

LEADERSHIP TO SUPPORT QUALITY IMPROVEMENT IN VIETNAMESE HIGHER EDUCATION

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Abstract

The impetus for the study was the higher education (HE) reform agenda outlined by the Vietnamese Ministry of Education and Training (MOET). Since the Renovation Policy (*Doi Moi*¹), Vietnamese HE has witnessed a massive growth in the number and size of State and private universities and colleges. Given the risks associated with rapid growth, there is a need not only for quality assurance, but also for continuous quality improvement. To manage quality issues, an understanding of institutional leadership styles and leaders' perceptions regarding quality and their visions to support quality improvement within their respective institutions is critical for strengthening Vietnamese HE. This research study investigated leadership to support quality improvement in Vietnamese HE. In particular, this study aims to understand (1) to what extent Vietnamese HE leaders in the Mekong Delta region are inclined to adopt transformational leadership style; (2) How Vietnamese HE leaders in the Mekong Delta support MOET's principles for quality improvement in Vietnamese HE; and (3) a relationship between leadership styles and support for MOET's principles for quality improvement in Vietnamese HE.

The study adopted a multi-method approach: a quantitative approach using the Multi-factor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ) to investigate the Vietnamese HE leaders' leadership styles (transformational, transactional, and laissez-faire leadership), and a qualitative approach using descriptive statistics and open-ended questions on the ranking scale to study how the Vietnamese HE leaders prioritised the quality improvement principles outlined by MOET. Both the MLQ survey and

¹ *Doi Moi Policy was implemented in Vietnam in 1986. A very important policy, it has changed every aspect of Vietnamese society, including Higher Education.*

ranking/order scale were administered to approximately 190 senior managers in the nine State colleges and universities in the Mekong Delta region.

The findings from the quantitative data suggest that leaders of different gender, age, educational background and leadership experience did not differ significantly in their perceptions about leadership factors. The qualitative descriptive statistics on the ranking scale results showed that Vietnamese HE leaders prioritised MOET's principles at high, moderate, and low levels. Non-significant differences were found in the ranking priorities of Vietnamese HE leaders based on demographic data. This combination of findings provides some support for the conceptual premise that HE leaders supported MOET's recent reform agenda and were inclined to use the transformational leadership style, which is considered to be effective for reforming Vietnamese HE leadership in quality aspirations. Further studies to investigate Vietnamese HE leaders in the private sector, and comparative practices between the State and private institutions are recommended to determine what lessons can be applied to improve quality in both types of institutions.

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List of Abbreviations

CEPES	European Centre for Higher Education
CR	Contingent Reward
EFQM	European Foundation for Quality Management
GUG	Good Universities Guide
HE	Higher Education
HERA	Higher Education Reform Agenda
IC	Individual Consideration
IIA	Idealised Influence Attribute
IIB	Idealised Influence Behaviour
IM	Inspirational Motivation
IS	Intellectual Stimulation
IPO	Input–Process–Output
LF	Laissez-Faire
MBEA	Management-by-Exception Active
MBEP	Management-by-Exception Passive
MBNQA	Malcolm Baldrige National Quality Award
MLQ	Multi-factors Leadership Questionnaire
MOET	Ministry of Education and Training
PCA	Principal Components Analysis

QUT	Queensland University of Technology
RMSEA	Root Mean Square Error of Approximation
SEM	School Excellence Model
SPSS	Statistical Program for Social Science
SQA	Singapore Quality Award
TQM	Total Quality Management
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation

Statement of Original Authorship

The work contained in this thesis has not been previously submitted to meet requirements for an award at this or any other higher education institution. To the best of my knowledge and belief, the thesis contains no material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made.

QUT Verified Signature

Signature:

Date:

May 27th, 2016

Dedication

I would like to dedicate this dissertation to my beloved husband, Khuu Lam Quang, who resigned from his job and sacrificed his career in Vietnam, and devoted his life to supporting my study. Thanks for always being by my side and encouraging me to complete this project.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

In the three decades since the Renovation Policy (*Doi Moi*) was implemented in Vietnam in 1986, Vietnamese higher education (HE) has witnessed a massive growth in State and private universities and colleges (Dao & Hayden, 2010; MOET, 2005a; Oliver et al., 2006; Pham, 2011). Given this rapid growth and the risks associated with it, there is a need not only for quality assurance, but also for continuous quality improvement. To manage quality issues, institutional leaders' perceptions regarding quality and their visions to support quality improvement within their respective institutions is critical for strengthening the Vietnamese HE sector.

While commercialisation of HE has reached the global marketplace (Altbach, 2015), comprehensive reforms in HE systems have been implemented in many Asian countries in order to enhance their global competitiveness (Mok, 2015). The HE reform agenda outlined by the Vietnamese Ministry of Education and Training (MOET) was a response to this trend. In this reform agenda, HE quality improvement is a particular objective (MOET, 2005b). Therefore, this research study on HE leadership was devised to support quality improvement in Vietnamese HE with a focus on State HE institutional leaders and their leadership strategies for quality improvement in their institution.

This introductory chapter outlines the background of Vietnamese HE (Section 1.1) and subsequently describes the context (Section 1.2) of leadership in Vietnamese HE to discuss the needs for this research study. Section 1.3 then presents the aims of the study, and subsequently, the research questions and the study significance are

also discussed. Section 1.4 explains the methodology employed. Finally, Section 1.5 outlines the remaining chapters of the thesis.

1.1 BACKGROUND TO VIETNAMESE HIGHER EDUCATION

In Vietnam, the Ministry of Education and Training (MOET) implements education legislation governing the HE sector, and the State sector of HE remains effectively a part of the State bureaucracy (Dao & Hayden, 2010). The Education Law Act 2005 provides a legal framework which gives MOET apparently close-to-absolute power (Hayden & Lam, 2007). MOET governs the quality of the whole educational system in Vietnam, including the quality of HE. All universities and colleges in the country are guided by the Education Law (Dao & Hayden, 2010; Hayden & Lam, 2007; Pham, 2010) which provides general criteria for the performance of a university, including the quality of HE institutions. Individual universities use the Law to develop their own institutional level quality improvement guidelines. In light of the above, quality in HE is conceived differently in different institutions in Vietnam, but it follows the common national legal framework stipulated by MOET. In 2007, MOET signed the official criteria for quality assessment in the HE system nationwide (MOET, 2007). The ten criteria generally guide the Quality Assessment Department to evaluate institutions' quality. However, as most national frameworks are very broad to ensure inclusiveness of all stakeholders' interests, there are significant challenges in implementing the framework and some of the criteria contained therein. Furthermore, these criteria have many deficits: they are very general and hard to apply for any specific institutions (Nguyen, 2011).

Additionally, although Vietnamese HE development has learned and improved from many developed countries such as the US, Australia, and the United Kingdom, there are some concerns regarding unique aspects in how quality is understood and judged by leaders of Vietnamese HE. Some of this understanding is strongly influenced by the HE leaders to support quality improvement. First, from a political perspective, Vietnam is a one-party Communist state in which the Party is constitutionally responsible for leading the State. Dao and Hayden (2010) explain that this means all decision-making structures normally require a parallel Party structure. The role of the Party is to assess decisions taken in terms of their consistency with Party ideology and to exercise a right to veto, if considered necessary. Second, from the economic point of view, Vietnam's HE system is indeed "a site of contradiction between the demands of socialism and the trend towards a market economy" (Tipton et al., 2003, p. 241). On the one hand, the nation's commitment to its ideological background makes courses such as "Marxism-Leninism and the thoughts of Ho Chi Minh" mandatory for all undergraduate programs in Vietnam for both State and private sectors. On the other hand, the State encourages the establishment of private HE institutions – all of which are heavily driven by market forces for their survival and charge higher tuition fees than those charged by State-sector institutions (Dao & Hayden, 2010). Furthermore, all State universities and colleges in Vietnam are under control of MOET, except the two National Universities, which are directly responsible to the Cabinet. Therefore, the autonomy, accountability, accreditation, and academic freedom are very limited for State universities and colleges in Vietnam.

As Tran and Nguyen (2011) suggested, the transformation of Vietnamese institutions requires a crucial role by institutional leaders. However, under the control

of MOET, HE leaders' power and flexibility in the State sector are quite limited compared to leaders in the private sector. For instance, the power of hiring, firing, or increasing staff salary in State institutions is very much restricted, because HE leaders in the State sector have to follow the general framework regulated by MOET, whereas leaders in the private sector have more autonomy with regard to these issues. Although there is no specific scholarly article, journal or research discussing leadership styles of Vietnamese HE leaders, the contingent reward for innovative leaders in Vietnam is influenced by Party allegiance and market oriented quality improvement. The exchange of value process between institutional leaders and their staff is regulated in the Education Law. In other words, all of the recognition and reward for staff achievement has to follow the regulations of Education Law; and it is very hard for HE leaders to go beyond this mandate. In fact, HE leaders in the State sector are usually bound by the state guidelines and are constrained in rewarding their staff if their people make a great contribution. This is because rewarding excellent performance is not stipulated in the framework and academics are expected to perform to the best of their ability at all times as part of their existing reward and incentive systems; recognition for incentivising behaviour is not mentioned in the HE framework.

In recent years, the quality of HE institutions in Vietnam has captured the attention of many researchers and stakeholders (Harman et al., 2010; Ngo, 2010; Nguyen et al., 2009; Tran et al., 2011). Concern about quality issues and high demand for quality assurance as well as quality improvement in Vietnamese HE are posing questions for many executive leaders in Vietnamese HE, especially institutional leaders. Leaders play a significant role in supporting quality improvement: their leadership styles and strategies strongly influence the

effectiveness of their leadership in the academy (Basham, 2010; Ngo, 2010). Unlike the situation in many Western countries, in Vietnam, because all of the State sector universities are under the control of MOET, many HE leaders are hesitant in making independent decisions to improve the quality of education services of their institutions (Dao & Hayden, 2010). Therefore, to support MOET to implement its quality improvement policy, this study investigated how HE leaders in the country perceived the recent reform agenda in the Vietnamese HE system and their role to support their institutions in meeting the demand for high quality HE. Additionally, in the context of Vietnamese HE, which is discussed in the next section, the demand for a transformation of HE is critical; hence, the study explored leadership style, such as transformational leadership, which is considered to be effective for reforming Vietnamese HE leadership.

1.2 CONTEXT

Vietnamese HE is going through an exciting phase with many reforms in recent years. It is believed that one of the fundamental issues to support quality improvement is that it should be designed in ways that helps to change education leaders' beliefs and conceptions (Tran et al., 2011). Therefore, Vietnamese HE needs a transformation of the whole system, rather than fragmented, activity-oriented reform. The HE Reform Agenda (MOET, 2005) illuminated a wide range of constraints within Vietnamese HE, including quality accreditation, governance and management, privatisation, teaching and learning, research culture, the renewal, restructuring and internationalisation of the HE curriculum, and the development of a more internationally integrated HE system (Harman et al., 2010).

It is important to note again that in Vietnam the Government exercises its authority through various ministries, of which MOET has by far the most extensive responsibilities. In other words, MOET controls one-quarter of all State HE institutions, including 12 out of the 14 officially designated “key” universities, except for the two National Universities (i.e. Hanoi National University, and Ho Chi Minh City National University). Institutions under direct MOET management nominate the rector’s appointment. At this time, the power of rectors in State Universities is quite limited compared to rectors in the private sector. While the office of the rector is the established seat of power, rectors do not have a significant capacity to affect decisions about the curriculum, its delivery, academic standards or the conditions of academic work, because these matters are largely determined by MOET (Dao & Hayden, 2010).

To help implement the reform, there are still many challenges that require research evidence and procedures to enhance and strengthen the reform process. According to a report from MOET (2009), the development of HE in Vietnam has undoubtedly faced many challenges including the inability to meet the demands of industrialisation, modernisation, international integration and the learning needs of the people. In addition, the US-Vietnam Education Task Force’s Final Report (MOET, 2009, p. 3) argued that Vietnam is under a “pressing need for significant modernisation of Vietnam’s higher educational system, including fundamental changes in governance, institutional autonomy, financing and administration, faculty hiring, promotion and salary structure, as well as in curricula and the modalities of teaching, evaluation, and research”. While the Vietnamese HE system is developing rapidly, the Education Ministry’s management is failing to keep pace with the HE management’s innovations and practices (MOET, 2009). Pham (2010) believes that

the most complex and important issue in reforming HE in Vietnam concerns the future relationship between the Ministry of Education and Training (MOET) and HE providers.

The introduction of the MOET legal framework and the MOET stipulated criteria noted above initiated a response that Vietnam lacks even a single university that has recognised international quality (Vallely & Wilkinson, 2008). Vallely and Wilkinson's report, "Vietnamese higher education: Crisis and response," demonstrates that Vietnamese universities are not producing the educated workforce that Vietnam's economy and society demand. Students are ill-prepared for professional work, personal life, or to undertake studies abroad. Tran and Nguyen (2011) concur with this argument: that graduates from Vietnamese universities lack practical, engineering, and/or organisational capabilities. It is clear that Vietnamese HE is lacking an appreciation of quality improvement and mechanisms to ensure that universities' quality is well-suited and capable of meeting the high demands for a diverse workforce that is able to meet local and international standards.

In addition, Pham (2011) reported that in spite of the increased focus on the quantity of HE students and institutions in Vietnam, there have been concerns about standards of education quality. The lack of confidence in the local system has seen a trend in Vietnam where students tend to choose to study for foreign degrees, pursuing prestigious educational opportunities associated with social advantages (Marginson, 2004, as cited in Pham, 2011). Vietnam is facing a big challenge in recruiting and retaining high quality students in a competitive educational environment. Pham (2011, p. 220) challenged the Vietnamese HE system and its leaders in recent years by asking "how does Vietnamese HE compete with foreign

institutions both in Vietnam and overseas to not only keep local students but also attract international students”

In light of recent developments in Vietnamese HE, there is a demand for transforming the HE system to improve quality. However, there is currently a debate on the transformation of academic institutions in Vietnam (Tran & Nguyen, 2011). On the one hand, Tran and Nguyen (2011) believe that academic institutions in Vietnam have contributed greatly to social and economic development, including the workforce, and to innovation and technology. On the other hand, Tran and Nguyen (2011) also argue that academic system development presents a mixed picture in Vietnam. In other words, the development of some institutions in Vietnamese HE is recognised; however, it is very incoherent and inconsistent, so the implementation of the reforms is likely to encounter more challenges in this context. Pham (2010), Tran and Nguyen (2011) argue that while there is much activity within the HE sector in Vietnam, and leaders acknowledge systematic problems, current issues that the sector faces include a lack of resources, lack of innovative leadership, lack of any national quality monitoring system, and conflict between the university missions/objectives and the national human resources demand, as well as conflict between quantitative and qualitative development of institution systems in Vietnam. Such issues are challenging institutional leaders to make reforms. Institutional leaders’ perceptions and their leadership styles are crucial to understanding and then resolving the fragmented problems in their institutions and supporting reform. It is, therefore, the current study used the leadership framework (i.e., transformational leadership, transactional leadership, and laissez-faire leadership) to investigate Vietnamese HE leaders’ perceptions and leadership styles. The discussion about these leadership styles is elaborated further in the literature review chapter.

Tran and Nguyen (2011) noted that frequently the statements on university missions/goals are very broad and ambitious; however, practical human resources do not have sufficient capabilities to carry out the roles; some institutions do not have enough people to do perform the required tasks. Sometimes, conflict between commercial value and scientific value is recognised in these institutions, which present tensions for the leadership (Tran & Nguyen, 2011). As noted above, the rapid growth of HE institutions in Vietnam has attracted many providers. Unfortunately, while this growth has increased access to HE, quality remains a challenge (Vallely & Wilkinson, 2008).

Tran and Nguyen (2011) make a wide range of suggestions with regard to transforming Vietnamese HE institutions. Specifically, they suggest that more autonomy should be given to HE leaders to encourage them to take more responsibility for quality. In addition, MOET's longer-term vision and more strategic approach should replace the current short-term objectives of simply collecting fees in order to pay for the academic system by retaining the status quo. Tran and Nguyen (2011) support the linking of research activities to teaching in HE institutions to encourage innovative research, because they believe that research activities form the fundamental background for stimulating quality improvement, and that research and teaching have a mutual relationship. Specifically, research and teaching activities should be improved in an interrelated relationship to support each other. Teaching programs should encourage students to do research, and encourage them to take initiatives to apply in practice; and vice versa, the research in teaching should help improve teaching initiatives, including teaching methods, content, and teaching context.

Moreover, Tran and Nguyen (2011) also suggest that modern university and research and development management practice should be thoroughly applied. Currently, university research capacity is severely limited, although small numbers of universities in recent years have made impressive progress (Harman & Le, 2010). Hence, HE leaders should learn from these small number of universities that are leading the transformation. Vietnamese HE leaders should take into account that research activities and research development practice are significant contributors to transformation and quality improvements. Tran and Nguyen (2011) also emphasize that in the process of this transformation, leadership of institutions is crucial in adopting a pro-active approach to operate their institutions. Internationalisation, including international staff, salary levels, modes of management, evaluation criteria and teaching quality, are strongly recommended. Tran and Nguyen (2011) suggest that more thorough investigation needs to be undertaken to shed light on the academic system and the balance between teaching, research, and serving society.

Traditionally, the governance of Vietnamese HE has been associated with the notion of hierarchical control, usually by the State (Pham, 2010), and this type of management has limited the HE leaders' ability to be innovative. Therefore, Pham (2010) suggested that HE institutions in Vietnam should operate with more autonomy, and accountability, in developing research, human resources management and finance capacities. However, some HE leaders are quite slow to change, and some do not have enough courage to take actions when the autonomy is handed over because they do not want to be burdened with more responsibilities (Dao & Hayden, 2010; Pham, 2010). In addition, the relationship between MOET and HE institutions is a critical concern, as noted in recent discussion where the centrally controlled governance by MOET was considered no longer appropriate (Pham, 2010). MOET

has now stated that it will concentrate on policy issues, including policy-making and policy monitoring, given the increasing recognition that leaders play a key role in appropriately supporting reforms.

In summary, there are challenges as well as opportunities for HE leaders to show leadership to support quality improvement in their institutions in the context of Vietnamese higher educational transformation, as suggested in the higher education reforms agenda (HERA) in 2005. In order to successfully transform the HE system to gain international recognition, many issues should be taken into account: leadership strategies and planning are one of the key factors. Therefore, this investigation on leadership perceptions in reforming Vietnamese HE, and HE leaders' leadership styles, is extremely necessary and timely.

1.3 PURPOSES

1.3.1 Aims of the study

As discussed above, the reform of national and institutional governance in Vietnamese HE strongly influences HE leaders in their leadership practices. One of the areas of the reform is to support quality improvement in Vietnamese institutions where HE leaders need to become cognizant of international research on quality demands placed on HE institutions. Therefore, the current study in *leadership to support quality improvement in Vietnamese HE* aims to understand Vietnamese HE leaders' perceptions in dealing with reform issues, such as how institutions' internal and external factors influence the quality of HE institutions. Using the leadership frameworks (Avolio & Bass, 2004), the study aims to investigate the leadership styles preferred by Vietnamese HE leaders and how that may support quality improvement initiatives. Specifically, the proposition about transformational

leadership will be tested amongst the leadership of Vietnamese HE leaders. The following research questions will guide this research study:

1. To what extent are Vietnamese HE leaders in the Mekong Delta inclined to adopt a transformational leadership style?
 - 1.1 Does the demographic data (i.e., gender, age, education and experience) influence the inclination to adopt transformational leadership style of Vietnamese HE leaders?
2. How do Vietnamese HE leaders in the Mekong Delta support MOET's principles for quality improvement in Vietnamese HE?
 - 2.1 Does the demographic data (i.e., gender, age, education and experience) influence Vietnamese HE leaders' support MOET's principles for quality improvement?
3. Is there a relationship between leadership styles and support for MOET's principles for quality improvement in Vietnamese HE?

1.3.2 Significance of the study

The contribution of this study to leadership knowledge and to the HE reform agenda in Vietnamese HE is significant. The investigation of leadership styles of Vietnamese HE leaders demonstrates an inclination to adopt transformational leadership in their practice. The study also helps HE leaders to appreciate the importance of their leadership approach in understanding and supporting quality improvement indicators in the Vietnamese HE system. Thus, the research project has both practical and conceptual value. In regard to the practical value, the research study will delineate the crucial roles of HE leaders in supporting quality improvement in their institutions through the ways they perceive the quality indicators. Moreover, while many research articles (Dao & Hayden, 2010; Pham, 2010; Harman et al., 2010) have discussed the reforms of governance in Vietnamese HE, this research study will concentrate on leadership issues, especially HE leaders' leadership styles and strategies. In regards to the conceptual value, the study will illuminate leadership strategies by researching transformational and transactional leadership principles as applied to Vietnamese HE leaders. Since Vietnamese HE is in a stage of transformation, the demand for education system reform is critical. Segmented reforms in HE are not helpful for the system at this time. Therefore, transformational leadership is critical to HE leaders in Vietnam to support the reforms and to achieve the common goals of HERA.

1.3.3 Concept definitions

To understand the research area, concepts of leadership and quality are defined in this research study. In the area of HE, leadership and quality concepts can be perceived differently from leadership concepts in other areas. Generally, as

Northouse (2010, p. 3) defined it, “leadership is a process whereby an individual influences a group of individuals to achieve a common goal.”

As stated above, the current study focuses on transformational leadership to investigate to what extent Vietnamese HE leaders are inclined to adopt transformational leadership in their practice. Therefore, a definition of transformational leadership is necessary. Additionally, other leadership styles, such as transactional leadership and laissez-faire leadership, are defined to contribute a comprehensive understanding about leadership concepts. Bass and Riggio (2006) defined transformational leadership in terms of how the leader affects followers. According to Bass and Riggio (2006, p. 3), “transformational leaders are those who stimulate and inspire followers to both achieve extraordinary outcomes and, in the process, develop their own leadership capacity.” Similarly, Northouse (2010) also stated that transformational leadership is a process that changes and transforms people.

On the other hand, transactional leadership is largely based on the exchange values between leaders and followers. Kuhnert (1994) and Northouse (2010) explained that transactional leaders exchange things of value with subordinates to advance their own and their subordinates’ agendas, whereas transactional leaders do not individualise the needs of subordinates or focus on their personal development. Avolio and Bass (2004, p. 3) defined that “transactional leadership occurs when a leader rewards or disciplines a follower depending on the adequacy of the follower’s performance.” By contrast, “laissez-faire leadership is the avoidance or absence of leadership. It is the most inactive, ineffective form of leadership. Under laissez-faire leadership, nothing is transacted” (Avolio & Bass, 2001, p.4).

Regarding the quality concept, many countries in the world have reached consensus that quality in HE is very important; however, there is no agreement on definition of what quality in HE means (Frazer, 1994; Redmond et al., 2008). However, Brooks (2005) argues that the definition of quality should depend on its purpose, audience, and other contextual factors. In the scale of this study, quality is delineated according to the official criteria for quality in the HE system nationwide by MOET (2007a). According to Decision 65/QĐ-BĐGĐT (Chapter 1, Clause 1) about *Criteria for Evaluating Quality of Vietnamese Higher Education* (MOET, 2007a), the quality of a HE institution is defined by whether the institution is able to accomplish the university's goals to ensure that the requirements of the Education Law are satisfied. Higher Education quality should satisfy the human resources training demands for social and economic development in the region and nationwide.

In sum, both leadership and quality concepts can be perceived very distinctively in HE. This study examined the leadership and quality concepts in an integrated relationship with mutual influence.

1.4 METHODOLOGY

The study was designed from a multi-method approach, in which both quantitative and qualitative methods were utilised to understand two different, but integrated aspects of the study. Specifically, this study adopted a multi-method approach using a quantitative survey for studying leadership aspects and a qualitative descriptive statistics on the ranking scale with open-ended questions to study leader's understanding of HE quality issues. The Multi-factor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ) instrument was used to investigate leadership styles of HE leaders in Vietnam to support the reforms in Vietnamese HE (research question 1), as well as to

test the proposition about transformational leadership in institutional leaders' leadership styles. The MLQ was developed by Bass and Avolio in 1995 and updated in 2004 and it has been one of the principal means to reliably investigate leadership styles (Avolio & Bass, 2004). The MLQ constructs transformational, transactional and laissez-faire leadership, which was appropriate for the purpose of this study. The qualitative approach using descriptive statistics on the ranking scale was used to study how the Vietnamese HE leaders perceive quality improvement indicators in supporting quality improvement in their institutions. In addition, the qualitative descriptive statistics on the ranking scale assisted to understand how institutional leaders perceive institutions' internal and external demands to support quality improvement in their institutions. Specifically, the qualitative approach using descriptive statistics on the ranking scale was employed to find the responses to question 2 of the research questions. Additionally, demographic items were included in the survey to understand how different groups of HE leaders responded.

The data sources of this study were collected from only State HE leaders in the Mekong Delta of Vietnam. HE leaders sought for the study were from the positions of senior management boards, including Dean and Vice Dean of the department, Director and Vice Director of the centre, Head and Vice Head of the office/ unit, and President and Vice President of the institution.

The MLQ questionnaire, the ranking scale, and the demographic items were included in one survey. Since the quantitative and qualitative data were independent, both were coded to allow the researcher to recognise the data from the same respondent to allow correlations. The combined survey was presented in Vietnamese to ensure that participants fully understood the instructions and questions. The survey

instrument was carefully examined by professional interpreters to increase the accuracy of the translation.

1.5 OUTLINE OF THE STUDY

The study consists of five chapters, comprising the introduction (Chapter 1), the literature review (Chapter 2), research design (Chapter 3), research findings and discussion (Chapter 4), and conclusion (Chapter 5).

Chapter 1 briefly described the background and context of Vietnamese HE to give a general understanding about current issues of HE in Vietnam. The chapter established the specific focus of the study, which is to investigate institutional leaders' leadership styles to support the reforms. Subsequently, the aims of the study and significance were presented. In addition, definitions of key concepts were mentioned in Chapter 1. The methodology section briefly described the research instruments, data collection methods, and population and sampling as well as the data analysis.

Chapter 2 focuses on the relevant literature regarding leadership styles and quality improvement. Transformational leadership and transactional leadership are the two leadership types this study focused on amongst others types of leadership. Similarly, the literature review chapter examines international perspectives on quality issues and considers the appropriateness of quality issues to apply in Vietnamese HE to support quality improvement. The leadership section discusses both Western and Vietnamese trends in HE. This chapter also presents the literature closely related to the area of the study.

Chapter 3 describes the methodology of the study. It encompasses description of the methodology: multi-method – quantitative survey and qualitative descriptive

statistics on the ranking scale and open-ended questions and rationale, survey instruments, validity of the instruments, research design, the sample, and data analysis used in the study. The quantitative questionnaire used the MLQ to investigate the leadership styles of Vietnamese HE leaders in the State sector and this section is included in one combined survey. Additionally, a qualitative approach was used in the ranking scale within open-ended questions survey, in which the Vietnamese State leaders presented their perspectives by ranking the importance of quality issues to support quality improvement in their institutions, and explaining their priorities in the open-ended responses.

Chapter 4 reports the results and findings of the study and consists of two main parts. First, the quantitative survey data analysis and results are reported, and second, the analysis and results of the qualitative descriptive statistics on the ranking scale are presented together with the associated open-ended questions. Finally, the summary of the chapter synthesises the quantitative and qualitative findings.

Chapter 5 revisits the research questions and the discussion is structured in three sections. The first section links the findings of the quantitative section to fully understand how they may affect the MLQ approach in Vietnamese HE leaders (Research Question number 1). The next section of chapter 5 focuses on the qualitative findings to explain the ranking priorities of Vietnamese HE leaders in the Mekong Delta regarding MOET's principles for quality improvement in Vietnam (Research Question number 2). Finally, this chapter attempts to seek and explain any relationships that may exist between the Vietnamese HE leaders' leadership styles and their ranking priority (Research question number 3).

Chapter 6 begins with an overview of the study's findings and links to the aims and research questions of this study. The findings of this research provide significant

implications for leadership knowledge contextualised to Vietnamese HE. Finally, limitations of the study are acknowledged and future directions for research are recommended.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

2.1 INTRODUCTION

Quality improvement in higher education (HE) has always been a critical issue and captured the attention of many stakeholders. In the phase of transformation, quality improvement in HE is a national strategy for development in Vietnam. Significant reforms are currently underway in its HE system. In implementing HE reforms, leaders play a key role.

This chapter reviews the literature concerning leadership perspectives and how they may impact on quality improvement in HE. In Vietnamese HE, most Vietnamese leaders do both the leading and managing role. They provide the leadership, they also involve in the management. As such, most of the participants involved in this study are in the senior manager positions, and provide leadership for their organization. The review focuses on two issues: the leadership characteristics or styles of HE leaders in Vietnam, and how they relate to the quality improvement principles promoted by the Vietnamese Government under its reforms. Leadership concepts and definitions are presented to provide a general understanding about leadership theories, specifically leadership in HE, and the appropriateness of these theories in the Vietnamese HE context is discussed. As part of this research study, the quality improvement of Vietnamese HE is examined from the leadership perspectives of Vietnamese leaders. As a result, leaders' priorities about quality improvement principles and their strategies to support such quality improvement initiatives are reviewed. The critical analysis of quality principles in HE examines institutions' internal and external perspectives, as well as quality improvement

principles in the HE systems of different countries. Figure 2.1 presents the conceptual framework that will guide this chapter.

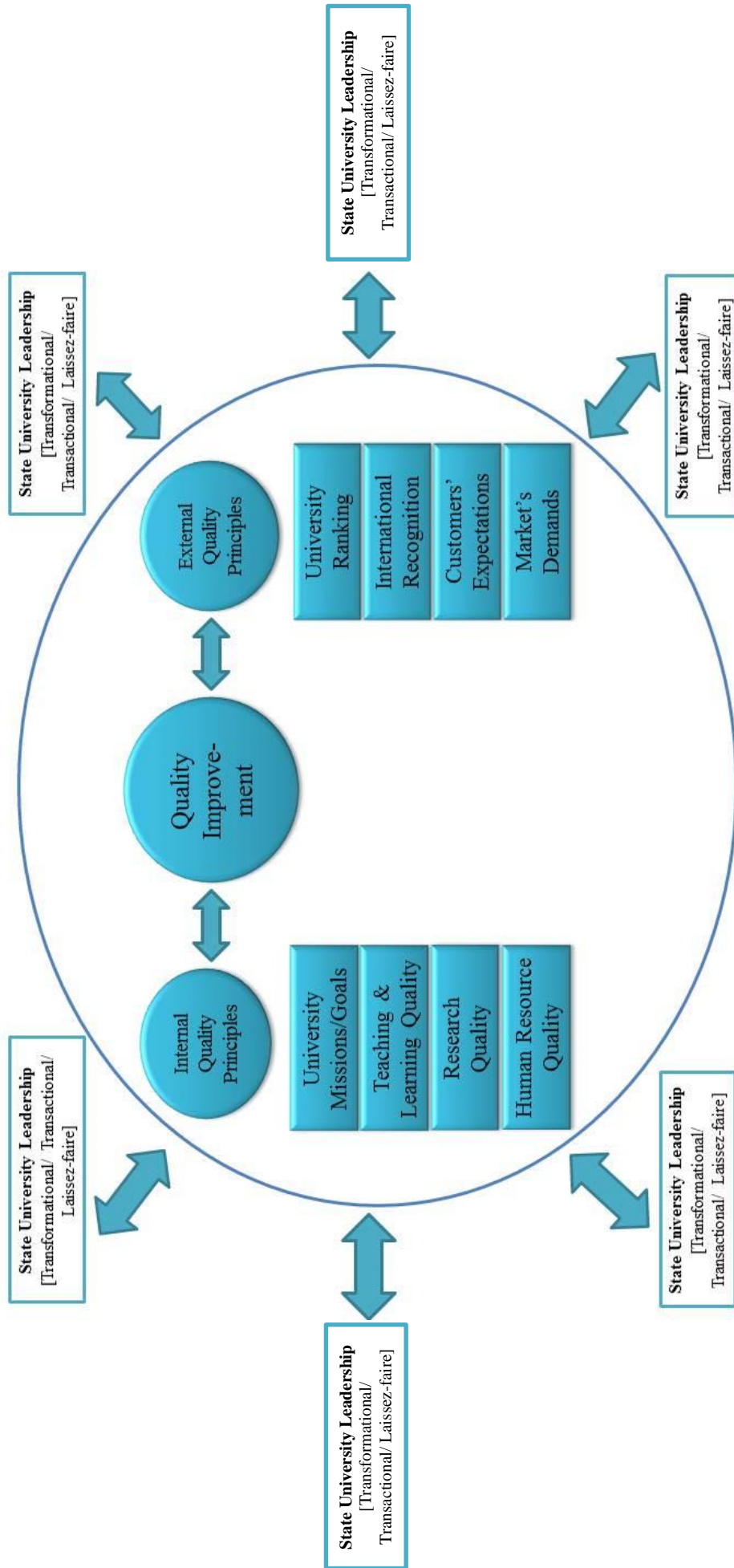


Figure 2.1. The conceptual framework for the current research study

2.2 LEADERSHIP IN HIGHER EDUCATION

2.2.1 General leadership concepts and definitions

This section presents a general understanding about leadership with reference to leadership in HE. Several leadership theories such as contingency, transactional, transformational, and laissez-faire leadership are carefully examined and discussed with regard to their appropriateness in the Vietnamese HE context. The discussion focuses on understanding the match between these leadership theories and leadership propositions in Vietnamese HE, which were presented in Chapter 1.

Leadership is an abstract concept and is one of the most examined phenomena in contemporary society (Burn, 1978). Bass (1990, 2008) argues that leadership is a universal activity evident in humankind and animal species, therefore the scrutiny afforded to leadership is not surprising. Bass further notes, that, indeed, reference to leadership is evident throughout classical Western and Eastern writing, with a consensus that leadership is important for effective organisational and societal functioning (Bass, 2008). Hence, there are more and more researchers trying to define leadership, at least as it is applied to their own research areas. Northouse (2010) reported that in the past 60 years, as many as 65 different classification systems have been developed to define the dimensions of leadership. He also noted that there are many different ways to define leadership, and it seems impossible to give an exact definition since there are as many definitions of leadership as there are people who have tried to define it. Antonakis, Cianciolo, and Sternberg (2004, p. 5) also agree that “leadership is easy to identify in situ; however, it’s difficult to define precisely,” as Northouse (2010, p. 2) states that “although we intuitively know what

we mean by leadership, it can be understood differently from the others.” Indeed, personal perspectives on leadership are different.

Some researchers, including Northouse (2010) identified a set of definitions that leadership may be best conceptualised from a personality perspective. In fact, Northouse argues that leaders’ traits and characteristics influence their leadership behaviours, and this tendency has been identified in the literature of many research areas (Jung & Sosik, 2006; Zaccaro et al., 2004). Some define leadership in terms of the power relationship that exists between leaders and followers; others, such as Antonakis et al., (2004), and Northouse (2010), view leadership as a transformational process; and some scholars, including Mumford (2010) and Northouse (2010) address leadership from a skills perspective. Since leadership has gained attention from researchers worldwide, many studies have tried to identify leadership traits and characteristics (Kirpatrick & Locke, 1991; Lord et al., 1986; Mann, 1959; Stogdill, 1948, 1974; Zaccaro et al., 2004). Although these researchers failed to determine the common traits in their research, they represent a general convergence of research regarding which traits are leadership traits (Northouse, 2010).

It is necessary to differentiate between leadership traits, characteristics and attributes. Zaccaro et al. (2004) stated that leader effectiveness, leader emergence, and leader advancement could be predicted by leader traits. Characteristics such as intelligence, self-confidence, determination, integrity, and sociability form leadership traits; while characteristics including cognitive capacities, personality orientation, motives and values, social appraisal skills, problem-solving competencies, and general and domain-specific expertise constitute leader attributes.

In an effort to define leadership, Northouse (2010) also determined that there are some components that can be identified as central to the phenomenon whereas others may be considered second-order issues. The central phenomenon includes: (a) leadership is a process, (b) leadership involves influence, (c) leadership occurs in a group, and (d) leadership involves common goals. Therefore, Northouse (2010, p. 10) defines leadership in terms of the involvement of these components: “leadership is a process whereby an individual influences a group of individuals to achieve a common goal.” Similarly, Antonakis, Cianciolo, and Sternberg (2004, p. 5) support the statement by giving a similar definition, that “leadership can be defined as the nature of the influencing process – and the resultant outcomes that occurs between leaders and followers,” thus arguing it is a process.

It is certain that leaders need followers in order to lead; they cannot be a leader of themselves. Bass (1990) suggests that some definitions view leadership as the focus of group processes. From this perspective, Northouse (2010) explains that the leader is at the centre of group change and associated activities and embodies the will of the group. He also adds that leadership only occurs in a group and the effectiveness of the group depends on their leaders. Jung and Sosik (2002) confirm that, when leaders empower followers to perform their job independently, this highlights the importance of cooperation in performing collective tasks, realigning followers’ values to create a more cohesive group, and the effectiveness of group working will be increased. Similarly, group performance will reach a higher level if leaders can elevate group members’ needs from self- to collective interests and inspire higher levels of commitment to a common mission and/or vision (House & Shamir, 1993; Shamir, House, & Arthur, 1993; as cited in Jung & Sosik, 2002).

Every leader has his or her own leadership style, and a combination of styles in their leadership which can work if they find the appropriateness and effective blend for their organisation (Avolio & Bass, 2004). Currently, many leadership styles are used by different types of organisations and researchers have shown these varying styles to be effective in their varying contexts (Northouse, 2010). To understand how leadership may be operationalised by leaders, the following leadership theories will analyse the strengths and weaknesses of each theory to examine their appropriateness to the Vietnamese HE context.

Trait leadership theory

One of the first systematic attempts to study leadership was trait theory, which is more concerned with the personalities of the leaders than other attributes. Trait leadership focuses on innate superior qualities and characteristics that differentiate a leader from his followers (Stogdill, 1981). In major reviews, Stogdill (1948, 1974) identified intelligence, self-confidence, responsibility, influence, and cooperativeness as traits of a leader. These core personality traits also help to predict the effectiveness of a leader. However, in the first major survey about trait leadership, Stogdill (1948) stated that a person who possesses certain leadership traits does not necessarily become a leader. Rather, those traits must be relevant to the situations in which the leader is functioning. Northouse (2010) argued that the trait approach does not lay out a set of hypotheses or principles about what kind of leader is needed in a situation or what a leader should do in a context. Instead, this leadership theory emphasizes that having a leader with a certain set of traits is the most important factor for effective leadership; leadership is considered a more macro level leadership capacity. Similarly, Zaccaro et al. (2004, p. 104) define leaders' traits as relatively stable and coherent integrations of personal characteristics that foster a

consistent pattern of leadership performance across a variety of group and organisational situations. These characteristics include personality, temperament, motives, cognitive abilities, skills, and expertise.

