

**MARKETIZATION OF HIGHER EDUCATION IN VIETNAM IN THE
ERA OF NEOLIBERAL GLOBALIZATION: POLICY & PRACTICE**

by

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ABSTRACT

Using a qualitative research approach, this study investigates how a neoliberal policy agenda and the global trend of marketization in higher education have influenced higher education policies in Vietnam. The major part of this study analyzes national policy documents and related literature to identify policy determinants and policy trends at the national level. The secondary part provides a critically reflective analysis of institutional responses to national policies, drawing on documents and interviews with a senior university administrator, a dean, department heads, a teacher and a student at the Vietnam National University in Hanoi (VNU-Hanoi).

This study finds that globalization and pressure by global trends in favour of the market place are external determinants while social demand for higher education as well as the Government's budget rationalization agenda are internal determinants for Vietnam to adopt marketization policies in higher education. The institutional responses to the marketization included privatization, massification, and the corporatization of university management through competitive student recruitment and adoption of corporate culture. The privatization included tuition-charging practice, commercialization of research activities and other revenue-generating schemes.

Keywords: Globalization, neoliberalism, marketization, privatization, higher education, policy, Vietnam

DEDICATION

For my father who always encouraged and was always there for us.

For my mother who never had a chance to go to higher education, but has always encouraged her girls to pursue higher education.

For my husband who likes challenging me and, at the same time, provided immense support while I was working on this degree.

And for my energetic Jonathan whose humour and intelligence bring me joy and energy.

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ABBREVIATIONS

ADB	Asian Development Bank
ASEAN	Association of South East Asian Nations
CPV	Communist Party of Vietnam
DOET	Department of Education and Training
DRV	Democratic Republic of Vietnam
HEI	Higher education institution
IMF	International Monetary Fund
MOET	Ministry of Education and Training
MOF	Ministry of Finance
MOLISA	Ministry of Labour, War Invalids and Social Affairs
OECD	Organization of Economic Cooperation and Development
RIHED	Regional Center for Higher Education and Development
SEAMEO	Southeast Asian Ministers of Education Organization
SRV	Socialist Republic of Vietnam
UNDP	United Nations Development Programmes
UNESCO	United Nations Education, Science and Culture Organization
UNESCO PROAP	UNESCO Principal Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific
USA	United States of America
WB	World Bank
WTO	World Trade Organization

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

1.1. Introduction

Memoir on the Stele of Doctors at the Temple of Literature in Hanoi:

“Virtuous and talented men are key factors for sustaining State development” (1442).

“Knowledge is the greatest asset of the nation” (1466).

This study is a critically reflective analysis of the direction of higher education policies in Vietnam over the past twenty years, relying on documents and interviews with key informants at Vietnam National University in Hanoi to illustrate the complexity in national policies in higher education in Vietnam.

Growing up in Vietnam, where education is both highly regarded, but opportunities to study in university scarce, anyone would spend the childhood and youth dreaming of being able to attain the highly prized award of university entry. A long history of feudalism, colonialism, war and poverty made higher education in Vietnam just a dream or an unreachable goal for many generations of commoners and working class Vietnamese. Under the feudal and colonial regimes, higher education was a symbol of privilege, social status and power. Under the communist regime, although higher education was “for people” and considered to be a route to social stability, still only a small number of citizens could get into higher education through rigorous and difficult entrance examinations.

However, over the last two decades, the higher education system in Vietnam has undergone a major transformation, changing the institutional framework in which higher education institutions (HEIs) operate. Part of that transformation is due to changes in politics and the economic environment, influenced in part by the acceleration of globalization and the development of neo-liberalism. Part of the change has been initiated by the Government through the adoption of new market-oriented policies designed to make HEIs more efficient and effective. The other part of the reform is due to the rapid technological development, which has fostered the growth of cross-border academic programmes offered through both conventional and internet-based campuses, and the increased demand for knowledge workers within the country.

Although continuing to be a staunch communist country, Vietnam has enthusiastically adopted and introduced the capitalist neo-liberal free-market policy framework to its higher education system. Market competition has been promoted by allowing an increasing number of privately funded HEIs, and by letting public HEIs compete nationally with other public HEIs for students and state funds. Funds from the state coffers for public institutions are now awarded through a competitive performance-related scheme. Public HEIs have been forced to diversify their sources of income by introducing tuition fees, commercialization of research activities and massification of higher education. Colleges and universities are encouraged to operate like enterprises with autonomous decision-making power and responsibility for generating revenue

from a variety of sources. State financial support for students is now provided through student loan schemes instead of grants.

These changes have led to an increase in the number of students enrolled and a greater freedom of choice for students; however, it has also raised concerns about the impact of the neo-liberal policies, especially the growing trend of marketization, on academic life in higher education. In the face of market competition, higher education institutions are now more concerned with credentials, programmes that meet market needs, student recruitment and financial resources, hence quality may be overlooked. While market mechanisms may boost production and management efficiency in a bureaucratic higher education system in a way similar to a manufacturing enterprise, the question remains as to whether it is wise to match mass access with limited resources; and whether to generalize the western experience of market freedom with the culture and a society like that of Vietnam?

This thesis will outline how the Vietnamese higher education system has changed and adapted to make higher education more accessible for a much larger portion of the population. In the six chapters of this thesis, I will examine the national policies of higher education in Vietnam to reveal how the neo-liberal “free market” policies have influenced the Vietnamese policies, and how institutions have responded to these policies. The first chapter introduces the topic, purpose and rationale of this thesis as well as the methodology used to conduct the research. It is important to understand the historical context for the contemporary situation, and so the second chapter provides an overview of the

historical development of the higher education system in Vietnam. The third chapter outlines the application of the political economy theory of globalization and uses it to conceptualise the theoretical framework of this study, setting themes and categories for the analysis in the following chapter. The core of this thesis is chapter four in which an in-depth examination of the Vietnamese national policies pertaining to the marketization of higher education is undertaken. The chapter addresses the research question as to how globalization has influenced higher education policies in Vietnam, as well as investigating the introduction of marketization policies into the Vietnamese higher education system. The fifth chapter uses one institution, the Vietnam National University of Hanoi as a case study to examine at a micro-level the institutional practices and see how one institution has responded to the changing higher education policies and the global trend of marketization. The final chapter discusses the issues arising from the adoption of the new policies and makes some recommendations for the future.

1.2. Purposes of the Study

Set in the context of the current cycle of globalization, this study explores the emergence of national policies in higher education in Vietnam from the start of *đổi mới* (reform/ renovation) in 1986 to 2008; and examines how the neo-liberal policy agenda influences policy-making in a communist country such as Vietnam. This study also focuses on the institutional responses to the trend of marketization and the national policies in higher education.

1.3. Research Questions

This study sets out to answer the following question:

1. How has global trend of marketization impacted higher education policies in Vietnam from 1986 to present?
2. How has it impacted institutional practices?

1.4. Methodology

The theoretical framework of this study draws the political economic theory of globalization, which is re-conceptualized from a body of literature concentrating on neo-liberalism and its marketization policy agenda. This conceptualization identifies categories and themes for the analysis of the Vietnamese national policies as well examining the policy implementation at the institutional level. Howlett and Ramesh's (2003) analytical framework is used to identify policy actors, entities, determinants and the many levels in which interactions take place. The main part of the study is based primarily on state documents, institutional documents, Vietnam General Office of Statistics data, the Ministry of Education and Training's (MOET) and institutional data; and provides an in-depth analysis of policy shifts from 1986 up to 2008. To support this, policy implementation at the Vietnam National University in Hanoi is explored as a case study.

The case study is chiefly based on information collected from semi-structured interviews (Creswell, 2005; Silverman, 2005) with stakeholders at Vietnam National University in Hanoi. The selection of the VNU – Hanoi as the

site for the case study was based on identification of a comprehensive public university where reform policies have been implemented. Interviewees were chosen due to the nature of their positions and their work being directly and/ or closely related to the development of Vietnamese higher education policies, and their understanding of the current issues in higher education. The student interviewee was selected randomly from the International School of VNU-Hanoi, because the school represents the most recent adoption of the new policies. Interview questions focused on national reform policies and their impacts on the institution's governance and management, financing and curriculum changes.

Interviewees included a board/ executive member, two senior administrators, the Dean of Graduate Studies, a lecturer and a student. All interviews were audio-recorded, except for one administrator who answered interview questions by email. Every interview started with a brief introduction and an overview of what this thesis was about. Interview questions were all open-ended, and were designed to let interviewees freely address their understandings and knowledge of higher education issues related to policies and practices. Besides ten main designated questions, small questions or informal questions were inserted during the interviews to clarify the interviewees' intention, to elicit more information, and/ or to direct interviewees back to the main question. All interviews and data were manually analyzed according to themes identified from the literature.

1.5. Rationale of the Study

A body of literature has revealed that higher education systems around

the world, especially in developing countries, have responded to the current cycle of globalization and neo-liberal policies by moving further towards marketization and privatization. The question exists as to what steps a developing country like Vietnam should take to minimize the negative impacts, and how to nurture and sustain the positive impacts.

The Vietnamese Government may not be fully committed to the ideology underpinning the global economy; however, they have been driven to it by more pragmatic considerations of financial strength and desire for economic advancement. The integration into the world economy has led to the redefinition of the role of higher education in Vietnam. The notion that higher education is the route to social stability and universities are the place to foster this route has been challenged by various market forces. For many policy makers, neo-liberal policies have opened up opportunities for many people to attend higher education; yet for many others, these policies brought about concerns over the quality of higher education and social equity.

Although studies in higher education policies are not new among scholars around the world, there has been little work done on higher education in Vietnam, especially in the policy area. In the two decades that have passed since the start of higher education reform, the Government and policy-makers of Vietnam have introduced and experimented with many policies in the higher education system, yet they are still looking for the policy framework that works best for the political and economic environments in Vietnam. There is also only a very small amount of literature in policy studies available to scholars and policy-makers in Vietnam;

therefore, many education administrators do not thoroughly understand the conditions under which certain policies emerged, or what problems were inherent in certain policies. Moreover, a large population of Vietnam does not have the knowledge of how policies are made, nor what policy alternatives are available.

Therefore, this study aims to contribute significantly to determining both the positive and negative impacts of the neo-liberal policy agenda in this cycle of globalization, helping Vietnamese policy makers and educational administrators to find solutions to minimize negative impacts while sustaining positive impacts on the education system, ensuring a high quality of education and social equity. This study will also help the academic community around the world and in Vietnam have a better understanding of the policy process in Vietnam.

CHAPTER 2: DEVELOPMENT OF THE HIGHER EDUCATION SYSTEM IN VIETNAM

The Vietnamese people have always given a high priority and regard to education, especially higher education. In analysis of policies in higher education, it is important to understand the background as to how higher education has been developed. This chapter provides an introduction to the education system in Vietnam, with a focus on the development of the higher education system.

2.1. Overview of the Education System in Vietnam

2.1.1. Brief Country Overview

2.1.1.1. The Country and the People

Vietnam, officially known as the Socialist Republic of Vietnam, is a country located on the eastern coast of the Indochina Peninsula. To the North Vietnam have borders with China, to the West with Laos and Cambodia, and to the South and East *Biển Đông* (or East Sea in Vietnamese - the South China Sea internationally). Hanoi is the capital of the country. The country land area is 330,363 square kilometers, not counting many archipelagos and islands in the surrounding seas. The land border of Vietnam is 3,730 km and the coastline 3260 km long.

Vietnam developed as an agricultural society and now has a population of over 85 million (statistic data in July 2007). Almost two fifths of the population are under 35 years of age; only 1.9 million people are currently attending higher

education institutions; three fourths (62 million in 2007) are still living in rural areas; and 50% of the employed population works in agricultural activities. However, people are increasingly migrating to cities, swelling the population of Ho Chi Minh City, Hanoi, and other big cities (General Statistics Office, 2007a; 2007b).

There are almost 60 ethnic minority groups in Vietnam, but the majority of the population is Vietnamese. The second largest ethnic group is Chinese, mainly living in big cities. Other ethnic minority groups are small, living in the remote mountainous areas.

Vietnam's administrative system is similar to that of a parliamentary system, with the central government governing 64 cities and provinces. These provinces/cities are often referred to by geographical and economical characteristics such as Northwest, Northeast, Red River Delta, North Central, Central Coastal, Central Highlands, Southeast, and Mekong Delta. The most developed areas of those are Red River Delta, which includes Hanoi and Haiphong; and Mekong Delta, which includes Ho Chi Minh City. The least developed areas are Central Highlands and the Northwest (around the border with China).

2.1.1.2. The Language

Vietnamese language has a long and rich history. The spoken language is a form of proto-Vietnamese that probably existed by the fourth century B.C., having linguistic affiliation with the Austronesian language group including Malay and various dialects of South China, and the Austroasiatic group of Mon-Kh'mer

languages. Vietnamese was also influenced by the Chinese language during a millennium of colonial rule. Once the Vietnamese regained their independence in the tenth century, they continued to borrow words from Chinese, but insisted on pronouncing them according to their own speech habits. Thus, Vietnamese came to be closely related to Chinese more than to any other language (Marr, 1991).

Vietnamese used Chinese writing characters, known as *Hán*, which had been introduced by the Chinese rulers during their occupation; however, only the tiniest minority of Vietnamese were able to master them. Naturally, the possession of Chinese language competence set the Vietnamese literati apart from the masses. By the end of the thirteenth century, a simplified writing system that was derived from Chinese *Hán*, known as *Nôm*, was introduced in Vietnam (Pham, 1995), providing the peasantry an opportunity to access literature and disseminate their own ideas in *Nôm* (Marr, 1991). However, most Vietnamese literati continued to regard Chinese as “the ultimate in civilized communication and thus considered *Nôm* a form of recreation” (Marr, 1991, p. 142). Between the late fourteenth and the late eighteenth centuries, several Vietnamese monarchs ordered that *Nôm* be used for administrative and educational purposes. Since there was someone able to read *Nôm* aloud in every village, the literati needed a greater potential for influencing the attitudes and activities of the masses, causing the central court to worry about the *Nôm* use. Eventually, several monarchs issued edicts banning the print, sale, distribution, or ownership of *Nôm* text (Marr, 1991). The body of *Nôm* literature continued to grow, nonetheless.

During the *Trần* dynasty (1225-1400), *Nôm* was widely used and flourished (Marr, 1991; MOET, 2004; Nguyen, 1997).

The Romanized writing characters used in the present days had been formulated in the Seventeenth Century by the European Catholic missionaries, especially Alexandre de Rhodes, known as *Quốc Ngữ* (Nguyen, 1997). The purpose of this creation was to aid in their study of spoken Vietnamese and to train Vietnamese auxiliaries. However, the Catholic tracts and catechisms were published not in Vietnamese Romanized script, but in Chinese, *Nôm*, or Latin until 1861 when the French invading colonial forces set up a printing press to publish materials in Vietnamese Romanized script as well as French (Marr, 1981).

The French colonial officials of the late Nineteenth Century were convinced that to achieve permanent colonial success required harsh curtailment of Chinese influences, including the writing system; and the missionaries saw the Confucian literati as the main obstacle to the general Catholic conversion of Vietnam. Therefore, in their view, to eliminate the Chinese language was simultaneously to isolate Vietnam from its heritage and to neutralize the traditional elite (Marr, 1991). Consequently, *Quốc Ngữ* became compulsory in Vietnamese schools in 1906 (MOET, 2004). This new writing system became more accessible for ordinary Vietnamese, and significantly raised mass awareness of education and politics (Pham & Fry, 2002 & 2004; Dinh, Nguyen & Nguyen, 1999). As time went on, both administrators and missionaries had second thoughts about any policy that increased the chances of disequilibrium.

By the late 1920s, the French were re-introducing Chinese characters to the primary school curriculum in the forlorn hope that order might be restored (Marr, 1991). French and *Quốc Ngữ* remained main languages in education until the end of French colonialism in 1945. Vietnamese (or formerly *Quốc Ngữ*) became the only official language in Vietnam since regaining independence in 1945. However, it is worth noting that English has recently been considered the official second language in Vietnam since all government websites have both English and Vietnamese versions, and all government documents are published in both English and Vietnamese. English has become a compulsory second language at schools and universities in recent years.

There are several other languages used by ethnic minority groups in Vietnam, but only Kh'mer, Cham, Tay and Thai have their own written forms, the others are only spoken languages.

2.1.1.3. The History

The history of Vietnam is characterized with war and colonialism. The country was under Chinese imperial rule for almost 1000 years prior to its independence in 938, but continued to be influenced by Chinese Confucian ideas in culture, state management, education and politics. The French started to colonize Vietnam in 1857, and the country began to experience Western colonial cultures, politics and education. Following the tradition to resist foreign invaders, the August Revolution led by Ho Chi Minh overturned French domination and Japanese occupation, regaining independence and forming the Democratic Republic of Vietnam (DRV).

However, the French, with support from other Western countries, especially the United States of America, came back with a new aggression war against Vietnam just a few months after Vietnam proclaimed its independence (Statler, 2007). The war lasted nine years, until the French were defeated in Điện Biên Phủ and subsequently withdrew from Northern Vietnam following the Geneva Peace Accord in 1954. The Accord temporarily divided Vietnam into two parts at the seventeenth parallel; the North was to be governed by Viet Minh (the DRV government), and the South was to be governed by the French (Dinh, et al., 1999; Stockwell, 1999).

There was supposed to be a general election in 1956 to unite the North and the South; however, the USA was worried about the advancement of the communism in Asia if Ho Chi Minh won the election (Stockwell, 1999), and the interference of the USA in Vietnam began. They refused to sign the Geneva Peace Accord and set up a pro-American government in the South of Vietnam. The infamous “Vietnam War” (as referred to by the Americans) or the “American War” (as referred to by the Vietnamese) between *Việt Cộng* (North Vietnam) and the American-supported government in the South and American allies lasted more than ten years, from 1961 until 1975, when Americans were forced out of Vietnam by the *Việt Cộng* (Dinh, et al., 1999; Stockwell, 1999). Vietnam became a united and independent country in April 1975, continuing the Soviet model of centrally planned economy and management that was adopted in 1954.

A decade after the end of the Vietnam War, Vietnam had been isolated from the western world; the Soviet Union and other Eastern European countries

within the Soviet Bloc were Vietnam's sole allies. There was almost no economy, and the country survived mainly on aid from the Soviet Union and its allies, accounting for almost 80 percent of the GDP (Masina, 2006; Fforde, 2007; Dollar, 1999).

The communist leaders at the Sixth National Congress of the CPV in December 1986 adopted a bold and comprehensive plan to reform its economy and social systems, leading Vietnam to a new direction. The socialist market-oriented economy, which started in 1987, helped reduced the skyrocket inflation rate from 600 percent in 1986 to less than 10 percent in 1996; real GDP growth averaged 7.3 percent over the decade from 1986-1997 (World Bank, 1997). The economic reform also resulted in the improvement of other social aspects in Vietnam; for instance, the life expectancy of Vietnamese increased from 48 years in the late 1970s (Eberstadt, 1988) to 73.7 years in 2005 (UNDP, 2008), and adult literacy increased from 87.6 percent in the late 1980s to 90.3 percent in 2005 (UNDP, 2008). Vietnam continues to perform well with the reforms even throughout the financial crisis that hit Asia in 1997. Although Vietnam remains an agricultural economy and society, the middle class is emerging.

2.1.2. The Current Education System in Vietnam

The general education system in Vietnam is a 5-4-3-4 system, which is explained as follows:

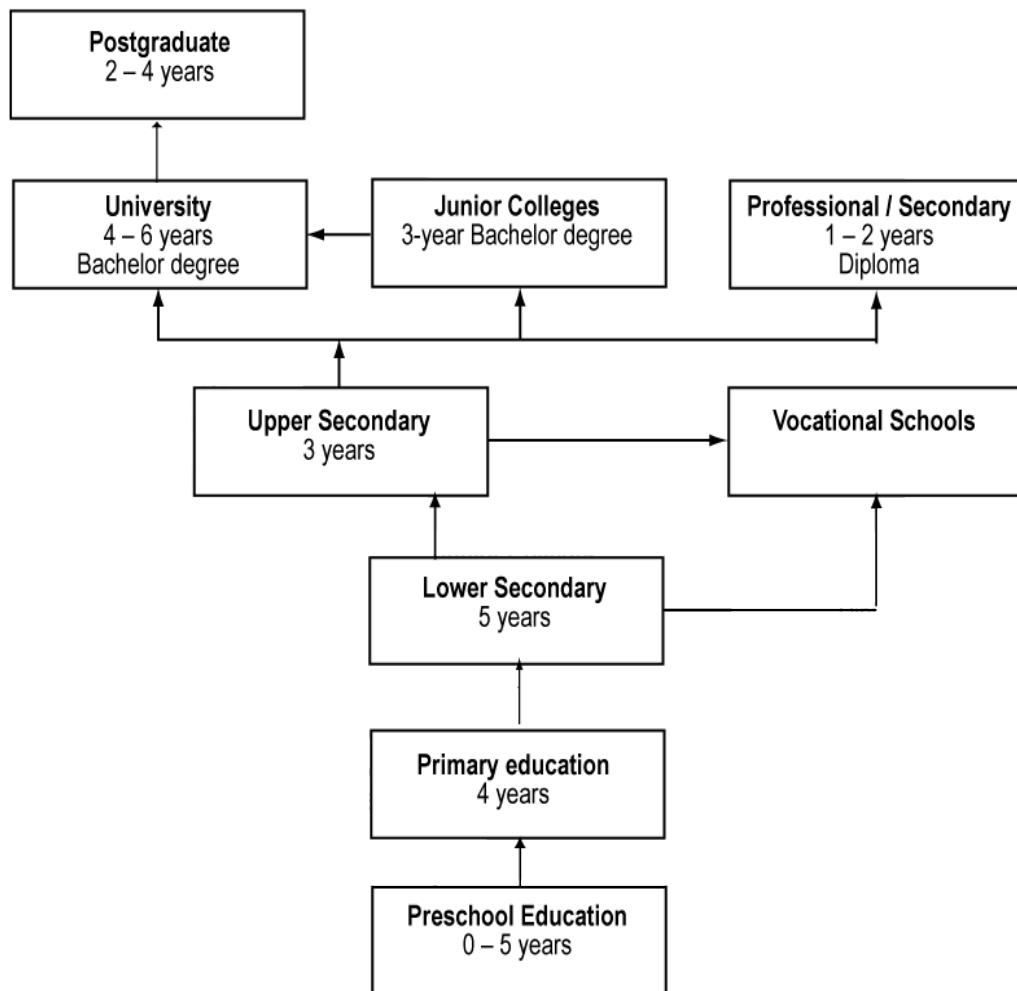
- **Preschool education:** accepting children from three months to five years of age. The preschool institutions include crèches and kindergartens. The crèches (or daycare) accept children from three months to 35 months of

age; and the kindergartens accept children from 36 months to 60 months of age, preparing them for the transition to primary education. The enrolment into preschools is not compulsory, except for the last year of kindergarten.

- Primary education: starts from Grade 1 to 5, accepting children from six to 11 years of age. Primary education was constituted as compulsory basic education in 1992, and became universal education in 1998. Tuition is free-of-charge to all Vietnamese children within the age of primary education; however, parents still have to pay for books, school supplies and small amount of school fees.
- Lower secondary education (or middle school): starts from Grade 6 to Grade 9, serving children from 12 to 15 years of age. This level is also part of the compulsory basic education, and Vietnamese government is planning to make this level universal in 2010. In theory, graduates of this level will continue to upper secondary education or can move to vocational training, but in reality, most vocational training schools require upper secondary diplomas.
- Upper secondary education (or high school): starts from Grade 10 to Grade 12, serving children from 16 to 18 years of age. Graduates of upper secondary schools are able to go into higher education institutions, enter the workforce directly or through vocational training routes.
- Professional secondary education: accepts graduates from lower secondary and upper secondary school, providing training for students

who will become technicians in the industrial sector or equivalent level in other sectors. The study duration varies between 18 months for high school graduates or 3.5 years for graduates from lower secondary schools.

Figure 1: Structure of Educational System in Vietnam

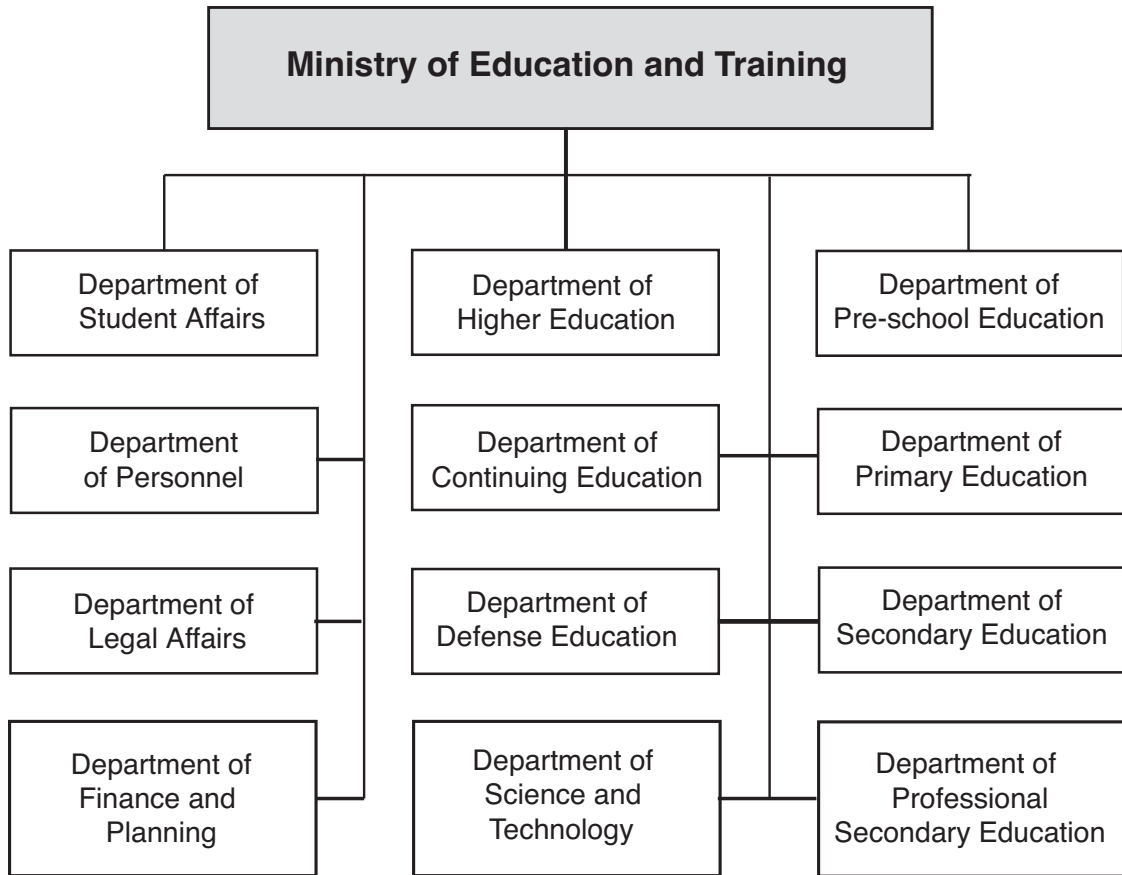


- Vocational training: accepts graduates from lower and upper secondary schools, training them toward semi-skilled to skilled certifications. Graduates from lower secondary schools have to spend a longer time to complete a training programme than those from upper secondary schools.

