we work with trainees. As from the expectations ...we need to identify the gap between the leaders' expectation and the reality, the current level of the staff...we identify the gaps...in our language is training needs assessment. After we have identified the competency gap between the expectations and the reality, we design the training program based on what they have already known and what they need to know. Normally if we work with long-term clients we will consult them the long-term direction as we can't change their staff competency within a training course or some days of training from the current level to the expected level of leaders. For the long-term clients, we will advise them the roadmap to train their employees from one level to another. That is the pre-training process.

Regarding the during-training process, we monitor closely to manage the quality of trainers' delivery of training as long as the evaluation of trainees. As in my opinion, there is no best trainer, there are no bad trainees either. It is the appropriateness and relevance of the trainer and the group of trainees, they are in the same mode of communication. That is what we consider more important. Because sometimes the trainer is very good but the trainees are very different and they don't like the trainer then the training quality is not met. We as the training provider have the role of the bridge between the trainer and trainees. We understand trainers and we understand trainees and connect between the two. We have to evaluate and give timely feedbacks to trainers to adjust the content of the training.

Then when the course finishes we do the evaluation to see whether they understand the training contents, whether they satisfy with the course and their expectation for the next. And then we send the report to the payers or sponsors we will consult with them with such the changes, what the next steps, and what the next training should be.

R: Can you tell me for your company, what is the perception of quality for a training course? And what does your company do to improve the quality of training course?

P: We have two types of evaluations when the course finishes. The first is the trainee's evaluation of trainers. The other is the trainer's evaluation of trainees. This is a two-way evaluation. Normally we have the regulation that the training course with the evaluation grading ranges from 8 out of 10, the course is considered satisfactory. Secondly I think that....the fact that our company can keep clients coming back to use our services, that is one of the....criteria to evaluate the quality of our services whether it is good or not...Especially for the long-term clients, whom we have worked with for many years, we ourselves have to improve continuously, change continuously because each year their demand is higher than last year.

R: It means that the perception of quality for your company is the clients' satisfactory?

P: The measure of quality is the clients' satisfactory and trainee's satisfaction.

R: In your opinion, who is the beneficiary of training quality? And what are the benefits?

P: I think, in terms of beneficiary from training quality, trainees are the first and direct beneficiaries of quality training because the role of training is to change their awareness... Then their organisation is also beneficial from it as the awareness change can lead to behaviour change. I say it can because from the awareness change to behaviour change, it requires many other external factors. If the client organisations they collaborate well, training can be a good starter to change their staff behaviours. And I think especially for soft skills courses, the beneficiary can be their family members, as we always emphasise with trainees that the soft skills you learn are not only good for your jobs but is also helpful for your own life. They will learn to change the way they treat their family, they may change the way they handle their individual matters, they may also change their attitude toward life. I think the impact of training for each individual is different but mostly positive.

R: Yes. Does your company have any bodies or organisations who are your regulators?

P: No, we are a financially independent entity, we are in control of our own training content, the quality, our own finance and human resources.

R: It means that a training company register their business similar to any other companies?

P: Yes, similar to other companies. And we have the permission of Ministry of Education and Training to operate in Vietnam. And we pay tax as required.

R: So your company does not have to follow any regulations of quality assurance for training from any regulating bodies?

P: As I mentioned, we have never seen regulations... by any bodies. We can say our regulator is MOET as we register with MOET, MOET can be our regulator. But we have never seen any regulations from MOET regarding the training quality for short courses. And we consider the quality is clients' satisfaction.

R: In the management position, what can you do to ensure the whole company follow the internal quality assurance process which involves all Departments and all units?

P: This is...really a challenge...for us as we don't have a procedure. Even the criteria for client satisfaction are somewhat vague. We try our best by manage closely each process...follow up each step to ensure clients are happy. For example, for some programs we are not very confident with or with new programs, we have to evaluate daily or even half day to get feedback from trainers and trainees and to adjust the training timely.

R: What challenges does your company face in implementing and controlling training quality?

P: Well, in fact that is a difficulty, as I have mentioned before, ourselves...in the company we have the procedure but to have any standard to benchmark with, we don't have. Client satisfaction is a vague concept. As for some clients they don't have many chances to attend training, they are easier than others. Many others, even we try much but they have been trained too much so they are very difficult. There are no standards so it very difficult for us. Using trainee's evaluation, in my opinion, is not a really good criterion because trainees' evaluation at the end is very subjective. Secondly, sometimes they are reluctant to lose others' face, that is Vietnamese culture. They don't want other to lose fact, sometimes they may not satisfy but they still give a high rate so that everyone is happy. And they may highly evaluate because if they don't then next year their HR won't send them to training again (*laugh*). In general, it is a really a challenge to us.

R: Do you have any comments or further thoughts on the quality of training of private training companies in Vietnam?

P: In Vietnam, I think if there is a standard, it will be easy for us as training providers and for clients. Because every year let's say if Ministry of Education and Training or the Department of Education check and rate or rank the training providers then we as the providers know which level we are currently at, and we know the objectives that we should aim to. On the other hand, for clients when they select the providers, they know for which level they should choose which providers. As I know one company they have many levels of training, executive level, senior and middle management level and staff level. If they know the quality through some bodies neutral who can rank the quality of providers, they would know which provider they should go for which level of training they need. Currently, in Vietnam, clients know about the providers via personal contact a lot.

R: There are not any bodies who in charge of quality management or act as a registrar of training companies, is it right?

P: It very difficult here, everyone says they are good. But no one can compare, we don't have any standards to benchmark.

R: Thank you very much for your participation.