Several strengths of trait leadership were identified in this review. First, the trait approach is built on the premise that leaders are individuals who are out in the front; they are different and their difference resides in the special traits they possess (Stogdill, 1981; Northouse, 2010). Others (e.g. Zaleznik, 2004) usually consider these leaders as gifted people. A century of research into the trait theory of leadership gives the trait approach a measure of credibility and longevity that other approaches lack. An abundance of research (Bass, 2008; Judge et al., 2002; Stogdill, 1948, 1974; Zaccaro, 2007) has arisen with data that point out the important role of various personality traits in the leadership process. Additionally, Northouse (2010) also believes that the trait approach can help identify some benchmarks for what traits a person should have, or whether the traits a person has are the best traits for leadership. This strength of the trait approach offers valuable ways for supervisors and managers to review their strengths and improve their leadership effectiveness.

In addition to its strengths, trait leadership has been criticised. Stogdill (1948, 1974) believes that people who possess certain traits that make them leaders in one situation may not be leaders in another situation. In addition, the traits may help them emerge as leaders, but cannot help them maintain their leadership over time. Although many researchers have focused on trait leadership, there are inconsistencies between these studies around common traits (Northouse, 2010; Zaccaro et al., 2004). Moreover, while leadership is a compound of leaders, followers, and situations, trait leadership only focuses on leaders. This approach has failed to take followers and situations into account and failed to address the effectiveness of a leader as well

(Lord et al., 1986; Judge et al., 2009). Additionally, trait leadership encompasses highly subjective determinations of the most important leadership traits. Zaccaro et al. (2004) further agree that trait leadership is not useful for training and development for leadership, since teaching new traits is not an easy process, as traits are not changed easily.

This section defined trait leadership theory and provided a general understanding about one of the earliest leadership theories. Although several strengths have been noted, there are also some weaknesses. Overall, trait leadership focuses on leaders' personalities and offers trait information for supervisors and managers to develop a deeper understanding of who they are and how they can influence their followers.

Contingency leadership theory

Contingency leadership theory stems from Fiedler's 1964 model which developed from Fiedler's studying of leaders' styles in different contexts. Fiedler (1964) described the contingency model of leadership effectiveness as an appropriateness of leaders' styles and situations. Ayman, Chemers, and Fiedler (1995) stated that the contingency model predicts a leader's effectiveness based on their task or relationship motivation orientation and their situational control. It provides a framework for effective matching of the leader's capabilities and the situation. In this style of leadership, task motivation and relationship motivation are described as the main attributes and are characterized in three different situational variables: leader-member relations, task structure, and position power (Ayman et al., 1995; Northouse, 2010). According to Antonakis et al. (2004), the leader-member relation will influence directly the effectiveness of getting to their common goals. If

this relationship is good, achievement of common goals will be easy; if the relationship is strained, then the leader may find it challenging to achieve the common goals. Therefore, to understand leaders, understanding and nurturing the leader-member relation is critical in this type of leadership. The task structure is the degree to which the requirements of a task are clear and spelled out. So, the more leaders control and influence tasks, the clearer the tasks are.

The position power is a component of situational control, and it is defined as the administrative authority (Ayman et al., 1995). In contingency leadership theory, position power is conceptualised as the amount of authority a leader has to reward or to punish followers. It includes the legitimate power individuals acquire as a result of the position they hold in an organisation. Northouse (2010) states that position power is strong if a person has the authority to hire and fire or give raises in rank of pay; it is weak if a person does not have the authority to do these things. This has strong significance in the context of the Vietnamese HE system, where the position power of leaders in the State universities and colleges is very limited, since their authority is restricted from rewarding or punishing followers (Dao & Hayden, 2010). In contrast, leaders in private Vietnamese institutions have this authority and thus are very successful in adopting this leadership style. They have the real power to hire, to fire or to decide on staff rank and pay.

Considering the strengths and weaknesses of contingency leadership theory, many researchers (Peters, Harke & Polman, 1985; Strube & Garcia, 1981) confirmed contingency theory to be valid and reliable in explaining how leadership effectiveness can be achieved. Contingency leadership is also very predictive and provides useful information about leadership styles that are most likely effective in certain contexts. Moreover, contingency theory matches the leader and the situation,

but does not demand that the leader fit every situation (Fiedler, 1964). However, contingency theory fails to fully explain why people with certain leadership styles are more effective in some situations than others. It also fails to explain what organisations should do when there is a mismatch between the leader and the situation in the workplace (Northouse, 2010).

Transactional leadership

Transactional leadership is the process of exchanging values between leaders and their followers for the common good (Burn, 1978, 2012). While trait leadership focuses on leaders' innate personalities, and contingency leadership predicts the effectiveness of leadership styles in situations, transactional leadership focuses on results, conforms to the existing structure of an organisation and measures success according to that organisation's system of rewards and penalties (Spahr, 2015). A leader is transactional when s/he rewards the followers for meeting agreements and standards, or gives penalties for failing in what s/he was supposed to have done (Bass, 2008). Transactional leadership differs from transformational leadership (which is reviewed in the next section) in that the transactional leader does not individualise the needs of subordinates or focus on their personal development.

Kuhnert (1994) stated that transactional leaders exchange values with subordinates to advance their own and their subordinates' agendas. Transactional leaders are influential because it is in the best interest of subordinates to do what the leaders want (Kuhnert & Lewis, 1987). Meanwhile, Bass (1985) applied Burns' (1978) ideas to organisational management and argues that transactional leaders mostly consider how to marginally improve and maintain the quantity and quality of performance, how to substitute one goal for another, how to reduce resistance

to particular actions, and how to implement decisions. They focus on one activity at a time and do not have a holistic view. This type of leader is often considered as maintaining organisational performance rather than being innovative and reforming an organisation.

In order to determine the transactional leadership style of a leader, Avolio and Bass (1995, 2000, 2004) identified three factors, including contingency reward, management-by-exception active and management-by-exception passive. Transactional contingent reward leadership clarifies expectations and offers recognition when goals are achieved. The clarification of goals and objectives and providing recognition once goals are achieved should result in individuals and groups achieving expected levels of performance. “Contingent reward is the constructive transaction in which leaders assign tasks or obtain agreement from their followers on what needs to be done and arrange for psychological or material rewards of followers in exchange for satisfactorily carrying out the assignments” (Bass, 1998; 2008, p. 623). Contingent reward is a specific feature in transactional leadership and it is highlighted in the Vietnamese HE sector. However, contingent reward is very different between the State and the private sector in Vietnam. While leaders in the private sector have more power to raise their followers’ salary or fire a staff, leaders in the State sector are very limited in this area. It is hard for leaders in the State sector to make a deal with their followers.

The management-by-exception active leadership approach describes leaders who often specify the standards for compliance, and what constitutes ineffective performance. Leaders of this style may punish sub-ordinates for not complying with those standards (Avolio & Bass, 2004). In addition, this style of leadership monitors deviances, mistakes, and errors and then takes corrective action as quickly as

possible when they occur. Since these leaders fully concentrate their attention on irregularities and mistakes, complaints and failures, they take timely actions to ensure every initiative in their organisation is being kept on track (Avolio & Bass, 2004). In contrast, the management-by-exception passive leaders fail to interfere until problems become serious and wait for things to go wrong before taking action. Leaders of this style fully demonstrate that they will not take any action until the problems become chronic. Hence, this leadership style usually causes a negative reaction from their subordinates (Bass & Yammarino, 1991; Howell & Avolio, 1993). According to Hater and Bass (1998) management-by-exception active and passive leaders are only distinct in terms of the timing of their intervention.

Transactional leadership is quite clear about requirements and rewards for subordinates. Although punishments are not mentioned, they are well understood, and formal systems of discipline are commonly in place (Basham, 2010). Basham (2010) believes that there are both strengths and weaknesses in the transactional approach. For instance, although transactional leadership can be described as aiming towards exchange of valued outcomes, all exchanges frequently are not equivalent (Dienesch & Liden, 1986; Kuhnert & Lewis, 1987; Bass, 2008). In Vietnamese HE, rewarding excellent individuals for their contribution strictly follows MOET's framework in State colleges and universities. As a result, the reward most of the time is not equivalent to the individual's contribution. Similar is the case of punishment in Vietnamese HE system. At this point, rewarding and punishing norms seem to be out of transactional leaders' authority in the Vietnamese context.

In the current Vietnamese HE sector, leaders are required to manage and implement the State-approved mandate as the context is highly structured by policies and procedures. The authority to reward or punish followers of Vietnamese leaders

strictly follows the State regulations. Unlike leaders in private institutions, leaders in State institutions do not have enough power to reward or punish their followers, despite the fact that rewards and punishments do exist in the system with specific regulations regarding how to implement them. Leaders in the State sector can only enforce what is stipulated by the State rules. There are legal guides on how to reward or punish staff in the Vietnamese State document system. Hence, when issues arise that may not be covered in the regulations, it creates confusion for leaders in the State sector. They are usually slow in reacting to these situations, and make their sub-ordinates dissatisfied. The current extensive use of transactional leadership in the State sector in Vietnamese HE seems to be inappropriate for the common goals of reforming and improving the quality of HE in Vietnam.

Transformational leadership

Transformational leadership has captured the attention of many scholars (Antonakis, Cianciolo, & Sternberg, 2004; Basham, 2010; Northouse, 2010; Sarros & Santora, 2001), and has emerged as the central model in current leadership research. Many definitions and descriptions of transformational leadership refer to it as charismatic leadership. Bryman (1992) described transformational leadership as part of the ‘new leadership’ paradigm, which gives more attention to the charismatic and affective elements of leadership. Northouse (2010, p.171) defines “transformational leadership as a process that changes and transforms people. It is concerned with emotions, values, ethics, standards and long-term goals, where the focus is on changing human values which in turn will change organisational practices.” As a consequence of this broader focus, Burns (1978) argues that transformational leadership is complex and potent. A transformational leader looks

for potential motives in followers, seeks to satisfy higher needs, and engages the full person of the followers.

Transformational leadership is also concerned with improving the performance of followers, and developing followers to their fullest potential (Avolio, 1999; Avolio & Bass, 2004). It is different from contingency leadership theory and transactional leadership theory, both of which focus more on tasks. Transformational leadership considers investment in human resources to stimulate organisational reform, which in turn targets the tasks. As cited in Sashkin (2004), Bass (1985) believes that by engaging in transformational leadership behaviours, leaders transform followers. From this point of view, transformational leadership seems to be appropriate for reforming the Vietnamese HE system. As stated in Chapter 1, Vietnamese HE is trying to transform its whole system – including HE structure and administration, and human resources including values and work ethic – to capture international recognition. Therefore, transformational leadership theory underpins this study to examine the leadership styles of Vietnamese State institutional leaders and to support quality improvement.

Those who exhibit transformational leadership often have a strong set of internal values and ideals, and are effective at motivating sub-ordinates to act in ways that support the greater good rather than their own self-interests (Kuhnert, 1994). Avolio et al. (1999) and Avolio and Bass (2004) describe the five factors determining a person as a transformational leader, including (i) idealised influence attributed; (ii) idealised influence behaviour; (iii) inspirational motivation; (iv) intellectual stimulation; and (v) individual consideration.

In their design of the MLQ instrument to measure leadership styles, Avolio and Bass (2004) explain that transformational idealised influence (attributed and behaviours) refers to leaders who are admired, respected and trusted people. These leaders consider followers' needs over their own needs. They also share risks with followers and are consistent in conduct with underlying ethics, principles and values. Inspirational motivation refers to leaders who talk and behave in an optimistic manner about the future with their followers by providing meaning and challenge to their followers' work, whereas intellectual stimulation refers to the ways leaders stimulate their followers' effort to be innovative and creative by questioning assumptions, reframing problems, and approaching old situations in new ways. In addition, individual consideration refers to leaders who pay attention to each individual's need for achievement and growth by acting as a coach and mentor. They usually spend time teaching, coaching, and treating others as individuals rather than just as a member of the group.

According to Basham (2010), the strengths of transformational leaders include attributes to learn across their specialist discipline. This includes having the perspective to see that change is needed and what the consequences may be for continuing the same practices. Swail (2003, p. 12) also supports this statement by stating that transformational leaders who develop and communicate a vision and a sense of strategy are those "who find clear and workable ways to overcome obstacles, are concerned about the quality of the services their organisation provides, and inspire other members to do likewise."

As noted by Gous (2003), transformational leadership is essential in HE, so that continuous adaption can be accommodated to meet the constantly changing demands of the economic and academic environment. This is very applicable to the

current HE sector in Vietnam where the HE service is being challenged to be more responsive to the labour market's demand to support the economic and social demands of the country. Leaders who encourage and support transformational leadership tend to share power by delegating responsibilities and engaging a larger number of stakeholders. They are also willing to learn from others, thus establishing systems to receive feedback from others within the organisation, including their clients. Transformational leaders are sensitive to each team member's needs for achievement and growth. In addition, Gmelch and Wolverton's (2002) study of leadership among Faculty Deans found that the institutional type had a significant effect on Deans' abilities to play the role of transformational leaders. For example, Deans at research universities found it quite difficult to build community and to operate as transformational leaders compared with Deans at comprehensive universities.

In the changes noted by Dao and Hayden (2010) about the Vietnamese HE context, the changes are complex and are not just about making instrumental changes, but rather about changes to the whole culture of the HE sector (which will be discussed in detail in the section on leadership in Vietnamese HE). Therefore, transformational leadership seems to be the most appropriate approach for State universities' leaders to employ in order to support quality improvement.

Transformational leadership vs. Transactional leadership

Transformational leadership and transactional leadership are not opposite styles of leadership as the ends of bipolar dimensions (Bass, 1985). Instead, they are independent aspects of leadership, just as task orientation and relationship orientation are independent dimensions (Sashkin, 2004). According to Burns (1978), while

transactional leadership refers to the exchange of values in the organisation between leaders and followers, transformational leadership is concerned with the factors which raise the motivation and morality in both the leaders and followers. Kuhnert and Lewis (1987) describe the different values in these leadership styles. Concerning the exchange of values, transactional leaders usually provide assistance in exchange for followers' efforts in work accomplishment. The spiritual or physical rewards and punishments are used as exchanges between leaders and their followers for the purpose of reaching the common goals. They believe that while the values in transactional leadership are exchangeable, it is the personal values and beliefs that originate in the transformational style. In addition, Bass (1985) and Burns (1978) note that transformational leaders include justice and integrity values in their leadership and are able to unite followers and change followers' goals and beliefs. Transformational leaders usually display a sense of confidence. They often talk about their beliefs and express confidence that they and their followers will achieve their common goals.

In leadership of HE, both transformational and transactional leadership are essential. In Basham's (2010) dissertation on presidents as transformational or transactional leaders in HE, there are conclusions concerning these leadership styles. He concludes that:

- i. The distinction between transactional and transformation leadership practices and concepts in HE may not be as clear as traditionally believed.
- ii. University presidents recognise that establishing an environment of excellence inspires trust.

- iii. Both transactional and transformational leadership practices will have to be applied to ensure change despite the reluctance of tenured faculty and staff to consider changes due to personal impact.
- iv. The situation and environment of reduction in state and/or government funding will require critical application of transactional and transformational leadership practices and concepts.
- v. The attribute of authenticity must reside within the university president's acumen.

In the context of this current study, both transactional and transformational leadership practices are necessary. These are styles on a continuum and both can influence and help the HE reform process in different ways and for different purposes. However, Vietnamese HE context has already been in the one end of transactional leadership style; the study focuses on exploring how far leadership in Vietnamese HE moves forward to transformational leadership style. In light of understanding State institutional leaders' leadership styles, and leaders who are inclined to adopt transformational leadership to support quality improvement in their institution, the review on transactional and transformational leadership practices has provided fundamental knowledge for further research in this study.

To sum up, since the early 1980s, transformational leadership has come into practice and become one of the most popular leadership theories in the research. Hence, transformational leadership has attracted many scholars' interest and has earned a central place in leadership research (Northouse, 2010). Lowe and Gardner (2001) found that one-third of the research was about transformational or charismatic leadership. While transformational leadership is a process of transforming people

through raising motivation and morality in both leaders and followers, and the ability to change followers' goals and beliefs, transactional leadership is more about the exchange process. The exchangeable values make transactional leadership popular in reality because of its simplicity and tangible benefits and sanctions, but transactional leadership often fails to reform a whole system.

Laissez-faire leadership

Bass and Avolio (2004) describe laissez-faire leadership as a passive avoidant leadership behaviour. A leader who is described as a laissez-faire leader usually avoids getting involved when important issues arise. This type of leader is often absent when needed, and avoids making decisions. These leaders frequently delay responding to urgent questions as well. The laissez-faire leadership style is also marked as a general failure to take responsibility for managing (Eagly et al., 2003).

In examining laissez-faire leadership in many organisations, Avolio and Bass (2004) found that strong negative associations with effectiveness and satisfaction were repeatedly obtained when leaders were rated as frequently using a laissez-faire style of leadership. Similarly, Lowe, Kroeck, and Sivasubramaniam (1996) did the first meta-analysis of the literature and confirmed the negative effectiveness of the laissez-faire style. Additionally, Foschi (1992, 2000; as cited in Eagly et al., 2003) states that leaders who manifested ineffective styles such as laissez-faire leadership may be deselected from leadership more quickly; this is especially true of female leaders, who may be deselected more quickly than their male counterparts. This has particular implications for the Vietnamese HE sector, which is highly dominated by male leaders.

Generally, laissez-faire leaders exhibit frequent absences and a lack of involvement during critical junctures, as well as a lack of concerted strategic effort. This type of leadership is also described as the least effective leadership style and rarely gets support from followers in organisations.

2.2.2 Leadership in higher education

In terms of leadership in HE, Novak (2002) defines leadership as a personal and professional relationship between those in leadership positions and their subordinate staff with the objective of bringing out the best in people. In HE, successful leaders have been described in terms of personal attributes, interpersonal abilities, and technical management skills. Personal attributes include humour, courage, judgement, integrity, intelligence, persistence, hard work, vision, and being opportunity conscious, and interpersonal abilities include being open, building teams, and being compassionate (Bensimon et al., 1989). These authors note among attributes that describe effective leaders in HE, intelligence, self-confidence, and integrity are those cited by researchers and scholars. Additionally, several different research studies in recent years have examined the leadership styles of university leaders such as Presidents, Vice Presidents, Deans, and administrators (see Table 3.2, leaders' positions participated in the study for more details), revealing the importance of balancing relational and task orientations and examining them in relation to leadership outcomes (McKee, 1991; Neumann & Neumann, 1999; Wen, 1999). The importance of forming a favourable relationship was noted earlier in this thesis. Here Basham (2010) examined the leadership style of Presidents as transformational or transactional leaders, and found that the leader–follower relationship plays a crucial role in supporting these leaders to lead their institutions successfully. Specifically, Basham found that Presidents in his study recognised the

critical need to have a vision and purpose with value and how the leader–follower relationship can support and promote such common understanding.

Generally, the personal characteristics of a leader have a strong influence on their leadership approaches, but personal characteristics alone are not enough for leaders to be effective and successful in transforming their institutions. In some cases, it is contingency leadership that is needed to solve the problems in a specific situation, where the leadership matches the situation. In other circumstances, the required leadership style is believed to be more appropriate and effective when the leaders' personality and characteristics are considered. For instance, there is a need of holistic transformation in the human resources and the HE system in the context of Vietnamese HE reform, traits/contingency leadership may not be appropriate for State institutional leaders who aim to transform the HE system, and operate their institution within the rigid and prescriptive guidelines provided by the government to reach international standards. This is because traits theory focuses on leaders and what is good for leaders, not what is good for their followers or good for common goals (Northouse, 2010). As mentioned above, leadership is composed of relationships between leaders, followers and situations, and because trait leadership focuses on leaders, it often neglects to address followers and situations.

Concerning contingency leadership in HE, the use of contingency theory can be found in different organizational subsystems, including the bureaucratic, collegial, political, and symbolic subsystems. Leadership becomes more closely related to perspective or vantage points through contingency theory (Kezar et al., 2006). In addition, as noted by Fiedler (1997), the contingency model examines the relationship between micro-aspects of the organizational context (such as task design and subordinate development) and leadership. Research findings (Peter et al., 1985;

Hakonsson et al., 2006) have reported that aspects of the organization and the leadership task affect the leadership process. Generally, contingency theory in the HE context focuses on being task motivated and relationship motivated between leaders and followers. Contingency leadership would be efficient for leaders who are task oriented and stimulate a good leader-follower relationship to create a professional and comfortable working environment. However, in the context of Vietnamese HE (as discussed in Chapter 1), a contingency leadership style may be inappropriate for institution leaders when they desire to transform State university quality to achieve international HE standards. Vietnamese State leaders require their followers to change, adapt, and improve in every aspect in the institution to reach the common goal of quality improvement and strive for international recognition.

This section presented general understandings about how different leadership approaches may have an impact on HE. In reviewing leadership in HE in the international context, the current study discusses effective leadership in international HE in more detail before focusing on reviewing the Vietnamese context.

In this section, the literature also looks at what constitutes effective leadership when dealing with HE organisations, and analyses the leadership styles or behaviours that are found to be effective in studies of HE leadership.

Bryman (2007) reviewed the literature on departmental leadership effectiveness in universities and found 13 factors of leader behaviours associated with effectiveness. His literature reviews leadership effectiveness from UK, Australian and American HE systems. These 13 factors comprise many aspects of leader behaviour that can be found in the leadership literature more generally, such

as the emphasis on vision, integrity, consideration and sense of direction. The 13 factors Bryman identified are:

- Clear sense of direction/strategic vision
- Preparing department arrangements to facilitate the direction set
- Being considerate
- Treating academic staff fairly and with integrity
- Being trustworthy and having personal integrity
- Allowing the opportunity to participate in key decisions/encouraging open communication
- Communicating well about the direction of the department
- Acting as a role model/having credibility
- Creating a positive/collegial work atmosphere in the department
- Advancing the department's cause with respect to constituencies internal and external to the university and being proactive in doing so
- Providing feedback on performance
- Providing resources for and adjusting workloads to stimulate scholarship and research
- Making academic appointments that enhance the department's reputation

In his study, Bryman (2007) concludes that leaders' behaviours are very significant in fostering a collegial atmosphere and advancing the department's cause. Furthermore, in HE leadership that is considered effective by staff, research has shown that leaders' competencies make a difference in satisfaction levels, Bryman (2007) explained. In an attempt to identify the important competencies necessary for effective leadership, Smith and Wolverton (2010) found that the HE leadership competencies model contains five competency categories, including analytical,

communication, student affairs, behavioural, and external relations. They used a quantitative research method with extensive analysis of the data and existing theory to determine the five-component model as the most logical and meaningful solution that emerged from their data. This contrasted with McDaniel's (2002) original four-component model, which included context, content, process, and communication.

As Smith and Wolverton's five-component model was developed from McDaniel's four-component model, the literature review on the leadership competency of this study focuses on the original four-component model, because of its origin and application to examining general effective leadership. The competencies in the HE context require competent leaders to be able to relate general knowledge about their context for an effective decision-making process (Bensimon et al., 1989; Smith & Wolverton, 2010). The content competencies also hinge on a leader's understanding of strategic planning and how it relates to the mission and goals of the HE institution. For instance, Ferren and Stanton (2004) described competent leaders as able to understand finance, budgeting, institutional planning, and their interconnectedness. Process competencies comprise the leader's knowledge and understanding of leadership in general and the behaviours and processes necessary to achieve successful outcomes. Process also refers to leaders' creativity, flexibility, risk-taking nature, and adaptability. Effective leaders use communication competencies to articulate a meaningful vision for the organization (Fisher & Koch, 1996, 2004; Gilley et al., 1986; McLaughlin, 2004). Generally, McDaniel (2002) concludes that senior leaders in HE used the four-component model of leadership competencies to assess their own knowledge and skills, and then plan learning activities and experiences to address the gaps they identify. Considering leadership competencies in this study provides the researcher with an understanding about

which components effective leaders should consider in their leadership; the researcher can then pay more attention to these components when investigating leadership styles of Vietnamese HE leaders.

Northouse (2010), in his review of Stogdill's (1948) study about personal factors associated with leadership involving the Ohio State University, found that subordinates' responses on the questionnaire clustered around two general types of leader behaviours: initiating structure and consideration. Initiating structure behaviours are essentially task behaviours, including such acts as organising work, giving structure to work context, defining role responsibilities, and scheduling work activities. Consideration behaviours are essentially relationship behaviours and include building camaraderie, respect, trust, and liking between leaders and followers. In fact, the impact of leaders' behaviours on the performance of small groups to reach their purpose is closely paralleled to the task and relationship leadership behaviours. Similar to contingency and transactional leadership, initiating structure behaviours and consideration behaviours also focus on tasks. However, these types of leadership do not tell the leaders how to behave, but merely describe the major components of their behaviour (Northouse, 2010).

In the 21st century, as the world has become more complex and challenging, university leadership also requires excellence in senior-level management and leadership. At the university/college level, it is highly important for university leaders to have a vision. In the American HE context, Jerry Sue Thornton, President of Cuyahoga Community College, USA (2009, p. 3) believes that "in these ever-changing times, effective [university] leadership can make a real difference that is felt far beyond the borders of any one institution." Lou Anna K. Simon, President of Michigan State University, USA (2009, p. 1) adds that "the role of the university

president is continuously evolving as the challenges facing our institutions and the world at large become more complex and farther reaching.” At this point, a transformational leadership approach would be the best fit for contemporary leaders in an uncertain world. Leaders need to change their associates’ awareness of what is important, and move them to see themselves and the opportunities and challenges of their environment in a new way. As the presidents’ role is continuously evolving, these leaders need to be proactive, and as transformational leaders they should seek to optimize individual, group and organizational development and innovation, not just achieve performance or expectations. They have to convince their associates to strive for higher levels of potential as well as higher levels of moral and ethical standards.

When the world is changing every second, the leadership in HE needs to be alert to these changes. As Simon (2009, p. 3) stated, “with increased globalisation, decreased public financial support, and more external interventions, HE leaders must balance often competing demands representing multiple constituencies both inside and outside the institution.”

The literature has emphasized the importance of effective leadership in HE, the inclusion of leadership in developing countries such as Thailand, Malaysia, and Singapore contributes a comprehensive understanding about leadership in HE. Since globalisation has increased and profoundly influenced HE (Altbach, Reisberg & Rumbley, 2010), HE reform has been implemented in many countries to catch up with this trend. In the process of HE reform, national strategies play the leading role in reforming the HE system in their country.

In the Thai HE reform, Pimpa (2011) highlights five key reform policies in teaching and learning, finance, human resources, research, and administration which were made by the Thai government. However, Pimpa (2011) also revealed that staffing and quality of human resources, budget and finance, and consistency in policy and leadership are factors which have obstructed the Thai's reform strategies. Hence, it is suggested that flexibility in higher educational management and transparency should be increased to reform the Thai HE system (Pimpa, 2011).

Similarly, the Ninth Malaysian Plan (2006-2010) which aims to turn Malaysia into a regional education hub was suggested in the initiatives of Malaysian HE reform (Sidhu & Kaur, 2011). The Malaysian government has implemented many strategic initiatives to support this plan, including enhancement of research development capabilities, promotion of development through international cooperation, human capital development. The Malaysian government also asserted the strategy to make Malaysia into an educational hub into national mission (Sidhu & Kaur, 2011), and highlights a HE transformation agenda (Malaysian Ministry of Higher Education, 2007). However, slow progress in research and development and brain-drain problem are challenging issues that the government of Malaysian has to resolve in order to improve the competitiveness of its HE system (OBHE, 2008).

Having the same ambition to be the education hub in the region like Malaysia, Singapore HE reform is highlighted with a strategic policy in human resources (Mok & Lee, 2003) to develop a knowledge-based economy (Singapore government, 1999). In response to the changing social and economic context, institutional autonomy was granted to Singaporean universities (Mok & Lee, 2003; Mok, 2008). Targeting at world-class level universities, Singapore HE reform implemented two main policies to (1) expand postgraduate education and research at the universities,

(2) to review the undergraduate curricula with an emphasis on students' creativity and thinking skills (Mok & Lee, 2003). It cannot be claimed that Singapore HE reform is successful and obtain its objectives. However, the Singapore Government has successfully maintained the state control over its public policy and political domains while more operational autonomy was granted to Singaporean universities to implement the reform.

The literature in HE reform in developing countries such as Thailand, Malaysia, and Singapore highlights a common concern to reach a world-class level. However, Marginson (2011) indicated that this is an ambitious goal and national governments in these countries insufficiently support the global mission. Varghese and Martin (2014) also found a common strategic policy in implementing HE reform in these countries that institutional autonomy has been granted to HE institutions. Having the same ambition to reach the world-class level, Vietnamese HE is also in the process of reforming the HE system. The next section 2.2.3 reviews leadership in HE in Vietnam in light of the HE reform.

2.2.3 Leadership in higher education in Vietnam

Vietnamese HE in the 21st century is facing many challenges, including quality, high market's demand, quality assurance, and learners' expectations (Harman et al., 2010). From the university leadership perspective, these challenges demand effective leadership to lead institutions through the challenging times and reach the aspirations noted in the national standards (MOET, 2005). The anticipated leadership is also expected to have the capacity to undertake international benchmarking to catch up with international institutions in the Asia Pacific region.

As noted in Chapter 1, 14 key universities in Vietnam are controlled by the State, which means that the State university leaders in Vietnam are influenced and controlled by MOET. Therefore, it is very difficult for rectors in State sector universities to make decisions concerning the curriculum framework, enrolment quotas, tuition fees, and so on. Vallely and Wilkinson (2008) and Dao and Hayden (2010) state that the central government makes decisions on how many students are recruited each year, and even what many instructors are paid at State universities. In fact, enrolment quotas are the key factors for the government's decision on how much funding the State institutions will receive in a fiscal year. Hence, university leaders have to strictly follow these guidelines from MOET, and try hard not to deviate from them to avoid sanctions.

According to Felt and Glanz (2002), autonomy is perceived as the key element that allows for the transformation of an institution from the inside and guarantees freedom of research and teaching. In Vietnamese HE, autonomy was quite a novel term for State institutions until the last few years. Recent educational laws and reforms gave authority to university councils and leaders, and this significant policy shift has brought both benefits and challenges to university leaders. Since the concept of institutional autonomy is not widely understood in Vietnam, meaningful levels of institutional autonomy for State sector institutions unfortunately have not yet been sufficiently operationalized. University leaders have not dared to take any action given the years of operating with a highly centralised system, especially for those leaders who do not fully understand institutional autonomy. Dao and Hayden (2010) noted that most State HE institutions in Vietnam do not have adequate administrative systems to help exercise institutional autonomy effectively. They are quite confused and slow in taking this policy directive in actuality.

In contrast, private universities in Vietnam are autonomous, although they follow the rules and programs developed within MOET's framework. The Government does not control their finance and human resources. Therefore, they are able to seize opportunities and demands for new programs. Since they are not financed by the State, they are able to recruit students without quota limits as long as they satisfy the teacher-student ratio, and teaching and learning requirements.

As stated in Chapter 1, Vietnam has a one-party Communist government, so even in HE institutions, university councils often comprise of the executive board, including the rectorate and the representatives of the Communist Party. Hence, it is necessary to separate the power of these board members. Dao and Hayden (2010) believe that the charter for HE institutions lays down a foundation set of specifications for the roles and responsibilities of governing councils and rectors in achieving institutional autonomy. In principle, by doing so, there should be no conflict in operating the institutions in the State sector. However, Dao and Hayden (2010) also query the nature of autonomy when line-management from MOET decides matters related to the curriculum, its delivery, academic standards or the conditions of academic work. Their burden of responsibilities certainly increases. Furthermore, many rectors may not be happy with this change, since they encounter great difficulty in managing the change, and the centralised system of budgets and management have given them no opportunity to develop relevant skills (Dao & Hayden, 2010). Autonomy, accountability, accreditation, academic freedom, merit-based selection, international links and standards are popular terms in HE systems in the Western world (Vallely & Wilkinson, 2008). However, in HE in Vietnam, a developing country, each of these new constructs brings up considerable challenges for State institutions, especially for the leaders in managing and dealing with these

challenges. To be effective in dealing with these challenges, there is a high demand for leaders with greater effectiveness and efficiency in their leadership processes.

Professor Hoang Tuy (2007), one of the most accomplished Vietnamese scientists of the 20th century, raised the above-noted challenges and requested special attention and actions from university leaders in Vietnam. He argues that Vietnamese HE needs a strategic vision for immediate and long-term objectives, direction, demand, and capacity relevant to development trends, guiding ideology, and a general path of actions. His ideas constitute a philosophy of science and education in the present world. He cautions that if the reform plan is not carefully examined and does not foresee predictable risks, it may change at any time when problems arise, and will cost the HE system huge amounts of money to fix. In other words, the uncertainty of university leaders and their mistakes in decision-making will waste time and money in further reform.

Second, Hoang (2007) argues that for Vietnamese HE to reach international standards of education, it is necessary to think globally. The author emphasizes that all our thoughts and actions must take account of the common rules of the game if we are to win in the globalised world. In fact, this is a good reminder for university leaders to consider in the process of developing quality assurance and reaching international benchmarks. Finally, he challenges HE leaders to be accountable for attracting talented human resources who have studied abroad to return and serve for their homeland. For that, Vietnamese leaders need to successfully integrate universities with efficiency and speed into the international HE context. The ability to rapidly respond to the arising issues has become a significant advantage for leaders and is sometimes more important than efficiency (Hoang, 2007).

In sum, although Hoang (2007) raised these issues for Vietnamese education in general, Vietnam HE should seriously take these criticisms into account, and university leaders in particular should consider the big picture and plan their strategies for developing HE and assuring the quality of Vietnamese HE.

Generally, university leadership in HE in the context of Vietnamese society demands excellence in leaders. In the 21st century with many reforms in HE including the education laws, university leaders have to deal with many challenges. To be successful in their stewardship of Vietnam, university leaders should not only understand the Vietnamese HE system well, but also be versatile leaders with excellent leadership styles to work within the changing Vietnamese HE system.

2.2.4 Summary of leadership in higher education literature and its implications

Section 2.2 discussed several issues in leadership in HE, including (i) a review of general leadership concepts and definitions; leadership theories which included traits, contingency, transactional, transformational, and laissez-faire leadership theories; (ii) a review of international practices in leadership in HE; and (iii) a review of leadership in HE in Vietnam. The following section summarises and presents the implications of the leadership issues.

In light of the government-initiated reforms in HE in Vietnam, there is an urgent need for understanding contemporary leadership concepts, definitions and processes of leadership in HE. The previous section discussed several leadership theories and also considered the appropriateness of these theories for the Vietnamese HE context to support quality improvement, and transform the system to obtain international recognition. The literature discussed the appropriateness of each

leadership theory and carefully examined their applicability in an attempt to understand these leadership styles in the HE context, specifically in the context of Vietnamese HE. A closer look into leadership in Vietnamese HE reviewed mainly the governance policies in the State sector.

The literature review suggests that university leaders in Vietnamese HE should have a deep understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the HE system in Vietnam, as well as the new governance principles outlined by MOET. From this perspective, the implication for leadership in Vietnamese HE is a need for analysis of the key factors which influence and/or support university leaders to perform their leadership roles. Additionally, the review also opens a pathway for researchers to look for appropriate leadership approaches with potential to bring success for university leaders. Hence, this current study not only addresses the appropriate leadership styles to support the implementation of MOET's reform agenda, but also university leaders' perspectives on quality improvement in Vietnamese HE.

2.3 QUALITY IMPROVEMENT PRINCIPLES IN HIGHER EDUCATION

Leadership as a generic concept and its implications in HE institutions were discussed in Section 2.2. To better appreciate the concept of leadership, it is more meaningful when it is contextualised, for instance, researching HE leadership to improve the quality of the services provided. Given the increasing focus on quality by HE institutions all around the world and the underpinning concern noted in MOET's reform agenda, this study researched HE leadership with a specific focus on quality improvement.

In order to contextualise leadership for quality improvement, it is important to include a review of contemporary literature related to HE quality improvement.

There is global consensus that quality in HE is very important; however, there is no agreement on a definition of what quality in HE means (Frazer, 1994). Quality in HE is evaluated differently from nation to nation, and institution to institution. Frazer (1994, p. 103) also states that “although there is no single definition or way of measuring quality in HE, quality usually embraces goals, process, and achievements.” Furthermore, Frazer suggests that some popular terms relating to quality are levels, standards, effectiveness, and efficiency. Brooks (2005) argues that the quality definition should depend on its purpose, audience, and other contextual factors. This lack of consensus on what constitutes quality presents an additional challenge to Vietnamese HE leaders as they try to implement MOET’s reform agenda. There are two aspects to quality that have gained significant recognition in the literature and these are internal (within the organisation) and external (external agencies).

2.3.1 Quality principles from the internal perspective

The internal perspective refers to internal process of an institution. In literature, quality principles from the internal perspective usually deal with the university missions/goals, teaching and learning quality, research quality, and human resources quality in the HE system. The literature review discusses these quality principles in HE systems in different countries to highlight the issues which the study investigates with university leaders in Vietnam.

The mission statements of HE institutions often emphasize internal quality. The quality of teaching, service to the community, research, and other focus areas are all shaped by the institution’s internal mission statement. Fenske (1980) states that mission is often unstated, and used to express the aspirations that society has for

institutions of HE. These aspirations are consensual and represent the most general level of hopes and expectations people in general hold for colleges and universities. However, Scott (2006) states that institutional missions depend on the different stages of national development. In different periods, university and college missions will be adjusted to adapt to the ever-changing world. The concept that universities should have missions that are expressed in mission statements was first developed by American universities, which published their mission statements in their catalogues (Scott, 2006); then British, Canadian, and other universities followed this trend in recent years to represent their reputation and accountability to the public. In American HE, teaching, research, and public service are the core of university missions. In the 21st century, when globalisation has become central, American universities have added internationalisation into their mission statements (Scott, 2006). The university missions of teaching, research and community service/engagement are also found in the British, Australian, and Canadian HE institutions. However, the university type and context (such as social, economic, and political circumstances) will have an effect on university missions (Henkel, 2007; Marginson, 2007).

Malaysian universities and colleges determine teaching, research, and community services to be their mission in most institutional statements nationwide. It is quite easy to check the university vision and mission statement on the websites of Malaysian universities and colleges. For example, the University of Technology Malaysia states their mission is to be “the leader in the development of human capital and innovative technologies that will contribute to the nation’s wealth creation” by providing quality education, research innovation, meeting stakeholders’ requirements, and engaging in community and outreach. Similarly, the University of

Malaysia sets a goal to be a leader among research universities, so its missions of research and community service are central. Specifically, three in four missions of the University of Malaysia focus on research issues, and the fourth one aims to provide consultancy services and excellent collaborative research to the State and private sectors through strategic partnerships.