- Higher education: accepts graduates of upper secondary schools through a rigid examination system. Studies for a degree at the junior college study for three years; a university degree requires four to six years, depending on the discipline; a master's degree requires two to three years; a doctoral degree spans three to five years of study.

The Ministry of Education and Training (MOET) is the central authority that has assumed responsibility for all education matters at the national level since its creation in 1990 (IIE, 2004), except for the vocational training, which is under management of the Ministry of Labour, Invalids and Social Affairs (MOLISA). There are also a number of colleges and universities that are under management of other ministries, such as the Institute of Foreign Affairs under the management of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs; the College of Culture Studies belongs to the Ministry of Culture, Information and Social Issues; the Universities of Medicine under the management of Ministry of Health. MOET is divided into many separate departments, each responsible for a separate area. The most important departments are those responsible for primary and secondary education, higher education, teacher education and adult education (IIE, 2004). MOET also manages, in collaboration with other ministries, the provincial governing bodies of education and all higher education institutions.

Figure 2: Chart of the MOET Organizational Structure



Source: Ministry of Education and Training of Vietnam

At the provincial level, there are Departments of Education and Training (DOET), reporting directly to provincial governments (known as People’s Committees). The DOETs oversee all primary and secondary schools, some provincial professional secondary schools, colleges and universities. At the district level, there are District Offices of Education reporting to DOETs, responsible for all primary and lower secondary schools in the districts.

2.2. Development of the Higher Education System in Vietnam

Vietnamese text books and official documents indicate that Vietnam has been a nation for 4000 years; however, there is no comprehensive book or evidence that suggests higher education has existed that long (Pham, 1995).

Vietnam had been under Chinese imperial rule for almost 1000 years, from 111 BC to AD 938. During this time, schools were established for the sons of the Chinese administrators, so that they could continue the rulings. This system continued until *Ngô Quyền* defeated the Southern *Hán* troops in 938, putting an end to the Chinese occupation and establishing the independent Vietnamese feudal state (Pham, 1995). Throughout three dynasties *Ngô*, *Đinh* and Early *Lê* (from 939-1009), education was provided in private and Buddhist schools, but was not developed extensively. When the *Lý* dynasty (1009-1225) began, education received more attention, and the first higher education institution was built in 1076.

2.2.1. Higher Education under the Feudalism

The *Lý* dynasty (1009-1225), with much admiration for Confucius and love for learning and talents, built the Temple of Literature in Thăng Long (presently Hanoi) to worship Confucius and study Confucianism in 1070. Six years later, the Royal College (*Văn Miếu Quốc Tử Giám*) was built in the Temple of Literature, aiming to provide moral education and training for princes and sons of dignitaries and mandarins (Marr, 1991). It was considered the first higher education institution to be built in Vietnam (Pham, 1995; Pham & Fry, 2002; MOET, 2004).

The *Trần* dynasty (1226-1400) established the National Institute of Learning in the Temple of Literature, aiming to select princes and excellent commoners for training as mandarins. The Royal College and the National Institute of Learning are considered the first public schools in Vietnam; and the Royal College existed in Thăng Long until the eighteenth century, when it was moved to Hue, the capital of the *Nguyễn* dynasty, and maintained there until the beginning of the 20th century (Pham, 1995).

When King Lê Thánh Tông started the *Lê* dynasty (1428-1778) in the fifteenth century, Confucian ideology, which valued knowledge, ethics and talents, was used as standards for ruling and national education, marking an era of flourishing education in Vietnam (MOET, 2004).

Education during feudalism was characterized by extremely difficult and rigid examinations. The first competitive examination in history of Vietnamese education was organized in 1075 during the *Lý* dynasty. However, it was not until the end of the *Trần* dynasty and later *Lê* dynasty (Fourteenth Century and Fifteenth Century) that the competitive examination was implemented fully in three levels: *thi hương* – the inter-provincial examination (equivalent to present high school diploma); *thi hội* – the pre-court examination (equivalent to present bachelor); and *thi đình* – the prestigious court examination for graduates of *thi hội*. Those who succeeded in *thi đình* were titled *tiến sĩ* or doctor (Pham, 1995; MOET, 2004).

The curriculum for those competitive examinations was common for all types of schools (private, provincial schools, and the Royal College). The content

was based on the set of Four Confucian Books (The Great Learning, The Doctrine of the Mean, The Analects of Confucius, and The Mencius) and Five Confucian Classics (The Ching, The Classic of Poetry, The Three Rites, The Classic of History, The Spring and Autumn Annals, and The Classic of Music). All teaching materials were written in *Hán*; however, *Quốc Ngữ* became compulsory in examinations in 1906 (MOET, 2004). The use of *Quốc Ngữ* was initially seen as undermining the status of scholars as it gave the masses access to literature, learning and literacy, which was previously unattainable (Marr, 1991; Pham, 1995).

Examinations were aimed to select talents for administrators' positions. The last examination of the feudal education happened in 1919. During the course of 845 years (1075-1919), there were 187 examinations organized; 30 people were awarded *trạng nguyên* (the first-rank doctorate and first laureate); 2989 were awarded *tiến sỹ* (MOET, 2004).

2.2.2. Higher Education under the French Colonialism

In 1847, the attack of a French naval squadron in Đà Nẵng signalled the involvement of the French in Indochina. This involvement escalated in 1853 when fourteen ships of the French military and Spanish colonial forces in the Philippines bombarded Đà Nẵng revenging for the death of their missionaries. They subsequently seized Saigon in 1859; and officially colonized Vietnam and its neighbouring states, including Laos and Cambodia (Pham, 1995; Dinh, Nguyen & Nguyen, 1999).

In the first stage of the colonialism, the feudal education system was maintained; and four writing systems (*Hán, Nôm, French and Quốc Ngữ*) existed together until 1919 (Marr, 1991; Pham, 1995; MOET, 2004). By the 1920s, *Hán* was not taught in schools, and the feudal competitive examinations were abolished; the choice of language in schools was limited to French or *Quốc Ngữ* or both (Marr, 1991).

The education system under French colonialism was similar to that in France, mainly serving children of the colonial administrators and wealthy Vietnamese landlords. To many Vietnamese, it appeared that the French authorities had designed colonial schools in order to discourage serious learning (Marr, 1991), because it would be easier to rule illiterate people than the literate ones. Consequently, it was estimated that only three percent of the Vietnamese population was able to attend schools in the 1941-1942 school year. When Vietnam became independent in 1945, ninety five percent of the population was illiterate, providing a foundation for national literacy campaigns from 1945 onward (MOET, 2004; Marr, 1991).

Since the beginning of the Twentieth Century, the French imperialists began to establish higher education institutions in Vietnam to train children of the ruling class. For example, the College of Medicine and Pharmacy was established in 1902; the Teacher Training College was established in 1917; College of Veterinary Medicine, College of Law and Administration and College of Civil Engineering were established in 1918; the College of Literature and College of Experimental Sciences were established in 1923; the College of Fine

Arts and Architecture was established in 1924 (Pham, 1995). Although these institutions were called “College(s)”, the training content and purpose of the training were similar to professional (or vocational) education in present time (MOET, 2004; Pham, 1995).

These colleges gradually became parts of the University of Indochina, which was established in 1906, providing a mixture of advanced secondary, technical and vocational schooling. A prime reason for the French government to upgrade the University of Indochina in the 1930s was its conclusion that too many Vietnamese students had already travelled to France and learned the wrong things (Marr, 1991). During the 1920s, many Vietnamese scholars and students went overseas for political as much as for scholastic reasons. Especially, the *Đông Du* (Going East) movement, led by Phan Bội Châu (1867-1940), had sent many Vietnamese students to Japan and China to learn from their intellectuals as to how to gain independence in a peaceful way rather than through armed struggles (Dinh et al., 1999). Meanwhile, Vietnamese students in France were also involved in many demonstrations against the colonial repression, resulting in them being arrested and deported back to Saigon, where they later took leading roles in Marxist proselytizing efforts of the 1930s (Marr, 1991).

The Vietnamese higher education system under French colonialism was considered more developed than the feudal one; however, similar to other colonial regimes, the main objective of higher education was to train employees for the colonial apparatus (Pham, 1995), and thus provided access to a very

small number of Vietnamese who could afford going further into higher education. The student body, including French, Chinese and Cambodian nationals as well as Vietnamese, totalled 631 in the 1937-1938 school year (Marr, 1991). During the World War II, being cut off from the educated French, the colonial authorities increased local student enrolments and gave the graduates better jobs. As a result, there were 1109 Vietnamese students at the university in 1944 (Marr, 1991).

2.2.3. Higher Education during the Resistance War against French Aggression (1945-1954)

The victory of the August Revolution, led by Ho Chi Minh, in 1945 laid a foundation for the birth of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam (DRV) on the 2nd of September 1945. Immediately after proclaiming independence, the young government of DRV faced numerous challenges, including an empty bank account and 95 percent illiteracy rate (Dinh et al., 1999; Marr, 1991; Pham, 1995). One of Ho Chi Minh's first actions as the president of the DRV was to declare a nationwide campaign to wipe out illiteracy, which was considered an enemy (Marr, 1991). *Quốc Ngữ* was made the official language at every level of education, including higher education (MOET, 2004). By the end of 1958, it was claimed that 93.4 percent of the lowland population aged twelve to fifty could read and write (Marr, 1991).

As one of the tasks to reconstruct the country, the young government of DRV restored the operations of HEIs inherited from the French colonial regime. All HEIs were placed under the management of the Ministry of National

Education (*Bộ Quốc Gia Giáo Dục*). However, the resistance war against the French occupation broke out in the late 1946; students, teaching staff and equipments of those HEIs were evacuated to the mountainous area of Việt Bắc to continue training (Pham, 1995).

Despite of the hardships of the war, the lack of financial resources and isolated location, the new government of the DRV was determined to develop the higher education system in order to train manpower and skilled professionals for the resistance war as well as for the socioeconomic development of the country once the French occupation was ended (MHPSE, 1985). As a result, two junior colleges (*Cao Đẳng*) namely Advanced Pedagogical College and College of Basic Sciences, and four colleges were established in the mountainous area of Việt Bắc, including College of Foreign Languages – Chinese and English in 1947, College of Law in 1948, College of Civil Engineering in 1947, College of Fine Arts in 1949, and the College of Medicine and Pharmacy in the early 1950s (Pham, 1995; MOET, 2004).

The government of the DRV carried out the first educational reform in July 1950, which followed the principles of “nation, sciences and people”, aiming to serve the resistance war and reconstruction of the nation (MOET, 2004, p.23). For the first time, Vietnamese education was aimed to improve the quality of the people’s lives and to produce competent citizens for the future, beginning a new chapter of the educational system of an independent country (MOET, 2004; Pham, 1995).

Meanwhile, in the French-occupied territories, the French authorities reopened the University of French Indochina in 1949 and renamed it as National University of Vietnam, with faculties of Laws, Medicine and Pharmacy, Architecture and Sciences. The university had two campuses: one in Hanoi and one in Saigon; and the training model remained the same as in the period of French colonialism. There were also other colleges under the *Bảo Đại* feudal government in Huế, including the College of Literature, College of Teachers Training, and College of Public Administration. After the signing of the Geneva Peace Accord in 1954, those colleges were moved to Saigon (MOET, 2004; Pham, 1995).

2.2.4. Higher Education from 1954 to 1975

The victory in Điện Biên Phủ in May 1954 ended the French occupation in the Northern Vietnam, and also led to the signing of the Geneva Peace Accord that divided the country into two parts with two separate political and social systems. The North adopted the socialist system similar to that of the Soviet Union's while the South continued with the French and then American colonial system until 1975, when Vietnam was united into one country.

2.2.4.1. Higher Education in Northern Vietnam

Once peace was achieved in the North, the government took over the education system in the newly liberated area and actively prepared for a new education reform in the context of economic rehabilitation: building the socialist society in the North and continuing to fight for the reunification of the whole

country (MOET, 2004). The government of the DRV quickly adopted the Soviet model of higher education, which was characterized by mono-disciplinary universities.

Under the second education reform that happened in 1958, education was identified as training and fostering young people to become citizens with all-round development in all aspects. Educational content was made more comprehensive, with an emphasis on moral, intellectual, physical and aesthetic aspects. A number of mono-disciplinary universities were established, serving almost 5000 students and 400 teaching staff. Between 1956 and 1958, new universities, in addition to existing Medical/ Pharmacy, Sciences and Pedagogy institutions, were established in areas such as Agriculture and Forestry, Polytechnics and Economy. Seven universities were established, including the Hanoi Comprehensive University, the Teacher Training College of Hanoi, University of Technology of Hanoi, Hanoi College of Medicine and Pharmacy, University of Agriculture and Forestry, University of Economics and Finance, Hanoi College of Fine Arts (MOET, 2004; Pham, 1995). Students were admitted to HEIs based on the results of competitive entrance examinations. Tuition was free, and graduates were assigned positions in the government organizations (Pham & Fry, 2002).

Due to the destruction from the American bombs, especially from 1965 to 1975, most universities were evacuated to countryside and operated on a small scale. For example, the Teacher Training College of Hanoi was divided into the Teacher Training College Hanoi Number 1, the Teacher Training College Hanoi

Number 2, and the Teacher Training College of Foreign Languages; the University of Technology of Hanoi was divided into some technical colleges such as the College of Civil Engineering, the College of Mining and Geology, and the College of Light Industry. Other public HEIs that primarily provided undergraduate education were established in the provinces of Thái Nguyên, Vinh and Thái Bình, including Việt Bắc Teacher Training College, Vinh Teacher Training College, Việt Bắc College of Medicine, Thái Bình College of Medicine (Pham, 1995). They were placed under the management of the Ministry of Higher and Professional Secondary Education, which was formed in 1966.

By the 1974-1975 academic year, there were 41 higher education institutions in the North of Vietnam with 100 different disciplines, serving 55,700 students and 8,658 teaching staff (MOET, 2004). The duration of training was three years at junior colleges, five years at universities, six years at colleges of medicine. Graduates from HEIs became engineers, doctors of medicine, and teachers of upper secondary schools. The title “bachelor” in their degree diplomas was not conferred until the late 1990s. Postgraduate degrees included *phó tiến sỹ* (associate doctoral), and *tiến sỹ* (doctoral). Most of the best postgraduate students were sent to the Soviet Union and Eastern European countries through government grants or scholarships for their studies (Nguyen & Sloper, 1995). Many senior teaching staff in the current Vietnamese HEIs studied in these countries (MOET, 2004).

Table 1: Development of Higher Education in Northern Vietnam from 1954 to 1975

Academic Year	1955-1956	1965-1966	1975-1976
Number of HEIs	4	23	59
Number of Students	1,190	60,020	92,100
Number of Academic Staff	100	3,600	9,640

Source: Ministry of Higher and Professional Secondary Education, 1985.

2.2.4.1. Higher Education in Southern Vietnam

Higher education in Southern Vietnam during this period of time continued to follow the French model of higher education, with multi-disciplined universities. When the USA replaced France in Southern Vietnam in the 1960s, the higher education system adopted the American model, which was more academic than practice-oriented with focus on fundamental sciences, laws, economy and administration. By 1975, there were four public universities located in Saigon, Huế, Cần Thơ and Thủ Đức, serving 130,000 students; three community colleges in Mỹ Tho, Nha Trang and Đà Nẵng, serving 2,600 students; eleven private HEIs in various locations, serving 30,000 students (MOET, 2004; Pham, 1995). These universities were large and comprehensive, having multiple disciplines; for example, Saigon University had thirteen colleges and 41 departments, Huế University had three faculties and two colleges. However, almost two-thirds of the total student population undertook social studies, mainly law and literature (MOET, 2004).

Similar to the North, postgraduate studies were limited to a small number of students. Most of them studied for their postgraduate degrees in the Western countries, such as France and the USA (Nguyen & Sloper, 1995).

2.2.5. Higher Education before *Đổi mới*, from 1975 to 1986

After liberating the South from the American occupation, Vietnam reunified two regions and became the Socialist Republic of Vietnam. Higher education institutions in the South were re-organized to follow the model of higher education in the North, aiming to build a united system of socialist HEIs. The third education reform happened following the Resolution Number 14-NQ/TW of the Fourth Congress of the Central Committee of the CPV in January 1979. This reform sought to unify the two systems and only applied to general education (MOET, 2004).

Higher education during this period also saw some significant changes; especially, postgraduate studies were promoted and became official programmes in 1976, training *phó tiến sỹ* (associate doctoral degree) and *tiến sỹ* (doctoral degree) in accordance with the Soviet model of higher education. The State also started to confer *phó giáo sư* (associate professor) and *giáo sư* (professor) titles to scientists working at the universities and research institutions in 1980 based on their academic achievement and research experiences (MOET, 2004). However, the postgraduate education of Vietnamese students was undertaken mainly in Eastern European countries until 1990 (Nguyen & Sloper, 1995).

There were only public HEIs during this period. All private HEIs in the South were merged or became public HEIs since 1976. Higher education institutions included junior colleges (three-year programmes) and colleges/ universities (five- to six-year programmes, depending on disciplines). Students attended colleges/ universities in three different categories: regular full-time (*chính quy dài hạn*), in-service (*tại chức*) and short-term training (*chuyên tu ngắn hạn*). In the 1980-1981 academic year, the country had 85 mono-disciplinary public universities/ colleges and 33 junior public colleges, with 146,000 students and 17,300 academic staff (MOET, 2004).

Higher education was totally subsidized, which was considered inappropriate in a poor country like Vietnam, especially in the context of the post-war period and economic crisis (Nguyen & Sloper, 1995). Graduates were still guaranteed positions in government organizations.

2.2.6. Higher Education from 1986 to present

The biggest challenge facing Vietnamese higher education in the early 1980s was that the State was not able to provide financial resources. The country was deep in a serious financial crisis, due to the consequence of the devastating wars and the impact of the centrally planned economy that was no longer appropriate in the world market. Education, like other social sectors, faced serious shortages of resources. Universities and colleges did not have adequate budgets for maintaining their regular activities, nor did they have any autonomy within the bureaucratic system (MOET, 2004)

In order to overcome the economic crisis, Vietnamese leaders planned for a major national reform, moving from the centralized planning system to the socialist market-oriented mechanism. As a consequence of this overall change in national policies, the education sector also needed reform. Higher education was no longer seen as training for only public organizations, but for various economic components and to meet the diverse learning needs of the society. Instead of reliance on the state budget, all possible financial sources were to be mobilized and used. Instead of rigid training programmes, various flexible and diverse training programmes were developed to meet the requirements of the employment market and finding a job in the market-oriented economy. Master programmes have been added to the postgraduate training since 1991; and the programme that trained *phó tiến sỹ* (associate doctoral degree) was eliminated in 1993 (MOET, 2004).

The reform also aimed to renovate management activities and to strengthen state management functions with laws and regulations. Higher education institutions were given more autonomy to set and fulfil their own targets to meet socio-economic development requirements. HEIs have been allowed to charge tuition fees, and expand their student intakes as well as provide research services to society.

The reform identified education as every citizen's right, made it the "first national priority", and promoted life-long learning. It allowed various forms of training as well as various types of HEIs; especially it allowed private and foreign invested HEIs.

There were also changes in the management structure of higher education that happened as a result of the reform. The Ministry of Education and Training was established in 1990 by merging the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Higher Education and Professional Training. The Ministry of Education and Training is responsible for all educational matters, from primary level to higher education. It oversees all HEIs, except institutions under the Ministry of Defence and Ministry of Foreign Affairs. There are also a number of HEIs that are under management of line ministries. For examples, University of Cultural Studies is under the management of the Ministry of Culture, Information and Social Issues; the Banking Institute is under the management of the State Bank; the Universities of Medicine and Pharmacy are under the management of the Ministry of Health. In addition, two national universities have the autonomy of an independent ministry and are under direct management of the Government. However, MOET still oversees the curriculum of these universities as well as their student recruitment.

Due to this reform, the higher education sector has experienced positive development and gained considerable achievements. By 2007, the country had 345 HEIs, of which 288 are public and 57 are private, accommodating almost two million students (GSOV, 2007a).

2.3. The Vietnamese Contemporary Higher Education System

Unlike most countries in the world, where higher education refers to any form of tertiary and/or post-secondary education, higher education (*giáo dục đại*

học) in Vietnam refers only to post-secondary education leading to associate bachelor's degree, bachelor's degrees, master's degrees and doctoral degrees. Higher education is to be conducted and administered only by officially recognized institutions of higher learning, namely those with the word *đại học* (university), *học viện* (institute), and *cao đẳng* (junior college).

Higher education study in Vietnam lasts 3 years (for colleges of shorter term training - *cao đẳng*, leading to the associate bachelor's degree) or four to six years (for universities - *đại học*, leading to the bachelor's degree). Postgraduate training is also conducted in selected institutions of higher education (National Assembly of Vietnam 1998, Article 6 and 34; 2005, Article 4 and 38) lasting an average of two years for master's degrees, and three to four years for doctoral degrees. Some selected public research institutes now provide master's and doctoral degrees, but they are not considered as HEIs because they do not provide undergraduate courses.

Post-secondary training opportunities not counted as part of Vietnam's higher education system are:

- Long-term vocational training which lasts for 1.5 - 2 years, admitting graduates from secondary schools and leading towards a certification of vocational skill
- Professional Secondary Education with 2 - 2.5 years training, admitting graduates from upper secondary schools and leading towards a Diploma of Professional Secondary Education (mid-level technicians, nurses, etc.)

Currently, there are 345 HEIs in Vietnam, of which 288 are public and 57 are private, excluding military and security (police) colleges (GSOV, 2007a).

2.3.1. Types of Universities/ Colleges

The university network in Vietnam includes multi-disciplinary universities, mono-disciplinary universities, and open universities.

2.3.1.1. Multi-disciplinary Universities

Aiming to strengthen the university network, improving research at this level and enhancing the links between research and university teaching, a fundamental institutional reorganization of higher education took place in the mid 1990s. The consolidation of a large number of small, mono-disciplinary HEIs created several multi-disciplinary universities, including two national universities (in Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City) and three regional universities (in Huế, Đà Nẵng and Thái Nguyên). The two national universities offer bachelor's, master's and doctoral degrees; the four regional universities offer bachelor's, master's, doctoral degrees and other college-level programmes.

The Vietnam National University in Hanoi was established in 1993 by merging several mono-disciplinary HEIs in Hanoi, including College of Natural Sciences, College of Social Sciences and Humanities, Teacher Training College of Foreign Languages, Teacher Training College Hanoi 1, College of Laws, College of National Economics. It currently has four faculties, three colleges and one International School.

The Vietnam National University in Ho Chi Minh City was founded in 1995 by amalgamating nine HEIs, but currently it has five colleges, one faculty and one high school for gifted pupils.

Đà Nẵng University was established in 1994, providing 62 disciplines at undergraduate level, 13 disciplines at master's level, 10 disciplines at doctoral level, 27 disciplines at associate bachelor's level (3-year programmes) and several professional training programmes. It currently has five colleges and 16 professional training centres.

Huế University was established in 1994, providing undergraduate and graduate studies at all levels. It currently has six colleges.

Thái Nguyên University was established in 1994 by merging four HEIs (Việt Bắc Teachers' College, Bắc Thái College of Agriculture Number 3, Thái Nguyên College of Industry, and Bắc Thái/ Thái Nguyên/ Việt Bắc College of Medicine), providing undergraduate and postgraduate studies at all levels. The new university currently has five colleges, one Centre for Defence Education, two faculties and several research centres.

There are also provincial multi-disciplinary universities created in recent years, either by merging provincial junior colleges or new institutions, including Haiphong University, University of Hanoi, Cần Thơ University, Nha Trang University, Đà Lạt University.

2.3.1.2. Mono-disciplinary universities

As a legacy of the Soviet-influenced era, there are still a number of mono-disciplinary HEIs specialized in such areas of training as engineering, agriculture and forestry, fishery, finance, medicine, pharmacy and sports. These HEIs are under the management of various ministries.

2.3.1.3. Open Universities

Due to a number of factors after *đổi mới* (reform/ renovation), including the abandoned of guaranteed employment for graduates and the need for HEIs to fund themselves as well as the need for more higher education graduates, a number of universities established the “open” (*mở rộng*) programmes to recruit fee-paying students (IIE, 2004). Students admitted to these programmes were those who did not score enough marks on the university entrance examinations for the regular full-time programmes. Generally, they studied in the same classes, took the same curriculum as those in the regular programmes, but their degrees were conferred with the words *mở rộng* (open), which did not have a high status and were not normally accepted for entry to postgraduate programmes.

It was argued that the perceived low quality of the open degrees devalued regular degrees from the same institution, and the money received did not compensate for the strain on resources (IIE, 2004). Consequently, MOET decided to modify the open system and restricted it to designated open universities and junior colleges. Currently, there are two open universities in Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City.

2.3.1.4. Private Higher Education Institutions

In response to the increasing needs for higher education graduates and skilled workers in the developing labour market, the government diversified the higher education system by allowing the establishment of non-public HEIs. Additionally, some public HEIs have also been privatized to reduce the burden on the state budget. Initially, non-public HEIs included semi-public, people-founded and private HEIs, but the semi-public and people-founded institutions no longer exist since 2006 (IIE, 2004; MOET, 2004; UNESCO, 2006).

Semi-public (*bán công*) HEIs were institutions owned by the state, managed by a public authority at the central, provincial, district or community level, but all operating costs were covered by students' tuition fees.

People-founded (*dân lập*) HEIs were institutions owned and managed by non-governmental organizations or private associations such as trade unions, cooperatives, youth organizations and women's associations. Similar to semi-public institutions, people-founded HEIs were operated on a cost-recovery basis.

Private (*tư thực*) HEIs are privately owned and managed by individuals or organizations. Their main source of income comes from students' tuition fees, donations and other services. They are mainly located in urban areas and attract students from wealthy families.

Community colleges are being set up as pilot colleges in some provinces and cities, following the model of community colleges in the North America.

