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

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

University of Tasmania
Launceston, Tasmania
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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

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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.

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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.
### Glossary of Terms/Abbreviations Used

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Terms</th>
<th>Descriptions/ Definitions</th>
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<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” (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” (Education Act, 2005).</td>
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<td>Terms</td>
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<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
CHAPTER 5 RESEARCH SUB-QUESTION 1: PERCEPTION AND EVALUATION OF TEACHING IN MOET’S GUIDELINE

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

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
Perceptions of teaching held by teachers in University P .................. 162
Perception of teaching held by teachers in University N .................. 164
Discussion .................................................................................. 166
Chapter summary ....................................................................... 170
CHAPTER 8  DISCUSSION ............................................................... 171
Introduction ................................................................................ 171
Tensions Between Stated and Enacted Purposes of SETs ................. 172
System-wide View of Tertiary Teaching in Vietnam ...................... 175
Two Institutional Approaches to the Evaluation of Teaching .......... 178
Implications of the Findings ....................................................... 180
  Implications for educational research on perceptions and evaluation of
  teaching .................................................................................. 180
  Implications for teaching evaluation practice ............................. 183
  Implications for tertiary teaching improvement in HEIs in Vietnam .. 185
Suggestions for Further Research .............................................. 186
  Suggestions related to theory development ............................... 187
  Suggestions related to research methods .................................. 188
  Suggestions related to practice ................................................. 189
Closing Remarks ......................................................................... 189
References ............................................................................... 191
Appendices ............................................................................... 221
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.
CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

Background to the Study

Having grown up in Vietnam, I once held a strong belief that the purpose of teaching was to transfer enthusiasm and knowledge to students. During four years of undergraduate study in a public university, my favourite teachers were the ones who talked about the subject with passion, the ones who motivated me to learn the subject. To me, they were not only the “wells of wisdom” (Vietnamese aphorism), but also models of morality. In those days, as students, my classmates and I sometimes chatted about what we liked and disliked about our teachers. However, we dared not comment about our teachers to the university administrators. Nor did we have any chance to do so.

After graduation in 1995, I returned to my hometown to work as a teacher of Foreign Languages at another public university. Following in the steps of my favourite teachers, I tried my hardest to present to the students what I knew and understood about the subject matter. I taught with enthusiasm. Whilst my students seemed to like my teaching, I was not sure what else I could do for them and how I could improve my teaching. In this university, evaluation of teaching was mainly focused on workplace procedural conformity and teaching load. Two sources of evaluation of teaching in place were self-evaluation and the impression of the university administrators about an individual teacher’s performance. Students’ voices about teaching were never considered to be necessary in the evaluation of teaching and therefore were not obtained. Over nearly seven years of teaching in this public university, I did not have any classroom visitations from the university’s administrators and yet I was granted tenure by the university.
Like many of my colleagues working in this public university, I felt secure in my employment. No feedback from the students, no feedback from my colleagues about my teaching meant that I had done well. However, in the last couple of years of teaching in this university, I sometimes felt puzzled about my teaching because I was not sure about how well I was actually in teaching. To my mind, it was necessary to have someone, be they administrators, colleagues, or students tell me what I was doing that was right or wrong. At the time of teaching in that public university, such sharing was not available to me.

I then moved to a non-public university (i.e., a private university) and worked as a teacher of English as well as an officer in the International Relations Office. This university implemented what they called a “Feedback Form”, that is, a questionnaire, in which students were asked at the end of each semester how they felt about their teachers and their teaching. Teachers, including myself, felt that we were constantly being monitored and put under pressure to teach in a way that made the students like the subject, since our contracts with the university might be terminated if we did not receive good scores in the evaluation. Although the results of student feedback were not made public, the corridor talk with my colleagues provided me with glimpses of their scepticism. Some of them talked about the Form as a way the university pleased its fee-paying students.

I tried to teach in a way that would help me to get good results from the evaluation. I was confident that I did a good job in teaching, as I got relatively good scores on the overall teaching from my students at the end of every semester. I also believed that my students were competent in their usage of English, as a result of my teaching.
However, one incident challenged my thinking and the confidence I had about my own teaching. One day, the International Relations Office, where I worked, received an email from an overseas partner, expressing concerns about the inappropriate language in one business letter sent to them. The letter was written by one of my former students, who graduated with High Distinction from the university and was offered a job in the same office as me. After this incident, I pondered many questions: Who should be blamed for the student’s failure? Why couldn’t a student who had graduated with High Distinction do the task that she had learnt to do? Was it her former teachers, including myself, who did not deliver high teaching quality, although we had fairly good results in the teaching evaluation? Or was there something wrong with the evaluation of teaching and student learning? These questions have led me to studies about how teaching is evaluated and perceived within the context of Higher Education in Vietnam.

**Changing Context for HEIs**

Higher education has changed markedly in many countries over the last several decades: from elite to mass higher education (Doyle, 2006; Harvey & Newton, 2004; Trow, 1973), from government fully-funded enterprise to competition for public funding (Karmel, 2000). Massification manifests in the percentage of students enrolment in tertiary education: globally, from 19 per cent in 2000 to 26 per cent in 2007 (Altbach, Reisberg, & Rumbley, 2009). In contrast to the widening up access to the public, government money is shrinking (Karmel, 2000). For example, in Australia, there was a 12 to 15 per cent cut in public funding for tertiary education over the period of 1987-1997 (Marginson, 1997).

Responding to the global massification movement, in a time of limited resources, desire for the demonstration of effectiveness and efficiency is sought after
by both the government and the higher education institutions (Trowler, Fanghanel, & Wareham, 2005). Governments accountable to the public need to demonstrate that a quality education is being provided by institutions, regardless of their particular mission and focus. Institutions, in turn, are accountable to the government to demonstrate that the money is well spent and is used to maximise its impact (Chalmers, 2007). Driven by an unprecedented focus on “bottom line” accountability for expenditure (Coady, 2000), HEIs began to collect data with respect to research, teaching, and student learning (Theall, 2010), and to make comparison about the “merit or worth” (Scriven, 1967) of an institution. In this climate, evaluation of teaching as an indicator for institutional success became integral to the survival of an institution.

**Problem Statement**

The literature on Student Evaluation of Teaching (SET) is a site of controversy. Theall and Franklin (2001) succinctly stated that “few issues in higher education are as sensitive, divisive, and political as faculty evaluation and in particular the quality and value of the information provided by students in their evaluations of teachers and courses” (p. 45). Indeed, numbers of studies have presented debates around the purposes of the evaluating instruments and asked whether SETs should be used for diagnostic and developmental purposes related to teaching or for judgemental purposes (for review, see, Darwin, 2010). Although these competing purposes do regularly coexist in many of the teaching evaluation system, tensions and confusion are created between the two (Barrie, 2001; Burden, 2010). Tensions flow from the fact that when SETs are used for teaching improvement, teachers tend to expose their weaknesses, while when SETs are used for judgemental purposes, teachers tend to show their strengths. Much of the
attention in the arguments about the “improve-prove” function dichotomy (Barrie, 2001) of SETs was paid to teaching as an end in itself, and assumed the correlation between student ratings and student learning. However, findings from intensive investigations of SETs over the last two decades have provided contrary evidence (Carrell & West, 2010; Galbraith, Merrill, & Kline, 2011; Kember & Leung, 2009; Pounder, 2007; Schuck, Gordon, & Buchanan, 2008; Zabaleta, 2007), that is, the existence of low or no correlations between SET scores and student learning. In a recent study by Carrell and West (2010), it was found that teachers receiving higher SET scores tended to excel more at contemporaneous student achievement (teaching to the test), but harm the follow-on achievement of their students. They further concluded that high SET scores were actually associated with lower levels of deep learning.

Controversy continues in relation to the reliability and validity of SETs. Evidence for SETs as reliable indicators of teaching effectiveness came from the work of researchers such as Marsh (1984, 1987, 2007), Cohen (1981, 1982), and McKeachie (1996, 1997), and came largely from multiple-section studies that found there were correlations, though not significant, between SET scores and some measures of student achievement such as a common final examination. SETs, therefore, were considered to be “quite reliable” and “reasonably valid” instruments to evaluate university teaching (Marsh, 1987, p. 369). However, many studies have challenged the widely accepted validity of SETs (for review, see Pounder, 2007). From the time when Dowell and Neal (1983) observed “student ratings are inaccurate indicators of student learning and they are best regarded as indices of ‘consumer satisfaction’ rather than teaching effectiveness” (p. 462), the search for evidence of invalidity for the use of SETs continues to this day. Arguments have
been advanced that SETs are influenced by student-related factors such as their perceptions of teaching or their maturity (e.g., Aleamoni, 1981; Crumbley, Henry, & Kratchman, 2001) or by teacher-related factors such as the appearance, likeability, and popularity of the teachers (Boysen, 2008; McNatt, 2010).

As research on teaching evaluation in general, and SETs in particular, was faced with continuing question, the underlying problems in evaluation were revealed to be more complex than the simple improve-prove function of SETs or the valid-invalid/reliable-unreliable dichotomy surrounding SETs suggested (Theall, 2010). The main problem, as several researchers (Barrie, 2001; Barrie, Ginns, & Symons, 2008; Edström, 2008; Kolitch & Dean, 1999; Saroyan & Amundsen, 2001) argued, lay in the “fragile foundation” (Darwin, 2010) underpinning the development of the instrument, that is, the lack of understanding of the assumptions about knowledge and about the conceptions of learning and teaching underlying the SET instrument. However, to date, no empirical evidence has been available to support their claims, despite the significance of these assumptions for the fairness, validity, generalisability and interpretation and usefulness of SETs (Lemos, Queirós, Teixeira, & Menezes, 2010). Therefore, the research agenda on SETs needs to be refocused away from challenging the validity of SETs to improving SETs through the examination of what lies behind SETs.

Literature in the field of teachers’ perceptions/conceptions of teaching has produced a wealth of insightful information about the ways in which university teachers conceptualise teaching (Akerlind, 2004; Carnell, 2007; Kember, 1997; Postareff & Lindblom-Ylänne, 2008; Pratt, 1992; Samuelowicz & Bain, 2001; Trigwell & Prosser, 1996a). The extant literature has consistently indicated that teachers’ teaching practices are affected by their educational beliefs, conceptions and
perceptions (Hatiba & Goodyear, 2002b; Kember, 1997). Studies such as those of Trigwell and Prosser (1996b) and Kember and Kwan (2000) have shown the logical relationship between teachers’ conceptions of teaching and teaching approaches. While much attention in the literature has been paid to exploring the various ways in which university teachers conceive or perceive teaching, little has been paid to making explicit the distinction between the conceptions of teaching underpinning teacher-centred approaches to teaching, and those underpinning student-centred approaches to teaching.

Another area, which has been largely ignored in the literature on conception/perceptions of teaching, is the investigation into the way university administrators perceived teaching. A limited number of quantitative studies which examined the way to which administrators perceived teaching (Neumann, 1993; O’Meara, 2005; Padovan & Whittington, 1998; Williams & Rhodes, 2002) focused primarily on the comparison between administrators’ perceptions of teaching and their perceptions of research as key aspects of teacher’s work. In the existing literature, no qualitative investigation focusing exclusively on administrators’ perceptions of teaching has been found. In the context of Higher Education in Vietnam, understanding the views of teaching held by administrators is particularly crucial as they are the behind-the-scene architects responsible for the design and implementation of instrument for the evaluation of teaching, such as the SETs to be used for the evaluation of teaching.

**Conceptual Framework**

The conceptual framework for this study is based on the connectedness of constructs, which contribute to an understanding of approaches to teaching evaluation in Higher Education. The framework reflects the congruence of
components of approaches to teaching evaluation which include belief about knowledge, perceptions of teaching, the purpose of evaluation, and the focus of the evaluation. The study explored these components and further identified two approaches undertaken by two participating universities.

Research Aim and Research Questions

The primary aim of this study was to explore the approaches to teaching evaluation undertaken in Higher Education (HE) in Vietnam through the examination of the perceptions of teaching held by university administrators, that is, those who comprise the designers of the teaching evaluation system. Therefore, the main research question of the study was:

How is teaching perceived and evaluated in Higher Education in Vietnam?

The following research sub-questions were formulated to address the main research question:

(i) How is teaching perceived and evaluated in the Ministry of Education and Training (MOET) Guideline on Student Evaluation of Teaching?

(ii) How is teaching perceived and evaluated by university administrators in particular Higher Education Institutions in Vietnam?

(iii) How is teaching perceived by the university teachers who work in the same institution as the university administrators of (ii)?

Research Methodology

The study employed a qualitative research approach. As the study was primarily aimed at an enhanced understanding of the views about teaching held by university administrators and teachers in Vietnam, it was designed as an exploratory
case study “bounded” (Stake, 1995) by the cultural, educational, and institutional context of HE in Vietnam. This case study used a multi-site, multi-person, and multi-method means of data collection and data analysis. The two participating universities included one public university in the Northern region and one non-public university in the Southern region of Vietnam. Five administrators participated in the study, three from the public university and two from the non-public university. These administrators were responsible not only for the institutional teaching evaluation system, but also for the strategic direction of teaching and learning in their universities. In addition, a total of 206 teachers from the two universities were surveyed, 100 returned the survey-questionnaire (a respondent rate of 49 per cent for the public university and 54 per cent for the non-public). Data collection methods included semi-structured interviews with the five administrators, analysis of documents related to the evaluation of teaching such as the SET Form, MOET Guideline on SETs, and the survey-questionnaires for administrators and for teachers. Each interview was conducted in Vietnamese, audio-taped, and transcribed verbatim. Qualitative data using Vietnamese language was then analysed using Nvivo 8, while the numerical data were analysed using the SPSS 16.

Significance of the Study

This study sought to extend the literature on conceptions/perceptions of teaching by providing understanding of teaching held by various groups of stakeholders in HE in Vietnam, including the Ministry of Education and Training, university administrators, and university teachers. In doing so, firstly, the study provided more nuanced views of teaching held by university administrators responsible for the teaching evaluation system in their respective institutions. This is a group whose views of teaching have been minimally dealt with in the literature
because there is little apparent connection between teaching and administrators’ work. The study explored the ways in which these administrators perceived teaching and related them to the purpose and the focus of the teaching evaluation system in their institutions. Secondly, the study gave prominence to administrators and teachers in the HE system of a developing country, whose views have been much less researched than those of administrators and teachers in more developed countries. Thirdly, in providing a systemic view of tertiary teaching from both institutional and ministerial level, the study offered an explanation to the government’s failures in its attempts at quality improvement.

This study broadened current understanding of teaching evaluation system by examining the congruence of various aspects of the system. In the literature, the purpose and the focus of teaching evaluation had been as discrete aspects of the evaluation; in this study, these were explored in relation with the perceptions of teaching held by administrators – the designers of such system. In doing so, the study proposed various institutional approaches to teaching evaluation, which were not readily found in the literature.

This study also added a broader dimension to teaching evaluation practice by exploring the reflection of administrators’ perceptions of teaching in the SET instrument in selected HEIs. In doing so, it provided empirical evidence for the claim made in the literature (Barrie, 2001; Edström, 2008; Kolitch & Dean, 1999) that behind every teaching evaluation system, there is an understanding of teaching held by those who design and use the system. It also proposed a refocus of the research agenda on improving the teaching evaluation practices by exploring such understanding.
Chapter 1

Introduction

Outline of the Thesis

The thesis consists of eight chapters. As described above, an overview of the research with its purposes and research questions is provided in this Introduction Chapter. The cultural and educational context of the research is described in Chapter Two, while the literature review is provided in Chapter Three. The research approach, research methodology, research strategy, and the methods of data collections, and data analysis employed for this study are presented in Chapter Four. The results of the data analysis to each research sub-question, followed by the discussion of these, are presented in three chapters, Chapter Five, Chapter Six and Chapter Seven, respectively. The thesis concludes with Chapter Eight, which discusses the overall findings of the study, the implications of these findings and suggestions for further studies.
CHAPTER 2  CONTEXT OF THE STUDY

Introduction

This chapter sets the study in its historical, cultural, and educational context without which an in-depth understanding of the study would be difficult. The chapter, firstly, provides an overview of the Higher Education (HE) system in Vietnam, particularly focusing on the roles of the Government in the governance and management of public and non-public Higher Education Institutions (HEIs). This is followed by an account of the main challenges to tertiary teaching and learning. The Government’s attempt to improve the quality of teaching and learning is also outlined. Finally, the chapter presents an historical account of the legislative framework for the use of the Student Evaluation of Teaching (SET), the main instrument used for the evaluation of teaching in HE in Vietnam.

Higher Education in Vietnam

The educational system in Vietnam is composed of four levels of schooling: pre-primary, primary, lower secondary, and upper secondary. Tertiary education is available in colleges and universities, and is accessible for those who pass an upper secondary school leaving examination and a national entrance examination. Prior to 1980, the HE system in Vietnam followed the Soviet Union’s model of education, with highly specialised institutions, which generally focused on one field of study. At that time, HE institutions were established to meet the need for skilled labour, and were regarded as an arm of the state bureaucracy, with the relevant ministry or local government providing the funds and management necessary for their operation (Hayden & Lam, 2010; Ngo, 2005; M. H. Pham, 1995). Graduates of tertiary education were traditionally assigned jobs in the public sector including in both
government and state-owned enterprises. This model of education resulted in the separation between teaching activities and research, and has left the governance of HEIs to particular ministries (Dao & Hayden, 2010; Fry, 2009; Hayden & Lam, 2010; Ngo, 2005; Sheridan, 2010).

In 1986, the Government proclaimed a new policy, đổi mới or renovation, that is, the central planning in the Soviet tradition was replaced by a socialist-oriented market economy. Since then, the Vietnamese economy has experienced an impressive annual growth rate of 7.5 per cent, as well as a reduction in the poverty rate (Asian Bank Development, 2010; World Bank, 2008). Accompanying economic success, the Vietnamese education system, particularly HE has accomplished “notable progress” (UNESCO, 2011; World Bank, 2008) in areas such as in diversifying the availability of HE and the types of degrees offered by institutions and in providing the legislative framework for non-public/private institutions. However, concerns remain regarding the centralisation of higher education management in Vietnam (Hayden & Lam, 2007; C. D. Tran, Lam, & Sloper, 1995; World Bank, 2008).

In Vietnam, the Ministry of Education and Training (MOET), as stated in the Education Act, is “accountable to the Government for the implementation of State management of education. Other ministries and ministerial-level agencies are responsible for co-operating with the Ministry of Education and Training to exercise the State management of education according to their competence” (Education Act, 2005, p. 42). MOET, by law, is the major agency responsible for the governance and management of education in Vietnam. Two other ministries that advise the government about national policy formulation, national target setting and sectoral financing for higher education are (i) the Ministry of Planning and Investment (MPI),
and (ii) the Ministry of Finance (MOF). These ministries working within the Prime
Minister’s Department decide on the intended growth of the HE system, the
appropriate balance of capital and recurrent expenditure, the development and the
application of student fee principles, and the levels of integration required between
the higher education sector and other sectors of the economy (*Education Act*, 2005).

The central control exercised by MOET over all HEIs in Vietnam is reflected
most strongly in the capped student enrolment and in the organisation of instruction.
All institutions, regardless of the institution’s “ownership” type, i.e., public or
private/non-public, must follow MOET's Guideline regarding student enrolment
numbers and admission policies. For example, HEIs in Vietnam are not allowed to
enrol students outside the student load target set by the government. The strict
control over admission is indicative of the limitation of substantive autonomy
(Hayden & Lam, 2010; Sheridan, 2010). As a result, the growth rate of individual
institutions, both public and non-public, is affected, and consequently the generation
of income for both sectors is limited.

Another system-wide responsibility of MOET is the implementation of the
National Curriculum Frameworks (NCFs). All HEIs are required to comply with the
NCFs, which are typically developed by MOET-appointed panels of experts, and
then approved by MOET (MOET, 2006, 2007a). Academic structure and content for
undergraduate programmes are specified in the NCFs. These include programme
aims, number of core courses in each major, teaching topics and the allocation of
time for each content area, as well as assessment methods. Generally, each
undergraduate programme consists of approximately 60 courses, equivalent to 200
credits (Director, Doughty, Gray, Hopcroft, & Silvera, 2006). Due to the centrally
controlled curriculum, academic staff have a heavy teaching workload, and are under constant pressure to “[cover] the syllabus” (Hayden & Lam, 2007) during classes.

In addition to the capped student enrolment and centrally controlled curriculum, details pertaining to the roles of MOET, as an arm of the government, in relation to each sector, that is, in relation to the public and non-public institutions, are presented in the next section.

**Public institutions**

With the proclamation of the đổi mới policy, there was a structural shift in the scope of the public HEIs: specialised, teaching or research only HEIs were replaced by multi-disciplinary institutions. Two national universities, Vietnam National University, Hanoi and Vietnam National University, Ho Chi Minh City, were established and now operate within the specific charter given to them by the Prime Minister. The President and Vice-President of these universities are directly appointed by the Prime Minister and given ministerial-level status (07/2001/ND-CP: Chinh phu, 2001; Ngo, 2006), as such, these appointments are unique within the public sector as the incumbents are given both substantive autonomy in matters such as curriculum design and procedural autonomy in matters such as financial management. Specifically, these universities can make their own decisions about whether or not to follow or depart from MOET’s National Curriculum Frameworks. Full funding from the government coupled with greater autonomy have resulted in better equipped teaching and learning facilities in these national universities (Hayden & Lam, 2007) compared with other public HEIs which are directly controlled by MOET, or by one of the other ministries, or by the local government.

Funding for public institutions is heavily reliant on the central government (58/2010/QĐ-TTg: Chinh phu, 2010). According to the most current survey of
university finance in 2005 (MOET, 2005), government allotment and tuition fees accounted for 94 per cent of income generation. Sixty-eight per cent of university funds were received from budgetary allocations determined by MOET, MOF, and MPI, and 26 per cent were from tuition fees and other fees. The enrolment quota imposed by MOET, therefore, was crucial for public institutions, as it determined the annual block grant that a public institution received from the government. It also determined the amount of money generated from tuition fees. The survey further indicated that income from research-related activities was accounted for only slightly above half of one per cent of public institutions’ revenues.

Public institutions are subject also to MOET regulations and approval in the matter of personnel management, particularly in relation to the top management team. Each public institution is administered by a management team comprising a President and several Vice-Presidents, the appointment of whom is approved by MOET. Typically, the President serves four-year terms, with extensions dependent on the support from the Ministry’s officials, and no limits exist on the number of terms in the post. The hiring of other personnel is capped by the hiring quota set by the Ministry of Home Affairs. Although MOET does not set the hiring quota for academic and administrative staff for individual public HEIs, it approves any expenditure on staff in the public institutions’ budgets. As a result, decisions made by the top management team regarding the hiring and firing of academic and administrative staff may have little impact on the management of the institutions, since the decisions are subject to MOET’s approval.

The tight control of the government over these institutions (except for the two national universities), ranging from the enrolment of students to the hiring and firing of staff, from budgeting to expenditure, has led to individual institutions’ inability to
improve education quality and to adapt their enrolment numbers to meet the changing needs of the market-driven economy. The sector appeared unresponsive to change (14/2005/NQ-CP: Chinh phu, 2005; MOET, 2009; World Bank, 2008), despite the rapid increase in the number of public institutions, from 110 in 1993 to 306 institutions in 2011 (MOET, 2011).

**Non-public institutions**

The implementation of the đổi mới policy has led to limitations in the State’s ability to supply the number of HE graduates for the growing economy. In 1992, in order to meet the needs of individuals and the labour market’s growing demands for a tertiary educated workforce, the government provided a legislative framework for the establishment of non-public Higher Education Institutions (HEIs). In the Charter for Higher Education, non-public or private institutions are described as educational institutions, established by social, professional, or economic organisations with non-public funding (58/2010/QĐ-TTg: Chinh phu, 2010). The first non-public HEI was established in 1993, as a “people-founded” university, by a group of highly renowned and respected mathematicians who were concerned with the lack of funding flexibility and, therefore, with the quality of higher education (X. S. Hoang, 2004). The introduction of nomenclature such as “people-founded”, or “non-public” was intended to avoid the connotations of “private” as being “for profit”.

Following the establishment of the first people-founded HEI, this sector has expanded rapidly. To date, there are 80 non-public institutions, inclusive of universities and colleges (MOET, 2011), accounting for 11.4 per cent of the total HE student load. The development of this sector reflects the government’s recognition that the demand for higher education could be addressed by requiring students to pay tuition fees (Hayden & Dao, 2010).
The management structure of non-public institutions follows the Charter given to this sector, in which the Board of Trustees is considered to be the governing body responsible for overall strategic direction of the institution. The Chair of the Board and the President of the institution are approved by the Minister in charge of MOET (58/2010/QĐ-TTg: Chinh phu, 2010). Presidents of non-public institutions are appointed by the governing body and approved by MOET.

Funding for non-public HE institutions relies heavily on tuition fees collected from the students, as these institutions are not eligible for state funding. According to the Survey for University Finance in 2005 (MOET, 2005), 82 per cent of revenue acquired by non-public institutions was generated from tuition fees. The enrolment quota imposed by MOET, therefore, is a decisive factor for non-public institutions’ financial viability as it largely determines the income for the institutions. Restricting student intake in each institution, particularly those in the non-public sector, is used as a mechanism for maintaining and managing the growth of the sector. However, any assessment of an individual institution’s capacity to offer students educational opportunities was not available until 2010.

The management teams in non-public institutions have more procedural autonomy in managing their finances, in the allocation of funds, and in the management of personnel, than do those in public institutions (58/2010/QĐ-TTg: Chinh phu, 2010). In other words, the principles of self-balancing are applied in order to maintain the institutions’ development and activities. In addition, academics and administrative staff employed by non-public institutions are not subject to MOET regulations in relation to academic hiring, promotion, and firing. As a result, non-public institutions tend to hire short-term academic staff and keep their permanent staff numbers relatively low.
Given that the non-public institutions’ capacity to survive are dependent on the number of students enrolled as well as on student retention, it may be argued that non-public institutions are more open to the changing needs of the students, that is, students are often regarded as “customers” (World Bank, 2008), and their rights and interests are attended to. One example of this student focus was the introduction of student feedback on teaching in the non-public sector, before it was initiated in the public sector.

In summary, although there had been some positive progress in the HE system in Vietnam, the centralisation of higher education management, whereby MOET governed all areas of institutional managerial decision making, inhibited the level of substantive and procedural autonomy needed for the system to prosper and grow.

Tertiary Teaching and Learning in Vietnam

Since the formation of the Vietnamese Kingdom of Van Lang in 2879 BC, Vietnam has changed enormously, from a country under colonisation to an independent nation, from a country with a high poverty rate to an economy with a recent impressive annual growth rate of 7.5 per cent (World Bank, 2008). The country was under Chinese imperial rule for nearly one thousand years, and then, under French colonisation, which in turn lasted for almost 100 years. The French colonisation ended with American intervention in 1954, resulting in the division of the country into two states, North Vietnam and South Vietnam. In 1975, the country became reunified as Vietnam. Since then Vietnam has joined in several international communities, e.g., Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN), World Trade Organisation (WTO), and Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC). In such an
historical context, it is undeniable that teaching and learning in Vietnam have been strongly influenced by foreign cultures.

**Cultural influences on teaching and learning**

It has been argued in several studies that teaching and learning in Vietnam are influenced by Confucian ideas and ideology (e.g., L. H. Pham & Fry, 2004; Welch, 2010; Whitmore, 1984). In Vietnamese society, the highly respected role of the teacher is expressed in the aphorism “Quân-Sư-Phụ” (King-Teacher-Father), in which teachers hold the second highest honourable position, even preceding the father in the level of loyalty and respect due. One significant influence on social structure and learning in Vietnam is Confucianism with its emphasis on harmony, dignity, and morality (Welch, 2010).

The hierarchical organising principle of Confucianism has been described as a culture of high collectivism and high power distance (Hofstede, Hofstede, & Minkov, 2010). The Power Distance Index for Vietnam of 70 (on a scale of 100) suggests a society in which people with higher social rank exercise authority, and “blame” those with lower rank for things that go wrong. In Vietnamese culture, high power distance manifests itself in the hierarchical relationship between teachers and administrators of the same school or institution, and also between teachers and students. In the classroom, teachers are in positions of authority over their students, while they in turn are subject to the authority of the university/school administrators, and of the Ministry of Education and Training. Nguyen and McInnis (2002) observed that in Vietnam, teachers are often seen as models for students to follow and students typically are expected to listen to the “right words” from their teachers and not engage in discussions with them. Similarly, Pham (2010) described the “traditional
way” of teaching in Vietnam as teachers presenting lectures verbally and students making notes from what they hear.

Coupled with the Vietnamese culture which demonstrates high power distance, Vietnam is influenced by what Ballard and Clanchy (1991) described as “conservation of knowledge”, that is, a culture that places much greater value on memorising information and reproducing understanding, than on disagreeing or critically examining extant knowledge. In other words, it is a culture where scholarship is traditionally exhibited by an extensive and accurate knowledge of the wisdom contained in authoritative texts or communicated by authorities in the field. Teachers are expected to transmit the necessary knowledge to their students and to act as an overt model of wisdom. Students are expected to follow their teachers as closely as possible and to achieve verisimilitude in their work.

The attitude to teaching and learning referred to above is echoed in the common understanding in Vietnam of what it means to “teach” and what it means to “learn”. The word “dạy” (to teach) in the Dictionary of Vietnamese (P. Hoang et al., 2010) has three meanings, (i) impart knowledge or skills, (ii) make someone aware of what is right or wrong, of morality, and (iii) train animal to do things like human being. The word “học” (to learn) has two meanings, (i) receive knowledge and practical skills transmitted from other people, and (ii) read over and over for memorisation. Undeniably, the shared understanding of teaching as imparting knowledge, and learning as gaining knowledge from others, characterises a culture of “conservation of knowledge” (Ballard & Clanchy, 1991), rather than a culture that encourage students to extend their existing knowledge and to demonstrate critical thinking skills by challenging themselves and the extant knowledge.
Chapter 2

Context of the Study

Challenges to tertiary teaching and learning

The rapid growth of HEIs in Vietnam both in scale and scope has not been without its challenges. Concerns for the quality of the HE system were particularly raised when no university in Vietnam was in The Time’s Asia Best University in the year 2000 (Asiaweek, 2000). The Vietnamese government has acknowledged the weaknesses of the HE system: the quality lagged behind regional and international standards; graduate students were limited in their abilities in relation to creative thinking, practical skills, and team work skills (201/2001/QD-TTg: Chinh phu, 2001). These weaknesses were explicitly stated in the preamble of the Resolution on the Fundamental and Comprehensive Reform of Higher Education in Vietnam 2006-2010 (14/2005/NQ-CP: Chinh phu, 2005), often referred to as HERA (Higher Education Reform Agenda):

[The HE system has not] met the demands for industrialisation, modernisation, and people’s demands for learning, and demands for global integration. It is necessary to overcome many weaknesses and shortcoming in sector management, system structure, higher education network, training processes, teaching and learning methodology, academic staff, and education managers, and resource use, as well as corruption in exams and degree issuance and other educational activities (p. 1)

A recent study (Director et al., 2006) has enforced HERA’s statement when it concluded that in Vietnam HE there were ineffective teaching methods which had too high dependence on lectures and little use of active learning techniques, and little interaction between faculty and students in or outside the classroom. The over-emphasis on rote memorisation of factual knowledge and a lack of emphasis on conceptual learning or higher order learning have resulted in a surface approach to
learning. Additionally, student learning was passive and consisted of listening to lectures, taking notes, and reproducing memorised information in exams.