In Vietnamese HE, universities' mission statements may be worded differently, however, most universities and colleges in Vietnam are carrying out the mission of teaching and public service as dictated by MOET guidelines. For instance, one of the leading universities in Vietnam, the National University of Hanoi, aims to teach and train high-quality human resources for society, develop innovative initiatives in technology and research and also play a key role in reforming the Vietnamese HE system. Similarly, Can Tho University, one of the largest universities in the Mekong Delta, focuses its mission on training, conducting scientific research, and technology transfer to advance the socio-economic development of the Mekong Delta region.

Generally, the university missions of developed and developing countries have both commonalities and differences. While contextual issues and socio-economic or political circumstances affect the specifics of institutional missions, most HE missions generally target ways to adapt to the ever-changing world. However, in most Vietnamese universities, teaching and community service missions are still the central missions.

Teaching and learning quality is one of the most important issues in HE, and it attracts many stakeholders' concern in the competition to determine the reputation of an institution. Trigwell (2011) defines quality teaching as a conception related to excellence, value for money, efficiency and effectiveness of fitness for purpose, and

transforming students' perceptions of applying their knowledge to solve real-world problems. According to Ramsden (1998; as cited in Trigwell, 2011, p. 170), it is hard to define quality teaching; however, researchers do generally agree on several indicators which are essential for good teaching, and Zailan et al. (2008) also agree on these indicators. They are:

- (i) Good teachers are good learners,
- (ii) Good teachers display enthusiasm for their subject and desire to share with their students,
- (iii) Good teachers recognise the importance of context and adapt their teaching,
- (iv) Good teachers encourage learning for understanding, developing their students' critical thinking skills, problem-solving skills, and problem-approach behaviours,
- (v) Good teachers have the ability to transform and extend knowledge rather than transmitting it,
- (vi) Good teachers set clear goals and use valid and appropriate assessment methods and provide high quality feedback to their students, and
- (vii) Good teachers show respect for their students.

In university teaching, the approaches focus on students' learning options, which in turn lead to better learning outcomes and graduates. These options are that the teacher has some control over what is taught and how; the class size is not too large; and the department supports teaching (Ramsden, 1998). Leadership by the head or course convenor should be firm and fair; s/he should model good teaching, inspire people to adapt positively to change, support staff development (often through resourceful delegation), help people learn new teaching skills, and encourage

colleagues to learn from each other (Ramsden, 1998). By emphasising these approaches, university leaders can recognise their staff's expectations and support their professional development, which will improve the quality of both teaching and research outcomes and benefit students' learning.

In addition, there are some arguments (Benowski, 1991; Taylor, 2003; Yair, 2008) that because there is a strong link between university research and teaching, universities that are strong in research will be strong in teaching, and therefore the indicators of research strength are also indicators of strength in teaching (Trigwell, 2011). However, Trigwell (2011) noted that no institutions in the USA (in their sample) have a balanced orientation towards both students (learning) and research. These and other studies have led Dill and Soo (2005, p. 507) to conclude that "empirical research suggests that the correlation between research productivity and undergraduate instruction is very small and teaching and research appear to be more or less independent activities." King (2004) believes that the scholarship of teaching will also help to develop and strengthen the synergies between professional development for teaching and for research. Therefore, although research and teaching are quite independent, research activities do support teachers' professional development with regard to content knowledge and practice. From this perspective, university leaders should take into account both the research and teaching quality activities in their institutions to support the improvement and achievements of students' learning. Access to this empirical research on HE quality improvement by the HE leaders in Vietnam is limited. Therefore, the task of providing leadership support for these quality issues can be confusing and challenging for the HE leaders in Vietnam.

In terms of research quality, Brooks (2005) believes that faculty research is an important component of university quality, but considerable difficulty exists in obtaining data that accurately reflects faculty-level accomplishments. Often there can be tension between university-level and faculty-level aspirations; hence, there is a role for senior management in providing a clear and mutually agreeable vision, as well as adequate resources to achieve the vision. Brooks (2005) explains the consequences of having different understandings of university quality expectations. He notes that research quality has often been found to be unrelated to reputational measures, because the research funding for individual faculty members is not strongly related to their program quality (Brooks, 2005). However, research quality is one of the key components in the university ranking system, which Times Higher Education Supplements and Shanghai Jiao Tong University employ to rank universities world-wide (Marginson, 2007). Although faculty publication and citation have been fraught with challenges, they are still considered as a measurement for university quality (Marginson, 2007). Therefore, university leadership should involve all senior management (Deans of Faculty) and not just the Rectors and the University Council. Leadership should be seen as a group process rather than an individual one, with all participants working together to improve research productivity, which in turn influences reputation in the era of global HE.

Human resources issues that must be addressed to support HE quality improvement involve a combination of “hard” issues – such as recruitment and retention, and rewards and incentives – and “softer” issues – such as motivation, work-life balance, and career development (Gordon & Whitchurch, 2007). In addition, Ramsden (1998, p. 365) suggests that leadership in academic environments should focus on staff development. He states that “academic work gets done better

when leadership combines efficient management of people and resources; and when it blends a positive vision for future change with a focus on developing staff — a focus on helping them to learn. The effects occur through the academic staff members' perceptions of the context in which they work.” Hence, in the process of supporting quality improvement, it is crucial that HE leaders support and develop human resources in institutions, despite the variances in the national context, and local or institutional HE.

According to Gordon and Whitchurch (2007), there are external and internal quality indicators that force institutions to change or develop their human resources. These forces can come from institutional contexts and/or professional contexts. Therefore, appropriate recognition and a transparent means of rewarding of staff are significant issues. Otherwise, due to competition within and between universities in the global market, good quality staff will move to different faculties or institutions that provide more professional development support and are better connected to their professional partners. In a highly competitive global HE sector, there is need for leaders to be cognisant of the need to invest in staff to continue growing and improving the quality of services. Furthermore, globalisation has contributed to changed individual expectations and work styles. In recent years the range of roles that an academic may be expected to undertake has increased significantly. These can be clustered under six overarching core functions: teaching and student support; research; community service; professional service; leadership, management and consultancy; and developmental project work (Gordon & Whitchurch, 2007). From the position of university leaders, these challenges in human resources management and development are critical to ensure quality improvement in HE institutions, and therefore universities are in need of skilful leaders to solve these complex challenges.

Concerning human resources development in Vietnamese HE, there is a great investment to improve this crucial workforce for Vietnamese society. Understanding human resources plays a key role in the development of national HE, and understanding the shortcomings in this workforce, MOET once again signed the Decision No 6639/QĐ-BGDĐT on December 29th 2011 on the Development of Human Resources in Education, 2011–2020. Specifically, MOET aimed to build a workforce of 127,000 people to serve in universities and colleges nationwide by 2020, including faculty, staff, and managers. Concerning the quality of this workforce, the project explains that there is a need to have about 58,000 people who hold Masters degrees, and 29,000 people holding PhD degrees. In addition, they highlight the project of training 20,000 people to hold PhD degrees in diverse research areas to support the full-faceted development of the economic, political, and socio-cultural aspirations of Vietnam.

To sum up, the review on internal quality principles explored the issues of university missions, teaching and learning, research, and human resources quality. Obviously, there is an interrelation between these principles that university leaders need to consider. In the university missions in Western and Asian HE, teaching, research and community services are the core functions. Teaching, learning, and research quality in HE raise many issues for university leaders to think about in supporting quality improvement. Ramsden (1998) demonstrates in his work on management and leadership in Australian, New Zealand, U.K., and Asian universities that the characteristics of an academic leader's performance were associated with staff reports of greater satisfaction and motivation to work. He indicates how such leadership is related to higher productivity in research and teaching. For example, leadership in teaching should bring new ideas about teaching

into the department, and convey to colleagues a sense of excitement about teaching. Leadership in research should inspire respect for one's own ability as a researcher and provide guidance in scholarly practices. Finally, human resources development always plays a key role in stimulating the whole organisation or institutions to improve. In the context of Vietnamese HE, institutional leaders' perceptions and their leadership styles on how to manage these quality principles productively are the focus of the second part of this study.

2.3.2 Quality principles from the external perspective

The external perspective refers to external process of an institution. The external perspective on quality improvement in HE reviews the issues of university ranking, international recognition, customers' expectations, and the market's demand. The literature highlights the significance of these issues for university leaders' consideration. Furthermore, the review will point out the quality indicators in these principles to capture institution leaders' attentions, and discuss current understanding about these external principles in international HE, then link these to Vietnamese HE.

At a UNESCO/CEPES conference on HE indicators, Dill and Soo (2005) argued that cross-national research on these ranking systems contributes to the international market improvement for HE. In addition, demand for consumer information on academic quality has led to the development of university rankings in many countries of the world. Although there are some disagreements regarding the validity and reliability of these global university ranking systems (Bowden, 2000; Dill & Soo, 2005), they are here to stay. These ranking systems are more or less a standard measurement for international institutions, determining their reputation of

academic quality. Several prestigious league tables currently evaluate and rank the universities in the world, namely the Times Higher Education Supplement (US), U.S. News and World Report (US), the European Commission (Europe), the Times Good University Guide (UK), the Maclean (Canada), the Good Universities Guide (Australia), and Shanghai Jiao Tong (China).

In order to support quality improvement and raise the institution's profile in international university rankings and to demonstrate academic quality to earn both a local and an international reputation, university leaders in Vietnamese HE have to consider several indicators that are frequently evaluated by the global university rankings systems. Those indicators are the quality of faculty, quality of students, financial resources, and facilities considered as input quality, teaching quality as process quality, and satisfaction, graduation, employment and reputation as output quality (Dill & Soo, 2005).

At this point, MOET has concerns about the 'input' quality and the ranking 'process' and issued regulations requiring institutional establishments to support such quality improvement in 2007. The Decision 2368/QĐ-BGDĐT applies to both State and Private institutions in Vietnam, and to all existing institutions intending to open a new field of study. The Decision clearly regulates capacity to ensure quality by monitoring the student/staff ratio and the class size for each field of study. For example, the student/staff ratio is 20–25/1 in the field of social science, and the class size of a lecture hall is about 1.4–1.5 square metre per student, and so on for the laboratory, classroom, library, office, and research centre. The faculty quality is determined by requiring 50% of teaching staff to hold postgraduate diplomas, such as masters' or doctoral degrees or higher in the respective field of study.

In terms of the input quality of institutions, Dill and Soo (2005) cited several criteria which are being used by most league tables to rank universities, including the staff–student ratio, the faculty’s degrees, staff salaries, and the ability to attract research grants. These are important criteria in university rankings developed by the Good Universities Guide (GUG) (Australia, 2012), The Guardian (UK, 2012), The Times (UK, 2012), and U.S. News and World Report (2012). There is also concern about the quality of students when they enter the universities, because Macleans (Canada, 2012) believes that students are enriched by the input of their peers, and it is argued that if a university is able to attract the best students (or international and out-of-province students), then it must be a good university. Dill and Soo (2005) and Reinalda (2011) believe that the high demand for the quality of students in institutional recruitment will strongly build up their reputation, because a good university is able to attract good local and international students. In Vietnam, the institutional recruitment is demonstrated in the annual entrance exam. Similarly, the competitive rate of entrance into the two biggest national universities in Vietnam (the National University of Hanoi, and the National University of Ho Chi Minh City) brings them an honourable position and makes them desirable places to study for most Vietnamese students.

The output quality considers students’ satisfaction, graduation rates, and employment as quality indicators in the criteria of many league tables. However, it is not the same criteria in all the ranking schemes. While GUG, Maclean’s and the U.S News and World Report judge the students’ satisfaction with their institutions, the Guardian and The Times highly evaluate the graduation rate. It seems employability after graduating is an effective quality indicator to measure academic quality, but only GUG, the Guardian, and the Times adopt this indicator. In Vietnamese HE, the

annual reports about the graduation rate of both State and Private institutions are sent directly to MOET. Hence, it is quite feasible to measure the graduation rate in each institution. However, the data on student satisfaction and their employability are quite limited, except reports in some recent journal articles in this field, such as Nguyen (2011), and Tran and Swierczek (2009).

Obviously, there is a strong relationship in the process of determining academic quality in the international university ranking systems and international recognition. Once institutions record their name in the league tables, their reputation will be recognised. In an attempt to capture international recognition, MOET has recently approved the establishment of the International University in 2003, a member of the National University of Ho Chi Minh City. This is the first State-run university in Vietnam to use English in teaching all subjects (Nguyen, 2011).

Generally, Vietnamese HE is gradually catching up with international trends in HE and is transforming its system. Although the transformation is slowly taking place and encounters many challenges, the great efforts of Vietnamese institutions to improve their positions in the international league tables, and capture international recognition are remarkable. At this point, it is obvious that the State institutional leaders in Vietnamese HE play the crucial role in the transformational process. A process requires the transformation of both leaders and followers; therefore, understanding Vietnamese leaders in how their leadership styles support the quality improvement aspects of the reforms is the focus of this current study.

Understanding students' expectations and the special consumers (employers) who directly use the services of the universities helps university leaders know what is needed to improve their institutions. The literature in students' expectations about

teaching in the UK found that the students preferred to be taught by interactive lectures and group-based activities, but were less likely to learn in formal lectures, role-plays and student presentations (Sander et al., 2000). These researchers also indicated that essays, research projects and problems/exercises were students' preferences for coursework assessment. Additionally, Voss, Bruber, and Szmigin (2007) state that students expected their lecturers to be knowledgeable, enthusiastic, approachable, and friendly. At this point, Vietnamese HE providers have a limited understanding of students' expectations, which is not ideal. Knowledge about students' expectations can help institutional leaders choose appropriate assessment methods in testing students, leading to increased student satisfaction and increased student interest in learning. In addition, students also expect qualified teachers with good teaching skills, especially good methodology (Sander et al., 2000).

In other research on students' expectations, Münsterovaet et al. (2003) discovered that students had only a rough notion about their future career and that the university partially helped them to create one. Longden (2006) agrees with this statement, and clearly states the importance of the role of universities in career planning at the West Coast University in the UK. Therefore, a future career orientation in undergraduate programs probably is helpful to undergraduate students. Working with employers of graduate and professional bodies is increasingly being used by many Western universities to enhance the perception of their quality as demand driven.

Similarly, a study by Voss et al. (2007) on students' expectations of HE service quality found that students wanted lecturers to be knowledgeable, enthusiastic, approachable, and friendly. Students highly appreciate valuable teaching/learning experiences to help them pass tests and prepare them well for their profession. The

vocational aspects of their studies motivate them more effectively than their academic interests. This often presents a dilemma for university leaders in terms of how much applied knowledge is necessary in university programs. Generally, students' expectations of institutions mostly relate to the quality of teaching; however, there is a change emerging in students' expectations in HE. For example, James (2002) found that there is an increased proportion of full-time students working part-time, and a decline in the proportion of students' time devoted to their academic work within the five-day week. James (2002) also noted that students care more about the cost of their learning. These new and emerging expectations challenge HE leaders to look for alternative delivery modes, away from traditional classroom-based approaches, and to adopt more work-integrated learning.

Nguyen (2011) reported that global competition, cultural diversity, advancements in technology, and new management processes demanded employees with more skills to support their career. Therefore, meeting employers' expectations or the market's demand for the institutions' products (graduates) is a critical indicator that will require university leaders to become innovative with their programs, improving academic quality and seeking alternative delivery modalities. King et al. (2007) found that a good relationship between employers and HE institutions brings mutual benefit. The institutions can understand what employer consumers (who directly use institutions' products) demand to train their students, and the employers know more about what their future staff have learned.

In Vietnamese HE, meeting the market's demand and satisfying employers' expectations is increasingly important for Vietnamese universities and colleges. This is redefining what is meant by quality in HE, and increasingly, the rate of employability for their students after graduation is being considered a HE quality

indicator. In 2007, MOET conducted a survey on the employability of undergraduate students, and the result was a real concern for HE leaders and policy makers. Specifically, there were only 25 among 89 universities (i.e. 28.09 %) with more than 60% of undergraduates finding appropriate jobs in their major field of study within a year after graduation (Nguyen, 2011).

In research on the Vietnamese students' skill development, Tran and Swierczek (2009) found the skills development provided in universities has not matched employers' needs. For instance, communication skills, while being highly valued by employers, have not been paid much heed by the universities. This study indicates some priorities of employer needs, including learning, communication, information processing, problem solving and interpersonal skills. In general, however, skills development in universities is poor and deviates from employer needs. Similarly, in an investigation on Vietnamese students' employability skills, Nguyen (2011) collected data from 120 employers/managers in various companies/organisations in Ho Chi Minh City and Binh Duong Province, and drew conclusions about the range of skills which employers expect from their staff. Nguyen states that

staff need to understand organisational politics, issues and external influences. They should learn how to anticipate issues, challenges and outcomes and effectively operate to best position in the organisation. Staff also need to know how to support the changing cultures and methods of operating, if necessary for the success of the organisation, and ensure due diligence by keeping informed of business and operational plans and practices. (2011, p. 181)

Thus, Nguyen's point is very pertinent for institutional leaders to consider in developing their program and delivering the training to ensure students meet these requirements from market employers, who will directly employ the products of HE training.

To sum up, there are some external HE quality principles discussed above that require Vietnamese university leaders' consideration, including university ranking, international recognition and reputation, students' and customers' expectations, and market's demand. In order to support academic quality improvement and determine their institution's reputation, university leaders should carefully consider these issues, and provide good quality education to the Vietnamese community.

2.3.3 Implications of quality improvement in Vietnamese higher education

The education sector has adapted and applied the quality management models practised by the business world (Chua, 2004). For instance, Total Quality Management (TQM) has been used in the UK, US, and Asian countries such as Malaysia. In addition, quality practices include the European Foundation for Quality Management (EFQM) excellence model, ISO 9000, Malcolm Baldrige National Quality Award to improve performance. The models and concepts, such as EFQM, Singapore Quality Award (SQA), School Excellence Model (SEM) and Malcolm Baldrige National Quality Award (MBNQA), are widely applied to educational institutions. These models embrace the philosophy of TQM, which has been modified for the education environment (Chua, 2004). However, Chua (2004) argues that managing quality in the education context should be handled differently from managing quality in the manufacturing or service industries. In Vietnam's HE

system, quality management operates quite differently from other countries, because the governance of HE in Vietnam is under the control of MOET (Dao & Hayden, 2010). Hence, HE reform and HE leaders have to consider an appropriate model to support the reform. Nevertheless, for current and future HE leaders, empirical research from Vietnam can provide very useful insights.

The quality of HE in Vietnam is defined by how consistently it meets the predetermined aims, purposes or missions of the universities (Nguyen, 2011). Similarly, the Department of Testing and Educational Quality Assessment of Vietnam defined that quality is achieved when the university missions and education targets which are set from the beginning of their institutions' establishment are achieved. Nguyen (2011) also agrees with this quality definition in his critical review on the 10 criteria to evaluate HE in Vietnam, which is regulated by MOET, 2007 (Decision 65/QĐ-BGDĐT). It is important to acknowledge that the definition of quality in regard to HE has different meanings and significance depending on the country, institution or stakeholders using the term. In regard to this study, quality recognition and improvement of Vietnamese HE are reviewed in the sense of teaching, learning and research; and meeting customers' expectations in order to achieve international recognition. Specifically, here are the 10 criteria MOET enacted in Decision No.65/2007/BGD-ĐT for evaluating quality of Vietnamese HE institutions:

1. University's Mission and Goals
2. Organisation and Administration
3. Teaching and Learning Programs
4. Training Programs
5. Human Resource

6. Learners
7. Research, Applied Science, Development and Technology Transition
8. International Relation and Cooperation
9. Library System, Facilities and Equipment
10. Finance and Finance Management

Tran (2000) considers that quality assurance of Vietnamese HE should ensure training outcomes that meet the high demand areas of the Vietnamese workforce market. Tran (2000) also describes the components of the training process and factors for quality training and quality assurance in HE in the framework of input–process–outcomes/output (IPO) (see Figure 2.2 below). Chua (2004) suggested a similar IPO framework and believes that through use of such a framework, quality improvements can be achieved within the specifics of the operating system of any organisation, including those from the HE sector.

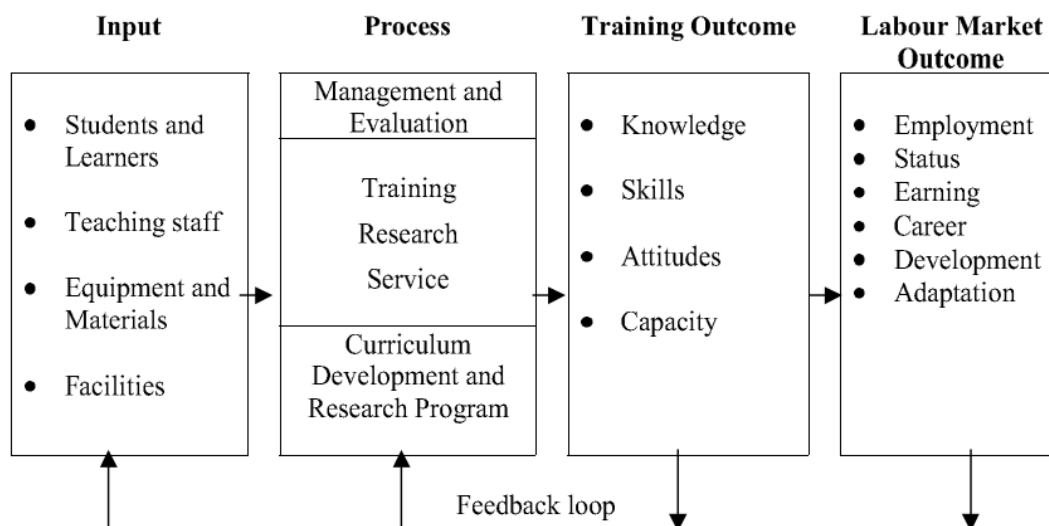


Figure 2.2. Higher Education - A model of total training process.

While researchers like D. Tran and Chua have identified the key HE factors for quality improvement, the leaders of Vietnamese HE may not be fully aware of these.

Hence, in order to ensure the quality of HE in Vietnam, it is necessary to build up a system of quality standards to measure Vietnamese HE performance. Therefore, another implication of quality in Vietnam is about the quality standard system which the HE leaders should be aware of. As stated in Chapter 1, Vietnamese HE is trying to reform the whole system, namely teaching and learning, research, governance, and human resources. Great efforts in reforming the Vietnamese HE system have been made (Harman, 2010; Pham, 2010; Ta & Winter, 2010; Welch, 2010) since adoption of the MOET and National Assembly decisions (namely, the Decision No 38/QĐ-BGDĐT in 2004 and Decision No 65/QĐ-BGDĐT in 2007) about the quality assurance criteria to evaluate State and Private Vietnamese universities and colleges. The quality assurance initiative presents another challenge to the Vietnamese HE leaders. However, how these initiatives are perceived and implemented is still vague; hence, this study aims to contribute to university leaders' understanding of quality and how their leadership styles can support quality improvement to meet the demands of Vietnamese HE innovation.

To sum up, there are many reforms promoted by MOET to improve the quality of Vietnamese HE, including reforms around teaching and learning, research quality, human resources, and governance. To ensure these issues are successfully implemented, Vietnamese university leaders will need to play a critical role. Hence, leaders need to first appreciate the value of these reforms and then draw on their leadership capabilities to implement processes for quality improvement in their institutions. Although there are many challenges in reforming the whole HE system, there is potential for Vietnamese HE to reconfigure the leadership teams who will play the key roles in driving this reformation.

2.3.4 Summary of quality improvement principles literature and its Implications

Section 2.3 has discussed quality principles in HE from internal and external perspectives, and the implications of quality improvement in Vietnamese HE. The literature review has discussed the internal quality principles in HE (Section 2.3.1), including university mission, teaching and learning, research, and human resources quality. The external quality principles synthesise the issues of university ranking, international recognition, customers' expectations, and market's demand for HE (Section 2.3.2). Section 2.3.3 analysed the implications of quality improvement in Vietnamese HE, including the quality concepts, the quality assurance framework, the need for building up learning and research societies, and human resources development in catching up with the internationalisation of HE, and the market's demand.

Several implications have been drawn from this literature. First, in reviewing literature on principles of quality improvement from internal and external perspectives, quality indicators such as teaching and learning, teaching programs, curriculum, research, services, and the model of input–process–output are mostly concerned with the quality assurance of many countries. However, each HE system standardises their own criteria based around a common set of principles. In Vietnamese HE, under strict control from MOET, university leaders in State institutions have to perceive these quality principles and adopt innovative leadership strategies to lead their institutions following the Education Laws and regulations from MOET.

Second, the literature review on quality of Vietnamese HE in this section only focused on the State sector of HE in Vietnam, because the HE of the State sector dominates HE in Vietnam currently, and most HE reforms in governance and policies are aimed at the State sector universities. Moreover, it is important to emphasize the key role of MOET in the management of Vietnamese education. Hence, both the strengths and weaknesses of Vietnamese HE system are attributed to MOET (Harman & Le, 2010).

Third, Jackson and Lund (2000) used benchmarking as a way of reinforcing peer evaluation, helping to maintain and enhance institutional reputation. Jackson and Lund (2000) also explained that since HE markets have become more sophisticated, it is necessary to provide information that will enable degree outcomes to be compared and differentiated. In other words, it should be clear how a degree in a given subject in a given HE institution is distinct from a degree in the same subject at other HE institutions. Therefore, the benchmarks for HE institutions are useful for Vietnamese HE for self-evaluation as well as peer evaluation. Understanding benchmarking is necessary for improving administrative process, as well as for improving instructional models at colleges and universities (Alstete, 1995). Vietnamese HE institutions are applying benchmarks to assess their institutional quality.

Finally, international recognition is the goal for Vietnamese educational development and HE improvement. Recent reforms in educational policies on teaching and learning, research, governance, and accreditation in Vietnamese HE aim to bring Vietnam's quality standards to international levels. Although the benchmarking initiatives of HE quality in Vietnam are behind those of other countries in the East Asian region, the recognition of international benchmarking and

the internationalisation of HE are the central targets of Vietnamese HE development in the next decade.

2.4 SUMMARY OF THE CHAPTER

Chapter 2 has outlined the different rationales for understanding leadership concepts and theories in HE, and aims to use this knowledge from international HE literature to investigate effective leadership, which university leaders in Vietnam can learn and apply to their leadership positions. Furthermore, the literature review in this chapter has reviewed the current quality improvement issues, approaches and strategies in HE that HE leaders could adopt effectively to support quality improvement in Vietnamese HE. This aspect of the literature review also highlights the quality principles from the internal and external perspectives that concern university leaders. Nevertheless, there is still a gap in the literature on matching the leadership in HE with quality improvement, particularly to support HE reform in Vietnam. Therefore, the study investigates university leaders' visions regarding improving the quality of HE in Vietnam, and their strategies to lead their institutions to international standards.

Chapter 3: Research Design

This chapter describes the research design adopted by this study to respond to the research questions stated in Chapter 1. The research questions aim to investigate and understand (1) the inclination to adopt transformational leadership style of Vietnamese higher education (HE) leaders; (2) their supports for the quality improvement principles which were outlined by MOET; and (3) a relationship between leadership styles and support for MOET's principles for quality improvement in Vietnamese HE. The first section of this chapter, Section 3.1, discusses the methodology and research design. Section 3.2, Population and Sampling, describes the participants who were involved in this study. Section 3.3 describes the data collection tools, including the survey instrument and the ranking/order scale to collect data. Section 3.4 discusses the procedure for the field work. Section 3.5 explains the data analysis. Finally, Section 3.6 discusses the ethical considerations of the research and its potential limitations.

3.1 METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a multi-method approach using a quantitative survey for studying leadership approaches and a qualitative approach using descriptive statistics (Elliot & Timulat, 2005; Sandelowski, 2000) on the ranking scale to study the leaders' understanding of HE quality improvement and their priorities on these issues. The study is exploratory and descriptive in nature. The two main instruments to collect data in this study comprised of a multi-factor leadership questionnaire (MLQ) and a ranking/order scale with open-ended questions.

Since all methods have bias and weaknesses, “the collection of both quantitative and qualitative data neutralised the weaknesses of each form of data” (as cited in Creswell, 2013, p. 15). While quantitative research concentrates on the facts, qualitative research method focuses on the meanings (Gray, 2014). Additionally, since quantitative research is inspired by the researcher's concerns, whereas qualitative research often is designed to raise the participant's voice, researchers are able to merge researcher's interest and participant's voice within a single investigation (Onwuegbuzie & Leech, 2005). Hence, the combination of quantitative and qualitative approaches provides a stronger understanding of the problem or question than either one by itself, and limits the drawbacks of single type of data. In the case of this study, the quantitative approach itself is only able to investigate the research question related to leadership styles; meanwhile, the qualitative approach is used for investigating the research question of leaders' perceptions of quality improvement. As Gray (2014) states that within a qualitative approach, the researcher gains a deep and intense understanding about the research problem – Vietnamese leaders' ranking priorities on quality improvement principles. Furthermore, Onwuegbuzie and Leech (2005) confirm that the inclusion of qualitative data can help intensely explain quantitative data. Therefore, it is necessary to combine both the quantitative and the qualitative approach to address the research questions of this study.

As stated in Chapter 1, the purpose of this study is to understand the extent Vietnamese leaders in HE are inclined to adopt transformational leadership, and how Vietnamese leaders support the quality improvement of HE in Vietnam. The specific research questions are:

1. To what extent are Vietnamese HE leaders in the Mekong Delta inclined to adopt a transformational leadership style?
 - 1.1 Does the demographic data (i.e., gender, age, education and experience) influence the inclination to adopt transformational leadership style of Vietnamese HE leaders?
2. How do Vietnamese HE leaders in the Mekong Delta support MOET's principles for quality improvement in Vietnamese HE?
 - 2.1 Does the demographic data (i.e., gender, age, education and experience) influence Vietnamese HE leaders' support MOET's principles for quality improvement?
3. Is there a relationship between leadership styles and support for MOET's principles for quality improvement in Vietnamese HE?

The quantitative approach using principal components analysis statistics was applied as data analysis for the nine-factor Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ). The nine factors are the nine variables discussed in detail in Section 3.3. These are investigated and matched to each leadership style (transformational, transactional and laissez-faire leadership). Adopting the MLQ survey with quantifiable data allows powerful statistical calculations using computer software (Hinkin, 1998) and the use of computer software has also allowed for data from large samples to be processed with minimum errors (Burn, 2000, as cited in Tan, 2006). In addition, concrete variables in quantitative approaches are measurable and can be easily processed with the statistical computer software (the Statistical Program for Social Science – SPSS) that is used in this study. As a result, the quantitative

approach with concrete variables makes the generalisation and conclusions more accurate and more reliable (Miller et al., 2002).

While the current study uses a quantitative approach to explore the leadership styles of Vietnamese HE leaders and the extent to which they are inclined to adopt transformational leadership to support the reforms, the qualitative approach supports the final aim of the current study. In order to examine how leadership styles support the quality improvement of HE in Vietnam, the following section discusses the rationale for selecting the qualitative approach using descriptive statistics on the ranking/order scale and two open-ended questions. The open-ended questions were placed at the end of the ranking/order scale to provide a comprehensive understanding about Vietnamese HE leaders' priorities.

Creswell (2003) describes the natural setting as one of the characteristics of the qualitative research approach. In this case, the way the HE leaders in the Mekong Delta rank the quality improvement indicators reflects their reaction to and perceptions of these indicators. Although the ranking/order scale survey uses numbers to rank the quality improvement principles from the first priority to the last priority, the numbers are descriptive rather than being subjected to any statistical analysis. The current study also uses the demographic data to understand how demographic data such as, gender, age, gender, education, and experience influence their perceptions on the ranking scale.

Qualitative approach allows researcher to gain an integrated overview of the study, including perception of participants (Gray, 2009). Creswell (2013) added the participant's meaning as another characteristic of a qualitative approach and notes that it is important for the researcher to focus on learning the meaning that the participants hold about the problem or issue, but not the meaning that the researcher

brings to the research. Furthermore, explaining the ranking order on the basis of ranking scale only can be very subjective. In this current study, it is the perception of quality improvement of Vietnamese leaders that the study aims to investigate which the participants themselves narrow their priorities rather than the researcher having to do prioritise. In addition, the two open-ended questions were added to verify participants' perceptions on the quality improvement principles (Gray, 2009). Based on the above arguments, the multi-method approach within the combination of quantitative and qualitative approach is the main research methods in this current study.

3.2 POPULATION AND SAMPLING

The following section presents the population and sampling of this research study. The appropriateness and the advantages of convenience sampling present a suitable approach. Tariman et al. (2009) claimed easy accessibility of subjects, faster accrual, and less expense as advantages of convenience sampling include. The number of participants participating in this study as described in Table 3.1 is a small sample from a limited geographic area of Mekong Delta, in Vietnam. Second, "not all populations defined by a researcher are easily accessed" (Balnaves & Caputi, 2001, p. 95), and, particularly in the case of applied social research, it is not feasible or practical to do random sampling (Trochim, 2002). The Vietnamese HE system is very hierarchical and highly controlled, so access is not usually easy. The above two issues are relevant to the current study, and thus respondents were only available when permission was granted by their institutions of HE. Third, a convenience sampling allows researchers to have contact with the participants actively in an inexpensive way. Therefore, convenience sampling is the most appropriate sampling for this small sample of the current study.

Table 3.1

Participating State Colleges and Universities and Number of Participants

Institutions	Training	Location	Number of participants
Can Tho College	3-year college	Can Tho City	11
Can Tho Medical College	3-year college	Can Tho City	45
Can Tho College of Economics and Technology	3-year college	Can Tho City	32
Can Tho Universities	4-year college	Can Tho City	12
College of Foreign Trade & Economy	3-year college	Can Tho City	18
Can Tho Medical and Pharmaceutical University	6-year college	Can Tho City	32
Can Tho Universities of Technology	4-year college	Can Tho City	25
College of Vocational Training	3-year college	Can Tho City	14
Hau Giang Community College	4-year college	Hau Giang Province	18
Total			207

Table 3.1 describes a list of State colleges and universities and the number of participants from the respective institutions that were included in this research study. There are nine colleges and universities in total selected from the Mekong Delta area. Most of these offer three- and four-year college training, except for a Medical and Pharmaceutical university, which offers six-year programs. The institutions are located mostly in Can Tho City and in the surrounding provinces in Mekong Delta. As shown in Table 3.1, the sample of this study consists of 207 senior managers and leaders in State colleges and universities drawn from the population of State HE

institutions. The non-completed or inappropriate response rate at 8% was excluded, which left 190 responses in the final sample.

Table 3.2 presents a list of senior management positions included in this study. The senior leaders who participated in this study held the positions of Dean or Vice Dean of the department, Director or Vice Director of the centre, Head or Vice Head of the office/unit, and President or Vice President of the institution. Targeting this group was essential as they are the key decision makers and their leadership style and perception about MOET's principles of quality are key to making the reform successful.

Table 3.2

Leaders' Positions Participated in the Study

Level	Participants	Number of participants
University	President/Vice president	Total: 51
	Dean/Vice Dean of the Department	
	Head/Vice Head of the training office	
	Director/Vice Director of the centre	
	Head/Vice head of the Department	
College	President/Vice president	Total: 156
	Dean/Vice Dean of the Department	
	Head/Vice Head of the training office	
	Director/Vice Director of the centre	
	Head/Vice head of the Department	
		Total: 207

These leaders were chosen for the following two reasons: (1) the leaders in these chosen positions are believed to be powerful enough to make the reforms happen and support the quality improvement in their institution; and (2) this study only focuses on the State sector, since most of HE institutions in Vietnam are State colleges and universities (MOET, 2005b). Leaders in the State sector are strictly controlled by MOET. Hence, the study investigated how these people may be influenced by MOET and vice versa. In addition, in Vietnamese HE, as discussed in Chapter 1, MOET controls most of HE institutions, including one-quarter of the State universities. Therefore, any reforms will directly influence the State sector, which means State leaders are important drivers of the reforms.

To ensure that the sample is representative of HE institutions included in the study, sampling analysis was undertaken using the method proposed by Krejcie and Morgan (1970). The sample size of this current study was 207 participants, which was calculated based on statistical formula within the margin of error was 5% of chance, level of confidence was 95% and the population of approximately 250 people. The specific positions of senior managers and leaders in the State colleges and universities are listed in Table 3.2 above. A single-stage sampling procedure was used where the researcher could have access to these participants from nine institutions and sample the participants directly.

In summary, this current study chose the convenience, single-stage sampling with a self-administered survey within the sample size of 207 participants in the population of 250 people in the nine colleges and universities in Mekong Delta for data collection.

3.3 DATA COLLECTION TOOLS: SURVEY INSTRUMENT AND THE RANKING SCALE

The choice of survey instrument is the most appropriate tool to collect data for research question 1 in this study, since Fowler (2009) argues that a quantitative or numeric description of trends, attitudes, or opinions of a population can be provided by analysing a sample of that population. In this study, the investigation on leadership styles of Vietnamese leaders specifically focuses on leadership behaviours, attitudes, and opinions. The ways in which leaders react to a situation or an issue define their leadership styles. Therefore, a quantitative survey helped the researcher understand the numerical descriptions about leadership behaviours and leadership styles of Vietnamese HE leaders. There is a cross-sectional survey for data

collection with the intent of generalising from a sample of leaders in the nine colleges and universities in the Mekong Delta region to a population of leaders in HE in similar types of institutions.

Burns (2000) argues that the respondents will be willing and able to give truthful answers to the researcher when an anonymous survey is used to collect data. Indeed, because the anonymous survey keeps the respondents' identities hidden, respondents feel comfortable to participate and give honest answers. Therefore, an anonymous self-reporting survey was used to encourage honest responses and improve the reliability of the study. Moreover, the anonymous survey was used to ascertain a sound understanding about the leadership style preferences of Vietnamese HE leaders, particularly when considering the hierarchical nature of the HE system.

Brown (2007) also believes that a survey is one of the most widely used methods because it is flexible, can be relatively inexpensive, and can be used to gather a lot of information from a broad array of people in a short period. In light of the large sample involved in this study, a survey research method saved a lot of time. The survey was delivered to 232 people in person and got 207 responses returned (89.2%). Indeed, the survey method is the most flexible, inexpensive and time-efficient method for this situation.

Additionally, Burn (2000) stresses that one of the strengths of using the survey method is that it can provide information about the beliefs and attitudes of the respondents. In the case of this study, the survey sought information about the beliefs and attitudes about leadership styles of the Vietnamese HE leaders. In the leadership literature related to reforming systems and changing cultural practices, transformational and transactional leadership tend to be the most cited leadership

styles. As such, a survey instrument was used to investigate HE leaders' leadership styles (whether transformational, transactional or laissez-faire leadership).