2.3.1.5. Cross-border Higher Education Institutions

Đổi mới coupled with integration into the world economy and access to WTO means opening doors for foreign direct investment to every sector of economy, including higher education sector. As a result, a number of foreign higher education providers have entered Vietnam to set up their institutions. Most popular forms of cross-border higher education in Vietnam have been joint programmes between a foreign HEI and a Vietnamese HEI, providing Vietnamese students an opportunity to obtain a degree from an overseas institution without having to travel to the host country. Institutions providing joint programmes with Vietnamese HEIs include Troy State University, Washington State University of the USA; University of Melbourne and Monash University of Australia; Victoria University of New Zealand; Singapore National University; and many other universities from France, Belgium, the United Kingdom, Switzerland and Taiwan.

The first 100% foreign invested university in Vietnam was the Royal Melbourne Information and Technology (RMIT) of Australia established in 2001, having two campuses: one in Hanoi and one in Ho Chi Minh City. The university mainly offers programmes that are in demand in the employment market, such as business, information technology and English.

2.3.2. Admission to Higher Education Institutions

Admission to undergraduate programmes is for the holders of the upper secondary diploma. Students must first pass the Secondary School Leaving Examination (SSLE) that consists of comprehensive tests in six subjects (math, a

foreign language, literature and three alternative subjects), each with a maximum value of ten points. In order to graduate from the upper secondary school and to sit the university entrance examination, students must score at least 20 points (IIE, 2004).

The university entrance examinations are divided into four main groups in accordance to the fields of study the student plans to pursue and the university offering that field:

- Group A: tests knowledge of math, physics and chemistry (for students of engineering, computer science, physics, chemistry, economics, maths, etc.)
- Group B: tests knowledge of math, chemistry and biology (for students of medicine and biology)
- Group C: Test knowledge of literature, history and geography (for students of social sciences and humanities)
- Group D: tests knowledge of literature, math and a foreign language (for students of foreign languages, foreign trade, international studies, and tourism)

Admission to master's programmes is for holders of bachelor's degrees, who have passed the entrance examination. Master's degrees are mainly offered in universities, but some research institutions can also offer master's degrees, with special approval from the Prime Minister, in conjunction with a university.

Admission to doctoral programmes is for holders of master's degrees or, in some cases, the first-class honoured bachelor's degrees. Doctoral programmes are offered by universities and research institutions with special approval from the Prime Minister.

The Minister of Education and Training grants doctoral diplomas, while rectors and presidents of HEIs grants master's, bachelor's and associate bachelor's diplomas. The Government grants postgraduate diplomas to students of some special disciplines (MOET, 2004).

2.3.3. Types of Training Programmes

Under the current structure of the education system, universities and colleges offer a number of programmes in order to meet the learning needs of the society. HEIs provide higher education in the form of full-time, part-time, long-term, short-term, formal (*chính quy*) and non-formal (*không chính quy*) and distance education programmes.

Short-cycle programmes refer to programmes offered at junior or community colleges (*Cao đẳng* or *Cao đẳng Cộng đồng*), and normally require three years of study, leading to the Certificate of Higher Education, Junior College Diploma or Associate Bachelor degree (*cử nhân cao đẳng*). Some universities also offer the short-cycle programmes as an alternative arrangement for students who did not pass the entrance examination with the required marks to enter the long-cycle programmes.

Long-cycle full-time programmes refer to programmes offered at colleges or universities, lasting between four to six years depending on the disciplines, and are divided into two phases. The first phase, consisting of 90 credits and spanning three or four semesters, leads to the Certificate of Higher Education, which will determine the eligibility for admission to phase two. At the end of this phase, students can change universities; however, in practice, it is still restricted due to the nature of the core programme and the availability at another university. Eligible students will proceed to the second phase of the programme, which focuses on specialized education. This phase concludes with a graduation thesis or project or comprehensive exams. In the past, the thesis route was restricted to the best students only, but now has become an option for all students. Upon graduation, students are conferred a bachelor degree in the field of their specialization, which is titled *cử nhân* and followed by the area of specialization. The whole programme usually requires five years of study for engineering and six years for medical studies; other disciplines take only four years of study.

The credit system has been slowly introduced to the country, replacing the previous tightly structured semester-based model. The old system required students to go through subject by subject in the order set by the university in each semester. A cohort entered a programme together and stayed together throughout the entire degree programme, taking same courses all the time. The new credit system allows students to complete their degrees when they can as long as they fulfil the required credits for their programmes.

Table 2: Credit Requirements for Undergraduate Programmes

Types of programmes	Total required credits	Required credits for the first phase	Required credits for the second phase
Short-cycle: 3 years	160	90	70
Long-cycle: 4 years	210	90	120
Long-cycle: 5 years	270	90	180
Long-cycle: 6 years	320	90	230

In-service programme is another well-established programme in Vietnam. Originally, it was established to serve employees of government organizations who needed to upgrade their skills and to prepare for more difficult and/ or responsible positions. In the current system, in-service programmes are sometimes referred to as part-time (or continuing education) programmes. HEIs open in-service programmes to serve students who did not pass the university entrance examination, but wanted to pursue higher education; students who had a degree from a different field wanting to undertake another programme for personal development; students who finished the short-cycle programme wanting to pursue higher level of education, etc. Upon graduation from this programme, students are also conferred a bachelor degree in the specialized field, but the diploma is endorsed with the term *tại chức*. Formerly, holders of the in-service degrees were not eligible for entry to postgraduate studies, but they are now given equal opportunities as those of the regular full-time programmes.

Short-term programmes are for students who have completed two or three years of secondary technical education or vocational training and have a diploma

or certificate. Students can obtain a degree after three years instead of four or five years required by regular students entering directly from upper secondary schools through the entrance examination route. However, students usually take the in-service route nowadays.

Postgraduate programmes remained undeveloped in Vietnam until 1990, because there were not enough resources, facilities and manpower to train postgraduate students in Vietnam. Most students were sent to study for postgraduate degrees in the former Soviet Union or Eastern European countries (Nguyen & Sloper, 1995). Postgraduate studies were restricted to graduates from the full-time long-cycle programmes only. After *đổi mới*, the government has become more flexible with the postgraduate system and adopted the Western model of higher education, allowing both regular full-time and in-service graduates to undertake postgraduate studies since 2002 (IIE, 2004). Postgraduate studies include master's programmes and doctoral programmes.

Master's programmes are usually two-year programmes of coursework and thesis. Holders of bachelor's degrees are eligible to take a competitive examination to enter the programme. Aside from having to pass the examination, students need to have achieved good marks at their undergraduate level in order to be considered for the master's programme.

Doctoral programmes are usually three- to four-year programmes, with a minimum of two years' coursework and a dissertation defended in front of the national examiners. Holders of master's degrees are eligible to take a

competitive examination to enter the programme. However, students with first-class honoured bachelor degrees may also be admitted to the programme.

According to the amended Education Law in 2005, the Ministry of Education and Training stipulates curriculum framework for every training programme of higher education. The curriculum framework decides content structure of each subject and training field, training duration, training ratio between theory and practice, and practicum duration. HEIs then can design their own training programmes based on this framework.

CHAPTER 3: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND LITERATURE

3.1. Globalization and Higher Education

3.1.1. What is Globalization?

Globalization is a contested concept that has become increasingly important to debates within economics, politics, culture and other social sciences. Although globalization has only become a buzzword in public and scholarly debates for over the last two decades (Walters, 1995; Robertson & White, 2007, Robertson, 2000), it can be argued that the globalization process started as early as the 15th century (Coatsworth, 2004; Robertson, 1997, Wallerstein, 1987).

John Coatsworth (2004), a British historian, asserts that globalization originated from the civilizing process that began in 1492, when Spain and Portugal started their conquest and colonization of American societies, and a vast trans-Atlantic trading system was created. Coatsworth also suggested that the world has experienced four cycles of globalization. The first cycle started in 1492 and lasted until the 1600s, during which the world witnessed the establishment of regular trade between the Atlantic and Indian Oceans; the first trans-Pacific trade route, from Acapulco to Manila; and the first regular ocean commerce between Europe and East Asia. The second globalization cycle commenced in the late seventeenth century, when Europeans established the main slave colonies in the New World; developed European settlement colonies

in North America; and shifted its strategy in the Indian Ocean from the maintenance of trading post empires to the full-scale conquest to create colonies. The third cycle began in the late nineteenth century with major increases in international trade, capital and technology flows, as well as mass migrations from both Asia and Europe to the Americas. This cycle, which ended with the Great Depression in 1930s, also saw the “last big scramble for conquest colonies by the European powers in Africa and Asia” (p.39). The most recent cycle of globalization began with the liberalization of international trade after the Second World War and intensified after a further liberalization of global trade in manufactured goods after 1967. Coatsworth also stresses that many countries in East Asia took advantage of this big change immediately, but the last cycle did not start in other countries in Latin America and South Asia until the 1980s or after the economic crisis of 1982.

In recent years, the concept of globalization has had increasing focus, generating considerable interest and controversies in economics, politics, culture, education, humanities, policy circles and among the informed public at large (Appadurai, 1996; Bauman, 1998; Baylis & Smith, 1997; Bhagwati, 2002; Castles & Davidson, 2000; Giddens, 2000; Lechner & Boli, 2008; Robinson, 2007; Robertson & White, 2007; Tomlinson, 2007; Waters, 1995). Some consider globalization a more recent phenomenon that only came with the literature in the 1970s and 1980s on the post-Fordist transformation of production processes as a global process, as well as related accounts of an information society, cultural globalization, or a post-modern culture (Harvey, 1995; Kumar, 1995; Waters,

1995; Webster, 1995). For many others, the idea of globalization did not fully enter the academic and political discourse until late the 1980s and early 1990s; and the widespread use of this term only started after the fall of the Berlin Wall, which marked the triumph of capitalism over communism and an intensification of neoliberal globalization in Western Europe and North America (Currie, 2004; Dale & Robertson, 2002; Robertson, 2000; Robertson & White, 2007; Waters, 1995).

Globalization defines our era. We often hear government officials attribute their country's economic woes to the onslaught of globalization or praised globalization for the economic boom in their countries; business leaders justified down-sizing companies as necessary to prepare for globalization (Friedman, 2005); cultural advocates blamed the threatened disappearance of small cultures on relentless globalization (Appadurai, 1996; Featherstone, 1990; Tomlinson, 2007 & 2008); education administrators credited globalization for providing more choices and access to higher education for students (Bhagwati, 2004; Norberg, 2001; World Bank, 2002), while others blamed it for widening the institutional disparity between rich and poor (Chussodovsky, 1997; Fieldhouse, 1999; Owen-Vandersluis & Yeros, 2000; Sassen, 1998). Globalization is also purported to be undermining state autonomy and capacity (Ohmae, 1995; Peters, 1996; Peters & Savoie, 1995; Rhodes, 1997; Rosenau, 1990; Scholte, 1997), and has led to the destruction of the welfare apparatus that many states had erected (Falk, 1999). However, there has yet an agreement on what globalization really is.

Malcom Waters (1995), one of the leading scholars on the subject, defines globalization as “a social process in which the constraints of geography on social and cultural arrangements recede and in which people become increasingly aware that they are receding” (p.3). He also asserts that globalization “appears to justify the spread of Western culture and of capitalist society”, and “is the direct consequence of the expansion of European culture across the planet via settlement, colonization and cultural mimesis” (p.3). He discusses globalization in three different arenas: the economic globalization, the political globalization and the cultural globalization. Economically speaking, globalization means social arrangements for the production, exchange, distribution and consumption of goods and services, which results in restructuring of companies and workplaces from a Fordist to a Post-Fordist organization of production. The Fordist organization (or Fordism) is characterized by a hierarchical structure and mass production; whereas, the Post-Fordist organization is characterized by, among other things, total quality management, teamwork, and managerial decentralization. Politically speaking, globalization means social arrangements for the concentration and application of power, which resulted in the power of the nation-state being reduced and the rise of trans-national organizations and power such as the International Monetary Organization, the World Bank and the World Trade Organization. Culturally speaking, globalization has resulted in the universalization of Western cultural preferences and weakening of local cultures (Waters, 1995).

Other scholars have also examined the impact of globalization in these three different dimensions: economics, politics and culture. In economic terms, globalization refers to the effective creation of a world market in which every economic actor enters directly, knowingly or not, into relations with other actors potentially anywhere in the world; and which promotes freedom of exchange between localities, institutional flexibility and autonomy in response to global markets (Wagner, 2004; Jones, 1998). In political terms, globalization refers to the alleged decline of the sovereign nation-state and the increased power of international organizations predominant over national organizations (Jones, 1998; Rosenau, 1990; Torres & Schugurensky, 2002; Wagner, 2004; Waghid, 2001). In cultural terms, globalization is often seen as global Westernization (or Americanization), promoting consumerism and deteriorating the cultural and religious mosaic (Jones, 1998; Sen, 2008).

David Held (1991) defines globalization as “the intensification of worldwide social relations which link distant localities in such a way that local happenings are shaped by events occurring many miles away and vice versa” (p.9). He also suggests that globalization is the product of the emergence of a global economy, expansion of transnational linkages between economic units creating new forms of collective decision making, development of intergovernmental and quasi-supranational institutions, intensification of transnational communications, and the creation of new regional and military orders. In a more comprehensive work, Held and McGrew (2000) note that globalization:

“...has been variously conceived as action at a distance (whereby the actions of social agents in one locale can come to have

significant consequences for 'distant others'); time-space compression (referring to the way in which instantaneous electronic communication erodes the constraints of distance and time on social organization and interaction); accelerating interdependence (understood as the intensification of enmeshment among national economies and societies such that events in one country impact directly on others); a shrinking world (the erosion of borders and geographical barriers to socio-economic activity); and, among other concepts, global integration, the reordering of interregional power relations, consciousness of the global condition and the intensification of interregional inter-connectedness" (p.3).

Carlos Torres and Daniel Schugurensky (2002) describe the process of globalization as "blurring nation boundaries, shifting solidarities within and between nation-states, and deeply affecting the constitution of national and interest group identities" (p.430). They also note that the formation of the IMF and the World Bank in 1944 has weakened national trade barriers, allowing global economic forces to play a more significant role in local economies. As multi-national companies adopted global strategies of production, namely Post-Fordist or Toyotaist, and created a more economically and politically interdependent world; governments were under pressures to abandon Keynesian economic policies and to adopt free market ideologies, which have permeated social policy in all corners of the world, including former socialist and welfare state models (Torres & Schugurensky, 2002).

Meanwhile, Knight and de Wit (1997) define globalization as "...the flow of technology, economy, knowledge, people, values, ideas across borders. Globalization affects each country in a different way due to a nation's individual history, traditions, culture and priorities" (p. 6). This definition acknowledges that globalization is a multi-faceted process and can impact countries in vastly

different ways (namely: economically, culturally and politically), but it does not take an ideological stance or a position as to whether this impact has positive and/or negative consequences.

Based on these studies and the aphorism that history often repeats itself, my own definition of globalization is that it is the process of establishing a global community with common goals in economics, politics and culture set by dominant actors. Globalization is the inter-continental interaction that should be seen as a necessary phenomenon in human civilization, because globalization itself is supposed to bring about equality and spread civilization around the world. It is the motive, dynamic and ideology behind each cycle of globalization that needs to be examined and discussed.

If we consider John Coatsworth's assertions to be true, then each cycle of globalization has been based on one common motive that is to expand markets and boost economic growth for richer and more developed countries. The first cycle of globalization started based on an economic motive, with the creation of inter-continental trade activities between Europe and Asia. Perhaps, the motive of the second cycle of globalization was also based on the idea of market expansion, but escalated to competition among empires to possess human capital as well as natural resources around the world and resulted in the formation of colonialism. Again, the third cycle of globalization was motivated by the expansion of international trade, and it also saw the increasing cultural exchange and influence through the migration of people. The fourth cycle of globalization may be the most complex cycle of all, seeing economic and political

ideologies intertwined in the competition to influence the world during the Cold War. Both the Soviet Union and Western countries used economic support and sanctions as tools to politically influence less developed countries. The collapse of the Soviet Union and communism in Eastern Europe proved that capitalism prevailed, and that those with more money and economic might won. The winners continue to influence the world through their economic capability.

However, the current cycle of globalization happens on a larger scale. The previous cycles of globalization saw individual empires competing with one another to set up their own physical colonies, while the fourth cycle of globalization sees poor and developing countries being virtually colonized by a collective imperial empire led by the United States of America, the United Kingdom and Japan. As the major shareholders, these countries use the World Bank, IMF and WTO as means to spread their political economic ideology, known as neo-liberalism, to the world through regulations and conditions for loans.

3.1.2. Neo-liberalism

Neo-liberalism is the political economic ideology of policy-making that started to be widely used under the Thatcher government in the UK and Reagan administration in the USA (McChesney, 1999). Neo-liberalism, also known as Thatcherism and Reaganism, “has been the dominant global political economic trend adopted by political parties of the centre and much of the traditional left as well as the right” (McChesney, 1999, p.7). Influenced by neoclassical economic theory, the central principles of neo-liberal policy are free markets and free trade;

promoting deregulation, privatization of government operations, entrepreneurialism, competition, consumer choice, marketization, reduction of government budgets, and reduction of labour cost (Bourdieu, 1998; Coté, Day & de Peuter, 2007; Fairweather, 1988; Giroux, 2002; Klees, 2008; McChesney, 1999; Olssen & Peters, 2005; Slaughter & Leslie, 1997; Treanor, 2005; Williamson, 1990). Neo-liberalism meant shifting “policy goals from full employment and welfare protections to economic growth and low inflation” (Waks, 2006, p.417), and has been seen as a “populist remedy to the ‘inefficiencies’ of an anachronistic welfare state.” (Coté et al., 2007, p. 318). These policies began to be implemented worldwide by the IMF, the World Bank and the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) in the 1980s through their Structural Adjustment Programmes and the restructuring plans they imposed on countries that borrowed money for development (Bourdieu, 1998; Coté et al., 2007; de Siqueira, 2005; Giroux, 2002; Klees, 2008; Teodoro, 2003).

Although it started as a political economic ideology, neo-liberalism has permeated social policies, including education, throughout the world. It forces nation-state governments to focus more on acting as economic growth promoters for their national economies and creating macroeconomic stability than as protectors of the national identity or welfare systems (Carnoy & Rhoten, 2002; Lingard, 2000; Torres & Schugurensky, 2002). A number of scholars (Ball, 1998; Bray, 1999; Coté et al., 2007; Dale, 1989; Giroux, 2002; Klees, 2008; Kwong, 2000; Lingard, 2000; Lynch, 2006; Mok, 2007; Olssen & Peters, 2005; Slaughter

& Leslie, 1997; Torres & Roads, 2006; Torres & Schugurensky, 2002; Yokoyama, 2008) have written extensively about the impact of neo-liberalism on higher education. The neoliberal policies in economics were found to have influenced educational policies, because policy patterns such as privatization of public higher education institutions, corporatization, entrepreneurialism, competition, consumer choice, marketization and quality assurance have been adopted globally (Currie & Newson, 2998; Halpin & Troyna, 1995; Mok, 2007; Slaughter & Leslie, 1997; Teodoro, 2003; Torres & Roads, 2006).

Under the neo-liberal agenda, governments, especially those of the developing countries, are under pressure to cut down public spending on education while trying to provide a supply of skilled workers in order to attract foreign capital (Carnoy & Rhoten, 2002; Torres & Schugurensky, 2002). As a result, HEIs have to compensate for diminished government funding through liaisons and partnerships with business and industry that focused on innovative product development, and through marketing of educational and business services (Fairweather, 1988). Higher education institutions that received funding from governments have to comply with quality assurance standards while having to meet increasing market demand for higher education graduates (Giroux, 2002; Klees, 2008; Lynch, 2006; Mok, 2007). Furthermore, higher education is seen as an investment good to help achieve economic prosperity (World Bank, 1998); and students are considered as “self-interested entrepreneurs seeking to maximize fiscal return on their investment” in higher education (Hyslop-Margison & Sears, 2006, p.3). Therefore, it is posited that the cost of higher education

should be offloaded to individuals, who will then benefit from it, rather than provided by the state (Coté et al., 2007; Lingard, 2000; Lynch, 2006; Mok, 2007; Torres & Schugurensky, 2002). From this perspective, quality and objectives of higher education are determined by labour market conditions and students' learning needs (now considered customers' demand), which naturally is a part of the neo-liberal ideology.

As part of the “free market” mantra, foreign direct investment in education, also known as cross-border or trans-national education, is promoted throughout the world by the World Trade Organization. Under the aegis of the WTO, the General Agreement on Trade in Services (GATS) aims to facilitate trade in services, including education (de Siqueira, 2005; Nunn, 2001). As a result, countries are increasingly willing to open up their borders to foreign investors in education. Higher education institutions with more hard currency and accreditation deliver their educational services to their “customers” by setting up satellite campuses in different countries, provinces and cities. Schugurensky and Davidson-Harden (2003) note that education became big business in the late 1990s, as the higher education market outside the United States was valued at US\$111 billion per annum and the worldwide education industry was valued at US\$2 trillion annually. The United States alone exported US\$13.5 billion in educational services in 2004, an 11% increase over 2003 (U.S. International Trade Commission, 2006). In Australia, education is the third largest export business that brought in A\$12 billion in 2007 from 207,800 students attending onshore HEIs and 65,299 students attending offshore HEIs (Marginson, 2009).

The United Kingdom is another big exporter of higher education with the net earning of £1,889.7 million in tuition fees from non-EU students in 2004 (Lenton, 2007). In other words, education in general and higher education in particular has been drawn into the whirlpool of the neo-liberal “free market” agenda, allowing the market to rule. Higher education institutions are acting like business entities; following business managerial practices that focus on efficiency, accountability, accreditation, international competitiveness, quality assurance, and marketization (Daniel, 2002; Mok & Tan, 2004; Slaughter & Leslie, 1997; Torres & Roads, 2006; Van Damme, 2002).

3.2. Marketization in Higher Education

In the era of neoliberal globalization, higher education is predominantly viewed as a private commodity and much less as a public good (Albach, 2002; Giroux, 2002; Lynch, 2006). Consequently, it became a tradable commodity to be purchased by a consumer, a product to be bought and sold by academic institutions, which have transmogrified themselves into businesses. In other words, neo-liberalism has promoted market-oriented policy in higher education, making higher education a “service” that is tradable in the market, or allowing marketization of higher education to happen.

Marketization can be understood as the use of the market or market-oriented mechanisms with the aim of improving the public sector’s activities. It is a term used as part of the vocabulary of New Public Management (NPM) that started in 1980s (Bevir, Roads & Weller, 2003; Christensen, Laegreid, & Wise, 2002; Gray & Jenkins, 1995; Hood, 1995). New Public Management is

associated with discourses of neo-liberalism (Olssen & Peters, 2005), and is understood as a recipe for correcting the perceived failings of traditional public bureaucracies over efficiency, quality, customer responsiveness and effective leadership (Bevir et al., 2003; Hood, 1995; Jackson, 2001). It favours the governance mode of markets; and its guiding principles are efficiency and competition (Christiansen, 1998; Hood, 1991). A typical policy instrument of NPM is marketization, which is promoted through the privatization of public enterprises, deregulation, liberalization and competition (Mok & Lo, 2002; Salminen, 2003).

Marketization in higher education commonly refers to several income-earning strategies that universities have adopted. These strategies include tuition fees, massification of higher education, privatization, commercialization of research, commodification of knowledge, and entrepreneurialism (Clark, 1998; Johnstone, Arora & Experton, 1998; Marginson & Considine, 2000; Slaughter & Leslie, 1997). Universities and colleges operating under the context of marketization policy exhibit at least some of the following principles: (1) self-financing; (2) adopting market discourse and the use of the economic market as a model for managerial practices; (3) focusing on efficiency, economy and effectiveness; (4) revenue generation and cost-effectiveness; (5) competition; (6) accountability; (7) institutional autonomy; (8) quality assurance (Dill, 2003; Hanson, 1992; Johnstone, 1998; Robertson & Dale, 2000; Welch, 1998).

Studies in educational reform find that strong market forces and the ideas of corporate management have significantly affected the development and reform

of education in many countries (Jones, 1998; Welch, 1998). The use of market mechanisms has resulted in a dramatic increase in demand for higher education graduates, thus the higher education institutions responded to this notion of marketization by the “massification” of numbers of student intakes or, in other words, by widening access to HEIs (Fox, 2002; Theisens, 2004; Tilak, 2005a & 2005b). The increased numbers of students meant more funding was needed, thus leading to large state budgets and high taxation (Johnstone, 1998; Theisens, 2004; Tilak, 2005a). However, large budgets and high taxation are contradictory to the neoliberal ‘free market’ ideology, and are perceived as causes of economic problems. This has led to a policy of cutbacks on state budgets for social services, including the budget for higher education, especially in Western European and North American countries (Johnstone, 1998; Theisens, 2004; Tilak, 2005a). Ultimately, expenditure per student has shrunk over years, as student enrolments increased faster than governments could increase their budgets (Barr, 1993; Tilak, 2005a). In order for governments to keep expenditure constant and for HEIs to admit more students, HEIs that are primarily dependent on public funds have been forced to mobilize other sources of incomes by introducing tuition fees, contracting out research services, marketing educational services, and increasing private funding through privatization of the institution (Currie & Newson, 1998; Johnstone, 1999 & 2003; Johnstone et al., 1998; Rhoades & Slaughter, 2006; Slaughter & Leslie, 1997; Theisens, 2004; Tilak, 2005a).

Public-funded HEIs are now held accountable by governments to generate maximum (quality and quantity) outputs from the given financial inputs, as the public began to ask for better accountability of the use of their tax money and to question how the investment in education really could facilitate social and economic development (Ball, 1998; Green, Wolf & Leney, 2000; Jones, 1998). Advocates of neo-liberal education policy have criticized bureaucracy and inefficiency in education, “arguing that efficiency and effectiveness are best achieved through market – or quasi-market – systems where autonomous providers compete with each others for their shares of the educational market” (Green et al., 2000, p.55). Therefore, HEIs now have to compete for resources in a market context; whether these resources are from government grants, private funding, research contracts, university-industry partnerships or student tuition fees (Johnstone, 1998 & 2003; Slaughter & Leslie, 1997). In order to respond to this entrepreneurial competitiveness culture, public HEIs have to adopt new managerial doctrines that are consistent with private business practices, and act as though they are private entities, with a greater orientation to the student as a consumer (customer), higher education as a ‘product’, ‘market niches’, ‘pricing’ and aggressive marketing (Johnstone et al., 1998; Mok & Tan, 2004; Slaughter & Leslie, 1997).