Corruption in education is another major challenge for tertiary teaching and learning in Vietnam (14/2005/NQ-CP: Chinh phu, 2005; McCornac, 2008). More broadly, corruption still plagues the Vietnamese economy, as indicated by the 2007 Transparency International ranking of Vietnam at a low 2.6 on a scale of one (most) to ten (least) corrupt. While there are few statistics and studies on corruption in Vietnamese HE, McCornac (2008) conducted an informal survey-questionnaire with university undergraduates, graduates, teachers, and administrators, and found that “corruptive practices are the norm rather than the exception” (p. 26). More than 95 per cent of students in McCornac’s study reported that they had cheated at least once in a class and had observed situations of cheating by other students, and that the acceptance of bribes was endemic among academic staff. Teachers and administrators interviewed in his study admitted receiving payments to give higher grades or to assist or guarantee a student’s admission to a university.

Faced with the challenges outlined above, it is evident that the Vietnamese HE system is in need of serious reform to revitalise and improve the quality of its education provision.

**Government’s attempt at teaching quality improvement**

The government’s commitment to undertaking a profound system renewal, both in quantitative and qualitative terms, to meet the demands of industrialisation, modernisation, global economic integration and society’s demand for learning opportunities was shown through HERA, which aimed to “have a higher education system that is advanced by international standards, highly competitive, and appropriate to the socialist-oriented market mechanism” (14/2005/NQ-CP: Chinh
HERA further identified and specified objectives for the system. These included an increase in higher education enrolment to reach 450 students per 10,000 population by 2020, 40 per cent of whom were to be enrolled in non-public HEIs, and the training of a sufficient number of staff and managers with strong ethics, sound technical qualifications, and management skills. HERA further specified the establishment and development of a quality assurance mechanism for HEIs.

Critically, the Government detailed its ambitious reforms to “reorganise public HEIs by conferring on them legal autonomy in their operations, giving them the right to decide and be responsible for training, research, human resource management and budget planning” (14/2005/NQ-CP: Chinh phu, 2005, p. 3).

To rebuild and modernise Vietnam’s higher education system, a number of Strategic Plans were introduced, one of which was the designation of 14 “key” public universities (1269/CP-KG: Chinh phu, 2004) to form the core of a renovated higher education system. These universities were to receive additional assistance to improve quality and develop increased capacity to undertake research. In addition, they were given the autonomy to decide on the development of financial resources. Recently, two more public universities were added to the list, making a current total of 16 key universities (177/TTg-KG: Chinh phu, 2008; 1136/TTg-KGVX: Chinh phu, 2011). The designation of key universities has indicated a policy of incrementalism in the bid to reform the HE system, acknowledging that the government’s limited resources might best be utilised if channelled to selected institutions. However, Smith and Nguyen (2010) cautioned that the government was simply doing too much and too soon with its HE system, without a robust strategic planning progress to guide its decisions and activities.
Another attempt to improve the quality of teaching and learning in HE was the introduction of a quality assurance mechanism. In early 2001, some leading universities in Vietnam agreed to participate in an evaluation based on nine subject categories containing a total of 43 evaluation criteria (P. N. Nguyen & McDonald, 2001). At the end of 2004, MOET promulgated the Provisional Regulation on Accreditation of Higher Education Institutions in which 10 standards (53 criteria) were proposed. Twenty universities (18 public and 2 non-public) were selected to participate in the scheme. On the 1st November 2007, after a three-year trial and numerous consultations with stakeholders, a Decision on the Standard of Quality for HEIs was officially signed. According to this Decision (MOET, 2007b), an institution would be granted a Certificate of Accreditation if it met a minimum of 80 per cent of the evaluation criteria. In addition, on the basis of an institutional self-assessment report and an audit report, the National Council for Accreditation (NCA) had responsibility for endorsing an institution’s Certificate of Accreditation. The promulgation of the Standard of Quality for HEIs in Vietnam and the legislative requirement that all HEIs in Vietnam be accredited was welcomed, and seen as vital to improve the quality of tertiary teaching and learning (MOET, 2009). However, concerns have been raised in relation to the focus on input in the Standard (K. D. Nguyen, Oliver, & Priddy, 2009), and to the overriding framework of a teacher-centred pedagogical approach underpinning of the criteria in the Standard (D. N. Tran, Nguyen, & Nguyen, 2011).

The fact that the Standard required the use of the Student Evaluation of Teaching (SET) as an instrument to evaluate teaching has made the SET become compulsory in HEIs in Vietnam. Details concerning the use of SETs are provided in the next section.
Chapter 2

Context of the Study

The Use of the Student Evaluation of Teaching Instrument in HEIs in Vietnam

In Vietnam, obtaining student feedback about the quality of teaching started in the late 1990s. SETs were first trialed and implemented in some non-public institutions in Vietnam as a response to students’ needs in the area of the quality of teaching offered. Public HEIs, on the other hand, appeared to be “less concerned with responding to student needs” (World Bank, 2008, p. 39). Evidence suggested that non-public institutions in Vietnam operating as businesses tended to view students as customers, who pay for their service. As discussed earlier, the Presidents of non-public institutions are accountable to the stakeholders for the budget of the institution. It is likely that in this context the Presidents demand that academic staff be accountable for the quality of teaching they deliver and monitor it through the use of instruments such as the SET. In non-public institutions, non-tenured academic staff may make up half of the total staff (MOET, 2005), and having student feedback on teaching serves as one important source of information for the renewal of their employment contract.

In 2008 MOET required the use of the SET in all HEIs in Vietnam by promulgating regulation No 1276/BGDDT-NB dated on 20th February. In the same year, the interim Guideline on the organisation and collection of student feedback on university teacher’s teaching practices was introduced by MOET. In 2009 it was estimated the number of HEIs to use SETs was 30 per cent of the total HEIs in Vietnam. In May 2010 MOET revised the Guideline and officially promulgated a Directive entitled Guideline on the collection of student feedback on teaching, herein after referred to as Guideline on SETs, which detailed the content of SETs and the process of implementation of the instrument. The Guideline stated that all HEIs in Vietnam were obligated to implement the SETs, and the processes to be used for
implementation of the SET were to be examined by MOET. In the context of MOET’s imposed execution of the SETs, typically, the development and the use of the SET in each institution is carried out by the management team, involving the President, the Vice-President in charge of teaching and learning, and the Director of the Quality Assurance Office or Academic Affairs.

The existence of an instrument to measure teaching in all HEIs in Vietnam suggests that the concept of valuing students as important partners in teaching and learning processes began to make inroads into the thinking of MOET leaders and consequently, the leaders of HEIs in Vietnam. There was a shift in the views about the use of the SET from viewing it as unnecessary to viewing it a part of the quality assurance process. It is, therefore, crucial to explore the assumptions underpinning teaching and learning in the Guideline, as well as to investigate the practice of developing and using the SET in HEIs in Vietnam, without which radical reform to change the current state of teaching and learning would be difficult.

**Chapter Summary**

In the 20 years since đổi mới, the higher education system in Vietnam has expanded in both scale and scope, driven strongly by rapid socio-economic development and the labour market demand for higher education (Sheridan, 2010). Despite this expansion, the system is struggling to improve the quality of higher education. Several attempts to improve the system have been delivered by the government through the provision of both legislative and regulatory frameworks, such as promulgation of the Standard of Quality for HEIs and the Guideline for SETs. However, the question of the extent to which these attempts can create a pedagogical paradigm shift from essentially teacher-centred to student-centred teaching remains unanswered. To investigate this question, a deep understanding of
the dominant views about teaching implicit in the Guideline, and the views held by university administrators and teachers in HEIs in Vietnam becomes essential.

In the next chapter, a review of literature on the conceptualisation of teaching and a critical look at the assumptions about teaching implicit in the design of the SET instrument is presented.
CHAPTER 3  LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

The aim of the study presented in this thesis is twofold: first, to investigate how teaching is perceived by various stakeholders including university administrators and teachers; and second, to examine how teaching is evaluated particularly through Student Evaluation of Teaching (SET). The main interest in exploring these questions was in their implications for institutional approaches to improve the quality of teaching and learning through a teaching evaluation system. Failure to fully understand the views of teaching underpinning teaching evaluation system has been seen as a major obstacle in teaching improvement efforts (Barrie et al., 2008; Edström, 2008).

As the study focused on perceptions of teaching and its evaluation in tertiary settings, research studies selected in this review were drawn largely from the tertiary context, together with some which had been conducted in school settings because of their conceptual relevance to the study. In addition, given the limited number of research studies on tertiary teaching and learning in Vietnam, a selection of studies on teaching and learning in HE conducted in several other Asian countries, namely, Hong Kong, China, and Japan, were also included in this review.

To provide a strong conceptual framework within which the main research question could be answered, two bodies of literature relevant to the present study are critically reviewed in this chapter. The first body of literature included studies of the way in which teaching was conceptualised by university teachers (e.g., Akerlind, 2004; Carnell, 2007; Gao & Watkins, 2002; Hativa & Goodyear, 2002b; Kember, 1997; Kember & Kwan, 2000; Martin, Prosser, Trigwell, Ramsden, & Benjamin,
Chapter 3

Literature Review


The chapter begins with a review of the literature pertaining to the conceptualisation of teaching by university teachers and administrators. This is followed by a critical examination of studies on issues inherent to the purpose of the SET and to the reliability and validity of the instrument. The chapter ends with a synthesis of teaching evaluation approaches, based on Biggs’ 3P model of teaching and learning.

University Teachers’ and Administrators’ Conceptions of Teaching

Conceptions and perceptions of teaching defined

Despite the considerable number of studies on how a teacher thinks about teaching and learning, terms to capture these phenomena were loosely used, included “attitudes, values, judgments, opinions, ideology, perceptions, conceptions, disposition, implicit theories, or explicit theories” (Pajares, 1992, p. 309). “Conception” was the commonly used term to delineate a teacher’s thinking about teaching and learning (Kember, 1997). Thompson (1992) defined “conception” as “a more general mental structure, encompassing beliefs, meanings, concepts, propositions, rules, mental images, preferences, and the like” (p. 130). While Thompson’s definition has encapsulated elements of conception, Pratt’s (1992)
definition has offered a clarification of the relationship between “conception” and personal interpretations and actions:

[conception refers to] specific meanings attached to phenomena which then mediate our response to situations involving those phenomena. We form conceptions of virtually every aspect of our perceived world… In effect, we view the world through the lenses of our conceptions, interpreting and acting in accordance with our understanding of the world. Thus, our conceptions significantly influence our perception and interpretation of events, people, and phenomena surrounding us (p. 204).

The relationship among “beliefs”, “conceptions”, and “perceptions” is interwoven: “beliefs” are the central core element of “conceptions” because “beliefs” are seen as individuals’ taken-for-granted assumptions which assist them to define and understand the world and themselves (Pajares, 1992). The “conceptions” of an individual, in turn, influence and drive his/her “perceptions”. Perceptions of teaching can be defined as the mental images attached to teaching, and these perceptions are influenced by conceptions of teaching. Examining individuals’ perceptions of teaching helps to understand their conceptions of teaching, and subsequently their beliefs about teaching.

Conceptions/perceptions of teaching: A preliminary examination

Research into how teachers conceptualise teaching started to emerge in the 1980s and early 1990s with Fox’s (1983) study on “personal theories of teaching” to be the first of this type. This line of research was developed alongside the emerging interest in student learning, most noticeably in seminal study by Marton and Saljo (1976a, 1976b; 1997), which examined how students approached studying and their conceptions of learning. The literature pertaining to how teachers conceive of
teaching and how they approach teaching is extensive (Akerlind, 2004; Carnell, 2007; Gao & Watkins, 2002; Kember, 1997; Kember & Kwan, 2000; Martin et al., 2000; Postareff & Lindblom-Ylänne, 2008; Pratt, 1992; Samuelowicz & Bain, 1992, 2001; Trigwell & Prosser, 1996a; Trigwell et al., 1994).

One of the significant contributions of the literature noted above is that teachers’ teaching practices were found to be affected by their educational beliefs, conceptions, and perceptions (Hativa & Goodyear, 2002b; Kember, 1997). Studies by researchers such as Trigwell and Prosser (1996b) and Kember and Kwan (2000) have shown the logical relationship between teachers’ conceptions of teaching and their teaching approaches. In Trigwell & Prosser’s study (1996b), for example, the intentions, and teaching practices of 24 university science lecturers teaching a first year degree course were specifically analysed. They found evidence that teachers with what they termed “conceptual change” intentions about teaching often employed student-focused teaching strategies, whereas teachers with “information transfer” teaching intentions tended to adopt teacher-focused teaching strategies. Findings from other studies echoed the relationship between teachers’ attitudes to teaching and their teaching performance (Martin et al., 2000), or between teachers’ beliefs about teaching and their teaching practices (Samuelowicz & Bain, 2001).

Although studies on university teachers’ conceptions/ perceptions related to teaching and student learning were extensive, particularly during the 1990s, it is worth noting that only a very limited number of studies have explored the phenomenon from the perspective of the university administrators. Using key words such as “administrators’ perceptions of teaching”, “administrators’ views about teaching”, or “administrators’ beliefs about teaching”, a database search conducted late 2008 and again in 2011, using the Google Scholar database as well as
EBSCOHost online research database resulted in seven hits. However, all studies found were conducted in primary and secondary school setting, not in higher education.

Studies investigating the ways in which administrators think about teaching are few in number. There are several studies that explore the ways in which administrators perceive teaching-related policies and procedures (e.g., Neumann, 1993; O’Meara, 2005; Williams & Rhodes, 2002). For example, Neumann (1993) conducted a qualitative study, interviewing 33 university academic administrators in Australian universities, to identify the differences in their views about “research” and “scholarship”. Although “scholarship” was defined in Neumann’s study to encompass teaching, the study did not address the question of how teaching was perceived by administrators. Furthermore, the study did not address the reflection of such perceptions in the teaching evaluation system. In another study undertaken by O’Meara (2005), university administrators’ perceptions of reward structures, including reward for teaching, were explored. O’Meara’s study, therefore, was exclusively focused on the shift in academic promotion policies intended to give more weight to teaching as a result of Boyer’s (1990) classification of scholarship.

Given the lack of research into administrators’ perceptions of teaching in the literature, and the fact that administrators, by and large, have participated in teaching activities, in this study, dimensions used to delineate teachers’ conceptions of teaching are reviewed and adopted to investigate university administrators’ perceptions of teaching. A theoretical framework for the interpretation of administrators’ thinking about teaching was thereby provided.
Research into teachers’ conceptions of teaching

The extensive research into ways in which teachers think about teaching, as referred above, has resulted in numerous labels describing teachers’ conceptions of teaching. Table 3.1 summarises all the available published empirical studies using phenomenographic and “beliefs” framework with their category descriptions, labels of which were kept the same as in the original studies. Each category in Table 3.1 represented a particular way of describing teachers’ thinking about teaching. Categories of teachers’ conceptions of teaching identified in these studies were placed on a continuum from teacher-centred, viewing teaching as imparting and presenting information, to student-centred, viewing teaching as assisting students to change their conceptions of discipline-specific concepts or their views of the world (for a review, see Kember, 1997). For example, findings from a phenomenographic study by Trigwell et al. (1994) indicated six different ways in which 24 lecturers from Physics and Chemistry departments conceived teaching, namely, (i) transmitting concepts of the syllabus, (ii) transmitting the teachers’ knowledge, (iii) helping students to acquire concepts of the syllabus, (iv) helping students to acquire teachers’ knowledge, (v) helping students to develop conceptions, and (vi) helping students to change conceptions. Samuelowicz and Bain (1992, 2001), using a “beliefs” framework identified five orientations to teaching held by 39 academics from a wide range of disciplines in two universities, namely, imparting knowledge, transmitting structured knowledge, facilitating understanding, changing students’ conceptions, and supporting students’ learning.
Table 3.1

Ways of Conceptualising Tertiary Teaching (Studies Using Phenomenographic and Qualitative Methods)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Studies</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Research focus</th>
<th>Teacher-centred</th>
<th>Student-centred</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fox (1983)</td>
<td>Australia</td>
<td>“Conceptual model for thinking about the process of teaching and learning” (p. 151)</td>
<td>Transfer</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dall Alba (1991) Phenomenography</td>
<td>Australia</td>
<td>“Teachers’ conceptions or ways of understanding teaching” (p. 293)</td>
<td>Presenting information</td>
<td>Connecting theories to practice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Martin and Bella (1991) Phenomenography</td>
<td>Australia</td>
<td>“How participants initially conceptualised teaching” (p. 298)</td>
<td>Presenting information</td>
<td>Encouraging active learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Samuelowicz and Bain (1992)</td>
<td>UK</td>
<td>“Discover, describe and systematise the direct experience of teaching as perceived, experienced and reported by academic teachers” (p. 97)</td>
<td>Imparting information</td>
<td>Transmitting knowledge Facilitating understanding</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Beliefs” framework</td>
<td>Australia</td>
<td></td>
<td>Changing students’ conceptions</td>
<td>Supporting students’ learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pratt (1992)</td>
<td>Canada, Hong Kong, US / China</td>
<td>“Conceptions of teaching based upon content, learners, teachers, ideals and context” (p. 205)</td>
<td>Modelling ways of being Facilitating the intellect</td>
<td>Facilitating personal agency</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trigwell, Prosser and Taylor</td>
<td>Australia</td>
<td>“investigates their approaches to teaching and attempts to identify the</td>
<td>Transmitting concepts Help students develop concepts Help students</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Helping students acquire</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Findings/Category descriptions
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Studies</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Research focus</th>
<th>Findings/Category descriptions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(1994) Phenomenography</td>
<td></td>
<td>intentions associated with strategies described by the teacher” (p. 76)</td>
<td>Teacher-centred: conceptions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gow and Kember (1993)</td>
<td>Hong Kong</td>
<td>“Lecturer’s conception of teaching” (p. 21)</td>
<td>Student-centred: change concepts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Beliefs” framework</td>
<td></td>
<td>Knowledge transmission</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kember (1997)</td>
<td></td>
<td>Synthesis of literature</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Akerlind (2004) Phenomenography</td>
<td>Australia</td>
<td>“To investigate variation in the underlying meaning of or ways of experience being a university teacher” (p. 364)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carnell (2007)</td>
<td>UK</td>
<td>“Examines conceptions of effective teaching, analyses their views of characteristics of effective teaching” (p. 27)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Postareff and Lindblom-Ylanne (2008)</td>
<td>Finland</td>
<td>“To capture the variation in teachers’ descriptions of their teaching” (p. 111)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Although the existing research summarised in Table 3.1 has produced rich and insightful information about ways in which teachers think about teaching, these studies have offered limited clarification of the differentiated conceptual categories of teaching found across the studies. While labels of the categories seemed to bear similar connotations, the descriptions of these categories differed. For example, when the two categories of “bringing about conceptual change” identified in Dall Alba’s (1991) study and “changing students’ conceptions” in Samuelowicz and Bain’s (1992) study (see Table 3.1) were compared, it appeared at the outset that they were based on a similar way of understanding teaching. However, there were differences among them. The former described teaching as “… concerned with continually identifying and building on the different ways in which student interpret or understand the content” (p. 295). The latter, however, described teaching in the following terms: “teaching aims to change students’ conceptions from naïve forms to ones more in line with those experts and the conceptual framework of a discipline” (p. 99). From the descriptions, while the purpose of teaching described in these categories and perceived to be almost identical, the expectations required of students were different.

Consequently, confusion occurred as there was no explicit distinction between which conceptions of teaching underpinned teacher-centred, and which ones underpinned student-centred teaching. A line of argument that supported such distinction came from studies on the relationship between teachers’ conceptions of teaching and students’ approaches to learning. Gow and Kember (1993) examined the relationship between the quality of learning experienced by students and their teachers’ conceptions of teaching at several departments of a polytechnic institution in Hong Kong. They found that in departments where the predominant orientation was towards “knowledge transmission”, the students’ use of a deep approach to learning was likely to decline through the period of the course of study. On the other
hand, in departments with a propensity towards “learning facilitation”, students were
discouraged from using a surface approach to learning (Gow & Kember, 1993, p.
30). Similarly, Trigwell, Prosser and Waterhouse (1999) concluded that in classes
where teachers describe their approach to teaching as having a focus on transmitting
knowledge, students were more likely to report their adoption of a surface approach
to learning. By contrast, in the classes where students reported adopting significantly
deeper approaches to learning, teaching staff reported adopting approaches to
teaching that were more oriented towards students and to changing students’
conceptions. As deep approaches to learning are likely to lead to better quality
learning outcomes (Marton, Hounsell, & Entwistle, 1984; Marton & Saljo, 1997), it
is vital for the improvement of teaching and learning quality if the teachers conceive
teaching as student-centred (Ramsden, 2003).

Kember (1997) attempted to propose a framework of teachers’ conceptions of
teaching. In his review of 13 studies in the field, categories of teachers’ conceptions
of teaching were classified, and placed under two broad orientations, a teacher-
centred one and a student-centred one. The former consisted of two conceptions of
teaching, labelled “imparting information” and “transmitting structured knowledge”,
the latter consisted of two other conceptions of teaching, labelled “facilitating
understanding” and “conceptual change”. Kember (1997) argued that there was an
intermediate category, described as “teacher-student interaction”, bridging the two
broad orientations. However, no distinction was provided in Kember’s study as to
whether his proposed intermediate category of “teacher-student interaction” could be
seen as teacher-centred or student-centred conceptual category, or whether the
distinction depended on the nature the interaction (Samuelowicz & Bain, 2001,
original emphasis).
Dimensions to delimit perceptions/conceptions of teaching

Given the shared assumptions that teaching practices are associated with conceptions of teaching (Hativa & Goodyear, 2002a; Ramsden, 1992) and given the key focus of the present study was on the identification of ways in which teaching is perceived, it would be useful to consider a “framework” (Samuelowicz & Bain, 1992, 2001) for the delineation of conceptions of teaching. Literature has indicated that such frameworks have been explicitly or implicitly employed across various studies in order to delimit conceptions of teaching held by university teachers. These framework varied from a framework with two dimensions (e.g., Fox, 1983), to frameworks with nine dimensions (e.g., Samuelowicz & Bain, 2001). In reviewing available frameworks in the literature, there was a deliberate search for the one with broadly constructed dimensions in order to capture the differences among and between categories of conceptions of teaching.

It is noticeable that the organising framework for the demarcation of university teachers’ conceptions of teaching tended to emphasise what the teacher does. Fox (1983), for example, used a framework of two dimensions, that is, (i) focus of teaching and (ii) teacher’s and student’s roles, to delineate “theories of teaching”. Based on this framework, Fox contrasted “simple” theories of teaching with “developed” theories of teaching. The former, consisting of what he termed as “transfer” and “shaping”, were concerned with teacher’s roles as transfers of knowledge where teaching focus was on the delivery of the content of academic subjects. The latter, consisting of what he labelled as “travelling” and “growing”, were concerned with the development of the students. However, Fox (1983) failed to explain the differences in terms of student learning outcomes between “growing” and “travelling”, and why the former was considered to be superior than the latter.
Conceptual categories of teaching identified in Fox’s study may have been better differentiated if the framework had included the dimension of teachers’ expectations of learning outcomes.

Similarly, Postareff and Linblom-Ylanne (2008) argued that variations in conceptions of teaching could be discerned when considering teaching process, learning environment, conceptions of learning, and pedagogical development. Their two broad orientations to teaching were “learning-focused” and “content-focused”, and were distinguished by their positioning on the dimension of “what steers teachers’ actions” (p. 118). From interviews with 71 university teachers, it is argued in their study that if the purpose was to improve student learning, teachers were likely to take students’ previous knowledge and skills, as well as their viewpoints into account. On the other hand, when the purpose of teaching was characterised as to get through the course by following an exact plan, teachers were more likely to adopt a content-focused approach to teaching. Although Postareff and Linblom-Ylanne (2008) have differentiated variations of conceptions of teaching on the basis of the aims of teaching and the teaching process, they have not consider the outcomes of learning as a result of teaching.

The demarcation of teachers’ conceptions of teaching solely on what the teacher does, as in the abovementioned studies, runs the risk of viewing teaching as an end in itself. Shuell (1986, p. 429) argued “what the student does is more important in determining what is learned than what the teacher does”. Teaching or the conceptualisation of teaching, cannot and should not be devoid of consideration of the central role of the students and their learning. Thus, the dimension of what students have learnt as a result of teaching needs to be considered in the delimitation of teachers’ conceptions of teaching.
Table 3.2 summarises various dimensions used in published qualitative studies exploring conceptions of teaching, which were then subsumed under dimensions of (i) expected learning outcomes, and (ii) teachers’ and students’ roles. The former encompasses teachers’ thinking about what is desired as learning outcomes (Samuelowicz & Bain, 1992, 2001), while the latter portrays the responsibilities and interaction of the teacher and the student in the teaching and learning process.

In relation to the first dimension of expected learning outcomes, there were other subsumed dimensions, such as “types of understanding” (Dall Alba, 1991) or “aims of education/teaching” (Gow & Kember, 1993). Gow and Kember, for example, found that the difference between teaching as “training for specific professional jobs” and teaching as “developing generic critical thinking skills” was based on the differences surrounding the aims of education/teaching. Since one particular aim of teaching appeared to be derived from a particular expectation of learning outcomes, this distinction could be interpreted as the difference between the learning outcomes arising from (i) an expectation that students will be prepared for specific professional jobs, and (ii) an expectation that students will develop generic thinking skills. Gow and Kember, however, failed to make any connections between the aims of teaching and the outcomes of learning for students.
### Table 3.2

**Dimensions of Expected Learning Outcomes, and Teacher’s and Students’ Roles and Their Subsumed Dimensions**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dimensions</th>
<th>Subsumed dimensions</th>
<th>Descriptors</th>
<th>Studies</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Expected learning outcomes</td>
<td>Recall of atomised information vs change students’ ways of thinking</td>
<td>Samuelowicz and Bain (1992)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(ii) aims of education/teaching</td>
<td>Training for specific professional jobs vs developing generic critical thinking</td>
<td>Gow and Kember (1993)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(iii) type of understanding</td>
<td>Developing capacity to be an expert vs developing understanding of concepts or principles and their interrelations</td>
<td>Dall Alba (1991)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(iv) purpose of teaching</td>
<td>Focusing on content vs focusing on facilitating of students’ learning</td>
<td>Postareff and Linblom-Ylanne (2008)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher’ and students’ roles</td>
<td>Presenter-recipients with one way communication vs facilitator in two-way communication</td>
<td>Fox (1983), Pratt (1992), Prosser et al., (1994)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(i) directionality of teaching</td>
<td>One-way communication to transmit information vs two-way for the negotiation of teaching</td>
<td>Samuleowicz and Bain (1992)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(ii) agent responsible for constructing knowledge</td>
<td>Teacher responsibilities vs students’ responsibilities</td>
<td>Martin and Balla (1991)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The second dimension of teacher’ and students’ roles was common to almost all existing frameworks (see Table 3.2). Variants of this dimension were “directionality of teaching” proposed by Samuelowicz and Bain (2001) or “agent initiating learning” by Fox (1983). When teachers’ roles were defined as the responsibilities teachers have about what to teach and how to teach it, the dimension of teachers’ and students’ roles comprised not only the nature of teacher-student interaction, but also the purpose of this interaction: different ways of interacting with students were underpinned by different purposes for this interaction.

In the present study, based on two dimensions of (i) expected learning outcomes and (ii) teachers’ and students’ roles, categories describing how teachers conceptualise teaching in all published empirical qualitative studies in HE are reconceptualised. The conceptions identified in these studies are classified into teacher-centred conceptual categories, and student-centred conceptual categories (Table 3.3). Details of these categories are further described in the next section.

Table 3.3
Reconceptualisation of Teaching

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dimensions</th>
<th>Teacher-centred categories</th>
<th>Student-centred categories</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Imparting information</td>
<td>Facilitating critical thinking</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expected learning outcomes</td>
<td>To recall information</td>
<td>To reorganise and modify knowledge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher’ and students’ roles</td>
<td>Presenter-passive recipients</td>
<td>Presenter-active recipients</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Teacher-centred conceptual categories

**Teaching as imparting information**

In the first sub-category, there is an expectation held by the teachers that students recall information (see Table 3.3). Learning is viewed as knowledge accumulation (Akerlind, 2004; Boldt, 1998; Dall Alba, 1991; Gao & Watkins, 2002) and “unsuccessful learning is seen to be the result of poorly motivated, unintelligent, lazy and forgetful students” (Fox, 1983, p. 153). The main directional flow in teaching and learning comes from the teachers’ presage factors, suggested by Biggs (1993a), such as personality, content knowledge, and the presentation of materials. Teachers holding this conception are often passionate about their subject and “spend a great deal of time preparing their materials and making sure that it is accurate and up-to-date” (Fox, 1983, p. 152). Concerns for teachers in this category are neither with learning nor knowledge per se, but with the “means by which content could be delivered and goals achieved most efficiently” (Pratt, 1992, p. 221). Thus, students are expected to retrieve relevant knowledge to “give-it-back” to the teacher. It can be purely recall of pieces of information or reproduction of specified models presented by the teacher.

**Teaching as transmitting understandings**

In the second sub-category of teacher-centred categories, the outcomes of learning expected of the students are to reproduce understanding (Fox, 1983; Samuelowicz & Bain, 1992, 2001), rather than simply recall information for examinations. Teachers holding this conception of teaching believe that students’ roles are to absorb, to understand and interpret knowledge, but not to construct their own knowledge. As a result, in these teaching approaches, teachers emphasise the way material is structured, how it is put together, and they believe that if material is
well-structured, students can grasp the knowledge easily, resulting to the success of their learning (Samuelowicz, 1999). Students are expected to reproduce and apply standard frameworks taught in the course to solve standard problems in the examinations and/or latter in their professional practice.

**Student-centred conceptual categories**

*Teaching as facilitating critical thinking*

The first sub-category of student-centred conceptual categories (see Table 3.3), that is, facilitating critical thinking, is used to describe teachers who encourage students to integrate, reorganise and modify what they have learnt, to construct their knowledge in meaningful ways, and to solve new or unseen problems. The process of learning is seen as a “process of invention … it means that if you’re [students] really going to learn something, then you have to invent it for yourself” (p. 222) (quoted in Prosser, Trigwell, & Taylor, 1994). Students are expected to think for themselves, to make their own decisions in terms of setting up priorities and values that are appropriate to a situation. The teacher’s role is perceived to be that of a facilitator, assisting students in understanding the most acceptable solution to a problem (Samuelowicz & Bain, 1992, 2001).

*Teaching as enabling conceptual change*

Teachers adhering to the second sub-category of student-centred categories, that is, enabling conceptual change, believe that learning is about changing students’ thinking, attitudes and beliefs. Teaching goes beyond helping students to understand and to analyse a phenomenon to a position of changing a student’s way of perceiving the world. For these teachers, learning outcomes equate with the student’s ability to make and justify professional decisions, to be critical and innovative in the way they
think (Samuelowicz, 1999), to arrive at their own conclusions and to develop a personal and ethical position on key issues (Martin et al., 2000). Stated differently, students are expected to be challenged with differing points of view including their own in order to reconstruct their knowledge in a meaningful and purposeful way.

**Teacher-centred vs student-centred conceptions of teaching**

Explicitly differentiating between teacher-centred conceptual categories and student-centred conceptual categories facilitates the discussion about which conceptions of teaching should be promoted in order to bring about high quality in student learning. Pratt (1992, 1998) contended that no conceptions of teaching were better than others. He argued that each conception has its roots in different philosophies and epistemologies that were consonant with particular people, with particular purposes and in a given context. However, growing numbers of research studies have suggested the opposite. Ramsden (2003) contended that teacher-centred conceptual categories were seen as incomplete since they represented “narrow visions for teaching”. Student-centred categories, on the other hand, were seen as more “desirable” (McKenzie, 1996), more “sophisticated” (Akerlind, 2004; Entwistle & Walker, 2002; Fox, 1983; Pratt, 1992), and more likely to result better quality of student learning outcomes (Biggs & Tang, 2007; Ramsden, 1992).