The qualitative part of the study used a ranking/order scale to understand HE leaders' perceptions of the importance of the internal and external HE indicators in supporting their institutional quality improvements. Oldendick (2008, p. 688) defines "ranking instrument as a question response when researchers desire to establish some kinds of priority among a set of objects such as policies, attributes, organisations, individuals, or some other interests." In the case of this study, the ranking instrument was used to investigate how HE institution leaders perceive the internal and external quality principles by ranking a given set of principles in order of importance. As the number of objects to be ranked should be guided by the research question of interest (Oldendick, 2008), there were eight quality improvement indicators in total, which will be discussed in Section 3.3.2.

The MLQ instrument was used to investigate the leadership styles and a ranking scale was developed in order to investigate leaders' perceptions of quality improvement investigation. Since the official language in Vietnam is Vietnamese, the majority of senior leaders in the HE institutions in Vietnam do not feel comfortable in responding to questions in English language. Thus, the MLQ (originally written in English) that had already been translated into Vietnamese by the publisher was used to reduce the risk of misinformation that can affect the validity of the study. Additionally, four demographic items were included to collect participants' gender, age, position and experience in leadership position to examine the effect between demographic data and the leadership and ranking scale data. These demographic variables helped the researcher compare different subgroups within the sample to develop a deeper understanding of the research questions.

3.3.1 The multi-factor leadership questionnaire (MLQ) instrument

The multi-factor leadership questionnaire (MLQ) was developed by Avolio and Bass (2004) to investigate leadership styles, including transformational, transactional, and laissez-faire leadership (see Appendix D). Although the MLQ has both short and long versions, Avolio and Bass (2004) suggest that the MLQ short model is the most appropriate for research purposes. Therefore, this research study used the full range nine-factor (short) leadership model presented in Table 3.3 below. Despite being the short version, the number of items in this MLQ model covered a broad range of factors and was reliable to investigate leadership styles. In addition, Avolio et al. (1999) state that the MLQ model has been widely used and published since 1995. This extensive body of research provides an adequate basis for assuming high face validity for the instrument, and Avolio et al. also proposed several distinct, alternative conceptual models that can be tested with data collected using an MLQ survey.

Table 3.3 presents the nine factors in accordance with each leadership style and the number of items in each factor. Transformational leadership is comprised of five factors, transactional leadership consists of two factors and laissez-faire leadership includes two factors.

Table 3.3

The Nine-Factor Leadership Model

		Factors	Number of Items
Leadership Styles	Transformational Leadership	Idealised Influence Attributed (IIA)	4
		Idealised Influence Behaviour (IIB)	4
		Inspirational Motivation (IM)	4
		Intellectual Stimulation (IS)	4
		Individual Consideration (IC)	4
	Transactional Leadership	Contingent Reward (CR)	4
		Management-by-Exception Active (MBEA)	4
		Management-by-Exception Passive (MBEP)	4
		Laissez-Faire Leadership	4
		Laissez-Faire (LF)	4
			Total: 36

The thirty-six items in this MLQ nine-factor survey were used to investigate the Mekong Delta HE institutional leaders' leadership styles. The three styles recognised in the MLQ are transformational, transactional, and laissez-faire leadership. Transformational leadership comprises five factors in MLQ: (1) idealised influence (attributed), (2) idealised influence (behaviour), (3) inspirational motivation, (4) intellectual stimulation, and (5) individualised consideration. Transactional leadership is comprised of two factors: (6) contingent reward

leadership, and (7) management-by-exception active. Laissez-faire leadership is considered as the most passive and ineffective leadership (Antonakis et al., 2003) and comprises two factors: (8) management-by-exception passive, and (9) laissez-faire. In order to analyse this data, a five-point scale for rating the frequency of observed leader behaviours was used and bore a magnitude estimation based ratio of 4:3:2:1:0, according to a tested list of anchors provided by Bass, Cascio, and O'Connor (1974, as cited in Avolio & Bass, 2004) (Appendix D). The anchors used to evaluate the MLQ factors are presented as follows:

Rating Scale for Leadership Items

0 = Not at all

1 = Once in a while

2 = Sometimes

3 = Fairly often

4 = Frequently, if not always

The factors in each leadership style helped describe the characteristics of that leadership through descriptive statements noted in the items. The MLQ scale scores were average scores for the items on the scale. The score was derived by summing the items and dividing by the number of items that made up the scale. As the items were grouped in Table 3.4 below, the items which were included in the idealised influence (Attributed) were items 10, 18, 21, 25. When the scores were added for all responses to these items and divided by the total number of responses for that item, we had the degree of frequency a person is inclined to have the idealised influence (Attributed) factor. Other factors were calculated in the same way. The average of scale scores for the five factors in the transformational leadership factors told whether a person was more or less fitting with a transformational style. The process

was similar for the transactional and laissez-faire leadership styles. It is important to note the above process was calculated by using the SPSS software (version 21.0).

Table 3.4

Description of Factors for MLQ Instrument

Leadership styles	Scales	Item numbers
Transformational	Idealised Influence attributed (IIA)	10, 18, 21, 25
	Idealised Influence Behaviour (IIB)	6, 14, 23, 34
	Inspirational Motivation (IM)	9, 13, 26, 36
	Intellectual Stimulation (IS)	2, 8, 30, 32
	Individual Consideration (IC)	15, 19, 29, 31
Transactional	Contingent Reward (CR)	1, 11, 16, 35
	Management-by-Exception Active (MBEA)	4, 22, 24, 27
Laissez-Faire	Management-by-Exception Passive (MBEP)	3, 12, 17, 20
	Laissez-Faire (LF)	5, 7, 28, 33

3.3.2 The ranking/order scale and the open-ended questions

The ranking/order scale and the open-ended questions aimed to examine the leaders' perceptions of supporting quality improvement in HE. The scale asked HE leaders to rank the quality improvement principles from the first prioritised indicator to the last prioritised indicator. There were eight indicators in total that were ranked.

The eight indicators included four internal institution indicators, and four external institution indicators. See Table 3.5 below for more details.

Table 3.5

Consistency between Literature on Quality Principles and the Internal/External Institution Ranking Issues

Literature in chapter 2 on Quality Principles in HE	Internal / External Institution Ranking Issues
	University Missions/Goals
Quality principles from the internal perspective	Teaching and Learning Quality
	Research Quality
	Human Resources Quality
	University Ranking
Quality principles from the external perspective	International Recognition
	Customers' Expectations
	Market's Demand

These principles were derived from a synthesis of the literature discussed in Section 2.3 (Quality Principles in Higher Education) and the standard criteria from MOET, Decision 65/2007/QĐ-BGDĐT (2007a), Decision 6639/QĐ-BGDĐT (2011), and the Strategies for Education Development 2011-2020 (MOET, 2013). These key principles are what MOET uses to measure the quality of HE institutions in Vietnam. These principles not only help institutions' leaders ensure their institutions meet MOET's standards, but also provide a useful assessment of the overall quality assurance of their institutions. Investigating how the HE leaders ranked the eight indicators helped the researcher to understand how they may support the

implementation of the quality improvement agenda of MOET. The preferences of different demographic sub-groups for the priority principles for quality improvement enriched our understanding of leadership practice and behaviours towards quality improvement principle noted by MOET of Mekong Delta HE leaders.

In addition, two open-ended questions were added at the end of the ranking scale to ask participants to explain their ranking priorities. Particularly, the open-ended question asked (1) Why did you rank that indicator as your first priority?; (2) Why did you rank that indicator as your last priority? The open-ended questions merely asked participants to explain their ranking for the first and the last prioritised indicators, since this ranking differentiates their rankings the most. Furthermore, asking reasons for every priority ranking was not very helpful in understanding Vietnamese HE leaders' priorities, since they were not remarkably different. Overall, the two open-ended questions were used to assist the researcher to intensively understand Vietnamese leaders' priorities and their perspectives on quality improvement indicators. The validity and reliability of the data collection tools are discussed in the next section.

3.3.3 Validity and reliability of the survey instrument

This section discusses the validity and reliability of the survey instruments. The quantitative reliability and validity of the MLQ instrument will be discussed to determine that the MLQ is a valid tool to investigate the leadership styles. Then, the qualitative applicability and dependability of the ranking scale is considered to ensure that the ranking scale is rigorous and suitable for the study.

Cavana et al. (2001) state that validity and reliability determine the 'goodness' of measures (i.e., how well the instrument fits to measure a concept) adopted by a

data collection tool. Hinkin (1998) adds that reliability is a necessary criterion for validity and should be assessed after the first factor/scale has been established. Reliability is also related to the dependability over time of an instrument, despite different and uncontrollable testing conditions (Burns, 2000; Cavana et al., 2001). In the case of this study, the validity of the MLQ instrument and its reliability had been rigorously tested by the author of the instrument. Kirkbride (2006) believes that the MLQ is the most widely used instrument to examine transformational leadership theory. It is also considered the best validated measure of transformational and transactional leadership (Ozaralli, 2003, p. 338, as cited by Muenjohn, 2008). Many studies (Antonakis, 2001; Avolio et al., 1999; Hinkin & Schriesheim, 2008) have confirmed the validity of the MLQ and suggested the MLQ for further research in transformational leadership.

The MLQ instrument was developed by using the exploratory and confirmatory factor analysis with suggestions from six leadership scholars who recommended additions or deletions of items to increase the reliability and validity of the MLQ, as well as its feasibility (Avolio et al., 1995, 1999; Hunt, 1991; Yukl, 1998; as cited by Antonakis, 2001). Moreover, based on the results of the pooled study, psychometric measurements of the MLQ behaved as predicted by the theory. Avolio stated that the items within factors are highly correlated among themselves (Antonakis, 2001), suggesting a high reliability of the items associated with each factor.

The MLQ nine-factor model was tested using confirmatory factor analysis on a total sample of 1,394 respondents, collected by nine researchers (Antonakis, 2001). Similarly, Avolio et al. (1995) also tested the MLQ nine-factor model and noted the improvements in various fit indices used in structural equation modelling. Similar results were reported by Bass and Avolio (1997), where they independently gathered

another sample of 1,490 respondents, and used the nine-factor model used the confirmatory factor analysis to measure the construct of MLQ instrument again. In the last twenty-five years, the MLQ has been used to differentiate highly effective leaders from ineffective leaders in research within military, government, educational, manufacturing, high technology, church, correctional, and hospital contexts, as well as in volunteer organisations (Avolio & Bass, 2004; Berson, 1999). Avolio and Bass (2004) illustrated the overall fit measures of the nine-factor model in comparison with other models. As a result, they concluded that the full nine-factor model produced the best fit in examining the leadership styles (see Table 3.6 for details). Therefore, it is reasonable to assume the robustness of the factor structure of the MLQ, and to employ the MLQ instrument for leadership investigation of this study.

Table 3.6

Overall Fit Measures of Nine-Factor Model

Fit Measure	Nine-factor model
Goodness of Fit Index	0.92
Adjusted Goodness of Fit Index	0.91
Comparative Fit Index	0.91
Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA)	0.05

Resources: Multi-factor Leadership Questionnaire Manual (Avolio & Bass, 2004)

The item loading for each factor is summarised in Table 3.7 below. Although there were some instances where item loadings varied across region and particularly by level or source of ratings, there was a clear pattern of consistency for the nine-factor model across these respective findings by region and rater.

Table 3.7

Item Loadings with the Nine-Factor Model (US)

Factor		Factor		Factor		Factor		Factor	
Item	II(A)	Item	II(B)	Item	IM	Item	IS	Item	IC
II(A)10	0.73	II(B)6	0.45	IM9	0.70	IS2	0.52	IC15	0.67
II(A)18	0.69	II(B)14	0.75	IM13	0.76	IS8	0.60	IC19	0.59
II(A)21	0.81	II(B)23	0.55	IM26	0.74	IS30	0.76	IC29	0.65
II(A)25	0.44	II(B)34	0.73	IM36	0.73	IS32	0.74	IC31	0.79
Factor		Factor		Factor		Factor		Factor	
Item	CR	Item	MBEA	Item	MBEP	Item	LF		
CR1	0.51	MBEA4	0.65	MBEP3	0.62	LF5	0.68		
CR11	0.57	MBEA22	0.61	MBEP12	0.80	LF7	0.52		
CR16	0.64	MBEA24	0.70	MBEP17	0.34	LF28	0.65		
CR36	0.69	MBEA27	0.66	MBEP20	0.73	LF33	0.64		

Resources: Multi-factor Leadership Questionnaire Manual (Avolio & Bass, 2004)

II(A) = Idealised Influence (Attributed); II(B) = Idealised Influence (Behaviour); IM = Inspirational Motivation; IS = Intellectual Stimulation; IC = Individualised Consideration; CR = Contingent Reward; MBEA = Management-by-Exception (Active); MBEP = Management-by-Exception (Passive); LF = Laissez-faire Leadership

To increase the reliability of the MLQ nine-factor model, Avolio and Bass (2004) also provide the descriptive statistics data for it in a normative sample. The reliability was affirmed by administering MLQ testing in many different groups and/or organisations in the US. This also means that MLQ is applicable for examining leadership styles in different areas. Avolio and Bass (1999, 2004) also tested the inter-correlation among the MLQ factors based on the US data, and obtained the correlation ranging from -0.7 to 0.83. Overall, the analysis confirmed

the correlations between factors in MLQ nine-factor model were consistent. In summary, the validity and reliability of the instrument described above ensures the robustness of the instruments. This research study used the MLQ nine-factor short model with thirty-six items to investigate the leadership styles of Vietnamese HE leaders to find out to what extent they are inclined to adopt transformational leadership to make the reforms happen and support quality improvement.

Rigour of the methodology is an issue in qualitative research as it demands “theoretical sophistication and methodological rigour” (Silverman, 2002, p. 209). In qualitative research, reliability and validity are judged through the trustworthiness of the methodology and its processes. The trustworthiness of qualitative research is established by addressing the credibility, dependability and conformability of its studies and findings (Gay et al., 2009). Considering the qualitative nature of the ranking scale, the credibility of the ranking scale was strengthened by adopting the quality improvement principles outlined by MOET as standard criteria in their Strategies for Education Development 2011-2020 (MOET, 2013). As discussed in Section 3.3.2, MOET outlines educational quality standards that State colleges and universities have to adhere to; hence, the ranking issues were applicable and consistent for most institutions in Vietnam. Overall, the qualitative applicability and consistency of the ranking instrument in this current study were reliable.

A descriptive statistics analysis was used to analyse the ranking scale results and provide an understanding about Vietnamese HE leaders on the eight quality improvement indicators (see Table 3.5, p. 90), and a qualitative content analysis was employed to analyse the open-ended responses. The analysis process and results of the ranking scale and the open-ended responses are reported in detail in the next chapter (Section 4.2). Since the study used the Vietnamese version of the MLQ and

the ranking scale for data collection, then analysed and reported in English, the risk to validity needs to be mitigated. The MLQ was originally written in English but was translated into Vietnamese by the publisher of the instrument. The researcher, who is fluent in both English and Vietnamese, verified the translation by comparing the Vietnamese version with the English version and found approximately 95 percent consistency in the meanings. Similarly, the ranking scale used MOET's principles for quality improvement, which were translated into English for the purpose of this study.

Translation accuracy can considerably improve the reliability of an instrument. In cross-language qualitative studies, it is not only the research process and findings that influence reliability, but also the translation procedures and the translation results upon which the final research findings are based (Chen & Boore, 2009; Regmi, Naidoo, & Pilkington, 2010). There are some common translation procedures, including single translation, back translation and parallel translation. This current study used a back translation procedure due to certain benefits. Because of its potential to minimise inaccuracies in the translation with a result that strives for equivalence across languages, a back translation procedure is widely used in social science research (Liamputtong, 2010; Lopez et al., 2008; Sutrisno et al., 2014). In this study, back translation was applied when data collection was completed and the 207 responses were returned to the researcher. Two professional editors were employed to translate the open-ended responses from Vietnamese into English. The researcher compared the translation results and decided to keep the best translation which conveyed the most precise meaning between English and Vietnamese responses. Hence, to increase the trustworthiness of the instrument, the back translation was adopted in this study. Overall, the MLQ and the ranking order scale

were presented in Vietnamese and ensured every Vietnamese leader who participated in responding to the surveys was able to fully understand the meaning and purpose of each instrument. This process helped to control any variance that might have occurred due to lack of English language proficiency of the Vietnamese HE leaders, and thus increased the validity.

3.4 THE PROCEDURE FOR THE FIELD WORK

The data was collected from nine colleges and universities in the Mekong Delta, Can Tho City and surrounding provinces. The time frame for the data collection field work was four months. This study used the self-administered and anonymous surveys for data collection. A clear instruction and sample items allowed respondents to complete the survey without supervision. Regarding QUT's ethics requirements, the identity of the respondent was kept private and anonymous, and strict confidentiality was applied. On average, it took approximately 30 to 45 minutes to complete both the MLQ and the ranking/order scale survey.

Face-to-face, telephone and email were the main forms of communication with potential participants. Face-to-face contact helped to build rapport and ensure a higher response rate (Cavana et al., 2001). After the QUT ethics clearance was approved, the researcher sent a recruiting email to potential participants to explain the study and the importance of participants' contributions. The survey document was attached in the email. The researcher then travelled back to Vietnam to personally manage the data collection process. The researcher travelled to all nine colleges and universities and met with prospective participants either as a group or individually to further explain the purpose of the study and their role in the study (especially for people who did not know the researcher and the study) to increase the response rate. After the orientation activity, the participants were given the survey.

The demographics, MLQ and the ranking scale with open-ended questions were all combined into one set of documents (see Appendix D). That way, the researcher readily recognised the MLQ and the ranking scale to be completed by the same participant so that the administration of the data and interpretation of the relationship between their leadership and perceptions about quality improvement were made logically and coherently.

After the survey was delivered, the researcher followed up and if necessary travelled back to some institutions to encourage the participants to complete and return their survey responses. During this time, the researcher made every attempt to get the responses, including contacting participants regularly and sending out reminder emails, until the researcher collected enough responses for this study. The researcher spent the final month in the field doing data aggregation before coming back to QUT to do data analysis.

3.5 DATA ANALYSIS

The current research study undertook three sets of analysis: the MLQ, the ranking/scale with open-ended responses, and the relationships between the MLQ and ranking scale. All statistical analyses were conducted using the Statistical Program for Social Science (SPSS) version 21.0.

The MLQ analysis firstly undertook a principal components analysis (PCA) to confirm the validity of the MLQ instrument. The PCA was used to determine whether the data from sample sets confirmed the nine-factor model of leadership. In this current study, the PCA was constructed at both item and factor level. The MLQ factors included Idealised Influence – Attributed (IIA), Idealised Influence – Behaviour (IIB), Inspirational Motivation (IM), Intellectual Simulation (IS),

Individual Consideration (IC), Contingent Reward (CR), Management-by-Exception-Active (MBEA), Management-by-Exception-Passive (MBEP), and Laissez-Faire (LF) variables. Since the factor structure was stable with the new sample, the multivariate analysis of the variance (MANOVA) was used to analyse how the demographic variables interacted with the leadership styles. The study explored gender, age, educational background and experience variables to understand how the leadership styles generally and in particular the transformational leadership was perceived by the Vietnamese HE leaders. This analysis addressed research question number one.

RQ#1: To what extent are Vietnamese HE leaders in the Mekong Delta inclined to adopt transformational leadership?

The second analysis involved the ranking scale data and the open-ended responses. A descriptive statistics analysis using the mean and median was employed to understand the priority preference of Vietnamese HE leaders regarding quality improvement principles. The descriptive statistics were juxtaposed with demographic data to investigate how different sub-groups of the sample responded to the ranking. This addressed the research question number two. The qualitative content analysis was used to analyse the open-ended responses to provide a comprehensive understanding about Vietnamese HE leaders' priority.

RQ#2: How do Vietnamese HE leaders in the Mekong Delta support MOET's principles for quality improvement in Vietnamese HE?

The third analysis examined the relationship between the ranking/scale and the leadership styles of Vietnamese HE leaders. It first searched for any patterns between the two measurements and then investigated any patterns that may be influenced by

the nature of the demographic sub-groups. The analysis attempted to address research question number three.

RQ#3: Is there a relationship between the leadership styles and the support for MOET principles for quality improvement in Vietnamese HE?

3.6 ETHICS AND LIMITATIONS

Integrity in research is increasing becoming a critical component of research rigour. To avoid exploitation of participants through misrepresenting their contribution, research institutions have established stringent ethical guidelines. Creswell (2009) states that ethical considerations are required in relation to data collection, analysis and dissemination so that participants are not disadvantaged and the interpretation is justifiable. Although this study was low risk as per QUT ethics guidelines because it only involved surveying adult HE leaders, some participants prefer not to be identified and the institution may also want some protection against misuse of its classified documents (Gall et al., 2003). In the current study, personal information of participants was protected as confidential information while the two instruments kept participants' identity anonymous. Following QUT's research ethical clearance guide, the researcher was aware of possible ethical matters and kept the research ethically responsible. The ethics approval for this study was granted by the QUT ethics committee (approval number: 13000 00836).

The preparation for access, including requesting permission from the respective authorities, took time as there were nine colleges and universities. As a result, preparations for gaining access to HE leaders started as soon as the ethical approval was granted (Appendix A). The researcher first communicated with the Vietnamese Ministry of Education and Training (MOET), which manages these nine colleges and

universities, to initiate the request for permission (Appendix E and F). The approval and reference letter from MOET assisted the researcher to feasibly achieve access permission from institutions. Then, the permission for individual institution access was requested and granted by the rector of each college and university.

There were several limitations to this study: First of all, the risk of non-response to items may threaten the quality of the survey statistic (Burn, 2000). An example is when a participant refuses to provide any answer at all. In such instances, establishing good rapport with the interviewees at the onset of the interview is vital (Lichtman, 2010). Furthermore, although the survey was in Vietnamese (i.e. translated by the publisher) before handing out to the participants, and translated back in English at the end, the risk of shifting semantic nuances of many words and phrases was a concern. Two certified editors were employed to assist in backward translation to increase the credibility of the translation results. Furthermore, the survey methods may include survey bias from the researcher (Burn, 2000).

3.7 SUMMARY OF THE CHAPTER

The research design chapter has described the design and methodology which were employed in this study. The study adopted a multi-method approach using a quantitative survey for studying leadership styles and a qualitative approach using descriptive statistics on the ranking scale to study both the leaders' understanding of HE quality improvement and their priorities with regard to these issues. The open-ended questions were adopted to elicit a comprehensive view of Vietnamese HE leaders' priorities (Section 3.1).

Characteristics of the sample and potential participants were described in Section 3.2. Overall, there were 207 participants who hold senior leadership

positions (Table 3.1) in nine colleges and universities (Table 3.2) in the Mekong Delta. An anonymous self-administered survey was used to collect data. The survey comprised three main parts, including demographic items, the MLQ, and the ranking scale with two open-ended questions (Appendix D). Section 3.3 clearly illustrated the data collection tools, in which the validity and reliability of the MLQ and the ranking scale were presented.

Details of the field work procedure were outlined in Section 3.4. Once data was successfully collected, data analysis was defined in Section 3.5. Three main sets of analysis were undertaken. A principal components analysis (PCA) was used to confirm the validity of the MLQ instrument, and multivariate analysis of the variance (MANOVA) was used to analyse how the demographic variables interacted with the leadership styles. A descriptive statistics using the mean and median was employed to analyse the ranking scale results and understand how Vietnamese HE leaders prioritise quality improvement issues. Furthermore, this study employed a qualitative content analysis to further explain HE leaders' priorities in ranking quality improvement issues. Additionally, the ethical considerations and limitations of this study were addressed, as discussed in Section 3.6. The results and findings are presented in the next chapter.

Chapter 4: Results and Findings of the Study

4.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter reports the results and findings of the study and consists of two main parts. First, the quantitative survey data analysis and results are reported, and second, the analysis and results of the qualitative descriptive statistics on the ranking scale together with the associated open-ended questions are presented. The first Section (4.1) presents a discussion and explanation of the data cleaning and coding process, followed by justification that the quantitative instrument (MLQ) was appropriate for the current sample. The psychometrics of the survey are analysed and compared with its nominal data. This was done to verify the validity of the items and the stability of the factor structure. The results of two multivariate analyses of variance (MANOVA's) with the demographic data are analysed and reported. The analysis also focuses on leadership styles of Vietnamese HE leaders. Finally, the summary of the quantitative part of this study is presented.

The second section of the chapter (4.2) reports the results of the qualitative descriptive statistics on the ranking scale together with associated open-ended questions. It describes the data cleaning and coding of the data derived from the ranking scale, as well as the open-ended textual responses, and presents the results and findings of the Higher Education (HE) quality improvement ranking scale. It also presents the open-ended text responses to explain participants' priority preferences. Finally, the summary of the chapter synthesises the quantitative and qualitative findings.

4.1.1 Data cleaning and coding process

The total number of respondents was 207 participants. After screening data to ensure it was complete and appropriate (Pallant, 2013; Tabachnick & Fidell, 2006), 17 cases were deleted due to non-completion; these cases included unreliable responses such as identical responses among two or three surveys, and indiscriminate ticking of most of items in the MLQ section. Thus for use in the final analyses, 190 participants were retained. In the process of data screening, potential entry errors such as missing data and coding errors were detected. There were two cases of coding errors detected; however, corrections were immediately made.

Once all the data were screened, the SPSS version 21 was used to examine the validity of the MLQ nine-factor at item level (36 items), and stability of factor structure. There are two steps in this procedure: first, it is important to ensure the items measure what is intended, and second, it is important to determine whether the items still subscribe to the factors as was initially intended. The next section presents the analysis and results of this procedure.

4.1.2 The validity and stability of the instrument

4.1.2.1 Item reliability

This analysis was done to check the scale reliability of the MLQ instrument using Cronbach's alpha. Pallant (2013) noted that Cronbach's alpha determines the internal consistency of the instrument to measure underlying construct of the items, providing evidence of the scale reliability of the MLQ when used in a new sample. The item analysis of the 36 items is summarised in Table 4.1.

Table 4.1

The Item Analysis of the 36 Items in the Nine-factor MLQ Survey

Due to copyright restrictions, this table cannot be made available here.

As can be seen in Table 4.1, SPSS analysis revealed a Cronbach's Alpha at 0.813 for the overall items in the survey instrument. The analysis also indicated that for each item the Cronbach's Alpha was over 0.8. As a rule of thumb, Cronbach's

alpha above 0.70 is considered acceptable for construct validity tests (George & Mallery, 2003).

Generally, the analysis indicates that the MLQ nine-factor survey, at an item level, appeared to have good internal consistency, $\alpha = 0.813$. All items were worthy of retention; the greatest increase in alpha would come from deleting item 3, but removal of this item would increase alpha only by 0.006, and may distort the factor structure. In conclusion, all the items in the MLQ were appropriate for this study. The MLQ survey presented an internal consistency of the instrument in the context of a new sample made up of leaders in Vietnamese HE institutions. The above item loading is consistent with previous studies (Dao & Han, 2013; Luu, 2010) using MLQ in a Vietnamese context.

4.1.2.2 The internal consistency of the MLQ nine-factor to ensure the stability at factor level

The internal consistency analysis of MLQ at factor level was determined by a series of scale reliabilities. The nine factors of MLQ presented the Cronbach's alpha in the range from 0.668 to 0.774. As a rule of thumb, Cronbach's alpha at this range of 0.6 to 0.7 is considered to be acceptable (George & Mallery, 2003) (see Table 4.2 for more details). Although it is argued that the acceptable alpha rate should be over 0.7, these authors also stated that an alpha below 0.7 can be expected when dealing with psychological constructs (Kline, 1999; Field, 2009), which is similar to many of the constructs being measured in the MLQ (Avolio & Bass, 2004). As such, the alpha scores in this analysis are appropriate, with the lowest alpha value being 0.668 for the inspirational motivation (IM) factor. The overall analysis of the MLQ survey with the nine factors demonstrated a Cronbach's alpha of 0.732.

Table 4.2

The Internal Consistency of the MLQ Nine-factor Survey at Factor Level

Factors	Abbre- viation	Number of items	Cronbach's alpha (α)
Idealized Influence – Attributed	IIA	4	0.693
Idealized Influence – Behaviour	IIB	4	0.712
Inspirational Motivation	IM	4	0.668
Intellectual Simulation	IS	4	0.705
Individual Consideration	IC	4	0.689
Contingent Reward	CR	4	0.693
Management-by-Exception-Active	MBEA	4	0.689
Management-by-Exception-Passive	MBEP	4	0.735
Laissez-faire	LF	4	0.774

As shown in Table 4.2, generally, MLQ nine-factor at the factor level had good internal consistency, $\alpha = 0.732$. All factors were worthy of retention since any adjustment that may provide the greatest increase in alpha would be the deletion of the laissez-faire factor, but removal of this item would increase alpha only by 0.042, which is minimal. Therefore, all nine factors of the instrument were confirmed to be appropriate for leadership styles investigation in the current study.

4.1.2.3 Principal components analysis to confirm the correlation of the MLQ nine-factor

Principal components analysis was used for testing the psychometric properties of measurement instruments and confirming the correlation of MLQ nine-factor. The instrument's construct validity was tested in several studies in the Vietnamese context (Dao & Han, 2013; Luu, 2010) and produced stable results to demonstrate that the Vietnamese version of MLQ nine-factor was valid, and respondents fully understood the items even when they were translated into Vietnamese. For instance, Luu (2010) employed the MLQ instrument in the plastics industry in Vietnam with 416 responses and confirmed the original construct validity of MLQ in his study. Another study that focused on leadership and employed the MLQ instrument in the Vietnamese context was the transformational leadership and organisational culture study by Dao and Han (2013), which also confirmed the construct validity of the MLQ instrument in a sample size of 186 respondents in the marketing and media industries in Vietnam.

To understand how the factors explained the variance about the leadership of this sample, a factor analysis using principal components analysis with Oblimin rotation was performed. A principal components analysis was chosen as the factor loadings of the instrument identified the percentage of variance explained by each factor from the total variance or whether the same items would load on the appropriate factors. Table 4.3 illustrates the factor structure of the MLQ.

Table 4.3

Factor Structure of the Multi-factor Leadership Questionnaire

Due to copyright restrictions, this table cannot be made available here.

In the current study, the factor stability was assessed by investigating the correlation matrix between the nine factors (see Table 4.4 for the correlation matrix of the nine factors). This was done to ensure that the nine factors were separate and independent enough to be treated as distinct factors. The correlation matrix of the

nine factors revealed a significant pattern of separation between factors and confirmed the validity of the factor structure. Most of the nine factors have low correlations, with the lowest being between the contingent reward (CR) and laissez-faire (LF) factors (-0.179). Inspirational motivation (IM) and contingent reward (CR) are shown to have the highest correlation at 0.501. As can be seen in Table 4.3, most factors have a positive relationship with one another, except for the relationship between management-by-exception Passive (MBEP) and laissez-faire (LF) with the other factors. Their correlations are very low or negative, indicating that when the factors that comprise the transformational (i.e. IIA, IIB, IM, IS, IC) and transactional (i.e. CR, MBEA) leadership styles increase, the factors that comprise the laissez-faire leadership style (i.e. MBEP, LF) decrease, and vice versa. This is logical, as the items which describe the transformational and transactional leadership styles are opposite to the laissez-faire leadership style items. Although the correlations between the nine factors were not strong, the average rate was acceptable (Pallant, 2013).

Table 4.4

Correlation Matrix of the Nine Factors

	IIA	IIB	IM	IS	IC	CR	MB EA	MB EP	LF
IIA	1.0								
IIB	0.265	1.0							
IM	0.408	0.399	1.0						
IS	0.252	0.487	0.428	1.0					
IC	0.371	0.306	0.421	0.412	1.0				
CR	0.377	0.457	0.501	0.497	0.474	1.0			
MBEA	0.396	0.370	0.441	0.231	0.264	0.363	1.0		
MBEP	0.167	-0.155	0.218	0.007	0.219	0.042	0.179	1.0	
LF	0.049	-0.166	0.064	-0.140	-0.014	-0.179	0.103	0.446	1.0

Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) and Bartlett's Test measured the strength of the relationship among the factors. The KMO measures the sampling adequacy, which should be greater than 0.5 for a satisfactory factor analysis to proceed. In the current study, the adequacy of sampling was considered to be satisfactory, as KMO presented at 0.810, and Bartlett's test for sphericity was also significant, with p value at 0.00. Hence, the current study was confidently confirmed to have adequate sampling to verify the relationship among factors and proceed with factors loading analysis. Table 4.5 shows the percentage of variance explained by the factors.

Table 4.5

The Percentage of Variance Explained by the Factors

Factors	Eigenvalue	% of Variance
IIA	3.367	37.414
IIB	1.659	18.436
IM	0.844	9.375
IS	0.734	8.151
IC	0.568	6.315
CR	0.517	5.745
MBEA	0.468	5.197
MBEP	0.432	4.796
LF	0.411	4.572

In factor analysis, eigenvalues are used to determine the level variance explained by each factor. The factors with eigenvalue of 1.00 or higher are considered worth analysing, and it is the default in the SPSS program. According to Tabachnich and Fidell (2006), the factor with the largest eigenvalue explains the most variance, and the factors with small or negative eigenvalues are usually omitted from analysis. As can be seen from Table 4.5, the IIA and IIB factors have the highest percentage of variance (i.e. 37.414% and 18.436% respectively). The percentage of variance explained by other factors is under 10 percent (range: 4.572–9.375 percent). In sum, the results showed that the most significant difference between Vietnamese HE leaders is in the IIA and IIB factors, which is in line with next analysis on the MANOVA.

As mentioned above, the factor analysis was used to study the construct validity of the MLQ. The analysis above showed that the factor analysis for the

sample size of 190 in this current study verified the construct validity of the MLQ nine-factor instrument in the context of Vietnamese leaders in HE institutions.

4.1.3 Multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) – Stage one analysis

4.1.3.1 Demographic data after screening

At stage one analysis, the quantitative results compared the variance on each factor of the MLQ nine-factor model based on the demographic data (see Table 4.6 for more details) to reflect leadership perspectives on leadership styles of Vietnamese leaders. The following section reports the multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) results with the subscale of demographic data constituted in independent variables. The aim of the MANOVA was to test whether the demographic data, including gender, age, education and experience, influence leadership styles. Both the independent and dependent variables were retained from the original for analysis. Then, at stage two of the analysis, the adjustment of independent and dependent variables will be considered for fully understanding the data.

Table 4.6 summarises the demographic data after cleaning for both stage-one and stage-two analysis. Through screening data, 8.2% of the responses – those with incomplete surveys and untrustworthy responses – were deleted, which left approximately 190 responses in the final sample (91.8%). Characteristics of the population and sampling of the study were described clearly in Chapter 3 (see Chapter 3, Section 3.2, page 76). As can be seen in Table 4.6, there were four independent variables (gender, age, education, and experience). Small and unequal sample sizes may increase the risk of violation of the homogeneity of variance assumption, and affect the power to identify statistically significant differences at the

multivariate level (Hair et al., 2014; Tabachnick & Fidell, 2006; Tones, 2009). Hair et al. (2014) suggested that it was not feasible to increase the sample size; another option was to reduce the variables to simplify the MANOVA.

Table 4.6

The Demographic Data after Screening

Variables	Analysis	Sub-groups	N = 190	Percentage	Mean	SD
Gender	Stage-one	Male	112	58.9	1.41	0.493
		Female	78	41.1		
	Stage-two	Male	112	58.9	1.41	0.493
		Female	78	41.1		
Age	Stage-one	25–35	54	28.4	2.21	0.940
		36–45	57	30.0		
		46–55	65	34.2		
		56–65	14	7.4		
	Stage-two	25–45	111	58.4	1.42	0.494
		46–65	79	41.6		
Education	Stage-one	BA Degree	39	20.5	1.92	0.585
		MA Degree	121	63.7		
		PhD/EdD Degree	25	13.2		
		Missing data	5	2.6		
	Stage-two	Under-graduates	39	20.5	1.79	0.409
		Post-graduates	146	76.8		
		Missing data	5	2.6		
Experience	Stage-one	1-5 years	101	53.2	1.68	0.818
		6–10 years	44	23.2		
		Over 10 years	42	22.1		
		Missing Data	3	1.6		
	Stage-two	1–5 years	101	53.2	1.46	0.50
		Over 5 years	86	45.3		
		Missing Data	3	1.6		

4.1.3.2 MANOVA Results – Stage One Analysis

MANOVA has the ability to examine several dependent measures simultaneously, taking into consideration any mediating effect between the demographic variables (Hair et al., 2014). Furthermore, as Cramer and Bock (1966) suggested, a MANOVA was first performed on the means to help protect against inflating the Type 1 error. The analysis included four independent demographic variables – namely gender, age, education and experience. A meaningful pattern of correlations was observed amongst most of the independent variables, suggesting the appropriateness of a MANOVA. The findings are reported in Table 4.7.

Table 4.7

The Multivariate Analysis of Variance Test of Demographic Data on MLQ Factors

<i>Effects</i>	<i>Pillai's Trace Value</i>	<i>F Value</i>	<i>Hypothesis df</i>	<i>Error df</i>	<i>Significance</i>	<i>Observed power</i>
Gender	0.075	1.615	9.0	180	0.114	0.739
Age	0.135	0.940	27.0	540	0.554	0.820
Education	0.115	1.181	18.0	350	0.274	0.807
Experience	0.083	0.856	18.0	354	0.633	0.628

As stated above, a one-way MANOVA was conducted to test the hypothesis that there would be a significant difference between gender (male, female), age (25-35; 36-45; 46-55; 56-65), education (Bachelor, Master, Doctor), and experience (1-5 years; 6-10 years; over 10 years) on the nine factors of the MLQ. It was unexpected that the multivariate test statistic was not significant for any of the demographic groups; but the observed powers of these tests were quite low (62.8% - 82.0%). This can be interpreted to suggest that there were still 26.1%, 18%, 19.3%, and 37.2%

chances for the multivariate test statistic in gender, age, education, and experience respectively to be significant. The power of the test may be increased when the sample size is increased (O’Keefe, 2007). Furthermore, increasing the sample size provides more chances to detect differences between sub-groups that impacted the nine leadership factors. Overall, the power of the test to detect differences is increased when a larger sample size is investigated, and this is discussed in the next section.

To ensure the statistical MANOVA test did not violate the assumption of homogeneity of variance, the Levene’s test of equality of error variance tested the homogeneity of variances of each dependent measure in this study. While the homogeneity of variances assumes that dependent variables exhibit equal levels of variance across the range of predictor variables, the Levene’s test should be insignificant to confirm that the homogeneity of variance was not violated. In other words, the dependent variables (nine MLQ factors) do not have equal variance. Table 4.8 presents the significant value (p value) of the Levene’s test of equality of error variances for the nine factors.