Generally, adoption of principles of marketization may be said to constitute a repositioning of public HEIs to compete within the new economic realities of this era. HEIs have changed the way they operate and manage themselves in order to become more competitive while having to ensure high quality and

improving cost-efficiencies. Various forms of quality control and performance indicators have been put in place, providing clear evidence of policy convergence in Europe, North America, East Asia and a number of developing countries (Carnoy, 2000; Santos, 2006; Green, 1999; Rhoades & Slaughter, 2006). Values and managerial practices of private enterprises and corporations increasingly penetrated the public sector of higher education, such as mission statements, appraisal, strategic plans, audit and public relations (Clark, 1998; Duke, 1992; Marginson & Considine, 2000). The dominant doctrine of public management has become one of the market and individualism, with main characteristics of competition, consumer choice, economic efficiency and out-put measurements of success in policy implementation (Hood, 1998; Robertson & Dale, 2000); and because HEIs now pay more attention to good personnel practices, cash flow, product diversification, market position, and accountability (Johnstone, 1998). Under the context of marketization, public HEIs have become more autonomous in decision-making, and the role of governments has diminished following the increased private funding and decreased proportion of government funding (Henry, Lingard, Ritzvi & Taylor, 1999; Johnstone, 1998; Marginson & Considine, 2000; Marginson & Rhoades, 2002).

In summation, marketization has no doubt permeated the policy domain of higher education since 1980s. The most dominant trend of marketization in higher education is privatization, which means introducing more private funding into higher education through tuition fees; massification; increased involvement of the private sector, whether as providers of higher education or as financing

partners; research contracts; entrepreneurial training; and university-industry partnerships (Johnstone, 1998). The other trends of marketization in higher education include the introduction of performance-related funding mechanism or, in other words, market-oriented mechanism, which encourage competition, business-like practices (entrepreneurialism and corporatization), and institutional autonomy.

CHAPTER 4: POLICY PROCESS

Based on state documents and available literature, this chapter provides a description of what policies have been developed in Vietnam from 1986 to present and how policies were made. Documents were manually analyzed and classified into policy patterns and themes in relation to the neo-liberal policy agenda discussed in Chapter Three. In analysis of the policy process, Howlett and Ramesh's (2003) framework was employed to identify the roles of state and other policy actors in policy-making, as well as the environment in which the policies have been developed.

4.1. Policy Development

4.1.1. The Emergence of National Reform or “Đổi mới”

With over 1000 years under the Chinese imperial rule (111BC-938AD) and a long period of western colonialism, the Vietnamese higher education system has always been influenced by a foreign ideology and experienced constant changes (Pham, 1998a; Pham 1995; UNICEF, 1994). The formation of higher education in Vietnam could be dated back to the 11th Century when the Royal College was built in the Temple of Literature in 1076, aimed for training princes and sons of high dignitaries. However, modern higher education in the independent Vietnam does not have a long history.

After gaining independence in 1945 and ending French colonialism in 1954, the country adopted the Soviet model of higher education system, which was strictly controlled by the central government to serve the socialist ideologies that prevailed in Vietnam. The key feature of the Soviet model is the establishment of specialized institutions by separate ministries to train personnel for its respective ministry. This model suited the central planning system, incorporating a tradition of guaranteed post-graduation jobs (Pham & Fry, 2004; Lee, 2007; Le, 1991). According to Le Thac Can (1991), almost every admitted student would receive government grants, would graduate and would be assigned a job in a state-run enterprise or government office regardless of their academic achievements. The job placement of graduate students was intended to eventually replace the older generation and continue to foster the communist ideology (Pham & Fry, 2002).

Vietnam experienced a financial crisis in the early 1980s that saw a hyper-inflation rate at over 700 per cent¹ by September 1986. This forced Vietnamese communist leaders to rethink their own future and their political economic strategies (Pham & Fry, 2002; 2004). At the Sixth National Communist Party Congress in December 1986, communist leaders and members acknowledged the centrally planned Stalinist economic model that Vietnam has adopted since 1954 had failed. The term *đổi mới* (renovation/ reform) was coined for the transition from the centrally planned economic model to the socialist market-oriented economy. *Đổi mới* abolished the system of bureaucratic centralised

¹ Australia National University E-press (2003). Retrieved from: www.epress.anu.edu.au/vietnam/ch06.pdf

management based on state subsidies, moved toward a multi-sector, market-oriented economy with a role for the private sector to compete with the state in non-strategic sectors, and opened the country to foreign investment and influence (Berlie, 1995; Berman, 1990; Duiker, 1995; Fforde & de Vylder, 1996).

4.1.2. The Continuance of *đổi mới*: 1987- present

4.1.2.1. Laws and other regulations

The renovation programme known as *đổi mới* was launched under a decision made in December 1986, when the Sixth Communist Party Congress was held. However, the leaders who attended the Congress did not make clear as to how the new strategy would impact on social and cultural policies. Documents issued at the end of the Congress indicated that there would be a more practical approach to social problems; for instance, the Political Report of the Central Committee made by Truong Chinh (1987), the Secretary General, stressed the importance of science and technology in promoting the performance of the economy. The goal of education was described as: (1) to form and develop social personality of the younger generation, and (2) to train a skilled workforce capable of contributing directly to socio-economic development (Truong Chinh, 1987; CPV, 1987).

Specific goals for education during the transitional time included the abolition of illiteracy, the realization of universal primary education, and extending secondary education to all areas with favourable conditions. To enhance the quality of education, the social status and material conditions of teachers and other educational workers was raised. The role of ideology in education was not

ignored; however, the view was expressed that “we should oppose vestiges of feudal, colonialist, and bourgeois cultures” (CPV, 1987, p.113). Similarly, “all plots and moves by hostile forces aimed at making cultural and art activities a means of sowing pessimism and a deprave lifestyle must be traversed.

Superstitions and other backward customs and practices must be curbed” (CPV, 1987, p. 114-115).

Following the adoption of the economic reform toward a more diversified and market-oriented economy in late 1986, the national educational system also embarked upon a programme of adjustment in 1987 (Pham, 1995). The main purpose of the educational reform during this period was to adapt with the increasing demand for knowledge workers in order for the country to pursue goals of industrialization and modernization. A few key elements of the higher education reform were: (1) higher education institutions moved away from the subsidized system and started to operate on the cost-recovery basis and charged tuition fees, (2) increasing involvement of the private sector into the higher education, (3) giving higher education institutions more autonomy (Pham & Fry, 2004).

Education has become a national priority for both social and economic development and as a vehicle for *đổi mới* since 1991, when the Third Plenum Session of the Communist Party’s Central Committee decided a 10-year cycle of planning for educational development, including universal primary education by the year 2000 (Duncan, 2001). “Investment in education is investment for development” was a guiding principle for the Third Congress, but it took the

principle to “the concept which considers education as socio-economic infrastructure” (Pham, 1998b, p.86). Article 35 of the amended Constitution of the SRV in 1992 regarded education as the first priority of national policies. The goal of education has been indicated to be elevating people’s knowledge, training human resources, fostering talents, nurturing citizens’ morality and capability, producing skilled workers with creativity, innovativeness, national pride and self-motivation in order to contribute to implementing the country’s socio-economic goals (National Assembly, 2002; SRV, 1998 & 2005).

According to Le Thac Can and David Sloper (1995), a culmination of the parallel process of the professional and political reassessment of education and training was reached in January 1993 when the Fourth Plenum of the full Central Committee of the CPV was held. It was agreed among members that education was not merely a personal good or a public good, but that it was also an investment good; and that the investment in education and training is an investment for development and should be included in other investment strategies being pursued as part of national development under *đổi mới* policies.

An official document indicated:

Reform in education and training is an important part of the renewal of the state. The basic task of Reform in education is to shift from meeting the needs of a subsidized, centrally planned economy to meeting the needs of a multi-sector, state-managed, socialist oriented market economy... Investment in education and training must be regarded as one of the main targets for development investment. Conditions must be created to allow education to serve socio-economic development even more actively. (MOET, 1995, p. 14).

The Fourth Plenum of the Central Committee of the CPV passed Resolution Number 04- NQ/HNTW, on the 14th of January 1993, on the “continuation of reform of education and training”. This Resolution emphasizes that:

- education and training are the driving force and basic requirement for the realization of socio-economic objectives of national construction and defence; investment for education is to be regarded as a main orientation of investment for development.
- objectives of education and training are to raise the people’s intellectual standard, to train manpower for development, to foster talents, and to train cultivated and highly qualified people, to broaden the scale while raising the quality and effectiveness of education, to link study with practice and capability with moral quality.
- education and training should meet the demands of national development and follow progressive trends of life-long continuing education in modern time.
- education and training structures should be diversified; and social justice must be ensured in education.

The Resolution also indicates orientations and important measures for the development of the higher education system in the Vietnam in the near future:

- Authorization of non-public HEIs.
- Encouragement of non-formal and self-learning education and training

activities, giving to all citizens, in the frame of established laws and regulations, the right to learn, to participate in examinations, to choose the educational establishment, the training specialties, to receive education inside or outside of the country.

- Reorganization of the higher education institutions network to make efficient use of investment, infrastructure, facilities and teaching staff; to combine teaching -learning with research activities; to promote cooperation between universities/ colleges and research - extension institutions; establishment of key national universities / colleges.
- Enlargement of the higher education enrolment in a rational way, further development of post-graduate education.
- Review and elaboration of new training objectives, curricula, contents and methods.
- Development of academic and administrative staff.
- Redefinition of managerial tasks between ministries, governmental agencies.
- Improvement of higher education planning, inspection activities; giving more autonomy to universities/colleges and democratization of these institutions management.

In September 1995, the Government prepared and presented its own analysis of progress and future direction for education at a major donor meeting during which international donor community was advised where investments in education were required (Duncan, 2001; GOV, 1995). Although the budget for

education, voted by National Assembly, has seen its share in the national budget steadily increase from 12% in 1996 to 15% in 2000 and to 19.3% in 2007, this was still insufficient to fund an overall qualitative and quantitative improvement for education (Clark, 2006, p.4; World Bank, 1996).

In another attempt to reform the educational system in Vietnam, the Central Committee of the CPV issued Resolution 02/NQ/HNTW, on 24 December 1996, entitled “Strategic Orientations for Education and Training Development in the Period of Industrialization and Modernization” (CPV, 1996), defining six major orientations for education and training development in the new period:

- The task of education in the new period is the training of new generations of Vietnamese with the qualities and abilities to contribute to the country’s socialist oriented industrialization and modernization.
- Education and training, as the most important national development strategy, is to be given high priority in investment.
- Education and training is the common task of the (Communist) Party, the State and of all people and their organizations in the society.
- Education and training is to be developed in close coordination with the needs of socio-economic development and progress of science and technology.

Table 3: Major Changes in Higher Education Policies in Vietnam

Categories	Before 1986	From 1986 - Present
Ownership	Public	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Public; • Semi-public; • People-founded • Private
Funding	Solely funded by the government	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Public HEIs are partially funded by the government • Tuition fees • Other private financing resources
Management	Centrally planned bureaucratic system	Institutional autonomy in financial management and student recruitment
System Structure	Mono-disciplinary colleges	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Multi-disciplinary national and regional universities • Mono-disciplinary HEIs • Local HEIs • Open universities
Curriculum	Government decided subjects, curricular, training objective Theoretically based	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Government decides curriculum framework • HEIs design their courses • Practically oriented

- Promotion of equity in education and training.
- Giving the public education and training institutions the leading role in parallel with the diversification of institutional ownership; development of non-formal education and training activities.

For higher education, the Resolution indicates the following directives:

- To expand the enrolment by 1.5 times of 1995, with a structure of student body appropriate to country's development needs.
- To improve the higher education institutions network by establishment of key universities/colleges, of community colleges to supply necessary science and technology manpower on the place.
- To increase number of people undergoing training, further qualification in advanced countries.
- To increase the enrolment of students from ethnic minorities groups.
- To encourage the Vietnamese living in foreign countries and foreigners to participate in education and training activities in Vietnamese institutions; to cooperate with existing institutions in the country; to establish in the country their own institutions.
- To continue the establishment of people-founded and private higher education institutions.
- To continue academic staff development, so that in the year 2000 30% of university/ college teachers will attain the determined professional criteria.
- To establish incentives for teacher training institutions and their students.
- To continue the renovation of education and training content and methodologies.
- To improve the management of HEIs in terms of planning, entrance examinations, and employment for graduates.

- To strengthen the cooperation between universities/colleges and research and extension organizations.
- To continue and develop international cooperation activities by universities/colleges.

Aiming at contributing to the state goal of “rich people, strong country, civilized and equal society” and making education development the first priority of national policies, the National Assembly of Vietnam passed the first Education Law in December 1998 (SRV, 1998). The Law defined higher education as providing either associate degrees (3 years junior college programmes), or bachelor degrees (4 to 6-year college and university programmes, depending on fields of specialization), and master’s degrees. Article 39 of the Education Law stated that Minister of the Ministry of Education granted doctoral degrees; however, the Prime Minister granted the doctoral degrees for some special studies (SRV, 1998, p.30). The Law also stipulated the sources of funding for education, which included state budget; tuition fees; admission fees; income from consulting, technology transfer, production, business and service activities of educational institutions; investment from domestic and international organizations and individuals regulated by law (SRV, 1998, p.58-59). Except public primary schools, tuition fees are applied in every other kind of educational institution (SRV, 1998, article 92, p.61).

The passing of the Education Law by the National Assembly in 1998 marked a new milestone in the development of Vietnam’s education. Over the subsequent years of implementation, it has become outdated in the current

context. In May 2005, the National Assembly of Vietnam passed the amendments, which gave greater autonomy to higher education institutions in granting degrees as well as implementing a broader concept of higher education and a more integrated higher education system. Rectors of colleges and universities now grant all degrees, including doctoral degrees. Research institutes, though primarily responsible for doctoral studies and degrees, may also, with the permission of the Prime Minister, provide master's degrees in cooperation with the universities (SRV, 2005).

The amended Education Law also clarified the rights and duties of non-public educational institutions (people-sponsored and private). Under the preferential policies of Article 68 (SRV, 2005, p. 108), people-sponsored and private institutions, which did not receive any financial support from the State (Pham & Fry, 2002; Bryant & Pham, 2007), shall receive land allocation or rental, infrastructure allocation or rental by the State; and receive budget support when implementing duties requested by the State; and benefit from preferential policies on taxes and credits regulated by the Government (SRV, 2005). The Law also encourages investment in education by giving tax incentives to contributing individuals and organizations, including individuals and organizations from overseas.

Another significant milestone in the development of higher education policy was marked by the issuance of the *Education Development Strategies for 2001-2010* by the Prime Minister in December 2001, which states:

“Higher education has to meet the need for highly qualified manpower for the country’s industrialization and modernization, improving the competitive capacity of Vietnam in the globalization process; to create favourable conditions for expansion of post-secondary education in the various regions of the country; to strengthen the adaptation capacity of graduated students to the labour market, and to provide for them the capacity of self-employment and creation of employment for other people”. (GOV, 2002)

This strategy also plans to increase the number of higher education students per 10,000 inhabitants from 118 in 2000 to 200 in 2010, and increase non-public higher education institutions to 30% of the total sector by the year 2010. It promotes the ideas of diversification, standardization, modernization, socialization (marketization) of higher education in order to build a system that is practical, effective and with high quality; that is able to train highly qualified human resources and talents, helping the country to integrate into the global economy and achieve socio-economic goals. The strategy also emphasizes the life-long learning goal, making the nation a “learning society” (GOV, 2002; CPV, 2001).

Improving the quality of education is also one of the priority tasks encompassed in the Government’s 2001-2010 Educational Development Strategies. The current five-year Socio-economic Development Plan for 2006-2010, which was approved by the National Assembly in June 2006, identifies education as one of the key pillars of social economic development. The Government has released its “Higher Education Reform Agenda 2006-2020” (HERA) in Resolution Number 14/2005/NQ-CP dated 2nd November 2005, which sets an overall quantitative goal of ‘increasing enrolment in universities and

colleges by 10 percent annually, and to reach a ratio of 200 students per 10,000 citizens by 2010, and 450 students per 10,000 citizens by 2020' (GOV, 2005c). HERA also puts forward the overall qualitative goal, which is to develop a higher education system that meets the advanced educational standards of the region and the world; and is able to compete in and adapt with the global market economy. While the Education Development Strategies for 2001-2010 estimates that the share of education expenditure could increase to 6.9 percent of the GDP and 20 percent of total government expenditures by 2010; HERA proposes that big universities must become national scientific research centres, ensuring income from these research activities to take at least 15% of all incomes by 2010 and 25% by 2020 (GOV, 2002; 2005c). HERA also proposes that the non-public (private) higher education sector should enrol 40 percent of all higher education students by 2020; and that public higher education institutions should regulate their own expenditures and revenues, and should diversify their income streams by engaging in the sale of contractual services and commercialization of technology developments.

As the higher education system has started to respond to economic reform since 1987, Le Thac Can (1991), Tran Hong Quan (1995) summarized the following adaptations and changes:

- Higher education institutions must train manpower not just for state-run organizations, but also for non-public organizations. The task of higher education is not only confined to the supply of scientific and technical manpower to the society, but also designed to meet the demand of study

at higher level of all people;

- Funding for higher education institutions is covered partly by state budget, partly by tuition fees, and partly by production, research, service contracts between the HEIs and their partners.
- Student admission is not based only on the state plan, but HEIs also has to forecast and propose quota based on their training capacity and demands of the society and market;
- The State no longer provides grants to all students admitted to the HEIs. Only an approximate 50 percent of them receive full or partial fellowships/ scholarships, which are distributed according to their academic performances and family-need assessment.
- Job placement for graduates is no longer solely arranged in accordance with the state plan, but also through contracts between the HEIs and employers. Graduates are encouraged to find their own employment in all sectors or to be self-employed.
- In many HEIs, undergraduate courses are divided into two phases: (i) 1st phase includes the first four semesters and is reserved for teaching foundation and basic subjects; and (ii) 2nd phase covers the last two to four years, depending on the fields of training, and is for specialized and professional subjects. At the end of the 1st phase, students must pass an examination in order to continue on the second phase. Students who fail this examination are given a Certificate of higher education foundation studies. They can take examination into the second phase in other

universities, or can pursue their higher education through various forms of continuing education.

- Some HEIs have adopted the credit system to provide flexibility in the teaching/ learning process. The credit system allows students to manage their own study plan based on their learning and research abilities, enabling them to shorten the duration of study, to pursue more elective subjects and to specialize in more than one area, and to transfer between various degree programmes and forms of education.
- Some HEIs have expanded their postgraduate training by developing new courses at the Master's level, and combining Ph.D. training with the development of national and regional research programmes.
- Many HEIs have established various forms of continuing education, such as: long-term, short-term, full-time, part time, formal and non-formal.
- Diversification of ownership of the HEIs is encouraged. Private, people-founded, and semi-private have been established besides the existing public funded HEIs.
- New policy on tuition and fees has been introduced.
- Remarkable efforts have been made to expand research and development activities of the HEIs aimed at the mobilization of the scientific and technological potential of higher education to serve the development of the country, to improve teaching and learning quality, and to increase the financial and material. The cooperation between HEIs and production and research organizations is encouraged.

- The establishment of national and regional multi-disciplinary universities occurred as part of restructuring the higher education system.
- Democratization of administration and management in HEIs is carried out. For example, the promotion of heads of institutions, faculties, departments is conducted through elections that permit staff members and students to vote for these positions.
- Staff development, especially academic staff teaching fields related to economic management, is especially encouraged in all HEIs.
- International cooperation such as foreign investment and joint training programmes with foreign HEIs is encouraged.

4.1.2.2. Development of non-public higher education institutions

Taking advantage of the open policy, a group of intellectuals in Hanoi, led by Professor Hoang Xuan Sinh, established the first non-public university in Vietnam –the Thang Long People-sponsored University Center. The university was first founded by Decision No.1687-KHTV of the 15th of December 1988 of the Ministry of University and Higher Education and Vocational Training (now the Ministry of Education and Training). The word “Center” was used in order to call for investment from overseas and private sector². It was later re-established under the new name “Thang Long People-sponsored University” by Decision No.411-TTg on the 9th of August 1994 of the Prime Minister of Government. Article 3 of the Decision indicates that “the Thăng Long People-sponsored University shall organize and operate by law, and by Regulations for People-

² Thang Long People-sponsored University website: <http://www.thanglong.edu.vn/tin-tuc/cms/news/1f6ea456-6719-42a6-9db4-1c608251e08e/tab.aspx>

sponsored Universities issued by the Ministry of Education and Training and by its own Statute which is approved by the Ministry of Education and Training”.

Thăng Long People-sponsored University was opened with three faculties providing undergraduate programmes: Faculty of Mathematics and Information, Faculty of Management, and Faculty of Foreign Languages (UNESCO, 2004).

The establishment of Thăng Long People-sponsored University led the way for the establishment of many other non-public higher education institutions. The Government promulgated a series of regulations relating to non-public higher education institutions: private (GOV, 1993), semi-public (MOET, 1994), people-sponsored (GOV, 2000). However, semi-public HEIs were no longer mentioned in the amended Education Law in 2005; all people-sponsored HEIs and semi-public HEIs became “private” HEIs in accordance with the Prime Minister’s Decisions 122/2006/QĐ-TTg dated 29 May 2006 and 146/2006/QĐ-TTg dated 22 June 2006 respectively (GOV, 2006a; GOV, 2006b).

In Decree No. 90/CP, dated November 24, 1993, the Prime Minister determined a new framework for the national education system and committed to the concept that all citizens have the right to study and pursue higher education (Government of Vietnam, 1995, p. 26-27). Following this Decree, the number of public and non-public higher education institutions increased and began to offer a number of training forms suited to the needs of the students (IIE, 2004). Between 1993 and 1995, total higher education enrolments grew by 117%, from 162,000 to 354,000 students. Despite the consolidation of several public institutions into larger multi-disciplinary institutions, the number of higher education institutions

has grown from 120 in the early 1990s to 369 HEIs in 2008 of which 67 institutions are private. Private HEIs has accounted for 93.5% of the total number of newly established HEIs from 2005 to 30 July 2008, contributing to the increase of the “students per 10,000 citizens” ratio to 188 (MOET, 2008).

Table 4: Changes in HEIs and Student Enrolment

Year	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007
Number of HEIs	178	191	202	214	230	277	322	345
Public	148	168	179	187	201	243	275	288
Non-public	30	23	23	27	29	34	47	57
Number of Students (thousand)	899.5	974.1	1020.7	1131.0	1319.8	1387.1	1666.2	1928.4
Public	795.6	873.0	908.8	993.9	1182.0	1226.7	1456.7	1662.5
Non-public	103.9	101.1	111.9	137.1	137.8	160.4	209.5	265.9
Number of Lecturers	32,357	53,942	38,671	39,958	47,613	48,541	53,364	61,321

Source: General Office of Statistics of Vietnam, 2007

The establishment of non-public higher education sector has helped the Government provide access to higher education to almost 300,000 students in 2007 national wide, but non-public HEIs are not eligible for funding from Government. Instead, they are primarily dependent on tuition fees and other non-governmental resources to cover all their operating costs, such as salaries, equipment, libraries, rentals and constructions (Pham & Fry, 2002; Hoang, 2004). There is no specific limit on non-public institutions’ tuition fees, but it is regulated

that these institutions are entitled to collect tuition fees in order to “ensure all of their expenditures and keep intact financial resources” (MOF, MOET & MOLISA, 2000). However, in reality, most non-public HEIs have collected tuition fees much lower than the normal expenditure required for quality training at a public institution. For example, the actual expenditure for training one student at two national universities is VND 9,360,000 (about US\$625) in 2004; however, tuition fees at non-public HEIs varied from \$176 to \$251 (Hoang, 2004; Dao & Ngo, 2004). Currently, the minimum tuition fees at HCM Technology Private University is VND 4 million per term (about US\$235), which rose from VND3.25 million (about US\$213) two years ago; and the maximum tuition fees at Hong Bang Private University in Ho Chi Minh City for medical technology studies are VND14 million (US\$823) per annum, and VND12 million (US\$750) per annum for studies of treatment-convalescence³. This has led to financial constraints for non-public HEIs, and created difficulties for them to invest in building facilities that are necessary for teaching and developing programmes. Therefore, most non-public HEIs only offers programmes that are in high demands in the market, such as business, technology and foreign languages (Pham & Fry, 2002).

Despite some short-comings of the non-public HEIs, Pham and Fry (2002) asserted that non-public HEIs have contributed to enhancing efficiency and social equity, because non-public HEIs often attract students from higher socio-economic status, leaving more spaces at public HEIs for students from lower socio-economic status.

³ Vietnam News (October 6, 2008). School tuition fee system revamped. Retrieved from <http://english.vietnamnet.vn/education/2008/10/807128/>

4.1.2.3. Emergence of autonomous, multi-disciplinary public universities

With a legacy of the 30-year period of Soviet influence in Vietnam following the Second World War, Vietnam adopted the higher education system that is broadly similar to models adopted by former Soviet bloc nations, which consisted of mono-disciplinary universities. These mono-disciplinary universities were seen as the reason that limited the development of basic infrastructure and teaching staff; hindered improvements in the quality of higher education and specialized training; and limited the organization of education and training on wide scale as well as the capacity to link research with public services (UNESCO, 2006).

Aiming to create strong and comprehensive international standard universities in the key economic and political cities, and in response to the pressing need to strengthen the higher education system and improve research capacity, 1993 and 1995 saw the establishment of two pivotal multi-disciplinary national universities in Hanoi and HoChiMinh city by consolidating a relatively large number of mono-disciplinary HEIs (Ngo, Lingard & Mitchell, 2006; UNESCO, 2006). The first national university, the Vietnam National University in Hanoi, was established by the Government Decree Number 97/CP on the 10th of December 1993, through amalgamating five leading mono-disciplinary colleges. The second national university was established in Ho Chi Minh City on the 27th of January 1995 in accordance to the Government's Decree Number 16/CP by amalgamating nine mono-disciplinary institutions. These two universities share

some decision-making powers with MOET and other ministries, report directly to the Prime Minister, and have more autonomy than other HEIs.

These colleges were already well-established and had very good reputation of their owns; therefore, the merger of the Vietnam National University in Ho Chi Minh City (VNU-HCMC) soon became problematic, as the management became too complicated, and subsequently created inefficiencies in the use of common resources (Ngo et al., 2006). After a few years of operation, the Government had to detach some colleges out of VNU-HCMC, leaving only three colleges. At present, VNU-Hanoi has ten constituent institutions: four colleges, three faculties, one institute, three schools; VNU-HCMC has five colleges, one high school for gifted pupils, one institute and one faculty (Ngo et al., 2006; UNESCO, 2006).