Proponents of constructivism, underpinned by the belief that human beings construct and share meanings, concepts, and models to make sense of their experience, and then test and reconstruct these meanings in the light of new experience (Schwandt, 2000), maintain that student-centred conceptions of teaching are superior to teacher-centred (Biggs & Tang, 2007; Ramsden, 1992). As presented in the reconceptualisation of teaching section above, teacher-centred conceptions of teaching are based on the belief that knowledge is external to the students; teachers,
therefore, are assumed to have responsibility for passing on information and knowledge to the students. In contrast, student-centred conceptions of teaching are based on the belief that knowledge is internal to students; teachers, therefore, are assumed to have responsibility to create situations that help students to construct their knowledge, to develop critical thinking, and change students’ way of thinking.

Undeniably, to make radical shift from “instruction paradigm” to “learning paradigm” (Barr & Tagg, 1995), student-centred, rather than teacher-centred, conceptions of teaching are needed.

Literature concerning university teachers’ conceptions of teaching, critically examined in the above sections, has suggested a framework that can be used for the interpretation of university administrators’ views about teaching. In the next section, studies of teaching evaluations, in particular the Student Evaluation of Teaching instrument, are examined.

**Student Evaluation of Teaching**

Student Evaluation of Teaching (SET), is one of the few issues within higher education academia, which is well-researched, well-documented, and long debated. Since the first published article on student rating of instruction nearly 90 years ago (Remmers & Brandenburg, 1927, cited in Smalzried & Remmers, 1943), there has been an explosion of research on SETs, with approximately 2000 publications and presentations written on the topic during the period from 1960 to 1990 alone (Seldin, 1999). Parallel to the growing interest in researching SETs, the application of SETs has become almost universal. By the 1990s, four of five campuses in the United States used some sort of SETs (Seldin, 1993). The ubiquity of using SETs is inherent in controversies about whether or not students were qualified to rate their instructors, whether the instrument reliable and valid for the purpose it was intended for.
SETs: The cases for and against

Advocates for the inclusion of SETs in teaching evaluation systems have indicated that students could accurately judge what or how much they have learned as a result of teaching (Arreola, 2007; Franklin & Theall, 2002; Hativa, 1996; Theall, 2010). Indeed, students, unlike colleagues or administrators who observe an individual teacher’s teaching practice once or twice during a semester, have long-term exposure to the teaching of an individual teacher, spending a full semester observing and interacting with the teachers. No one else is as qualified to report on what transpired during the semester. Another argument for the inclusion of students in the teaching evaluation system is from consumerism (Darwin, 2010). Metaphorically, Seldin (1993) described students as customers who are well aware of whether or not they enjoy the services or goods on offer, “the opinion of those who eat the dinner should be considered if we want to know how it tastes”. With the expansion of fee-paying education, in the developed countries as well as in the developing countries, students deserve to be in the position of having a voice with regard to the education they receive. Advocates of SETs have pointed also to the “teachers as learners” movement (Shulman & Sherin, 2004), in which teachers are encouraged to learn about and reflect on their own teaching through the feedback they receive on their performance. When the purpose of SETs is to improve teaching, students provide much needed feedback for the teachers to work with (Abrami, d'Apollonia, & Rosenfield, 2007; McKeachie, 1997; Roche & Marsh, 2000).

On the other hand, researchers, such as Hildebrand (1972) and Trout (1997) argued that students were not qualified to rate any aspect of teaching. Opposition to the inclusion of students in teaching evaluations came early in 1972 when Hildebrand listed 23 objections to the use of SETs. This was followed by the “Dr
Fox” study (Ware & Williams, 1975), in which a negative correlation between student ratings and student achievement was found. Trout (1997) also argued that SETs would not lead to the improvement of teaching as many of the aptitudes evaluated can only be inherent rather than acquired. However, a review of extensive empirical research has demonstrated that this case is not supported. For example, a conclusion drawn from extensive reviews of SETs was that “student ratings are clearly multi-dimensional, quite reliable, reasonably valid, relatively uncontaminated by many variables often seen as sources of bias, and are seen to be useful by students, faculty, and administrators” (Marsh, 1987, p. 369). In other words, SETs can be and should be used as one important source in teaching evaluation processes.

**Issues related to the purpose of SETs**

Identifying the purpose for evaluating teaching requires a clearly articulated policy making framework regarding the sources of information, the foci of the evaluation, and the ways of collecting and interpreting results (Carrell & West, 2010; Lally & Myhill, 1994). Generally, teaching evaluation processes have been both summative and formative in form, and improvement and accountability directed in purposes (Darling-Hammond, Wise, & Pease, 1983; Darwin, 2010; Murray, 1997). The process of gathering information about teaching to review, to explore, or to improve is considered as formative evaluation, and when the purpose is to make decisions about merit, promotion, or tenure, it is regarded as summative evaluation (Abrami et al., 2007; Arreola, 2007; Carrell & West, 2010; Marsh, 1987; Pounder, 2007).

The coexistence of competing purposes in using SETs (i.e., to improve teaching, and to guarantee teaching quality) has resulted in tensions, confusion, even hostility towards SETs (e.g., Barrie, 2001; Burden, 2010). Barrie (2001) argued that
the data collected from SETs often focused on weaknesses in teaching rather than strengths if the purpose is to improve the quality of teaching. Consequently, improvement-directed SETs are designed largely to maximise identification of the weaknesses in teaching to be eliminated, and the result of such highly contextualised evaluation is confidential to the individual teacher. In contrast, when teachers wish to gather data to demonstrate their strengths, they perceive SETs as a judge of their teaching quality. Data collected for these administrative purposes is likely to be open to a third party which might provoke fear, frustration and hostility from the teachers. Empirical evidence from several studies supported Barrie’s assertions. One of these was Crumbley and Reichelt’s (2009) study, which found summative SETs has led to dysfunctional behaviours of the teachers, such as reducing grading standards and course content to improve SET scores.

Much of the discussion on whether the duality of both purposes should be fulfilled separately or co-jointly has given focus to teaching, rather than student learning. In other words, SETs were debated in terms of prove-improve functions for teaching, but not in terms of the enhancement for the quality of learning for students. The essential purpose of teaching evaluation for student learning appeared to be ignored in this debate (Clayson, 2009; Saroyan & Amundsen, 2001; Theall, 2010).

**Issues related to construct validity of SETs**

The literature on teaching evaluation is replete with studies concerning the reliability and validity of SETs, notably a set of review articles published in *The American Psychologist* in 1997. The contentious issue of construct validity, that is, the degree to which student ratings accurately measure the construct of teaching effectiveness, attracted considerable attention. Earlier research on SETs, operationalising teaching as series of actions and teaching behaviours, provided
empirical evidence both for (P. A. Cohen, 1981; Feldman, 1989; Marsh, 1984, 2007) and against (Aleamoni, 1981; Dowell & Neal, 1983; McNatt, 2010) the validity of SETs. Recent studies, underpinned by constructivist theories of teaching and learning, challenged the construct of teaching effectiveness in SET development, and thus, challenged SET validity (Carrell & West, 2010; Galbraith et al., 2011; Kember & Leung, 2009; Pounder, 2007; Romainville, 1999; Schuck et al., 2008; Zabaleta, 2007).

When teaching is defined as a series of actions and behaviours (Shulman, 1987), SET items are designed to measure overt teaching behaviours, presumably, characteristics of effective teaching. From this perspective, empirical evidence to support the claim that SETs were reliable and valid indicator of effective teaching was found. Cohen (1981) reported on a meta-analysis of 41 independent studies, and stated that students’ performance (i.e., tests and grades) correlated positively (.43) with overall teacher ratings. Recent reviews of research on SETs continued to indicate the presence of the correlation between teachers’ teaching skills and course organisation factors with student achievement (Marsh, 2007; Paulsen, 2002; Prebble et al., 2004).

Despite the widely accepted assertion of SETs to be reliable and valid indicator of effective teaching, several studies emerged to challenge the validity of SETs. SET scores were found to be influenced by student-related factors such as their perceptions of teaching, or their maturity or by teacher-related factors such as the appearance, likability and popularity of the teachers (Abrami, Leventhal, & Perry, 1982; Boysen, 2008). Recently, students’ ratings were reported to be influenced by “ethno-cultural similarity”, that is, university teachers who had the same ethnic origin as students to be awarded higher ratings (Bokek-Cohen &
Davidovich, 2011). This line of research has suggested that the validity of SETs is heavily dependent on how students perceive learning (Barrie, 2001; Clayson, 2009). In other words, SETs are considered to be valid to the extent that student’s perception of learning is valid. Accordingly, evaluation of students’ perceptions of teaching with the focus on the role of the teacher may be unhelpful in evaluating student-centred models of teaching (Richardson, 2005), and caution needs to be exercised in this area.

However, contemporary theoretical perspectives depict teaching as more than a series of overt actions (Pratt, 1997) and as “an intellectual and imaginative process” (Shulman, 1987, p. 41) which is influenced by personal theories and conceptions of teaching (Pratt, 1997; Ramsden, 1992) and, most importantly, teaching seen as making learning possible (Biggs & Tang, 2007; Ramsden, 1992; Shuell, 1986). From this standpoint, for a teaching evaluation instrument to be valid, it would need to show the correlation between the student evaluation of teaching and student learning. However, several studies reported that there was no apparent relationship between a teacher’s higher evaluation ratings and his/her higher student learning (Galbraith et al., 2011; Lemos et al., 2010). One exception came from Carrell and West’s (2010) study, in which university teachers “who excel at promoting contemporaneous student achievement teach in ways that improve their student evaluations but harm the follow-on achievement of their students in more advanced classes” (p. 409). In other words, high scores on SETs could be associated with low levels of “deep learning”. These studies have raised questions about whether the research agenda on SETs should focus on challenging the validity of SETs, or indeed, should renew the interest in how to improve SETs. Another set of questions were about what should be
measured in teaching: teachers’ behaviours, their teaching, or indeed, the quality of student learning.

The underlying problems in teaching evaluation are more complex than a simple “valid-invalid, reliable-unreliable dichotomy” suggests (Theall, 2010). The main barrier in SET design, as Theall (2010) and Edstrom (2008) argued, was that the instrument was rarely make its underlying teaching conceptions explicit. Given significance of such understanding for the fairness, validity, generalisability, interpretation, and usefulness of student evaluations (Lemos et al., 2010), surprisingly, little attention in the literature has been paid to explore SETs from this perspective. Consequently, the instrument appealed to a traditional transmissive model of teaching, and was largely teacher-centred evaluation, that is to evaluate the teachers and their teaching.

**Conceptions of Teaching and Approaches to Teaching Evaluation**

More than a decade ago, Kolitch and Dean (1999) argued that implicit in a SET was the assumptions about knowledge, learning and teaching, the purposes of evaluation, and the relationship between students and teachers. Sharing a similar view, Barrie et al. (2008) contended that a teaching evaluation system, particularly SETs “reflect a range of variables including implicit and explicit beliefs about what constitutes quality teaching or learning in particular contexts, and hence what is important to be measured, beliefs about who should do the measurement and what the measurement might mean” (p. 7) (original emphasis). However, the theoretical basis for SETs and how they relate to both the established theoretically sound models of teaching and the new ideas emerging from the research on university teaching were overlooked in the literature (Barrie, 2001; Burden, 2008; Darling-Hammond et al., 1983). The lack of such theoretical foundations together with prevailing and
powerful shared mythologies resulted in the significant limitations of contemporary approaches to teaching evaluation in HE, and have led SET practice to rest on fragile foundation (Darwin, 2010; Theall, 2010).

Many researchers (Biggs, 1993a; Biggs & Tang, 2007; Trigwell, 2001) has suggested that the “hidden” assumptions about teaching can be unpacked from models of teaching and student learning, such as the Presage-Process- Produce model originally developed by Dunkin and Biddle (1974), and further developed by Biggs and colleagues (1987, 1993a; 1993), and by Prosser and Trigwell (1999). In the next section, a reconceptualisation of teaching evaluation in HE based on 3P model of teaching and learning, is presented.

3P model of teaching and student learning

Originating in Dunkin and Biddle’s (1974) study, the 3P model of teaching described the process of teaching, the behaviours of teachers, and the outcomes for students in the classroom. Dunkin and Biddle (1974) contended that presage factors (referring to the characteristics of the teachers and to the characteristics of the teaching environment) fed into process factors (referring to teaching-learning activities in classroom), and which in turn produced the product (referring to students’ increased subject-matter competence and attitudes). Although Dunkin and Biddle’s initial model of classroom-based teaching has assisted the understanding of the causative relationship and the interaction between students, the teaching context, and students’ achievements, it was criticised because of the uni-directional nature of this very interaction (Biggs, 1993a; Biggs & Moore, 1993). Biggs argued that the teaching-learning and teacher-student interaction was not a simple one-way situation, that is, from presage-to-process-to-product. Instead, all aspects of teaching interact with each other to form an interactive and dynamic system.
From a constructivist perspective, which argued that knowledge was constructed internally and was tested through interaction with the outside world, Biggs (1993a) developed a systems model of teaching and learning (Figure 3.1) to describe a cycle of events, in which student characteristics (student presage), teaching context (teaching presage), and student learning processes (process) were continuously interacting to result in learning outcomes (product). Regarding students’ presage factors, Biggs (1993a, p. 74) described them as relatively stable, learning-related characteristics of the students such as their existing conceptions of learning, their expectations and motivations for learning, and their preferred approaches to learning. Teaching presage factors included (i) teachers’ personal characteristics, such as teachers’ competence and teaching style and their conceptions of teaching and learning, and (ii) institutional climate, such as course structure, curriculum content or assessment. The way students handle the task varies as a result of the interaction between students and teaching presage factors. Students derived a particular way of approaching the learning task, depending on their own preferences for a particular approach to studying, and their perception of the demands made by the teaching context. The product factors, or outcomes of learning, were largely determined by students’ approaches to studying, can be described in quantitative terms (how much students have learned), or in qualitative terms (how well students have learned). Correspondingly, learning outcomes may be of low cognitive level, that is, the emphasis on quantitative recall, or of high cognitive level, where outcomes emphasise on abstract conceptualising and relevance.
Figure 3.1: Biggs’s (1987, 1993a; 1993) 3P Model of Teaching and Student Learning

Whereas Biggs’s 3P model of teaching and student learning was underpinned by constructivism Prosser & Trigwell’s (1999) 3P model was developed from constitutionalism, which argued that individuals and the world were internally related through the individual’s awareness of the world. From phenomenography, as one form of constitutionalism, it was argued that perceptions of, approaches to and outcomes of teaching and learning were separate entities, but simultaneously present in the students’ awareness and were not independently constituted (Marton & Booth, 1997; Prosser & Trigwell, 1999). In adopting a phenomenographic approach, proponents of the presage-process-product model of teaching and learning focused on the analysis of the “individual’s awareness of the learning and teaching acts in which they are engaged” (Prosser & Trigwell, 1999, p. 14). Trigwell and Prosser (1996a), for example, found that when students perceived the teaching context as affording a surface approach to learning, they tended to adopt a surface approach,
and this consequently led to lower quality learning outcomes. When students perceived the context as affording a deep approach to learning, they tended to adopt a deep approach, and therefore achieved higher quality learning outcomes. From this line of enquiry, phenomenography researchers argued students’ perceptions of context shaped their approaches to learning and the learning outcomes, and hence advocated for students’ perceptions of the teaching environment to be included in the 3P model of teaching and learning as a separate component (Prosser & Trigwell, 1999; Ramsden, 2003; Trigwell & Prosser, 1996a).

However, in Trigwell’s and Prosser’s 3P model, no indication was provided as to whether students’ perceptions of context to be incorporated in presage, or process factors. As students filtered the teaching context, their perceptions of the context may be best represented as the interaction between student presage factors and teaching context. Such interactions, acknowledged as a decisive factor that “determined the ways students handle the task” (Biggs, 1996, p. 52), were included in Biggs’s 3P model by an arrow from the student factors to teaching context (Figure 3.1).

Since research on teaching at tertiary level reports a diversity of conclusions, rather than consensus, and, perhaps, no agreed definition of good teaching emerged (Lally & Myhill, 1994), models of teaching and learning, such as Bigg’s 3P model, not only enabled the discussion among presage, process, and product factors, but more importantly enabled educators to “unpack” different theoretical understandings about the complex, interactive process of teaching and learning. In the context of teaching evaluation, the model provided a perspective on how the choice and construction of items in SETs mirrored different understandings of teaching and learning (Barrie, 2001). Derived from the 3P model of teaching, three approaches to
teaching evaluation are presented in the next section: (i) student presage-focused, (ii) teaching context-focused, and (iii) student learning-focused. The chronology of the literature reviewed in the next section extends back over the past 60 years, with particular reference to the design and implicit thinking about teaching which lay in SETs. These studies are classified into three periods: prior to 1960, from 1960 to 1990, and post-1990. The intention in grouping these studies on three distinctive periods is to identify the focus of the teaching evaluation in each period as well as to identify the shift (if any) occurring across these periods.

**Student presage-focused approach**

The student presage-focused approach to teaching evaluation, or can be referred to as “what-the-student-is” approach, conceptualised teaching as the process of transferring a teacher’ knowledge to students (Biggs & Moore, 1993). The approach was rooted in positivism and hence knowledge was viewed as decontextualised, existing externally to the knower (Brown, Collins, & Duguid, 1989). Teachers were seen as those who knew “something not understood by others, presumably the students” (Shulman, 1987). Differences in learning outcomes were explained by the differences in students’ characteristics, such as students’ motivation (Biggs & Moore, 1993), since learning was viewed to be on the shoulders of the students alone. If students did not learn, it was because they were incapable, or unmotivated, and there was nothing wrong with the teaching (Biggs & Tang, 2007). As a result, teachers and administrators assumed that they were not accountable for any deficiencies in student learning.

Figure 3.2 captures the understanding of teaching and the focus of teaching evaluation based on the student-presage approach. The directional flow proceeded from the teaching context, identified mainly as the teacher’ content knowledge, to the
students and to their learning outcomes. Therefore, in this approach, an evaluation of teaching system would exclude instruments designed to gain students’ feedback for teaching since teachers were understood to have no responsibility if students did not learn. In Arreola’s (2007, p. 18) words, a SET was unnecessary and invalid, because “students, by definition, would not have the teacher’s content expertise and would thus not be qualified to make any sort of evaluative statements or conclusions concerning the teacher’s competence”.

Literature on SETs suggested that understanding teaching as the transmission of knowledge manifested in the debates on SETs, the choice of SET items, most noticeably prior to 1960. During this period, SETs had been introduced in a limited number of major universities in the United States (Marsh, 1987), however, it was not a common practice in the majority of US universities nor around the world. Movement toward obtaining students’ feedback on teachers and teaching in the 1940s and 1950s had been strongly opposed by teachers, and was seen as at best useless, and at worst, insulting (Blackburn & Clark, 1975). Studies on SETs at this time primarily concerned with the question of whether or not students were able to make judgement about the teachers, because of their immaturity, the lack of experience, and particularly their lack of sufficient content knowledge (Clayson, 2009; Isaacson, 1963).
Among very few student rating instrument available prior to 1960 was the Student Instructional Rating System Form designed and used by Michigan State University in the 1960s (Marsh, 1987, p. 381). The Form was designed with 30 items: the first 24 items were concerned with the characteristics of the teachers, and the remaining six items with student’s background, including items concerned with student motivation to do the course, or overall GPA (grade point average). Collecting data on students’ characteristics, therefore, to some extent, was seen as a way of measuring the effectiveness of teaching.

The 1960s were a turning point with respect to the paradigm shift from the view of teaching as the transmission of information toward a view of teaching as facilitating of learning (Theall, 2010). However, this shift which did not fully occur until late in the twentieth century (Barr & Tagg, 1995). During the transitional stage of paradigm shift, SETs were increasingly seen as an important channel for teachers and administrators to gain feedback about the quality of teaching and learning.
Teaching presage-focused approach

The approach to teaching evaluation which included a focus on teaching presage factors was underpinned by an understanding about teaching as transmitting teachers’ understandings to students (Arreola, 2007; Biggs & Moore, 1993). In this approach, teaching was seen as a process of providing a teaching context conducive for students. Learning, from this perspective, was seen as a function of “what-the-teacher-does” (Biggs & Tang, 2007, p. 17). The straight line in Figure 3.3 represents an assumption about teaching that was based on an understanding that responsibility for learning came from the teaching context-related factors (Biggs, 1993b; Biggs & Tang, 2007), of which characteristics of the teachers such as their personality and approaches to teaching, played important roles. Differences in learning outcomes were explained by the differences among teachers, or the “missing of essential skills” (Biggs & Moore, 1993). In other words, if learning did not occur, it was the teachers’ fault due to their lack of content knowledge and teaching skills, therefore, the teachers and their teaching were “to blame”, and were subjected to modification.

Accordingly, this approach to teaching evaluation defined teaching tasks in terms of the capacity to carry out detailed, and in most cases, pre-determined instructions (Biggs & Moore, 1993). Measures of teaching were associated not only with measures of a teacher’s content knowledge, but were extended to measures of a repertoire of specified techniques for delivering the pre-determined content. An instrument to evaluate teaching, such as SETs, was considered valid if it accurately identified a teacher’s deficiency in teachers’ characteristics and/or teaching skills. The dotted line in Figure 3.3 is indicative of a feedback’s loop, from the students to the teaching context.
In the period from 1960 to 1990, there was a surge in the number of studies into the use of student ratings, Seldin (1999) documented over 2000 publications and presentations which had been published on ratings topics during this time. The teaching presage-focused approach, as described above, takes one of the two main forms of feedback: (i) feedback from students’ observation of the teaching context, and (ii) feedback that was mediated through the student perception of such a context.

The former had its roots in behaviourism, in which learning was seen as a change in observable behaviour that occurred as the result of experience (Eggen & Kauchak, 2006). To make learning happen, the teacher “tells, shows, models, demonstrates, teaches the skill to be learned” (Palincsar, 1998, p. 347). Driven by behaviourism, SETs especially in its early days usually comprised of items which asked what students thought “of their teachers and how they feel about him as a personality” (Smalzried & Remmers, 1943, p. 363). Support for the measures of teaching to be the measures of a teacher’s personal traits came from studies that found

![Teaching Context-focused Approach to Teaching Evaluation](image_url)
“statistically significant average correlations between the traits and overall
evaluation” (Feldman, 1986, p. 139). As a result, “teachers’ predispositions”, that is,
what the teacher brings to the teaching situation (Abrami et al., 2007) were the main
focal points in the development of SETs. Students were asked to evaluate teachers’
general characteristics that were not necessarily associated with teaching. In the
Student Description of Teaching Questionnaire designed by Hildebrand used widely
in the 1960s and 1970s, there were items that asked students if the teacher “were
friendly toward students” (Item 23) or “varies the speed and tone of his/her voice”

The emphasis on the teachers’ predispositions in teaching evaluation was
criticised by the unsound linkage between the teacher’s personal traits and the
outcomes of student learning (Shulman, 1986). The existence of a relationship
between the perceived personality traits of the teacher and the perceived
effectiveness of his/her teaching might not be particularly problematic, but the
implications for teaching-related decision making are of concern, particularly in
relation to any evaluation of teaching. Informed by this relationship, an evaluation of
teaching could be designed to assess teachers as desirably charismatic performers.
The Dr Fox experiment (Ware & Williams, 1975) highlighted the failure of an
evaluation approach which emphasised primarily the non-substantive aspects of
teaching, and taking little or no account of students and their learning. This well-
documented experiment raised the question of using personality trait as a measure of
teaching.

In the 1970’s and the 1990’s, a shift occurred in the construction of SET
items, moving away from simple measures of a teacher’s personal traits to the
measures of teaching skills, or what Shulman (1987) termed “general pedagogical
knowledge”. The focus shift was driven by considerable research that found reasonable agreement between the teachers and students as to the characteristics they considered important (Crawford & Bradshaw, 1968; Yourglich, 1955). Subsequent empirical studies reported of such an agreement about the essential characteristics of teaching (Feldman, 1976, 1983, 1988; Marsh, 1984, 1987; Ramsden, 1991). During this period, instruments such as the Endeavour Instructional Rating developed by Frey (1973, 1978), or the Students’ Evaluation of Educational Quality (SEEQ) developed by Marsh (1984), were based on identified characteristics associated with teaching effectiveness. SEEQ items included the following “Instructor adequately discussed current problems in the field”, or “Instructor gave lectures that facilitated taking notes”, “Instructor was dynamic and energetic in conducting the course”, and “Instructor’s style of presentation held your interest during class” (SEEQ used in University of Southern California, cited in Marsh, 1984, p. 385). Although Marsh (1987) asserted that SEEQ was “quite reliable, reasonably valid”, he also acknowledged that the debate about which specific components of teaching effectiveness could and should be measured has not been resolved (p. 274). To put it differently, essential teaching skills were necessary but not sufficient for an academic to become an effective teacher. The assumption that mastering teaching skills and techniques would lead to higher quality in terms of student learning outcomes remained to be proven.

The second form of student feedback that was mediated through students’ perceptions of teaching context about teaching came from the realisation their perceptions would determine their approaches to learning, and affect their learning outcomes (Marton et al., 1984; Ramsden, 2003; Trigwell & Prosser, 1996a). Thus, from a phenomenographic perspective, collecting student feedback on teaching
needed to be done through the investigation of “student’s perception of the usefulness of teaching behaviours in helping them learn” (Barrie, 2001, p. 11). Barrie further argued that SET commonly used items such as, “The instructor clearly stated the objectives of the course”, or “The lecturer spoke clearly” (item bank, cited in Lally & Myhill, 1994, p. 80) could be paraphrased as “The objectives of the course were clear to me” and “I found the lecturer’s speech easy to understand” (emphasis added), to reflect students’ interpretations of what was said. Although in Barrie’s proposed items students were asked to evaluate how useful their teachers’ teaching were for them, the subject of the evaluation remained what-the-teacher-does.

Darling-Hammond et al. (1983) argued that an approach to teaching evaluation with a focus on teaching presage factors reflected an assumption that standards of professional knowledge and practice could be developed and assessed, and that their enforcement would ensure competent teaching and subsequently to high quality of learning outcomes. Without doubt, teaching skills are necessary for teachers to be successful in teaching. However, when “teaching is making learning possible” (Ramsden, 2003), being successful in teaching needs to take into account students’ learning. As a result, an approach to student evaluation of teaching which places the onus on “surface aspects” of teaching (Pratt, 1997) needs to shift to the evaluation of the “substance” of teaching, that is, the students learning outcomes that were informed by their approaches to learning.

**Student learning-focused approach**

The approach to teaching evaluation which placed emphasis on student learning, that is, what-the-student-does, was based on constructivism and phenomenography (Biggs & Tang, 2007). In this approach, the teacher’s responsibility was to create teaching/learning activities to help students construct
their own knowledge. This focus implied a view of teaching that was not just about facts, concepts and principles to be covered and understood, but also was about clarifying “what it means to understand content in the way that is stipulated in the intended learning outcomes, and what kind of teaching/learning activities are required to achieve those stipulated levels of understanding” (Biggs & Tang, 2007, p. 19). The view of learning contained in this approach was aligned with the social cognition perspective, which regarded learning as a change in an individual’s mental structures and processes that might or might not result in an immediate change in behaviour (Eggen & Kauchak, 2006). Students, according to this view of teaching, were seen as “co-producers of learning” (Barr & Tagg, 1995), the transformative participants who were encouraged and empowered to engage effectively with the complexity of the outside world. The understanding about teaching which underpinned this approach was aligned with two student-centred conceptual categories, (i) facilitating critical thinking, and (ii) enabling conceptual change.

In focusing on what the students should be able to do as a result of the teaching, the responsibility for learning did not reside in the students alone, nor in the teachers and their teaching alone, but in all involved (Biggs, 1993a). Restating the needs for a paradigm shift, Barr and Tagg (1995, pp. 14-15) strongly advocated for “learning paradigm” institutions which took responsibility for learning in order to produce learning (original emphasis). They further argued that students, teachers and the institution all have to take responsibility for student learning, even though none is in complete control of all the variables. Evaluation of teaching, therefore, instead of focusing on the act of teaching, focused on student learning as the “consequences of those actions” (Abrami et al., 2007).
The question of the validity and reliability of such an instrument, therefore, turned on the question of whether an evaluation of teaching could identify the deficiencies in student learning, from an evaluation of the process of their learning and in addition, the outcomes of student learning. Figure 3.4 details an approach to teaching evaluation with a focus on student learning. The dotted lines represent the flow of student feedback on teaching: students’ approaches to learning and learning outcomes feed back to the student presage and the teaching presage factors. Student evaluation of teaching instrument, therefore, became the *student evaluation of learning*, providing feedback for teachers, administrators and students themselves about what each party needs to be done to achieve the intended learning outcomes.

*Figure 3.4: Student Learning-focused Approach to Teaching Evaluation*

Post 1990s, the contemporary view of teaching as enabling students’ critical thinking and conceptual change and its manifestation in the construction of SETs, though might not be prevalent, did exist. Examples of SETs with focus on student learning included Student Assessment of Teaching and Learning (SATL) (Ellett, Loup, Culross, McMullen, & Rugutt, 1997), and the National Survey of Student Engagement (Kuh & Hu, 2001) in America, or its Australasian version (ACER,
2011), in which students’ approaches to learning and student learning outcomes were measured as indicators of effective teaching. The National Survey of Student Engagement, in particular, was designed with items that map into seven outcome measures, one of which is the participation in higher-order forms of thinking or the development of general forms of individual and social development. Recently, Kember and Leung (2009) developed a SET which was grounded in principles of excellent teaching, and was designed to identify “relative strengths and weaknesses in teaching so that appropriate remedial action can be identified” (p. 352).

Accordingly, several items in their SET have reflected a change in the understanding of teaching, for example, “I found the course challenging”, or “I have become more willing to consider different point of views” (p. 348). These proposed SET items suggested a reconsideration of placing the students and their learning at the centre of teaching evaluation. Although the construction of Kember and Leung’s 49-item SET had not yet escaped fully from teaching-presage focused approach, it signalled a transition to evaluate teaching that moved beyond “what-the-teacher-does” to “what-the-student-does”.

Table 3.4

Reconceptualisation of Approaches to Teaching Evaluation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Components</th>
<th>Student presage-focused</th>
<th>Teaching presage-focused</th>
<th>Student learning-focused</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Belief about knowledge</td>
<td>External to the students</td>
<td>External to the students</td>
<td>Internal to the students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perception of teaching</td>
<td>Imparting information</td>
<td>Transmitting teachers’ understanding</td>
<td>Facilitating critical thinking, and enabling conceptual change</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Purpose of the evaluation</td>
<td>Not necessary or punitive (if used at all)</td>
<td>Accountability and improvement</td>
<td>Enhancing learning and learning outcomes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Focus of the evaluation</td>
<td>What-the-student-is &amp; What-the-teacher-is &amp; What-the-teacher-does</td>
<td>What-the-student-does &amp;</td>
<td>What-the-student-achieved</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Chapter Summary

To improve the teaching evaluation practice and hence to enhance the quality of student learning, researchers (Edström, 2008; Kolitch & Dean, 1999) have called for making the assumptions about teaching and learning explicit, particularly in the design of SETs. Alongside this call has been the increasing realisation that student-centred conceptions of teaching are more desirable to bring about a change to teaching practice as they focus on the students and their learning (Akerlind, 2004; Entwistle & Walker, 2002; Fox, 1983; Kember & McNaught, 2007; Ramsden, 1992). However, in reviewing literature pertaining to conceptions of teaching and evaluation of teaching, it was evident that there was a lack of research that bridged these two bodies of literature to provide theoretical and empirical evidence for various approaches to teaching evaluation in HE, resulted in teaching evaluation practice to rest on a “fragile foundation” (Darwin, 2010). The three different approaches to teaching evaluation proposed in this chapter which were derived from Biggs’s (1987, 1993a; 1993) 3P model of teaching and student learning, can be seen as theoretical foundations for teaching evaluation. Empirical evidence is needed to support such approaches.