Table 4.8

The Levene's Test of Equality of Error of Variances

Factors	Significant Value (<i>p</i> value)			
	Gender	Age	Education	Experience
IIA	0.009	0.020	0.514	0.185
IIB	0.454	0.710	0.063	0.102
IM	0.580	0.370	0.040	0.413
IS	0.159	0.287	0.646	0.336
IC	0.696	0.767	0.953	0.972
CR	0.789	0.332	0.261	0.589
MBEA	0.838	0.690	0.517	0.299
MBEP	0.131	0.087	0.421	0.387
LF	0.078	0.800	0.053	0.038

As can be seen in Table 4.8, Levene's test is insignificant for most of the dependent measures, except for the IIA factor. Therefore, the study confirmed that the homogeneity of variance assumption was not violated; and dependent variables do not have equal variances, except the IIA.

As shown in Table 4.7, the gender analysis revealed an insignificant difference between the nine factors. Specifically, a statistically non-significant MANOVA effect was obtained, Pillai's Trace = 0.075, $F(9, 180) = 1.615$, $p > 0.05$. The multivariate effect size was estimated at 0.739, which implies that 73.9% of the variance in the canonically derived dependent variable was accounted for by gender. Therefore, it is possible to suggest that gender does not influence Vietnamese HE leaders in their perspectives about leadership in the Mekong Delta region of Vietnam.

The second demographic variable of age shown in Table 4.7 was analysed. The one-way MANOVA tested the hypothesis that age impacted leaders regarding how

they perceived their leadership styles. The homogeneity of variance assumption was considered satisfied for the age variable, even though one of the nine factors, idealized intellectual attributed, was statistically significant ($p < 0.05$). As shown in Table 4.7, a statistically non-significant MANOVA effect was obtained, Pillai's Trace = 0.135, $F(27, 540) = 0.94$, $p > 0.05$. The multivariate effect size was estimated at 0.82, which implies that 82% of the variance in the canonically derived dependent variable was accounted for by the age category. Therefore, it is possible to suggest that age does not influence Vietnamese HE leaders in their perspectives about leadership in the Mekong Delta region of Vietnam.

Education background was the third demographic variable to be examined in the analysis. The homogeneity of variance assumption was considered satisfied for the education variable, even though one of the nine factors, intellectual motivation, was statistically significant ($p < 0.05$). As shown in Table 4.7, a statistically non-significant MANOVA effect was obtained, Pillai's Trace = 0.115, $F(18, 350) = 1.15$, $p > 0.05$. The multivariate effect size was estimated at 0.807, which implies that 80.7% of the variance in the canonically derived dependent variable was accounted for by educational level. Therefore, the demographic variable of education was not significant in Vietnamese leaders' perception of their leadership style. Similarly, the fourth demographic variable of experience was examined and analysed in the one-way MANOVA. The multivariate analysis of variance test did not present any significant difference between experience sub-groups. Once again, a statistically non-significant MANOVA effect was reported, Pillai's Trace = 0.083, $F(18, 354) = 0.856$, $p > 0.05$. The multivariate effect size was estimated at 0.628, which implies that 62.8% of the variance in the derived dependent variable was calculated for the experience variable. Therefore, it is possible to suggest that experience does not

influence Vietnamese HE leaders in their perspectives about leadership in the Mekong Delta region of Vietnam.

Finally, a series of post-hoc analyses (Fisher's LSD) were performed to examine individual mean difference comparisons across the three independent variables. The independent variable of gender was not included in post-hoc tests due to insufficient groups (i.e., there were only two groups). As a rule of thumb, there should be at least three groups in each variable for performing post-hoc testing (Field, 2013). The results revealed that post-hoc mean comparisons were statistically significant ($p < 0.05$) in the age, education and experience variables. Specifically, in the LF factor, there was a significant difference between leaders in the group of 25-35 compared to leaders in the group of 56-65 (p value < 0.05), as well as variance between the groups of 46-55 and 56-65. In the category of education, the current study found a significant difference between BA degree background and MA and PhD/EdD degree background in the following factors: IIA, IM, IC, and MBEA (p value < 0.05). The significant difference in the category of experience focused on the IIB, IM, and IS factors. In the IIB factor, the leaders in the group who had 1-5 and 6-10 years of experience differed from leaders in the group who had over 10 years' experience: how more experienced leaders reported differently from the others is discussed further in the next chapter. Similar findings were found in the IS factor. In the IM factor, there was variance only between the 1-5 years of experience group and the over 10 years of experience group.

4.1.3.3 MANOVA results – stage two analysis

As stated in Section 4.1.3.1, the original demographical variables were merged to increase the sample size and re-run the MANOVA. According to Keppel

and Wickens (2004), unequal sample sizes make homogeneity of variance a problem. Furthermore, based on the MANOVA's result at stage one analysis and as a learning process, MANOVA's results at stage two analysis expected to find differences in leadership styles of Vietnamese HE leaders based on demographic items. Therefore, at stage two analysis of this study, groups in the age, education and experience variables were regrouped to increase the sample size and narrow the unequal size.

A one-way MANOVA was recalculated for these groups to examine whether age and experience impacted on the MLQ nine factors to reflect their leadership styles. The Levene's test of equality of error variances retested the homogeneity of variance assumption, and confirmed the variances between these sub-groups were not equal and the test did not violate the homogeneity of variance assumption for the purposes of the MANOVA. In performing MANOVA in the new groups of age, education and experience, significant findings are reported in the Table 4.9.

Table 4.9

The Multivariate Analysis of Variance Test of New Groups of Demographic Variables on MLQ

Factors

<i>Effects</i>	<i>Pillai's Trace Value</i>	<i>F Value</i>	<i>Hypothesis df</i>	<i>Error df</i>	<i>P Value</i>	<i>Observed power</i>
Age	0.023	0.463	9.0	180	0.898	0.224
Education	0.087	1.857	9.0	175	0.061	0.809
Experience	0.031	0.636	9.0	177	0.765	0.308

As can be seen in Table 4.9, the multivariate analysis of variance test of new groups of demographic variables on MLQ factors, within the Pillai's Trace value of

0.023; 0.087; 0.031 for age, education, and experience respectively were $F(9, 180) = 0.463$; $F(9; 175) = 1.857$; $F(9; 177) = 0.636$. The p value for all three categories was still non-significant ($p > 0.05$). However, the observed power decreased from 82.0 % to 22.4% in the age variable; and the experience variable's observed power decreased from 62.8% to 30.8%. The observed power in the education variable was almost the same at 80.7% to 80.9%.

Generally, there were non-significant differences found in the relationship between the independent variables of the demographic data, including age, education and experience on the dependent variables of MLQ nine factors subscales at stage-two analysis. In regrouping the demographic categories, the sample size in each group was improved; however, the total variance between dependent and independent variables was still non-significant. It must be noted that the observed powers were very low; therefore, it is possible that significant differences may exist and could be determined with greater statistical power.

4.1.4 Leadership styles of Vietnamese higher education leaders

The multi-factor leadership questionnaire (MLQ) allows the researcher to measure the leadership styles that are employed by participants. However, the MLQ is not designed to label a leader as a solely transformational, transactional, or laissez-faire leader. Rather, it is more appropriate to identify a leader as more transformational than the norm or less transactional than the norm (Avolio & Bass, 2004). In this current study, the norms indicated by the MLQ's manual were used to determine where participants fell on each factor and their overall leadership style.

In order to measure participants' leadership styles' inclination, the analysis firstly grouped items by factor (see Table 3.4 for classification of items and factors);

then calculated an average score for each factor. For instance, the items which are included in the individualized influence attributed (IIA) are items 10, 18, 21, and 25. The scores for each participant were added for these items and divided by the total number of responses for that item. See Table 3.4 for the classification of factors and leadership styles.

Once the average of each leadership style (i.e., transformational, transactional, and laissez-faire leadership) was calculated, a one-way MANOVA was re-run to test whether demographic variables (i.e., gender, age, education and experience) impacted on Vietnamese HE leadership styles. The Levene's test of equality of error variances tested the homogeneity of variance assumption, and confirmed the variances between these sub-groups were not equal and the test did not violate the homogeneity of variance assumption for the purposes of the MANOVA. In this analysis, the quantitative results using MANOVA compared the variance on each leadership style based on demographic data. This analysis was the initial quantitative analysis on leadership styles of Vietnamese HE leader. Therefore, an additional descriptive analysis contributed to a comprehensive understanding of overall Vietnamese leader's leadership inclination. In performing MANOVA in the new groups of demographic items (including gender), findings are reported in the Table 4.10.

Table 4.10*The Multivariate Analysis of Variance Test of Demographic Variables on Leadership Styles*

<i>Effects</i>	<i>Pillai's Trace Value</i>	<i>F Value</i>	<i>Hypothesis df</i>	<i>Error df</i>	<i>P Value</i>	<i>Observed power</i>
Gender	0.024	1.545	3.0	186	0.204	0.403
Age	0.015	0.926	3.0	186	0.429	0.251
Education	0.046	2.907	3.0	181	<u>0.036</u>	0.686
Experience	0.012	0.745	3.0	183	0.526	0.208

As can be seen in Table 4.10, the p value for the categories of gender, age, and experience was non-significant ($p > 0.05$). A significant difference however was found for education ($p = 0.036$). The observed power for this MANOVA analysis was quite low (gender: 40.3%; age: 25.1%; education: 68.6%, and experience: 20.8%). While there were no significant differences in the leadership styles (i.e., transformational, transactional, and laissez-faire leadership) between Vietnamese HE leaders based on their gender, age, and experience, the findings showed that leaders with different educational backgrounds did significantly differ in their leadership style.

Since no significant differences were found in the MANOVA analysis, a descriptive statistics analysis on the mean and standard deviation (SD) of demographic variables was analysed to compare the leadership styles preferences of Vietnamese leaders. Table 4.11 presents the average scores and descriptive statistics of leadership styles of Vietnamese HE leaders.

Table 4.11

The Average Score and Descriptive Statistics on the Mean and Standard Deviation of Leadership Styles

		Transformational Leadership Mean (SD)	Transactional Leadership Mean (SD)	Laissez-Faire Leadership Mean (SD)
Average Score (75 th Percentile)		3.10	3.38	1.6
Demographic Items				
Gender	Male	2.89 (0.39)	3.05 (0.50)	1.36 (0.62)
	Female	2.90 (0.39)	3.03 (0.45)	1.29 (0.46)
Age	25–45	2.89 (0.04)	3.00 (0.05)	1.32 (0.05)
	46–65	2.92 (0.04)	3.10 (0.05)	1.26 (0.06)
Educational Background	Undergraduates	2.75 (0.38)	2.88 (0.51)	1.20 (0.60)
	Postgraduates	2.93 (0.38)	3.08 (0.45)	1.31 (0.55)
Experience	1–5 years	2.86 (0.37)	3.00 (0.45)	1.30 (0.53)
	> 5 years	2.94 (0.40)	3.09 (0.51)	1.31 (0.61)

Table 4.11 showed that at 75th percentile, the average score of participants who are inclined to use transformational leadership is 3.10 on the 4.0 scale. This means that 75% of participants scored lower, and 25% scored higher than 3.10. Similarly, the transactional leadership average score is 3.38 (over 4.0) at 75th percentile. This also means that 75% of participants scored lower, and 25% scored higher than 3.38. What is interesting in this data is that the average score of participants who were inclined to use laissez-faire leadership is very low (1.6 over 4.0, at 75 percentile). This result showed that the majority of participants did not use a laissez-faire

leadership style in their practice, since 75% of participants rated lower than 1.6, and only 25% of participants rated higher than this score.

Overall, these results indicated that Vietnamese HE leaders are inclined to adopt transformational leadership and transactional leadership in their practice more than the laissez-faire leadership style. Although the number of HE leaders who had the average score higher than 3.1 and 3.4 for transformational leadership and transactional leadership, respectively only obtained 25% in the sample, there was an inclination to adopt transformational leadership and transactional leadership in HE leaders' practice. By contrast, Vietnamese HE leaders were not inclined to use a laissez-faire leadership style. In this study, the majority of Vietnamese HE leaders self-reported that they adopt a transformational or transactional style of leadership.

The descriptive statistics on the mean and SD of demographic items in Table 4.11 clearly showed a trend of employing transformational and transactional leaderships in Vietnamese HE leaders' practice in more detail. Although there was a slight difference in the means and SD of demographic sub-groups, the inclination of employing transformational and transactional leadership was apparent (mean = 2.75–3.10). Similarly, a slight difference was shown in the mean and SD of laissez-faire leadership style (1.20–1.36). This also means that Vietnamese HE leaders' perspectives on employing laissez-faire leadership were slightly different. Laissez-faire leadership was less preferable than the other two leadership styles.

In sum, the findings from the MANOVA analysis showed that the leadership styles of Vietnamese HE leaders were not largely different based on their gender, age, and experience. However, leaders with different educational backgrounds were inclined to adopt different leadership styles. The descriptive statistics analysis on the

demographic items indicated a trend that transformational and transactional leadership were more preferable than laissez-faire leadership in HE leaders' performance.

4.1.5 Summary of the quantitative results

The current study illustrated that the psychometrics of the MLQ for the Vietnamese HE leaders' sample confirmed the reliability and validity of the instrument at both item level (36 items) and factor level (nine factors). Furthermore, the study also concluded that using the MLQ nine-factor of Vietnamese leaders, non-significant total variance was found between the demographic variables of gender, age, level of education, and experience in stage-one analysis. Although the post-hoc test revealed variances between sub-groups of the above demographic variables at significant levels, these variances did not show overall differences in the Vietnamese leaders' perspectives on their leadership styles. Similar results were found in stage-two analysis: when the demographic variables were regrouped to improve the sample size, some significant differences were reported, while the overall result was still non-significant in testing the impact of demographic variables on MLQ nine factors. The leadership styles inclination of Vietnamese HE leaders was reported and indicated that transformational leadership and transactional leadership are inclined to use more than laissez-faire leadership. Further details of the results are presented in the discussion chapter.

4.2 THE QUALITATIVE DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS ON THE RANKING SCALE RESULTS FOR HIGHER EDUCATION QUALITY ISSUES

There are three main parts to the qualitative results. The first section, Section 4.2.1, reports the data cleaning and coding process of the ranking scale survey data and open-ended questions. Section 4.2.2 presents the analysis of the ranking scale, and Section 4.2.3 reports the textual open-ended responses which were used to understand participants' decisions on ranking the most and the least important indicators.

4.2.1 Data cleaning and coding process

A data cleaning and coding process was implemented to ensure the data in the ranking scale survey and open-ended questions were complete and appropriate (Pallant, 2013; Tabachnick & Fidell, 2006). Specifically, 28 cases were deleted due to non-completion, or unreliable responses such as identical responses between two or three surveys, or because the responses did not prioritise ranking (i.e., the respondent ranked all indicators at the same level). After screening the data, there were 179 responses that were deemed appropriate and retained in the ranking scale survey sample. In the process of data screening, potential entry errors such as missing data and coding errors were detected. There were two cases of coding errors detected; however, corrections were immediately done. Table 4.12 describes the demographic data for the ranking scale after cleaning. Following the quantitative analysis, the demographic data in this section is similar to the MANOVA analysis - stage 2 in which sub-groups in the variables of age, education, and experience were regrouped to increase the sample size.

Table 4.12

The Demographic Data for the Ranking Scale after Screening

Variables	N = 179	Percentage	
Gender	Male	106	59.2
	Female	73	40.8
Age	25–45	108	60.3
	46–65	71	39.7
Education	Undergraduates	35	19.6
	Postgraduates	139	77.7
	Missing data	5	2.8
Experience	1–5 years	98	54.7
	Over 5 years	78	43.6
	Missing Data	3	1.7

There were two open-ended questions at the end of the survey to collect respondents' views on what priorities they felt should be the most, and the least, important in HE in Vietnam. In the open-ended questions, 36 cases (20.1%) were incomplete regarding explaining the first question and 45 incomplete cases (25.1%) were recorded for the second question. The pairwise deletion (i.e., data is used whenever they are available and the researcher only discards data at the level of the variable, not the observation) (McKnight, 2007) was applied for missing data in this section. Despite the 20.1% and 25.1% of missing data, 79.9% (respondents ranking number one; most important priority) and 74.9% (respondents ranking number eight; least important priority) remained in the open-ended responses, and they strongly indicated several themes. Once the data was screened, the descriptive statistics and

the frequencies of eight indicators were analysed by using the SPSS version 21 program to examine the priority of their ranking. The textual open-ended responses were assessed in themes. Each response was carefully examined and categorised into groups with the same theme. Three main themes were found to explain the reasons why the respondents ranked an indicator as their first priority (the first open-ended question). Similarly, two main themes were found for the last priority indicator ranking (the second open-ended question). These themes are explained in Section 4.2.3 of this chapter in detail.

4.2.2 The ranking scale results

As noted in chapter 3, MOET's education development strategies in the HE reform agenda 2006-2020 (MOET, 2005b) identified eight indicators (see Section 3.3.2, p. 90) which were used to design the ranking scale survey. The participants were asked to rank these indicators ranging from the highest priority (number one) to the lowest priority (number eight) from their individual perspective. A summary of participants' responses is presented in Table 4.13, which reports the descriptive statistics of the ranking scale to map Vietnamese leaders' perceptions of the eight indicators.

Table 4.13

The Descriptive Statistics for the Ranking Scale

Indicator	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Mean	2.83	2.53	5.04	3.55	6.77	7.33	4.34	3.60
SD	1.91	1.33	1.46	1.68	1.09	1.34	1.73	1.97
Median	2	2	5	3	7	8	4	4
Minimum	1	1	1	1	2	1	1	1
Maximum	8	7	8	8	8	8	8	8
Skewness	0.793	0.855	-0.374	0.265	-1.795	-2.811	0.058	0.299

Note: N = 179; Ranking 1 = the highest priority indicator; Ranking 8 = the lowest priority indicator. Indicator 1 = University Missions/Goals; Indicator 2 = Teaching and Learning Quality; Indicator 3 = Research Quality; Indicator 4 = Human Resources Quality; Indicator 5 = University Ranking; Indicator 6 = International Recognition; Indicator 7 = Customers' Expectations; and Indicator 8 = Market's Demand

The descriptive statistics also reported the mean and standard deviation (SD) of these indicators in the data set. The lowest mean reflects that the indicator was frequently ranked as higher prioritized than the others, and vice versa for the highest mean. The lower mean score meant the indicator was more important, as it was prioritised high on the ranking scale. As shown in Table 4.13, the teaching and learning quality indicator appeared to be considered as receiving the highest priority of all indicators for quality of HE (mean = 2.53; SD = 1.91); this indicator was so highly regarded that there was no respondent who ranked the teaching and learning quality indicator as being the lowest (8) on the ranking scale. However, the teaching and learning quality indicator was not the one that received the greatest frequency of ranking number one (see Table 4.14).

Table 4.14

The Descriptive Frequencies of the Eight Indicators (Raw Data)

Ranking order	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	Total
Indicators									
University Missions/Goals	66	29	25	20	17	15	4	3	179
Teaching and Learning Quality	42	63	34	23	12	4	1	0	179
Research Quality	1	9	19	33	33	64	14	6	179
Human Resources Quality	23	29	42	30	30	19	4	2	179
University Ranking	0	2	2	3	14	2	102	35	179
International Recognition	2	2	3	3	4	9	37	119	179
Customers' Expectations	9	19	30	39	34	30	11	7	179
Market's Demand	36	26	25	27	36	16	6	7	179

Similarly, the international recognition indicator was considered as having the least priority for the Vietnamese leaders, as it had the highest mean compared to other factors (mean = 7.33; SD = 1.34). It should be noted that no one considered the international recognition indicator as their highest priority (number one) in their ranking. In addition, the SD of 1.34 also described data distribution around the mean with the distance of 1.34. From that, it can be understood that most of participants ranked the international recognition indicator at number 7 position with the distance

of 1.34 fluctuations around 7—which is very low priority. In the current context of Vietnamese HE, the low priority may be related to the fact that no Vietnamese university has been recognised yet for their quality, as none appeared in any league tables of leading Asian universities (Vallely & Wilkinson, 2008). Thus, Vietnamese leaders are realistic about the status and leadership concerns in their current context, which is discussed in Chapter 5 of this study.

As can be seen in Table 4.13, research quality, human resources quality, customers' expectations, and market's demand indicators all have symmetric distribution; their distributions are very close to the mean. As a rule of thumb, if the skewness is between -0.5 and 0.5, the distribution is approximately symmetric. Obviously, the skewness of these indicators is in this range. This can be interpreted to demonstrate that the research quality indicator was prioritized at around number 5 of ranking (mean = 5.03), and the customers' expectations indicator was prioritised around number 4 in the ranking (mean = 4.34). Similarly, respondents rated human resources quality and market's demand indicators between numbers three and four of the ranking (mean = 3.55 and 3.60 respectively).

The distribution of the sample data will be skewed to the right when it has a positive skewness. In contrast, the distribution will be skewed to the left when its skewness is negative (Brown, 2008). Pyzdek (2003, p. 370) argues that “positive skewness indicates that the tail of the distribution is more stretched on the side above the mean. Negative skewness indicates that the tail of the distribution is more stretched on the side below the mean.” In light of the above, the distribution of university missions/goals and teaching and learning quality indicators are highly skewed to the right. Meanwhile, the distributions of university ranking and international recognition indicators are extremely skewed to the left. The skewness

may be deduced as compared to the mean, the tails of the distribution (bell curve) for university missions/goals (mean = 2.83) and teaching and learning quality (mean = 2.53) indicators are stretched on the positive side of the curve and are above the mean. That means that the majority of the respondents ranked other indicators above 2.53 and 2.83 for their priority position. Since rank number one is considered highest and eight the lowest, means that are small in value suggest the indicators are considered most important by the university leaders. In contrast, university ranking and international recognition indicators' distributions are extremely skewed to the negative side of the curve and their tails stretch on the side below the mean. It can be interpreted that the majority of respondents ranked these two indicators as having very low priority. In other words, the frequency numbers of respondents who ranked the university indicator (mean = 6.77) as priority number seven and international recognition as priority number eight were extremely high compared to other indicators (see Table 4.14 for more details). The next analysis considers patterns of frequency response for each indicator against the eight-point ranking scale. Table 4.14 presents a summary of the data.

In examining the frequencies of each indicator on the eight-point priority ranking scale, Table 4.14 describes an overall trend pattern for each indicator. As can be seen, the indicators can be classified in three different prioritised ranking levels: highly prioritised (approximately 80% ranking 1–3), prioritised at an average level (approximately 75% ranking 4–6), and prioritised at a low level (approximately 80% ranking 7–8).

University missions/goals and the teaching and learning quality indicators are classified as the highly prioritised indicators. The university missions/goals indicator was ranked mostly in positions one to three, so it was considered a very highly

prioritised indicator. Not only did this indicator receive higher rankings, it was also done by the majority of the Vietnamese HE leaders (95/179 ranking it as either 1 or 2). The teaching and learning quality indicator had the same trend pattern, as most of the participants (139/179 participants) rated this indicator one to three. This can be interpreted to mean that teaching and learning quality was an important indicator to Vietnamese HE leaders, and it was highly prioritised as well.

As can be seen in Table 4.14, there are four indicators grouped in the average prioritised level, including the research quality, human resources quality, customers' expectations, and market's demand. Table 4.14 showed that there was an average rate in ranking these indicators in numbers four to six (approximately 100-130/179 participants rated these indicators either numbers 4, 5 or 6). At the average prioritised level, 130/179 participants rated human resources quality numbers 4–6. This ranking pattern confirmed the importance of the human resources indicator in improving the quality of Vietnamese HE and its critical role in implementing the reform in HE. Similarly, the research quality began to attract Vietnamese leaders' attention; however, as 130/179 participants rated 4-6 in their priority, it can be understood that the research quality indicator received only an average priority level. This average trend pattern of research quality was entirely logical, as research activities are not currently highly valued in Vietnamese HE. Simultaneously, the customers' expectations indicator had the same trend pattern. Most participants ranked it in the position of 4–6 (113/179 participants). This implies that the customers' expectations are beginning to gain attention among Vietnamese HE leaders, although they are still ranked at an average level. In addition, Vietnamese HE leaders also recognised the impacts of market's demand and determined it as an indicator which reframes their institutional education quality.

The university ranking and international recognition indicators were recognised as low-priority indicators. Table 4.14 shows that 137/179 and 156/179 participants rated university ranking and international recognition respectively as their last priorities (ranking seven and eight). This can be interpreted to suggest that university ranking and international recognition indicators have not been prioritised as one of the development strategies in Vietnamese HE context; and/or Vietnamese HE leaders are realistic in their current situation, as university ranking and international recognition are high-level indicators that are currently out of reach of Vietnamese HE.

The next analysis in this section focuses on the most extreme situations by analysing the indicators with the highest number one ranking and the highest number eight ranking. Analysing the distribution of the frequency of priority number one (Table 4.14) indicates that the university missions/goals indicator was ascribed the highest priority (number one) by the participants. There were 66 participants out of 179 (36.9%) who ranked this indicator as number one. The second highest frequency of priority number one was attributed to the teaching and learning quality indicator (42 out of 179; 23.5%). The third-ranked number one indicator was the market's demand indicator (36 out of 179; 20.1%); while 23 out of 179 participants (12.8%) thought that the human resources indicator was important and ranked it number one in their priority. Other indicators such as customers' expectations and international recognition were not highly ranked in the first priority (9 and 2 out of 179, 5% and 1.1% respectively); and the university ranking indicator stood out in this ranking, as no participant thought that this was the most important issue and should be the first priority, from their leadership perspectives.

As mentioned above, this analysis also identifies participants' lowest priority indicator with the highest ranking number eight. In contrast to the frequency of participants noting the university missions/goals indicator as number one (the first priority), the international recognition indicator received the highest frequency of priority number eight or the least important issue to participants. As can be seen in Table 4.14, international recognition was considered a low-priority indicator, with 119 out of 179 (66.5%) of HE leaders considering it not important. Only 35 respondents (19.6%) rated the university ranking indicator as their last priority (number eight); and very few participants believed that other indicators were less important and rated them as their last priority. In particular, no one rated teaching and learning quality number eight in their ranking. This suggested that within current HE conditions in Vietnam, leaders do not prioritise international recognition or the university ranking indicator in their leadership. The following bar chart illustrates these frequencies graphically.

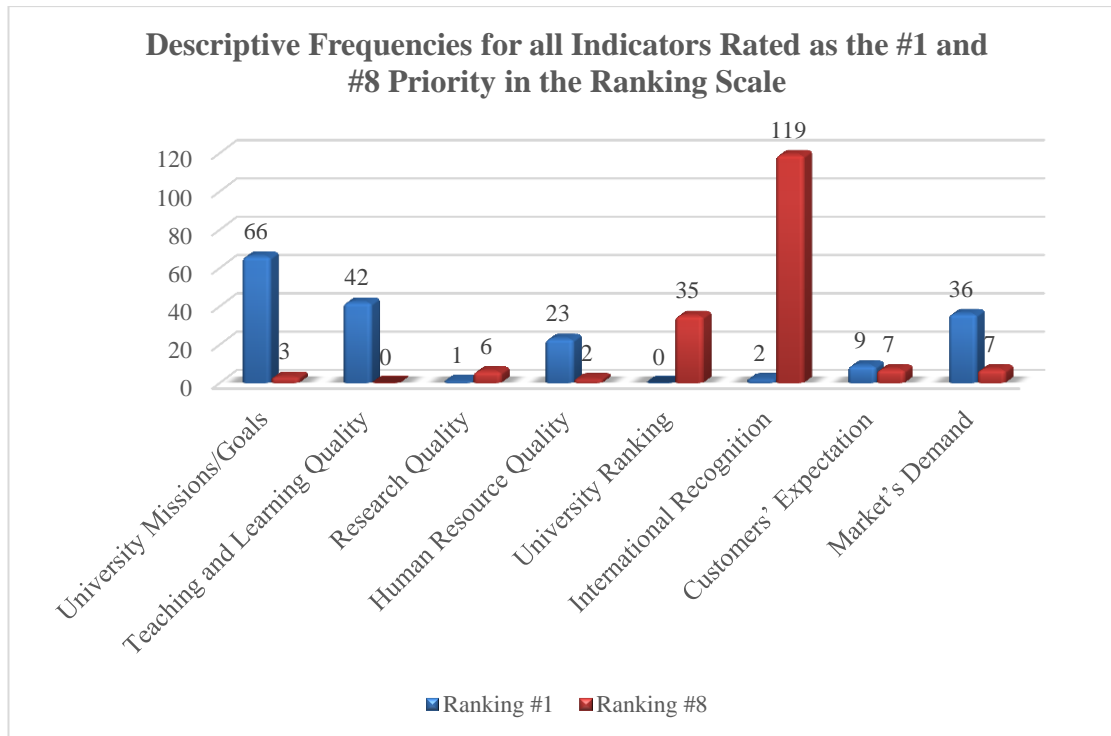


Figure 4.1. Descriptive frequencies for indicators rated as the first and the last priority.

As mentioned above, data in the ranking scale were presented with the purpose of examining the indicators which were most frequently rated most important (number one) and least important (number eight). As shown in Figure 4.1, the university missions/goals indicator was rated as the number one priority as it was important to 66 of the participants (36.9%), while international recognition was considered the number eight priority, as it was the least important indicator to participants (119/179 participants, 66.5%). The comparison illustrated in Figure 4.1 shows a reverse in ranking the teaching and learning quality and the university ranking indicators. While 42 participants (23.5%) rated teaching and learning as their first priority (ranked number one) and no one (0%) ranked this indicator as number eight, 35 participants (19.6%) rated university ranking as their last priority and no one (0%) mentioned it as their first priority indicator.

As shown in the methodology chapter, four demographic variables were considered. The ranking analysis was conducted to see how the different

demographic variables ranked the eight indicators. The analysis also focused on the sub-groups of each variable to see how different groups prioritised and ranked the indicators.

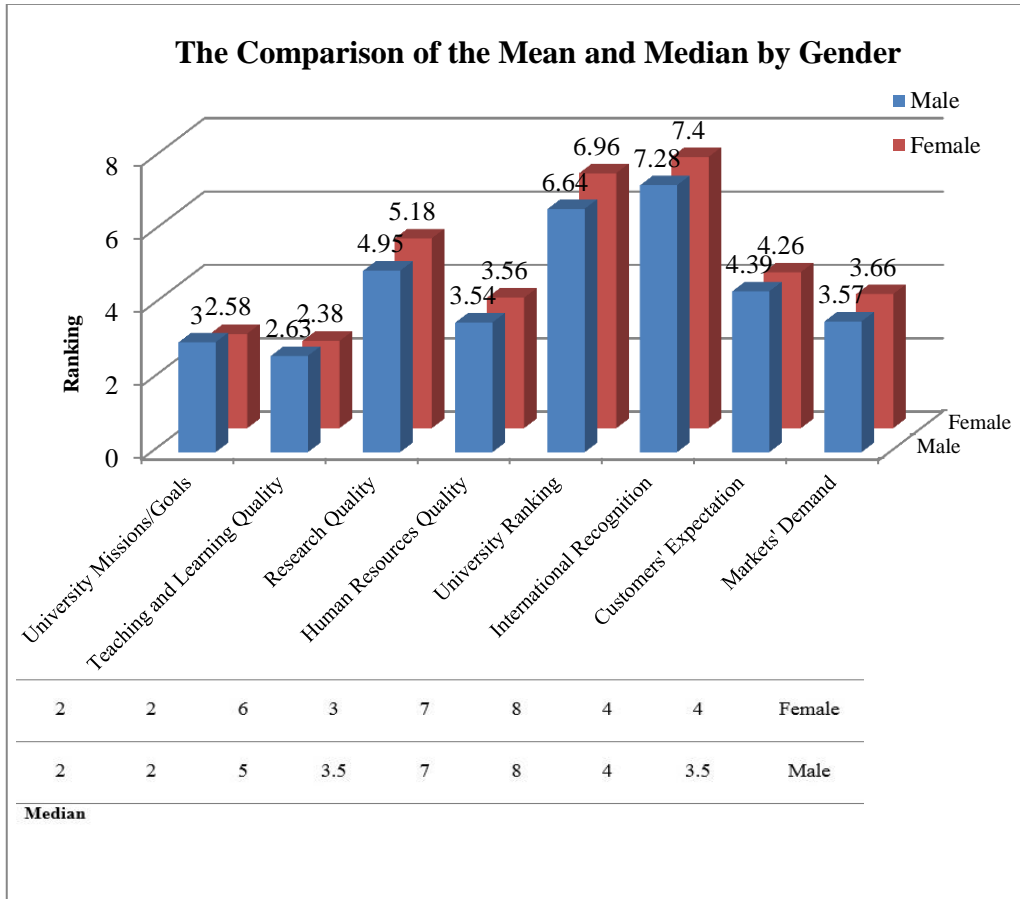


Figure 4.2. The comparison of the mean and median by gender.

As can be seen in Figure 4.2, the graph presents the means of ranking responses for eight indicators and the medians are presented in the table below the graph. There is little difference on the means and medians of eight indicators between male and female leaders. Particularly, the variance on the means was between 0.02 and 0.42. The most variance on the mean between male and female is on the university missions/goals indicator (0.42), and the lowest variance is the means between the teaching and learning quality indicator. Similarly, the medians on ranking eight indicators by male and female respondents are slightly different. Some

indicators have the same medians on males' and females' ranking, such as the university missions/goals, university ranking, international recognition, and customers' expectations. The variance on the medians of other indicators is not significant. They are in the range 0.5–1.0. The most significant difference on the median is on the research quality indicator.

As mentioned above, the analysis in this section focused on the indicators with the highest number one ranking (university missions/goals) and the highest number eight ranking (international recognition). In considering demographic variables, there was little variance between male and female leaders in their ranking of the university missions/goals as the highest priority indicator. While 38.4% of female leaders (28 out of 73 respondents) rated this indicator as a high priority or as the most important (ranking number one), 35.8% of male leaders (38 out of 106 respondents) gave it the same priority (rank number one). This can be interpreted to mean that the perspectives of male and female leaders in Vietnamese HE institutions are similar and they equally rate the importance of having robust and clear goals and mission statements.

Amongst the 119 participants who rated the international recognition indicator as the least important indicator (number 8), there were 69 out of 106 males (65.1%) and 50 out of 73 females (68.5%). There was no great variance between these sub-groups. Only 3.4% of variance was recorded in the gender category; hence male and female Vietnamese leaders do not differentiate very much in their ranking priority and perspective. The explanation for this is discussed in Chapter 5.

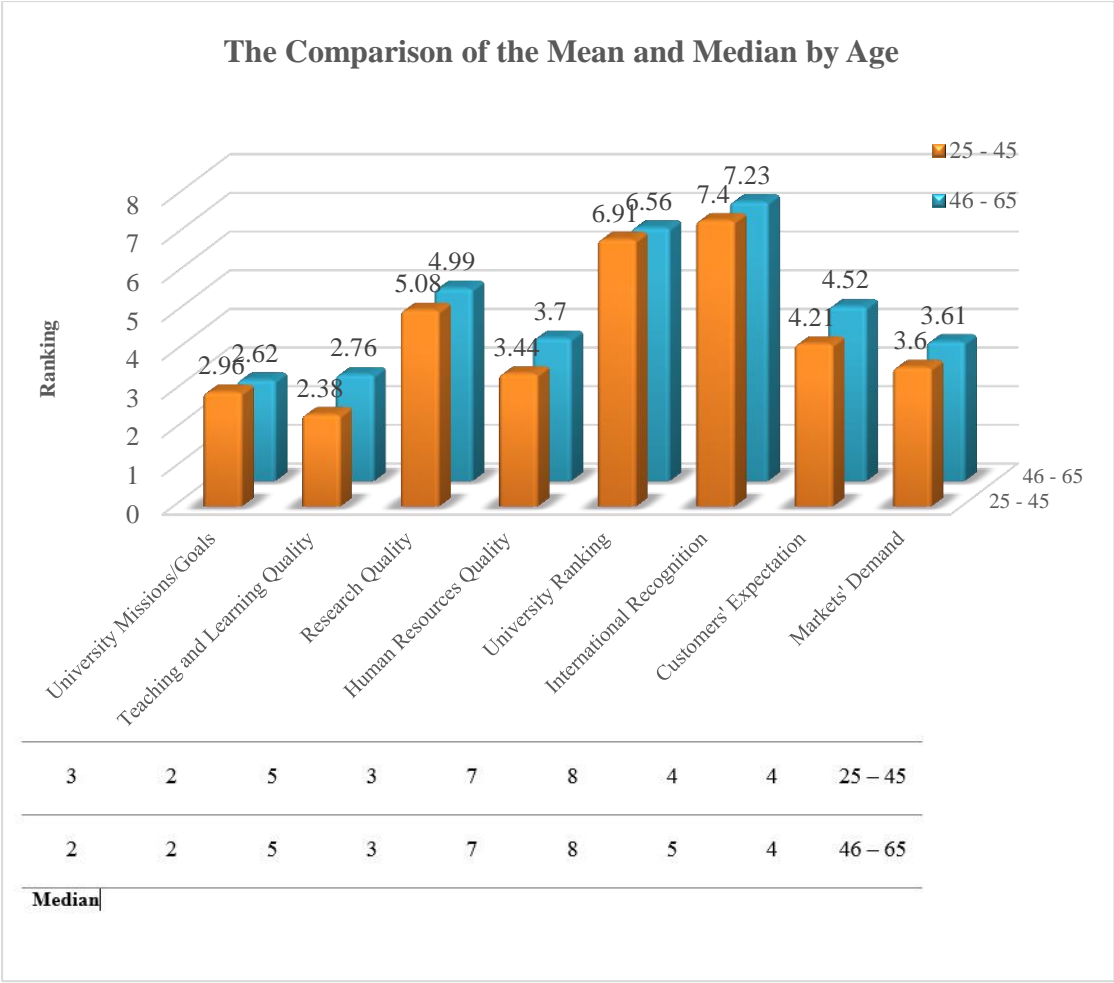


Figure 4.3. The comparison of the mean and median by age.

Figure 4.3 compares the means and medians of responses from respondents in the age ranges 25–45 and 46–65. Overall, the variance between eight indicators on the means is not significant, and the variance range is between 0.01 and 0.38. The smallest difference on the mean between the two groups is on the market’s demand indicator (0.01), and the biggest difference is recorded in the teaching and learning quality indicator (0.38).

Similarly, little variance on the median was found in this analysis. In particular, some indicators have the same median between two groups, including teaching and learning quality (Median = 2.0), research quality (median = 5.0), human resources quality (median = 3.0), university ranking (median = 7.0), international recognition

(median = 8.0), and market's demand (median = 4.0). As can be seen in the table below the graph in Figure 4.3, only the university missions/goals and customers' expectations indicators have slight difference in the median (median variance = 1.0). Thus, it can be seen that the ranking average between groups aged 25–45 and 46–65 is very similar, and the majority of participants rated the eight indicators identically or very similarly.