The notion behind the establishment of multi-disciplinary universities was to enhance the overall quality of training and research, and to make effective use of resources in order to meet the requirements of the transition towards a market-oriented economy (UNESCO, 2006). By the same process of amalgamation, three other regional multi-disciplinary HEIs were established in 1994, namely, Thái Nguyên University, Huế University, and Đà Nẵng University.

While pointing out problems in merging universities in Vietnam in their case study of VNU-HCMC, Ngo et al. (2006) affirm that it was a necessary move to meet national demands of a new era, an era that promotes the country's industrialization and modernization.

4.1.2.4. Socialization (Marketization) of higher education

Since the commencement of *đổi mới* policies in 1986, Vietnam higher education has experienced some importance changes. As long as policies are concerned, changes are made to meet demands for human resources in the socialist market-oriented economy. Although the national budget for education has been increased gradually, from 7.7% in 1992 to 15.7% in 2003, and an estimate of 20% in 2010 (IMF, 1999; 2003; MOET, 2001), there has been a shift from relying solely on the state budget for financial provision of higher education to multiple sources of funding.

The Ministry of Education and Training started to allow public HEIs to admit fee-paying students in 1987, outside of the centrally planned quota for which scholarships and grants were available (UNESCO, 2006). The number of fee-paying students grew quickly compared with the number of students sponsored by the State. In the 1987-1988 academic year, there were 133,136 students attending HEIs; 91,182 of them were full-time students, who received scholarships and did not have to pay tuition fees; and 41,954 were part-time (in-service) fee-paying students. However, the Prime Minister issued Decision Number 70/1998/QĐ-TTg dated 31 March 1998 that provided clear guidelines on tuition collection and utilization in public education and training institutions in the national education system; and the 1998-1999 academic year saw the number of

tuition-paying students among full-time students grew four times larger than the number of students receiving scholarships ⁴.

Furthermore, the Government has lifted or loosened many regulations that had limited the role of private sector in education (Pham & Fry, 2002; Tran, 2005). The Government promulgated Resolution Number 90/CP on 21 August 1997 on “the orientations and policy of socialization of activities in education, healthcare and culture”. The Resolution called for a broader participation of the people and the whole society into the development of education (GOV, 1997). It also defined “socialization” of education as:

- to build up a sense of community responsibility in the people of various strata toward building and improving a healthy economic and social environment favourable for activities in education, healthcare and culture;
- to broaden the sources of investment;
- to exploit the potential in human, material and financial resources in the society;
- to develop and effectively use various resources of the people, creating favourable conditions for educational [...] activities to develop quickly and with a higher quality.

Some measures to “socialize” activities of education and training included:

- consolidating public educational institutions to help them maintain their leading role and serve as the core;

⁴ Student Finance and Accessibility:
www.gse.buffalo.edu/org/inthigheredfiance/region_asiaVietnam.pdf.

- diversifying forms of education (full-time, part-time, in-service), and types of educational institutions (public, semi-public, private and people-sponsored, distance education) in order to create opportunities for every one to raise their standard, and have access to new knowledge and scientific and technology advancement for their career advancement;
- exploiting and effectively using other potentials of financial, human and physical resources in the society to develop education; including tuition fees, contributions from students' parents, production and business services;
- raising tuition fees at vocational schools, colleges and universities;
- raising the quality of the educational activities, ensuring balance relations between size, quality and effectiveness
- allowing all foreign and domestic agencies, organizations and individuals to take part in the development of education;
- using part of the budget and foreign aid to send teaching staff and selected students abroad for further training (GOV, 1997).

In the quest to speed-up the “socialization” process, the Government issued two more documents to clarify some key points that would help attract more participants. The first document, Decree Number 73/1999/ND-CP on the *encouragement of socialization of activities in education, healthcare, culture and sports* dated on the 19th of August 1999, offered tax incentives for participants in

the development of education; and provided guidelines in financial management and state management for non-public institutions (GOV, 1999).

The second document, Government Resolution Number 05/2005/NQ-CP on *stepping up the socialization of activities in education, healthcare, culture and sports* was issued on the 18th April 2005. In this Resolution, the Government vowed to continue: (1) reforming State management; (2) strengthening policies; (3) increasing investment resources; (4) shifting public institutions from bureaucratic mechanisms to autonomous, not-for-profit mechanisms, having full autonomy in organization and management; (5) developing and maintaining only two forms of non-public institutions (people-sponsored and private), and gradually abolishing the semi-public establishments; (6) creating an conducive environment for development and competition in order to make both public and non-public institutions commit to quality assurance and broaden their operation scales. The Government also encouraged the establishment of non-public institutions, either under the models of not-for-profit or for-profit; and considered converting some public HEIs into non-public institutions to be autonomously managed by collectives or individuals and refund the capital to the State (GOV, 2005; National Assembly, 2005).

The Government also indicated that it would continue: (a) to increase the percentage of budget expenditure on education and training, ensuring fund for general education and key areas of study and research; (b) to give priority to investments in less populated and mountainous areas; (c) to attract investment and resources from all levels of society, and strengthen links between

educational institutions with families and society; (d) to fundamentally reform policy on tuition fee, making sure that tuition fees are enough to cover institutions' teaching and learning expenses; (e) and to encourage cooperation between Vietnamese educational institutions with high-quality foreign educational institutions, or the establishment of 100% foreign-invested educational institutions in Vietnam (GOV, 2005).

The term “socialization”, which is translated from the Vietnamese term “*xã hội hoá*”, has quite different meanings from its English origin. As the policies have indicated, the “socialization” of higher education in Vietnam clearly fits with the definition and characteristics of marketization discussed in Chapter Three. When I used the term “marketization” in my interviews with some leaders of the Vietnam National University in Hanoi, all of them quickly corrected me “we use the term *socialization* here”. Although Vietnam has adopted a market-oriented economy since 1986, and the ideology of neo-liberalism has been presented in its policies, some public administrators and scholars are still not comfortable with the involvement of non-public sectors in delivering education. There are opinions that oppose the ideas of marketization/ commercialization of education, because they believe in education as public goods, not a private commodity that could be exchanged in the market⁵. Moreover, Vietnam still remains a staunch communist country, and so marketization or commercialization would undermine the socialist

⁵ Cam Lu (2005). *Tranh cãi nhiều về thị trường giáo dục* [Much discussion education market]. Available at <http://www.vnn.vn/giaoduc/vande/2005/01/363131>.

characteristics of higher education. It is just a matter of “wording” to fit in the ideology of communism, and I decided to stay true to the wording of the policies.

4.1.2.5. Entrepreneurial (or corporatized) Higher Education Institutions

In the era of globalization, the function of the nation-state has been transformed, and universities are struggling to find a new identity as relatively autonomous corporations (Waks, 2002). As Readings (1996) states “the university no longer has to safeguard and propagate a national culture because the nation-state is no longer the major site at which capital reproduces itself” (Readings, 1996, p.13). Waks (2002) adds that “the university is no longer called up on to train national citizens and leaders, because the cosmopolitan world citizen of global society is attached to the modern corporate order more securely than to the nation-state” (Waks, 2002, p. 3). Thus, universities are marketing their wares globally to individuals and corporate customers, and are evolving into “corporate universities”.

The term “corporate university” has been used since 1960s (Waks, 2002). Scholars (Allen, 2002; Clark, 1998; Slaughter & Leslie, 1997; Currie et al, 2003; Aronowitz, 2000) have linked it to three distinct kinds of organization: (1) established, mainstream, non-profit public or private, which are adapting to economic and political pressures or technological opportunities by adopting managerial practices of modern for-profit corporations; or (2) newly established, highly innovative that operate as for-profit corporations, but satisfy the political and legal requirements for university status, and meet the standards of

accrediting bodies; (3) new organizations operating within and providing education and training services for for-profit corporate firms.

Furthermore, empirical studies reveal that strong market forces and the ideas of corporate management have significantly affected the development and reform of education around the world (Jones, 1998; Welch, 1998). The economic rhetoric of individual rights and the ideology of “efficiency” are gaining momentum not only in industrialized countries but also in less developed ones. In many nations of the East Asia and Pacific regions, the notions of “excellence”, “enhanced international competitiveness”, “quality”, “increasing system effectiveness”, and the like have become evident in education reform agendas (Bray, 1996). Education now focuses on results, efficiency and effectiveness, decentralized management environments, flexibility to explore alternatives to public funding, establishment of productivity targets and competitive environments among public institutions, along with the strengthening of strategic capacities at the centre of organizations. Like many other developing countries, Vietnam’s higher education system has been under direct government control and poorly funded by the State while the demand for human resources with high technical capability and new management skills increases. This forces the policy makers to allow universities to look for alternative sources of income.

Since the Ministry of Education and Training allowed universities and colleges to establish scientific research production units in 1989, there have been a number of educational institutions establishing research production units to provide services to society in order to increase income for their institutions. By

1990, there were 111 units of scientific research and social services established; thirteen of which were under MOET's management, and 98 other units belonged to 23 universities and colleges (Dang, 1997, p.367). With the aim to improve quality of education and serve the society, the Education Law of 1998 officially allowed HEIs to provide services in scientific research and application, technology transfer and production in areas that are appropriate to the development of human resources and national economy (SRV, 1998, article 15, p. 13-14).

Taking a further step to associate training and scientific research with actual production, to accelerate the prompt application of scientific and technological research results to production, and to partly supply resources for training as well as scientific research in order to raise the training and research quality, the Prime Minister issued Decision Number 68/1998/QD-TTg on 27 March 1998 allowing the experimental establishment of state enterprises in some public HEIs (universities, colleges and research institutions). Under this Decision, State enterprises established within the public universities are allowed to manufacture and trade in products resulting from the technological research and application, or scientific and technological products and services that are closely associated with the functions and professional tasks of the HEIs.

After eight years of implementation of Decision Number 68/1998/QD-TTg, and aiming to reduce the burden on the state budget, the Government issued Decree No. 43/2006/ND-CP on 25 April 2006 to: (1) allow non-business public institutions more autonomy and self-responsibilities in their operations, including

organizational structure and financial management; (2) encourage public higher education institutions to convert their operations into the model of enterprises or non-public organizations (Article 4).

By transforming their operations to the model of enterprises or non-public organizations, these institutions are eligible for tax incentives, land allocation as well as state property that have already been invested. The Decree also clearly indicates their autonomous status in every area, such as financial management, staff and student recruitment, allowing them to operate like an independent enterprise. The institutions are no longer assigned to train new leaders for the State, but the State will place an order as a customer (GOV, 2006c).

Entrepreneurial higher education institutions are not limited within the public sector, non-public HEIs are also encouraged to develop service establishments within the institutions. Those institutions are also eligible for the State's tax incentive policies, land allocation as well as equal treatment in providing services to the State (GOV, 2006d).

There have been a number of HEIs operating as enterprises in Vietnam, including most non-public HEIs, 100% foreign invested universities such as the Australian Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology (RMIT), the two National Universities, which will be discussed in details in Chapter 5. The model of an entrepreneurial university operating within a for-profit organization only started in 2006, when FPT University was established as a private university funded and run by the wealthy Corporation for Financing and Promoting Technology (FPT). It is the first university of this kind to be opened in Vietnam, mainly focusing on

information technology training. The tuition fee at this university is extremely high for Vietnamese; however, the funding company is committed to employ its graduates in the years to come. Some partners of FPT such as Microsoft, International Data Group, offer full scholarships for students to study there.

As an entrepreneurial entity, entrepreneurial HEIs are required to diversify their sources of revenues (GOV, 2001; GOV, 2003). Although these institutions are required to raise revenues from market-related activities, they are not allowed to raise tuition fees. Any increase in tuition fees has to be approved by the Prime Minister⁶. Therefore, entrepreneurial HEIs have to adopt strategic plans to seek revenue from other sources such as full-fee paying students, research contracts, technology development, consultancy, franchised educational programmes, and in-service training, etc (GOV, 2001; GOV, 2005a).

Besides diversifying their sources of revenue, the entrepreneurial HEIs in Vietnam also adopted corporate managerial practices to improve its accountability, efficiency and productivity. Management techniques from the private sector such as mission statement, strategic planning and quality assurance have also been employed. Rectors or presidents of HEIs can be seen as a powerful figure in resource and financial management. For example, the heads of two National Universities are titled “*Giám Đốc*” (President in English) whose role is more like a Chief Executive Officer (CEO), and is called upon to make top-down decisions. Decision-making tends to be limited to a small management body called “*Hội đồng trường*” (Governing Council of the University)

⁶ VietnamNet (2007). Proposed tuition hike still only in draft stage: MOET officials. Available at <http://english.vietnamnet.vn/education/2007/07/717384>

at the public HEIs, or “*Hội đồng quản trị*” (Board of Directors) at non-public HEIs (GOV, 2003). There are also other functioning units to support the directors, rectors or presidents in industry liaison or revenue generating activities, as well as institutional development.

The notion behind the establishment of entrepreneurial HEIs and giving universities more autonomy and responsibility in management, training, research, personnel organization and finance was to respond to the market demands for knowledge workers; to allow institutions to better adapt to the changing environment; and to contribute in raising the competitiveness of the market economy (GOV, 2001; 2005b; 2005c; 2006c; 2006d). This reflects the influence of global trend of marketization that involves the development of private institutions, forcing public universities to compete and adopt practices and standards that are consistent with corporate/ enterprises’ practice. Furthermore, it has also seen government and policy-makers making a greater use of market mechanisms as a way to encourage public institutions to compete and act as private entities.

4.1.2.6. International Cooperation and Collaboration in Higher Education

The terms “globalization” and “international integration” have become slogans and rationales for the Vietnamese government to put forward a variety of reforms for improving the effectiveness, efficiency and competitiveness of the public sector. One of the major manifestations of marketization of higher education is the stress on competition among HEIs. Besides improving the quality of education, competition is supposed to provide parents and students

with a wider range of choices and hold HEIs accountable for their programmes. Competition has been fostered through the diversification of types of schools and programmes. In addition to allowing the private sector to participate in providing higher education services, the Government also supports the expansion of international relations to exchange views, ideas, experiences, advanced research methods and technology (GOV, 1999; 2005b). International cooperation is seen as providing opportunities to mobilize external resources for the development of higher education.

The Government has been encouraging foreign investment in higher education in the form of joint training and research programmes with local universities, and overseas research fellowships. However, the involvement of foreign higher education providers in Vietnam has only become increasingly active since 2000, when the Government's Decree No. 06/2000/ND-CP dated on the 6th of March was enacted, providing incentives for foreign investment in education and training (GOV, 2000b). The Government issued Decree No. 18/2001/ND-CP the next year, allowing the set-up and operation of Vietnam-based for-profit foreign educational establishments (GOV, 2001b). The Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology (RMIT) International University Vietnam became the first university with 100 percent foreign investment established in 2001 in Ho Chi Minh City. This university has two campuses, with one in Ho Chi Minh City and the other one opened in 2004 in Hanoi. It offers undergraduate and graduate programmes in educational administration, business, computer science, information technology, multimedia and engineering.

Since becoming the 150th member of WTO, which promotes free and liberalized trade in higher education across national borders under GATS, Vietnam has become a fertile ground for foreign providers of higher education from developed countries to move in. Besides RMIT, a number of foreign HEIs have also entered into joint programmes with Vietnamese HEIs; many of them offer “sandwich programmes”, which provide students a choice to complete the degree in either Vietnam or in the country of the foreign institutions. For example, students enrolled in the Troy State University undergraduate programme in collaboration with VNU-Hanoi’s Faculty of Economics can either complete their degrees in Vietnam or spend the last few semesters in the USA to complete them. As I am writing this, a delegation of the United States educators visits Vietnam, looking to open an American International University in Vietnam by 2010 to provide “the best quality education at reasonable cost” for both young students and mature workforce⁷.

More importantly, the Government has also reserved funds from the state budget to send Vietnamese students overseas to study and do research in needed areas. MOET assigned a unit formerly known as “Project 322” to oversee and manage the Government’s scholarships for Vietnamese students to study overseas. In addition, a significant number of students receive scholarships and other types of awards directly from foreign universities, and many Vietnamese students are studying abroad through self-financing. The number of Vietnamese students studying in the United States is reported to have jumped 45.3% to more

⁷ Thanhnien News (28 November 2008). US educators look to open American international school. Retrieved from <http://www.thanhniennews.com/education/?catid=4&newsid=44116>

than 8700 in the 2007-2008 academic year, making Vietnam rank 13th in the list of top 20 countries sending students to the U.S.A⁸.

4.1.2.7. Quality Assurance

Higher education in Vietnam has undergone massive expansion, and has gradually changed from elite education to mass education due to ever increasing demand for knowledge workers in the market-oriented economy. High quality in education is considered the key factor to ensure better education outcomes and enhance the competitiveness. The Government of Vietnam has also started to pay attention to the quality assurance in Vietnam since 1999, when the Centre for Education Quality Assurance and Research Development of VNU-Hanoi was given the task to conduct state-level research on accreditation in higher education (UNESCO, 2006). Consequently, the *Research on Setting up the Batteries of Criteria Use in the Accreditation of Vietnamese Higher Education Institutions* was published in March 2002. Results of this research have set standard criteria in many aspects ranging from curricula, faculties, facilities and investments, for evaluating quality of training in a HEI. The State Scientific Committee approved the results of this research and requested the government authorise their use for accrediting purposes (UNESCO, 2006). In the same year, MOET established an Office of Accreditation responsible for all matters of accreditation. It was upgraded to the General Department of Assessment and Accreditation (GDAA) in 2003. MOET promulgated the Provisional Regulations on Accreditation of Higher Education Institutions on the 2nd of December 2004,

⁸ Thanhnien News (18 November 2008). Vietnamese studying in US jumps 45.3 percents: report. Retrieved from <http://www.thanhniennews.com/education/?catid=4&newsid=43813>

setting up ten standards for accreditation of HEIs and a three-stage process of accreditation involving institution's self-assessment, external evaluation and approval⁹.

The organization that helps the Minister of Education and Training to direct and carry out accreditation is the Council of Higher Education Accreditation. President of the Council is the Minister or Vice-Minister delegated by the Minister. The standing Vice-President of the Council is the Director of GDAA.

Higher education institutions accredited by the Council of Higher Education Accreditation are given priority in allocation of funds stipulating enhancement of quality and in approval upon their training programs joined with domestic and overseas institutions.

4.2. Policy Actors

4.2.1. State Actors

Since the dawn of Vietnam, the State is the highest level of authority and has taken itself the regulatory and funding responsibilities with respect to education in general and higher education in particular. The State control model existed during the colonial period, and remained the dominant model after the country became independent. This model implied that the State designed and regularly adapted regulatory frameworks for higher education, and it was the sole funder of higher education until the collapse of Communism in Eastern Europe.

⁹ See more details at <http://100years.vnu.edu.vn:8080/BTDHQGHN/Vietnamese/C1794/2006/05/N8051/>

There has been much discussion about the impacts of globalization on economic, social, political and cultural fronts during the last two decades. The liberalization of national economies and the domination of supranational institutions such as IMF and the World Bank have reduced the role of nation-states in managing the public domains (Bauman, 1998; Faulks, 2000; Giddens, 2000; Held, 1991; Ohmae, 1990; Walters, 1995). However, looking at its role in policy-making and reform of higher education, Vietnam shows that it is not a shrinking welfare state, where “no one seems to be in control” as Bauman (1998) suggested, nor has it been a minimalist state that embodies a reduction of central state regulative and intervening roles, it has become an interventional state and taken the role as the driver for changes.

Since *đổi mới* took place in mid-1980s, what has emerged in Vietnam is a developmental state that “establish[es] as its principle of legitimacy, its ability to promote and sustain development” (Castells, 1992). In economic terms, the developmental state is seen as an interventionist, guiding the development of the national economy, directing and regulating economic activities towards certain national goals. It is also conceived as a mechanism for promoting a first wave of industrialization (Masina, 2006). Education, in Vietnam, is seen as an instrument for promoting national unity, social equity, and economic growth; and for reaching the goals of national modernization and industrialization (MOET, 2001; National Assembly, 2002). Therefore, the State, instead of cutting back on education expenditure, invests heavily on education and human resource development in order to bring the country out of an under-developed situation and lay down the

foundation for it to become an industrialized and modernized country by 2020 (MOET, 2001). The state budget for education increased from 4.2 per cent of GDP in 2000 to 5.6% in 2006 (Nguyen, 2007). In 2007, the budget for higher education increased 21.1 percent over 2006¹⁰. However, the expenditure on education per capita in Vietnam is still low. Even though the expenditure on higher education accounts for 15% of the total annual budget for education expenditure, the average expenditure for a student is only about \$400 per annum (Nguyen, 2007).

4.2.1.1. The Legislative Body

The State is the source of all authority in Vietnam, including policy-making, governance and management of the country as indicated in the 1992 Constitution. The State authority is exercised through various levels. The National Assembly, a 493-member unicameral body elected to a five-year term, is the “highest representative organ of the people and state power” and is the only one with constitutional and legislative powers (National Assembly, 2002). The agencies of the National Assembly include the Standing Committee of the National Assembly, the Ethnic Council and the Committees of the National Assembly.

Bills proposed by the President of the SRV, the Standing Committee of the National Assembly, the Government, the Supreme People’s Court or other members of State, are first examined and commented on by the Ethnic Council

¹⁰ Vietnam News (9/1/2007). Education ministry boosts budget for higher education spending. <http://vietnamnews.vnnet.vn/showarticle.php?num=01EDU090107>

or relevant Committees of the National Assembly (e.g. for education, Committee of Culture, Education, Youth and Teenagers) before being presented to the National Assembly. Bills that require public opinions are published and aired through the mass media, so that the people and the state organs at all levels can comment before the presentation of those bills to the National Assembly. When the bills are passed at a plenary session and become fully-adopted laws, they are ratified by the President of the National Assembly and the President of SRV promulgates the laws.

Constitutionally, the Assembly is the sole body empowered to draw up, adopt the constitution and amend laws. As the highest state authority, it also has responsibility to legislate and implement state plans and budgets; approves the national revenue and expenditure balance of account; levies, amends and abolishes taxes. The National Assembly has the authority to establish or dissolve ministries, ministerial level agencies of the Government. It elects or removes from duty the country's President, Vice-presidents, Chairperson and Vice-Chairpeople of the National Assembly, members of the Standing Committee of the National Assembly, the Prime Minister, Chief Justice of Supreme People's Court, the Head of the Supreme People's Procuracy; and approves the appointment of Ministers upon the recommendation of the Government or release them from duties.

The National Assembly also supervises all activities of the State. It examines all working reports of the President of SRV, the Standing Committee of the National Assembly, the Government, the Supreme People's Court and the

Supreme People's Procuracy. It has the power to abolish any legal documents issued by those individuals and organizations that are not conformed to the Constitution, laws and Resolutions of the National Assembly.

4.2.1.1. The Executive Body

As stated in Article 109 of the Constitution of SRV, the Government is the executive organ of the National Assembly, the highest organ of State administration of Vietnam. The Government is composed of the Prime Minister, who is the member of the National Assembly; Deputy Prime Ministers; Cabinet Ministers and other members. It carries out overall management of the work for fulfilment of political, economic, cultural, social, national defence, homeland's security and external duties of the State. The Government is accountable to the National Assembly; reports to the National Assembly and its Standing Committee, and the country's President.

The Government is responsible for directing the work of all ministries, the organs of the ministerial rank and the organs of the Government, the People's Committees at all levels; ensuring the implementation of the Constitution and the laws in State organizations, economic bodies, social organizations, units of arm forces and among citizens; proposing draft laws, decree laws and other projects to the National Assembly and its Standing Committee; ensuring overall management of the building and development of the national economy; implementing national financial and monetary policies; promoting the development of culture, education, healthcare, science and technology; and carrying out the plan for socio-economic development and making sure the State

Budget is being used effectively. The Government also has the authority to approve international agreements on behalf of the State and direct the implementation of international agreements joined by the SRV.

In the republic system like Vietnam's, the Government has a task to convince the legislature to approve its measures; however, it has a wide range of power and resources to strengthen its positions. In addition to the control over fiscal resources, the Government has the bureaucracy at its disposal to provide advice and to carry out its preferences. It can use these resources to control and influence societal actors such as interest groups, mass media and think-tanks (Howlett & Ramesh, 2003)

In education, the Vietnamese government undertakes the overall State management of the national education system with regard to the objectives, curricula, content, plans, strategic development, the required standards of teachers, charters of schools and universities, regulations on organizations and operations, regulations governing examinations, quality assurance and evaluation, and the issuance of diplomas and certificates. However, any grand strategies or policies that affect rights of learners at the national level must be passed by the National Assembly before the Government can put them into effect (National Assembly, 2002; SRV, 2005).

The State management of higher education is strongly centralized at the ministerial level. The State authority lies primarily with five ministries with regulatory responsibilities across the system are the Ministry of Education and Training, the Ministry of Finance, the Ministry of Planning and Investment, the

Ministry of Home Affairs and the Ministry of Science and Technology. These ministries advise the Government of Vietnam about how the higher education system should accommodate to national policies and goals, sectoral financial plans, demands for human resources and government protocols. Based on this advice, the State makes decisions on the growth of the system, the appropriate capital and expenditures, the levels of integration between higher education sector and other sectors of the economy (Hayden & Lam, 2007).

The Ministry of Education and Training, which was formed in 1990 by merging the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Higher, Technical and Vocational Education, has the most extensive system-wide responsibilities. It is responsible to the Government for the implementation of State management of education, which includes all levels of education from pre-school to post-graduate and continuing education. However, the management over vocational and technical education was transferred to the Ministry of Labour, War Invalids and Social Affairs (MOLISA) in April 1998 in order to consolidate resources (UNESCO, 2006).

According to the Government's Decree No. 85/ND-CP dated 18 July 2003, MOET wields significant power over education and handles a number of tasks which include (1) promulgation of regulations affecting curriculum; (2) drafting and publishing of text books; (3) enrolment and student management; (4) academic assessment procedures and granting of degrees; (5) infrastructure and facility management; (6) staffing and personnel in education; (7) developing future plans and strategies; (8) providing proposals to the Government for

regulations of education matters scholarships, construction of universities and sending students to study abroad. For higher education, the governance capacity of MOET covers three major tasks, including: (1) the development of strategies and plans for higher education; (2) the development of regulations and governance of training content and quality; (3) the evaluation and inspection of programmes¹¹.

As a part of the state-management responsibilities, MOET coordinates with the Ministry of Finance, and the Ministry of Planning and Investment (MPI) in allocating the State budget expenditure for education (GOV, 2003a; GOV, 2004). MOET allocates enrolment quotas for all universities and colleges, including both public and private. The quotas, which are based on the market demand for skills and the training capacity of each institution, determine the number of student intake of an institution as well as the number of student intake within an individual programme of study. Consequently, the quotas will influence the allocation of grants, scholarship and other financial support to the public HEIs (GOV, 2004).