In Chapter 4, the methodology of the study will be discussed. In this chapter, the research approach, research methodology and the methods of data collection and data analysis will be presented.
CHAPTER 4  METHODOLOGY

Introduction

The overall aim of the study presented in this thesis was to investigate how teaching was perceived and evaluated in Higher Education (HE) in Vietnam. Several research sub-questions were formulated to seek answers for the stated aim: (i) How is teaching perceived and evaluated in the Ministry of Education and Training (MOET) Guideline on Student Evaluation of Teaching?, (ii) How is teaching perceived and evaluated by university administrators in particular Higher Education Institutions in Vietnam?, and (iii) How is teaching perceived by the university teachers who work in the same institution as the university administrators of (ii)? To explore this task, an exploratory collective case study within the qualitative research paradigm (Guba & Lincoln, 1994) was employed.

This chapter, therefore, will provide the justification for the choice of methodology employed, and will describe the methods and processes of data gathering and analysis. The chapter begins with an overview of the research approach and the rationale for why this current study resides in the qualitative research paradigm. This is followed by an analysis of the selection of case study as the research methodology. The chapter then describes phases in the development of research activities for the study, including ethical considerations, selection of research instruments, and the conduct of a pilot study. Finally, the ways in which data were gathered and analysed are presented, followed by some methodological problems noted in the literature, and ways to manage the limitations of the study.
Research Approach

This study was designed within the qualitative research paradigm for several reasons. Firstly, as the aim of the study was to explore the ways in which university administrators and teachers perceived teaching in their own constructions of a phenomenon (Guba & Lincoln, 1994), understanding of the phenomenon to be studied was, therefore, to be investigated. The study was not intended to provide any explanations of causality of the phenomenon. Instead, the study was primarily intended to develop deep understanding of the ways in which university administrators constructed their thinking about teaching in the process of designing a teaching evaluation instrument.

Secondly, the qualitative research approach allowed the researcher in the current study to investigate the direct experience of a number of stakeholders taken at face value (L. Cohen & Manion, 1994). The study was to designed to explore the subjective perceptions of teaching held particularly by university administrators, rather than in their objective descriptions of their experience with teaching. The use of the qualitative research approach was intended to ensure that university administrators could convey their own subjectivities and sensitivities to the phenomenon of teaching and to the evaluation of teaching. The study, therefore, was conducted in a relatively subjective manner, and the researcher relied on the views of the participants, and collected data that consisted largely of words from the participants (Creswell, 2008). Finally, employing a qualitative research approach allowed a meaningful and holistic interpretation of a phenomenon (Burns, 2000; Denzin & Lincoln, 2007; Patton, 2002; Sarantakos, 1998). The current study was intended to enhance the understanding of tertiary teaching in Vietnam, a
phenomenon which needs to be interpreted holistically in terms of the Vietnamese cultural, socio-economic and educational context in which it is located.

Case Study as Research Methodology

Case study is regarded as one of the most prevalent methodologies in higher education literature (Jones, Torres, & Arminio, 2006). According to Yin (1994, p. 13), case study is “an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomena and context are not clearly evident”. Stake (1995) defined case study as “the study of the particularity and complexity of a single case, coming to understand its activity within important circumstances” (p. xi). The “case”, therefore, must have an intrinsic boundary that delineates what the case is, and what it is not.

Case study as research methodology was selected for this current study as its primary concern was to “enrich the thinking and discourse of educators … by refinement of prudence through the systematic and reflective documentation of evidence” (Stenhouse, 1997, p. 50), rather than to provide judgements or explanations for the particular phenomenon to be studied. In other words, the study was primarily aimed at gaining an enhanced understanding of the views about teaching held by university administrators as they engaged in the evaluation of teaching practice. Additionally, the ways in which university administrators perceived teaching were “bounded” (Stake, 1995) in the cultural context of Vietnam, in the higher education system in Vietnam, and in the institutional context of the public and non-public sectors of HE in Vietnam.

An exploratory collective case study

The current study took the form of an “exploratory case study” (Yin, 1993), as its ultimate purpose was to explore in depth the ways in which tertiary teaching
was perceived by university administrators. Yin (2008) further stated that the exploratory and descriptive nature of this research design would allow for the collection of “thick” and “rich” data by observing a phenomenon to be studied in its raw forms. Not only was the current study exploratory in nature, it was characterised also as a collective case study.

Yin (1994) stated that although case study research is generally associated with qualitative data collection methods, that is, interviews, observation and document analysis, quantitative data can be used as well. Indeed, the use of quantitative data in case study is helpful in indicating relationships which may not be salient to the researchers (Creswell, 2008; Creswell & Clark, 2007).

In this study, a combination of qualitative and quantitative data collection methods were used to gain in-depth understanding about both the perceptions of teaching held by university administrators, and the perceptions of teaching held by teachers, at two teaching-intensive universities in Vietnam. Although the main data collection method for this study was qualitative, the study also collected quantitative data. The use of quantitative data in this study served to provide both demographic data about the teachers in each participating university, and mean scores on the Perceptions of Teaching, an instrument designed for this study to measure teachers’ perceptions of teaching. The quantitative data were used to identify the way teachers thought about teaching. Overall, this study was an exploratory collective case study using mixed methods of data collection, where the primary methods of data collection were qualitative.
Ethical considerations

The study involved the participation of university administrators and teachers at two universities in Vietnam and thus ethical considerations were applied for the data collection processes.

Before gathering data for the study, approval to conduct the research was requested and granted from the Northern Tasmania Social Sciences Human Research Ethics Committee (Approval No H10703 – see Appendix A1). Typically, formal permission to conduct research at a HEI in Vietnam is only required from the individual institution, and not from Ministry of Education and Training (MOET) Vietnam. Therefore, a request including a letter from the research team (see Appendix A2) and Information Sheets (see Appendix B1 and B2 for administrators, B5 and B6 for teachers) were sent to the President of the two universities. The granting of permission to conduct research at these participating universities was received in late December 2009 (see Appendix A3).

The primary consideration in these applications was the maintenance of privacy and anonymity of research participants and of universities, and the right of participants (in the survey-questionnaire and interview) to withdraw from the study at any time. Potential respondents for the survey-questionnaire were informed that their responses would be confidential and no individual responses would be identified in the results. Responses were collected through the provision of postage-paid return envelopes for respondents. Similarly, participants in the interviews were informed that their anonymity would be protected by labelling the audio-tape using a pseudonym and that names mentioned would be coded using a pseudonym.
Up to the time of the writing-up of the study, no ethical concerns had been reported either by the respondents to the survey-questionnaire, or by the participants in the semi-structured interviews.

**The role of the researcher**

In qualitative inquiry, the researcher is also a research instrument (Creswell, 2008), acknowledging that his/her presence and influence are unavoidable. The researcher interprets the phenomenon through “the lenses of language, gender, social class, race and ethnicity” of the researcher (Denzin & Lincoln, 2007), and through the intimate relationships that develop between the researcher and the data (Creswell & Clark, 2007). Therefore, a qualitative case study requires the researcher to make explicit the relationship between the researcher and researched, and the bearing that this relationship may have on the research process or on the interpretation. By acknowledging this, any possible biases the researcher may have had while conducting the research and arriving at the conclusions of the study are highlighted.

In qualitative research, accuracy does not mean that researchers have obtained the “correct solution” to a research problem or found the truth or reality, but rather “they have handled data and conveyed perspectives, observations, and biases with care and attention paid to meaningful details and have been accountable to the data” (Duff, 2008, p. 179). The researcher acknowledges that her experience as an academic in a public university and then in a non-public university may affect her interpretations of administrators’ perceptions of teaching. Through working as a university teacher and being evaluated, the researcher has experienced the differences in teaching evaluation approaches in these two universities. Conscious of the possible biases resulting from her own experience of being evaluated, the
researcher tried to ensure that the findings and the interpretations were as trustworthy as possible by employing several strategies that are presented later in this chapter.

**Developmental Phases of the Research Activities**

Prior to engaging in data collection processes for this current study, four main tasks were completed: (i) the development of instruments including a set of survey-questionnaires (one for university administrators and the other for university teachers), and interview guide, (ii) the consideration of ethical issues involving the recruitment of research participants, (iii) the translation of the instruments into Vietnamese, and (iv) the pilot study. As indicated in Table 4.1 below, these four tasks were conducted in 2009. The process of data gathering for this study started in early 2010 and lasted for three months. Further, data analysis and writing-up for the thesis were undertaken between April 2010 and December 2011. The time-line for the study’s activities prior to and after the data collection processes are presented in Table 4.1.

**Research instruments**

Given the purpose of the study was to explore how teaching is perceived by various stakeholders, that is, MOET, administrators and teachers in HE in Vietnam, it was important to have a variety of research instruments that not only captured in-depth views about teaching held by university administrators, but also allowed for the possibility of some limited but reliable generalisations to be made about the dominant views of teaching held by teachers. Thus, the research instruments for this study comprised: (i) semi-structured interview guides for university administrators, (ii) documents related to teaching evaluations, such as MOET Guideline and institutional SET Forms, and (iii) two survey-questionnaires, one for university
administrators and the other for teachers. Justification for and descriptions of each of these instruments are presented in the next section.

Table 4.1

*Time-line for the Study’s Activities*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Descriptions of activities</th>
<th>2009</th>
<th>2010</th>
<th>2011</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Development of survey-questionnaire and interview guides for two groups of participants</td>
<td>Feb → June</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethics application</td>
<td>July → August</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Translation of the research instrument</td>
<td>September</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pilot study</td>
<td>Sep → Dec</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Final version of two set of survey-questionnaires and interview guide</td>
<td>December</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data collection at University N</td>
<td></td>
<td>January</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Obtain permission to conduct research</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Distribution of the survey-questionnaires to teachers</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Semi-structured interviews with university administrators and survey-questionnaire distribution</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Repeat processes similar to that at University N for data collection at University P</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>February</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transcription of interviews and return for comments</td>
<td></td>
<td>March</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Numerical data coded and entered</td>
<td></td>
<td>April → May</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Analysis of numerical and textual data</td>
<td></td>
<td>June → Dec</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writing up of the thesis</td>
<td></td>
<td>Jan → Dec</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Semi-structured interviews*

Interviews were described by Lincoln and Guba (1985) as “a conversation with a purpose” (p. 268) that was constructed jointly by interviewer and interviewee. In researching beliefs about and conceptions of teaching, interviews were widely used as primary methods for data gathering, because the research participants had the
freedom to talk in an open-ended manner (Hativa & Goodyear, 2002a; Kane, Sandretto, & Heath, 2002). In this study, semi-structured interviews were chosen for several reasons.

First, the flexibility of this method enabled the interviewer to deepen the communication with the respondents (Fontana & Frey, 2005), and therefore allowed the clarification of any inconsistencies in respondents' accounts. By asking questions related to participant’s view on the institutional teaching evaluation system, and particularly on the development and the design of items to obtain students’ feedback on teaching engaged in by administrators, it was anticipated that administrators’ thinking and beliefs about teaching could be articulated. Their stated beliefs about teaching could then be compared with the implicit understanding of teaching represented in SETs.

Second, interviewing as a method of data gathering, allowed the researcher to situate the participants’ behaviours in context and, therefore, gain in-depth understanding of their actions (Seidman, 2006). Data for the current study were collected in the natural setting of the university where the university administrators worked. Thus, there was a full acknowledgement of the setting of the context and its impact on the way university administrators and teachers accounted for teaching, as well as the underpinning perception of teaching in SETs. Finally, the use of interviews assisted the researcher to collect data systematically, which in turn increased the comprehensiveness of the data (Patton, 2002).

Interviews were conducted with five university administrators to explore the views they held on teaching. Although the interview guide was prepared with a list of questions (see final version of the interview guide in Appendix C1), the researcher was free to ask any further questions wherever appropriate to gain a better
understanding of the views expressed. The prepared interview guide allowed the researcher to pace the interviews and thus systematised the data as well as enhanced their comprehensiveness.

Questions for the semi-structured interviews were classified into three groups. The first group focused on eliciting the extent to which each university administrator reported on their participation to the development of items in the SET Form currently implemented in their universities, and whether or not they were satisfied with the instrument. Questions, such as “Can you tell me about your participation in the development of the SET Form that is in use in this university?”, or “Has the Form been revised since the time it was first introduced?” were included in this group of interview questions.

The second group of questions were associated with an individual interviewees’ account of teaching. These questions asked administrators to nominate one teacher that they believed to be exemplary to allow administrators to express their views about their expectations of students, student learning outcomes, of teachers’ and students’ roles in teaching and learning process. The last group of questions concerned with administrators’ thinking about what should be measured in teaching such as “If you have to choose only one item to measure teaching, which item would you use to evaluate the quality of teaching?” Administrators were provided with opportunities to talk about reasons for their choices.

As detailed in the second group of questions the collection and the use of the SET Form documents in each university were critical in providing necessary information for the interviews. These documents were also considered to be a research instrument for the current study.


**Documents related to teaching evaluations**

Several important documents, at the institutional level and at the MOET level, were collected and used as research instruments. The use of documents is important as it permits the researcher to obtain the retrospective evidence that might not be revealed by using one-off interviews (Patton, 2002). Therefore, documents are often seen as “material culture” providing a “behind the scenes look” (Patton, 2002).

In this study, the versions of the Guideline for SETs stipulated by MOET were collected. In addition, copies of the SET Forms used at the time of data gathering for this study by each of the participating universities, were obtained. It is worth noting that the teaching evaluation system in these universities comprised only one particular SET Form. There were no other forms of teaching evaluations available in these universities. The SET Forms, thus, could be seen as the exemplification of teaching evaluation practices in each university.

**Survey-Questionnaire**

In addition to the approaches described above, namely, semi-structured interviews and document analysis, two survey questionnaires were used: one for the university administrators, and one for the university teachers of the same university. Both questionnaires were developed on the basis of the reviews of the perceptions/conceptions-based literature, and the literature pertaining the teaching evaluation practices in Higher Education.

Using a survey-questionnaire to collect data, in order to investigate the ways in which teachers in various departments in the participating universities perceived teaching, was a satisfactory method for several reasons. Firstly, this method was chosen because it allowed the inclusion of a larger number of subjects as well as subjects in more diverse locations (Burns, 2000), particularly those who were
lecturing in different departments in each participating university. Secondly, as this method increased the sample size, it allowed some generalisations with appropriate cautions, to be made about the overall trend of perceptions of teaching held by teachers (Burns, 2000).

In the literature, there were several inventories designed to identify teacher’s conceptions/perceptions of teaching (Chan, 2001; Pratt, 1998; Prosser & Trigwell, 2006; Trigwell & Prosser, 2004). Although these inventories have been used in a number of studies to identify the relationship between teachers’ approaches to teaching and their conceptions of teaching and learning (Prosser & Trigwell, 2006), the use of these inventories was not without criticism. Meyer and Eley (2006) argued that the development and application of the Approaches to Teaching Inventory was methodologically flawed and conceptually limited, and these authors further cautioned that similarly developed instruments designed to explore individual teacher perception of teaching would face similar problems.

Having acknowledged the limitation inherent to measuring teachers’ perceptions of teaching through inventories, in this study, the use of Survey-Questionnaire for teachers was not intended to measure the way in which each individual teacher perceived teaching, rather it aimed identifying the predominant views about teaching held by a group of teachers in each university. In reviewing perception-based inventories and questionnaires, it was evident that there was no “off-the-shelf” available questionnaire to explore perceptions of teaching held by Vietnamese teachers. There were, however, two inventories, namely, Approaches to Teaching Inventory (Prosser & Trigwell, 2006), and Teaching Perspectives Inventory (Pratt, Collins, & Selinger, 2001), which were developed in the Western context of teaching and learning, and were somewhat applicable. As the study was conducted in
Vietnam, with different cultural, socio-economic, and educational differences, it was deemed appropriate to design a different Survey-Questionnaire that tailored to the context of Vietnam.

As a result, the Survey-Questionnaire for Teachers was developed and trialled (see both English and Vietnamese version in Appendix C4 and C5). It consisted of three parts: Part A, entitled “Teaching in Higher Education”, which involved 30 statements concerning teachers’ views of university teaching reflected through the stages of Planning, Implementation, and Results (Pratt, 1997) in their teaching practices. Several questions, such as Q 6 and Q 26 were modified from Teaching Perspectives Inventory (Pratt et al., 2001), Q 3, Q 25, and Q 27 from Approaches to Teaching Inventory (Prosser & Trigwell, 2006), and Q 8 from Academics’ Orientations to Teaching Questionnaire (Samuelowicz, 1999). Respondents provided their response to these items using a five point Likert-scale similar to the scale proposed in Approaches to Teaching Inventory (Trigwell, Prosser, & Ginns, 2005), and ranged on a continuum, from (1) only rarely true, (2) sometimes true, (3) around half of the time true, (4) frequently true, and (5) always true.

Part B, labelled “Quality of Teaching in HE”, sought to elicit teachers’ views on the importance of several contributing factors related to teaching quality. Teachers were asked to rank factors such as teachers’ characteristics, students’ characteristics, support for student learning, curriculum, university support for teaching, how the teachers organise their teaching, and students’ approaches to learning, from 1 to 7, where (1) denoted the most important factor, and (7) the least important factor.
Part C was concerned with the teachers’ background and their demographic information. It consisted of 10 forced choice items on teachers’ biographical profiles, such as the employing university and department, gender, and teaching experience.

Another instrument, the Survey-Questionnaire for University Administrators, was designed to explore university administrators’ views of teaching. It was designed as a secondary means of data collection and analysis: that is, a means of comparing individual university administrator’s views about teaching, as articulated in the semi-structured interviews, with their responses to items in the survey-questionnaire. The questionnaire comprised three parts (see the Survey-questionnaire in Appendix C 2). Part A was designed to obtain university administrators’ beliefs about what should be measured in teaching, as these were reflected in their choices of items used for the Student Evaluation of Teaching (SET) Form. Twenty statements that could be used for SETs were proposed. University administrators were asked to choose ten statements out of twenty, and this multiple-choice format provided them with opportunities to choose their preferred statements. Part B of the Survey-Questionnaire for University Administrators, was designed in the same manner as Part B in the Survey-Questionnaire for Teachers. The intention of this section was to explore the consistency between university administrators and teachers of the same university in relation to the perception of factors impacting on the quality of teaching. Part C asked respondents about their background information, and it was used to extend the understanding of the demographics of the participants.

**Translation of the research instruments**

As previously described, three research instruments were developed for data gathering in this study. Since the interview guide and survey-questionnaire were developed in the English language based on the available literature, it was necessary
to translate these instruments into the Vietnamese language as this was the mother tongue of all survey-questionnaire respondents as well as interview participants. To this end, Brislin’s (1970) technique of “back translation” was used for the translation of the two sets of survey-questionnaires.

The two survey-questionnaires were translated into Vietnamese by the researcher with the help of two other Vietnamese-English university lecturers who were competent in both Vietnamese and English. These survey-questionnaires were then translated back to English. This latter task was done by another Vietnamese university teacher who was proficient in both languages and who was also “blind” to the original English version of the survey-questionnaires. No major differences were discerned after comparing English-Vietnamese and Vietnamese-English versions of the survey-questionnaires. The Vietnamese versions of the survey-questionnaires are attached in Appendix C3 and Appendix C5. The translated versions of the instruments were then tested for readability and face validity during the pilot study.

The translation of the interview guide adopted a simpler process. The interview guide was translated by the researcher with the help of a Vietnamese university lecturer who is proficient in both English and Vietnamese. The verification of this instrument was carried out during the pilot study.

The last source of data, namely, the documents which included MOET’s Guideline on SETs and SET Forms from each participating university, were collected from the universities, and did not require translation as they were written in Vietnamese. These documents, including both versions of the Guideline (see Appendix C6 and C7) and the SET Form in each university, were translated into English during the writing-up of this thesis. The English version of each of these SET Forms is attached in Appendix C8 and Appendix C9, respectively.
Pilot study

The pilot study was conducted in a Vietnamese non-public university, where the researcher had worked. Respondents for the Survey-Questionnaire for Teachers, and interview participants were former colleagues of the researcher. The key purpose in conducting the pilot study was to test the research instruments, and to familiarise the researcher with the necessary interview processes and techniques before the commencement of the main study.

After approval was given by the Northern Tasmania Social Sciences Human Research Ethics Committee to conduct the study, an invitation to take part in the pilot study was sent via email to ten university teachers and two university administrators. In the email, respondents were asked to report on any difficulties concerning: (i) the linguistic aspects of the items including their readability, and (ii) the instructions regarding the completion of the questionnaire. In addition, respondents were asked to report on the time they spent in completing the questionnaire.

Ten questionnaires were returned electronically from the ten university teachers and two questionnaires from university administrators. Responses from the trial indicated that the instructions and the language were adequate. On average, respondents to the two questionnaires reported spending from 10 to 12 minutes to complete them.

The trial of the interview guide was conducted as a face-to-face interview with two university administrators, the Dean of Academic Affairs and the President of the non-public university. These university administrators were invited because they were responsible for the development and the design of SET instrument in their university. Their responsibilities, therefore, were similar to the potential interview
participants in the later stage of the study. The purpose in interviewing two university administrators was to obtain feedback about the questions asked. In addition, the interviews were intended to help the researcher to gain confidence for the planned interviews with the President, Vice-President or Director of Academic Affairs Office at the other universities.

Recommendations arising from the interviews with the two university administrators helped the researcher to revise the interview guide.

Samples in the Study

As presented in the Research Methodology section earlier in this chapter, this study was an exploratory collective case study. Its samples, therefore, were selected according to the principles of purposive sampling, described as selecting “information-rich cases whose study will illuminate the questions under study” (Patton, 1990, p. 230). The strategies of criterion sampling and purposeful random sampling were employed for selecting participating universities as well as administrators and university teachers respectively. The criteria for the selection of participating universities, university administrators as interview participants and university teachers as survey-questionnaire respondents are detailed in the next section.

Participating universities

As presented in Chapter 2 Context of the Study, there are two types of HEIs in Vietnam that operate under the direct control of the Ministry of Education and Training (MOET): public and non-public. According to the statistics released by MOET Vietnam, in 2009, there were 194 public and 29 non-public HEIs. As this
study aimed to explore the perceptions of teaching held by university administrators in HEIs in Vietnam, it was decided to choose one university from type or each sector.

The two universities taking part in this study were selected on the basis that there existed an instrument to obtain feedback from students about teaching in these universities. It was decided to choose one public and one non-public university that engaged in the 1st Phase of the Quality Accreditation Program initiated by MOET. Of 194 public and 29 non-public universities, there were 18 public and 2 non-public universities respectively which took part in the Program. These 20 universities were considered to be potential candidates for the current study.

Of the 20 universities, two participating universities, one public (hereinafter referred to as University P), and one non-public (hereinafter referred to as University N), were chosen because of their accessibility, as well as the availability of administrators and teachers.

**University administrators**

In each university, a group of university administrators was selected using the strategy of criterion sampling. The logic of criterion sampling, as Patton (1990) noted, is to review and study all cases that meet some predetermined criterion of importance. In this study, university administrators were selected based on their strategic and managerial responsibilities for the design and the implementation of the SET Forms used in their respective universities.

In university P, i.e., the public university, three people, Director P, Vice-President P and President P, were invited to take part in the study as they were responsible for the design of the items in SETs and/or the implementation of the instrument. All three agreed to participate in the current study. The profiles of each university administrator are detailed below:
Profile of Director P: Director P has been working in University P for nearly 20 years. He has held the position of the Director of Office of Academic Affairs for five years. Before being appointed to this position, Director P used to be a Mathematics teacher. His main responsibilities at present were to liaise with the management team in each faculty to manage the faculty’s teaching and learning activities. He reported that he was the person who initiated the implementation of the SET Form. Additionally, he stated that he “drafted it [SET Form] and then it was sent to all Faculties and Divisions [in the university] to discuss”, suggesting that he had direct involvement in the design of items for SET Form at University P.

Profile of Vice President P: Vice President P was appointed by President P and his appointment was approved by MOET. As his main role was to assist President P in the management of teaching-related matters, Vice President P was the person who provided the strategic direction related to the implementation of a process of seeking students’ feedback on teacher’s performance. He reported that he “decided on the criteria” used for the evaluation of teaching.

Profile of President P: MOET Vietnam appointed President P to the position of President nearly 10 years ago. Although he was not the person who drafted the items for SET instrument, he approved its implementation in University P. He saw his involvement in the approval and implementation of SET to be crucial for the success of the instrument’s implementation. In his words, “this is a leader’s job, whether they have commitment or not, whether they really want to do it [implementing the evaluation of teaching] or not, because if they want, they definitely can do it.”

In University N, the non-public university, two university administrators responsible for the design and implementation of SET were (i) Director N, who was
Individual profiles of these university administrators are described below:

**Profile of Director N:** Director N was an academic who taught in the Engineering discipline before being appointed to by the President to be the Director of the Office for Academic Affairs ten years ago. Director N had a direct input to the design of the SET Form in use at University N at the time of data collection for the study. He stated that, “I myself participated in the SET design from the beginning … all procedures are undertaken by [his] office”.

**Profile of President N:** He has been in the role of President of this non-public university for more than six years. He was appointed by the Board of Management of University N, and his appointment was approved by MOET. He oversaw the operationalising of strategic objectives set by the Board of Management. In addition, his responsibilities included academic performance management. Not only has he given strategic direction to the evaluation of teaching in his university, he had direct involvement in the design of items in the SET instrument. He reported that “I, together with lecturers and specialist in the Office of Academic Affairs were involved in the design of the questionnaire [SET] items and the development of the feedback mechanism”.

**University teachers**

Two groups of university teachers, one from University P, and the other from University N, were chosen to take part in the study based on the strategy of purposeful random sampling (Burns, 2000). Given that the study aimed to explore university administrators’ perceptions of teaching and the perceptions of teaching held by teachers of the same university, it was important for the purposes of the
study to select the teachers in a way that could enhance the credibility of the study. Details of the random procedures for selecting these groups of teachers are further presented in the Data Gathering Process section.

Table 4.2

*Demographic Information of Survey Respondents from University P (n=72)*

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Discipline</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Natural science</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>76.4</td>
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<td>Social science</td>
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<td>23.6</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender</th>
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</tr>
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<td>Male</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>73.6</td>
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<tr>
<td>Female</td>
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<td>26.4</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teaching experience</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Less than 6 years</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>33.3</td>
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<tr>
<td>From 6-20 years</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>48.6</td>
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<td>More than 20 years</td>
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<td>18.1</td>
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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teaching certificate</th>
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</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
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<td>Without</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>18.1</td>
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<tr>
<td>With</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>81.9</td>
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<th>Academic interest</th>
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<tr>
<td>Teaching only</td>
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<td>.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research only</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Equally in both</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>45.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In both, leaning to teaching</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>43.1</td>
</tr>
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<td>In both, leaning to research</td>
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<td>11.1</td>
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Table 4.3

Demographic Information from Survey Respondents from University N (n=28)

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<th>Discipline</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Natural science</td>
<td>11</td>
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<td>Social science</td>
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<td>60.7</td>
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<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>57.1</td>
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<tr>
<td>Female</td>
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<td>42.9</td>
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<th>Teaching experience</th>
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<th>%</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Less than 6 years</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>42.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>From 6-20 years</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>46.4</td>
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<tr>
<td>More than 20 years</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>10.7</td>
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<th>Teaching certificate</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Without</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>28.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>With</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>71.4</td>
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<th>Academic interest</th>
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<td>3.6</td>
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<tr>
<td>Research only</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Equally in both</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>46.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In both, leaning to teaching</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>39.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In both, leaning to research</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>10.7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The Survey-Questionnaire for Teachers was sent to 155 potential respondents in University P, and 51 in University N respectively. Completed survey-questionnaires were received from 72 teachers in University P (see Table 4.2 above), and from 28 teachers in University N (see Table 4.3 above). The response rate was 49 per cent and 54 per cent, respectively. Similarly, Table 4.3 shows demographic information for the respondents from University N.

Data Gathering Process

As presented in the Research Methodology section, this study involved both qualitative and quantitative methods of data collection. Multi-methods of data
collection allowed the researcher to cover both deep and broad aspects of the research questions and facilitated the triangulation of findings (Burns, 2000). In the next section, the processes of collecting data from semi-structured interviews with five university administrators are described first, followed by the processes of obtaining documents related to the evaluation of teaching. Finally, the distribution of the survey-questionnaire is presented.

**Semi-structured interviews**

Prior to the interviews with university administrators of the two participating universities, a request for the approval to conduct research at these universities was granted by the President of each university. Following this process, the researcher made contact with the Head of Human Resource Office (HRO) at each university to request a list of university administrators who were responsible for the design and implementation of the SET. In University P, for example, three university administrators were identified by the Head of HRO. They were the Director of Office of Academic Affairs, the Vice President, and the President. Similarly, in University N, two university administrators identified by the Head of HRO were the Director of Office for Academic Affairs and the President.

In late December 2009, telephone contacts with these university administrators were made by the researcher. During this initial contact via telephone, the researcher informed the university administrators of the study’s purpose, and invited them to participate in the study on the basis of their insights and involvement in the design and implementation of the SET Form in their respective universities.

After the initial telephone contact, a formal letter of invitation (see Appendix A2) together with the Information Sheet (see Appendix B2 and B6) detailing the research aims and the statement of confidentiality was sent to each university
administrator. A week after this initial contact, the researcher was informed that all five university administrators voluntarily agreed to take part in the study.

Subsequently, appointments were made, and the semi-structured interviews with the two university administrators from University N were conducted in mid-January 2010, while the interviews with three university administrators from University P were completed late February 2010. All interviews were conducted by the researcher at times of convenience for the participants. Each interview began with an outline of the purpose of the study, and an overview of what might be covered in the interview. In addition, an assurance that interviews would remain confidential and anonymous was provided.

The interviews generally followed the interview guide (see Appendix C1) designed to elicit information about participants’ thinking about teaching and teaching evaluation. To help and encourage the participants to show and reflect upon their experience of the topic discussed, questions in the interview guide consisted of open-ended questions. In addition, follow-up probing questions, such as “could you explain more?” or “what do you mean by that?”, allowing a deeper insight into participants’ experience, also were employed. The importance of follow-up probing has been stressed by Prosser’s study (2000, cited in Drew, Bailey, & Shreeve, 2001): interviewees stated that they did something because they wanted to “understand”, however, careful probing showed that, for these interviewees, “understanding” actually meant “recall”.

In this study, the interviews lasted between 40 minutes to one hour, except for the interview with the President P which lasted 20 minutes due to his busy schedule. All the interviews were conducted in Vietnamese and recorded using a standard digital recorder. Prior to the interview recording, the interviewees were asked to sign
the Consent Form (see both English and Vietnamese version in Appendix B3 and B4) prior to the commencement of the interview.

Documents

As described earlier in this chapter, the current study was an exploratory collective case study with multiple data collection methods, one of which was the gathering of documents related to the MOET Guideline on the collection of students’ feedback at ministerial level, and the teaching evaluation practices at institutional level. To obtain feedback from the students about teaching, MOET stipulated a Guideline for SETs. However, each participating university used a Student Evaluation of Teaching Form which was designed with different items.