When examining the indicator with the number one ranking (highest priority), university missions/goals by age, the study found that there was a slight difference between sub-groups (see Figure 4.3). Figure 4.3 shows that more participants in the older age group (46–65) rated the university missions/goals indicator as their highest priority than in the younger age group. It can therefore be seen that there is a significant difference in leadership priority by age category among Vietnamese leaders. The older they are, the more likely they are to rank the university missions/goals indicator as the most important.

In considering the international recognition indicator (the highest number eight ranking) by age, the study found that the sub-groups in the category of age did not reflect a significant difference in their rankings. While there were 34/66 participants in the 25–45 group who rated international recognition number eight, 32/66 participants in the 46–65 group also rated it number eight. Generally, the variance between sub-groups in the age category was not remarkable, except for the oldest age group, over 55.

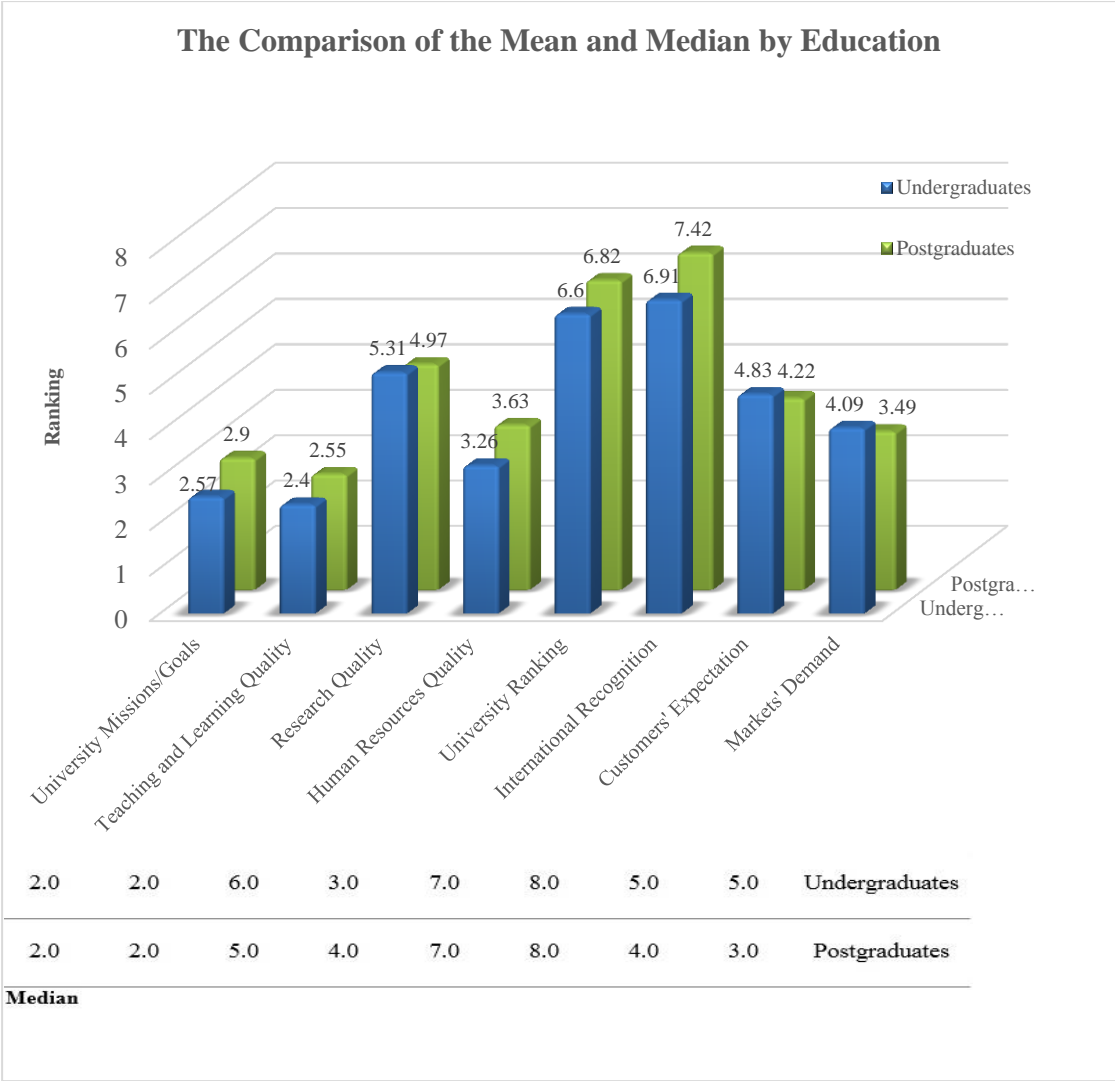


Figure 4.4. The comparison of the mean and median by education.

The average ranking of the eight indicators (means) by highest education level (undergraduate or postgraduate) of the respondent is shown in Figure 4.4, and it does not reveal significant differences. Although the variance on the mean between these two groups is slightly bigger compared to the mean variances on the gender and age groups, this variance is still very small (range 0.15–0.61). However, there is a significant difference on the median of market’s demand indicator, which shows a median variance range at 2.0. While the majority of participants who hold postgraduate degrees rated market’s demand number three, the majority of participants who hold undergraduate degrees ranked it number five in their priority.

In addition, the analysis of the medians of these groups also found more median variance (range 1.0) in other indicators, such as research quality, human resources quality, and customers' expectations. Those with undergraduate degrees and those with postgraduate degrees have similar medians in their ranking of the indicators of university missions/goals, teaching and learning quality, university ranking, and international recognition.

In examining the effect of the demographic variable education background on the highest number one ranking indicator, the current study found that participants who hold a postgraduate degree were more supportive of the university missions/goals indicator than those with undergraduate degrees only. It is quite logical as the number of participants who hold postgraduate degree was dominant in this study (146/179 participants). Similar to the trend in the age group, the rate of respondents who ranked the university missions/goals indicator as the most important also increased in the same direction with their educational background. The higher the degree they held, the higher they ranked this indicator. This result is quite understandable in the current context of Vietnamese education. As more and more people enhance their educational qualifications, the number of people who hold an M.A degree is rapidly increasing. Therefore, their educational background partly influences their leadership perspectives in prioritizing these indicators.

In conjunction with the result of ranking the university missions/goals indicator as the highest priority, the number of participants who hold a postgraduate degree and rated the international recognition indicator at number eight was also outstanding. Of the 119 participants who rated the international recognition indicator at number eight priority (the least important), 96 held a postgraduate degree, and

only 19 held undergraduate degrees. Four participants did not specify their qualification. The discussion on this result is presented in the next chapter.

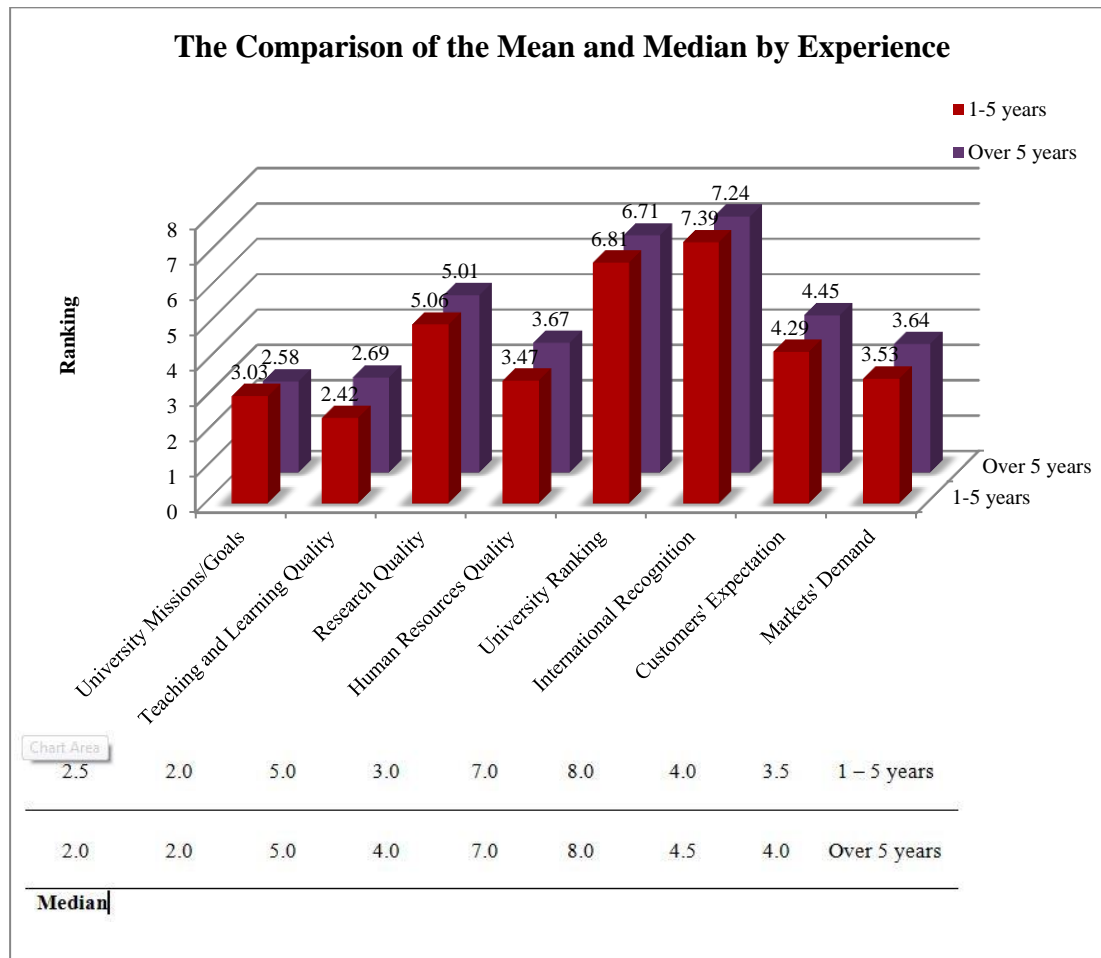


Figure 4.5. The comparison of the mean and median by experience.

As can be seen in Figure 4.5, there is a very slight difference in the mean between the sub-groups of experience (1-5 years and over 5 years). The mean variance range is between 0.1 (university ranking) and 0.45 (university missions/goals). Figure 4.5 also shows the comparison of the median between these groups of experience in the table below the graph; however, non-significant differences are found between the 1-5 years and the over 5 years of experience groups. The median variance range is between 0 and 0.5, and these sub-groups have the same medians on some indicators, including teaching and learning quality, research quality, university ranking, and international recognition. Overall, the

median difference between these sub-groups of experience is very small, and it is the smallest variance range in the comparison of the medians of the four demographic variables (gender, age, education, and experience). The discussion of these variances appears in the next chapter.

When the study examined the university missions/goals indicator as the highest number one ranking by experience, it found that there was a slight variance in the number of participants who rated this indicator as their first priority in the sub-groups. Of the 66 participants who rated university missions/goals as their number one priority, 29 had 1–5 years of leadership experience, 36 had over 5 years of leadership experience, and 1 did not specify their experience (considered as missing data). Overall, in spite of their experience, Vietnamese leaders in HE institutions share a common perspective in their leadership by prioritising the university missions/goals indicator.

Although the variance was very small between the sub-groups of 1–5 years and over 5 years of leadership experience in their ranking of the international recognition indicator as the lowest priority (rank number eight), the variance between these groups is worthy of analysis. Of the 119 participants who rated this indicator number eight, 67 people had 1-5 years of leadership experience, 50 of them had over 5 years of leadership experience, and 2 people did not specify their experience (considered as missing data). This can be interpreted to suggest that participants' leadership experience slightly influenced their ranking priority. The next chapter discusses this variance in detail.

In summary, the research found that internal issues (including university missions/goals, teaching and learning quality, research quality, and human resources quality) were considered more important than other indicators of external issues

(university ranking, international recognition, customers' expectations, and market's demand). The findings that indicated the greater importance of internal matters are considered in the next chapter. To clarify the reasons why Vietnamese leaders considered one indicator as more important than the others, open-ended questions were added at the end of the data collection survey to obtain comprehensive responses. The following section reports the textual responses to the open-ended questions.

4.2.3 The textual responses to open-ended questions

In this section, an explanation for Vietnamese leaders' priorities in ranking the indicators as the highest and lowest priority is presented. The two specific questions employed to collect data were: (1) "Reason for ranking the indicator as the highest priority"; and (2) "Reason for ranking the indicator as the lowest priority." In analysing the textual responses to the open-ended questions, word repetitions, similarities, and key words in context techniques were used to identify themes in this qualitative data. According to Ryan and Bernard (2003), the word repetitions, similarities, and key words in context techniques are the easiest and most popular ways to identify themes. Since topics occur and recur in the corpus of data, the word repetitions technique was used (Ryan & Bernard, 2003). Searching for similarities by making systematic comparisons across the textual responses assisted the researcher in identifying themes in this analysis. Additionally, since the key words in context technique draws on a simple observation, the analysis took a look closely at the words in the textual open-ended responses and identified themes for the next analysis section (Section 4.2.3.1 and Section 4.2.3.2).

Although there were 36 missing cases out of 179 for question 1, and 40 missing cases out of 179 for question 2, constituting 20.1% and 22.3% respectively for the missing data, the written responses were still rich and broad enough to be informative. The textual responses were sorted into the two main groups: explanations for the highest priority indicator and explanations for the lowest priority indicator. As presented in Section 4.2.2, the university missions/goals indicator was considered the highest priority. Sixty-six respondents out of 179 (36.9%) rated it as the most important priority (number one). In contrast, the international recognition indicator was the least important priority: most people rated it number 8 (119 out of 179; 66.5%). The following section clarifies respondents' explanations as to why they chose the responses they did for the highest and lowest priority ranking.

4.2.3.1 The reasons for ranking university missions/goals indicator as high priority

Broadly, analysis of the written content identified three main themes in participants' responses. Respondents believed that (i) University missions/goals is the leading indicator which has an impact on other targets and activities in a HE institution. In other words, these respondents believed that if they can accomplish their university missions/goals, the seven other indicators will follow. (ii) University missions/goals are the backbone, the foundation for a university's development. Since these Vietnamese HE leaders value each indicator as equally important, they determined that the university missions/goals' accomplishment would be a strong foundation to drive other indicators to develop. (iii) University missions/goals cover all other indicators, as once these Vietnamese HE leaders can solve the issues in the university missions/goals indicator, all other indicators would synchronise, and work properly to develop their institution.

The university missions/goals indicator is the leading indicator, which has an impact on other targets and activities in a HE institution. Twenty-five out of the 66 respondents (37.9%) who indicated that the university missions/goals indicator was the first priority in their ranking explained that this indicator had a great influence on other indicators. For instance, one respondent stated:

University missions/goals is the oriented indicator which orientates and leads other indicators to achieve their common goals.

Subjectively, these respondents believed that once the university missions/goals indicator has been achieved, it will lead other indicators to follow these missions and goals. In addition, some respondents added that when university missions and goals are well understood, proper policies and directions in teaching and learning strategies would be well-established. These respondents outlined that other issues, including human resources, training programs, and students' outcomes, are also improved and developed once the university missions and goals are determined and implemented. These respondents strongly believed that if they established their university missions and goals, and were then able to successfully achieve these goals, they would be successful in all other indicators. They also clarified that any institutional activity had to serve this common goal. In explaining this ranking priority, one senior leader clearly stated:

We have to understand our college's missions and goals thoroughly in order to establish proper policies and strategic planning for other activities such as teaching and learning quality and human resources development.

Generally, the study found a common perspective in these respondents' ranking priorities in that they believed that the university missions/goals indicator is

the critical issue that influences and leads all other indicators (teaching and learning quality, research quality, human resources quality, university ranking, international recognition, customers' expectations, and market's demand) to achievement.

University missions/goals are the backbone, the foundation for university's development. There are 15 out of 66 respondents (22.7%) who believed this. Although these respondents had the same perception that the university missions/goals indicator was the most important, their explanation was quite different. They generally believed that the university missions and goals should be the first priority in their institution since it is the foundation that fosters a university's development. In supporting this priority, one respondent stated:

The university missions/goals is the first prioritised indicator since it is important to establish next strategic [institutional] goals [based on the university missions/goals.]

These respondents explained that they valued each indicator equally and they expected to achieve success in each indicator by establishing a strong foundation. For that, they determined the university missions/goals' achievement would be a strong foundation to push all other indicators to succeed. Some respondents also indicated that according to their university's status as a newly established university, the missions and goals would be the prerequisite to establishing a solid foundation and obvious directions and strategies for their development. One respondent stated:

If we could not attain the university missions and goals, we would be unable to complete any other indicator.

In analysing these textual responses, the study found the explanation for these respondents' priorities contrasted with other respondents' above. Specifically, they rated university missions and goals as the backbone of their university, a strong foundation to foster other indicators up to success and develop their institutions, while other respondents, as stated above, believed that university missions and goals were leading their institutional activities and other indicators to success, as once they were successful in achieving the university missions/goals, all other indicators will follow that achievement. In sum, 22.7% of respondents indicated that university missions/goals ranked as their first priority; they believed this indicator could establish a strong background for further development of their institution.

The university missions/goals indicator covers all other indicators: Among 66 respondents who rated this indicator as their first priority, there were only 10 respondents (15.7%) who stated that the university missions/goals included all other indicators in their structure. They explained that when the missions and goals of a university were established, it was possible for them to include any other indicators mentioned in the ranking survey within this indicator. Additionally, these respondents also believed that since other indicators were included in this indicator, their institution should only aim to achieve this overall target, and then other goals would automatically follow. In other words, once these Vietnamese HE leaders can solve the issues in the university missions/goals indicator, all other indicators would synchronise, and work properly to develop their institution. However, this was the view of a small number of respondents, and it appears clear that the missions/goals indicator cannot cover all the other seven indicators. For instance, an institution providing technical training is unlikely to be concerned about university ranking or international recognition in their missions/goals at the time of its establishment.

Instead, its missions and goals would be to meet market's demand and customers' expectations in its training programs. A detailed discussion of this point follows in Chapter 5.

The study also recorded some individual explanations for ranking priorities that are worth considering, even though they did not constitute a common theme. One respondent stated:

The university missions/goals indicator determined the existence of an institution [since a university cannot operate properly without a specific mission or goal.]

Another respondent argued:

If a university failed to achieve its missions and goals, all other indicators would fail as well.

Generally, although these respondents had their own argument to support their ranking priority, they all had a common sense that the university missions/goals indicator was the most important and their first priority in leadership.

4.2.3.2 The reasons for ranking the international recognition indicator as the lowest priority

To understand participants' priorities in ranking the international recognition indicator as the least important priority, the study analysed the textual responses for open-ended question number two. The word repetitions, similarities, and word in context techniques were used to identify themes in this qualitative data. Two main themes were identified that explain Vietnamese HE leaders' ranking priority.

Respondents believed that: (i) they need to implement indicators to serve from local to global demands, as the international recognition indicator was considered as a further target which could only be reached on the back of other indicators. In the current Vietnamese HE context, international recognition is not seen as a priority issue. Universities need to serve the social domestic demands in Vietnam before going beyond for international recognition. (ii) The international recognition indicator was considered by respondents as an unrealistic goal, as their institutions' capabilities are limited in capturing international recognition. At this point, Vietnamese HE leaders highly value international recognition of Vietnamese HE; however, their institutions' current capabilities are very limited and restrict them from approaching this target. Therefore, these respondents determined that the international recognition indicator was unrealistic for the current context of Vietnamese HE.

Implementing indicators to serve from local to global demands: The study found that 53 out of 117 respondents (45.3%) rated the international recognition indicator as their lowest priority. These respondents explained that international recognition was less important than the other indicators in their current circumstances, and they could only reach this indicator when they successfully obtained others. They believed that in order to achieve international recognition, they first had to establish a well-prepared foundation for their institutions, in which the indicators of university missions/goals, teaching and learning quality, research quality, and human resources quality were prioritised. They also outlined that the indicators of customers' expectations, university ranking, and the market's demand needed to be met before international considerations could be prioritised. Participants

felt that global demand that would arise from international recognition would be achieved on the back of these indicators. One respondent stated:

Meeting our local demands is our prerequisite. When our social demands are satisfied in domestic, then we will target further goals such as international recognition.

Additionally, these respondents clarified that the international recognition indicator was a high-level target. Given their current circumstances and their institutional capacities, they are unable to achieve this indicator due to its challenges. Instead, they would firstly attain other indicators, such as teaching and learning quality, research quality, and human resources quality. Eventually, they could achieve the international recognition indicator after all other indicators were satisfied. Therefore, they prioritised the international recognition indicator after the others in their ranking. Furthermore, they also believed that other indicators would be a stable foundation to reach the international recognition indicator in the future.

The international recognition indicator was considered as an unrealistic goal, as their institutions' capabilities were limited to achieve the international recognition. In analysing the textual open-ended responses, the results showed that the word repetitions such as “unrealistic goal” and “out of reach” occurred many times in the explanations of respondents. For instance, one respondent stated:

The international recognition is very unrealistic in our circumstance. We might think about it in the next 20 years when other indicators [listed in the ranking priorities] are satisfied.

As stated above, Vietnamese HE leaders highly valued this indicator in their development; however, it was their capacities that restricted them from approaching this target. In analysing the respondents' explanation, the study found that 25 out of 117 respondents (21.4%) agreed that international recognition was the last indicator in their ranking priority. However, their explanation for this priority was quite different. These respondents explained that their institutions did not have enough capacity to satisfy the criteria to reach international recognition. One respondent stated:

Our university was newly established, it would be impossible for us to reach the international recognition. Other indicators should be prioritised.

In addition, these respondents strongly believed that international recognition was an outreach goal for them, as they found many challenges restrained them in reaching this indicator. For instance, their institution's teaching and learning quality had not even satisfied the quality assessment of the Department of Testing and Educational Quality Assessment. The limited infrastructure and equipment in their institution posed great challenges for their development as well. Therefore, they confirmed that international recognition was beyond their capabilities in their current circumstances.

While many other indicators had not been completed successfully, and there were many challenges in implementing these indicators, these respondents believed that international recognition was perhaps the most unrealistic goal in their current circumstances. Some respondents added that in order to reach this indicator, they needed many years of development with great effort. Some respondents did not

believe that their institution was able to reach the international standards and obtain recognition, not even in the Asian region.

In summary, the international recognition indicator was the least important indicator to Vietnamese HE leaders. They firmly believed that they did not have enough capacity to successfully achieve this indicator. Moreover, they considered this indicator as unrealistic and unable to be pursued in their current situation. As a result, these respondents gave the lowest priority in their ranking to the international recognition indicator.

Some explanations for ranking the international recognition indicator as the least important are worthy of analysis even though they did not constitute a common theme. These explanations indicated that the international recognition indicator should be a long-term institutional target. Although respondents stated that they needed many years to obtain this indicator, they did not specify a particular timeframe. One respondent did not even think that the international recognition indicator was an essential indicator for his/her institution's development, as he/she claimed the institution was a small, newly established college that targeted local demands only. Those respondents who gave open-ended explanations allowed the researcher to more deeply understand their ranking. Their responses also partly reflected the current Vietnamese HE context, which is discussed in depth in the next chapter.

4.2.4 Summary of the qualitative results

With a sample size of 179 participants, this study found that the university missions/goals indicator obtained the highest ranking as the most important indicator, as 66 out of 179 (36.9%) respondents rated this indicator as number one. In contrast,

the international recognition indicator was considered the least important, since 119 out of 179 (66.5%) respondents rated it as number eight. The study also found that teaching and learning quality was always listed as a high priority. It was ranked the second most important indicator after the university missions/goals. In particular, it is worth noting that no respondent ranked teaching and learning quality as their lowest priority. The descriptive statistics also showed the priority order for each indicator by synthesising the respondents' ranking. Their prioritised ranking order was (1) university missions/goals, (2) teaching and learning quality, (3) human resources quality, (4) customer's expectation, (5) market's demand, (6) research quality, (7) university ranking, and (8) international recognition.

To understand the respondents' ranking priority, the two textual open-ended questions collected respondents' explanations. The study found that there were three main themes explaining the leadership perceptions of Vietnamese HE leaders in ranking the university missions/goals indicator as the most important priority. Similarly, two main themes characterised respondents' perceptions in ranking the international recognition indicator as the least important. In sum, the study shows how Vietnamese HE leaders prioritise eight indicators addressed by MOET's educational development strategies. The discussion of the results of this qualitative descriptive statistics on the ranking scale is presented in the next chapter.

4.3 SUMMARY OF THE CHAPTER

As noted in Chapter 1, the main aims of this study were to explore Vietnamese HE leaders' inclination to adopt transformational leadership and their priorities in response to the eight indicators addressed by MOET's educational development strategies. To address these aims, three main research questions were designed based

on the literature review, to systematically uncover both Vietnamese leadership styles and leaders' priorities in the current national context.

The study employed the nine-factor MLQ instrument and the ranking scale within the open-ended questions via multi-method research. The quantitative results of this study confirmed that the MLQ nine-factor was valid and reliable in investigating Vietnamese HE leaders at both item level and factor level. The MANOVA was conducted to test the hypothesis that there would be a significant difference between demographic variables – gender, age, education, and experience – on the nine factors of the MLQ. In stage-one analysis of the multivariate test statistics, the study confirmed that no significant difference was found between these variables. In stage-two analysis of the multivariate test statistics, the sub-groups in the demographic variables of age, education, and experience were combined to increase the sample size. The re-run MANOVA did not reveal any significant difference between these groups. However, the observed power in stage-two analysis was very low (22.4% for age, 30.8% for experience, and 80.9% for education), which implied that there were more chances for significant differences between these sub-groups when impact factors such as sample size and the MLQ factors were changed.

The qualitative descriptive statistics on the ranking scale results of this study indicated that the university missions/goals indicator was the most important to Vietnamese HE leaders, and the international recognition was the least important indicator. The descriptive statistics explored the ranking order of the Vietnamese HE leaders' priority and found the order from the most important to the least important indicators as follows: university missions/goals, teaching and learning quality, human resources quality, customers' expectations, market's demand, research quality, university ranking, and international recognition. The study also analysed the

descriptive frequencies in the university missions/goals (ranked number 1) and the international recognition (ranked number 8) indicators to compare the sub-groups in the demographic variables: gender, age, education, and experience. The study found that there was no great difference in the sub-groups of gender, but significant differences were found in the sub-groups of age, education and experience in ranking university missions/goals as the most important indicator. Similarly, the study also found no great variance between sub-groups in the gender and age categories, but differences were found in the groups of education and experience in ranking the international recognition indicator as the least important.

The textual responses to open-ended questions provided a better understanding about Vietnamese HE leaders' priorities. Respondents explained their ranking priorities in two written responses to open-ended questions. The study found that three main themes explained the priority for the most important indicator, and two main themes clarified their ranking of the least important indicator. The study presented both the quantitative and qualitative descriptive statistics on the ranking results and findings sequentially. The results and findings in this chapter were confirmed by statistical logic, and explored the explanations for Vietnamese HE leaders' ranking priorities in an understandable sequence. The discussion of these results and findings is presented in the next chapter.

Chapter 5: Discussion

5.1 INTRODUCTION

The previous chapter presented the results and key findings from the multi-factor leadership questionnaires (MLQ) administered to Vietnamese HE leaders, and the leaders' priority rankings of the eight HE reform indicators issued by MOET. It is important that the interpretation and discussion do not remain focused on the data analysis, results and findings only, but provide a broader and comprehensive understanding of the HE leaders' leadership styles and perceptions of MOET's quality improvement indicators by reflecting on related research and realistically linking this to the circumstances of the local context. In addition, the logical sequence of a research finding is critical. Therefore, this chapter revisits the research questions posed in Chapter 1 and structures the discussion in four sections. The first part, Section 5.2, links the findings of the quantitative section to fully understand how they may affect the MLQ approach in Vietnamese HE leaders (Research Question number 1). Section 5.3 focuses on the qualitative findings to explain the ranking behaviours of Vietnamese HE leaders in the Mekong Delta regarding MOET's principles for quality improvement in Vietnam (Research Question number 2). Finally, Section 5.4 attempts to seek and explain any relationships that may exist between the Vietnamese HE leaders' leadership styles and their ranking priority (Research question number 3). This discussion chapter closes with Section 5.5, a summary.

5.2 LEADERSHIP STYLES OF VIETNAMESE HIGHER EDUCATION LEADERS

RQ#1: To what extent are Vietnamese HE leaders in the Mekong Delta inclined to adopt transformational leadership?

5.2.1 Leadership practice of Vietnamese higher education leaders

As stated in Chapter 2, transactional leadership seems to be the most relevant leadership style in Vietnamese HE, particularly in the State sector, as it is highly structured and leaders are required to manage and implement the State approved mandate. However, MOET's reform agenda and strategies require leaders to be more inclined towards the transformational leadership style to fully support the reforms and transform the Vietnamese HE system. Following MOET's reforms, this study investigated Vietnamese HE leaders' leadership styles and perspectives on the quality improvement issues that are outlined by MOET in order to inform MOET about the current perspectives of Vietnamese HE leaders on the reforms.

The findings validated that the MLQ instrument is appropriate for investigating leadership styles of Vietnamese HE leaders. The study showed that the psychometric of the MLQ instrument is robust at both item and factor level. The multivariate analysis of variance tested the hypothesis that there is any difference in the influence of the demographic data (i.e. gender, age, education, and experience) on the nine factors in the MLQ instrument in two stages. Since the sample sizes were too small when disaggregated, the sub-groups were combined to increase the sample sizes in stage two analysis. However, there was no significant difference found in the first attempt at analysis, as expected. The multivariate analysis retested the same hypothesis a second time with larger sample sizes by regrouping the sub-groups in

the age, education, and experience categories. Despite increasing the sample by reducing the number of categories, no significant differences were found between the demographic data and the nine factors in this analysis when considering the overall results. However, when considering individual factors, variance was found in the means of the following factors: laissez-faire (LF) (in the age group); idealised influence attribute (IIA), inspirational motivation (IM), individual consideration (IC), and management-by-exception active (MBEA) (in the education group); and idealised influence behaviours (IIB), inspirational motivation (IM), and intellectual stimulation (IS) (in the experience group). The following discussion elaborates on the implications of these findings.

In the literature of leadership practice, many researchers have employed the MLQ instruments to explore leadership styles and effectiveness (Barbuto et al., 2007; Basham, 2010; Bryman; 2007; Jung & Sosik, 2002) and have demonstrated the effectiveness of the MLQ. In the Vietnamese context, the MLQ was used by Dao and Han (2013), Ho (2013), and Luu (2010). These authors determined that the MLQ is appropriate for researching leadership styles in Vietnam, confirming face validity of the instrument for the study reported here. However, none of these studies focused on leadership in the Vietnamese HE sector, which may be considered as a gap in the literature on HE. The findings from this study are broadly consistent with the literature that the MLQ is valid and robust in the Vietnamese context, and contributes to the literature of leadership in HE as a valid instrument to investigate leadership styles and practices in Vietnamese HE.

As stated in Chapter 2 (Section 2.2.1, p. 32), transformational leadership underpins this study with the assumption that it is the best option for supporting the reforms of the Vietnamese HE system – which relate to HE structure; the qualities of

staff, including values and work ethics; and the administration system – to achieve international recognition. Therefore, the analysis of the nine factors of the MLQ based on gender, age, education, and experience of Vietnamese leaders aims to identify the differences in their leadership to understand the extent to which they are inclined to adopt the transformational leadership style in their practice. The following discussion interprets Vietnamese HE leaders' leadership practice by gender, age, education and experience.

5.2.2 Leadership practice and gender of Vietnamese higher education leaders

Historically, leadership in Vietnamese HE has been dominated by males who themselves have highly authoritarian leadership styles. Since the increased involvement of females in leadership roles, it is possible that gender may impact on leadership styles and effectiveness. In most leadership and management studies, there is a significant difference between male and female leaders in their leadership styles (Hugh, 2005; Kotur & Anbazhagan, 2014). Research has shown that female leaders tend to exhibit more transformational leadership behaviour than male leaders (Rohmann & Rowold, 2009).

As discussed in Chapter 2, transformational leadership is more focused on empowering workers, which seems most apt to support the reform in Vietnamese HE. However, contrary to other studies, this current study found that there is no significant difference between male and female leaders in their leadership styles. This finding is consistent with the findings from Alhourani's (2013) study, which argued that gender does not impact on leadership effectiveness in the Lebanese and Egyptian contexts. Alhourani (2013) investigated the leadership style of males and

females and concluded that there was no significant difference between the two groups of leaders in the three universities in Lebanon and Egypt.

Women in public organisations in Egypt are usually marginalised in reaching upper-level positions (Elkhouly & Sadfy, 2014), as they are under-rated in qualifications and abilities compared with men. Elkhouly and Sadfy (2014) also state that when comparing two leaders in the same leadership position, some respondents believed that male leaders are better than females. In the Vietnamese context, the representation of women in the positions of chair or vice chair of the people's committee has been much lower compared with men over the past two decades (Truong, 2008). Truong also stated that there are many challenges for female leaders in Vietnam, such as discrimination in employment, inequitable divisions of labour in the family, and early retirement age of 55, as opposed to 60 for men. However, the findings from this study show an opposite result to the literature on leadership practice by gender and the inequality arguments against female leaders.

This contradictory finding could be explained by the fact that recent urbanisation and globalisation and the increasing educational level of females in Vietnam could have influenced the results. The traditional view that Vietnamese women are less capable may not hold anymore (Druskat, 1994; Rohmann & Rowold, 2009). In addition, the Vietnamese National Assembly has adopted laws on gender equality, while the Government has developed and effectively carried out several strategies, policies and programmes of action on the advancement of women and gender equality (Vietnamese Prime Minister, 2011). It is plausible that as result of these government-led interventions and the changing education levels, the status of Vietnamese women has been enhanced and gaps between male and female in all aspects of politics, society, economics and education have been narrowed. In the

political field, in the Party's highest leadership body, the Politburo, the positions of Vice Chairwoman of the National Assembly and Vice State President are currently women. Hence, these national actions and policies of gender equality may be the key issues which influence the results of this study.

Additionally, Vietnamese women's qualifications and leadership positions in the Vietnamese academic context have also been recently enhanced. The percentage of women in leadership and management has been increasing. Several women even hold the rector position in State universities (Funnell & Dao, 2013). Although the number of female rectors in Vietnamese HE is very low, the qualifications, academic status, and leadership positions of Vietnamese women show that they have begun to compete with men in the academic workplace. This academic status of Vietnamese women may be the reason for non-significant differences between male and female leadership practices in this study.

Since many policies and strategic programs now support and enhance the status of Vietnamese woman, and advances have been made in women's education levels, the perception of female leadership has been changing in Vietnamese society. Women's ambitions to participate in and compete in the traditionally male-dominated arena of senior management in HE motivate their academic career, and drive their leadership style. Funnell and Dao (2013, p. 308) reported that a female rector, "rather than adhering to a single style of leadership, combines her male/female experiences through delegation and is inclusive and collaborative promoting participation, information sharing and team-building; strengthens her leadership and professional skills by being active in professional, social and women's organisations." It is this perception about leadership that may explain the

fact that no significant difference was seen between male and female leaders in their leadership styles in this study.

5.2.3 Leadership practice and the age of Vietnamese higher education leaders

Leadership is often associated with maturity, and leadership research has demonstrated that age can influence leadership styles and behaviours of leaders (Cox et al., 2014; Holden & Raffo, 2014; Oshagbemi, 2004). Cox et al. (2014) stated that generational differences describe a highly influential sub-culture element which impacts on an understanding of the perception of leadership styles in the Vietnamese context and they suggested further studies of cross-cultural leadership. Cox et al.'s (2014) investigation of leadership in the Vietnamese business sector found that there is a significant difference in leadership perspectives between older and younger leaders. Holden and Raffo (2014) also found that participants of different generations prefer different leadership styles. Despite the above research findings and the conventional wisdom, this study shows an inconsistent result to the literature: Vietnamese HE leaders from different age groups did not show any significant difference in their leadership styles. However, the findings from this study are in line with a leadership study in Pakistan. Sawati, Anwar, and Majoka (2013) demonstrated that there is no significant association between the leadership styles and the age of school leaders in Pakistan, but they claimed the large and unequal sample sizes in the demographic sub-groups of age may have influenced the results of their study.

In the Vietnamese context, the non-significant difference between leadership styles by age may be influenced by recent national projects on developing human resources throughout the country, where both younger and older leaders are trained

in similar practices. The intensity of training in which HE senior managers also participated can cause a ceiling effect. Obviously, the national human resources development strategies increase the educational level of Vietnamese human resources, and Vietnam has witnessed a trend towards younger people taking up leadership positions. It is worth noting again that people who benefited from these MOET initiatives to reform the HE sector (i.e. schemes such as Mekong 1000, Saigon 300, Hanoi 165) had to agree to work in a State university. Moreover, the majority of HE leaders who were recruited for the training, young and old, had received their academic training in a foreign institution/ university. For instance, if a person is trained for two years with government funding, they have a commitment to work for six years when they complete their study and return to Vietnam. These people, on return, are usually assigned in a leadership position such as head or vice head of a department, dean or vice dean of school, or director or vice director of a centre in a State institution. Certainly, these people are a mix of old and young (as illustrated in Table 4.5) and are talented enough to satisfy many of the criteria that MOET requires. Consequently, more and more young leaders (58.4 % are under 45 years old) with sufficient exposure to international practices hold key leadership positions in Vietnamese State organisations, including HE institutions/universities. Such background may have influenced the results of this study.

Apart from general leadership training happening in the country (both private and public sector) to support development in new management and organisational culture and practices, the leadership capacity of Vietnamese HE leaders has been simultaneously enhanced in recent years. In 2011, MOET enacted the Decision No 6639/ QĐ-BGDĐT to implement a national educational development project that aims to enhance the quality of human resources in the Vietnamese education system,

including HE. Therefore, the age of Vietnamese HE leaders is not a good variable: the vast training and learning opportunities provided to both young and old may have neutralised the differences and narrowed the gap between young leaders and those in the older generation. In sum, the increase in the experience level of Vietnamese HE leaders, as well as experience with modern leadership practices through overseas training, and learning from the private sector in Vietnam, may have had an impact on the results of this study and caused a non-significant difference in leadership practices due to age.

5.2.4 Leadership practice and the educational background of Vietnamese higher education leaders

Research focusing on the impacts of prior educational background on the leadership styles is limited in the literature (Barbuto et al., 2007), and almost absent in the literature of Vietnamese HE leadership. Barbuto et al. (2007) and Sawati et al. (2013) demonstrated that leaders' prior educational levels did not have an impact on their influence tactics or leadership. Consistent with the above, the findings from this study showed that Vietnamese HE leaders' prior educational background did not influence their leadership styles overall. The subsets of leadership areas in which the differences were most significant are: idealised influence attributed (Factor IIA), inspirational motivation (Factor IM), individual consideration (Factor IC), and management-by-exception active (Factor MBEA).