According to Clause 1, Article 41 of the Law on Education in Vietnam amended in 2005, MOET defines curriculum frameworks for all higher education programmes throughout the system, which include the content of each subject, training duration and ratio between theory and practice. MOET's other important system-wide regulatory responsibilities include management of the appointment of processes for chair positions in universities, and management of a national system of examinations for admission to universities and colleges.

¹¹ Ministry of Education and Training (2006). Higher Education in Vietnam. Available at <http://en.moet.gov.vn>.

The management and financing of higher education in Vietnam are seen as horizontally and vertically decentralized. The horizontal decentralization refers to the functional departments responsible for education and training in the central government (GOV, 2003a; IIE, 2004). Although MOET wields significant power over higher education, many HEIs in Vietnam are financed by and fall under direct management of other ministries and government agencies. For example, universities and colleges of medicine and pharmacy are funded and managed by the Ministry of Health; colleges of culture and conservatories are funded and managed by the Ministry of Culture and Information; the State Bank finances and manages the Institute of Banking; and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs funds and manages Institute of International Relations. This model was seen in many Soviet bloc nations during the Soviet period of influence, when individual ministries established their own universities, colleges, and institutes to meet their specific needs for knowledge workers. These ministries then provide funds and management necessary for the existence of these institutions (Hayden & Lam, 2007; IIE, 2004; UNESCO, 2006).

The vertical decentralization refers to different levels of government responsible for education. In higher education and vocational education, with the exception of universities, the provincial governments have the state administrative management responsibilities over education as large as the role of central government (GOV, 2004).

MOET is directly responsible for the state-management over education of all universities and colleges, with the exception of the two national universities

that have their own ministerial status and report directly to the Prime Minister. The two national universities have more autonomy than other public HEIs in terms of financial management, granting degrees and staffing; however, they still have to follow the MOET's curriculum framework, and MOET still plays a large role in decision-making in the universities' operation and activities. For example, MOET has authority to appoint or remove rectors of member colleges within the national universities; MOET proposes the appointment and the removal of the directors of the national universities to the Prime Minister; the directors of the national universities can decide the student recruitment criteria or their own universities after approval by MOET.

All non-public HEIs in Vietnam have a high level of financial autonomy, because they do not receive any funding from the State. They are responsible to the State through their own governing boards, which are comprised of members of local communities and shareholders. However, the appointment of their rectors by the governing boards must be approved by the MOET; and they have also to comply with MOET's curriculum frameworks, admission quotas and many other regulations.

In a nutshell, MOET plays a large role in state management of higher education in Vietnam. Recently, the director of VNU-HCMC's Centre for Education Testing and Quality Assessment, Vu Thi Phuong Anh, commented that "the function of MOET is somewhat like the university administration at the national level". Many international and domestic education administrators and

experts have called for greater autonomy for universities during a recent seminar held at Vietnam National University- Ho Chi Minh City¹².

4.2.2. Political Structures and Actors

The nature of a country's political economy has an important structural impact on policy-making (Howlett & Ramesh, 2003). The same policy actors are present in every society; however, their roles and influence may vary in different political systems. The following discussion will concentrate on the roles of these different groups and organizations in the policy-making process in Vietnam.

4.2.2.1. Political Parties

Studies concerning the roles of political parties in public policy-making in western democratic societies find that political parties tended to influence public policy indirectly, primarily through their role in staffing the executive and the legislature (Thomson, 2001); that political parties have made positive impact on the development of welfare state programme (Wilensky, 1975; Korpi, 1983); and that "left-wing" and "right-wing" governments have had different fiscal policy orientation towards unemployment and inflation reduction (Hibbs, 1977). However, Richard Rose (1980) finds that "a political party can create movements on a given issue, but it cannot ensure the direction it will lead" (p.153).

Vietnam is a single-party socialist State. This means that only one political party, the Communist Party of Vietnam (CPV), is legally allowed to hold effective power. The central role of the CPV is reaffirmed in the current Constitution,

¹² Thanhnien News (1 December 2008). Experts advocate less state control in higher education. Retrieved from <http://www.thanhniennews.com/print.php?catid=4&newsid=44181>

adopted in April 1992. It is the vanguard of the Vietnamese working class, the faithful representative of the rights and interests of the working class, the toiling people and the whole nation, and is the leading force of the State and the people (National Assembly, 2002, Article 4).

With a legacy of 30 years under influence of the Soviet system and the ideology of “*Party leads, State manages and People are owners*”, the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Vietnam (CPV) is viewed as an elitist hierarchical organization that exercised virtually unchallenged power (Thayer, 2008), and is a key stakeholder in the decision making process. The Communist Party participates in the decision-making process concerning the most important issues of the country’s development and defence (Tran, Vu & Sloper, 1995). Since education is considered the first priority of national policies, the CPV plays the leading role in forming and implementing educational policies. Evidently, the Central Committee of the CPV has issued a number of resolutions to initiate the reform of the education system in general and the higher education system in particular (CPV, 1987; 1996; 2001).

The structure of the CPV is similar to that of other communist political systems. The CPV membership never stood more than 3 percent of the total population in Vietnam (Thayer, 2008). The supreme leading body is the Politburo (Political Bureau) headed by the Secretary-General, who is considered the most powerful individual in the country (Thayer, 2008). The Politburo is elected by the Central Committee, which is elected by regular congresses of party delegates. The party’s policy is set by a fourteen-member Politburo. The top four positions in

the Politburo are held by the Party General Secretary, the General Minister of Public Security, the State President and the Prime Minister. The members of the Politburo are selected by the party's 160-member Central Committee. The Party Secretariat, which consists of eight Politburo members, oversees day-to-day policy implementation. Senior party members form the leadership nucleus of the state apparatus, National Assembly, the People's Armed Force and the Vietnam Fatherland Front (*Mặt Trận Tổ Quốc*).

The Communist Party of Vietnam exercises hegemonic control over state institutions, the armed force and other organizations in society through the penetration of these institutions by party cells and committees (Thayer, 2008). There are representatives of the CPV in every HEI in Vietnam, whose role is to "lead the school and operate within the Constitution and laws" (National Assembly 2005, Article 56). However, the Constitution of SRV vaguely defines the roles of the CPV as "the force leading the State and society". At institutional level, its representatives play an important role in decision-making at the HEIs, making sure that the institutions operate and educate students within the guidelines and ideology of the Communist Party. Martin Hayden and Lam Quang Thiep (2007) even assert that the Party committees at HEIs can potentially veto any decision made by a governing council or rector, causing bureaucracy and threatening the authenticity of the institutional autonomy. In reality, though, all rectors have to possess "good political and moral standards" (GOV, 2003, Article 31) and most (if not all) members of the governing council are members of the Communist Party.

4.2.2.2. Think-tanks and Higher Education Institutions

The following discussion is about another set of societal actors in the policy process that is composed of researchers working at universities, research institutes, and think-tanks on particular policy issues and issue areas.

The term “think-tank” stems from the RAND Corporation, which operated as a closed and secure environment for the US strategic thinking after the World War II. According to Diane Stone (2005), the term became popular in the 1960s to describe a group of specialists who undertake intensive study of policy issues. Simon James (1993) defines a think-tank as “an independent organization engaged in multidisciplinary research intended to influence public policy” (p.472). UNDP (2003) defines think-tanks as “organizations engaged on a regular basis in research and advocacy on any matter related to public policy. They are the bridge between knowledge and power in modern democracies” (p.6).

The Western tradition regards think-tanks as relatively autonomous organizations with separate legal status that maintain an interest in a broad range of policy problems and employ experts, either on full-time or on a contract basis, on various issue areas in order to develop a comprehensive perspective on the issues facing governments (Howlett & Ramesh, 2003; Stone, 2005). While think-tanks are generally more partisan than their purely academic counterparts, they must maintain an image of intellectual autonomy from the government or any political party in order for the policy-makers to take them seriously (Howlett & Ramesh, 2003). In Asian countries such as Japan, Taiwan, China and South Korea, think-tanks are often found inside corporations. Especially, Chinese think-

tanks are often government-sponsored and their scholars often have close relationships with political leaders. Many think-tanks in other South East Asian countries are semi-independent and often have close tie with government or with political figures (Stone, 2005).

Think tanks in Vietnam represent an experience of the Soviet influence, in which a think-tank is attached to a particular ministry (Stone, 2005). Vietnamese think tanks are divided into five groups, as being: (i) part of ministries, ministry-level agencies, and government- attached agencies; (ii) part of state general corporations; (iii) self-financed; (iv) transformed into independent enterprises or parts of enterprises; and (v) subjected to merger or dissolution. There are some 100 research institutes in Vietnam, most of which fall into the first group; and public policy research activities are mainly undertaken by them (Nguyen, Bui & Pham, 2005). Research done by these institutions often focus on the subject matters that are relevant to the funding ministry's concerns and activities.

An example of the first group of think-tanks is Vietnam's National Institute for Education Strategy and Curriculum Development (NIESAC), which is funded by the Ministry of Education and Training, and focuses on educational matters only. It helps MOET to map out educational development strategies and programmes for different levels of education and training. Besides providing postgraduate training and professional development for educational personnel, it claims to have carried out a number of research to set grounds for the development of educational strategies and policies as well as the improvement of

educational quality¹³. Due to its bureaucratic structure, it is likely to remain in the orbit of the state/ ministry; and the degree of intellectual autonomy and influence over the policy process it can afford are in questions.

A different example of think-tank in Vietnam is the Vietnam Development Forum (VDF), a joint project between the National Graduate Institute for Policy Studies (GRIPS) in Tokyo and the National Economics University (NEU) in Hanoi. This is an independent organization that somehow represents the Western definition of a think-tank (James, 1993; UNDP, 2003). It engages in multi-disciplinary research intended to influence public policies, including higher education; and “bridges the gap between academic research and policy formulation”, and “build open networks where researchers and policy makers can meet, discuss and help each other”¹⁴. The project is funded by the Japanese government, which is a major donor of ODA (Overseas Development Aid) to Vietnam. In addition, scholars from its Vietnamese partner often have close relationship or interaction with policy-makers and/ or political figures. The Vietnamese director of this organization is also the rector of Hanoi National Economic University and is a member of Communist Party. Although it appears to be an independent think-tank, its funding status does not guarantee the intellectual autonomy in the policy process.

University researchers in Vietnam often have theoretical and philosophical interests in public issues, and conduct research for the purpose of participating in policy debates. However, their research results may not or cannot be translated

¹³ National Institute for Education Strategy and Curriculum Development: www.niesac.edu.vn

¹⁴ Vietnam Development Forum: <http://www.vdf.org.vn/aboutus.html#who>

directly into usable knowledge for policy purposes. Indeed, a number of university professors and researchers in Vietnam have written extensively about policies in higher education such as Trần Hồng Quân, Lê Thạc Cẩn, Phạm Minh Hạc, Lâm Quang Thiệp, Nguyễn Lộc and Hoàng Tụy; however, little research provides recommendations that influence the outcomes of policies. As prominent as these researchers, what they have done is mainly raise concerns over the policies and issues in higher education, and have not really come up with solutions for the shortcomings of policies and practices. It is important to note that most of them have held important positions in MOET and the Central Government; their ideas are often in lines with the Communist Party's orientation/ plans; they are sponsored by think-tanks or the government; they have close relationships with influential politicians; and they are politicians themselves.

4.2.2.3. Public

Researchers (Berelson, 1952; Schattschneider, 1960; Key, 1967; Howlett & Ramesh, 2003) who studied public policies found that the *public* played a small direct role in the public policy process. They also found little or no direct linkage between public opinion and policy outcomes. Howlett and Ramesh (2003) claim:

...in most liberal democratic states policy decisions are taken by representative institutions that empower specialized actors to determine the scope and content of public policies, rather than the public per se determining policy (p.74).

Some other researchers (Monroe, 1979; Page & Shapiro, 1992) appear to be dissatisfied with this finding, but I think the finding is rather accurate, especially in a system like Vietnam, where policies are made by the elected

representatives (members of National Assembly) of the *public* and appointed officials. Moreover, these representatives do not run campaigns for their election as their counterparts in other democratic societies do, nor do they “sell” their policy packages before the election in order for the *public* to make informed decisions. Although public participation in the process of policy-making is a requirement of WTO accession and membership, the policy process in Vietnam is still solely dominated by experts and a small group of members of a specific committee and the Central Committee of the CPV (Nguyen & Nguyen, 2008).

In higher education, the decision-making lies primarily with MOET and four other ministries. However, public opinions have become more vocal and stronger. A number of internet discussion forums dedicating to issues of higher education have drawn attention from people of various backgrounds, including students, teachers and parents. It is only fair to credit public opinion for some of the crackdowns on some “rouge” universities that only focus on recruiting students without providing proper training, and subsequent regulations on student recruitments and qualifications of teaching staff.

4.2.2.4. Mass Media

The role of media in policy process is undeniably pivotal in every society, because, nowadays, media do not only passively report problems but also actively provide analysis, and sometimes act as advocates of particular policy solutions (Russell, 2006). News programmes do not just report problems but often provide interpretation, and bring in experts who would comment on the issues at length or suggest solutions. Howlett and Ramesh (2003) note that

media provide crucial links between state and society that allow for significant influence on the preferences of government and society in regard to the identification of public problems and their solutions.

Edward Herman and Noam Chomsky (1988) have written extensively about mass media and how money and power could influence the outcome and content of the media in the capitalist societies. When mass media are in the hand of wealthy corporations, news reports are often filtered or even distorted before reaching their audience in order to serve the purpose and ideology of the owners and their allies.

Since mass media in Vietnam are funded by the State, no private or independent mass media organizations have yet been allowed to operate in the country; Herman and Chomsky's assertion can be seen as applicable in the Vietnamese setting as well. Media are considered the mouthpiece of the State and the CPV, mainly broadcasting news and programmes that are in line with the Party's strategies and ideology.

Perhaps, education in Vietnam has never received as much attention from media before as it has in recent years. They have focused on many areas of education, both positive and negative; however, news reports are often brief, raising problems without any further comments or suggestions, and are led by the State's opinion rather than vice versa. It would not be exaggerating to conclude that the role of the Vietnamese mass media in policy processes is mainly to propagate the formation and implementation of policies.

4.2.3. Societal Structures and Actors

Vietnam's higher education is a major contributor to the economic success and social well being of the country. Higher education is considered a national asset, because better educated and more highly skilled people are more likely to be working, earn more and contribute more productively to the economic society. Over the last 20 years, the social demands for higher education have clearly become intensified in Vietnam. It is unquestionable that higher education has to take into account, more and more, the interests of a variety of social stakeholders, because having a higher education degree increasingly became a necessary condition for entering almost every profession, from government to the private sector, from the rapidly expanding services to technologically oriented jobs. This is accompanied with the need for on-going professional development or "retooling", or lifelong education in order to keep abreast of rapidly changing job requirements and technology updates.

Although the State of Vietnam is the sole decision-maker in the policy process, it needs the support of prominent social actors for its actions in order to make and implement policies effectively. The following discussion will concentrate on the roles of social groups in the policy process in higher education.

4.2.3.1. Mass political organizations

Mass organizations in Vietnam are often strong on social issues. From the beginning of the establishment, mass organizations have had the function of caretaker of social issues. They provide a broad organizational network ranging

from the central governmental level to provinces, districts, communes and villages. They have a solid membership base and can channel information and campaigns to all parts of the country. They help promote effective implementation of policies by enforcing them upon their members, through sanctions if necessary. Furthermore, they usually have close contacts with the government and the Communist Party, and can feed back information and make suggestions for policy.

The three largest and most influential mass organizations that play an important role in enforcing policy implementation in higher education are the Vietnamese Fatherland Front, Vietnamese Women's Union and Ho Chi Minh Youth Union.

The Vietnamese Fatherland Front (*Mặt Trận Tổ Quốc Việt Nam*) and its member organizations constitute the political base of people's power. It is an umbrella group of pro-government "mass movements" (such as women, workers, peasants, and youth) and special interest groups (professional, religious, etc) in Vietnam, and has close links to the Communist Party of Vietnam and the Vietnamese government. It is an amalgamation of many mass organizations, including the Communist Party itself. Other mass organizations that form the Front include the Vietnamese Women's Union, the Vietnamese General Confederation of Labour, and the Ho Chi Minh Communist Youth League (aka the Hồ Chí Minh Youth), and some officially sanctioned religious groups. The leaders of these mass organizations regularly serve on the party's Central Committee (Thayer, 2008; National Assembly, 2002).

At the national level, the Vietnamese Fatherland Front and its member organizations are responsible for mobilizing the populations to take care of the cause of education and contributing to the realization of educational objectives (National Assembly, 2005). At the institutional level, the Women's Union and Ho Chi Minh Communist Youth Union are directly involved in facilitating staff and students in healthy recreational, cultural and athletic activities; coordinating with schools in the education of the youth by motivating its members to set examples in learning, training and participating in the development of the cause of education.

The Vietnam Women's Union is the largest mass organization with nearly eleven million members belonging to 10,331 local units across the country¹⁵. It is funded by the State, and plays a leading role as a member of the statutory National Council for the Advancement of Women. Leaders and key members of the Union are members of the Communist Party; some are members of the National Assembly. It takes part in formulating laws and policies on gender equality and oversees their execution; and cares for and protects the legitimate rights and interests of women and children. Its movements, such as "women actively study, creatively work, and nurture happy families", help enforce policy implementation at all levels through sanctions and rewards. Although its sanctions are not usually severe, they do affect women's opportunities for promotion or career advancement, especially at state-funded organizations.

¹⁵ Vietnam Women's Union website:
<http://www.hoilhpn.org.vn/newsdetail.asp?CatId=66&NewsId=819&lang=EN>

The Ho Chi Minh Communist Youth Union is a socio-political organization of Vietnamese youth. It was founded, led and trained by the Communist Party of Vietnam & President Ho Chi Minh. It has over six million members throughout the country, serving as a reserve force for the Communist Party of Vietnam¹⁶. Similar to the Women's Union, it plays an active role in enforcing policy implementation at HEIs, because its membership is compulsory to higher education students aged from 18 to 30. It also provides youth with communist ideological education, participating in building and protecting the Communist Party and State.

4.2.3.2. Business actors

As pointed out by Howlett and Ramesh (2003), the organization of business and labour is often most significant in determining a state's policy capacities because of its vital role in the production process. Among interest groups, business is generally considered the most powerful, with an unmatched capacity to affect public policies, especially in a capitalist economy in which ownership of the means of production is concentrated in the hands of corporations (Howlett & Ramesh, 2003). In addition, the financial contributions that business makes to political parties also afford them an important resource for influencing policy-makers.

Vietnam is a single-party State, so the business contribution to policy-making is often through influencing and lobbying elected or appointed officials. Individuals being influenced or lobbied, either by financial means or political

¹⁶ Ho Chi Minh Youth Union:
<http://www.aseanyouth.org/index.php?p=countries&c=VNM&s=youth#1>

support, tend to be sympathetic towards business interests and often influence other elected or appointed fellow officials to provide business with “head-ups” about policy formation or incentives in policies. However, business plays a different role in higher education policy-making.

Since Vietnam moved away from the centrally planned economy to market-oriented economy, which saw a steady growth in the private sector and foreign direct investment, the business sector has been facing increased competitiveness from within and from outside. This competitiveness forced the business to acquire new capacity in order to improve efficiency and quality of products. Consequently, this meant the demand for a new generation of highly qualified workforce with high English proficiency and professional knowledge became more urgent and intensified (Tran, 2006; Pham, 2008). With no choice, policy-makers in higher education and HEIs must renovate the system so that it can contribute in sustaining the development of economy and society.

Obviously, the relationship between the business sector and higher education is a demand-versus-supply relationship. Being on the demand side of the equation, the business sector is ultimately an important and influential actor in making policies in higher education. Even though business representatives are not directly involved in decision-making, their feedback on the need for and the quality of higher education graduates in the employment market is significant in prompting actions from policy makers and educators. Evidently, the Government and policy makers have made education the top priority in national policies. A number of regulations and policies (as listed in the earlier part of this chapter)

have been put in place to enable the higher education system to respond to the needs and demands of the market and society.

However, Tran Ngoc Ca (2006) and Pham Thi Thu Huyen (2008) note that the demand has not yet been met, even though the numbers of newly established HEIs and student enrolment have steadily increased every year. Pham Thi Thu Huyen (2008) further cites that if the supply of the human resources increases by 30%, the demand will increase by 142%. According to the Director of the Vietnam Shipbuilding Industry Corporation (VINASHIN), the shipbuilding industry needs 20,000 new workers and 2000 new engineers each year, but the training scale can only provide 50% of the demand for workers and 30% for engineers (as cited in Pham, 2008). In addition, the World Bank reports that almost 50% of enterprises in the textile and chemistry industries claim to have not been satisfied with the quality of trained labourers; almost 60% of young graduates from training establishments need to be retrained upon recruitment; and 80% to 90% of graduates in software technology need to be retrained at least for one year (World Bank, 2007).

This situation will not lessen the influence of the business sector on the higher education system in Vietnam anytime soon, but will only help increase its influence in policy-making of higher education and encourage its involvement in higher education.

4.2.4. International Organizations/ Actors

A large body of literature argues that states are increasingly constrained and shaped by global force, namely “trade” and “transnational” policies (Ohmae, 1990; 1995; Fukuyama, 1992; Falk, 1997; Sklair, 1999; Waters, 2001). Although states are sovereign entities whose governments and citizens are expected to decide and participate in their domestic policy process, or close their border to any foreign influence as they choose, it is nearly impossible for states to stop foreign influence at the border because of constraints rooted in the international system (Held & McGrew; 1993; Walsh, 1994). Hobson and Ramesh (2002) note that different international institutions and actors have different impacts on domestic policy-making and policy outputs. Indeed, international organizations such as the World Bank, IMF and WTO, have influenced or even imposed upon many countries’ domestic policies, especially poor and developing countries.

The World Bank and the IMF were founded when world leaders gathered at the Brent Woods conference in 1944. The IMF would control countries’ finances, using the “gold-pattern” as a warranty for the currency value and monetary reserves, while the World Bank emerged with the purpose of supplying loans for the reconstruction of countries destroyed by the World War II. This did not come about due to lack of funds. However, it soon became a Bank of Development, rather than a Bank of Reconstruction, aiming at lending resources to developing countries. In early 1980s, it stopped operating as a Development Bank and started functioning as an assistant in charge of the foreign debt (Fried & Owen, 1982), compelling indebted countries to adopt structural adjustments

such as loans, known as SALS and SECALS (Structural Adjustment Loans and Sectoral Adjustment Loans, respectively), and to privatize many public companies and open their markets (de Siqueira, 2005).

The World Bank became not only the major financier of educational development in the developing world, but also the most powerful ideologue and regulator, and a key supranational institutional carrier of the flows and pressures of neo-liberal globalization (Jones, 1992; World Bank, 1995; Carnoy, 1995; TFHES, 2000; Banya and Elu, 2001; Brock-Utne, 2003;). It has succeeded, through both coercive and normative pressures, in pushing governments of developing countries to adopt a neo-liberal and market-oriented approach to policy development, including education, which favours the shrinking of public expenditures, privatization of public institutions, marketization, deregulation, the trend toward a more entrepreneurial pattern of higher education organizational change, as well as cost recovery measures (World Bank, 1986, 1988; Jones, 1992; Alexander, 2002; Vaira, 2004; Jones & Coleman, 2005). Vietnam, like many other developing countries, has been receiving loans from the World Bank for its development, and had no choice but to comply with the rules. Recently, the World Bank has approved a loan of US\$100 million to the Vietnamese government from its International Development Association to support the Government in implementation of Higher Education Reform Agenda (HERA). The *Vietnam: Developing Advanced Institutions for Higher Order Capacity (DAI HOC)* project, which will start in May 2009, aims to help improve the higher education responsiveness and overcoming skill bottleneck for a rapidly changing economic

and social environment. Especially, it will assist MOET to develop and implement a series of policies and regulations defined in HERA, which will create a more flexible, responsive and diverse higher education system, with more private sector participation, supporting self-governance and financing framework. Policies defined in HERA are mostly in line with the World Bank's loan conditions. Therefore, it would probably be naïve to assume that the World Bank did not have anything to do with the birth of HERA in the first place.

After the IMF and the World Bank, there was an intention to create an International Commerce Organization. However, the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) was signed in 1947. Despite being called an "agreement" not an "institution", GATT has its own office and staff. The agreement was perceived by poor countries as benefiting rich countries (Williams, 1994; de Siqueira, 2005). A new round of GATT trade negotiations known as the Uruguay Round, which started in 1986 and extended to 1995, saw the creation of the World Trade Organization (WTO). The WTO incorporated GATT as a general agreement governing trade in material goods, and also established GATS (General Agreements on Trade in Services) (de Siqueira, 2005). Under GATS, higher education is regarded as a service that is tradable¹⁷.

Vietnam became the 150th member of the WTO in November 2006, and had to commit to GATS conditions, including opening up its door for foreign providers of higher education services, known as cross-border education or

¹⁷ WTO (2003). Services Sectoral Classification List. Retrieved from http://www.wto.org/english/tratop_e/serv_e/gns_w_120_e.doc

transnational education. Cross-border higher education comes under the forms of private HEIs, joint programmes with domestic HEIs, which enable Vietnamese students to obtain a foreign degree without having to travel to the country of the host institution or pay high tuition fee as they would have to if study overseas.

In light of the global trend of cross-border education, UNESCO and the OECD have developed a set of guidelines for quality provision in cross-border higher education (UNESCO & OECD, 2005). This has influenced policy-making in Vietnam regarding student admission, the awarding of degrees and their recognition, and the operation of foreign investment in higher education in Vietnam to avoid fraudulent practices by foreign providers (Varghes, 2007; Le & Ashwill, 2004).

UNESCO has been active in Vietnam since the start of *đổi mới*, helping Vietnam to assess its education system and human resource needs through a number of projects. It jointly carried out two research projects with MOET and UNDP that provided in-depth analysis of the education system, pointing out the problems and shortcomings of the system (MOET, UNDP & UNESCO, 1989; 1992). However, the rapid economy growth at that time made education reform less urgent.

UNESCO also initiated a series of activities and programmes pertaining to higher education that involve Vietnam directly or indirectly, including The Global Forum of International Quality Assurance, Accreditation and the Recognition of Qualifications; The Global Forum on Research, Knowledge and Higher Education

Policy; The Higher Education Open and Distance Learning Knowledge Base; and The Greater Mekong Sub-region Virtual University (Lee, 2004).