Before the first visit to each university, the researcher searched the websites for these documents. While MOET’s Guideline on SETs were accessible, the samples of SET Forms were not found on either of the universities’ websites. As a result, the researcher made contact with the Personal Assistant to the President in each university to obtain copies of these Forms. The English versions of these documents are attached in Appendix C8 and C9, respectively.

Survey-Questionnaire

Prior to the distribution of the Survey-Questionnaire for Teachers in each university, a list of current teaching staff in each department was obtained from the Head of the Human Resource Office. To obtain a random sample of teachers from the list in alphabetical order, it was decided to distribute the survey-questionnaire to every third teacher in the list. One week after the initial distribution, the researcher contacted all Heads of Department individually to ask them to remind the teachers in their weekly professional teacher meeting. Surveys were returned by the teachers in postage-paid addressed envelopes directly to the researcher’s office address. The
intention of asking teachers to return surveys directly to the researcher was to enable teachers to take control of their decision to take part in the study, as well as to ensure confidentiality of the responses. As a result of this process, survey-questionnaires together with the Information Sheet and a pre-paid envelope were distributed to potential respondents in both University P and University N.

The Survey-Questionnaire for University Administrators was distributed to each university administrator after the completion of the interviews. Each university administrator completed the survey and returned it to the researcher. All five questionnaires were completed with a respondent rate of 100 percent.

**Data Analysis Methods**

In a case study such as this current study, data analysis should be holistically and contextually viewed (Patton, 2002; Stake, 2005; Yin, 1994). Additionally, “analysis involves organising the data by specific cases for in-depth study and comparison” (Patton, 2002, p. 447). Thus, to seek answers for the study’s research sub-questions, data from three main sources, that is, (i) transcriptions from semi-structured interviews, (ii) the university administrators’ and teachers’ responses to the two sets of survey-questionnaire, and (iii) MOET’s Guideline and SET Forms were analysed. Methods for data analysis involved two levels of analysis, namely, within-case and cross-case analysis. This two-level analysis is commonly used in multiple case studies (Merriam, 1998) such as this investigation. Both textual and numerical data were analysed at each level. A variety of tools was also used to aid these analyses.
Chapter 4

Methodology

Analysing textual data

In this study, textual data including five interviews, MOET’s Guideline on SETs, and two SET Forms were analysed using the computerised software package Nvivo 8, as it enabled the researcher to search for recurring themes that related to administrators’ thinking about teaching and teaching evaluation, as well as the perceptions of teaching implicit in the SET Form. To that end, all interview transcripts and the SET Forms were typed using MS Word, then imported into Nvivo for analysis (QSR International, 2008). As Nvivo accepts different languages and it also allows the analysis to be done with different languages, these transcripts were kept in Vietnamese to maintain the authenticity of the views expressed. The textual data were then coded and analysed as described below.

Coding is the process of reducing the information obtained to make it more manageable (Denzin & Lincoln, 2007). In qualitative research such as this, coding allowed the researcher to compare the beliefs about teaching held by different university administrators in each individual university, and the perception of teaching implicit in SETs. Researcher such as Pomerantz (2003) have supported the coding of data following an a priori framework that derived from the existing literature. Costas (1992, p. 258) for example, pointed out that researchers who attempt to build on the discoveries of research conducted in situations and on topics similar to the ones they are investigating may refer to research or published works in the relevant area. Categories are then derived from statements or conclusions found in the literature of other researchers who investigated a similar phenomenon.

In the present study, each interview was coded initially according to the main groups of interview questions, that is, the participants’ involvement in the design and
the implementation of the SET Form, and the participants’ views about what was considered to be the most important aspect in teaching. In analysing the interviews, special attention was paid to interviewees’ answers to the probe questions to seek understanding of what was said, rather than simply what was said.

As the data from the Survey-Questionnaire for University Administrators were analysed and combined with the analysis of SETs, the data from interviews were re-organised to reflect the emergent themes from the examination of the literature as well as from the interview and survey data. Several broad constructs were identified. These included development and use of SETs, expectations of student learning outcomes, expectations of teacher’s and students’ roles, and the evaluative focus of SETs. Textual data, including interview data and document data, were extracted to match each of these broad constructs. During the process of selecting extracts from the textual data into these constructs, categories and themes that emerged from the data were sought.

A five-step procedure for the analysis of the study’s textual data was undertaken. First, interview data from individual administrators were analysed to understand their views about teaching and teaching evaluation by identifying (i) their expectations in relation to student learning outcomes, (ii) their expectations concerning the roles of the teacher and the students, and (iii) their assumptions of what should be measured in teaching. Second, quantitative data related to the individual administrators were analysed and extracted into identifiable dimensions in accord with the interview data. Third, the SET Form from each participating university was analysed to interrogate the assumptions about teaching implicit in the instrument. The analysis of these Forms was based on their underpinning expectations of student learning, teachers’ and students’ roles, and the focus of
teaching evaluation. Fourth, the views about teaching held by individual administrators, and the underlying assumptions about teaching implicit in SETs were compared to identify similarities and differences. The comparison was conducted on the basis of the three-dimension framework referred to above. Finally, a triangulation of findings was undertaken to establish the relationship between university administrators’ perceptions of teaching and the implicit perception of teaching seen in SETs.

A screen shot of the textual data analysis is presented below:

![Figure 4.1: Screenshot of Coding of Textual Data](image.png)

**Analysing numerical data**

The data from the survey-questionnaire for teachers in this study were collected and used to answer the third research sub-question relating to the perception of teaching held by academics of the participating universities. To assist this analysis, the Statistical Package for the Social Science (SPSS) version 16 was used. SPSS was used to generate descriptive statistics and to conduct statistical
procedures such as the calculation of frequencies, means, standard deviation, and principal component analysis.

The first consideration in analysing quantitative data in this study was whether to use parametric or non-parametric statistics. From the frequency tests on Question 1 to Question 30, it was noted that the histograms were plotted against a normal distribution curve. By and large, the distribution of data was negatively skewed and the scores for these 30 items were located more towards the high end of the scale. It was decided to use the median value as a more appropriate descriptive measure of central tendency than the mean value (Bryman, Becker, & Sempik, 2008). This decision was coupled with a recognition of the relatively small sample size, namely, 72 responses in University P and 28 responses in University N, making a sample size much less than the size recommended as appropriate for the use of parametric tests suggested by Tabachnick and Fidell (2007). The limitation of methodology in relation to the small sample size in each university (28 responses in University P and 72 responses in University P) precluded the use of factor analysis for the 30-item Perceptions of Teaching (Part A of the survey-questionnaire) in each university, a process which may have been useful to explore the interrelationship among these items as perceived by the teachers in the public and non-public universities separately. However, factor analysis was used for a combined set of data, that is, data drawn from both universities.

The decision to conduct a factor analysis, that is, “…statistical techniques applied to a single set of variables when the researcher is interested in discovering which variables in the set form coherent subsets that are relatively independent of one another” (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2007, p. 607) for the combined data set (i.e., 100 responses, which is significantly less than 300 suggested by Tabachnick) was seen as
useful for this study after consideration of the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy score of .66. There are two common extraction methods to determine the factors, namely, Principal Component Analysis (PCA) and Principal Axis Factoring (PAF), and the PCA was chosen for this study as it appeared to best fit the goals of identifying a reduced number (i.e., set) of variables and allow the establishment of the underlying dimensions; furthermore, it is the “default” method in many statistical programmes.

Limitations of the Study and Strategies to Manage Limitations

This study was an exploratory collective case study conducted at one point in time at two universities in Vietnam using qualitative and quantitative data collection methods. The process and products of the study were limited by several aspects, including the limited number of cases and the lack of prolonged engagement.

First, the major limitation of any case study such as this current study was that the cases were limited in number. In this study, only five university administrators in two Vietnamese universities were selected. The number of university teachers who participated in the study was 100. This limited the generalisability of the current study’s findings.

The second limitation was inherent in the lack of prolonged engagement (Lincoln & Guba, 1986). Due to time constraints, in this study, only one-off interviews were conducted, each lasting between 40 minutes and one hour. Notwithstanding these time constraints, the timeframe was believed to be sufficient for participants to express their views on the topic. In addition, documents available for analysis such as the Student Evaluation of Teaching Form shed some light on what had been done previously in each university.
Third, to seek answers for the third research sub-question, that is, the perception of teaching held by teachers in HEIs in Vietnam, teachers in two participating universities were asked to complete a survey-questionnaire. The use of questionnaire limited the opportunities to examine in depth teachers’ perceptions of teaching.

Since this case study employed a combination of both qualitative and quantitative methods of data gathering and data analysis, different strategies were used to manage these two facets of the study. Onwuegbuzie and Leech (2007) pointed out that a qualitative study could not be assessed for validity as such assessment might lead to a dichotomous outcome, that is, valid or invalid. Instead, validity is regarded as an aspect of integrity to be assessed “relative to purposes and circumstances” (Brinberg & McGrath, 1985, p. 13). Therefore, evaluating qualitative research leads to the evaluation of the legitimation of the study’s purposes with its circumstances. To assess the qualitative aspects of this study, a mixture of techniques such as triangulation, leaving an audit trail, checking for representativeness, peer briefing, rich and thick description, and informant feedback were used (Onwuegbuzie & Leech, 2007; Patton, 1990). To judge the quantitative aspects of the study, traditional scientific criteria of reliability and validity were employed.

Triangulation involves the use of multiple sources of data or multiple methods, multiple investigators and theories to obtain the corroborating evidence (Merriam, 1988; Patton, 1990). Following Denzin’s (1997, p. 319) assertion that “interpretations that are built upon triangulation are certain to be stronger that than those that rest on the more constricted framework of a single method”, data triangulation, theory triangulation and methodological triangulation were utilised in this study to explore the relationship between what university administrators perceive
teaching to be and their teaching evaluation practices. Data generated from the survey questionnaire, interviews and documents were triangulated.

Leaving an audit trail involves the researcher maintaining extensive documentation of records and data stemming from the study (Onwuegbuzie & Leech, 2007). The auditability of the current study was ensured by providing detailed account of methods used to collect and analyse data, by means of which the research processes became trackable. In addition, all important materials developed during the process of this study are attached in the Appendices in this thesis.

Rich and thick description potentially assists the transferability of research findings. In a qualitative study, transferability is limited, but “thick” and “rich” description enables the reader to judge the degree of similarity to the context or subject that all or a part of the findings can be applied to (Lincoln & Guba, 1986; Merriam, 1998; Stake, 2000). In this study, the participants’ perceptions of teaching and the contexts of Vietnamese tertiary education were described thoroughly.

To avoid inaccurate generalisation such as sampling non-representative informants or events, or processes, different strategies are needed to check for representativeness of the samples (Miles & Huberman, 1984). The representativeness of teachers was addressed through purposeful random sampling of the teaching staff in these two universities.

The data collected as result of administering the Survey-Questionnaire for Teachers and Survey-Questionnaire for University Administrators generated a set of quantitative data. Both instruments were evaluated in terms of the criteria of reliability and validity noted in Burns (2000) and Creswell (2008).

The reliability of a study can be described as the extent to which it consistently measures what it purports to measure (Burns, 2000). Since the results of
these questionnaires were intended to be used for supplementing the informants’
responses reflected in their interview transcripts, the reliability of the instruments
was particularly considered in terms of the consistency of the responses provided by
the respondents. To determine the internal reliability of the study, the level of
internal consistency (Burns, 2000) was assessed by calculating the Cronbach’s alpha
reliability coefficient.

To be valid, an instrument must first be reliable (Creswell, 2008). In this
study validity relates to the question of what the instrument measures: Does it
measure perceptions of teaching (construct validity)? Does it appear to measure what
it is supposed to measure (face validity)? Is the content of these survey-
questionnaires representative of the content of conceptions of teaching (content
validity)? These questions have been kept in consideration before, during, and after
the process of questionnaire design.

First, the basic construct of teachers’ perceptions of teaching derived from an
extensive literature review was incorporated into the questionnaires. Second, face
validity was ensured by asking ten university teachers to judge the face validity of
the instruments during the process of trialling. Last, the content validity of the
instruments was ensured by using several items which were previously trialled and
tested. These items have been modified from Teaching Perspectives Inventory (Pratt
et al., 2001), Approaches to Teaching Inventory (Prosser & Trigwell, 2006), and
Academics’ Orientations to Teaching Questionnaire (Samuelowicz, 1999).

Chapter Summary

This chapter has presented the research approach for this study and described
the characteristics by which it can be identified as qualitative research. It also
described the current study as an exploratory collective case study. The multi-site,
multi-person, and multi-method nature of the data gathering methods were described to allow replication. The processes of data collection and data analysis for this case study have been described.

In the following chapters, the results obtained from the data analysis processes and discussion of such results are presented in the context of the research aim and the research question.
CHAPTER 5     RESEARCH SUB-QUESTION 1:
PERCEPTION AND EVALUATION OF TEACHING IN MOET’S GUIDELINE

Introduction

This chapter is the first of the three which report the results from the process of data analysis from the multiple sources, that is, interviews with university administrators, survey-questionnaire for teachers and administrators, and document analysis. In addressing the research aim, namely, to investigate the perceptions and evaluation of teaching in Higher Education in Vietnam, the results of qualitative and quantitative data analysis were collated to address each of the three research sub-questions:

(i) How is teaching perceived and evaluated in the Ministry of Education and Training (MOET) Guideline on Student Evaluation of Teaching?

(ii) How is teaching perceived and evaluated by university administrators in particular Higher Education Institutions in Vietnam?

(iii) How is teaching perceived by the university teachers who work in the same institution as the university administrators of (ii)?

In seeking answers for each research sub-question, in this chapter and the two that follow, not only results of the data analysis are presented, they are also discussed in relation to the extant literature. The intention to incorporate result presentation and the discussion of such results was to give prominence to the views expressed by each group of participants in the study, that is, MOET Vietnam, university administrators, and university teachers.

This chapter is concerned with Research Sub-question 1. This question was addressed by examining the underlying perception of teaching in MOET’s Guideline
on SETs, a legislative framework within which SETs in HEIs in Vietnam were implemented. The chapter, therefore, begins with results of the data analysis from the two versions of MOET’s Guideline (see Appendix C6 and C7). It is followed by the discussion of these results.

Results

The preambles of the two versions of MOET’s Guideline (see Appendix C6 and C7), the first promulgated in 2008, and the current in 2010, reflected different rationales for the introduction of SETs nation-wide. It was stated in the first version that the Guideline was developed on the Directive from the Prime Minister regarding anti-corruption in education entitled Chinh phu: 33/2006/CT-TTg. The second version, however, was on the Directive regarding (i) renovation in education management in the period 2010-2012 entitled Chinh phu: 296/CT-TTg, (ii) the Directive of the Minister of MOET on the central mission of HE in the academic year 2009-2010, and (iii) the results from SET trials in several selected universities during academic year 2008-2009. It became apparent that in the preambles of both versions, no theories of teaching and learning, as well as no evidence from research, were explicitly stated. The Guideline included seven samples of complete SETs with the clear expectation that other HEIs would follow these samples in their instrument development.

The Guideline reflected a priority of evaluating teaching on “what-the-teacher-is” and “what-the-teacher-does” reflected in the stated purpose of the instrument. In both versions, MOET required HEIs in Vietnam to use SETs to “develop teaching staff with morality, professional conscience, with good content knowledge, and advanced pedagogy” (Guideline – Appendix C6). MOET also instructed university administrators to use SET data to “comment and judge their
teachers”, and to “prevent corruptions in teaching” (Guideline – Appendix C6). The purpose of improving student learning was not mentioned in the Guideline.

In addition, there was inconsistency in the purpose of SET implementation stated in two versions. Initially, SETs were instructed for the purpose of *proving* the quality of teaching delivered, such as to “contribute to the implementation of the Decree on Democracy”, to “contribute to quality accreditation in the HEIs”, to “assist administrators in HEIs to commend on and judge their teaching staff”, and to “prevent corruption in teaching in HEIs” (Guideline – Appendix C6). These purposes, however, have been removed from the current version of the Guideline. The current version appeared to be driven by the purpose of *improving* teaching practices. Particularly, in this version, university teachers were requested to “respect, be humble with their result from student feedback” (Guideline – Appendix C7). Corruption in education and the purpose of corruption prevention through the use of the teaching evaluation system were not mentioned.

The priority in measuring “what-the-teacher-is” and “what-the-teacher-does” as indicators of effective teaching became particularly evident in the content areas of the evaluation framework provided by MOET. For example, when five of the seven content areas were outlined, these were concerned with measuring teachers’ characteristics: “teacher’s content knowledge” (No. 1); “teacher’s teaching and learning materials” (No. 2); “teachers’ sense of responsibility and their enthusiasm to students, and teaching hours”; (No. 3), “teacher’s fairness in assessment and judgement” (No. 5), and teacher’s “professional behaviours” (No. 7). Other areas considered to be important in teaching evaluation were “teachers’ teaching skills” (No. 2), “teachers’ abilities in encouraging students to be creative and in respecting students’ independent thinking” (No. 4), and “teachers’ abilities in organising, giving
advices, and in guiding students to learn” (No. 6). It appeared that these content areas demonstrated a preoccupation with evaluating teaching on what teachers possess and demonstrate in their teaching as a presage variable, rather than on what students have learnt and achieved as process and product variables.

Analysis of the two MOET’s Guideline on SET yielded several crucial themes. The apparent change in the stated purposes for SETs from proving to improving indicated a change in the way teaching was perceived and evaluated. The revised Guideline outlined a commitment to and attempts made by the government of Vietnam to improve the quality of teaching and learning in HEIs. However, there was a lack of understanding about contemporary theories of teaching and learning to provide a strong theoretical base for MOET’s Guideline. The evaluation framework provided by MOET, therefore, primarily utilised aspects in terms of “what-the-teacher-is” and “what-the-teacher-does”, without taking into account students and their learning. In the following sections, these themes are discussed in relation to the literature.

Discussion

**MOET’s Guideline: A teacher-centred perception of teaching**

Data analysis presented above demonstrated that MOET’s Guideline on SETs was underpinned by a view of teaching that centres around teachers and their teaching, rather than students and their learning. Specifically, MOET instructed HEIs to design SETs with a set of predetermined criteria that exclusively measured teachers’ characteristics and teachers’ teaching behaviours. The non-existence of criteria related to the processes and outcomes of learning suggested that student learning was not viewed as important in the teaching evaluation, and hence in the improvement of teaching. The teacher-centred view of teaching identified in
MOET’s Guideline aligns with findings from a recent study by Tran et al. (2011) which found the underlying principles for two legislative documents - the National Curriculum Frameworks and the Standards of Quality for HEIs - were also teacher-centred. This study, therefore, reaffirms the work of Tran et al. (2011) by providing evidence from another legislative document – MOET’s Guideline on SETs.

The lack of theories of teaching and learning in the Guideline’s development

The data from this study provided evidence for Smith and Nguyen’s (2010) argument that in Vietnam the government’s enthusiasm to improve the quality of tertiary education has been driven by a genuine desire and ambitious goals without the benefit of a robust strategic planning process to guide its decisions and activities. As presented in Chapter 2 Context of the Study, the mandated implementation of SETs across all HEIs was seen as an effort to change the current state of a traditional transmissive model of teaching. However, the policy framework for teaching evaluation, as presented in this chapter, was not designed on the basis of an explicit contemporary theory of teaching and learning, nor on a research-based rationale. Instead, the Guideline was based on the Directives of the Prime Minister, the Minister in charge of MOET, and on the experiences of several HEIs in the SET implementation. The lack of theories of teaching and learning underpinning teaching-related policies may derail the Vietnamese government’s attempts at and efforts to improve the quality of teaching, as several studies (Burden, 2008; Lemos et al., 2010) have cautioned that confusion may be created rather than improvement of teaching and learning, should SETs continue to be designed without explicit theories of teaching and learning.
The central role of MOET in tertiary teaching management

The data analysis is indicative also of the centralisation of MOET reflected in its requirements regarding the evaluation of teaching. The fact that MOET mandated all HEIs to comply with its detailed instructions for the design and implementation of SETs, including core criteria to be covered in the development of SETs suggested that HEIs in Vietnam were centrally governed by MOET. Several researchers have made the claim about the centralisation of MOET encapsulated in MOET capped student enrolment policy, or in policy concerning with what to teach in each undergraduate programme (Dao & Hayden, 2010; Director et al., 2006; Hayden & Lam, 2010), in this study, however, centralisation was reflected in policy detailing how teaching was to be evaluated.

Chapter Summary

This chapter has presented the results of data analysis in relation to the purpose and the focus of teaching evaluation in MOET’s Guideline on SETs. The data analysis demonstrated a view of teaching that placed the emphasis on the teachers and their teaching because it does not provide the link of intellected foundations needed to persuade teachers.

The following chapter will address the second research sub-question and consider the ways in which administrators in two participating universities perceived teaching, and evaluated teaching. The data suggest congruence between the perceptions of teaching held by administrators and that in the instrument for teaching evaluation in each university. The presentation and discussion of such results will form the content of the next chapter.
CHAPTER 6  RESEARCH SUB-QUESTION 2:
STUDENT EVALUATION OF TEACHING AND PERCEPTION OF TEACHING HELD BY UNIVERSITY ADMINISTRATORS

Introduction

In addressing the research sub-question 2, namely, how is teaching perceived and evaluated by university administrators in Higher Education Institutions in Vietnam, the qualitative data from the interviews were used as the primary source of information, and results were compared with data from the survey-questionnaire. The organisation of this chapter is based on the results from each case, that is, University P and University N, respectively. The presentation of these results is followed by the examination of such results with the extant literature.

In reporting different ways of perceiving teaching, the following considerations were made. First, data analysis emphasised the individual administrator’s thinking about teaching and the perceptions of teaching implicit in each of the SET Forms used in University P and University N. Second, for presentation purposes, and given that there were no well-defined boundaries among various ways of perceiving teaching (Kember, 1997), descriptions of perceptions of teaching in this study are reported holistically, to reflect the inter-connectedness and the interwoven nature of perceptions of teaching held by administrators.

Third, to protect participants’ anonymity, real names are not used. Instead, each university administrator was given a pseudonym based on the position they held at the time of the interview and the pseudonym applied to the university, for example, DP means Director P at University P. All extracts from the interview transcripts quoted in this thesis follow the format university administrator’s pseudonym-line of reference, for example, DP.49 means Director at University P,
speaker turn 49 in the transcript. As described in the section on the data gathering process, all the semi-structured interviews were conducted in Vietnamese: the extracts from these interviews have been transcribed and translated by the researcher, after a random check for accuracy from a senior teacher of English. Finally, the instrument for teaching evaluation, the Student Evaluation of Teaching in each participating university, that is, University P and University N, was translated into English by the researcher.

**Results: The Case of University P**

In this section, the assumption about teaching integral to the teaching evaluation instrument, the SET Form, currently used in University P, is presented. The section begins with an account of the context in which the Form was developed and introduced in University P, followed by presentation of a detailed analysis of the SET items. In addition, the ways in which three university administrators, namely, Director P, Vice-President P, and President P, perceived teaching and the evaluation of teaching, are described.

**Development of SET**

At University P, collecting students’ feedback on the quality of teaching through a survey instrument was initiated in 2005, *concurrently* with its participation in the national accreditation program. The SET Form (see Appendix C 8) was then drafted and later officially introduced in 2006. It was developed by the three university administrators mentioned above. While Director P and Vice-President P appeared to have more direct involvement in the design of SET, the whole process of SET development was led and approved by President P.
The Form, aimed at “creating a friendly environment”, was designed with five overarching categories, signifying five items in the Form, namely (i) teaching methods; (ii) content of the lesson, (iii) compliance with regulations; (iv) enthusiasm and sense of responsibility; and (v) academic integrity. Twice a year, at the end of every semester, students in University P were asked to evaluate their teachers’ performances on a four-point Likert scale, ranging from, (1) not very good, (2) average, (3) good, (4) very good. The numbers 1, 2, 3, 4 were assigned to each similar item to calculate the total SET scores, that is, the higher the score a teacher received, the higher the perceived quality of teaching. The scoring system suggested that the same teacher’s performance could be rated “not very good” in one categorical aspect of teaching, but “very good” in other aspects of teaching. The last item, which asked students if their teacher had breached the Professional Code of Practice, that is, had accepted bribes from students, was a binary “Yes – No” question. This SET also allowed students to write open-ended comments, particularly for the last item, on the back of the Form.

The introduction and development of a tool to evaluate teachers and their teaching was not a smooth process. Considered to be “one of earliest universities to get students’ feedback about the teachers, according to MOET’s requirements”, the University encountered some challenges when it attempted to gather students’ voices about the quality of teaching. President P, for example, talked of the difficulty of going “against Vietnamese tradition”, in which as he put it, “only the teacher can give comments to the students, students have no right in evaluating the teacher”. Besides, university administrators also reported teachers’ feeling nervous about one specific item in the Form, namely:
The last question asking if the teacher was corrupt worried some teachers. For example, they [teachers] worry that even when they have done everything right, but the students might give negative feedback, [and the students] gave out comments that were untrue. (DP.2)

To ease the tension, particularly in relation to the question of teachers behaving corruptly, the draft of the Form went through various consultation stages. While there was a consensus regarding the four broad aspects of teaching included in the SET, there was a sense of reluctance when the aspect relating to teachers’ misconduct was included in the Form. The three university administrators reflected on these processes:

Before doing it [SET implementation], we have discussed and consulted with both parties [teachers and students]. Teachers agreed [with SET] because it was something that the students can comment on; and students are also enthusiastic because it is beneficial for them. (PP.2)

We drafted it [SET Form] and then sent it to all teaching groups for discussion, sending copies [of the Form] to all departments for discussion. The final round was in 2006 with 50 people, department Head and Heads of teaching groups. Each criterion was read out loud and voted on. For the first four items, it was quite easy, but the last one [Was the teacher corrupt?] was tough. Many voted it down, but then at last, it remained. (DP.2)

The university was hesitant at first thinking that teachers will react negatively to this Form, but after a few years of implementation, things became quite smooth (VPP.5)

For four years, from 2006 when the SET was first mooted until February 2010 (when this study was conducted), the Form has not been revised. The three university administrators appeared to be satisfied with what the instrument covered in the evaluation of teaching. Vice President P and President P, particularly, did not
want to alter or delete any of the currently used items in the Form. Vice President P, for example, stated that the Form was “reasonably adequate to evaluate teaching quality”, with the length “short enough” to avoid students “feeling uncomfortable and less inclined to complete [the Form]”. Director P expressed that there was one item which needed to be included in the Form; that is, a question in relation to whether the teacher “had prepared detailed lesson plans” prior to teaching the class.

**Perception and evaluation of teaching in University P’s SET**

As referred to in the section above, the SET instrument in University P consisted of five overarching categories/items. In analysing these item design, three key aspects emerged; (i) the evaluative focus of the SET Form, (ii) the expectations of what students should be able to do as a result of teaching and learning, and (iii) the expectations of the teacher’s and students’ roles in teaching and learning process. Each of these aspects is reported below.

With regard to aspect (i) above, it appeared that all five items in the SET used in University P overwhelmingly focused on the teacher’s characteristics and their compliance with institutional regulations. Specifically, the measure of teachers’ abilities to cover the required content was reflected in one item, to transfer knowledge to students in one item, however, the measure of teachers’ compliance with institutional regulations was reflected in three items. As the SET was designed in a way that each item was given equal weighting, it was assumed that the extent to which teachers conformed with institutional rules and regulations would determine their SET scores. Table 6.1 outlines such priority in the Form.

Teaching, implicit in the Form, appeared to be associated with teachers’ characteristics and compliance and, thus, the teaching evaluation instrument was a tool to measure these aspects. The evaluative focus, as presented in Table 6.1,
indicated perceptions of what needed to be modified to improve the quality of teaching. Teachers’ compliance with regulations, their sense of responsibility and enthusiasm were perceived to be the problem that required fixing.

Table 6.1

**Focus of Teaching Evaluation Implicit in SET**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Evaluative focus</th>
<th>Item No</th>
<th>Items as in SET</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Teachers’ compliance with regulations and teachers’ presage variables</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Compliance with regulations (punctuality, student management in class, coverage of required teaching load and of required mid-term tests)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Enthusiasm and sense of responsibility</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Was the teacher corrupt? (If yes, please provide details in the provided section so that the University can deal with it)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

With regard the expectations of student learning implicit in University P’s SET, only one item (out of five) appeared to convey an expectation of what students should be able to do after studying a course. The underlying expectations, reflected in this item, were somewhat in conflict with each other, particularly when they were combined in one triple-barrelled item (Table 6.2). It seemed that students were expected to not only to comprehend the lesson, but also to be active and creative. These expectations became somewhat in conflict, taking into account what the teachers were supposed to do to help students achieve these outcomes: they were supposed to teach in a way that did not challenge students’ thinking for students “easy comprehension”, antithetical to the way that challenge students’ thinking for them to be “creative and active”.


Table 6.2

**Expectations of Student Learning Implicit in SET**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Expectations of student learning</th>
<th>Item No</th>
<th>Item as in SET Form</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Conflicting expectations</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Teaching methods (assisting students for easy comprehension, encouraging students to be active and creative)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The expectations of teachers’ and students’ roles implicit in the SET were that teachers provided the content knowledge and students were the recipients of the presented knowledge. One item was found to convey these expectations (Table 6.3). Aspects of lecture content were combined in a multiple-barrelled item which indicated that lectures were expected to be “scientific”, “clear”, “correct”, “updated” and “applicable”. These in turn indicated an expectation of teachers to be seen as the providers of content prescribed in the syllabus. Here, “content” of the lectures was understood as well-arranged information that needed to be updated regularly. Teachers, in this regard, were responsible for updating the “correct” information and for the transmission of this information to the students.

Table 6.3

**Expectations of Teachers’ and Students’ Roles Implicit in SET**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Expectations of teachers' and students' roles</th>
<th>Item No</th>
<th>Item as in SET Form</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Presenter – Recipients</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Content of the lectures (scientific, clear, correct, updated, and applicable)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In brief, the introduction and development of a teaching evaluation instrument were initiated in response to meet requirements set in the national accreditation program. Underpinned this instrument were assumptions that (i) teaching evaluation should focus on the identification of “what-the-teacher-is”, (ii)
students were not supposed to construct knowledge for themselves and knowledge was seen as external to the students, and (iii) teachers’ roles primarily were seen in terms of responsibility to update the “scientific”, “correct” and “applicable” information and to impart it to the students in an easily comprehensible way.

In the next sections the ways in which the three university administrators in University P who were in charge of developing the SET Form perceived teaching are presented. Multiple data sets, interviews and the Survey-Questionnaire for Administrators, were used to facilitate comparison of various views about teaching expressed by these administrators. Results of the way individual administrators perceived teaching and teaching evaluation are presented below, first by Director P, then followed by Vice-President P and President P.

**Director P: “We have to transmit all of this knowledge to students”**

**Perception of teaching**

Results from data analysis of survey-questionnaire completed by Director P indicated that he believed teachers’ characteristics to be the most important factor in teaching. Indeed, two factors that he believed would affect the quality of teaching were, first, what the teachers bring to the classroom and, second, how the curriculum was designed (Table 6.4). Aspects in relation to how university support teaching, and how teachers support student learning received minimal attention in Director P’s view about teaching.

Analysis of the interview with Director P further suggested that student learning was not a prominent feature in his understanding of the quality of teaching. He equated teaching with teachers’ content knowledge. Therefore, in his view,
teaching was a process intended to transfer a teacher’ knowledge to the students.

