PERCEPTIONS AND EVALUATION OF TEACHING IN HIGHER EDUCATION IN VIETNAM: A CASE STUDY

By
Nga D Tran
B.A., M.A., M.Ed

A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

University of Tasmania
Launceston, Tasmania
September 2012
Declaration

I certify that this thesis contains no material which has been accepted for a degree or diploma by the University or any other institution, except by the way of background information, and duly acknowledged in this thesis, and to the best of my knowledge and belief, no material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made in the text of the thesis.
Approval to Copy

This thesis may be made available for loan and limited copying in accordance with the *Copyright Act 1968*. 
Statement of Ethical Conduct

The research associated with this thesis abides by the international and Australian
codes on human and animal experimentation, the guidelines by the Australian
Government’s Office of the Gene Technology Regulator and the rulings of the
Safety, Ethics and Institutional Biosafety Committees of the University.
Acknowledgements

I would like to acknowledge the many people who have given me support and encouragement throughout this journey.

I am indebted to the university administrators and teachers who spent time to participate in this study, regardless of their busy schedules. My thanks and appreciations for your sharing and cooperation without which this thesis would not have come into being.

My heartfelt appreciation goes to my supervisors, Professor John Williamson and Dr. Marion Myhill, for their continuous support and guidance. They have offered me immense encouragement and timely advice. The countless discussions I had with them deepened my insights in this research.

I owe thanks to my colleagues in Haiphong Private University in Vietnam for their support, especially during my pilot study at the university. Special thanks go to Marilyn Pietsch for her thorough reading of my thesis and to all my “study buddies” in RHD room during the ups and downs of my journey.

Finally, my wholehearted appreciation goes to my parents for their emotional sacrifices. I dedicate this thesis to them, to my beloved husband and daughters, Khanh and Anh. Your cheerleading rhyme “Let’s go mum, let’s go” is a constant source of encouragement to me.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Terms</th>
<th>Descriptions/ Definitions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Accreditation</td>
<td>A process of higher education institutions in Vietnam to meet criteria set by the Ministry of Education and Training. It involves self-assessment and external assessment from the Ministry.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accreditation program</td>
<td>A program initiated and managed by Ministry of Education and Training, Vietnam, starting in 2006. The first stage of the program (2006-2008) was voluntary with participation from 20 universities. The second stage (2009-current) was mandated in all higher education institutions in Vietnam.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conception</td>
<td>&quot;Specific meaning attached to phenomena which then mediate our response to situation involving those phenomena.&quot; (Pratt, 1992)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Higher Education Reform Agenda (HERA)</td>
<td>An agenda initiated by the Government of Vietnam to provide strategic direction for a fundamental and comprehensive reform of Higher Education in Vietnam in the period 2006-2010.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HE</td>
<td>An abbreviation for Higher Education.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HEIs</td>
<td>An abbreviation for Higher Education Institutions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning outcomes</td>
<td>What a student knows or can do as a result of teaching.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MOET</td>
<td>The Vietnamese Ministry of Education and Training responsible for the management of education system in Vietnam. The Ministry plays central role in the governance of HEIs (except for national universities).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MOF</td>
<td>The Vietnamese Ministry of Finance “responsible for co-operating with the Ministry of Education and Training to exercise the State management of education&quot; (Education Act, 2005).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MPI</td>
<td>The Vietnamese Ministry of Planning and Investment “responsible for co-operating with the Ministry of Education and Training to exercise the State management of education&quot; (Education Act, 2005).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Terms</td>
<td>Descriptions/ Definitions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------------------------------------</td>
<td>----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National Curriculum Frameworks</td>
<td>Frameworks for every undergraduate programme, in which specify what to teach including the objectives, topics to be covered, and assessment. All higher education institutions (except for two national universities) are required to follow the frameworks.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National Entrance Exam (NEE)</td>
<td>An annual examination conducted nation-wide in Vietnam for upper secondary school leavers. Those who pass this exam can have access to tertiary education.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-public institutions</td>
<td>Educational institutions, established by social, professional, or economic organisations with non-public funding (58/2010/QĐ-TTg: Chinh phu, 2010). These institutions are given more freedom to manage their finance, but these are also controlled by the MOET in relation to instruction.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perception</td>
<td>Perception is observation or mental images acquired through senses (Perception, 2011) and they are strongly influenced by conceptions (Pratt, 1992).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perception of teaching</td>
<td>Mental images attached to teaching and are influenced by conceptions of teaching</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public institutions</td>
<td>Institutions in Vietnam that receive funding from the government for their infrastructure and staffing. These institutions (except two national universities) are subjected to MOET’s regulations and approval regarding organisation of teaching and learning, management of finance and personnel.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student Evaluation of Teaching</td>
<td>An instrument designed to obtain student feedback about teaching.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Table of Contents