In this study, the lack of significant difference between leadership styles and prior educational background can be attributed to the unequal sample sizes in the sub-groups of education. As stated in Chapter 4 (Section 4.1.3), the unequal sample sizes may affect the significant differences at the multivariate level (Hair et al., 2014;

Tabachnick & Fidell, 2006; Tones, 2009). However, while the numbers of participants who hold a bachelor's, master's or doctoral degree are unequal, they reflect the current population of senior HE leaders. In the education group, the number of participants who hold a master's degree is dominant (121 out of 190 participants). In recent years, the national projects to enhance the quality of human resources, including enhancing educational background, have strongly influenced the desire of workers to enhance their educational level. Particularly, human resources in HE are influenced the most, since the Government requires the HE system to be responsible for training its leaders. Therefore, the HE system has had to strengthen and enhance their human resources' educational level to implement MOET's goal: more effective leaders who are competent in their leadership and more inclined toward the transformational leadership style. For instance, to be eligible for opening a bachelor degree major by coursework, MOET (2011) requires the institution to have in their leadership team at least one person holding a doctorate, and three people in the teaching staff with master's degrees in that major. Consequently, the academic teaching staff are required to enhance their educational background.

Although the study did not find any significant difference in the overall leadership styles of Vietnamese HE leaders based on their educational background, significant differences were found in some factors, such as the idealised influence attribute (IIA), inspirational motivation (IM), individual consideration (IC) and management-by-exception active (MEBA) factors. As stated in Chapter 3 (Table 3.3), IIA, IM, and IC are factors in transformational leadership, and MEBA is a factor in transactional leadership. Avolio and Bass (2004) argued that these factors are the characteristics of transformational and transactional leadership. Bass and Riggo (2008) contended that transformational leaders who possess the IIA

characteristic usually behave as a role model for their staff. In return they are admired, trusted and respected; leaders who possess the IM characteristic usually motivate and inspire their followers by explicitly describing meaning and challenge in their work; and leaders who possess the IC characteristic pay special attention to the staff needs and how to stimulate achievement and growth through the role of mentor. By contrast, transactional leaders who possess the MBEA characteristic usually control deviances from standards, mistakes, and errors in staff's work and take action to correct them as needed, and are more driven by a compliance agenda.

The significant differences in these factors of transformational leadership and transactional leadership based on the educational background of Vietnamese HE leaders can be interpreted as suggesting that Vietnamese HE leaders have different perspectives on some aspects of transformational leadership style, and are still influenced by transactional leadership. As stated in Chapter 2 (Section 2.2.1, p. 30) transactional leadership is considered as the most common leadership style in the Vietnamese State sector of HE, as leaders are required to manage and implement the State-approved mandate. This suggests that the leaders' authority and discretion are quite limited in the State colleges and universities compared with the private sector. It is worth noting again that MOET controls the State sector very strictly with regulations. Therefore, MOET's very tight control may influence leaders' perspectives and their leadership styles.

With regard to the difference in the MBEA factor of transactional leadership, it suggests that monitoring staff deviances from standards, mistakes, errors and taking corrective actions may not be appropriate any longer in the Vietnamese HE context. With high demand from MOET to reform the educational system, it is believed that leadership practice should be changed in the direction of reforming personnel issues

to achieve common targets. Consequently, instead of monitoring followers' deviances from these targets, leaders should motivate, encourage, and mentor their followers to successfully lead them to the common goal. Overall, the Government's development strategies and control of the HE system strongly impact the findings of this study, which reflects the current context of Vietnam.

5.2.5 Leadership practice and experience of Vietnamese higher education leaders

The literature on leadership practice is extensive; however, research focused on the impact of leaders' experience on their leadership styles is limited, and almost absent in the literature of Vietnamese HE. Sawati et al. (2013) found that there is no correlation between experience and leadership styles in their study in Pakistan, and Kotur and Anbazhagan (2014) indicated that work experience has no influence on leadership styles in India. The findings from this current study are congruent with Sawati et al.'s findings that Vietnamese HE leaders' experience did not impact on their leadership styles overall; non-significant differences were found in 6 out of the 9 factors of the MLQ. The most significant differences were found in the areas of idealised influence behaviour (Factor IIB), inspirational motivation (Factor IM), and intellectual stimulation (Factor IS) factors.

As discussed above, the unequal sample sizes may have influenced the results of this study. Obviously, the number of participants who have 1–5 years of leaders' experience is 2.29 times more than the 6–10 years, and 2.4 times more than the over 10 years groups (see Table 4.5). The dominance of young and less experienced leaders in the Vietnamese HE system is strongly influenced by national strategies that aim to develop the quality of human resources, which has been discussed above

(see Section 5.2.1.2, and 5.2.1.3). The following discussion focuses on the significant difference of Vietnamese leaders on transformational leadership characteristics. It is useful to recall that IIB, IM, and IS are factors/characteristics that are associated with transformational leadership; hence, it can be interpreted that even though transformational leadership is believed to be an ideal leadership style in supporting the reforms of Vietnamese HE system, Vietnamese leaders' perspectives on transformational leadership are still varied.

As Bass and Riggo (2008) noted, transformational leaders who possess the idealised characteristic usually serve as a role model; their behaviours are observed directly by staff (Day & Antonakis, 2012). Besides providing intellectual stimulation, leaders encourage creativity, problem-solving skills, and new approaches and ideas in their followers (Bass & Riggo, 2006). The findings from this study indicated that there is a positive trend among Vietnamese leaders who have less than 10 years of leadership experience to practice differently from leaders with more than 10 years of leadership experience. Further analysis needs to be undertaken to fully understand this difference.

It can be interpreted that the perceptions about being a role model by less-experienced leaders (less than 10 years of leadership experience) and senior leaders (over 10 years of leadership experience) are different. The duration in the leadership position might be the cause of this significant difference. Leaders' seniority may stimulate Vietnamese leaders to be more likely to act as a role model for their followers. In contrast, less-experienced leaders may not be confident enough to act as a role model, or the modest culture of the Vietnamese may influence their behaviours. Additionally, a leader's age may contribute to this difference, since age and their seniority of experience are usually in accordance with each other. Although

it does not suggest that older leaders would be more experienced in leadership, the study found that senior leaders are usually older than less-experienced leaders.

With regard to the differences between senior and less-experienced Vietnamese HE leaders in the intellectual stimulation characteristic of transformational leaders, it is obvious that senior leaders are more likely than less experienced leaders to support their followers' creativity and problem-solving skills, and encourage them to try new approaches and ideas. In the Vietnamese HE context, the top-down leadership strategy is still strongly advocated despite MOET's intention for reform; hence, it strongly influences this leadership characteristic, and causes this difference. Particularly, Bass and Riggo (2008, p. 7) described one of the sample items of the intellectual stimulation (IS) factor that encourages and accepts alternative views: "the leaders get others to look at the problems from many different angles and do not criticise when followers' ideas differ from the leaders'." Within the top-down leadership culture, senior leaders seem to be more rigorous to their followers; as a result the followers are very hesitant to present their own ideas. The Vietnamese HE system has witnessed massive changes and reforms in the policies and regulations from the Government, and perceptions about transformational leadership have been accepted by Vietnamese leaders. Therefore, the significant difference on the IS factor of transformational leadership between the senior and less-experienced leaders is reasonable in the current context.

Inspiring and motivating followers to reach ambitious goals describes the inspirational motivation (IM) characteristic of transformational leaders (Bass & Riggo, 2006). This study found that there is a significant difference between the group with 1–5 years of leadership experience and the groups with over 5 years of leadership experience. This can be interpreted to suggest that the ambitious national

projects (i.e. the project 322², 911³) to improve the quality of human resources from MOET and the Government strongly impact these results. In these projects, MOET has established the ambitious goal of having 20,000 employees with doctoral degrees by 2020, many of these in the HE sector. Obviously, many leaders in the group with 1–5 years of leadership experience have benefited from MOET’s projects.

In summary, Vietnamese HE leaders’ experience did not impact on their leadership styles and practice overall; however, their perceptions about transformational leadership characteristics are very different. The national projects to develop human resources nationwide, in which MOET plays the key role, have apparently contributed to the significant difference between Vietnamese leaders.

5.2.6 Vietnamese higher education leaders’ inclination to adopt transformational leadership in their practice

The study was designed to determine to what extent Vietnamese HE leaders are inclined to use transformational leadership in their practice, and their perceptions of the transformational factors that underpin this study. As discussed above, the Vietnamese HE leaders’ perspectives on transformational factors revealed significant differences in only some factors based on the demographic data of educational background and experience. Therefore, the following discussion interprets the implications of these factors of transformational leadership – idealised influence attribute (IIA), idealised influence behaviour (IIB), inspirational motivation (IM), intellectual stimulation (IS) and individual consideration (IC) – in the Vietnamese

² Project 322: Vietnamese national project which offers scholarships for talented young students to study abroad. This national project aims to achieve highly qualified workforce in Vietnam.

³ Project 911: An extension of Project 322 for the higher education sector when Project 322 ended.

HE context, and considers the meanings of these factors in relation to MOET's reform objectives.

As discussed above, transformational leadership in Vietnamese HE is believed to help the Government achieve its reform objectives. It can be interpreted from the findings that Vietnamese HE leaders have begun to adopt transformational leadership in their practice. Although this trend is not conclusive for the overall sample, significant differences in perspectives on transformational leadership were found in Vietnamese leaders with different levels of education and experience.

The results of this study indicated that Vietnamese HE leaders' perspectives on transformational leadership differ significantly between leaders who hold an undergraduate degree (BA) and leaders who hold postgraduate degrees (MA, PhD/EdD) in terms of the idealised influence attribute (IIA), inspirational motivation (IM), and individual consideration (IC) factors (Chapter 4, Section 4.1.3.2). This can be explained by the fact that many Vietnamese HE leaders who hold postgraduate degree were trained in a university overseas, such as in the US, the UK, or Australia. In those countries, transformational leadership practice is more common than in Vietnam. These Vietnamese leaders have had more opportunities to work and communicate with people who are more inclined toward the transformational leadership style. Therefore, their perspectives on impacting other people (IIA), motivating their staff (IM), and paying special attention to their staff's needs and desires (IC) are quite different from those leaders trained in Vietnam.

In the context of Vietnamese HE, MOET (2013) requires leaders in the senior leadership and management positions to fully support the objective of reforming the education and training system, from the training models to the teaching and learning pedagogies, and ensuring there are enough human resource capacities in

implementing this objective. This study found that the leaders who incline towards transformational leadership are more inclined to encourage their staff to achieve MOET's objectives, because they are trusted leaders who will do the right thing and demonstrate ethical and moral conduct and high standards (Bass & Riggo, 2006). These leaders will assist MOET to achieve the common goals by their transformational leadership perspectives. Additionally, MOET indicated that one of the desired educational development strategies is the development of individuals and the whole organisation. This requirement perfectly matches the IM characteristic of a transformational leader, as Bass and Riggo (2008) state that leaders who have high inspirational motivation characteristics will motivate and inspire their staff by clearly describing the meanings and challenges in their work. The findings showed that Vietnamese HE leaders perceive these factors in their leadership practice, although the leaders' perspectives still differ between those who hold postgraduate degrees and those who hold undergraduate degrees only. In sum, there is a trend to adopt the transformational leadership style among Vietnamese HE leaders. Although this trend is just beginning, the perception of how transformational leadership can support MOET's objectives is becoming more widespread among Vietnamese HE leaders.

Based on their leadership experience, Vietnamese HE leaders showed different transformational leadership perspectives in idealised influence behaviours (IIB), inspirational motivation (IM), and intellectual stimulation (IS) factors. Particularly, leaders who have less than 10 years of leaders' experience are different from those with over 10 years of leaders' experience (Chapter 4, Section 4.1.3.2). As discussed above, although the results showed non-significant differences overall, there were differences in the transformational leadership characteristics based on leaders' experience. This can be explained by the fact that leaders' age is attributed to this

difference, as age and experience are associated. Additionally, the number of leaders who have less than 10 years of leader experience is dominant in this study (145 out of 190). The unequal samples contributed to this significant difference. This can be interpreted to suggest that Vietnamese HE leaders who are young and less experienced in leadership showed a different perspective on transformational leadership in supporting MOET's objectives.

As discussed above, transformational leaders influence their staff by their behaviours (IIB), and motivate and inspire them to achieve the common goals (IM). This study found that Vietnamese leaders have different ideas on the importance of intellectual stimulation (IS) to appeal to their staff's intellect by "creating awareness and problem solving, of thought and imagination, and of beliefs and values" (Bass, 1985, p. 99, as cited in Antonakis, 2012). Although these characteristics of a transformational leader perfectly match MOET's requirements for leaders in HE in supporting the reforms, it is obvious that leaders' perspectives on these issues are still very different from each other. In other words, Vietnamese HE leaders are inclined to adopt transformational leadership in their practice, but the experience gap indicates different leadership perspectives.

Overall, it can be interpreted that Vietnamese HE leaders perceive and are inclined to adopt transformational leadership practices in their leadership. Whether the leaders show their different perspectives on IIA, IIB, IM, IS or IC factors based on their educational background or their leadership experience, they are all inclined to use transformational leadership in their practice. As transformational leadership is still a new concept to many Vietnamese leaders, it will take time for other leaders to adopt it. Additionally, the trend of adopting transformational leadership to support MOET's objectives is just the beginning. As Vietnamese HE is still in a transitional

phase, perhaps in the next 5–10 years, when this study were repeated, there would be more leaders using transformational leadership in their practice to support MOET's reforms.

5.3 DISCUSSION OF QUALITATIVE RESULTS

RQ#2: How do Vietnamese HE leaders in the Mekong Delta support MOET's principles for quality improvement in Vietnamese HE?

5.3.1 Interpretation of the ranking scale findings

In its educational development strategies 2009–2020, MOET outlined key principles to successfully implement national reforms in HE. The principles include human resources development and quality improvement to support the HE reforms in leadership and management, teaching and learning quality, market's demand, and research activities. This research study was designed to investigate how leaders in the State HE sector perceive MOET's principles to support the reforms by asking them to prioritise the quality improvement indicators. The findings showed that the eight indicators were classified in three prioritised ranking levels (as shown in Chapter 4, Section 4.2.2): high priority (university missions/goals, teaching and learning quality), moderate priority (research quality, human resources quality, customers' expectations, and market's demand), and low priority (university ranking and international recognition). The findings indicated that there are non-significant differences in the ranking priorities between Vietnamese HE leaders based on their gender, age, educational background and experience; however, a small difference was found in the ranking priorities. The following discussion elaborates on the trends in ranking priorities (high, moderate, and low) and the non-significant differences in ranking priorities by demographic variable in order to develop an understanding of

Vietnamese HE leaders' priorities in supporting MOET's principles for quality improvement and informing MOET about their strategies in quality improvement.

Highly priority indicators

In line with MOET's strategies on education reforms, Vietnamese HE leaders agreed that the eight indicators which were outlined by MOET were important for quality improvement in their colleges/universities. However, each indicator was prioritised differently based on the participant's circumstances. As stated in Chapter 4, Section 4.2.2, the university missions/goals and the teaching and learning quality indicators were highly prioritised by the majority of Vietnamese HE leaders, and this trend pattern reflects the current situation of the Vietnamese HE system, in which the missions of the university and the teaching and learning focus are major concerns for senior leaders.

The findings from this study are consistent with previous work from Velcoff and Ferrari (2006), which found that senior leaders in a private Roman Catholic university supported mission-related activities that were socially desirable, and encouraged faculty engagement related to the mission. Although Velcoff and Ferrari's (2006) study focused on a private university, and did not reveal the level of support provided, they indicated that senior leaders, including deans and vice-presidents, have similar perceptions about their institutional missions. In the Vietnamese HE context, the association between leadership and institutional missions is absent in the literature, and this lack of association was reflected in the data of this study. However, there is a widespread emphasis on university missions/goals in the Vietnamese HE system, and the importance of university missions/goals is clearly presented in the legislation on Vietnamese Education

(Education Law, 2005). Indeed, the data analysis of the ranking scales (see Chapter 4, Section 4.2.2, and Section 4.2.3.1) determined the importance of university missions/goals and explained why this ranked as a priority of Vietnamese leaders.

As stated in Chapter 2 regarding the university mission, Scott (2006) states that institutional missions depend on the different stages of national developments. In different periods, university and college missions will be adjusted to adapt to the ever-changing world. Similarly, Marginson (2007) and Henkel (2007) argued that the university type and context, such as social, economic, and political circumstances, also influence university missions. In light of the literature above, this study investigated the importance of university missions by asking participants to rank priorities in their leadership functions. The finding interestingly found that the university missions/goals indicator was ranked first priority by a large number of Vietnamese HE leaders. The data analysis in Section 4.2.2 reflected that 66 out of 179 participants (36.9%) ranked university missions/goals as the number one priority. The reasons for this ranking were presented and explained in Section 4.2.3.1. The reasons include: (1) the university missions/goals indicator is the most important indicator because it has an impact on all other targets and activities in a HE institution; (2) university missions/goals are the backbone for the foundation for development of a university; (3) the university missions/goals indicator covers all other indicators which were outlined by MOET. Therefore, the findings can be interpreted to suggest that the university missions/goals indicator is important to Vietnamese HE leaders, and it is the first priority of many leaders.

Regarding the teaching and learning quality indicator, the ranking result showed that it was also highly ranked (see Chapter 4, Section 4.2.2). According to Pham (2012), the input conditions for teaching and learning in Vietnamese HE were

improved by the university governance reform; however, the quality of teaching and learning outcomes did not change much. Pham (2012) suggested that in order to continuously improve teaching quality in the HE sector above the quality threshold, it is necessary to have the HE governance's support of this activity with appropriate incentives. Pham (2012) also believes that if the teaching quality is enhanced, it will in turn help to raise the overall quality of the HE system. The findings from the ranking scales support Pham's (2012) work and indicate that governance reform is critical in enhancing teaching quality above the threshold. In this process, the HE leaders' perceptions had a strong impact on teaching and learning quality. The findings showed that Vietnamese HE leaders in the State sector strongly support quality improvement in teaching and learning (see Table 4.11), even though it may be materialising slowly. The high priority ranking of the teaching and learning indicator illustrated an obvious evidence for this desire from HE leaders.

In addition to the HE leaders' support, MOET's educational reform agenda strongly impacts this result, in which the teaching and learning indicator was ranked as a high priority. In particular, the Decision 911/QĐ-TTg about the approval of support for providing doctoral degree level training for teaching staff at colleges and universities, 2010–2020 (Vietnamese Prime Minister, 2010) indicated that in order to improve teaching quality, teaching staff's qualifications and experiences play a key role. It was also clearly stated in the objectives of this Decision that the academic quality and research experience that teaching staff gain from their doctoral degrees not only improves teaching and learning quality at their institutions, but also helps improve research activities in HE. Research and scholarship in teaching and learning provide a stable foundation to improve teaching and learning quality. These decisions are in line with Pham's (2012) suggestions. However, Pham (2008) argues

that in order to be successful in reforming teaching and learning quality, teachers' perceptions of their roles and responsibilities in class and their teaching approaches strongly impact the reforms; therefore, the author suggested that policymakers and HE leaders need to be cautious when they approve a teaching and learning approach and implement innovative approaches in the Vietnamese context.

In summary, university missions/goals and teaching and learning indicators are ranked highly by Vietnamese HE leaders. The discussion above explained some principles which strongly impacted the HE leaders' ranking results. The discussion also indicated that there is a mutual relationship between HE leaders and the teaching staff in implementing the teaching and learning quality reforms in the Vietnamese HE system (see Chapter 4, Section 4.2.2). The reforms cannot be successful if leaders and teachers do not support them.

Moderate priority indicators

As stated in Chapter 4, Section 4.2.2 there were four indicators prioritised as being in the moderate level: research quality, human resources quality, customer's expectations, and market's demand. The following discussion clarifies some principles that may have influenced the Vietnamese HE leaders' ranking in this study. The discussion also interprets possible rationales for the prevalence of each indicator in the current HE context and evaluates whether the priority rankings agree with findings in the literature regarding the broader Vietnamese HE context and other contexts.

Over past decades, there has been a massive growth in the number of HE institutions in Vietnam, and these institutions have become more oriented to research in order to serve the objectives outlined in the Higher Education Reform Agenda

(HERA) in 2005 about science and technology development (Harman & Le, 2010). Additionally, the central investment in science and technology and technology transfer has been emphasized to stimulate research development and research activities. While Harman and Le (2010) state that more efforts were made to integrate research activities within universities, Nguyen (2013) argues that research activities in Vietnamese institutions only focus on teaching and learning issues and require a broader focus. Moreover, these institutions also encounter significant challenges in developing research resources for their institutions, such as adequate personnel, sufficient infrastructure and research funding, policies and mechanisms for supporting research, and leadership commitment (Fatseas, 2010; Nguyen, 2013). Fatseas (2010) added that even when policies and legislative frameworks have been established to support research activities, it is still very hard to translate policies into practice.

The findings from this current study partly support Nguyen's (2013) work, which showed that HE leaders are only moderately supportive of research development, as they believe that their university is not ready for implementation of strong policies for promoting research. The government has established a policy and legislative framework to build Vietnamese research capacity to support science and technology development, and encourage technology transfer (Science & Technology Law, 2001; as cited in Fatseas, 2010). In addition, the higher education reform agenda (HERA) has set an explicit goal in building research capacity for the HE sector by increasing the funding for research activities at HE institutions by at least 1% of national budget per annum, and by requiring teaching staff to perform both teaching and research responsibilities. Although these policies have positively impacted research activities in Vietnamese HE institutions, many challenges, as

discussed above, restrict more accelerated development of research activities. In particular, Harman and Le (2010) showed that Vietnamese universities are much weaker in research than in teaching. This position is supported by Fatseas (2010), who argued that this occurs because Vietnamese academics tend to focus more on their teaching mission than their research role. Hence, these challenges may influence the ranking of these quality indicators by Vietnamese HE leaders, who may hesitate to deal with challenges when they support research activities and development for research quality. Moreover, the lack of a research culture that values research activities and research outputs (Harman & Le, 2010) also has an impact on Vietnamese leaders' prioritisation of research development in Vietnam.

In comparison with research standards across the Southeast Asia region, research activities and infrastructure in the State sector of Vietnamese HE are well below standard (Dao and Hayden, 2010; Fatseas, 2010) (although research rates and publication at international standards are still higher than those found in Vietnam's private sector). In comparison with research in Malaysia and Singapore, research output and productivity in Vietnam are much lower (World Bank, 2008). This could be influenced by the moderate ranking of research priorities by the HE leaders, or by the poor outcomes influencing the leaders' rankings. Malaysian institutions are moving towards achieving excellence in research and development (Ahmad et al., 2014); and Singapore has been targeted to become a global education hub in East Asian by developing transnational education (Mok, 2008). Meanwhile, Vietnamese HE has just begun establishing research infrastructure, human resources, revenues, and research and development cultures to support science and technology and technology transfer.

In summary, development of research activities in Vietnamese HE has been reformed and supported by the government, including the Science and Technology Law in 2001 and the higher education reform agenda (HERA) in 2005. These legislative frameworks and policies strongly impact Vietnamese HE leaders' perceptions about research quality in their institutions. However, there may still be challenges that limit research output and productivity in Vietnamese HE. Nevertheless, research quality has captured the attention of HE leaders and they have a strong investment in developing in this area, including staff/researchers, research development, and knowledge transfer – hence the ranking as moderate priority.

Prioritised at the same moderate level, the human resources quality indicator was ranked slightly higher than other indicators within the same level (see Table 4.11). The findings showed that many HE leaders believe that human resources quality plays a key role in supporting the reforms in Vietnamese HE. Additionally, HE leaders indicated that human resources quality is the key to drive HERA to success, including implementing university missions/goals, improving teaching and learning quality, and research quality.

Two possible explanations for Vietnamese HE leaders' prioritising of the human resources quality indicator at a moderate level (see Chapter 4, Section 4.2.2) are: first, improving the human resources quality indicator may not be as urgent an issue as the indicators grouped in the high priority ranking, thus it may not require HE leaders to take immediate action. As outlined in Chapter 3 (Table 3.1), 6 out of 9 participating institutions are colleges. Some participants considered their institutions as small and newly established. These leaders may believe that their current personnel is qualified and has enough capacity to implement their current missions and goals. From the institutional leaders' perspectives, these leaders ranked the

improvement of human resources quality as of moderate importance. Indeed, although these HE leaders determined that they fully support MOET's strategies in improving their teaching staff's qualifications (i.e. lecturers with master's and doctoral degrees) by sending them overseas for postgraduate degree training (under MOET's projects and national budget or foreign institutions' scholarships), only a few staff were supported by their institutions with grants to pursue their studies (Harman & Le, 2010). Second, another possible explanation for this may be that leaders' age and leadership position influenced their perspectives on the human resources indicator. Many HE leaders who participated in this study are in the age range of 25–45 (see Table 4.5) and their roles give them a limited capacity to make decisions about human resources issues. It is worth noting again that the governance of Vietnamese HE is centralised and top-down management (Hayden & Lam, 2007). At the institutional level, only presidents have the power to allow staff to enhance their qualifications. As age may be associated with leadership positions in Vietnam, those who are younger and in earlier stages of leadership may have limited perceptions about the importance of human resources quality, leading them to prioritise it at a moderate level.

Although the findings showed that the human resources quality indicator was only ranked a moderate priority, the HE literature indicates that there is a high demand for quality improvement of human resources in Vietnamese HE (Harman & Le, 2010; Harman & Nguyen, 2010; Tran, 2006; World Bank, 2008), as Vietnamese human resources quality in HE is low in comparison to other countries in the East Asian region, such as Malaysia, Indonesia, and the Philippines. The World Bank (2008, p. 31) states that “the proportion of faculty members with doctoral degrees is generally used as an indicator of the quality of a HE institution, especially in the case

of international rankings. A large proportion of academic staff in Vietnam does not have a postgraduate degree and very few have doctorates.” In particular, only 13.1% of faculty in public institutions held doctoral degrees and only 1.5% of all university staff held the rank of professor in 2005 (World Bank, 2008). As presented in Table 4.5, only 25 out of 190 participants (13.2%) held a doctoral degree. This result concurred with the literature, and highlighted that the number of Vietnamese leaders who have doctorates is limited, particularly when considered alongside MOET’s demands for development. Understanding the current situation of Vietnamese HE human resources quality, MOET was very explicit in HERA that the qualifications of academic staff must be improved and by 2020 Vietnam HE should be ranked as a highly competitive, first-class HE system in international standing (Harman & Nguyen, 2010). However, it appears that this goal is not highly prioritised by HE leaders. The human resources quality indicator was ranked at a moderate level of priority, behind the accomplishment of university missions/goals and teaching and learning quality indicators.

With regard to customers’ expectations, the findings from this study showed that Vietnamese HE leaders prioritised this indicator at a moderate level in their leadership. Although there is a wealth of literature on customers’ expectations and students’ satisfaction that also captures the interests of many HE leaders (Min et al., 2012; Munteanu et al., 2010; Sandmaung & Do, 2013; Nguyen, 2012; Voss, 2007), Vietnamese HE leaders do not rank customer expectations as a high priority. This can be interpreted to mean that Vietnamese HE leaders in the State sector may not prioritise the customers’ expectations indicator as high as leaders in the Vietnamese private sector (Asian Development Bank, 2010). Additionally, these HE leaders may not have considered students as their customers and the training programs as their

services; therefore, customers' expectations and satisfaction have not been appraised properly. This idea of viewing students as 'customers' may require a conceptual change in Vietnamese HE leaders, and it may take time before HE leaders fully appreciate the value of this perspective.

Munteanu et al. (2010) stated that when service quality meets or exceeds customers' expectations, customers' satisfaction will be achieved. However, customers' expectations and students' satisfaction are almost absent in the literature of Vietnamese HE in the State sector. In the private sector, Nguyen (2012) found that facilities, faculty, administration, and tuition fees significantly influence students' satisfaction in Vietnam. Similarly, the customers' expectations indicator in Southeast Asian HE countries such as Singapore, Thailand, and Malaysia is an important indicator that is used to measure the service quality of an institution (Min et al., 2012; Munteanu et al., 2010; Hanaysha et al., 2011; Sandmaung & Do, 2013). The findings from the ranking scales in this study contribute to the literature and inform Vietnamese HE leaders that it is important to consider students as customers of their colleges and universities. The findings also highlight that meeting customers' expectations should be an aim for their institutions, as the competition in recruiting enrolments in Vietnam is anticipated to grow fiercer once MOET successfully transfers institutional autonomy into universities nation-wide.

The competition between institutions in both the private and the State sectors to attract enrolments has become critical in recent years (Teixeira et al., 2013); therefore, the customers' expectations indicator was expected to achieve a higher prioritised level from HE leaders. However, colleges and universities in the State sector are currently dominant in Vietnam; that might influence the perceptions about customers' expectations by State HE leaders (i.e., students need their services more

than colleges/universities need students' enrolments). Under HERA, Vietnamese HE is changing every day. Perhaps by 2020 customers' expectations will be a high priority to satisfy both students and the demands of employers in the industries.

Market's demand is an important indicator that orientates HE training programs and informs HE institutions of specific knowledge and skills that are demanded by employers (Fisher, 2014). In this current study, market's demand refers to the demands of employers and industry. Understanding the importance of market's demand to HE, the Vietnamese Government developed a market's demand indicator in the provision of HE to provide institutions in the State sector more institutional autonomy (Hayden & Lam, 2010). Additionally, HERA determined that Vietnamese HE is reforming to meet market requirements and include more practical and applicable skills (Pham, 2010). However, researchers indicate that there are a lack of linkages between HE institutions and potential employers, resulting in a lack of understanding by HE institutions as to the key skills graduates require for employment (Tran, 2006). Consequently, their graduates usually lack practical expertise. Fatseas (2010) argues that the lack of linkages and cooperation between industries and HE institutions is due to the lack of mechanisms in Vietnamese HE, and that HE leaders are the keys to reforming the gap. The findings from the ranking scales of this study support C. Tran's (2006) and Fatseas's (2010) works in that HE leaders prioritised the market's demand indicator at a moderate level. This means that they may not properly consider the importance of market's demand or lead their institution to meet the labour market's requirement as HERA directs.

The findings in light of the above discussion may be interpreted to suggest that Vietnamese HE leaders prioritised the market's demand indicator at a moderate level for two reasons. First, as stated above, Vietnamese universities focus on teaching

missions more than others quality indicators. Indeed, many leaders who participated in this study believe that if they implement the teaching missions well and improve their teaching quality, their graduates will find employment easily and be accepted by employers in the labour market. However, this neglects the fact that most Vietnamese graduates lack practical expertise. Second, the lack of linkages or interaction between HE institutions and industries may be influencing leaders' priorities. Indeed, the lack of interaction with industries restricted Vietnamese HE leaders from understanding the practical skills that are demanded by employers; hence, they fail to prepare undergraduate students with the skills and/or expertise required by the industry. Vallely and Wilkinson (2008) report that disconnection between classroom and market's demand is critical in Vietnam and causes a high rate of graduate unemployment in the area of their specialisation. Therefore, Vietnamese HE leaders should consider the market's demand indicator in approving curriculum design. They should also improve connections with industries via internship programs, which are believed to better prepare HE students with practical skills and increase their competitive capacity in applying for a job.

In summary, Vietnamese HE leaders prioritised research quality, human resources quality, customers' expectations, and market's demand indicators at a moderate level for several reasons. As stated above, this discussion has elaborated upon and explained issues which may influence HE leaders' priorities. The comparison of Vietnamese State HE with the private sector and with the international HE system, particularly Malaysia, Singapore and Thailand, brings a better understanding about these indicators to leaders in the State sector, and may help them reconsider their priorities for these indicators in the future.

Low Priority Indicators

As stated in Chapter 4, Section 4.2.2, the university ranking and international recognition indicators were ranked as the lowest priorities by Vietnamese HE leaders. This is understandable, as both of these indicators are perhaps currently considered beyond Vietnamese HE capacity, and the concepts of university ranking and international recognition are unfamiliar in the Vietnamese HE system. The following discussion elaborates upon and explains the results of Vietnamese HE representatives' ranking priorities for these two indicators.

University rankings have become ubiquitous in HE for various reasons, such as mass HE, commercialisation, global trends, and prestige of universities (Scott, 2013). Eaton (2013) added that university ranking is a useful tool for accountability and quality assurance in HE. In light of the above literature, university rankings have captured the attention of HE leaders from the government level in Vietnam, and MOET addressed this issue explicitly in HERA. However, HE leaders at the institutional level ranked this indicator as a very low-level priority. The findings from this study showed that few Vietnamese HE leaders prioritised university rankings in their leadership (see Table 4.11).

The first explanation for this may be that currently there is no national ranking organisation in Vietnam that has the authority or capacity to rank universities, although the number of colleges and universities has significantly increased since the introduction of the reform (*Doi Moi*) (World Bank, 2008). Indeed, many participants in this study indicated that it is not necessary to have a university ranking system in the current context of Vietnamese HE. Despite the necessity to have university

rankings, which has been argued in the literature (Marope & Wells, 2013), Vietnamese HE leaders appeared to ignore the importance of university rankings.

Second, many Vietnamese HE leaders believe that university rankings currently are beyond the Vietnamese HE system. Although these leaders indicated that university rankings would stimulate competition and encourage colleges and universities to improve their performance, the capabilities of Vietnamese HE institutions are still far from reaching this level. In recent years, university rankings have been highly valued by Vietnamese leaders at a governmental level, and an ambitious goal in international rankings was set out in HERA (i.e., the expectation that at least one university will be placed in the top 200 by 2020). However, Marginson (2008) states that this goal is currently out of reach for any Vietnamese university.

In comparison to HE in other countries in Southeast Asia, such as Malaysia and Singapore, Vietnamese HE is still far behind. Indeed, while two Malaysian universities have appeared in the top 200 (Hapsah, 2013), and one Singapore university placed 150 on the league tables in 2004 (Marginson, 2008), the number one university in Vietnam, Hanoi National University was only placed at 1133 by Webometrics in 2015. Recognising this situation, MOET aims to reform Vietnamese HE to reach international standards and to appear in the world league tables. Although university rankings are currently absent in Vietnam, HE leaders have paid increasing attention to this issue. Since university rankings influence national and institutional policy-making, strategies, and behaviours (Scott, 2013), HE leaders play a key role in implementing university rankings in Vietnam. Hence, it is necessary to inform MOET about leaders' perceptions of university rankings so that MOET can

develop strategies in guiding these leaders to implement the rankings systematically nation-wide.

As stated above, MOET has outlined an ambitious plan to internationalise Vietnamese HE by 2020, and to be present in international league tables. However, while Vietnamese HE is seeking international recognition for its quality, the findings from this study show that HE leaders at the institutional level are reluctant to support the international recognition indicator and hence have ranked it as their last priority. Many explanations for this ranking have been presented in Chapter 4, Section 4.2.3. Additionally, the following discussion interprets HE leaders' perceptions in the current context of Vietnamese HE to understand their leadership priorities, and link to international HE in other Southeast Asian countries, such as Malaysia and Singapore.

The internationalisation of Vietnamese HE has been discussed in the literature (Altbach, 2007; Marginson, 2010; Welch, 2010), yet international recognition has been underestimated. Many participants in this study indicated that several indicators, including the improvement of teaching and learning quality and human resources quality, should be urgently prioritised to support the reforms; therefore, it is not an appropriate time to target international recognition in the current context of Vietnamese HE. Additionally, the limited capacities of their institutions restrict these HE leaders from targeting international recognition.

However, the benefits of the internationalisation of HE and international recognition are highly valued by Vietnamese HE leaders. One way in which this process of internationalisation is occurring is through partnerships between Vietnamese universities and foreign colleges and universities from the United States,

Australia, Belgium, and Germany, and these types of partnerships are steadily growing in Vietnam (Albatch, 2007, World Bank, 2008). The most significant movements in international HE in Vietnam are seen in the establishment of an 100% Australian-owned Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology (RMIT) branch campus in Ho Chi Minh City, and an 100% American-owned Broward College Vietnam campus. These developments can be interpreted to suggest that due to limited resources and capabilities, Vietnamese leaders expect partnerships with foreign institutions to be able to assist Vietnamese HE to improve quality with qualifications that can be accepted internationally. This also means that student qualifications can be accepted for continuing higher degree studies overseas, and/or job applications in foreign countries. Another benefit of this internationalisation is that if students desire to study overseas while they are doing undergraduate study in Vietnam, student records can easily be accepted for credit transfer into overseas colleges and universities.

In the HE reforms agenda, MOET (2005) explicitly stated that reforms aimed to get Vietnamese HE recognised in the Asian region by 2020, and to attract more international students to Vietnam. However, in order to successfully implement this ambitious strategy, a huge improvement in Vietnamese HE may be required. In the current context of international HE in Southeast Asia, competition with Malaysian and Singaporean HE is a big challenge for Vietnam. While Singaporean HE aims to be a global education hub and rapidly enhance its system to compete in international education (Mok, 2008), and Malaysian HE has established a stable foundation and attracted a certain number of international students in the region (Albatch, 2007), Vietnamese HE is still struggling to achieve recognition in international HE.

Therefore, Vietnam is less likely to be competitive alongside Malaysia or Singapore in HE.

In summary, due to their understandings of the current context of Vietnamese HE, leaders at the institutional level give very low priority to the university ranking and international recognition indicators. The findings also indicated that great efforts for HE improvement are required for Vietnamese HE to reach international recognition and enter the international league tables.

5.3.2 Interpretation of the ranking priorities on the demographic data

Following the ranking patterns of Vietnamese HE leaders, the next discussion attempts to interpret discrepancies in the ranking of the prioritised indicators based on demographic data, including participants' gender, age, education, and experience. Although non-significant differences were found in the ranking of priorities, several differences are worth describing to clarify different perspectives on the eight indicators. Since the differences between sub-groups in the demographic data were small, the two indicators that showed the largest differences are examined for interpretation. The discussion also identifies influential factors that may impact the ranking priorities.

The greatest differences between male and female leaders' priorities were found in the university missions/goals and university ranking indicators. As stated above, the involvement of female leaders in Vietnamese political, economic, and educational areas has greatly increased, but the differences in leadership perspectives of Vietnamese male and female leaders are negligible. The findings from this study further support the idea that there is a non-significant difference between male and female leaders in their ranking priorities. However, the results suggest that female

leaders support the missions/goals indicator to a greater extent than male leaders. A possible explanation for this might be that the leadership positions and qualifications of female leaders have been recently enhanced, their involvement in the academic context has significantly increased, and several women hold the rector position of State universities (Funnel & Dao, 2013). Research has indicated that women are more risk-averse than men (Croson & Gneezy, 2009); it is possible, therefore, that female leaders are more cautious in establishing a stable foundation and avoiding any potential risks for their university's development by prioritising the university missions/goals. Additionally, it can be inferred that female Vietnamese leaders are more goal-oriented leaders; hence, establishing particular goals and accomplishing missions to reach those goals are meaningful to academic leaders.