Director P reported:

At the end of the day, we [teachers] have to transmit all of our knowledge to students … our knowledge of that particular subject. Say, Mr T. teaches 10 subjects, so he can only talk about these subjects [not others]. (DP.53)

Table 6.4

Factors Affecting Teaching Quality: Director P’s view

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level of priority (from the most important to the least important)</th>
<th>Underpinning focus</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Characteristics of the teacher</td>
<td>Teaching presage/ What the teacher is</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Curriculum design</td>
<td>Teaching presage/Curriculum</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers’ organisation of their teaching</td>
<td>Teaching presage/ What the teacher does</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students’ approaches to learning</td>
<td>Student learning process/ What the student does</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Characteristics of the students</td>
<td>Student presage/ What the student is</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers’ support for student learning</td>
<td>Teaching presage/ Support for learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University’s support for teaching</td>
<td>Teaching presage/ Support for teaching</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Knowledge was seen as external to the students, as he indicated an expectation of teachers to pass on to students what was written in textbooks and in the curriculum. His comment on several in-service students that “their knowledge had fallen out [after a few years of working]” indicated his view of knowledge as a block of information that could be “taken in” from the teachers’ talks or textbooks, and that could “fall out” if it was not in use. Director P, therefore, emphasised the need to teach a “correct curriculum”. He described the curriculum as a standard source of knowledge, stable and unchanged over time:
The content of your [teachers’] lessons needs to be based on scientific grounds because we are teaching human being, teaching them knowledge. If the content is not scientific, it must be wrong ... we can’t teach an incorrect curriculum (DP.43)

Maybe previously you [teachers] taught like this, but now you [teachers] have to change ... to teach according to the curriculum ... (DP.49)

In the abovementioned quotes, it appeared that for Director P, the word “scientific” was understood as being the antonym of the word “wrong”. To ensure that teachers were teaching a correct curriculum, Director P was concerned with ways to get teachers’ consensus about what to teach. He reported the endorsement process for the curriculum:

We need to depend on something correct … you are the teachers, you are the assessors ... you need to have something standard. The standard is something that the majority of members [in the department] endorsed ... The Dean needs to sign in ... he [the Dean] on your behalf, needs to sign to ensure its [curriculum] correctness. (DP.47)

Another aspect that concerned Director P in teaching was the way in which teachers could help students to correct their misunderstanding of the knowledge or the content. Students’ answers to a question were constantly compared with teachers’ answers or answers from the textbooks as if textbooks contained all the right answers. Correcting students’ understanding became one of the teachers’ important responsibilities, in Director P’s view:

The teachers will prove that your [students’] solutions might be correct but it could be correct only once ... the way you [students] understand this is not correct ... on this matter, you might be right, but overall you [students] are wrong. (DP.36)
Chapter 6

Student learning, for Director P, was mainly associated with how much content students have retained. Although he seemed to oppose the kind of examinations that required only the reproduction of information in several courses such as history, philosophy, or economic-politics, but it was not the case for other courses. In addition, he indicated a preference for norm-referenced assessment, that is, there must be some percentage of students who failed:

Don’t need to require students to memorise, like in the past ... you know, asking students to remember things that are hard to remember, such as names, date of birth or date of an event. The key is that teachers need to design exam papers in such a way that there must be some failures. If students do not study, they will fail...

(DP.75)

If the students do not study, if they copy cat, they copy the wrong part, they do not know how to associate with other parts ... if students do not attend class, they can not understand. (DP.75)

Interview data also indicated that Director P expected teachers to play the role of the “judge”, showing students the correct ways to think about or understand some things. Teachers were viewed as the controllers, who managed and corrected students’ understanding: “Teacher ... yes, the controller, the judge. They need to show students that your [teachers] understanding of this is correct, but you [students] understand that wrongly”. Students were expected to engage in “active learning”, by which Director P meant students being alert to teachers’ questions, rather than a process where students actively participate in meaning making. Students’ “active learning” in Director P’s account was the opposite of students’ propensity to be “lazy in learning”.

121
Students ... being active, meaning that we [teachers] have to make them work with us. It means that while teaching we [teacher] have a pause and ask students what they think about this matter? ... Call five students to answer the question ... then we [teachers] can give out the correct answers. (DP.34)

In brief, results from the multiple data source demonstrated that Director P viewed teaching as a process of imparting what was written in the textbooks to the students in an easily comprehensible way. Students, in his view, were seen as passive learners, and teachers were the knowledge carriers.

**Assumptions about what should be measured in teaching**

The interview data indicated that Director P placed particular focus on measuring teachers’ presage variables, such as their appearance, their voice, handwriting, and compliance with standards of professional conduct. For example, he expressed a particular satisfaction about the inclusion of the last item in the SET Form, that is, the question about corruption in education. In his view, an instrument, like SET, was aimed to detect teachers’ misconduct behaviours and hence data in relation to this would assist the university to differentiate the “good teachers” – teachers who were not corrupt from those who were, and thus allow it to “deal” with corrupt teachers:

There are many types of corruption, such as unfair marking, accepting money [bribes], frankly, teachers receive money from students and give them high marks … After the implementation of this Form [the SET Form], the good teachers were praised by students [for not engaging in bribery]. For those who were [corrupt], we [administrators] deal with them step by step: we [administrators] talked to them, then observed their behaviours, and if they showed some determination to change, we gave them a second chance… never think that there is no corruption… (DP.25)
When being asked what was the most important criterion in the evaluation of teaching, Director P mentioned teaching methods such as “teacher’s handwriting…the [level of] voice, and …personal appearance”. It emerged that in his view teaching methods involved aspects of “what-the-teacher-is”, rather than having the skills to engage the students in the teaching and learning process.

However, results of data analysis from Director P’s response to the multiple-choice question suggested his thinking about what should be measured in teaching was somewhat different. His choice of 10 SET items from the survey (see Appendix D – Table D1) suggested that he wanted teaching evaluation to be based on “the learning experience that helped me [students] to appreciate different viewpoints”, an aspect that was not evident in the interview.

**Vice-President P: “When they can repeat what you have talked about, it proves that they have understood”**

**Perception of teaching**

Vice-President P, the administrator responsible for the management of teaching-related matters in University P, stressed the importance of teachers’ characteristics, and teachers’ teaching skills for the improvement of teaching quality. Indeed, these factors were chosen as the most important factors affecting the quality of teaching (Table 6.5). In his view, support for teaching and learning appeared to contribute very little to teaching improvement process as these were ranked as the least important factors.
Table 6.5

Factors Affecting Teaching Quality: Vice-President P’s view

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level of priority</th>
<th>Underpinning focus</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(from the most important to the least important)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Characteristics of the teacher</td>
<td>Teaching presage/ What the teacher is</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers’ organisation of their teaching</td>
<td>Teaching presage/ What the teacher does</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Course/Curriculum design</td>
<td>Teaching presage/Curriculum</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Characteristics of the students</td>
<td>Student presage/ What the student is</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students’ approaches to learning</td>
<td>Student learning process/ What the student does</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University’s support for teaching</td>
<td>Teaching presage/ Support for teaching</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers’ support for student learning</td>
<td>Teaching presage/ Support for learning</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Correspondingly, the interview with Vice-President P showed his thinking about teaching and learning essentially as teacher-centred. Knowledge, in his view, was “stored in textbooks, teachers’ handouts, course syllabus”, and hence seen as external to the students. Teachers with good teaching methods were seen as those with the skills to assist students to “take in” knowledge within a short period of time. He also asserted that making students “think” was a sign of a bad teaching method. He commented:

It [teaching method] helps students to take in knowledge … If you have good teaching methods, students will be able to memorise the content straight after the lesson. However, [sadly] there are teachers who make students think and understand it by themselves ... (VPP.22)

The method of imparting which helps students to grasp it [lesson] straight in class, to understand it [lesson] at once, that is a good method (VPP.36)

Although he expressed his expectation of the students that they will “reach a different level of understandings”, the term “understanding” in his view was
understood as “when they [students] can repeat what you [the teachers] have talked about, it proved that they have understood. ..”. His expectations of students’ “understanding” of the lesson could be interpreted as the expectation that students remember and recall what has been presented to them. He expected teachers to be the people who presented the knowledge prescribed in the curriculum and helped students to store that knowledge.

Vice-President P also articulated an expectation that teachers “train students to be independent learners… and to be active in learning”. However, what he meant by “independent learning” and “active learning” equated with mechanical learning, that is, the ability to read textbooks or reference materials at home, or to be alert to teacher’s questions. He elaborated on “independent learning”:

When the lesson is left unfinished due to the lack of time, I would give them [students] some criteria or content, ... and require them [students] to study independently, then the next lesson I would check to see if they have studied it (VPP.42)

and on “active learning”:

We [teachers] can’t just present the knowledge to students, who are passively sitting to listen. While teaching sometimes we [teachers] need to pause suddenly and asked one or two students what we [the teachers] are talking about... It means that it forces students to listen to the lessons. If the teachers do not use this method, students might sit there hearing but not listening. However if the teacher occasionally asked students, student will listen (VPP.93)

Vice-President P viewed teachers in a traditional didactic role as people who controlled the teaching process and therefore the content, delivery and the extent of learning outcomes. Assessment, for example, was seen as a process of judging how much students have retained of the prescribed knowledge. Another purpose of
assessing student learning was to discern lazy students from hardworking students. Vice-President P reported:

If universities do not do it [set the exam], students will be lazy. When they [students] are lazy, they won’t study even for exams. If you [administrators] do not tighten up [the administration of the exams], students will have the opportunity to cheat [to open reference materials and copy], so a hardworking student sitting next to a student who can cheat without being punished, he [the hardworking student] will bring materials into the exam room next time. That’s why we [administrators] need to closely monitor the students who bring materials into the exam room, to make them [students] study. (VPP.145)

In short, Vice-President P viewed teaching as a process of imparting what was prescribed in the textbooks to the students, and learning as receiving the knowledge presented. While the role of the teachers in teaching and learning process was visible through the action of knowledge delivery, students were hardly visible in these processes. Students existed as passive recipients of the information delivered.

Assumptions about what should be measured in teaching

Emerging from the interview with Vice-President P was the view that teaching should be evaluated on the basis of the characteristics of the teachers, particularly their sense of responsibility in teaching. In evaluating teaching, he believed that “what-the-teacher-does” was fundamentally derived from “what-the-teacher-is”. Accordingly, what Vice-President P sought in evaluating teaching was information about a teacher’s content knowledge and the teacher’s personal traits, “open, cheerful, enthusiastic, and responsible, who complies with the regulations set by the university”. It became particularly evident when Vice-President P talked about his satisfaction with the implementation of the SET Form in his university:
I’m most satisfied with the fact that it [SET Form] has improved the transparency [of the teachers], and that’s important. Teachers became responsible. They know that students are watching them and they will think more conscientiously, that is important. From that thinking, it will lead to the quality of teaching. (VPP.222)

Initially, Vice-President P saw the purpose of SETs was to “enhance a bribe-free environment”, rather than a way to improve the quality of teaching. The teaching evaluation instrument, in Vice-President P’s view, was designed mainly for the purpose of investigating whether teachers complied with the university regulations, and warning university teachers that they were being monitored. Thus, his report on the impact SET implementation had on teachers at his university seemed to revolve around how to create a teaching context without teachers “engaging in professional misconduct”:

We distribute this Form to each class, they [students] generally tell us the truth … some of the teachers were corrupt … up until recently, there were instances of several teachers engaging in professional misconduct. (VPP.179)

For teachers, who were dobbed in by the students that they accept [bribes] repeatedly, the university will act … Most currently, from SET results for semester 1 in the academic year 2009 -2010, I would say, there will be two teachers who will be asked to resign due to their misconduct. (VPP.12)

Although data from interview showed that Vice-President P’s emphasis was on measuring teachers’ presage variables in teaching, the data from his response to the multiple-choice question seemed to be different. Specifically, he responded to the multiple-choice question that the measures of teaching should be on the basis of students’ confidence “in tacking unfamiliar problems”, and appreciation of “different viewpoints” (see Appendix D – Table D2). However, these aspects did not emerge from the interview data.
President P: “The knowledge that we have in our bodies, we are willing to impart [it] to our students”

Perception of teaching

President P’s accounts of teaching were primarily associated with the teacher’s characteristics. His response to the forced-response question demonstrated that teacher’s characteristics and curriculum design were the two most important aspects in the teaching improvement process (Table 6.6). As presented from Table 6.6, the least important elements in teaching improvement were students’ approaches to learning and the provision of a teaching and learning environment conducive to learning, suggesting that President P viewed student learning as unrelated to teaching.

Table 6.6

Factors Affecting Teaching Quality: President P’s view

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level of priority (from the most important to the least important)</th>
<th>Underpinning focus</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Characteristics of the teacher</td>
<td>Teaching presage/ What the teacher is</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Curriculum design</td>
<td>Teaching presage/Curriculum</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Characteristics of the students</td>
<td>Student presage/ What the student is</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers’ organisation of their teaching</td>
<td>Teaching presage/ What the teacher does</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University’s support for teaching</td>
<td>Teaching presage/ Support for teaching</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students’ approaches to learning</td>
<td>Student learning process/ What the student does</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers’ support for student learning</td>
<td>Teaching presage/ Support for learning</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

President P’s focus on “what-the-teacher-is” in teaching was apparent when he expressed the view that teaching and learning was a process where teachers passed on the knowledge that was embodied in the teachers:
In class, …, the lecture is, um, the knowledge, what we [teachers] have in our bodies, [and] we [teachers] are willing to impart it to our students. (PP.8)

Knowledge, in his view, was seen as external to the students and could be passed from the teacher’s “body” to the students. Students were expected to “acquire” the pre-packaged knowledge that is “owned” by the teachers and, therefore, their roles were hardly mentioned in President P’s account of teaching.

The teacher’s role was to tell students things in an organised and interesting way, utilising teaching aids such as computers, or computer software. Teaching pedagogy was associated with a teacher’s ability to use teaching aids. President P expressed his dissatisfaction with teachers who used only a blackboard in teaching:

For example, if someone teaches about the diesel engine, if they only use a blackboard, how can they fully explain it to the students? How can they draw very complicated pictures [on the backboard] and then teach them about the structure of the engine? [They can do it] only if they integrate [blackboard] with some modern teaching methods such as computers… (PP.14)

To carry out the lesson, especially for technical courses, it is not enough to use the blackboard, we [teachers] need to integrate this with an overhead, computer or make use of some software, AutoCAD, to teach students. Besides [using] a blackboard, teachers need to combine it with other visualisation facilities, (PP.12)

The role of the teacher in addition to passing on the knowledge and information they know was defined also as doing it within an allotted timeframe.

President P stated his concerns about “lesson burn out”, that is, leaving the syllabus unfinished when the bell goes. He mentioned that teachers should guide students to concentrate on the content to avoid being derailed from the syllabus:
For example, in this three-period lesson we [teachers] are supposed to teach this content, so we have to ensure that this content is delivered because each subject is designed with details in the course outlines and based on these course outlines, the teachers prepare their lesson plans, what should be included in this lesson plans ... what are we [teachers] supposed to teach in these periods. If a teacher does not have a good direction in teaching making students to ask so many questions, the teacher will have their lessons burnt. (PP.18)

It is apparent from the interview with President P that students were not encouraged to ask questions. Questioning was seen as sign of wasting a teacher’s class time, which should be spent on delivering and covering the prescribed content. For President P, time was critical, even in helping students to “understand” what has been presented: the shorter the time a teacher spent on giving students explanations, the better the teaching. He commented:

[Teaching] for easy comprehension means that a formula can be explained in only few words, don’t be wordy. (PP.20)

In short, President P viewed teaching as a process of delivering content knowledge from the teacher to the students in a simple way within an allocated time. He expected students to take in and store the given knowledge.

Assumptions about what should be measured in teaching

What President P sought for in evaluating teaching was to identify the differences in enthusiasm among teachers. The interview data suggested that for him, teaching should be measured by the extent to which the teachers expressed their enthusiasm and exhibited a sense of responsibility. He commented:

The most important? I always pay attention to the fourth [item in SET Form]: Enthusiasm and responsibility. Worded differently, it is about the ethics of the
teachers. If a teacher has it [enthusiasm and responsibility], she/he will achieve other criteria. (PP.2)

Data analysis from the survey, however, demonstrated that President P wanted to measure teaching on the basis of students achieving at a high cognitive level. Indeed, his choice of SET items (Appendix D – Table D3), such as students being able to “relate problems to what might happen in real-life”, and to “perceive the world from different perspectives” suggests a concern for the aspect of learning outcomes that was not evident in the interview.

Results: The Case of University N

In this section, the assumptions about teaching inherent in the teaching evaluation instrument, the SET Form, currently used in University N are presented. The section begins with accounts of the context in which the Form was developed and introduced in University N, followed by the presentation of detailed analysis of the SET items. In addition, descriptions of the ways two administrators, namely, Director N and President N, perceived teaching and the evaluation of teaching are presented.

Development of SET

The evaluation of teaching quality was first initiated in University N in 2001, long before its participation in the national accreditation program in 2005. A 19-item survey instrument was designed to gain students’ feedback on teaching. Since 2001, the SET Form (see Appendix C9) was formalised and became part of the teaching contract as an attachment. Recalling the time when SET was introduced, Director N and President N, both described the SET implementation to be “uncommon practices” in the HE system in Vietnam. This non-public university was among the
first HEI in the country to obtain student feedback about teaching process and quality.

Despite being “uncommon practice”, the university obtained agreement from their teaching staff to implement SET. In reflecting on the first implementation of the SET Form, President N reported:

I remembered sending letters with it [SET Form] attached to each teacher informing them about the university’s decision [to use the Form] and asked them to sign in the Form if they agreed with it..... Among 350 staff [teaching staff], only one person disagreed, the rest agreed ... that’s a real achievement... (PN.4)

The Form was designed to evaluate the teachers and their teaching across a wide range of disciplines in University N. It utilised a five-point Likert scale from (0) no comment; (1) strongly disagree; (2) disagree; (3) agree, and (4) strongly agree. It is worth noting that 11 items (from item No. 5 to item No. 16) were given double scores in the scoring system (Table 6.7). In this university, the higher the score a teacher received, the more effective he/she was assumed to be as a teacher. With this current scoring system, teachers who received a score of 22 and above were considered to be exemplary. The results of SET scores for individual teacher were not publicised, even for the relevant teacher, and the only two people who knew about the results were Director N and President N. Teachers who wanted to know about their SET results had to make contact with either President N or Director N for information.
Table 6.7

*Score Given to Each Item of the SET Form of University N*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scale</th>
<th>Score given to item No 1, 2, 3, 4, and item No 16,17, 18, 19</th>
<th>Score given to the remaining 11 items</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0 – No comment</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 – Strongly disagree</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 – Disagree</td>
<td>0.25</td>
<td>0.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 – Agree</td>
<td>0.50</td>
<td>1.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 – Strongly agree</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>2.00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Perception and evaluation of teaching in University N’s SET**

The 19 items in University N’s SET were analysed to explore the underlying understanding about teaching in the instrument. Emergent from this analysis were three key aspects: (i) focus of teaching evaluation, (ii) expectations of student learning, and (iii) expectations of teachers’ and students’ roles.

With regard to aspect (i) above, it was apparent that the majority of items (17 out of 19 items) were designed with “the teacher” at the beginning of the item, and thereby demonstrated that the focus of teaching evaluation was perceived to be the teachers and their teaching, but not student learning. Although two items were designed to evaluate teacher’s characteristics or “what-the-teacher-is”, the majority of the items sought student feedback on “what-the-teacher-does”. For examples: “The teacher used many examples to help students to take in the lesson’s content” (Item No. 6) and “The teacher used the teaching aids effectively” (Item No. 10). The evaluative focus on “what-the-teacher-does” became particularly evident when these items were given double scores in the scoring system.
The expectations of student learning, though not explicitly communicated in the Form, could be discerned from five items, as shown in Table 6.8. There was an expectation that students follow what had been prepared for them (Item No. 3). The heavy reliance on “teachers’ answer keys” to ensure the correctness of what students had gained (Item No. 17 and Item No. 19) indicated that teacher’s knowledge and their understanding were viewed as a standard source of knowledge. In addition, since the “connections between components of the unit” (Item No. 8) were ready-made by the teachers, students were not expected to construct these linkages. Rather they relied on the teachers, who had pointed out the connections and presented them to students.

Table 6.8

*Expectations of Student Learning Implicit in the SET Form*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Students were expected to</th>
<th>Item No</th>
<th>SET item description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>follow teachers’ instructions</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Reading materials, lesson handouts given in advance helped me easily follow the lessons and take notes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>17</td>
<td>Teacher’s feedback written in homework and mid-term test made me understand more about my mistakes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>19</td>
<td>Teacher’s answer key for mid-term test was clear and helped me to self-evaluate my own test.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>acquire teachers’ knowledge</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>The teacher used many examples to help students easily take in the lessons’ content.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>8</td>
<td>The teacher helped students to make connections between components of the unit.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In relation to the expectations of the teacher’s and student’s roles, it appeared that the SET Form was underpinned by an expectation that teachers should be effective in transmitting their understandings to students. This expectation was discernible particularly from nine items, as can be seen from Table 6.9. Specifically, several items (Item No. 5, 6, 8, and 10) were indicative of the teacher’s role in
implementing a smooth and straightforward process of delivering their knowledge and understandings to students. While teachers were expected to “use many examples” (Item No. 6), the purpose of using this technique appeared to be to prove what they had presented, rather than to facilitate discussions. In addition, teachers were expected to be role models for students in terms of punctuality and compliance with institutional rules and regulations. Students, in turn, were seen as the recipients of teachers’ understandings presented to them. Students, to some extent, were expected to be active in learning, by taking part in class discussion (Item No. 7), or preparing lessons before going to class (Item No. 14).

Table 6.9

*Expectations of Teacher’s and Students’ Roles Implicit in the SET Form*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teacher-Students</th>
<th>Item No</th>
<th>SET item description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Presenter – Recipients</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>The teacher taught clearly and easily to be understood.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>6</td>
<td>The teacher used many examples to help students take in the lessons’ content.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>8</td>
<td>The teacher helped students to make connections between components of the unit.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>10</td>
<td>The teacher used teaching aids effectively.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Presenter – Active recipients</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>The teacher created the environment and encouraged students to take part in the lessons (such as called students to answer questions, provided conditions for students to ask questions).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>9</td>
<td>The teacher was eager to answer students’ questions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>14</td>
<td>Homework given by the teacher made me prepare the lesson before going to the class.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>15</td>
<td>The teacher used many specific techniques to encourage me to study.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>11</td>
<td>The teacher always trained students to have professional and friendly characteristics of the working class (rules conformity, punctuality, good manners)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In short, the analysis of University N’s instrument for teaching evaluation demonstrated an assumption of teaching as a process of transmitting teachers’
understandings to the students. Students were seen as active in acquiring these understandings. The main focus of the instrument was on teachers’ teaching skills, or aspects associated with “what-the-teacher-does”.

In the next sections the ways in which teaching was perceived by two university administrators accountable for SET design, are presented. Multiple data sets collected in this study were used to facilitate the comparison of various views about teaching expressed by the university administrators. Perceptions of teaching and assumptions of what should be measured in teaching articulated by Director N, followed by those of President N, are reported.

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

**Perception of teaching**

The Director of Office of Academic Affairs in the non-public university viewed teaching largely in terms of the characteristics of the teachers. Indeed, his response to the forced-response question indicated that he emphasised teaching presage variables, such as the teacher’s characteristics and their organisation in teaching (Table 6.10). Factors associated with the provision of support for teaching and learning were rated the least important, suggesting that he viewed student learning as unrelated to teaching, and that he regarded the provision of teaching and learning conducive for learning as unnecessary.
Table 6.10

Factors Affecting Teaching Quality: Director N’s view

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level of priority (from the most important to the least important)</th>
<th>Underpinning focus</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Characteristics of the teacher</td>
<td>Teaching presage/ What the teacher is</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers’ organisation of their teaching</td>
<td>Teaching presage/ What the teacher does</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students’ approaches to learning</td>
<td>Student learning process/ What the student does</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Characteristics of the students</td>
<td>Student presage/ What the student is</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Course/Curriculum design</td>
<td>Teaching presage/Curriculum</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University’s support for teaching</td>
<td>Teaching presage/ Institutional support for teaching</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers’ support for student learning</td>
<td>Teaching presage/ What the teacher does</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

What mattered in the process of learning, for Director N, was whether the students had attained basic discipline-related knowledge which was delimited by external demand such as the curriculum. Outcomes of student learning were associated with “the content of the lesson”, that is the quantitative amount of information that students were able to retain after studying. Therefore, in Director N’s view of the learning process, there was a strong sense of students’ abilities to “take in” the information from the teacher, the more the better and the quicker the better. He emphasised ways in which teachers could help students to increase the amount of knowledge absorbed. Mechanical presentation of content, in his view, was seen as one way to achieve this goal:

Deliver [the content] comprehensively for students to take in … it [content] is stored, as well as increase the percentage of students who take [it] in quicker and with the most amount. (DN.21)

Another way the teacher could assist students in taking in the presented content, in Director N’s view, was through assessment. Talking of a female teacher
whom he nominated as having exemplary teaching, he commented that this teacher had found an efficient way to encourage students to study. He further elaborated that this teacher not only tallied the score of mid-term and end-term tests as required, but also tallied the scores of various informal assessment tasks, such as giving marks for the contribution that a student had made to classroom discussion:

In assessment, there are three different scores for a student in a term, one of which is attendance. She does not take attendance but she uses this for the contribution that a student has. (DN.55)

It was apparent that what he expected students to do in their learning was simply to store as much as possible of what was given to them. It seemed that Director N did not expect students to think critically, or to value different opinions.

In relation to the roles of the teachers and students, Director N expressed a view that teachers were those who “guide them [students] to get to the objectives [of the lesson] in the best way, the quickest and most productive”. Consistent with the view that teachers should provide guidance about content to students, Director N stressed the teachers’ abilities to show their expertise in relation to the subject and to “explain the content in detail” for students. Even in cases where students raised questions, teachers were supposed to showcase what they knew about the subject matter. He stated:

If there are questions raised by students? Teachers will have to answer these questions straight away. Questions can be answered by the relevant lessons ... basically, they [teachers] will answer based on their existing knowledge. If there are some hard questions, teachers can delay the answers for further investigation or they [teachers] can show them [students] some websites. (DN.27)
While in Director N’s account of teaching and learning, teachers’ roles were evident to a considerable extent, students were relatively invisible. The roles students were to play could be discerned from the roles of the teachers. While teachers were expected to provide guidance around content and assist student to take in what was written in the syllabus, students were expected to receive the presented information.

In short, Director N assumed that teaching was a process of imparting the pre-packaged content, and students were expected to store and recall the given content.

**Assumptions about what should be measured in teaching**

Data from the interview with Director N indicated an emphasis in teaching evaluation on measuring aspects related to “what-the-teacher-is” and “what-the-teacher-does” in teaching evaluation. When asked about the most important criteria in teaching evaluation, he stated that it would be “renovation in teaching methods, in assessment [of student learning]”, as well as a teacher’s sense of responsibility and their enthusiasm. He further explained why he particularly looked for enthusiasm in teachers:

In this university [non-public university], most teachers are visiting teachers, you know, they teach for many others [institutions]. When they come to teach in our university, they are tired… secondly, they don’t invest [their] time for a course, or a topic… thirdly, as visiting teachers, they do not spend all their time [for teaching in this university] (DN.52)

Being responsible in teaching was another aspect Director N looked for in teaching evaluation. Responsibilities involved careful preparation of lectures and student behaviour management, such as “writing up Classroom Logbook, caring for students’ attendance”. Lack of enthusiasm and responsibility, or as he termed
“dedication for the job” would be the primary cause for learning and teaching failures.

Director N’s satisfaction with the currently used SET came as he reported the effect SET implementation had on teaching practices institution-wide. He reported that the implementation of SET has “warned” the teachers that they were being monitored, and as a result of this monitoring system, he had observed some changes in the way teachers in his institution taught. Director N regarded the SET Form as a way to manage and monitor teacher’s behaviours during the process of teaching. He believed that every teacher could teach effectively, the matter lay in whether he/she was enthusiastic and responsible:

After using this Form, I’m most pleased to see teachers’ changes. It [SET] made teachers to modify their teaching, their assessment methods ... Simply put, if a teacher thinks that ‘my teaching and my subject will be evaluated at the end of the course’, he will definitely change factors that were not highly evaluated, or he or she [the teacher] will dedicate his/her time onto the subject ... this [SET] signals the teachers that you [teachers] are ‘monitored’ therefore they [teachers] cannot teach for the sake of fulfilling their teaching hours. (DN.100)

However, there was a difference in Director N’s views between those expressed in the interview and those recorded in the survey. In responding to the multiple-choice question, Director N responded that teaching should be measured on whether or not students “became more confident in tackling unfamiliar problems” (Appendix D – Table D4), an outcome of learning that was not visible in the account of teaching presented in his interview.
President N: “When it comes to teaching, we need to have logical presentation”

**Perception of teaching**

President N’s accounts of teaching were mainly expressed in terms of the provision of context contributing to teaching. Indeed, in responding to the forced response question, he indicated that curriculum design and the characteristics of the teachers were the most important aspects affecting teaching (Table 6.11). It is worthwhile noting that he rated the characteristics of the students to be the least important aspect affected to the quality of teaching, suggesting that teaching was seen as associated with the other factors rather than what the students brought to the classroom.

Table 6.11

*Factors Affecting Teaching Quality: President N’s View*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level of priority (from the most important to the least important)</th>
<th>Underpinning focus</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Course/Curriculum design</td>
<td>Teaching presage/Curriculum</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Characteristics of the teacher</td>
<td>Teaching presage/ What the teacher is</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers’ organisation of their teaching</td>
<td>Teaching presage/ What the teacher does</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University’s support for teaching</td>
<td>Teaching presage/ Institutional support for teaching</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students’ approaches to learning</td>
<td>Student learning process/ What the student does</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers’ support for student learning</td>
<td>Teaching presage/ What the teacher does</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Characteristics of the students</td>
<td>Student presage/ What the student is</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Data drawn from the interview with President N suggested that he held complex views about teaching. In relation to his expectations of student learning, he suggested that students should “learn something more after attending a teacher’s lecture”. Since he believed that “today we have more information than yesterday”,

141
the quality of learning seemed to be dependent on the quantity of information students had. Talking about his own experience of solving the same problem differently, depending on the amount of information he had, he expected students to develop some ability to obtain more information, as well as to accumulate the established body of knowledge presented by their teachers. In his view, deep learning may come later as a result of having adequate information about the subject matter. Thus, President N expressed his agreement with teachers designed assessment tasks in an individualised way, that is, each student was supposed to be given an individual test, so that students would be unable to copy answers from their classmates.

President N regarded the role of the teachers as ensuring that students were motivated to learn. He talked metaphorically about teacher’s roles:

Imagine this, for example, if we look at a picture or visit a new place, or go sightseeing, we only continue doing what we’re doing if it looks pretty. Sometimes we buy a book because of the beautifully designed book cover, we are unsure about the book content, but we can guess about the content. The decisive factor is the book cover, it is either presented very academically or beautifully or elegantly. (PN.15)

Students’ motivation to learn, in his view, did not come from a teacher’s capacity to inspire students to higher levels of learning, but rather from the ways teachers delivered their understandings to students. There was a strong sense of the importance of a teacher’s presentation to the students, particularly the “logical presentation” to assist students to overcome “hurdles” in learning. He stated that the main point of a lecture should be that a teacher “[makes] students feel that this problem is not difficult”. His expectation of teachers was that they guide students in their learning and make teaching and learning processes go smoothly. He described teacher’s roles:
The role of a teacher is to prepare [lecture] carefully in order to show students how a story happens by [using] specific examples. Each teacher must explore it [ways to teach], not just telling or picking up whatever she/he remembers (PN.22)

To be exemplary teachers, according to President N, required more than the content knowledge since “not everyone can teach well, teaching requires technique”. Thus, being skilful in teaching was associated with a teachers’ ability to choose appropriate examples to illustrate the topics to be covered. However, it was the teacher’s role to unpack the examples and show the students the relevance of the example to the content. For example,

Using only one example, but I can utilise it from different angles. When I explain this concept, I make use of the example in this way, later when I teach another concept, the same example but I utilise it in another way. It is just like a subject I can turn over and over again so students can see it from all angles (PN.24).