Declaration .................................................................................................................. ii
Approval to Copy .......................................................................................................... iii
Statement of Ethical Conduct ....................................................................................... iv
Acknowledgements ...................................................................................................... v
Glossary of Terms/Abbreviations Used ...................................................................... vi
Table of Contents ........................................................................................................ viii
List of Tables .............................................................................................................. xiii
List of Figures .............................................................................................................. xv
Abstract ...................................................................................................................... xvi

### CHAPTER 1  INTRODUCTION ........................................................................ 1
  - Background to the Study ...................................................................................... 1
  - Changing Context for HEIs ................................................................................. 3
  - Problem Statement .............................................................................................. 4
  - Conceptual Framework ....................................................................................... 7
  - Research Aim and Research Questions .............................................................. 8
  - Research Methodology ....................................................................................... 8
  - Significance of the Study ................................................................................... 9
  - Outline of the Thesis .......................................................................................... 11

### CHAPTER 2  CONTEXT OF THE STUDY ................................................... 12
  - Introduction ......................................................................................................... 12
  - Higher Education in Vietnam ............................................................................. 12
    - Public institutions ............................................................................................ 15
    - Non-public institutions ................................................................................... 17
  - Tertiary Teaching and Learning in Vietnam ....................................................... 19
    - Cultural influences on teaching and learning ............................................... 20
    - Challenges to tertiary teaching and learning ............................................... 22
    - Government’s attempt at teaching quality improvement ......................... 23
  - The Use of the Student Evaluation of Teaching Instrument in HEIs in Vietnam.. 26
  - Chapter Summary ............................................................................................... 27

### CHAPTER 3  LITERATURE REVIEW ........................................................... 29
  - Introduction ......................................................................................................... 29
  - University Teachers’ and Administrators’ Conceptions of Teaching.................. 30
Conceptions and perceptions of teaching defined........................................30
Conceptions/perceptions of teaching: A preliminary examination ........31
Research into teachers’ conceptions of teaching....................................34
Dimensions to delimit perceptions/conceptions of teaching ..................39
Teacher-centred conceptual categories..................................................44
  Teaching as imparting information..................................................44
  Teaching as transmitting understandings.........................................44
Student-centred conceptual categories................................................45
  Teaching as facilitating critical thinking.........................................45
  Teaching as enabling conceptual change.......................................45
Teacher-centred vs student-centred conceptions of teaching..................46
Student Evaluation of Teaching..........................................................47
  SETs: The cases for and against....................................................48
Issues related to the purpose of SETs................................................49
Issues related to construct validity of SETs ........................................50
Conceptions of Teaching and Approaches to Teaching Evaluation ..........53
  3P model of teaching and student learning.....................................54
Student presage-focused approach....................................................58
Teaching presage-focused approach..................................................61
Student learning-focused approach..................................................65
Chapter Summary ..............................................................................69
CHAPTER 4 METHODOLOGY..............................................................70
  Introduction.....................................................................................70
  Research Approach.........................................................................71
  Case Study as Research Methodology .............................................72
    An exploratory collective case study.............................................72
    Ethical considerations....................................................................74
    The role of the researcher............................................................75
  Developmental Phases of the Research Activities...............................76
  Research instruments.......................................................................76
    Semi-structured interviews...........................................................77
    Documents related to teaching evaluations....................................80
    Survey-Questionnaire.................................................................80
    Translation of the research instruments........................................83
Pilot study..............................................................................................................85
Samples in the Study...........................................................................................86
Participating universities ..................................................................................86
University administrators ................................................................................87
University teachers .............................................................................................89
Data Gathering Process.......................................................................................91
Semi-structured interviews ..............................................................................92
Documents ..........................................................................................................94
Survey-Questionnaire .........................................................................................94
Data Analysis Methods ......................................................................................95
Analysing textual data .......................................................................................96
Analysing numerical data ................................................................................98
Limitations of the Study and Strategies to Manage Limitations.......................100
Chapter Summary .............................................................................................103