Another organization that has significant impact on the policy process in Vietnam is Asia Development Bank (ADB). ADB resumed its operations in Vietnam in 1993, and a full-fledged country operational strategy was finalized in late 1995. Broadly, the strategies stress policy and institutional reforms, social and economic infrastructure development, and environment and natural resource management. ADB has provided broad-based assistance to a number of sectors, including education (ADB, 1999). ADB's support in the education sector focused on secondary education (1997) and reforming the vocational and technical training sector (1998). It also provided assistance to the teacher training areas, which started in 1999.

4.3. Policy Determinants

4.3.1. Economics

For a good part of the world's population, the word "Vietnam" often reminded them of a small war-torn country with no significant political or economic standing in the world stage. Indeed, having gained independent from the western colonialism for over 60 years, Vietnam's economic was often tempered with crisis. The first 30 years, from 1945-1975, were characterized by a war economy that survived mainly on foreign aids from the Soviet Union and its allies; 1976-1985 was a period of macroeconomic crisis that saw a skyrocket inflation at 600 percent; the period from 1986 to the present day has been hailed

as a period of significant economic reform and remarkable economic performance (Dollar, 1999; Harvie & Tran, 1997; Masina, 2006; Fforde, 2007).

After decades of failed economy and heavy dependence on foreign aid, Vietnam's policy-makers faced an extraordinarily difficult situation in the mid-1980s with hyperinflation, food shortages and structural imbalance in the economy (Harvie & Tran, 1997; Dollar, 1999). At the CPV's Sixth National Congress in December 1986, a comprehensive reform programme with economic liberalization was introduced and received strong political backing from the party and its new leadership (Masina, 2006). The reform measures explicitly recognized the failure of central planning and marked a major turning point in the economic development of Vietnam. The reform was referred as "đổi mới" or "renovation".

Đổi mới conferred autonomy upon SOEs (state-owned enterprises), eliminated the state monopoly of foreign trade, allowed for small-scale private commercial activities, gave much economic power to farmers in cooperatives, cut down state subsidies, opened doors to attract foreign direct investment (Harvie & Tran, 1997; Rondinelli & Litvack, 1999; Masina, 2006; Fforde, 2007). Subsequently, a number of the far-reaching reforms were implemented, including agricultural reform, price liberalization, state enterprise reform, financial reform, trade reform, and direct foreign investment reform (Harvie & Tran, 1997; Dollar, 1999); and this process was accelerated from 1989 into the 1990s.

As a result of this economic model, Vietnam has become one of the best performing economies in the world over the decade 1987-1996. Real GDP

growth averaged at 7.3 percent per annum over the extended period 1987-1996, increasing to 9 percent in 1995 and 1996; inflation was down from 600 percent in 1986 to single digits in 1997; GDP per capita increased from US\$100 in 1987 to UD\$300 in 1996 (World Bank, 1997; ADB, 1999). The regional financial crisis in Asia caused an economic slowdown in Vietnam in 1997. However, it continued to grow and has proven resilient to shocks, growing by 7.8 percent in the period 2003-2006; income per capita rose from US\$260 in 1995 to US\$400 in 2000 to a current level of US\$640 (World Bank, 2007).

Vietnam has become increasingly integrated with the world economy, joining the WTO in November 2006. The share of agriculture in GDP declined from 27 to 21 percent of GDP over 1995-2005 while that of industry rose from 29 to 41 percent over the same period. The services sector picked up to record an average growth of 7.2 percent over 2001-2005. Tourism-related services have been especially buoyant. The share of the domestic private sector in total investment has risen from 23 percent in 2001 to over 32 percent in 2005, while that of the state-owned sector has declined from about 60 percent to 52 percent. Foreign direct investment has picked up strongly in the last two years (World Bank, 2007).

Because of this impressive economic growth, there is increasingly high demand for tertiary graduates in relevant disciplines, the need to improve the match between graduates' skills and employers' requirements, and the need for the higher education system to become more efficient and responsive to on-going changes in the economy and society. Moreover, the recent economic crisis

in the USA and else where in the world has impacted the growth of Vietnamese economy, which slows down a lot more than in 1990s with the GDP growth at 6.5% in the first half of 2008 (ADB, 2008). This has drawn the Vietnamese leaders' attention to the pioneer technology industry, such as information and communications technology (ICT), and human capital more than ever (Tran, 2005). In order to achieve this goal, the Government had to revamp the higher education system, focusing on the quality while widening access to higher education, creating close links between the industry and HEIs.

4.3.2. Politics

The education reform commenced at the time of *đổi mới* reforms starting in 1987. The emergence of *đổi mới* must give credit to the threat of weakening Soviet Union in the years leading to the end of the Cold War and the total collapse of Soviet Union and its Eastern European allies in late 1980s, which implied the end of economic aid, the loss of the traditional export market, and the danger of being politically isolated (Dollar, 1999; Masina, 2006).

Furthermore, the death of Lê Duẩn in summer 1986, then secretary-general of the CPV, a conservative and staunch pro-Stalinist central planning system, paved the way for reformists to lead the Party (Fforde, 2007). At the Sixth National Congress, Nguyễn Văn Linh was appointed to the top post of the CPV and started a series of reform plans.

While reforming its economy at home, Hanoi also started reaching out to the international community and improving its international relations. The

withdrawal of its military presence in Cambodia in October 1991 enabled Hanoi to normalize its relationships with most Asian countries in the following year, including China, with whom Vietnam had a brief but intense border war in 1979 (Masina, 2006). Later, Vietnam formally became a member of the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) in July 1995, paving the way for participation in the ASEAN Free Trade Area (AFTA). The membership indicates that Vietnam can benefit strongly from further trade liberation, but it also means Vietnam will have to face fierce competition from other ASEAN countries. For higher education, the membership opens up opportunities for exchange experience, knowledge and cross-border education. It also means that higher education has to pick up pace to generate highly qualified workforce in order to help the country join the competition.

The removal of the USA embargo in February 1994 and the normalization of relations with the USA in June 1995 marked another milestone in Vietnamese politics. Despite the late reinstated diplomatic relations, the American administration already removed barriers to multilateral aid in July 1993, allowing the World Bank to resume lending to the country the following October (Masina, 2006). Subsequently, social and economic policies in Vietnam, like in other developing countries, have been to a great extent regulated by the conditions expressed in SALS and SECALS, which are part of the loan received from the IMF and World Bank.

In addition to the remarkable achievement in foreign relations with ASEAN countries and the USA, Hanoi, at the same time, was able to obtain a notable

improvement in relations with China (Masina, 2006). The enhanced relationships with international partners also gave Vietnam a better position in the world stage, and also proved to be a key resource for receiving financial support for economic reforms within the country.

Another significant event in Vietnamese politics is Vietnam becoming the 150th member of the WTO in November 2006. As a member of WTO, Vietnam is under pressure to move its education from a public service to a tradable service. This means Vietnam has to commit to opening its market to foreign providers of higher education under GATS. GATS also stipulates a country's domestic laws and rules and disciplines with regard to qualifications acknowledgement so as to ensure that the interests obtained by WTO countries under this agreement are not harmed by the domestic laws and regulations in each member country (de Siqueira, 2005). At this point, the national trade barriers have been dismantled, letting global economics play a more significant role in local economy. The convergence of higher education reforms can be explained mostly by the international economic imperative to remain competitive in the global market.

Additionally, while Vietnam was struggling to find ways out of poverty and economic crisis in 1980s, the fourth cycle of globalization had begun in the world with the rise of neo-liberalism taken place in the UK and the North America (Coatsworth, 2004). Studies about globalization concluded that globalization has been the main factor that influences most countries' policy-making (Fukuyama, 1992; Ohmae, 1990; Waters, 2001; Torres & Schugurensky, 2002). The patterns in which higher education systems around the world responded to globalization

and its ideology of neo-liberalism included privatization, institutional restructuring, centralization and decentralization, commercialization, marketization and deregulation, entrepreneurialism (Waks, 2006; Lee, 2004b; Mok & Lee, 2001; Torres & Schugurensky, 2002; Maasen & Cloete, 2006).

Vietnam's increasing participation in the global economy has, therefore, forced a re-assessment of the structure and model of the economy. Education, being one of the major social policies, is not immune from the strong tide of reforms that occurred in the 1980s. New legislative frameworks to propel HEIs restructuring were being developed; government plans, regulations and recommendations are hoisting HEIs into the marketplace, with changes proposed in all aspects of management. Marketization and privatization have become major planks with a broader set of reforms that have transformed the governance of higher education (CPV, 1996 & 2001; GOV, 1993; 1997; 1999; 2002; 2005a; 2005b; 2005c; 2006c; 2006d).

CHAPTER 5: INSTITUTIONAL PRACTICE: VIETNAM NATIONAL UNIVERSITY, HANOI

This chapter provides insight into how a higher education institution has responded to marketization policies in Vietnam. The Vietnam National University in Hanoi (hereinafter interchangeably referred to as VNU-Hanoi or the University) was selected as a case study because it is the first multi-disciplinary university in Vietnam that was established to implement reform policies. The information presented in this chapter is based on the analysis of data collected from semi-structured interviews with the personnel of VNU-Hanoi. As mentioned in Section 1.4 of Chapter One, the interviews were conducted in Vietnamese, audio-recorded, transcribed and manually analyzed into themes that were identified in relation to marketization policies discussed in Chapter Three.

Interviewees included a Board member/ Vice President, a Dean of Graduate Studies, a Rector of VNU-Hanoi's constituent college, a senior administrator, a lecturer and a student. These interviewees were chosen as it was felt that they would likely have a good understanding of policies and policy implementation due to the nature of their positions. However, half of them did not seem to answer questions openly due to either their limited understanding of the policy context and issues in higher education or personal hesitation. The timing of the interviews could also contribute to the lack of interviewees' engagement, because it was close to the traditional New Year holidays in Vietnam. Interview

questions were open-ended, letting interviewees discuss their understanding freely. Questions focused on changes in university governance, funding and student enrolment in the context of globalization and national reform policies.

5.1. The University

Vietnam National University- Hanoi (VNU-Hanoi), the first multi-disciplinary university in Vietnam after it became independent, was established in December 1993 by merging three leading mono-disciplinary universities in Hanoi: University of Hanoi, Hanoi Teachers' Training College No. 1 and Hanoi Foreign Language Teachers' Training College. The merged university continued to use the constituent campuses, however, construction of a new university compound started in 2003 in the newly developed suburban area of Hoà Lạc in Hanoi.

Despite being one of Vietnam's younger universities, the VNU-Hanoi inherited the legacy of the French colonial University of Indochina that was built in 1906, and of the original member universities that were founded after Vietnam became independent in 1945. The university was established in response to the needs for manpower brought about by the national economic reforms that started in the late 1980s, aiming to produce highly qualified human resources and talent for the industrialization and modernization of the country. Its missions are to: (1) develop into the nation's leading comprehensive and most prestigious institution of excellence for higher education, science and technology, gradually achieving international standards; (2) participate in the preparation of national policies and strategies of socio-economic development especially in education, science and technology; (3) play a key and leading role in Vietnam's higher education system;

(4) serve as a focal point for international scientific, educational and cultural exchanges of the whole country¹⁸.

The VNU-Hanoi currently has five constituent colleges (Sciences, Social Sciences and Humanities, Foreign Languages, Technology, and Economics), two faculties (Education and Law) and three schools (Graduate Studies, Business, and International). Departments with a particular strong reputation include Mathematics, Chemistry, Biotechnology and Law. It is also home to three national research institutes: Institute of Information Technology, Institute of Vietnamese Studies and Development Sciences, and Institute for Microorganisms and Biotechnology; and six different training and research centres around Hanoi. The University admits over 5,000 full-time undergraduate students and almost the same number of part-time students each year, plus 2,300 graduate students and nearly a thousand gifted high school students. As of January 2007, the University had 49,921 students in total, of which 18,716 were full-time “official” undergraduates; 23,296 were part-time undergraduates; 5,275 were post-graduates; 2,303 gifted high school students; along with 217 foreign students. However, by June 2008, the number of teaching staff was only 1466, of which 39 were full professors; 232 were associate professors; 566 had a PhD; and the rest only possessed a masters’ or undergraduate degree.

The University currently ranks 41 in the South East Asia region and at 1732 in the world, significantly lower than Ho Chi Minh City University of

¹⁸ Vietnam National University – Hanoi website:
<http://www.vnu.edu.vn/en/contents/index.php?ID=536>

Technology that ranks 33 in the region and 1522 in the world¹⁹. All constituent colleges and academic departments within the VNU-Hanoi are subject to internal and external quality assessments, which are based on the assessment standards of MOET, the ASEAN University Network, and the Association of North-Eastern American Universities.

5.2. Diversified University Income Strategies

There are a number of reasons why HEIs in Vietnam have had to diversify their sources of income. The foremost reason must be Vietnam's economic reform in the late 1980s that opened up opportunities for various actors to become involved in building a modernized and industrialized economy, and the consequent dramatic increase in demand for highly qualified human resources. The new economy required a greater knowledge of modern technology, and HEIs could no longer maintain their traditional teaching approaches by reusing one textbook for a course and delivering lectures with black boards and chalk. Rather, HEIs had to be equipped with appropriate technology in order to train students to meet the demands of the developing society, economy and industry.

While the state was trying to stabilize the country's macroeconomic situation after years of economic disaster, it recognized the importance of education, especially higher education, in the quest to achieve economic goals. Consequently, the state budget for higher education continually increased; however, it did not increase fast enough to keep up with the increased numbers of students entering higher education. At VNU-Hanoi, this was clearly

¹⁹ http://www.webometrics.info/Webometrics%20library/se_asia_jan09.pdf

demonstrated by the reduction of the portion funded by the state from 100% of the total income in the early 1980s to the present day figure of 50%, despite the fact that the total level of funding has significantly increased. In light of this reality, coupled with external pressures to integrate into the global economy, the state had to allow privatization of public HEIs through diversification of their sources of income outside of the state funding. Privatization is traditionally understood by Vietnamese scholars and policy-makers as having private shareholders of public institutions' assets and/ or capital; however, within the literature of neo-liberal policies, privatization means the increased involvement of private sector and any form of private funding, including tuition fees, commercialization of research and knowledge, and entrepreneurial partnerships (Johnstone, 1998). VNU-Hanoi is no exception to the new policy, thus the University has adopted income strategies that are discussed in the following sections.

5.2.1. Tuition Fees

Aside from the financial stringency, the notion that higher education is a public good and should be free-of-charge had been challenged by the neo-liberal "free market" philosophy that considered higher education as a private good and a tradable service. Although Vietnam is a socialist country, an increased number of scholars and educators have agreed with this capitalist view of higher education, and argued that privatization of higher education would lessen the burden on state budgets and boost social equity (Pham & Fry, 2002; Cam Lu, 2005; Tu Nguyen Thach, 2007). They believe that young people from higher

socioeconomic groups are more likely than their counterparts from lower socioeconomic groups to attend HEIs; therefore, government subsidies for higher education are more likely to benefit the rich than the poor.

Like many other public HEIs that have started charging tuition fees since 1987, VNU-Hanoi has charged tuition fees since its establishment. Despite tuition fees having increased steadily since their introduction, they only account for ten percent of the actual costs of education nationally as of 2009²⁰. At VNU-Hanoi, this source of income accounts for approximately 20% of the total revenue. With a new tuition policy in place starting in the 2010-2011 academic year, students at VNU-Hanoi will pay from VND200,000 (US\$11) to VND800,000 (US\$47) per month, depending on the subjects/ majors, a 50% increase from the previous rate. While this increase has drawn criticism from the wider society and may cause many students of lower socio-economic groups to drop out of higher education, it only covers a fraction of the total running costs of the University.

5.2.2. Massification

The dramatic expansion in student numbers since the late 1980s, which was aimed to meet market demands for knowledge workers as well as to open access for more full-fee students, has been described by Theisens (2004) as “massification”. VNU-Hanoi has responded to this global trend and the national educational reform policies by offering several forms of training programmes, including full-time, part-time, in-service and continuing studies. The University

²⁰ Vietnam Net (12 May 2009). Income-based tuition policy puzzled impoverished students. Retrieved on 12th May 2009 at <http://english.vietnamnet.vn/education/2009/05/847237/>

offers part-time, in-service and continuing studies not only on its campuses but also at different locations through “contracts” with other provinces, allowing more students to access higher education while still working in their hometowns. In other words, the University has taken its educational services to consumers in the wider community. The in-service training was originally designed for government workers to upgrade their skills, but has become a popular venue for working students and an important revenue-generating tool for the University. Since fees charged for these programmes are not regulated by the government, they may be set at full cost-recovery.

To broaden access and opportunities for students, VNU-Hanoi has collaborated with foreign HEIs (such as University of New South Wales of Australia, Washington State University of the USA, Nottingham University of the UK, St. Mary’s University of Canada, and Singapore National University) to offer joint programmes in areas of demand, such as English, business administration and technology. The University also set up an International School that mainly offers cross-border education to students who can afford full tuition fees. The School is not eligible for any government funding and its revenue solely comes from tuition fees, because it is considered a private not-for-profit organization operating on a cost-recovery basis within a public institution. Students enrolling into this institution include foreign students from neighbouring countries and Vietnamese students who usually come from wealthy families and had failed the entrance examinations to a public institution. It has provided access to higher

education for many students who would not have been able to attend an HEI just over ten years ago.

Additional characteristics of “massification” are changes in pedagogical practice and curriculum that enable the mass to pursue their higher education degrees at their convenience. Although many scholars and the University’s officials are reluctant to refer to students as “customers” or “consumers”, VNU-Hanoi has demonstrated various “customer oriented” practices. Firstly, the University adopted the credit system that allows students more flexibility with their study time and choices of programmes. Students no longer have to follow the strict cohort set-up from the beginning to their graduation, but can choose to graduate earlier or later as long as they finished required credit hours for a degree. Secondly, traditional teacher-centred teaching approaches have also been gradually replaced by student-centred teaching approaches, making students feel more comfortable and engaged in their classes. Thirdly, the curriculum has moved away from being purely theoretical-based toward being more practical-oriented and industry-related in order to better meet the requirements of the labour market. These practices aim to satisfy “customers”, whether they are employers in the market or students.

5.2.3. Commercialization of Research and Services

As a part of the institutional income strategies, VNU-Hanoi has promoted scientific research as another source of income generation. Aiming to become a leading comprehensive and research institution, the University currently has three nationally recognized research institutes, focusing on advanced technology

(such as nanotechnology) and providing scientific research service to society. This service comes under the forms of government assignments and/ or contracted research projects from private organizations.

These Institutes also act as links between VNU-Hanoi and industries through their partnerships with various organizations in the industries as well as other research institutions in other countries, keeping the University informed regarding the latest developments in technology and industry. The University's three research institutes operate as independent enterprises that promote and transfer research and development (R & D) products to the market and industries, collaborate in R & D activities, and provide consulting as well as training services for various organizations in the marketplace. Currently, these Institutes are still operating on an experimental basis, but in the long run, they are expected to generate a significant share of the total revenue for the University.

These research activities and services aim to help the University not only reach its goals/ missions and boost its reputation within society, but also generate income that as of 2008 accounted for approximately 30% of the University's total revenue.

5.3. Entrepreneurial Culture

Marketization has increasingly become an important policy discourse in this era of neo-liberal globalization. Apart from privatization and its diversified income strategies, VNU-Hanoi has responded to marketization in various ways

that fostered the notion of “market” mechanisms. The University has increasingly operated like a business enterprise, adopting corporate culture and managerial practices such as strategic plans, a mission statement, entrepreneurial structure, institutional autonomy and competition.

5.3.1. Autonomous Decision-Making Structure

The managerial structure is certainly the most important feature of an organization. The highest level of management is the Board of VNU-Hanoi that meets biannually to discuss and make collective decisions on development strategies and important issues of the University, including strategies, master plans, long-term and annual development plans, proposals on establishment or disbandment of constituent colleges and faculties, regulations on utilization and mobilization of teaching and research staff, regulations on academic training schemes and procedures, and other important issues arising regarding the development of VNU-Hanoi.

The Board consists of both permanent appointments and elected members. The President, the Secretary of CPV and Vice Presidents of VNU-Hanoi, Rectors of constituent colleges and Directors of constituent research institutes are permanent members. In case the president is also the Secretary of CPV, the first Deputy Secretary of the CPV becomes the permanent member of the Board. Permanent members elect other members, who usually are prominent scientists and educators, for a five-year term. The number of elected members on the Board does not exceed 30% of the total members of the Board. The President of VNU-Hanoi is the chair of the Board, and can make the final

decision on the appointment and removal of permanent members, elected members and the secretary of the Board based on the votes of permanent members. The absence of representatives of other sectors within VNU-Hanoi such as the students' union, and other senior officers, does not represent a good balance between professional and academic concerns, and between continuity and democratic representation; however, it reflects the common top-down decision-making structure of a corporate institution in Vietnam.

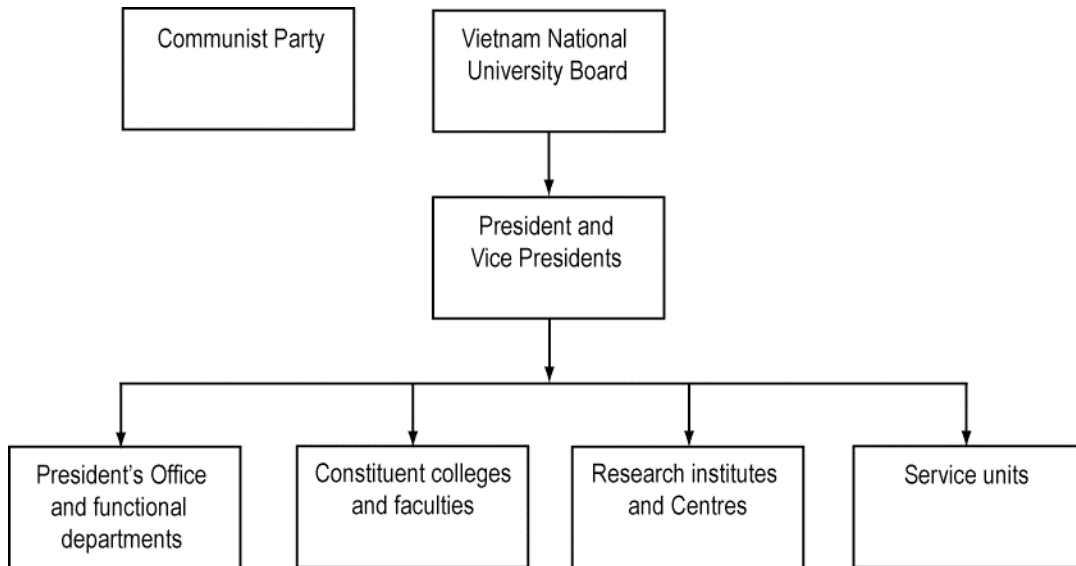
Despite having some constraints in some areas of decision-making, the Board and the President of the University have a great deal of autonomy in deciding matters relating to the University's finance, operational strategies, personnel and public relations. For example, rather than having to follow the government's imposed number of student admissions, the Board can decide the number based on the University's capacity and market demand and then make a proposal to MOET for approval. The Board also decides the University's financial strategies and programmes it can offer. However, the University still has to follow MOET's curriculum framework that imposes certain subjects and credit hours in every programme; the Board and the President can decide the content of professional subjects.

The executive leadership of VNU-Hanoi consists of the President and Vice Presidents (formerly referred to as Rector and Vice Rectors). The President is the legal representative of the University in their dealings with domestic and foreign individuals and/ or organizations, and is responsible for all activities of the University. The President of VNU-Hanoi is appointed or removed by the Prime

Minister based on the recommendation of the Minister-Chairman of the Government Personnel Council and an agreement from the Minister of Education and Training. It is worth noting that the title President is no longer referred to as *Hiệu Trưởng* (Rector) but as *Giám Đốc* (President/ Director) in Vietnamese, which is commonly used for the head of a corporate rather than the head of an academic institution. The President serves a maximum of two consecutive five-year terms, and is entitled to a high level of autonomy in management and decision-making compared to the same position at other public HEIs. He shares some power in decision-making that used to be solely a Minister's prerogative, such as in matters regarding personnel, academic schemes, curriculum, finance, institutional development and student recruitment. For example, s/he can decide to appoint or remove Vice Rectors of the constituent colleges, or to mobilize staff members. He is also responsible for implementing or overseeing the implementation of decisions made by the Board.

Vice Presidents are those who help the President in specific fields as assigned by the President. They are appointed and/ or removed by the Prime Minister based on the suggestion of the President of VNU-Hanoi. The term of Vice Presidents is as long as the term of the President. Currently, there are four Vice Presidents serving under the current President: one is in charge of undergraduate and high school studies; one is in charge of graduate studies, science and technology, and international relations; one is in charge of facilities; and one is in charge of politics and ideology, administration, inspection, rewards and discipline, student affairs and application of information technology.

Figure 3: Organizational Chart of VNU-Hanoi



Source: Vietnam National University website <http://www.vnu.edu.vn/en/>

There is also a Scientific and Training Council of VNU-Hanoi, functioning as an advisory unit to the President on training and scientific research, established by the President. Its members include the President himself, Vice Presidents and Directors of relevant functional departments, Rectors of constituent colleges, Deans of Faculties, Directors of Research Institutes, and a number of prominent scientists within and outside of VNU-Hanoi. The President appoints all members and executives of the Council, and enacts operational regulations of the Council.

Heads of constituent colleges and research institutes under VNU-Hanoi are referred to as Rectors (*Hiệu trưởng*) and Directors (*Giám đốc*) respectively. Each college and research institute has a Scientific and Training Council of its own. All constituent colleges and research institutes of VNU-Hanoi have their own legal status and operational structure that mirrors the structure of VNU-

Hanoi. However, the Rectors of colleges and Directors of research institutes are appointed by the Minister of Education and Training based on the proposal of the President of VNU-Hanoi. They are responsible for all activities of their institutions, including finance and training structures.

Anyone who had been to the office of a university president in Vietnam 15 or 20 years ago would understand why it is important to note the changes in the office settings and atmosphere at VNU-Hanoi. The small office and the ceiling fan of previous years are now replaced by a spacious office with air-conditioner; the old and rusty furniture and piles of Marxist books on shabby shelves are now replaced with an executive leather chair, modern furniture, recent books, and state-of-the-art communication facilities. The President is now a young, sophisticated professor in a well-tailored business suit and tie, acting and behaving like the Chief Executive Officer of a private corporation.

In addition, other functioning departments of VNU-Hanoi have also become less bureaucratic, more professional. Administrative staff responds to students' and guests' inquiries a lot faster and in a more professional manner than they did ten years ago.

Through observation, one may come to the conclusion that VNU-Hanoi has a transparent organizational structure and culture of a corporation even though it does not have absolute autonomy. More autonomy could mean more accountability since the managerial role of the State in university governance has increasingly diminished, and the University is responsible to more stakeholders than before.