Students were expected to be active and participative in learning, however, they were not expected to search for answers that differed from their teachers:

Teachers need to provide opportunities, opportunities for students to be creative, to participate in the lessons? Encourage students to talk about their own ideas? After that, the teacher can present [the lesson] again … You [teachers] have to explain which part [of a learning task] is interesting, and give them opportunities to correct [their answers]. (PN.25)

In short, President N’s views about teaching appeared to be complicated. On the one hand, he viewed teaching as a process of providing students with information, and the more information students obtained, the better learning outcomes they would attain. On the other hand, he also believed that teaching was a process of transmitting teachers’ understanding to students. He saw the role of the
teachers to be the provision of their own understandings in a logically arranged manners. Underpinned his thinking about teaching was the assumption that knowledge was external to the students.

Assumptions about what should be measured in teaching

President N viewed SET as an instrument to assist university teachers to improve their pedagogical skills. For him, 19 items in the SET Form were indicators of teaching quality. Data from the interview was indicative of his emphasis on the pedagogical skills in teaching, which came from his own experience as students. He reported:

I have learned from some brilliant teachers ... He is extremely good, he could answer all of the tough questions ... but the way he taught was extremely incomprehensible ... in my class of 40-50 students, only about 5 people or so loved his teaching since they could understand what he said. The rest found it [the lesson] boring since they did not understand it. (PN.20)

In addition “what-the-teacher-does” as indicator for teaching effectiveness, President N also indicated that teachers’ compliance with institutional rules and regulations was important. He believed that if students were asked to be punctual, teachers should provide good example for students: “If I say that the class starts at 7 am, I would never be late for class”.

President N expressed complete satisfaction with what was currently measured in his university’s instrument for teaching evaluation and this satisfaction with the SET implementation was on the basis that it “had a positive impact on teachers. They [teachers] know what they should have to do if they want to have higher score [SET score]. This, in itself, is very good”.

144
However, President N expressed a different view in his responses to the survey. His choice of SET items from the multiple-choice question (Appendix D – Table D5) demonstrated that his preferred basis for evaluating teaching was on the change in students’ thinking, as reflected in his choice: “after studying this subject, I reconsidered many of my former viewpoints”. This aspect was not evident in data from the interview with President N.

Analysis of the ways in which teaching was perceived and evaluated in University P and University N yielded several themes. First, administrators in this study viewed knowledge as external to the students, suggesting that students were not seen as being able to construct knowledge for themselves and by themselves, and teachers played the role of transferring knowledge to students. Thus, these administrators tended to hold teacher-centred views of teaching. Second, as designers of SET instrument in their respective universities, the ways in which these administrators perceived teaching were in congruent with the perceptions of teaching implicit in the instrument they designed. Furthermore, what administrators perceived to be important measures for teaching evaluation was reflected in the focus of teaching evaluation in their universities. In the following sections, these themes are discussed in relation with the literature on perceptions of teaching and evaluation of teaching.

Discussion

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

The research on administrators’ perceptions of teaching cited in the literature (e.g., Neumann, 1993; O’Meara, 2005; Williams & Rhodes, 2002) largely focused on how administrators in research-intensive universities perceived the value of teaching,
in comparison with the value of research. This present study adds to this limited literature by providing a detailed account of how administrators in teaching-intensive universities perceived teaching. All five administrators in the study perceived teaching as placing the teachers in the centre of the teaching and learning process. Specifically, four out of five of the university administrators held the view of teaching as transmitting information: that is, the purpose of teaching was to ensure that students acquired the prescribed curriculum, which was organised and transmitted to them by the teachers. These administrators saw the role of the teachers as “the judge”, or “the controller”, who transmitted the “essence of the content” to students. Students were seen as passive recipients, who were supposed to “take in” the presented knowledge, and “memorise the content straight after the lesson”.

One administrator, President N, presented a view of teaching as transmitting teachers’ understanding: that is, the main aim of teaching was to have students acquire teacher’s understanding of the content and reproduce this understanding. It was the teacher’s understandings of the subject that students were expected to achieve. Teachers’ roles, in this view, were to structure and explain the content in ways that made understandings easier for students to acquire:

When it comes to teaching I’m very keen on this – that is, we need to have logical presentation, it means we need to know that there are few hurdles for students in this topic... but these hurdles are important as if they [students] are caught up in these hurdles, they can’t go on... they will understand more in the next lessons or through doing exercises. That’s why we need to have logical presentation in a way to help students overcome these hurdles. (PN.14)

It should be noted that the data did not provide empirical evidence for student-centred understanding of teaching, which has been identified and
documented in the literature (Kember, 1997; Kember & Kwan, 2000; Norton, Richardson, Hartley, Newstead, & Mayes, 2005; Postareff & Lindblom-Ylänne, 2008; Samuelowicz & Bain, 2001; Trigwell et al., 1994). Instead, the ways in which university administrators in this study perceived teaching corresponded to what has been described as teacher-centred conceptual categories (Postareff & Lindblom-Ylänne, 2008; Pratt, 1992; Prosser & Trigwell, 1999; Prosser et al., 1994; Samuelowicz & Bain, 2001; Trigwell et al., 1994). The similarities between perceptions of teaching held by teachers found in the aforementioned studies, and those held by administrators in this study, could be due to the fact that all five university administrators in this study were teachers before they became administrators. The influence of broader “institutional, cultural, political and/or social contexts” (Pratt, 1992, p. 218), combined with past experience as students and teachers, perhaps, accounted for relatively strong presence of teacher-centred conceptual categories held by the administrators in this study.

First, administrators’ past experience as students, and then as teachers, may have had some impact on their views of teaching. For example, most of the administrators referred to their former teachers, or to what teaching and learning were like when they were school students. President N talked of his experience as an university student being taught by a teacher “with good subject-matter knowledge”, but somewhat “limited teaching skills” which resulted in the students’ failure to comprehend the lessons. This experience, in part, has made President N believe that “teaching requires techniques”, and that having teaching skills would allow students to acquire what was been presented by the teachers, and subsequently to attain learning outcomes. Teachers’ past experience in teaching and learning has been acknowledged in the literature as the most “commonly reported influence on the
development of teaching practices” (Ballantyne, Bain, & Packer, 1999, p. 249). This present study not only confirmed the work of other researchers in identifying personal influence on the conceptualisation of teaching, but also provided evidence of such an influence on a group of administrators.

In addition, the educational context of Vietnam suggests another contributing factor in the shaping of administrators’ over-emphasis on covering the required content in teaching. The pressure to finish the entire syllabus within an allocated time was felt throughout the institution, became evident when President P spoke about his concerns about “the lesson plan burnt”, that is, teachers leaving the syllabus unfinished when the bell goes. The administrators’ intense concerns about content coverage perhaps resulted from MOET’s mandated requirements that all HEIs to comply with the National Curriculum Frameworks, in which MOET prescribed what was to be taught, what was to be learned, and what was to be assessed, as well as how much time teachers were to spend on the delivery of instruction. In a centralised education system, like that of Vietnam, where MOET’s student enrolment quota was decisive in the generation of the main source of income for all HEIs (Hayden & Lam, 2010; World Bank, 2008), it was likely that administrators were expected to behave in conformity with MOET’s requirements and hence, with MOET’s views of teaching and learning.

The study provided evidence to support Watkins’ finding (1998) that in Asian culture it was of utmost importance in teaching that the teacher be able to provide a role model for students in the matter of good moral conduct. As a result, teaching and teaching profession were perceived to provide the opportunity for the teachers, not the students, to showcase their enthusiasm. As one President stated:
Teaching profession is the special career, it is about planting a whole new generation, it is the most noble profession that requires every teacher to have the most sincere conscience. Conscience means enthusiasm and responsibility. If they have that conscience for the job, they will think hard to create good teaching methods, they will comply with the regulations and rules and of course they won’t have misconduct in their teaching. (PP.6)

The understanding of teaching as teacher-centred held by these administrators, by and large, were considered in the literature to be a simple understanding of teaching (Fox, 1983; Kember, 1997; Prosser et al., 1994; Samuelowicz & Bain, 2001) and therefore, less “desirable” (McKenzie, 1996) if high quality of student learning is to be achieved. These university administrators were primarily concerned with how effective teachers were at delivering content to students, as opposed to how well student learning was supported, suggesting that they may hold, what has been described in the literature as “blame-on-teachers” view of teaching (Biggs & Tang, 2007). That is, the failure of student learning outcomes, as seen in these administrators’ views, was mostly due to the teachers and their teaching.

It is also worth noting that the two participating universities in this study were among the first 20 universities accredited by MOET, suggesting that there may be a widespread view among administrators in HEIs in Vietnam that institutions exist to “provide teaching”, rather than to “produce learning” (Barr & Tagg, 1995).

**SET – a mirror for its designers’ perceptions of teaching**

The data demonstrated a congruence between perceptions of teaching held by administrators – designers of SET Forms with that implicit in the Form. The congruence were reflected in aspects related to expectations of student learning,
expectations of teachers’ and students’ roles, and in the focus of teaching evaluation. Specifically, in University P, the three administrators believed the evaluative focus of SETs on measuring teachers’ personal characteristics. These views were reflected in a SET with three out of five items designed to evaluate the teacher’s “compliance with the rules” (Item No. 3), the teacher’s “enthusiasm and sense of responsibility” (Item No. 4), and “the teacher’s professional code of practice” (Item No. 5). Similarly, in the case of University N, the reflection of both administrators-SET designers’ perceptions of teaching was evident in SET items. Specifically, the two administrators believed that the focus of teaching evaluation should be on what-the-teacher-does, and this evaluative focus was translated into the design of SET, in which 11 items (out of 19) were used to evaluate teachers’ teaching skills, and were given double points towards the overall scores of SET.

The current study, therefore, provides important empirical evidence for the argument made by several researchers (Barrie, 2001; Burden, 2008; Kolitch & Dean, 1999; Pratt, Kelly, & Wong, 1999) that SET reflects the understandings and beliefs about teaching and learning of those who design and use them. The congruence of the SET designers’ perceptions of teaching with items contained in the SETs of the two participating universities found, demonstrated that the designers acted “in accordance” (Pratt, 1992) with their perceptions. In identifying so, the study suggests a need for an inclusion of the views of SET designers in future studies related to SETs.

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

The literature on SETs has documented different foci of teaching evaluation, such as focusing on teachers’ personal traits (e.g., Smalzried & Remmers, 1943),
and focusing on teaching pedagogical skills (e.g., Lally & Myhill, 1994; Marsh, 1984; Marsh & Roche, 1997). The data analysis presented in this chapter is indicative of a range of institutional foci in the teaching evaluation systems of each participating institutions. These foci were underpinned by assumptions about what was important to be measured in relation to teaching that were held by the administrators of the individual institutions. Specifically, the main focus on measuring "what-the-teacher-is" was evident in University P, while measuring "what-the-teacher-is" and "what-the-teacher-does" were apparent in University N.

What was important to be measured in teaching, for administrators in University P, was the teachers’ characteristics, particularly enthusiasm of the teachers. In the literature, several instruments used to evaluate teaching such as the Student Evaluation of Educational Quality (Marsh, 1987) has included teachers’ enthusiasm as one of the important criteria for the evaluation of teaching, because enthusiasm was perceived by teachers and students to be one of characteristics of effective teachers. However, in this study, teachers’ enthusiasm was believed to be the factor to ensure the quality of teaching delivered. Administrators in University P believed that if the teachers were enthusiastic they would “achieve other criteria”, that is, they would comply with institutional teaching-related rules and to teach in a comprehensible way, and hence to enhance the quality of student learning. It is also worth noting that compliance with the professional code of conduct appeared to be one of the criteria explicitly measured in the SET in this university. The inclusion of the question, “Was the teacher corrupt?” in a formalised teaching evaluation instrument may suggest the concerns of relative common phenomenon of teachers engaging in misconduct. The study reinforces concern about the current situation of corruption in education in Vietnam, a concern which has been acknowledged in the
government’s reform agenda to be one of the challenges facing the system (14/2005/NQ-CP: Chinh phu, 2005).

In University N, two administrators, Director N and President N, were responsible for teaching evaluation practice in the university and believed that the focus of teaching evaluation should be on both teachers’ characteristics and teachers’ teaching skills. In particular, two administrators rated teachers’ characteristics and the organisation of their teaching to be the most or the second most important aspects affecting the quality of teaching (see Table 6.10 and Table 6.11), and in President N’s words, “not everyone can teach well, teaching requires technique”. Indeed, researchers on evaluation of teaching (Centra, 1993; Marsh, 1984, 2007; Ramsden, 1991) considerably agreed that a teacher’s ability to organise, to plan and to present the teaching material were important dimensions of effective teaching, and these dimensions were commonly used in the evaluation of teaching.

It should be noted that the focus on student learning in teaching evaluation practice, which was documented in the literature (Ellett et al., 1997; Kember & Leung, 2008; Kuh & Hu, 2001), was not found in the administrators’ accounts of teaching evaluation. Instead, what should be measured in teaching for them was confined to the “technical aspects of teaching” (Pratt, 1997, p. 28), rather than the substantial aspects of teaching, that is, for the improvement of student learning. The institutional focus of teaching evaluation found in this study illustrates that if learning did not occur, teachers were perceived to be the problem that need to be monitored: either their expertise, their enthusiasm, and their appearance; or, teachers’ teaching skills in terms of their organisation for teaching and presentation of materials.
Perception gap

Research on the conceptualisation of teaching has found instances where individuals may have both “ideal” and “working” perceptions of teaching (Samuelowicz & Bain, 1992, 2001). The incompatibility of these perceptions often resulted in what has been described in the literature as “perception gap” (Galton, Hargreaves, & Comber, 1998).

The data presented throughout this chapter indicated that there was a gap between administrators’ preferred views of teaching and their actual views, most evidently in relation to their thinking about what should be measured in teaching. For example, the measure for teaching on the basis of the change in students’ thinking and appreciation of other people’ viewpoints expressed in the administrators’ responses to the survey was not mentioned in the interviews. Rather, interview data revealed that, by and large, administrators in the study believed in measuring the characteristics of the teachers and their teaching skills to be the main indicators of teaching effectiveness.

The co-existence of somewhat contrasting perceptions of teaching held by university administrators in this study could be explained by their own desire to exhibit the “presentation of self” (Goffman, 1959). The five administrators in the current study held the highest leadership positions in their respective universities, the position of President, Vice-President, and Director of the Office of Academic Affairs, respectively. It would not be surprising if they expressed their aspirations to see the high quality of student learning outcomes for graduates of their institutions.
The sharing of similar perceptions of teaching held by administrators in the same university

The data drawn from this study exemplifies the assertion by Schein (2004) that what a person has learnt from his/her own experience has a quality of absolute truth to that person, and when a group has worked together successfully, the assumptions that have assisted them to achieve the success are inevitably reinforced and shared among members of the group. The data here suggested that administrators in a university who have worked together to design and develop a SET instrument were likely to share relatively similar perception of teaching. The manifestation of the shared understanding about teaching among three administrators in University P was particularly apparent when they talked about how they understood the term “active learning”. They all shared a view that active learning was merely a low level cognitive ability, that was to “pay attention to the lecture” or “to be ready to answer teacher’s questions”. No administrators understood this term from the perspective of students engaging with intellectual meaning and knowledge making process. In addition, the survey data showed they all undervalued the support for teaching and learning, as these factors were rated among the least important ones affecting to the quality of teaching.

The collectivist, hierarchical and top-down culture of Vietnam (see Chapter 2) and the management of personnel in HEIs may have influenced the way administrators tended to think and act according to a common standard. Administrators at the lower rank were expected to listen to those of higher rank, particularly, the context whereby the appointment of the lower rank administrators such as Vice-Presidency and Director was decided and approved by the administrators of higher rank, may result in the coincidence of their views.
Chapter Summary

The chapter has detailed the results in relation to the perceptions and the evaluation of teaching by university administrators in HEIs in Vietnam. Their teacher-centred perceptions of teaching were evident. It was apparent also that the way they approach to teaching evaluation was shaped by their perceptions of teaching. Further discussion on the approach to teaching evaluation is to be presented in Chapter 8.

In the next chapter, results from the quantitative data analysis from the teachers’ survey are to be presented to examine the ways in which they perceive teaching.
CHAPTER 7  RESEARCH SUB-QUESTION 3:
PERCEPTIONS OF TEACHING HELD BY UNIVERSITY TEACHERS

Introduction

In addressing the third research sub-question, perceptions of teaching held by university teachers in HEIs in Vietnam, the results of the quantitative data analysis from the two participating universities are presented. As described in Chapter 4, Methodology, the survey-questionnaire for teachers was designed based on the review of the literature on teachers’ conceptions of teaching, with particular reference to several multiple-choice format inventories, such as Teaching Perspectives Inventory (Pratt et al., 2001), Approaches to Teaching Inventory (Prosser & Trigwell, 2006), and Academics’ Orientations to Teaching Questionnaire (Samuelowicz, 1999). However, unlike the design of the above described inventories, in this study, the survey-questionnaire for teachers (see Appendix C4) was comprised of two parts, i.e., 30-item Perceptions of Teaching section (Part A), and a forced response question (Part B). The intention of having both multiple-choice format and a forced response format was to facilitate a better understanding of the views expressed by teachers.

Results

In analysing the quantitative data, consideration in relation to the small sample size of the study was taken into account: although factor analysis for 30-item Perceptions of Teaching was justified for the combined data set, that is, data from both University P and University N, it was precluded from use in each university due to the low ratio of respondents to item (2.4 for University P, and less than 1.0 for University N). Given this limitation, factors extracted from Principal Component
Analysis using combined data set, are used as guidance for further analysis of the perceptions of teaching held by teachers in each participating university. In the following sections, perceptions of teaching held by teachers in both universities are presented first, and then followed separately by University P and University N.

**Perceptions of teaching held by university teachers in Vietnam**

A total of 100 usable responses (72 from University P and 28 from University N) were obtained on the 30-item Perceptions of Teaching instrument and these were subjected to factor analysis, utilizing the PCA approach. Prior to performing PCA, the combined data set was assessed for appropriateness in terms of the strengths of the relationship among the items and the sample size. Inspection of the correlation matrix demonstrated the presence of coefficients of .3 and above, indicating a reasonable relationship among the 30 items from the Perceptions of Teaching instrument. Also, the value for Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy was .66, which is above the level recommended by Tabachnick and Fidell (2007). However, coefficients of less than .55 do mean that the interpretation needs to be cautious.

PCA suggested the presence of 10 factors with the cut-off point of 1.0. It was decided to retain four factors for further investigation for two reasons: first, an inspection of the screeplot (see Appendix D – Figure D1) revealed a rather clear break after the fourth factor; second, the actual eigenvalue from PCA was higher than the criterion value from parallel analysis for the first four factors. The rotated four-factor solution using Varimax showed 30 items with a loading of above .3 (see Appendix D – Table D6); no items of below .3 were recorded. The first factor explained 12.8 per cent of the total variance, 9.1 per cent, 6.4 per cent and 5.8 per cent respectively for the second, the third, and the fourth factors, respectively.
Although no items with factor loading of below .3 was found, the interpretation of these factors needed to be done with cautions as Tabachnik and Fidell (2007) have pointed out factor loadings greater than or equal to .3 are interpretable but are nevertheless considered poor since they only explain 10 percent of the variance, while factor loading above .45 are fair and those above .55 are good.

The first two factors comprised 20 items and were labelled Student-centred Perceptions of Teaching (ScPT). Examples of items with high loadings from this subscale included: (i) “In teaching session for this subject, I use difficult or open-ended examples to provoke debates” (loading of .75); or, (ii) “In class I make opportunities available for students to discuss their changing understanding of this subject” (loading of .67); or, (iii) “It is important for me to know that students are able to reflect on and generalise what they have learned” (loading of .63). These items reflected perception of teaching as facilitating learning for students by helping them to develop critical thinking skills.

The last two factors, which comprised 10 items, were labelled Teacher-centred Perceptions of Teaching (TcPT). Examples of items with high loading from this subscale included: (i) “It is important to know that at the end of this subject, students will be able to repeat the materials taught” (loading of .58); or, (ii) “I feel good about my teaching when there is a high percentage of students who pass the end-term exams” (loading of .53). These 10 items reflected the teachers’ perception that teaching was helping students to recall the materials in response to exams.

It was noticeable that several items loaded on two factors, such as, “I see teaching as helping students to develop new ways of thinking about the subject”; or, “Real-life situations are reflected in the assessment of the subject”, suggesting that
there was a degree of fluidity in the view expressed by the teachers (see Appendix D – Table D6).

A further reliability test was conducted on each subscale to examine the internal consistency among sub-scale items. The Cronbach alpha for ScPT subscale and TcPT was reported at .7 and .84, respectively, indicating a good reliability of the items in each sub-scale (see Table 7.1). The item mean on these two sub-scales were reported in Table 7.2.

Table 7.1

*Cronbach Alpha for Two Extracted Subscales: Student-centred Perception of Teaching and Teacher-centred Perception of Teaching*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Perceptions of Teaching</th>
<th>No of items extracted</th>
<th>Cronbach alpha</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Student-centred Perception of Teaching (ScPT)</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>0.70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher-centred Perception of Teaching (TcPT)</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>0.84</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 7.2

*Teachers’ Item Mean Scores on ScPT and TcPT in Two Universities*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Perception of Teaching</th>
<th>No of items</th>
<th>Item mean</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Student-centred Perception of Teaching (ScCT)</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>3.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher-centred Perception of Teaching (TcCT)</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As described in Research Instruments section (Chapter 4), the survey-questionnaire for teachers incorporated a forced response question, in which teachers were asked to rate, from the most important to the least important, seven factors that they believed affected the quality of teaching. The Pearson correlation test was conducted to examine if there was any correlations between each sub-scale, that is
Chapter 7

Research Sub-question 3

TcPT and ScPT, with these factors. Table 7.3 shows that teachers who identify themselves as more student-centred tended to believe that factors relating to how teachers support students to learn was essential in the teaching and learning processes (positive correlation was statistically significant of .210). They also valued factors relating to the institutional support for teaching as an important ingredient in teaching quality (positive correlation of .107).

For teachers who identified themselves as more teacher-centred, factors relating to how they organise their teaching did not contribute to the quality of teaching and learning (negative correlation was statistically significant at -.219). Instead, for this group of teacher, factors such as institutional support for teaching would appear to be contributing factors for teaching quality (Table 7.3).

Table 7.3

Pearson Correlations: ScPT and TcPT with Factors Affecting to Teaching Quality

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factors affecting to teaching quality</th>
<th>Student-centred Perception of Teaching</th>
<th>Teacher-centred Perception of Teaching</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Characteristics of the students</td>
<td>-.132</td>
<td>.089</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Characteristics of the teachers</td>
<td>.061</td>
<td>.038</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Curriculum design</td>
<td>-.171</td>
<td>.037</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University support for teaching</td>
<td>.107</td>
<td>.109</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers' support for learning</td>
<td>.210*</td>
<td>-.117</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers' organisation of their teaching</td>
<td>-.022</td>
<td>-.219*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students' approaches to learning</td>
<td>.038</td>
<td>-.036</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed)

It was noted also from Table 7.3 that two factors, (i) characteristics of the teachers, and (ii) institutional support for teaching, had positive correlations with both sub-scales, indicating a degree of importance given to these factors.
Overall, teachers in the two participating universities perceived teaching as context-influenced and able to hold both student-centred and teacher-centred perception since the computed item mean scores for ScCT (3.8) and TcCT (4.0) scales were above mid-point of the five-point scale (Table 7.2).

To further investigate the relationship between teachers’ demographic variations and their scores on ScCT and TcCT sub-scales, a one-way between-groups multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) was performed. Two dependent variables were used: (i) Student-centred Perception of Teaching subscale; and (ii) Teacher-centred Perception of Teaching subscale. The independent variables were teachers’ demographic information such as institution employed at; disciplines taught; gender; experience; certificates in teaching; formal training qualification and interest as academics.

While there was no significant difference found across variables such as institutional employed at, disciplines taught, experience, teaching certificates, and discipline qualifications, there was statistical significant difference between male teachers and female teachers in terms of their scores to Student-centred Perception of teaching (p=.04) (see Appendix D – Table D7). While there was no statistical difference between male and female teachers on the combined dependent variables (Wilks’Lambda = .95; p = .12), when the result for the dependent variables were considered separately, the statistical significant difference was Student-centred (p = .04). A further inspection of the mean scores indicated that male teachers had a slightly higher mean value of Student-centred Perception of Teaching (M = 73.4) than their female counterparts (M = 69.4).

In addition, there was a statistical significant difference between different groups of teachers having different interests in teaching in terms of their score to
Student-centred Perception of Teaching (p=000) (see Appendix D – Table D7). A further inspection of the mean scores indicated that teachers with their main interest in teaching were reported to have the highest mean scores for ScPT (M = 80.0), higher than the score reported for teachers whose interest are in both teaching and research (M = 75.4) and those whose interest are in both teaching and research, but more inclined towards research (M = 75.1). The lowest mean value reported for Student-centred Perception of Teaching among these groups was for teachers whose interest are in both teaching and research, but more inclined towards teaching.

In the next section, the two sub-scales of TcPT and ScPT were used to further investigate the perceptions of teaching held by teachers at each university.

**Perceptions of teaching held by teachers in University P**

It is worth noting that of 155 randomly selected teachers in University P, 72 (49 per cent) completed all or almost all parts of the instrument. While all 72 teachers completed Part A, that is, the Perceptions of Teaching, seven teachers left unanswered Part B, the forced response question. In reporting the mean score for ScPT and TcPT subscales, 72 usable responses were used. However, analysis of the forced response question was drawn from 65 usable responses.

Table 7.4 shows the internal consistency, the Cronbach Alpha, among items in both ScPT and TcPT subscales met the recommended level at .85 and .68, respectively, and the item mean for ScPT subscale and TcPT subscale were 3.7 and 4.0, respectively. That is, the mean scores for 10 items of TcPT was higher than the mean scores for 20 items of ScPT. The difference in item means of the two sub-scales suggested that while teachers in University P perceived teaching containing both teacher-centred and student-centred elements, they tended toward a teacher-centred focus.
Table 7.4

*Teachers’ Item Mean Scores on ScPT and TcPT in University P*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>No of items</th>
<th>Cronbach alpha</th>
<th>Item mean</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Student-centred Perception of Teaching (ScPT)</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>0.85</td>
<td>3.70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher-centred Perception of Teaching (TcPT)</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>0.68</td>
<td>4.00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

To further explore ways in which teachers in University P perceived teaching, their responses to Part B, in which they were asked to rate factors affecting the quality of teaching from the most important to the least important, were analysed. Table 7.5 shows the factor relating to Teacher’s Characteristics was perceived as significantly affecting the quality of teaching with median of 6.0 on seven-point scale. Students’ Characteristics was also very important factor with median of 5.0. Indeed, of 65 teachers, 23 rated Teacher’s Characteristics to be the most important factor in teaching quality (see Appendix D – Table D8).

While the characteristics of the teachers and the students were perceived to greatly affect the quality of teaching, the ways in which student learning was supported and teaching was supported by the university were seen as having more minor impact in the quality of teaching. Teacher’s Support for Student Learning and University Support for Teaching were reported to be the least important with median value of 1.0 and 2.0 respectively (Table 7.5). Indeed, no teachers in University P rated Teacher’s Support for Student Learning to be the most important aspect in teaching (see Appendix D – Table D9); this factor was rated the least important for more than half of the total respondents.
Table 7.5

*Descriptive Statistics for the Perceived Importance of Factors Affecting Teaching Quality: University P Teachers’ View*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factor</th>
<th>Median</th>
<th>Std. Deviation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Teacher’s characteristics</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students’ characteristics</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organisation of teaching</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Curriculum design</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students’ approach to learning</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University’s support for teaching</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher’s support for student learning</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In brief, teachers in University P appeared to perceive teaching as being teacher-centred, with slightly higher mean scores on TcPT (4.0) subscale, compared with mean scores on ScPT (3.7). In addition, they tended to believe that the focus in teaching should be on what the teachers bring to the classroom, such as their content knowledge. Teaching, in these teachers’ views, was not seen as facilitating student learning.

**Perception of teaching held by teachers in University N**

The data drawn from 28 usable responses from teachers in this university were subjected to analysis to identify the perception of teaching. Item mean scores for two sub-scales, i.e., teacher-centred and student-centred, were performed together with Cronbach alpha for internal consistency among these items. As shown in Table 7.6, while there was a relatively good internal consistency among items in ScPT subscale (.75), the Cronbach alpha for TcPT was only .59, a little below the recommended level. The item mean score was reported at 3.93 for ScPT and 3.99 for
TcPP scale. Given that the score for TcPP indicated a minor difference with the score for ScPT, teachers in University N could be seen as having a blended or “combined” view of teaching, where teacher-centred and student-centred perception of teaching were evident, but inclined toward teacher-centred.

Table 7.6

*Teachers’ Item Mean Scores on ScPT and TcPT in University N*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>No of items</th>
<th>Cronbach alpha</th>
<th>Item mean</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Student-centred Perception of Teaching (ScPT)</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>0.75</td>
<td>3.93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher-centred Perception of Teaching (TcPT)</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>0.59</td>
<td>3.99</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

To identify the ways in which teachers in University N perceived teaching, their responses to the forced response question were analysed. As can be seen from Table 7.7, University N’s respondents believed that factors relating to Teacher’s Characteristics were the most important factor in teaching quality (with median value of 6.0) followed by the Organisation of Teaching (median value of 5.0). Indeed, almost half (46.4 per cent) of the survey participants rated Teacher’s Characteristics as the most important factor (see Appendix D – Table D10).

Two factors relating to the support for teaching and learning: (i) University Support for Teaching and (ii) Teacher’s Support for Student Learning had the lowest median score of 2.0. It is worth noting that no (0 per cent) respondent believed that Teacher’s Characteristics was the least important (see Appendix D – Table D11). Table 7.7 also demonstrated that respondents in University N appeared to agree with one another on the importance of Teacher’s Characteristics and Organisation of Teaching (SD = 1.4 for both two factors). Similarly, they tended to agree with one
another on the unimportance of the University’s Support for Teaching, and Teacher’s Support for Student Learning (with SD = 1.4 and 1.5, respectively).

Overall, data from teachers’ responses to 30-item Perceptions of Teaching and the forced response questions suggested that while there was not any significant mean score different between ScCT and TcCT subscales, teachers in University N perceived factor relating to “what-the-teacher-is” and “what-the-teacher-does” to be the most important factors in teaching quality.

Table 7.7

Descriptive Statistics for the Perceived Importance of Factors Affecting Teaching Quality: University N Teachers’ Views

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>N=28</th>
<th>Median</th>
<th>Std. Deviation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Teacher’s characteristics</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organisation of teaching</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Curriculum design</td>
<td>4.5</td>
<td>1.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students’ approach to learning</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students’ characteristics</td>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>2.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University’s support for teaching</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher’s support for student learning</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Discussion

Several limitations of the study inherent within the quantitative analysis need to be taken into account before discussing the results.

First, in relation to the development of the survey-questionnaire for teachers, comprising two parts, i.e. 30-item Perceptions of Teaching section and a forced response question, the scope of this survey-questionnaire was limited. It was built on the findings of the available qualitative studies which have mostly been conducted in
a Western context of teaching and learning. These research have showed teachers’ perceptions of teaching ranging from “imparting information” to “enabling conceptual change” (Table 3.3). In contrast, this study was conducted in Vietnamese tertiary settings, consideration needs to be given to the interpretation of the responses to the instrument. Second, the sample surveyed in this study did not produce a respondent/item ratio large enough for conducting a factor analysis for individual universities. Although performing factor analysis for the aggregated data was justified (as discussed in Chapter 4), considerable caution is needed in the interpretation of the quantitative data.