In contrast, the results also showed that male leaders rate the university ranking indicator higher than female leaders do (see Chapter 4, Figure 4.2). It may be that male leaders have benefitted from an overseas education; where university ranking is highly recognised and employed as a tool to assess the quality of a university. As stated above, some HE leaders have benefitted from government schemes that send Vietnamese people overseas for postgraduate studies. Although no official statistical data reports the number of Vietnamese male leaders who have benefitted from the government schemes to study abroad, the dominance of males' participation in academics is evident (World Bank, 2008). In light of benefits from foreign education, Vietnamese male leaders prioritised the university ranking indicator higher than female leaders did.

When considering age as a variable, the two largest differences were also found in the university ranking and the teaching and learning quality indicators. An interesting finding was that leaders in the age group 46–65 rated the university

ranking indicator higher than younger leaders aged 25–45. This result can be explained by the fact that senior leaders may have more experience in working with international universities and recognise the rankings of prestigious universities in the league tables. Hence, senior leaders supported ranking universities in Vietnam more than younger leaders did. However, these leaders also indicated that it is necessary to have a national ranking system in Vietnam to rank Vietnamese universities and colleges before heading to international league tables such as the Times, Webometrics, the Jiao Tong Institute and OECD. There are, moreover, other possible explanations for this result. For example, the background of leaders in the age group of 46–65 may influence their perspectives on university rankings. As stated above, the benefits that these leaders received from foreign education systems also contributed to the difference in these leaders' perspectives. It is therefore likely that there are connections between these leaders' experience and their educational backgrounds that have had an impact on their ranking priorities.

Based on the demographic data of age, the ranking results found a contradictory result: that leaders in the age group 25–45 rated teaching and learning quality higher than senior leaders in the age group 46–65. This contradictory result may be due to the focus on the teaching and learning mission in Vietnamese HE. Several reports have shown that Vietnamese HE tends to focus on teaching and learning quality more than other missions, such as research and development activities (Harman & Le, 2010; Tran, 2006). Additionally, many participants in this study in the age range 25–46 are working as both lecturer and leader: this may be why they rate teaching and learning quality as a higher priority than other indicators. Another possible explanation for this is the influence of participants' educational background. Indeed, the World Bank (2008, p. 31) reported that “a large percentage

of academic staff in Vietnam maintain the rank of lecturers and likely do not hold doctoral degrees.” Meanwhile, senior leaders in the age range 46–65 may have more experience in leadership positions, higher qualifications, and a stronger focus on leaders’ tasks and responsibilities; hence, these senior leaders rated the teaching and learning quality indicator of lower importance.

Examination of the demographic data of experience shows that the two largest differences were also found in the teaching and learning quality, and university missions/goals indicators. The ranking results showed that leaders who have 1–5 years’ experience in a leadership position prioritised the teaching and learning quality indicator higher than leaders who have over 5 years’ experience. As age is associated with experience, this result also supports the explanation above that leaders who are in the younger age, and have less experience in a leadership position, prioritise the teaching and learning quality indicator higher than the senior leaders (i.e., in the age group 46–65, and over 5 years’ experience).

By contrast, leaders in the group that had over 5 years of leadership experience prioritised the university missions/goals indicator higher than leaders in the group of 1–5 years of leaders’ experience (as shown in Chapter 4, Figure 4.5). A possible explanation for this result may be that leaders who have more experience in a leadership position understand the importance of university missions/goals more comprehensively than less experienced leaders. As stated in Chapter 4, Section 4.2.3.1, respondents generally believed that the university missions/goals were the leading indicator and were the stable foundation for a university’s development. Therefore, this indicator was highly ranked by senior leaders with more experience in leadership positions.

Based on the demographic data of educational background, the customers' expectations and market's demand indicators showed the most differences in priority between sub-groups. Leaders who hold postgraduate degrees prioritised these indicators higher than leaders who hold an undergraduate degree. As stated above, leaders who hold postgraduate degrees may benefit from the government's schemes and foreign education. It is widely considered that customers' expectations or student satisfaction is the best source of information to evaluate the quality of an institution, including service quality, teaching and learning quality, and facilities (Butt & Rehman, 2010; Hussain et al., 2014; Sadeh & Garkaz, 2014; World Bank, 2008). It is possible, therefore, that leaders who hold postgraduate degrees and who trained in foreign institutions rank the customers' expectations and market's demand indicators as of higher importance.

In Vietnamese HE, student satisfaction is rarely considered by the State sector, but is a great concern in the private sector. Since "students could be considered as real customers of HE institutes" (Sadeh & Garkaz, 2014, p. 2), their satisfaction and feedback are of greater concern and could be employed to evaluate teachers' performance (Hayden & Lam, 2010). From this point of view, it is suggested that leaders in the State sector should concern themselves more with student satisfaction and publish their feedback to improve the quality of their institution. The concerns about student satisfaction are expected to be necessary for the State sector because MOET has been transferring institutional autonomy to the State institutions. Competition in recruiting students between Vietnamese colleges and universities, including the State and private institutions, may become fiercer.

Vietnamese HE was criticised for the high unemployment rate of graduates (Vallely & Wilkinson, 2008) due to disconnection with employers in industry, and a

lack of concern about market's demand. As discussed above in Section 5.3.1, research on market's demand and linkages with employers in the industry are strongly recommended in order to increase the employment rate of graduates. In addition, Hayden and Lam (2010) suggested that students' skills and capacities should be focused and developed beyond academic pursuits, and should meet employers' skill requirements. In the private sector, market's demand is getting more attention. In particular, private universities such as the RMIT branch campus, Broward College Vietnam, FPT⁴ University, and Petro-Vietnam University carefully develop programs and courses to fit market's demand (Asian Development Bank, 2010). At newly established private universities such as FPT and Petro-Vietnam, students are given more opportunities to be interns and to be employed in the industry, because they have the advantages of available firms and factories. These universities are offering undergraduate degrees to meet their own demands, because these universities as employers comprehensively understand which skills are needed for future jobs in the industry. It can, therefore, be assumed that leaders in the State sector could learn from the private sector about their market's demand experience and be more concerned about this indicator. It is expected that when the training in HE meets market's demand, the employment rate of graduates could be increased and no social resources would be wasted.

In summary, Section 5.3 has identified the ranking trend patterns of Vietnamese HE leaders in prioritising eight indicators outlined by MOET. Since non-significant differences were found in the ranking priorities of Vietnamese HE leaders based on demographic data, the interpretation of ranking priorities only elaborated on

⁴ Acronym for the Vietnamese name for a private telecommunications firm

the two most different indicators by each demographic data. Further discussion (Section 5.4) interprets the relationship between leadership styles of Vietnamese HE leaders and their support for MOET's principles in improving quality of HE.

5.4 VIETNAMESE HIGHER EDUCATION LEADERS AND THEIR SUPPORT FOR MOET'S PRINCIPLES FOR QUALITY IMPROVEMENT

RQ#3: Is there a relationship between leadership styles and support for MOET's principles for quality improvement in Vietnamese HE?

The combination of findings in the quantitative and the qualitative sections (Chapter 4, Section 4.1; Section 4.2) provides some support for the conceptual premise that HE leaders supported MOET's recent reform agenda and are inclined to use the transformational leadership style, which is considered to be effective for reforming Vietnamese HE in quality aspirations; however, this trend was not definitive, and non-significant differences were found based on demographic data. Similarly, the demographic data revealed that leaders' ranking priorities on eight indicators showed no significant differences. Since this research study investigated HE leadership styles and how leaders ranked quality indicators noted by MOET for quality improvement in their institutions in two different data sets, the association between transformational leadership and the ranking priorities of Vietnamese HE leaders was non-definitive. The following discussion elaborates the relationship between a transformational leadership style and support for MOET's principles in Vietnamese HE.

Perhaps the most obvious finding to emerge from the analysis is that leadership styles of Vietnamese HE leaders were not conclusively transformational or transactional overall; however, there is an emerging understanding of

transformational leadership in their practice. In particular, the significant difference in several factors – such as IIA, IM, and IC (in the education group), and IIB, IM, and IS (in the experience group) – indicated that Vietnamese leaders have begun to adopt transformational leadership in their practice (see Section 5.2.2), even though their leadership perspectives are still very different. A possible implication of this is that Vietnamese HE leaders are not well-prepared for transformational leadership practice, although there is a high demand from MOET (as discussed above) for HE leaders to adopt a transformational leadership style to fully support the reforms and transform the Vietnamese HE system. Additionally, HE leaders in the State sector are required to manage and implement the State approved mandate, and transactional leadership is considered the most common leadership style in Vietnam (see Chapter 2, Section 2.2.1, p. 30). It is possible, therefore, that transformational leadership has not been widely adopted due to the governance in Vietnamese HE, and MOET's control. The present study raises the possibility that the majority of Vietnamese leaders are still inclined towards transactional leadership more than a transformational leadership style, as they still comply with central MOET's instructions rather than being empowered as leaders to innovate to do something different to transform the education system.

Contrary to expectations, this study did not find a significant difference between Vietnamese leaders' ranking priorities of eight indicators on demographic data (see Section 5.3.2). However, there is a trend towards an emerging understanding of the eight indicators. The study found that the high priority indicators, such as the university missions/goals and teaching and learning quality indicators, were considered as the most important to Vietnamese leaders; and the low priority indicators (i.e. university ranking, and international recognition) were

considered the least important and/or non-urgent indicators (see Section 5.3.1). These findings can be interpreted to indicate that the majority of leaders who are more inclined towards transactional leadership supported the university missions/goals and the teaching and learning quality indicators. Similarly, leaders who are more inclined to adopt transformational leadership support the university ranking, and international recognition indicators. In general, therefore, it seems that most Vietnamese HE leaders are still very conservative and comply with MOET's regulations; therefore, their leadership focuses on the internal quality improvement indicators (see Chapter 2, Section 2.3.1). By contrast, other leaders are more transformative and desire to act differently to transform the system. These leaders may lean more towards the external quality improvement indicators (see Chapter 2, Section 2.3.1). The findings also suggest that Vietnamese HE leaders have not prepared for the transformation taking place in their institutions, or to approach the high standards of international education.

With respect to the third research question, it was found that the relationship between the transformational leadership style and the ranking priorities of Vietnamese HE leaders is non-significantly correlated. However, the study made a contribution to the literature in its attempt to develop an understanding of the gaps in leadership of Vietnamese HE leaders, and indicated that these leaders have not yet moved into the transformational phase. Some indicators in the ranking priorities that require transformational leaders were ranked as a low priority, such as the university ranking and international recognition indicators. This can be explained by the fact that university ranking and international recognition have not had a large impact in Vietnam; hence, the low ranking of these indicators may be due to a lack of transformational leadership.

The study's findings not only make a contribution to the leadership knowledge and developing understanding of eight quality improvement indicators noted by MOET, but also provide a valuable report to MOET about the leadership inclinations of Vietnamese HE leaders and their support for MOET's principles on quality improvement. As discussed above, MOET presented many ambitious quality improvement goals in HERA's objectives to be achieved by 2020. However, the findings of this study do not support HERA's objectives since Vietnamese HE leaders have not adopted transformational leadership widely, and their support for MOET's principles is very different from the Ministry's expectations. These results corroborate the ideas of Harman and Nguyen (2010) and Marginson (2008), who suggested that HERA's objectives are still beyond Vietnamese HE institutions' capabilities and out of reach by 2020. Overall, the correlation between transformational leadership and the ranking priorities of the eight indicators was not definitive in this study, although an inclination to adopt a transformational leadership style and support for MOET's principles were found.

5.5 SUMMARY OF THE CHAPTER

In summary, the findings from this study suggest that there is an emerging understanding of the transformational leadership style in Vietnam, and HE leaders are inclined to adopt the transformational leadership style in their practice, although this trend is not definitive. This result may be explained by the fact that transformational leadership is still unfamiliar to Vietnamese leaders. While MOET requires leaders to be more transformational to support its reforms, the majority of leaders are still conservative and hesitant to change. This finding further supports the ideas of Dao and Hayden (2010), and Pham (2010) about the hesitation of Vietnamese leaders. The findings from the ranking scales showed that the quality

improvement indicators noted by MOET were classified into three different levels of priority. Although non-significant, small differences were found when comparing the ranking priorities of leaders from different demographic groups. The finding also suggested that there is trend of understanding of these quality improvement indicators. The relationship between transformational leadership and support for the quality improvement indicators is not definitive and there are still gaps in our understanding of this relationship. The study makes a contribution to the knowledge of leadership in the Vietnamese context, and contributes to the HE reform agenda of MOET an informative report that reflects HE leaders' perspectives on supporting MOET's principles. The implications and limitations of this study are discussed in the next chapter.

Chapter 6: Conclusion

6.1 INTRODUCTION

This conclusion chapter begins with an overview of the study's findings and links to the aims and research questions of this study (Section 6.2). The findings of this research provide significant implications for leadership knowledge in the context of Vietnamese higher education (HE). Section 6.3 presents implications for leadership knowledge as well as implications for the higher education reform agenda (HERA) promoted by MOET. Then, limitations of the study are acknowledged in Section 6.4. Finally, future directions for research are recommended in Section 6.5.

6.2 THE STUDY'S FINDINGS

The impetus for this study was the higher education reform agenda (HERA): a vision for 2020 outlined by the Vietnamese Ministry of Education and Training. Since the Renovation Policy (*Doi Moi*), Vietnamese colleges and universities have been rapidly growing in size and diversity. The leadership and management plus quality of training provided by these institutions have become issues of concern for many stakeholders, including MOET. HERA aims to fundamentally and comprehensively reform and modernise the Vietnamese HE system. In order to successfully achieve these goals, senior leaders at the institutional level must play key roles. Thus, an understanding of institutional leadership styles and leaders' perceptions regarding quality improvement is critical for strengthening Vietnamese HE. The literature in Chapter 2 (Section 2.2.1) argued that transformational leadership is considered as the best mechanism for supporting reform of the Vietnamese HE system. Therefore, the current study aimed firstly to investigate the

extent to which HE leaders are inclined to adopt transformational leadership in their practice. Secondly, since the support of HE leaders strongly influences achievement of HERA objectives, the study also aimed to investigate how leaders ranked quality indicators noted by MOET to support quality improvement initiatives. Finally, the study also evaluated the relationship between transformational leadership and support for MOET's principles for quality improvement to determine any association between transformational leadership and ranking priorities.

The current study showed that the multi-factor leadership questionnaire (MLQ) instrument is appropriate for leadership investigation in the Vietnamese HE context. The MLQ had been used in other sectors such as manufacturing and business management in Vietnam (e.g. Dao & Han, 2013; Luu, 2010). This study extends the application of MLQ to HE and confirms the reliability of this instrument for this population. This validation of the MLQ instrument also determined that the MLQ is a useful tool for researching leadership behaviours and practices to enrich leadership literature in the Vietnamese context.

The study was designed to determine to what extent Vietnamese HE leaders are inclined to use transformational leadership in their practice, and the transformational factors underpin this study. Based on demographic data (i.e. gender, age, educational background, and experience), the research has shown that there were no significant differences between the nine factors overall in the MLQ; however, significant differences were found in some factors such as IIA, IM, IC, and MBEA (in the education group), and IIB, IM, IS (in the experience group). As discussed in Chapter 5, Vietnamese HE leaders have begun to adopt transformational leadership in their practice. Although this trend is not conclusive for the overall sample, it can be presumed that there is an emerging understanding of transformational leadership in

Vietnam. In response to MOET's demands to transform the HE system, the emerging trend to adopt transformational leadership to support the reforms is positive. This supportive trend of HE leaders towards transformational leadership may assist MOET to more quickly achieve HERA objectives. However, since the HERA timeline was set out for 2020, this emerging trend to adopt transformational leadership at this stage (2015) may be considered a slow response for MOET's demands. In light of the above, many of the objectives that were expected to be achieved by 2020 may be out of reach, such as universities ranking in the world league tables and international recognition of Vietnamese qualifications. This finding further supports Marginson's (2008) assertion that the HERA goal to be in the world's top 200 by 2020 was totally out of reach. Indeed, the finding of the ranking scales showed that Vietnamese HE leaders have limited support for the university ranking and international recognition indicators. An understanding of the significance of university ranking and international recognition is still to be developed by many Vietnamese HE leaders.

In light of the HE reform agenda, this study set out to investigate how leaders in the State HE sector perceive MOET's principles to support the reforms by asking them to prioritise quality improvement indicators. The most obvious finding to emerge from this study is that MOET's principles were classified in three different levels of priorities:

- High priority indicators: University missions/goals and teaching and learning quality
- Moderate priority indicators: Research quality, human resources quality, customers' expectations, and market's demand
- Low priority indicators: University ranking and international recognition.

The ranking results reflect the current situation in the Vietnamese HE system, in which the majority of HE leaders strongly support internal indicators such as university missions/goals and teaching and learning quality. These priorities may be influenced by the culture, centralised control and management of MOET. In the Vietnamese HE context, university missions are set out for institutions; hence, leaders consider the achievement of university missions as their responsibility. According to these leaders, mission completion and teaching quality are two important standards to measure their institutions' success and reputation. By contrast, external indicators are assumed to be unnecessary and/or beyond their capabilities. Thus, the external indicators, such as university ranking and international recognition, receive very low levels of support. The moderate priority indicators included two internal indicators and two external indicators. This result showed that Vietnamese HE leaders concerned the indicators of research quality, human resources quality, customer's expectations, and market's demand at moderate level.

An attempt to find discrepancies in ranking priorities of HE leaders based on demographic data showed non-significant differences; however, small differences were worth describing to clarify different perspectives on the eight indicators outlined by MOET. The current study demonstrated that HE leaders had an understanding of the eight indicators. However, some indicators, such as university ranking, international recognition, and research quality, were new concepts and activities to Vietnamese HE leaders; they thus hesitated to prioritise these principles. Rather, HE leaders supported indicators which are well-known through their practice, such as university missions/goals and teaching and learning quality.

As stated above, an understanding of senior leaders and their leadership perspectives may greatly contribute to achievement of HERA objectives. As such,

the current study investigated the relationship between transformational leadership and support of Vietnamese HE leaders for MOET's principles, and found that this relationship was non-definitive. There were still gaps between transformational leadership and support for the quality improvement indicators among Vietnamese HE leaders. As discussed in Chapter 5 (Section 5.4), the emergence of an inclination to adopt transformational leadership was acknowledged. The trend towards emerging understanding of the eight indicators was recognised. However, the association between Vietnamese transformational leadership and leaders' support for MOET's principles was non-significantly correlated. The study has found that the central management of MOET may influence this result. The majority of Vietnamese leaders may still be conservative and comply with MOET's regulations. They hesitate to take actions for the transformation of the HE system. Moreover, the Vietnamese HE system is still in a transitional phase, and perhaps these HE leaders are not well-prepared for this transition. Similarly, the ranking priorities results showed that some indicators that require transformational leaders were ranked very low. Perhaps understanding about MOET's principles is not comprehensive, which could restrict support from Vietnamese HE leaders at the institutional level.

In summary, the study investigated (1) the extent to which Vietnamese HE leaders are inclined to adopt transformational leadership, (2) the support for quality improvement indicators noted by MOET, and (3) the relationship between the transformational leadership style and support for quality improvement principles. The findings indicated that Vietnamese HE leaders have not yet moved into the transformational phase; therefore, these leaders largely supported internal indicators such as university missions/goals and teaching and learning more than external indicators such as university ranking and international recognition. The relationship

between transformational leadership and support for MOET's principles was still non-definitive. However, the study made a contribution to the literature in an attempt to develop an understanding of the gaps in the leadership of Vietnamese HE leaders concerning quality improvement principles prompted by MOET. The next sections discuss the implications of this study for leadership knowledge and implications for MOET's HE reform agenda in detail.

6.3 IMPLICATIONS OF THE STUDY

6.3.1 Implications for leadership knowledge

The study's findings have implications for leadership knowledge in the context of Vietnam. Taken together, these results suggest that the emerging trend to adopt transformational leadership to support the reforms is positive, but embryonic: it is thus suggested that it may be time-consuming for transformational leadership practices to be widely employed by Vietnamese HE leaders. As stated above, this supportive trend of HE leaders towards transformational leadership may assist MOET to more quickly achieve HERA objectives. This emerging trend to adopt transformational leadership at this stage may be considered a slow response for MOET's demands in the vision of 2020. The outcomes of this study will inform MOET as to some explanations for this slow response of institutional leaders in the State sector.

First, Vietnam is still highly centrally controlled: MOET's central control may impact this study's findings. While MOET have acknowledged their intention to release their control and transfer autonomy to institutions, the reality may be that this has largely not occurred. Indeed, the slow responses of Vietnamese HE leaders to MOET's reform agenda reflected this reality. Although this study focuses on

transformational leadership at the institutional level, the findings may well have a bearing on examining transformational leadership practice at the MOET level in order to comprehensively understand transformational leadership practice in Vietnam.

In addition, this study has raised important questions about the nature of transformational leadership practice at the MOET level. Since MOET's guidelines and strategies for HERA achievements required systemic transformation, it was expected that transformational leadership practice at the MOET level would be a model for Vietnamese colleges and universities to exercise. However, central control by MOET was still not released in reality, and this may impact the ability of HE leaders at institutions to respond to MOET's principles.

Second, transformational leadership only flourishes when there is enough space and established roles to exercise autonomy. Although the Education Law (2012) clearly stated that MOET was to transfer institutional autonomy to Vietnamese universities, as discussed above this transfer has been slow. The literature in Chapter 2 also indicated that institutional leaders hesitated to grasp autonomy. In some cases, the central control of MOET caused constraints for universities to practise autonomy. For instance, one Vietnamese university encountered many arguments and objections when they announced that they would assign the positions of assistant professor, associate professor, and professor for their university, instead of allowing the State for Professor Title of Vietnam.⁵ Gaps still exist in the autonomy transfer procedure from MOET to institutions, and this may largely affect the transition of the

⁵ The State for Professor Title of Vietnam: a national organisation assigns the titles of Professor and Associate Professor in Vietnam

Vietnamese HE system. Therefore, it is wise to consider the partnership between MOET and institutional leaders in implementing the HE reforms.

Third, the partnership between MOET and Vietnamese colleges and universities may greatly contribute to the achievements of reforming the Vietnamese HE system. In order to move forward, the reform process may be hastened by not only the institutions' efforts to reform, but also MOET's release of control and the decentralisation of management. However, this partnership is still in the policy documents, and limited initiatives are practised. Therefore, this reality may influence HE leaders in responding to MOET's demands.

6.3.2 Implications for the higher education reform agenda (HERA)

The findings of this study have a number of important implications for the Vietnam HERA. It seems that MOET's intention to reform the HE system to reach international standards was appropriate and timely; however, it is worth noting that historical central control may constrain this process and the development of Vietnamese HE. While progress is in the right direction, reforming such entrenched practices takes time. For instance, internal indicators such as university missions/goals and teaching and learning quality were highly ranked by HE leaders. This may just reflect central management cultures in Vietnam, where confirming to the centrally derived mission is considered a high priority. Although no data in this study showed the central control of the system, the review of MOET's HERA indicates that central control prevails in the system, and it strongly influences HE leaders' perceptions on quality improvement indicators. This could have slowed the adoption of transformational leadership, which required high levels of autonomy.

The findings of this research show that MOET's principles for quality improvement are still not understood and appreciated by all. Hence, the support for some principles by HE leaders at the institutional level was restricted for some indicators. Indeed, although HERA aimed to reach international standards by participating in the world's league tables and achieving international recognition of qualifications, institutional leaders were not well prepared for this process. Therefore, a key policy priority should be to plan for the long-term aim of developing comprehensive understanding of HERA's objectives and MOET's quality improvement principles. Moreover, instead of targeting world standards, it may be more practical for Vietnamese HE to target the Southeast Asian region, and compete with its neighbours like Singapore and Malaysia as a starting point. Additionally, an implication of this is the possibility that MOET may release their central control, and widely exercise autonomy transfer to encourage transformation in Vietnamese institutions. From the institutional perspective, it is suggested that leaders should be bold and negotiate greater autonomy transfer from MOET and practice institutional autonomy.

Taken together, these findings suggest a role for MOET in promoting HERA objectives by further relaxing central control. The process for reforming Vietnamese HE is long-term, and may take decades to show fruitful achievements. Therefore, the HE reform agenda may extend its vision to 2030 and beyond.

6.4 LIMITATION OF THE STUDY

The current study was affected by several inevitable limitations in terms of scope of the study, sample size, and the risk of subjectivity from the researcher. Several attempts were made to reduce and appropriately manage limitations.

First, the scope of this study was limited to the State sector. It should not be assumed that the findings of this study would reflect the entire Vietnamese HE sector, since leadership perspectives of leaders in the private sector were not investigated. Although efforts were made to link and compare with leadership in the private sector for gap elimination, this limitation in the scope of the study was deliberate to make the study manageable and able to be completed within the program's timeframes.

Second, a limitation lies in the fact that the study investigated leadership at the institutional level. As discussed above, the central control from MOET strongly influenced the transformational leadership practice of institutional leaders and their understanding of the quality improvement principles. The study could not include MOET's perspectives; therefore, it is unknown how and if MOET is exercising transformational leadership and management in the system of Vietnamese education to support the reforms. Moreover, how much control MOET is inclined to give up to actually transfer autonomy to institutions was impossible to ascertain.

Third, an additional uncontrolled factor is the possibility that the sample size of this study was relatively small although the data set was still effective for the analysis. The non-significant differences in leadership styles and the ranking priorities may have been affected by the sample size. The researcher made attempts to collect more data and increase the sample size. However, the Vietnamese HE system is very hierarchical and highly controlled, so access to senior leader participants was difficult due to their full schedule. In addition, the time constraints for a field trip overseas restricted the researcher from recruiting more participants.

Finally, the risk of subjectivity from the researcher was inevitable. Since the study was limited to relying on survey respondents as data sources, inferences reflect

the researcher's subjectivity. Responses were limited to the choices given by the survey. Additionally, the assumption that transformational leadership is appropriate for the HE reform agenda may not be greatly supported by Vietnamese leaders. All efforts were taken to minimise subjectivity through techniques like triangulation of data and member checking of responses. However, the fact that the results of the MLQ questionnaire have not been triangulated in determining the leadership style of the participants is an additional limitation. Having discussed limitations of this study, the next section on the future directions addresses ways of conquering these limitations.

6.5 FUTURE DIRECTIONS

There are several potential directions for future research to build on the findings of this study by addressing the limitations mentioned above.

First, the study could be replicated with larger samples and the involvement of more colleges and universities. The research sites of future studies may extend beyond the Mekong Delta region to entire country. It would be interesting if future studies could access the top ten universities in Vietnam to investigate leadership perspectives of these leaders on quality improvement principles noted by MOET. Then the comparison on leadership practice and support for quality improvement between the current study's sites and future top ten universities would be meaningful to MOET's HE reform agenda.

Second, since the current study focused on the State sector, future research could include the private sector to determine if leaders in the private sector are more transformational in leadership. This data would allow for interesting comparisons to be made between differences that may be found between institutional leaders in both sectors. Since private institutions are more autonomous in finance, human resources,

and curriculum, transformational leadership practice in the private sector may be more prominent.

Finally, if the debate is to be moved forward, a better understanding of leadership practice at the macro level of MOET needs to be developed. The current study focused on examining leadership at the institutional level. It would be interesting, therefore, to investigate the transformational leadership practice of MOET in the context of Vietnamese HE transitioning to higher standards of quality in education. In this process of reform, MOET plays the leading role and drives the Vietnamese HE system. Therefore, a future study at the macro level of MOET could examine more closely its own transformational leadership practice and the links between MOET and institutions in reforming the HE system in Vietnam.

Findings of this study also suggest that leaders at MOET level release more institutional autonomy to Vietnamese institutions and consciously consider institutional leaders' perspectives on quality improvement issues in the HERA. This leads to timely adjustments on strategies for implementing the HE reforms, and the educational development strategies in the next stage after 2020. Furthermore, the findings of this study on the international recognition and university ranking recommend that the expectation that at least one university will be placed in the world top 200 by 2020 (Vietnamese Prime Minister, 2013) obviously needs to be adjusted to vest current Vietnamese HE. Taken together, this study does not support recommendation to aim highly at world top 200. Instead, leaders at MOET level may consider establishing a national league table to rank Vietnamese HE institutions. Further, placing in the top universities of Asia region should be targeted before aiming the world class level. That would make a steady progress in Vietnamese HE development.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Ethics Approval Number

 Queensland University of Technology <small>D Brisbane Australia</small>	PARTICIPANT INFORMATION FOR QUT RESEARCH PROJECT – Questionnaire –
Leadership to Support Quality Improvement in Vietnamese Higher Education	
<small>QUT Ethics Approval Number: 1300000836</small>	

RESEARCH TEAM

Principal Researcher: Thu Dinh Xuan Pham, Ed.D Student
 Associate Researchers: Hitendra Pillay, Professor and Nanette Bahr, Professor
 Faculty of Education, Queensland University of Technology (QUT)

DESCRIPTION

This project is being undertaken as part of a Doctoral study by Thu Dinh Xuan Pham.

The purpose of this project is to investigate the Vietnamese higher education leaders' leadership styles; and to study how the Vietnamese Higher Education leaders prioritize the quality improvement criteria outlined by Ministry of Education and Training. The study will also investigate possible relationships between leadership styles and quality improvement priorities.

You are invited to participate in this project because you hold a leadership position in senior management at a college / university in Vietnam.

PARTICIPATION

Participation will involve completing an anonymous questionnaire that will take approximately 30-45 minutes of your time. You will be asked to indicate how frequently that applies in your case, on a 5 point scale (never = 0 to frequently = 4). Questions will include statements such as:

1. I provide others with assistance in exchange for their efforts.
2. I re-examine critical assumptions to question whether they are appropriate.
3. I fail to interfere until problems become serious.

Your participation in this project is entirely voluntary. Your decision to participate or not participate will in no way impact upon your current or future relationship with QUT or with your university or college. As this questionnaire is anonymous, it will not be possible to withdraw it once the questionnaire has been submitted.

EXPECTED BENEFITS

You will benefit from reflecting on your leadership styles and matching your leadership with quality improvement in your institution. The State sector and MOET will benefit from the findings of the research to inform the reform processes. The researcher will benefit from the opportunity to undertake research training.

RISKS

There are no risks beyond normal day-to-day living associated with your participation in this project.

PRIVACY AND CONFIDENTIALITY

All comments and responses are anonymous and will be treated confidentially. The names of individual persons or organization are not required in any of the responses. Any data collected as part of this project will be stored securely as per QUT's Management of research data policy.

CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE

The return of the completed questionnaire is accepted as an indication of your consent to participate in this project.

QUESTIONS / FURTHER INFORMATION ABOUT THE PROJECT

If have any questions or require further information please contact one of the research team members below:

Thu Dinh Xuan Pham
 04029 37 990
dinhxuanthu.pham@student.qut.edu.au

Professor Hitendra Pillay
 +61 7 3138 3030
h.pillay@qut.edu.au

Professor Nanette Bahr
 +61 7 3138 3455
n.bahr@qut.edu.au

CONCERNS / COMPLAINTS REGARDING THE CONDUCT OF THE PROJECT

QUT is committed to research integrity and the ethical conduct of research projects. However, if you do have any concerns or complaints about the ethical conduct of the project you may contact the QUT Research Ethics Unit on +61 7 3138 5123 or email ethicscontact@qut.edu.au. The QUT Research Ethics Unit is not connected with the research project and can facilitate a resolution to your concern in an impartial manner.

Thank you for helping with this research project. Please keep this sheet for your information.

Appendix B: Information on “Leadership to support quality improvement in Vietnamese Higher Education”

(This information sheet will be translated into Vietnamese)

My name is Thu D Pham from the School of Education and I’m doing a Doctor of Education, at QUT, Australia under the supervision of Prof. Hitendra Pillay (h.pillay@qut.edu.au) and Prof. Nanette Bahr (n.bahr@qut.edu.au). I will be grateful if you could please complete a survey which is part of my study.

This survey is designed to obtain information that will assist in understanding your leadership styles and your perception about quality principles to support quality improvement in your institution. Hence, your opinion regarding your own leadership styles and your perceptions on quality improvement is important for my study.

The survey is anonymous and no real names are required. Thus, you will not be able to be identified in anyway.

To help develop leadership in higher education, and improve the higher education quality, I would really appreciate if you would fill out the survey. It should take approximately 30-45 minutes to complete. An informed consent form will be attached in this survey to indicate your consent to participate in this study. This study has been approved by QUT ethics committee. If you have any concerns about the ethical conduct of the study, please contact the secretary of the University Human Research Ethics Committee (Tel No: +61 7 3138 2340)

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Thu DinhXuan Pham

(dinhxuanthu.pham@student.qut.edu.au)

Queensland University of Technology

Faculty of Education

School of Cultural & Professional Learning

Kelvin Grove Campus, Victoria Park Road, Kelvin Grove QLD 4059, Australia

Appendix C: Permission Letter for Using MLQ Instrument

For use by Thu Pham only. Received from Mind Garden, Inc. on July 4, 2013



www.mindgarden.com

To whom it may concern,

This letter is to grant permission for the above named person to use the following copyright material;

Instrument: *Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire*

Authors: *Bruce Avolio and Bernard Bass*


Copyright: *1995 by Bruce Avolio and Bernard Bass*

for his/her thesis research.

Five sample items from this instrument may be reproduced for inclusion in a proposal, thesis, or dissertation.

The entire instrument may not be included or reproduced at any time in any other published material.

Sincerely,



Robert Most
Mind Garden, Inc.
www.mindgarden.com

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Published by Mind Garden, Inc., www.mindgarden.com

Appendix D: Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire and the Ranking Scale Survey

(This survey will be translated into Vietnamese)

Part 1: Demographic Questions

- What is your gender?
 - a. Male b. Female

- Which age group that best describes your age?
 - a. 25 - 35 b. 36 – 45 c. 46 – 55 d. 56 – 65 e. > 65

- What is your highest degree?
 - a. Bachelors b. Masters c. Doctorate

- How long have you been in the senior management position?
 - a. 1 – 5 years b. 6 – 10 years c. > 10 years

Part 2: Multifactor leadership questionnaire

Due to copyright restrictions, part 2 cannot be made available here.

Part 3: The Ranking/Order Scale

Please rate the following issues in the ranking order, using number 1 as the first priority issue to 8 as the last priority issue from your point of view.

Rank	Internal/External institutional issues
	University Missions/Goals
	Teaching and Learning Quality
	Research Quality
	Human Resources Quality
	University Ranking
	International Recognition
	Customers' expectations
	Market's demand

Reasons for ranking the indicator number 1:

Reasons for ranking the indicator number 8:

Thank you for your time.

Appendix E: Permission for Data Collection in Vietnam (Vietnamese Version)

BỘ GIÁO DỤC VÀ ĐÀO TẠO
CỤC ĐÀO TẠO VỚI NƯỚC NGOÀI

Số: 1607/ĐT-VNN

V/v: thu thập tài liệu phục vụ đề tài
nghiên cứu của bà Phạm Đình Xuân Thu

CỘNG HÒA XÃ HỘI CHỦ NGHĨA VIỆT NAM
Độc lập - Tự do - Hạnh phúc

Hà Nội, ngày 18 tháng 11 năm 2013

Kính gửi:

Bà Phạm Đình Xuân Thu, giảng viên Trường Cao đẳng Y tế thuộc Ủy ban nhân dân TP. Cần Thơ được Bộ Giáo dục và Đào tạo cử đi học tiến sĩ ngành Giáo dục bằng học bổng ngân sách Nhà nước trong thời gian 03 năm kể từ ngày 01/01/2012-30/3/2013 và từ ngày 01/8/2013-01/5/2015 tại Trường Đại học Công nghệ Queensland, Ô-xtrây-li-a.

Trong khuôn khổ chương trình đào tạo tiến sĩ, bà Thu phải về nước từ ngày 01/01/2014 đến ngày 01/5/2014 thu thập số liệu và tìm hiểu thông tin về kỹ năng lãnh đạo và quan điểm của các vị lãnh đạo đối với các vấn đề liên quan đến cải thiện chất lượng giáo dục tại các trường đại học, cao đẳng trong vùng Đồng bằng sông Cửu Long, đặc biệt là tại TP. Cần Thơ, để phục vụ đề tài nghiên cứu. Để tạo điều kiện thuận lợi cho bà Thu hoàn thành luận án tiến sĩ, Cục Đào tạo với nước ngoài - Bộ Giáo dục và Đào tạo giới thiệu bà Phạm Đình Xuân Thu đến Quý Trường liên hệ xin Trường hỗ trợ trong việc cung cấp các thông tin cần thiết nêu trên phục vụ cho đề tài nghiên cứu của bà Thu.

Cục Đào tạo với nước ngoài - Bộ Giáo dục và Đào tạo trân trọng thông báo để Quý Trường biết và giúp đỡ bà Thu hoàn thành tốt nhiệm vụ học tập./.

Nơi nhận:

- Như trên;
- Bà Phạm Đình Xuân Thu (để t/h);
- Lưu: VT.



Appendix F: Permission for Data Collection in Vietnam (English Version)

BẢN DỊCH

MINISTRY OF EDUCATION AND TRAINING
DEPARTMENT OF VIETNAMESE
INTERNATIONAL EDUCATION
DEVELOPMENT

SOCIALIST REPUBLIC OF VIETNAM
Independence - Freedom - Happiness

Ha Noi, November 18, 2013

Nº: 2607/ĐTVNN

On data collection for the research of
Mrs. Thu Dinh Xuan Pham

Dear Colleges/Universities,

Mrs. Thu Dinh Xuan Pham, a lecturer at Can Tho Medical College under the management of the People's Committee of Can Tho City, has been nominated to study the Doctoral degree in Education from the government scholarship (VIED – QUT) in the three – year period from January 01, 2012 to March 30, 2013 and from August 01, 2013 to May 1, 2015 at Queensland University of Technology, Australia.

In the framework of the doctoral training program, Mrs. Thu has to take a field trip back to Vietnam from January 01, 2014 to May 01, 2014 to collect data to do research on the leadership styles and leaders' perceptions on quality improvement issues in the colleges and universities in the Mekong Delta, especially in Can Tho City. To give Mrs. Thu the best support to complete her doctoral dissertation, Department of Vietnamese International Education Development – Ministry of Education and Training recommends Mrs Thu Dinh Xuan Pham to access to the colleges and universities in this area with the purpose that these colleges and universities will help Mrs Thu to provide necessary information for her doctoral dissertation.

Department of Vietnamese International Education Development – Ministry of Education and Training respectfully sends this announcement to you and hope that you will help Mrs. Thu to complete her study duty.

To:

- *As listed above*
- *Mrs. Thu Dinh Xuan Pham*
- *Restore at VIED*

Director

(signed)

Nguyen Xuan Vang