5.3.2. Accountability

The historic role of HEIs in Vietnam has not been to question authority, but to constitute it. VNU-Hanoi owes its origin to its ties with the political elite as it was established to train colonial clerks, children of diplomats and rich landlords who studied during the French colonization period, and the intellectual as well as political elites of an independent Vietnam. Under the colonial system, the relationship between the University and the State and its political elites was a tight-knit one, because the University was set up to train human resources for the ruling class, hence being held accountable by only the State and the small population of the political and intellectual elite. Since the end of the French colonialism, VNU-Hanoi has continued to play a defining role in training of governing elite, and was held accountable by the State only until the late 1980s.

However, technological and economic development during the late twentieth century caused a rapid expansion of technical and managerial employment and demanded a workforce with higher levels of skills. The old system of elite higher education could not cope with the increased demand for such a workforce, and was often criticized for its economic inefficiency. New policies have been put in place, and have changed the relationship between the State and public HEIs in Vietnam. Public HEIs have become more autonomous since the State was no longer the sole finance provider of higher education. The involvement of the State in the university's decision-making has gradually diminished; therefore, an effective way for it to exert influence is through the use of performance-related funding mechanisms, holding HEIs accountable for the

allocated funds. Public HEIs, like VNU-Hanoi, that receive money from the State budget have to comply with quality assessment standards set by MOET.

Under this circumstance, VNU-Hanoi has directed its strategic plans for 2006-2010 toward “quality”, “efficiency”, and “cost effectiveness”, aiming to achieve its mission statement that sets “prestige” as a goal in a timely manner. In terms of “quality”, the University is committed to training high-quality students, recruiting highly qualified teaching staff, and improving the quality of student services. In terms of “efficiency” and “cost effectiveness”, the University is committed to efficient management, effective mobilization and utilization of financial resources. These commitments are demonstrated through the engagement in various types of quality assurance and accreditation that include internal and external evaluation of the university governance, staff, students, teaching and learning, research, facilities, finance, consultancy and technology transfer, and international relations. These nine areas of assessment were developed by VNU-Hanoi’s Centre for Education Quality Assurance and Research Development (CEQARD) in 1995, approved by the Government and agreed upon by universities throughout Vietnam, setting standards for public HEIs to meet expectations of the Government. The University had been evaluated for its performance in the 2006-2007 academic year, and three out of six colleges were classified as to have met “first class” standards while the three others met “second class” standards.

While the Government’s marketization policies in higher education are aimed at strengthening student choice and liberalizing markets in order to

improve the quality and variety of higher education services, they are also aimed at encouraging HEIs to pay more attention to their students and to innovation in teaching and research. In other words, under the context of market mechanisms, HEIs are not only held accountable by the Government, but also by many other stakeholders in society such as students, parents and the business sector. Since parents are paying for their children to study at a higher education institution, they demand the best value for their money. They expect their children would get the education that will ensure them better chances for employment, or a wide range of programmes that meet market demands. Therefore, more emphasis is placed on the individual, namely the student. Evidently, VNU-Hanoi has adopted a “customer satisfaction” practice that encourages students to evaluate their lecturers’ performances and services provided by the University.

Furthermore, the University has also tried to establish itself as an innovative institution that can operate at its maximum capacity in order to generate social benefits through the development of new services and new forms of programmes that are in demand in the labour market. By doing this, the University enables students to have more choices for their career paths while making sure that the need of the business sector is also met. However, the extension of services and programmes often jeopardizes the quality of education. While officials of the University insist that the University has so far put “quality” before “quantity”; the criteria for entry to the University has become lower and lower when the quantity of students admitted have increased. For example, the 50 students admitted to the Mathematics programme in 2007 were required to

score 19.5 points in the three subjects of the entrance examination, but only 18 points were required in 2008 when the University admitted 60 students to the same programme. Similarly, 108 students were admitted to the Electro-Communication Technology programme with an average of 24 points in 2007, and 120 students were admitted at the average of 23.5 points in 2008. These examples only applied to “official” students, who would receive scholarships and/or grants and have to pay only part of the tuition fees. Fee-paying students who enrol to the University under the “massification” strategy (such as in-service or continuing study programmes) are usually admitted at much lower admission criteria. This raised concerns over the different quality of graduates from two training systems.

Certainly, “quality” enables the University to receive Government funding as well as to get recognition from the business sector, but “accountability” means more than just guaranteeing “quality”. There are different groups of stakeholders with different needs in this market-oriented environment that would hold VNU-Hanoi accountable for various reasons and motives, such as those who want to end the social elitism of higher education, and those who want their tax money to be invested wisely. The full impact of this “accountability” pressure has forced the University into a competition to obtain prestige and recognition.

5.3.3. Competition

Financial constraints, public policies that foster a greater role for market forces, changing levels of demand, and the increase in numbers of private HEIs as well as trans-national HEIs have exacerbated competition and pushed VNU-

Hanoi to pursue strategies that it believes are in its best interests in the competitive marketplace. Despite this, many departments of VNU-Hanoi still see themselves as part of one of the most prestigious institutions in Vietnam and therefore facing no competition; that VNU-Hanoi still has the highest number of prominent scholars in Vietnam, mostly inherited from three founding institutions; and that it possesses some of the most state-of-the-art technological equipment in Vietnam and is entitled to more government support. Officials of the VNU-Hanoi, however, have admitted that Vietnamese higher education in general, and VNU-Hanoi in particular, is facing intensifying competition from domestic institutions as well as trans-national institutions.

In terms of competition for student recruitment, the VNU-Hanoi is, for the time being, more likely facing challenges from similar public HEIs than from private HEIs since Vietnamese still regard public HEIs as more prestigious than private HEIs, and since tuition fees at public HEIs are cheaper than those of the private HEIs. The University, like many other public HEIs, uses merit-based aid to recruit highly desirable students; however, the University is under the threat from a number of other public HEIs that have better appeals for their name sakes in the current economic environment and programmes that they offer. For example, under the current economic environment, Hanoi College of Foreign Trade and Hanoi University of Technology often attract more talented students than any other public HEI. In pursuit of prestige, being able to recruit good students certainly plays a vital role. As a result, the VNU-Hanoi has strategically focused more on training for market demand, offering more programmes that will

guarantee better employment opportunities for students, and cutting down on student intakes into programmes that are not in high demand such as the humanities, social sciences and psychology. For example, there are only four to eight students admitted to the humanities program each academic year, or even in every two to four academic years while the University is often overwhelmed with applications to programmes such as information technology, economics, accounting, business administration and English. Other programmes in natural sciences that are crucial to the development of society but are not in high demand for employment such as geography, mathematics, biology and environment, also admit much less students than Information Technology and English programmes. In every academic year, only 30 or 50 students are admitted to each of these programmes while more than 200 have been admitted to the Information Technology programme and over 400 to the English programme.

Beyond the competition for students, VNU-Hanoi has been experiencing a so-called “domestic brain drain” and a “brain gain” at the same time. With much better financial compensation, private HEIs are attracting high-quality teaching staff from public HEIs, including those of VNU-Hanoi. In the meantime, VNU-Hanoi is also attracting teaching staff from other public universities due to its resources and the supposed prestige. It has become common for lecturers and professors to work part-time at their home university while earning extra income for themselves by moonlighting in private universities and providing consultancy work to outside organizations, which potentially causes conflicts of interests

when they do the same work for other institutions. Although most professors and qualified lecturers of VNU-Hanoi do not leave the University permanently for private institutions, their divided time between institutions and busy teaching schedules surely affect their ability to devote their energy to students and research. The same argument is applied to visiting lecturers to VNU-Hanoi. Since they are paid by the hours they spent in classes, other responsibilities to students are often minimal. This only makes the mission to achieve prestige more difficult to reach since teaching staff play a vital role in generating high-quality students. There's not much VNU-Hanoi can do to minimize this trend; however, in its strategic plan for 2006-2010, the University proposed some solutions that included improved staff appraisal and rewards, professional development, exchange opportunities and sabbatical leaves.

Staff appraisal and rewards aim to promote “excellence”, “accountability” and “performance”, and at the same time encourage internal competition among faculties and departments. Various competition programmes have been promoted by the President in collaboration with the Trade Union and Students' Union, giving incentives and rewards for success, and at the same time, disciplining for inappropriate practices. Professional press management and public relations are a vital part of this process. This is clearly an integrated corporate culture that has been adopted by and nurtured at the VNU-Hanoi.

Competition from foreign HEIs has further challenged the Vietnamese higher education on many levels. In fact, many officials of MOET and VNU-Hanoi have conceded to the competition from an increased number of trans-national

HEIs participating in the Vietnamese higher education “market”, citing the imbalance in financial resource as well as academic ability. One of many challenges that VNU-Hanoi faces in competition with trans-national HEIs is the ability to deliver lectures in a global language, namely English. As Vietnam continues to develop and integrate itself into the global economy, it needs a large number of English-speaking knowledge workers in order to respond to the demand of foreign-invested and international organizations operating in Vietnam, as well as to adopt new technology required in this era of knowledge economy. However, the number of Vietnamese lecturers who are able to deliver lessons in English is still small; and most of them are often hired by the trans-national HEIs, contributing to the existing “brain drain” problem.

The experience of VNU-Hanoi clearly supports the literature and framework of marketization policies discussed in Chapter Three. It has been demonstrated that VNU-Hanoi has positively responded to the global trend of marketization and the nation’s educational reform policies through its adoption of various self-financing schemes, changing its institutional practices from being a bureaucratic organization to a corporate. It is not an intention of this study to evaluate the policy implementation at VNU-Hanoi; however, in the concluding chapter will discuss impacts that marketization policies make upon higher education in general, and on institutions and students in particular.

CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSIONS

Writing this thesis has led me to think of Vietnam metaphorically as a beautiful woman who has become confused after going through many marriages and divorces. The forceful marriages to three abusive husbands, namely the feudal Chinese for centuries, the French and Americans, left her both emotionally and physically exhausted. She rushed into an affair with the Russian when he came to offer ideas and financial support to help her divorce the French, and later the American. The Russian was not as abusive but turned out to be paternalistic, making her dependent on him and behave the ways he wanted her to. The five-decade affair ended when the Russia went bankrupt and succumbed to a different idea, and as a result, Vietnam found herself all alone with no money or friends.

While trying to find ways to feed her children and integrate into the global community that she had been removed from for so long, Vietnam became aware of the opportunities for prosperity in three handsome gentlemen, namely the World Bank, IMF and WTO. She wasted no time in pursuing these three rich and handsome men and landed herself in relationships with all three. These relationships have undoubtedly brought her prosperity and created jobs for her children; however, they did not come without conditions. Similar to her former boyfriend Russia, the World Bank, IMF and WTO want her to think and act in the ways they do, and to teach her children their ways. Those conditions include

making knowledge that used to be passed down from one generation to the next a commodity, and reforming the economic and social systems by employing the ideology of neo-liberalism.

This study has found that Vietnam has accepted and even embraced these conditions by willingly adopting neo-liberal policies to reform its economic and social systems that included higher education.

6.1. Findings

6.1.1. National Policy Responses

As the literature has revealed, neo-liberal economic policies have permeated policies in higher education around the world during the last two decades. Thanks to the globalization phenomenon, a staunch communist country such as Vietnam could not resist the temptation of the neo-liberal free-market mechanisms that the World Bank, the IMF and the WTO offered through their loan programmes. Although many Vietnamese scholars and policy-makers have been avoiding the word “marketization”, Vietnam has nonetheless adopted marketization policies in higher education. The adoption of these policies was demonstrated through the introduction of privatization, commercialization of research, massification, institutional autonomy and entrepreneurialism.

The ground-breaking reform of the Vietnamese higher education system in response to the global trend of marketization included the move toward privatization by changing from a subsidized education system to a cost-recovery system with the introduction of tuition fees. Before these changes took place in

1987, higher education had been totally subsidized by the State and had only trained manpower for State organizations and enterprises; students had been granted scholarships and allowances while undertaking studies at a HEI. Since *đổi mới* started, higher education has been considered an investment good and served not only the State but also the needs of multiple sectors of the economy. The introduction of tuition fees resulted in the rising number of student intakes at HEIs, allowing the wider population access to higher education and promoting life-long learning. This was seen as a good move to shift some of the financial burden for higher education off the State budget.

The situation in which Vietnam's poorly funded public higher education system could not meet the increasing demand for knowledge workers has forced the Government to introduce a number of Resolutions that encouraged HEIs to broaden their financial resources by exploiting private funding opportunities, such as contributions from parents and society, commercialization of research activities, training and consulting services. For example, Resolution 02/NQ/HNTW issued by the Central Committee of the CPV in 1996 called for the diversification of institutional ownership, and encouraged overseas Vietnamese and foreigners to invest in education and training activities in Vietnam. Following this Resolution, the Government showed its commitments to privatization by issuing education development strategies that highlighted the expansion of student enrolment and the diversification of financial resources of public HEIs (GOV 2001; GOV, 2002; GOV, 2005c).

The expansion of student enrolment was intended to allow all citizens the right to learn, the right to participate in examinations, freedom to choose among educational establishments and programmes, and freedom to study abroad. Therefore, HEIs were encouraged to introduce various forms of education, such as distance learning, open education, part-time programmes and cross-border programmes. Meanwhile, the diversification of financial resources aimed to help the poorly funded public HEIs to cope with the increase in student intakes. As a result, HEIs were encouraged to conduct contracted research activities, to provide consulting services, and to seek income from donations and from university-industry partnerships.

The privatization of higher education became more obvious to many Vietnamese by the authorization of non-public institutions that included people-founded (1988, and officially in 2000), private (1993), semi-public (1994) higher education institutions. The emergence of non-public HEIs has helped widen access to higher education for almost 300,000 students in 2007 at no cost to the Government. Non-public HEIs mainly relied upon tuition fees and other private financial resources; therefore, they only offer programmes that are in high demand in the marketplace, such as business, English and information technology. Although Vietnamese have yet to regard non-public HEIs in high esteem, they have gradually accepted them as alternative venues for higher education. As a result, the number of non-public HEIs has grown steadily since the first non-public institution was established in 1988.

Under the pressures of market mechanisms and the mission to integrate into the global economy, Vietnamese policy-makers had to speed up the marketization process by loosening the Government's restrictions and control over HEIs, allowing HEIs to have greater autonomy in many areas of management and encouraging HEIs to operate like business enterprises. During 1997-2005, the Government issued a number of Resolutions that aimed at reforming the State management of HEIs, shifting public institutions from bureaucratic mechanisms to autonomous and market-oriented mechanisms. Higher education institutions were given more sovereignty to decide their affairs and operations (such as the level of student enrolment, composition of the curriculum, staff appointment, financial management, construction of facilities) that had previously been tightly controlled by the Ministry of Education and Training.

The marketization process clearly became intensified in Vietnam when the Government allowed HEIs to set up research production units to provide research services to the broader society and market in order to generate more income; the Government also encouraged public HEIs to convert their operations in ways that favoured accountability, cost effectiveness, efficiency, productivity and competitiveness. Evidently, two national universities were established to demonstrate the policy intentions. The two universities operate on a cost-recovery basis, and use the language of market discourse to explain their managerial practices.

With the expansion of the higher education system and increased autonomy of HEIs, the Government has also had to put in place some measures to hold public HEIs accountable for their allocated funds by setting up standards for accreditation and quality assurance.

In conclusion, the Government of Vietnam has become more concerned about the role of education in improving the competitiveness of the country and its place in regional and global markets; therefore, it has carried out a radical reform to higher education policies during the past two decades. The reforms have included the introduction and increase of tuition fees, the increase in private funding and the reduction of state funding for public HEIs, an increase in number of students admitted, the intrusion of market forces into the macro and micro management of higher education, and measures to encourage HEIs to become more relevant to social and economic development of the nation by engaging into market-driven activities. Obviously, the reform strategies were along the lines of neo-liberal marketization policies, conceived not only to relax the financial strain but also to improve the efficiency and the performance of HEIs.

6.1.2. Institutional Responses

After examining practices at the Vietnam National University - Hanoi as a case-study, this study found that marketization policies have been accepted and implemented thoroughly at VNU-Hanoi. The market strategies adopted by the University were not only to explore additional non-state financial resources but also to improve performance and effectiveness of the University. Some common characteristics of marketization were displayed clearly at the University, including

diversified income strategies, cost-effective operations, institutional autonomy and a corporate culture.

There is no doubt that the number of student enrolments has been expanding incessantly. Multiple channels of financing have thus been employed by the University to cope with this increase and to compensate for the reduction of the proportion financed by the Government, which as of 2008 accounted for only 50% of the University's total income.

In the context of reform, VNU-Hanoi has changed from a bureaucratic environment to an autonomous organization with a strong and expedient central decision-making body able to react to expanding and changing market conditions. Instead of all their affairs being controlled, the Board of the University has been able to decide income strategies, student enrolment levels, and staff appointments. In addition, an integrated corporate culture was found to have been nurtured at VNU-Hanoi by the use of performance-related measures, by means of incentives and rewards for success, and by appropriate internal and external publicity. The University has become more ambitious, more flexible and needs-driven in order to change its capacities; and has demonstrated a market consciousness by having active units in both mainstream academic and specific fields so that can respond to the market needs.

The leaders and administrators of the University are still not comfortable with the term "marketization" or are not aware of what "marketization" really means, yet the prominence of tuition fees, the commercialization of research activities, the expansion of student enrolment, the consulting services and

university-industry partnerships, as well as the adoption of corporate culture have clearly demonstrated that VNU-Hanoi has been experiencing the process of marketization.

6.2. Discussion

This study has found that the Vietnamese higher education system has been influenced by the global trend of marketization over the past two decades, resulting in a radical reform that has seen public HEIs become increasingly autonomous and operating in a market driven manner. These changes have been credited for solving the growing dissatisfaction for the rigidities and inefficiencies of the public sector, widening access to higher education for the wider population, reducing financial burden for higher education in the State budget for higher education, and helping to achieve the national goals of modernization and industrialization. However, the move toward marketization has triggered many debates around the world. The argument over whether higher education should be considered a public or private good never seems to end. Within Vietnam, many have argued that the adoption of marketization policies undermined the characteristics of a socialist society and would cause the social disparities because tuition fees have increasingly become unaffordable for many poor students. Despite these arguments and reluctance, the Government has adopted marketization policies, and HEIs seemed to have responded to this trend enthusiastically. This study does not intend to get involved in those never ending debates, but to point out some concerns about the consequences of these changes.

6.2.1. Students as Customers

One of the most significant features of marketization in higher education is the way that students have been regarded. In a country with a long history of feudalism like Vietnam, students used to be seen as learners and teachers were masters, who delivered the knowledge and were utterly respected. Obtaining entry to higher education was a privilege for which students had to go through vigorously competitive examinations and were frequently rejected without apology. However, the recent shift in funding for higher education from the Government to individual students to encourage growth has changed the student-teacher-university relationship. Higher education institutions now have to compete to recruit new students, and faculty has to create courses that are more attractive to the greater number of students and that meet market needs. Ultimately, students have become consumers; teachers/ lecturers have become service providers, or in other words, “have been forced to sell their wares” (Fox, 2002, p. 130); universities have become more conscious about market needs, customer satisfaction and brand loyalty like any other business entities.

Although most Vietnamese students still have to take entrance examinations to demonstrate that they deserve to be accepted into the highest level of education, they have more choice of where they can undertake their university studies and can switch from one institution to another more easily if they are not satisfied with the “services” they receive. Furthermore, the “customer satisfaction” scheme adopted by HEIs that allows students to “rate” or appraise

their lecturers has completely changed their position in the system. It may sound like an exaggeration in the Vietnamese culture, but students have become “masters who must be flattered and cajoled by humble lecturers” (Fox, 2002, p. 130). Students are now able to complain to higher levels of management in the HEI if they are not satisfied with the way they are taught or the marks they receive. This has resulted in young and inexperienced lecturers introducing easier course structures and applying lower expectations in order to satisfy their “customers” and to be rated highly. On the other hand, many experienced and capable lecturers, who are consistent with their high expectations of students, have found themselves receiving higher disapproval ratings from students.

One may argue that the student-centred system have made universities become more accountable and lecturers more responsive to students’ needs; however, there should be concerns over the real quality of higher education in this market-driven society. Especially, in light of the current (2008-2009) economic meltdown in North America and the UK, policy-makers and education administrators have to be vigilant about the consequences of free-market mechanisms in higher education. It may be argued that neo-liberalism and its free-market agenda does not always work. Although free-market mechanisms offered answers to the shortages of financial resources, the prosperity it brought about was short-lived and the consequences are still not measurable. Many have blamed the current economic crisis on the greed that was created through years of the neo-liberal free-market agenda. Let us ask ourselves a question as to

where our society will go if higher education continues to generate generations of students whose focus is more on getting a degree than obtaining real knowledge.

Another consequence of the emphasis on what students receive as customers is the weakening of the position of the arts, humanities and critical social sciences, because research and teaching in these fields does not attract students who have to pay their own fees. University degrees are seen as a saleable commodity, and customers only demand a worthwhile product that will then provide a good return on their investment. The reduction of student intakes in these programmes at VNU-Hanoi is a proof of the fact that arts, humanities and social sciences are losing their status as the state and HEIs draw back from continuing investment in these areas. This may have created a come-back of elitism, because students who cannot afford to pay for in-demand programmes often end up studying in social sciences. Even if they become successful researchers or professors in these fields, they don't often get paid as much as their peers who studied business or other natural sciences. Therefore, the disparity between rich and poor in society will persist.

There is certainly the contradiction between pursuing a market-oriented agenda and ensuring the quality of higher education as well as widening access for the wider population. Marketization certainly has negative impacts on equality of student intakes as well as the quality of education when an adequate financing scheme is absent, because "increased student choice for students is meaningful only for those who can afford to pay tuition... or for those with access to financial aid" (Steier, 2003, p.163). Therefore, the Government has to create a system that

is for the benefit of students from diverse backgrounds, a system that also allows the poor to study what they wish to study. Since it is stated in the Vietnamese Constitution that education is every citizen's right, the poor should not be denied opportunities to study. Even though it is arguable that higher education is a private investment since it directly benefits the individuals, it also benefits society since these individuals usually will earn and pay higher taxes than those who do not attend higher education.

6.2.2. Commercialization of Scientific Research and Ethics

The rise of marketization has changed the role of HEIs. What is notable is that universities are forced to change from “centre[s] of learning” to “business organization[s] with productivity targets” (Doring, 2002, p. 140). As business entities, higher education institutions have adopted many commercial values that purely focused on the output, efficiency, cost effectiveness and competitiveness, rather than the knowledge being created for the benefit of society. The findings of this study suggested that the values of the business sector seemed to have been encoded in the heart of the university and processed without reflection. The function of research in the university has also been subordinated to the greater purpose of generating revenue and driving national prosperity.

Universities have been encouraged to commercialize research activities in the hope of creating increased economic activities, and if done well, producing significant economic returns. The commercialization of research activities means that university scientific research has become a private good since these activities are no longer funded by tax money but by private sources. Therefore,

patents and copyrights of scientific research have become the private property of researchers or the universities, rather than public property.

One may argue that private copyrights and patents often translate research findings into tangible commercial commodities more quickly than traditional routes of dissemination of publicly funded research, that translating university research into products is also of direct benefit to society, and that market-related incentives help induce professional scientists to focus their efforts on the individual utility of consumers and encourage universities to do a better job in securing the public interest (Bok, 2004). However, the commercialization of scientific research raises a concern about academic ethics and dangers to society, especially in a country that has a reputation for corruption, unclear laws and the lack of a transparent code of ethics.

As described by Derek Bok (2004), these dangers are characterized by increased secrecy of findings inhibiting the flow of ideas, increased conflict of interest where considerations of personal gain affect professional judgement, and corporate efforts to influence research results potentially leading to the suppression of research findings. Since university-industry partnerships have increasingly become an important income-seeking strategy for universities and corporate contributions to scientific research are becoming more visible, the corporate influence in scientific research may become exponential.

In order to minimize these dangers, the Government could produce clear guidelines on research funding, and ensure that research that does not have immediate commercial potential but may produce economic benefits in the long

run if adequately subsidized, is supported. Furthermore, research that impacts public health and the environment must be funded by tax money, having the public hold universities accountable for their research results. This would help avoid a situation in which a university may generate results that will benefit the endorsing industry, but which may be harmful to society, for instance research into the use of tobacco and dangerous drugs, and other business activities that may endanger the environment.

Derek Bok (2004) argues that while the entrepreneurial university may succeed in the short-term at a certain time and in a certain environment, only those universities that vigorously uphold academic values, even at the cost of a few lucrative ventures, would win public trust and retain respect of faculty and students. Universities in Vietnam are young and are poorly funded compared to universities in the region, and thus there is always a temptation to ignore academic values in pursuit of financial prosperity and international competitiveness. Therefore, there must be a clear set of rules, proper intellectual property policies, and transparent guidelines on ethical conduct in scientific research for academic staff, ensuring that academic values can prevail over commercial values. Professional scientists should be adequately rewarded and should also face appropriate consequences for the lack of academic ethics and social responsibility.

6.3. Research Limitations

One of the difficulties this study faced was the collection of data. There was the lack of consistency in data collected from the General Office of Statistics

and from the Ministry of Education and Training. Data before 1995 were almost non-existent. Data collected from the case-study institution were mostly from its website and through the face-to-face interviews, which was pure estimation and might not be precise. In particular, financial data was not available because the financial status of public organizations in Vietnam is not made public. Even though interviewees were carefully identified, the majority of them were not familiar with the literature on the subject of marketization in higher education and did not fully understand the policy context.

6.4. Implications

This study focused on policies that have been adopted by the Vietnamese Government to reform its higher education system during the past two decades. The findings of this study set a foundation for further research about the impact of marketization policies on academic life and the quality of graduates in order to determine the impact they have on society as a whole. The questions as to what education really means and whether education should be commercialized have yet to be satisfactorily answered.

APPENDICES

Appendix 1: Interview Questions

- 1) How have the country's economic reforms influenced your institution?
- 2) How have national policies of higher education reform influenced your institution's practice?
- 3) What are the main challenges that your institution faces in developing and reforming?
- 4) How have the national reform policies and your institutional reform impacted student enrolment?
- 5) How have the national reform policies impacted educational quality of your institution?
- 6) How have the national reform policies impacted the financing of your institution?
- 7) How have global trends of restructuring, commercialization and privatization impacted your institution's policies during the past two decades?
- 8) How have the trends of marketization and privatization impacted the curriculum and teaching staff recruitment?
- 9) What is the rate of students' graduation employment in their career choice?
- 10) What is missing in the national policies that would be important?

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