Much of the prior research, particularly quantitative studies that employed inventories to categorise teachers’ perception of teaching, such as the Teaching Perspective Inventory (Pratt, 2001), Approaches to Teaching Inventory (Trigwell & Prosser, 2004), or Conceptions for Teaching and Learning Questionnaire (Chan, 2001), have argued that a teacher may have two or more, or even conflicting perceptions of teaching (Gao & Watkins, 2002; Kember & Gow, 1994; Larsson, 1983).

In this study, teachers’ responses to the 30-item Perception of Teaching and a forced response question suggested that it was possible to characterise the perceptions of teaching held by the Vietnamese university teachers in the study as demonstrating “intermingling” (Chan, 2001) of both teacher-centred and student-centred views of teaching. Specifically, Vietnamese teachers tended to believe the purpose of teaching was to help students to recall the materials in response to exams (TcPT subscale item mean score is 4.0 on a five-point Likert scale – Table 7.2). They also believed that teaching was to facilitate students’ learning by developing their critical thinking skills (ScPT subscale item mean score was 3.8 – Table 7.2). The
relatively high mean scores for both TcPT and ScPT subscales indicated multiple perceptions of teaching held by this sample of teachers in Vietnam. The study, therefore, supported the findings of other studies (Gao & Watkins, 2002; Kember & Gow, 1994; Larsson, 1983).

However, unlike Kember and Gow’s (1994) study, in which “learning facilitation” orientation to teaching was found to have higher mean score than “knowledge transmission”, the data from this study suggested the reverse: that is, TcPT subscale scores were higher than the ScPT. This suggested that Vietnamese teachers responded more favourably to the idea of teaching as teacher-centred, rather than student-centred. This preference was supported by the data from the forced response question, in which Teachers’ Characteristics was perceived to be the most important factor for the quality of teaching and Teacher’s Support for Student Learning was the least important factor (see Appendix D- Table D8 and Table D10).

The identification of a view of teaching inclined to place the significance of the teachers and their teaching over student learning, was evident in this study, and confirmed the claim made by several researchers (Harman & Nguyen, 2010; T. H. T. Pham, 2008, 2010) about the dominance of the teacher-centred approach in HEIs in Vietnam. This current study, however, provided more nuanced finding: although teachers in HEIs in Vietnam tended to prefer a teacher-centred to student-centred approach, they also responded positively to student-centred views of teaching. Perhaps, the internationalisation currently taking place in HE in Vietnam (Welch, 2010), the increased exposure to western cultures in the mass media, and the promotion of constructivism in learning (Saito, Tsukui, & Tanaka, 2008) has triggered a shift in teachers’ views toward the development of students’ critical thinking skills.
It also was noted that there was a difference among teachers from these two universities in relation to what they perceived to be the important aspects affecting teaching quality. The teachers from the public university (University P) believed that students’ background and their characteristics played the second most important role (median value of 5.0 on seven-point scale – Table 7.5), while for teachers from non-public university (University N), the important factor related to how they organised their teaching (median value of 5.0 – Table 7.7). In the Vietnamese context, where public universities attract students with somewhat higher National Entrance Examination (NEE) scores, and non-public universities are often left with “second-tiered” students, with lower NEE scores, it may be understandable that the perceived important aspect for the teachers in the former was what the students bring to the classroom, i.e., NEE scores, and for teachers in the latter, it was what the teachers bring to the classroom, i.e., their organisation of teaching.

The current study found no statistically significant differences in relation to teachers’ views of teaching and their disciplines, which contrasted with findings from several studies (Lindblom-Ylanne, Trigwell, Nevgi, & Ashwin, 2006; Lueddeke, 2003). Lueddeke (2003), for example, surveyed teachers in three disciplines, namely, Business, Social Science, and Technology at Southampton Institute, and teachers from the Nursing faculty at University of Wales, and found that there were differences in perceptions of teaching held by academics teaching “pure/applied hard” with those teaching “pure/applied soft” (Biglan, 1973). The former tended to hold an Information Transmission orientation to teaching, while the latter appeared to take a more developmental or constructivist approach to teaching. In the current study, however, teachers teaching Social Science (soft discipline) and Natural Science (hard discipline) showed no marked differences in their perceptions.
of teaching. The study, therefore, does raise queries related to the assertion made in the literature (see, Lindblom-Ylanne et al., 2006; Lueddeke, 2003) about a possible influence from the teachers’ academic disciplines to the ways they perceived teaching. The current study suggested that, in HEIs in Vietnam, regardless of disciplines, teachers tended to hold both teacher-centred and student-centred views of teaching, but inclined toward a teacher-centred approach. Possible explanations for these views could be rooted in the Confucian-heritage culture, and the institutional teaching and learning culture, which will be further discussed in Chapter 8.

**Chapter summary**

The chapter has presented the results from quantitative analysis in relation to the perceptions of teaching held by teachers in HEIs in Vietnam. Data analysis indicated that teachers held an “intermingling” (Chan, 2001) conception of teaching, but inclined toward teacher-centred, as they perceived factors related to teachers’ characteristics to be the most important, and factors related to support for student learning to be the least important in teaching quality.

The following chapter synthesises, analyses, and discussed the main research question in relation to the extent literature, and indicates implications of the study’s findings for educational research, policy and practice.
CHAPTER 8  DISCUSSION

Introduction

The broad aim of the present study was to explore the perceptions of teaching and the evaluation of teaching in HE in Vietnam. The main underlying interest in answering these questions lies in their implications for the implementation of a teaching evaluation system to improve the quality of teaching and learning in HE in Vietnam. Although the focus of this research is not directly on a teaching evaluation system per se, understanding ways in which the system, particularly the Student Evaluation of Teaching, is “shaped”, is a prerequisite for an effective approach to teaching quality improvement. Just as the key to improving teaching through professional development is the understanding of the individual teacher’s belief about teaching (Samuelowicz & Bain, 1992, 2001), the key to improving teaching through teaching evaluation is the understanding of the perceptions of teaching behind the system and how it is shaped.

In the preceding chapters (Chapter 5, Chapter 6, and Chapter 7), the findings of three research sub-questions have been presented and discussed. In Chapter 5, the question of how teaching was perceived and evaluated in the MOET Guideline on SET was addressed. The data demonstrated that the MOET evaluation framework highlighted aspects in relation to “what-the-teacher-is” and “what-the-teacher-does” as single indicators for measuring teaching quality, and disregarded aspects in relation to students and their learning. Additionally, it was apparent from the study that the development of the framework was not based on contemporary theories of teaching and learning, and that tensions emerged as a result of the inconsistency regarding the purpose of SETs in trying to combine teacher development and assessment. In Chapter 6, results concerning how teaching is perceived and evaluated
by university administrators in particular HEIs in Vietnam have been reported and discussed. Administrators in the study tended to hold teacher-centred views of teaching. The data showed that the ways in which these administrators perceived teaching were in congruent with the perceptions of teaching implicit in the instrument they designed. Furthermore, what administrators believed to be important in teaching and teaching evaluation was manifested in the focus of the evaluation instrument in their respective institutions. Finally, in Chapter 7, the third research sub-question related to the perceptions of teaching held by teachers in HEIs in Vietnam was addressed. It was reported that teachers held both teacher-centred, and student-centred perceptions of teaching, but were inclined toward teacher-centred.

Several themes emerged during analysis of these research sub-questions which addressed the question of how teaching is perceived and evaluated in HE in Vietnam. In this chapter, therefore, these themes are discussed in relation to the extant literature. It is therefore an examination of how literature on the conceptualisations of teaching and the evaluation of teaching have been supported, broadened, and challenged. The chapter presents the implications of the findings for educational research, policy, practice, and suggestions for further studies. The chapter and the thesis conclude with a section entitled closing remarks.

**Tensions Between Stated and Enacted Purposes of SETs**

The intended purpose of enhanced teacher quality would become elusive if those who implement a teaching evaluation system were unclear about why they are doing so (Darwin, 2010). Given teaching evaluation processes have been described as improvement and accountability directed in purposes (Arreola, 2007; Darling-Hammond et al., 1983; Darwin, 2010; Murray, 1997; Pounder, 2007), for the SET
Evident in this study, from the policy framework provided by MOET, were the duality of the intention for the use of SETs, that is, for both improvement and accountability purposes. The purpose in the MOET Guideline was explicitly stated: (i) to provide university administrators evidence to “appraise teachers”, and to “prevent corruption in education”; and (ii) to assist teachers to “adjust their teaching activities” and to “improve teachers’ responsibilities”. However, the inconsistency became apparent when comparing the stated purpose of the first and the revised version of the Guideline: the purpose of appraising teachers and preventing corruption in education was not stated in the latter. As a consequence of this inconsistency in purpose, tensions between the rhetoric and the practices in the process of SET design were created. In both versions of the Guideline, instructions for the design of SETs remained unchanged, suggesting that although the judgemental purpose of SETs was not explicitly expressed in the Guideline, it was implicitly embedded in the intentions of the Ministry for institutions to use SETs.

This confused situation may be due to the fact that the promulgation for the use of SETs was MOET’s *ad hoc* response to the mounting pressure of educational reform to ensure the quality of its HE system. The lack of consistency in the formulation of policy for SET implementation has been reported in several studies in Japan (Burden, 2008, 2010) which found that the teachers’ fears and cynicism over the purpose of teaching evaluation system have increased as a result of unclear structured policies for its use. By removing the explicit judgemental purpose, MOET signalled a desire to be *seen* as a Ministry focusing on the improvement of teaching, rather than focusing on making judgement about teachers’ performance.
Tensions—between the intended purpose and that discernible from SET—became apparent not only at ministerial policy level, but also at the institutional level. For example, in University P, the use of SET Form was described as to “enhance the quality of teaching and support student learning”. However, the instrument was designed to obtain student feedback on the characteristics of the teachers and their compliance with the institutional rules and regulations. Such feedback from students is not likely to enable teachers to identify what goes wrong in activity of teaching in the classroom, nor it would provide useful information for teachers to achieve the stated goal of “enhancing their teaching”. In reality, it would likely serve as a tool to make judgment decisions about individual teacher’s performance, particularly when it is used to monitor teachers’ professional conduct such as corrupt behaviours. As a result, in University P, “a large number of teachers [were] worried” (DP.22) about the use of such an instrument.

The current study demonstrated that tensions could be created not only because of the inconsistency inherent to the purpose of teaching evaluation which have been noted in the literature (Barrie, 2001; Burden, 2010; Darwin, 2010), but, perhaps, also to the problems that required modification as perceived by the designers of the evaluation system. In this study, all five administrators believed that the implementation of SETs was to identify the problems inherent to “what-the-teacher-is” and “what-the-teacher-does”. As a result, teachers were nervous about the SETs. To avoid such tensions in teaching evaluation, it is desirable to adopt an approach that shifts the purpose of the teaching evaluation from the identification of problems associated with the teachers and their teaching behaviours to those that associated with student learning.
System-wide View of Tertiary Teaching in Vietnam

Previous studies on HE in Vietnam have examined how Vietnamese university teachers approached teaching (e.g., Director et al., 2006; Harman & Nguyen, 2010; T. H. T. Pham, 2008; T. H. T. Pham, 2010), or the approach implicit in MOET’s policy framework on quality assurance (e.g., D. N. Tran et al., 2011). For example, Director et al., (2006) described the dominance of the teacher-centred approach to teaching employed by teachers in HEIs in Vietnam, while Tran et al., (2011) provided evidence that there was a teacher-centred understanding of teaching underpinned MOET’s policy framework. These studies explored the issue of tertiary teaching from either institutional or ministerial perspectives, as discrete groups of educators. In the current study, however, tertiary teaching was investigated through the lenses of both the institution and the Ministry. The findings presented in Chapter 5, Chapter 6, and Chapter 7 demonstrated essentially teacher-centred views to teaching, in a “linked-chain” fashion, from MOET’s policy framework, to university administrators, to teachers in HEIs in Vietnam.

Specifically, the Ministry’s teacher-centred views of teaching were reflected in its teaching evaluation policy framework, in which teaching was measured solely on the basis of teachers and their teaching: i.e., their content knowledge and their abilities to transfer the knowledge to students, rather than on students and their learning: i.e., what students have learnt and how qualitatively different their ways of learning had become. Such understanding of teaching at the ministerial level - the highest official hierarchical ranking in educational system in Vietnam - was shared among the university administrators in this study.

At the institutional level, in turn, data from the present study demonstrated that there was a general agreement between administrators’ and teachers’ views
about teaching, particularly evident in relation to the perceived key attributes to
teaching quality. For example, in University P, of the seven factors affecting teaching
quality, both groups, i.e., administrators and teachers, agreed on the utmost
importance of teacher’s characteristics with the median value of 7.0 and 6.0,
respectively, on a seven-point Likert-scale (Table 8.1). Similarly, in University N,
administrators and teachers cited teacher’s characteristics and organisation of
teaching to be the most important elements in teaching (median value of 6.5 and 5.5,
and 6.0 and 5.0, respectively) (Table 8.2).

Although the present study did not investigate what caused the prevalent
teacher-centred understanding of teaching in HE in Vietnam, the broader “cultural,
political, and/or social contexts” (Pratt, 1992, p. 218), within which these views were
situated, could be accounted for the “blinkered” view of teaching in Vietnam. The
Confucian-heritage culture of Vietnam (L. H. Pham & Fry, 2004), and the culture of
“knowledge conservation” (Ballard & Clanchy, 1991), in which teachers were seen
as playing the role of transmitters of knowledge and models of morality and wisdom,
perhaps, contributed to the overemphasis on the roles of the teachers to bring about
student learning outcomes. Additionally, in a culture of high power distance, like
Vietnam, there were expectations of the students (less powerful members in teacher-
student relationship) to be dependent on the teachers (more powerful members) and
to accept the unequally distributed power. The current study, therefore, supported the
work of Hofstede (1980, 2008) in the establishment of the role of culture in framing
people’ views in that culture.
Table 8.1

*Similarity in the Views about Teaching: University P’s Administrators and Teachers*

<table>
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<th>Teachers (n=72)</th>
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<tr>
<td></td>
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<td>Curriculum design</td>
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<tr>
<td>Organisation of teaching</td>
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<td>1.0</td>
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<tr>
<td>Students’ characteristics</td>
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<td>1.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students’ approach to learning</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University’s support for teaching</td>
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<td>0.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>0.5</td>
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</table>

Table 8.2

*Similarity in the Views about Teaching: University N’s Administrators and Teachers*

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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Median</td>
<td>SD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher’s characteristics</td>
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<td>0.7</td>
</tr>
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<td>Organization of teaching</td>
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<td>0.7</td>
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<td>Curriculum design</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students’ approach to learning</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1.4</td>
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<tr>
<td>University’s support for teaching</td>
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<td>1.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students’ characteristics</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>2.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher’s support for student learning</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>0.7</td>
</tr>
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</table>

Most importantly, data from this study is indicative of a small but discernible transition in the way teaching is perceived, from both MOET and at institutional level. The fact that MOET introduced the Standard of Quality for HEIs (MOET,
2007b), in which the use of SETs was made compulsory, suggested a new thinking about the value of SETs, and hence a change in the perceptions of teaching, moving away from the view that SETs was unnecessary, and that teaching was simply to impart information to students. Findings discussed in Chapter 6 suggested that administrators, in turn, showed some small signs of making a similar transition to the view of teaching as transmitting teachers’ understanding to students. Although these were fundamentally teacher-centred, the latter signalled a movement towards more “sophisticated” views of teaching (Akerlind, 2004; Entwistle & Walker, 2002; Fox, 1983). University teachers’ perceptions of teaching discussed in Chapter 7 also suggested a possible tendency of a transitioning stage to viewing teaching with more emphasis on the students and their learning. However, the transition is unlikely to succeed if the teaching-related policy frameworks continue to be grounded in teacher-centred views of teaching.

Two Institutional Approaches to the Evaluation of Teaching

Data from the current study supported and provided empirical evidence for the argument made in the literature (Barrie, 2001; Burden, 2008; Kolitch & Dean, 1999; Pratt et al., 1999) that implicit in a teaching evaluation system were the beliefs about teaching and learning of those who design and use it. Data from the study demonstrated two approaches to teaching evaluation, namely, student presage-focused approach and teaching context-focused approach, which were characterised by the congruence among aspects of how teaching was perceived and evaluated in that context. These included (i) perceptions of teaching held by administrators-designers of SETs, (ii) purpose of teaching evaluation, and (iii) focus of the evaluation.
Specifically, the data from University P demonstrated an approach to teaching evaluation which was underpinned by university administrators’ shared beliefs of teaching as transmitting information to students. Driven by the belief that differences in learning outcomes were, in part, a result mainly from the differences in the students’ abilities and, in part, from the differences in the teachers’ characteristics, the SET instrument in this university was designed as a reactive response, reflected in the confused construction with multiple-barrelled questions and conflicting items in the instrument. In addition, the purpose of the evaluation was limited to differentiate teachers, those who complied with institutional rules and regulations, and those who did not. A possible explanation for such an approach to teaching evaluation in University P was that public universities in Vietnam were “less concerned with responding to student needs” (World Bank, 2008, p. 39).

University N, on the other hand, adopted a teaching presage-focused approach to teaching evaluation, which was influenced by President N’s views of teaching as the transmission of teachers’ understanding to students. Driven by the belief that differences in learning outcomes were explained by the teachers’ differences in their characteristics, understanding and teaching skills, the SET Form in this university was designed to measure aspects in relation to both “what-the-teacher-is” and “what-the-teacher-does”. Teachers in University N were expected to demonstrate and improve their teaching practices according to these aspects. The fact that the implementation of SET in University N began several years before its participation in the national Accreditation Program suggested that the SET instrument was viewed by administrators in this university as a proactive response to the needs of the students.
This study did not provide empirical evidence for student-centred evaluation of teaching instrument, which is underpinned by student-centred views of teaching as facilitating critical thinking and enabling conceptual change. However, it does not mean that such approach does not exist in other contexts. There was a thin thread in the literature which provided evidence for a student-centred approach to teaching evaluation (Kember & Leung, 2009; Kuh & Hu, 2001). Further research is therefore necessary to examine the underpinning understanding of teaching in this approach in different social and institutional contexts.

**Implications of the Findings**

The research reported here bridged two bodies of literature, one on the conceptualization of teaching by teachers (Akerlind, 2004; Carnell, 2007; Kember, 1997; Postareff & Lindblom-Ylänne, 2008; Samuelowicz & Bain, 2001; Trigwell & Prosser, 1996a) and the other on Student Evaluation of Teaching (Frey, 1973; Marsh, 1984, 2007; McKeachie, 1997) by providing evidence of the ways in which administrators - the designers of the SET in their respective institutions - perceived teaching. Comparable to teachers’ teaching practice that was found to be influenced by their conceptions of teaching (Ramsden, 1992; Trigwell & Prosser, 1996b), the data obtained in this study indicated that administrators’ perceptions of teaching influenced how teaching was evaluated in their institutions.

**Implications for educational research on perceptions and evaluation of teaching**

The study reinforced the significance of unpacking the understanding of teaching held by administrators, whose views were decisive in the formulation of policy and practice related to teaching evaluation. Without an adequate
understanding of what shaped the teaching evaluation practice any intervention/attempts to improve teaching quality would have limited impact. The absence of student-centred views of teaching in the account for teaching held by administrators indicated a gap between a contemporary understanding of teaching those views of the administrators. If the situation persists, that is, administrators do not allow opportunities for their perceptions to be articulated and challenged, these views will be routinized and normalized into the taken-for-granted understanding of teaching.

This study also added a broader focus to existing studies on the conceptualization of teaching by adding contextual details from the HE system of a developing country to the investigation of other researchers in developed countries (e.g., Akerlind, 2004; Carnell, 2007; Kember, 1997; Samuelowicz & Bain, 2001; Trigwell & Prosser, 1996a). The study suggested, however, that unlike its developed countries’ counterparts, teachers and administrators appeared to hold more traditional views of teaching; that is, the focus is on the teachers and their teaching skills only. Thus, the focus on students and their learning that have been promoted and encouraged in most developed countries may not be easily transferable to teachers and administrators in the educational and cultural context of Vietnam. Additional consideration should be given to the issue of whether a change in the understanding of teaching can be a precursor to changes to teaching practice for teachers and teaching evaluation practice for administrators.

This study challenged the assumed linkage in many of the studies on SETs (P. A. Cohen, 1981; Marsh, 1984, 2007) that when the SET was proved to be valid, the instrument could lead to teaching improvement by identifying what teachers need to do. The data obtained in this study indicated that administrators from two
Institutions considered SETs to be face valid as the instrument measured what they believed it was intended for. This apparent face validity, however, would inhibit a shift to student-centred approach to teaching, since the instrument was designed with administrators’ underpinning teacher-centred understanding of teaching.

With regard to the methodology for researching conceptions/perceptions/beliefs, this study supported Thompson’s (1992) caution that

Any serious attempt to characterise a teacher’s conception of the discipline he or she teaches should not be limited to an analysis of the teachers’ professed views. It should include an examination of the instruction setting, the practices characteristic of that teacher and the relationship between the teachers’ professed views and actual practice (p. 134)

In the current study, multiple data sources, that is, semi-structured interviews, survey-questionnaire, and documents, were triangulated. The focused discussion regarding the instrument in the interviews with administrators enabled the researcher to refer to what had been done in the individual institution and, therefore, provided the “behind-the-scene look” (Patton, 2002). In addition, the study contributed to the methodological discussion of the qualitative research approach to be used in Vietnam, a context in which each educational institution is considered as a closed territory, and teachers and administrators tend not to want to talk about their thinking and work, particularly to outsiders, for fear of criticism. The study reinforced that building relationship and trust with the researched participants was crucial. This can be achieved by talking about the achievements of the institutions, and in the context of this study, it was about the progress that had been made in the teaching evaluation practice.
Implications for teaching evaluation practice

The most significant implication of this research is that how an institution approached teaching evaluation, particularly in its SETs, was grounded in the perceptions of teaching held by the administrators in their respective universities. This was comparable to teachers’ teaching practices that are influenced by their conceptions of teaching (Ramsden, 1992; Trigwell & Prosser, 1996b), the data obtained in this study indicated that the ways university administrators, the designers of the teaching evaluation system, perceived teaching influenced both the ways and what they believed should be measured in teaching and the focus of the evaluation, and their approach to teaching evaluation. When administrators perceived teaching as the transmission of information/knowledge to students, it was likely that they would approach teaching evaluation with a focus on measuring “what-the-teacher-is”. When administrators perceived teaching as the transmission of teachers’ understanding to students, it was likely that they would approach teaching evaluation with a focus on measuring “what-the-teacher-is” and “what-the-teacher-does”. The current study demonstrated that institutional teaching evaluation practice was driven by administrators’ taken-for-granted expectations of what a teacher should be like, and how she/he should teach.

The majority of the teaching improvement effort through evaluation reported earlier focused on changing teaching evaluation practice (P. A. Cohen, 1981; Marsh, 1984, 2007), and disregarded the understandings of teaching that underpinned the practice. The research presented in this study showed that administrators’ perceptions of teaching were closely related to their teaching evaluation practice, and that it was unlikely that administrators would adopt practices that were contrary to their beliefs. It is therefore vital for the development of a teaching evaluation system to make the
assumptions about teaching explicit to avoid the system resting on a “fragile foundation” (Darwin, 2010), as well as to enable university administrators to demonstrate a coherent approach characterised by the purpose and the focus of the evaluation. Additionally, the literature on conceptual change (Mezirow, 1991, 1997) indicates that perceptions/conceptions serve as filters for the acquisition of new knowledge and that changing ways of conceptualizing is not simple. It seems in this context that institutional teaching improvement efforts should be directed to shift administrators’ views about teaching towards the student-centred end of the teacher-centred/student-centred continuum. A change in administrator’s perceptions of teaching may serve as a precursor to changes in the teaching evaluation practice and, hence, to the teaching improvement programs.

In addition, the homogeneity in perceptions of teaching held by administrators of the same institution and the similarities in their ways to approach teaching evaluation found in this study suggested that there was no dissatisfaction with the present practice. If dissatisfaction is regarded as sine qua non for change, administrators in this study holding less desirable views of teaching (teaching as transmission of information/knowledge and teaching as transmitting teachers’ understandings) may not see any reason for change. It would be appropriate here to create a policy framework related to teaching and learning underpinned by student-centred views of teaching because perceptions of teaching be it held by administrators or teachers cannot be changed simply by disseminating the results of educational research.

The data reported above argued that if the enhancement of student learning is the primary focus of teaching evaluation system, institutions should move beyond measuring teachers’ characteristics and teaching skills to measuring the processes
and outcomes of student learning. It seeks 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 evaluation instrument used for such an approach becomes one concerned with student evaluation of learning.

**Implications for tertiary teaching improvement in HEIs in Vietnam**

The study extends the understanding about tertiary teaching in Vietnam by providing a systemic view from MOET to university administrators to teachers. The data obtained in this study portrayed a HE system, in which teacher-centred view of teaching appeared to be dominant as garnered from MOET’s documents and from views of administrators in accredited universities in Vietnam. The current research, therefore, offered an explanation to the failures of the government’s attempts to improve the quality of teaching and learning in HE. It suggested that the underpinning framework for teaching-related policy was rooted in a view of teaching which focused on the teacher and their teaching did not trigger a need to change to student-centred views of teaching, and this resulted in the unchanged teaching practice in HEIs in Vietnam. The shift to learning paradigm (Barr & Tagg, 1995) may prove to be particularly difficult for this HE system, given the culture of Confucian-heritage (L. H. Pham & Fry, 2004), knowledge conservation (Ballard & Clanchy, 1991), and high power distance (Hofstede, 2008) in Vietnam.

Literature on the conceptualisation of teaching has suggested there existed a “soft” boundary within teacher-centred understanding of teaching or student-centred understanding of teaching and a “hard” boundary between these two major conceptual categories (Kember, 1997; Samuelowicz & Bain, 2001). The data suggested that making the transition to cross a “soft” boundary does not require
significant change, however to cross a “hard” boundary requires substantial and often radical change. Evidence from the current study demonstrated that the HE system in Vietnam appeared to cross the “soft” boundary within teacher-centred categories. However, for the system to move toward student-centred education, greater effort from the Government is needed to provide a sound policy framework underpinned by a student-centred understanding of teaching. Such a policy framework will determine the course for institutions in Vietnam.

The study suggested that policy related to teaching and learning promulgated by MOET was based largely on the accumulated experience of senior officials, and was not research-based. This overreliance on experience can lead to the disregard for research on teaching and learning, thereby minimising the potential for the development of a robust strategic policy framework that is informed and underpinned by contemporary theories of teaching and learning. This lack of acknowledgement exercised at the ministerial level will likely be adopted by HEIs, given the centralisation of the system in Vietnam. If the government of Vietnam is serious about teaching improvement, it is necessary for teaching-related policy development process to be grounded in research on teaching and learning.

**Suggestions for Further Research**

This research has explored the evaluation and perceptions of teaching held by various groups of stakeholders in a small number of HEIs in Vietnam. The cultural, educational and institutional context, in which the views about teaching are situated mean the findings may not generalize. For example, as the current research is an in-depth investigation of how teaching was perceived and evaluated in “information-rich” institutions (Patton, 1990, p. 230), representing public and non-public sector,
generalisation can not be drawn directly from the results of the study to other institutions in Vietnam.

The case study presented in this thesis was a time-fixed snapshot in HE in Vietnam. Although the study has provided rich data from both ministerial and institutional level, the study was limited in the selection of participating universities and in terms of its restriction to only one single policy framework, that is, related to teaching evaluation, suggestions related to theory development, to research methods, and to practice are made for further research to delve in the issue of perceptions and evaluation of teaching in HE.

**Suggestions related to theory development**

The evidence from this present study demonstrated the need for further case studies of the approach to teaching evaluation. In the context of HEIs in Vietnam, only teacher-centred approach to teaching and teaching evaluation was found, it is appropriate that further research can be carried out in other institutional settings, whereby more student-centred approaches to teaching are promoted and exercised. New case studies conducted in such contexts will have the potential to add to the collection of institutional approaches to teaching evaluation and will, in turn, contribute to a better understanding of the perceptions of teaching which underpinned the institutional approach. A consequence of such research interest will provide the opportunity to place the foci of future studies on the identification of an approach that views teaching as enabling critical thinking and facilitating conceptual change.

In the current study, all five administrators were designers of the SET instrument in their institutions. However, it might not be the case in other institutions. More research could be conducted to compare the understanding of
teaching held by those who approve the SET instrument and by those who design the instrument, and to what extent their views of teaching are reflected in the institutional approach to teaching evaluation.

A similar study could be extended to include the views of the government policy makers, such as the Minister or Vice-Minister responsible for the teaching-related policy framework. Although there may be difficulty of establishing the details for exact replication of the researcher’s deliberations (Patton, 2002), such an attempt from a different perspective, will add to the understanding of the policy actors’ thinking. This might be done through interviews with the senior officers in the Ministry to explore their views of teaching and teaching evaluation, and to examine the congruence between their views of teaching and the views of teaching implicit in the subsequent public policy framework.

**Suggestions related to research methods**

The adoption of time-limited case study as research methodology (Stake, 1995) for the present research appeared to be appropriate as means to deepen the understanding of views expressed, and to obtain rich data from both documents and various stakeholders. A future study could be extended to become a longitudinal one, say, over a calendar year. For instance, longitudinal enquiries of how teachers’ perceptions of teaching are changed as result of changes in the teaching evaluation practices would be an important addition to the existing literature on perceptions and evaluation of teaching.

As this study was conducted in two teaching-intensive universities, there is a need also for a multiple-site case study, which may be conducted in teaching-intensive, and/or research-intensive universities. Evidence from these multiple-site
case studies will be more compelling and will add to the external generalisability of this study’s findings.

**Suggestions related to practice**

Another area of future research could be directed to the teaching evaluation practice, and the teaching improvement programs. Further research should attempt to design the *student evaluation of learning* instrument for teaching evaluation. This instrument will be used to inform the teachers, the administrators, and the students about how students approach their learning (i.e., deep or surface), and how qualitatively different students become as a result of teaching. Such an instrument will potentially identify issues related to student learning, and provide the opportunities for students, teachers, and administrators to reflect upon their current practices.

**Closing Remarks**

Investigating higher education in Vietnam through participants’ perceptions, the SET instruments and the published approaches to the evaluation of tertiary teaching, the current study has provided a sound and systemic view about the dominant teaching approach in Vietnam and what may be seen as the transitioning stage in the State management as well as in the institutions. In addition, the study showed that the ways in which university administrators perceived teaching were closely related to the ways in which they approach teaching evaluation practice: to how they perceive the purpose of teaching evaluation and the focus of the evaluation. It is evident from the study that different institutions adopted different approaches to teaching evaluation and these approaches were grounded in different ways administrators-designers of SET perceived teaching.
Finally, returning to my initial question at the beginning of my research journey. Instead of asking who should be, blamed for students’ failure, following this journey, I think the question should be what each individual, the teacher, the student, the administrator, can do to help students to achieve the desired learning outcomes, for as Burden (2010, p. 1473) stated “The education of students is not the sole responsibility of the teacher but one shared equally between all the parties involved” and the data support this assertion.
References


Ware, J. E., & Williams, R. G. (1975). The Dr Fox effect: A study of lecturer expresiveness and ratings of instruction. *Journal of Medical Education, 5*, 149-156.


## Appendices

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<td>Appendix B</td>
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<td>Appendix C</td>
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