CHAPTER 5 RESEARCH SUB-QUESTION 1: PERCEPTION AND
EVALUATION OF TEACHING IN MOET’S GUIDELINE.................................105
Introduction........................................................................................................105
Results................................................................................................................106
Discussion..........................................................................................................108
MOET’s Guideline: A teacher-centred perception of teaching.......................108
The lack of theories of teaching and learning in the Guideline’s development .........................................................................................................................109
The central role of MOET in tertiary teaching management .......................110
Chapter Summary .............................................................................................110

CHAPTER 6 RESEARCH SUB-QUESTION 2: STUDENT EVALUATION OF
TEACHING AND PERCEPTION OF TEACHING HELD BY UNIVERSITY
ADMINISTRATORS..............................................................................................111
Introduction........................................................................................................111
Results: The Case of University P ...................................................................112
Development of SET ........................................................................................112
Perception and evaluation of teaching in University P’s SET .......................115
Director P: “We have to transmit all of this knowledge to students” ..........118
Perception of teaching .....................................................................................118
Assumptions about what should be measured in teaching .......................122
Vice-President P: “When they can repeat what you have talked about, it proves that they have understood” ................................. 123

Perception of teaching....................................................... 123

Assumptions about what should be measured in teaching........ 126

President P: “The knowledge that we have in our bodies, we are willing to impart [it] to our students” ........................................... 128

Perception of teaching....................................................... 128

Assumptions about what should be measured in teaching........ 130

Results: The Case of University N ........................................ 131

Development of SET .......................................................... 131

Perception and evaluation of teaching in University N’s SET .... 133

Director N: “Deliver it clearly for students to take in. It is then stored by students” ............................................................ 136

Perception of teaching....................................................... 136

Assumptions about what should be measured in teaching........ 139

President N: “When it comes to teaching, we need to have logical presentation” ............................................................ 141

Perception of teaching....................................................... 141

Assumptions about what should be measured in teaching........ 144

Discussion........................................................................... 145

Teacher-centred perceptions of teaching held by administrators in HEIs in Vietnam .................................................................. 145

SET – a mirror for its designers’ perceptions of teaching ............ 149

Institutional focus of teaching evaluation: “What-the-teacher-is” and “what-the-teacher-does” ......................................................... 150

Perception gap ...................................................................... 153

The sharing of similar perceptions of teaching held by administrators in the same university ......................................................... 154

Chapter Summary .................................................................. 155

CHAPTER 7  RESEARCH SUB-QUESTION 3: PERCEPTIONS OF TEACHING HELD BY UNIVERSITY TEACHERS ........................................... 156

Introduction............................................................................. 156

Results................................................................................... 156

Perceptions of teaching held by university teachers in Vietnam .... 157
List of Tables

Table 3.1  Ways of Conceptualising Tertiary Teaching (Studies Using Phenomenographic and Qualitative Methods) ........................................... 35
Table 3.2  Dimensions of Expected Learning Outcomes, and Teacher’s and Students’ Roles and Their Subsumed Dimensions .......................... 42
Table 3.3  Reconceptualisation of Teaching ........................................... 43
Table 3.4  Reconceptualisation of Approaches to Teaching Evaluation ........ 68
Table 4.1  Time-line for the Study’s Activities ........................................ 77
Table 4.2  Demographic Information of Survey Respondents from University P (n=72) ........................................................................ 90
Table 4.3  Demographic Information from Survey Respondents from University N (n=28) ................................................................. 91
Table 6.1  Focus of Teaching Evaluation Implicit in SET ............................... 116
Table 6.2  Expectations of Student Learning Implicit in SET .......................... 117
Table 6.3  Expectations of Teachers’ and Students’ Roles Implicit in SET ........ 117
Table 6.4  Factors Affecting Teaching Quality: Director P’s view .................. 119
Table 6.5  Factors Affecting Teaching Quality: Vice-President P’s view .......... 124
Table 6.6  Factors Affecting Teaching Quality: President P’s view ................ 128
Table 6.7  Score Given to Each Item of the SET Form of University N ............ 133
Table 6.8  Expectations of Student Learning Implicit in the SET Form .......... 134
Table 6.9  Expectations of Teacher’s and Students’ Roles Implicit in the SET Form. 135
Table 6.10  Factors Affecting Teaching Quality: Director N’s view ............... 137
Table 6.11  Factors Affecting Teaching Quality: President N’s View ................ 141
Table 7.1  Cronbach Alpha for Two Extracted Subscales: Student-centred Perception of Teaching and Teacher-centred Perception of Teaching .... 159
Table 7.2  Teachers’ Item Mean Scores on ScPT and TcPT in Two Universities .... 159
Table 7.3  Pearson Correlations: ScPT and TcPT with Factors Affecting to Teaching Quality ................................................................. 160
Table 7.4  Teachers’ Item Mean Scores on ScPT and TcPT in University P .......... 163
Table 7.5  Descriptive Statistics for the Perceived Importance of Factors Affecting Teaching Quality: University P Teachers’ View ...................... 164
Table 7.6  Teachers’ Item Mean Scores on ScPT and TcPT in University N .......... 165
Table 7.7  Descriptive Statistics for the Perceived Importance of Factors Affecting Teaching Quality: University N Teachers’ Views .................................................. 166

Table 8.1  Similarity in the Views about Teaching: University P’s Administrators and Teachers................................................................. 177

Table 8.2  Similarity in the Views about Teaching: University N’s Administrators and Teachers................................................................. 177
List of Figures

Figure 3.1: Biggs’s (1987, 1993a; 1993) 3P Model of Teaching and Student Learning .................................................. 56

Figure 3.2: The Student Presage-focused Approach to Teaching Evaluation ......................... 60

Figure 3.3: Teaching Context-focused Approach to Teaching Evaluation .......................... 62

Figure 3.4: Student Learning-focused Approach to Teaching Evaluation .......................... 67

Figure 4.1: Screenshot of Coding of Textual Data ................................................................. 98
Abstract

This thesis is a time-fixed snapshot of how teaching is perceived and evaluated in Higher Education in Vietnam. The interest in exploring this question lies in its implications for improving teaching through teaching evaluation practice. Although the thesis is not directed to the teaching evaluation system per se, understanding the perceptions of teaching underlying the system is a prerequisite to teaching improvement.

This case study was conducted at a public and a non-public university in Vietnam. Five university administrators – the designers of the Student Evaluation of Teaching (SET) instrument, and one hundred teachers participated in this study. Data were obtained through semi-structured interviews, survey-questionnaire, and analysis of documents including institutional SET Forms and Guideline on SETs from the Ministry of Education and Training, Vietnam.

Findings show that in Vietnam tertiary teaching was generally perceived as focusing on the teachers and their teaching, in a “linked-chain” fashion, from MOET’s policy framework to university administrators, and to teachers. Two approaches to teaching evaluation, that is, student presage-focused, and teaching context-focused were found in this study. These approaches are characterised by congruence of the perception of teaching held by the university administrators, with the focus of teaching evaluation, and the purpose of the evaluation.

The research presented in this thesis makes a considerable contribution to the literature. First, it argues for an approach to teaching evaluation underpinned by student-centred perceptions of teaching, that is, teaching as facilitating critical thinking and as enabling conceptual change. The teaching evaluation instrument used for such an approach becomes student evaluation of learning. Second, it extends the
understanding of administrators’ perceptions of teaching, which were under-researched, compared with the prevalent literature on teachers’ perceptions of teaching. Third, the study gives prominence to administrators and teachers in the Higher Education (HE) system of a developing country whose views were much less researched than those of developed countries. Finally, the study adds to the present lack of literature on the HE in Vietnam and provides a systemic view of the HE system through the lens of the perceptions of teaching which lie behind the teaching evaluation system. By doing so, it contributes to explanation of the Vietnamese Government’s failures in its attempts at quality improvement in HE.