

# **Vocational Education Training in Vietnam: Perceptions and Improvement of Image**

By

**VI HOANG DANG**

(B.A. Foreign language; MEd)

A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for

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School of Education

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# **DECLARATION**

I hereby certify that the work embodied in this thesis is the result of original research and has not been submitted for a higher degree at any other university or institution.

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**VI HOANG DANG**

June 2016

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# **DEDICATION**

This thesis is dedicated to

**MY GRANDPARENTS: ĐẶNG HỮU BÌNH & NGUYỄN THỊ CHÂU**

**MY FATHER: ĐẶNG HỮU HÙNG**

**MY MOTHER: TRẦN THỊ LIÊN**

# PREFACE

This dissertation is submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy at the University of New England (UNE), Armidale, Australia by publication. The research described herein was conducted under the supervision of Dr Brian Denman and Dr Tanya Hathaway in the School of Education, between from February 2013 to June 2016. According to UNE (2015), ‘a thesis prepared by publication adds value to the research student experience, encourages timely completion, enhances job prospects and improves the publication outputs and research ranking of the University’.

Based on the guidelines from UNE for the PhD thesis submission by publication, the dissertation has three main parts.

The first part introduces the reasons why the research was conducted and outlines the context of the study, the aims, and research questions. The second part is the main body of the research. It comprises of the published papers corresponding with the chapters. The last part is the conclusion chapter. It highlights the findings of the research and the implications of the study. This part also includes the recommendations for further work.

It is noted that eliminating the duplications, author copied and pasted the main parts in the published papers and put them into the chapters. In addition, the references for the introduction chapter, literature review chapter and conclusion chapter are presented at the end of the conclusion chapter.

# ABSTRACT

This study addresses the perceptions and improvement of image in the vocational education and training sector of Vietnam. It identifies a range of perceived positions of key stakeholders concerning the context of the Vietnamese Government's recent efforts to promote training in the vocational education sector as an alternative to university studies. The latter is evidenced in the funding records for the sector which has demonstrated a tenfold increase, from 49 million United States Dollars (USD) to 490 million USD, in the period 2001 to 2011 under Vietnamese Prime Minister Nguyen Tan Dung (decision No. 630/QD-TTg, 2011). The expectations of Government are that the funding will encourage an increased number of students to enrol in the Vocational Education Training (VET) sector which will, in turn, lead to a greater number of skilled workers, with the expectation of becoming an industrial nation (as perceived by the rest of the world) by 2020. Currently, community acceptance of the VET sector in Vietnam has been very slow, which has major implications for the country. This study is a response to this apparent lack of acceptance from the Vietnamese community.

In order to gain a greater insight into the perceptions of key stakeholders, this study applied a mixed-method approach (quantitative and qualitative), which comprises of three methods to collect data. The quantitative method used a survey questionnaire to explore students' perceptions. The qualitative method involved open-ended interviews to explore parental perspectives on the sector. The last method utilised the nominal group technique to unpack the perceptions of six key stakeholders who have a clear understanding of and close relationship with the VET sector in Vietnam.

By means of triangulation, two reliable findings emerged from the research. First, it was revealed that the issue of the relationship between VET providers and industries resulted in a convergence of impact concerning the quality of VET programs. The second finding showed a web of influences on student perceptions of the VET sector, which was mapped to indicate preference according to priority factors. These influences include by order of ranking: (1) family/parents, (2)

school/guidance counsellors (3) government policies; (4) social perceptions; (5) VET image; and (6) media.

Based on these findings, five recommendations are proposed to aim at eliminating the negative perceptions on the VET sector and to helping young people, parents, industries and community to recognise that their perceived views of the VET sector in Vietnam may be unfounded.

The first recommendation is that the traditional understandings and notions of VET be replaced by an inclusive and transformational system under a new name, with new policy development and a revamp of the VET programme, facilitating a smoother transition between school and work.

The second recommendation relates with the relationship between the VET providers and industries. A model of the relationships between two institutions is proposed for further study and consideration.

The third recommendation is to conduct a promotional campaign focusing on the VET sector through media.

The fourth recommendation is to develop a career advice and guidance system, in which parents and guidance counsellors collectively assist students in guiding career choice.

The last recommendation proposes factors of influence concerning the perceptual process of an individual. The best way to change the perception of an individual is to change the perceived object which, for this study, is the VET sector in Vietnam.

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# LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ADB: Asian Development Bank

EFA: Exploratory Factor Analysis

FAE: Fundamental Attribution Error

GDVT: General Directorate Vocational Training

IE: Imperial Examinations

ILO: International Labour Organization

MOET: Ministry of Education and Training

MOLISA: Ministry of Labour, Invalids and Social Affairs

NGT: Nominal group technique

OS: Official-Scholar

SPSS: Statistical Package for the Social Sciences

TET: Technical Education Training

VET: Vocational Education Training

WB: World Bank



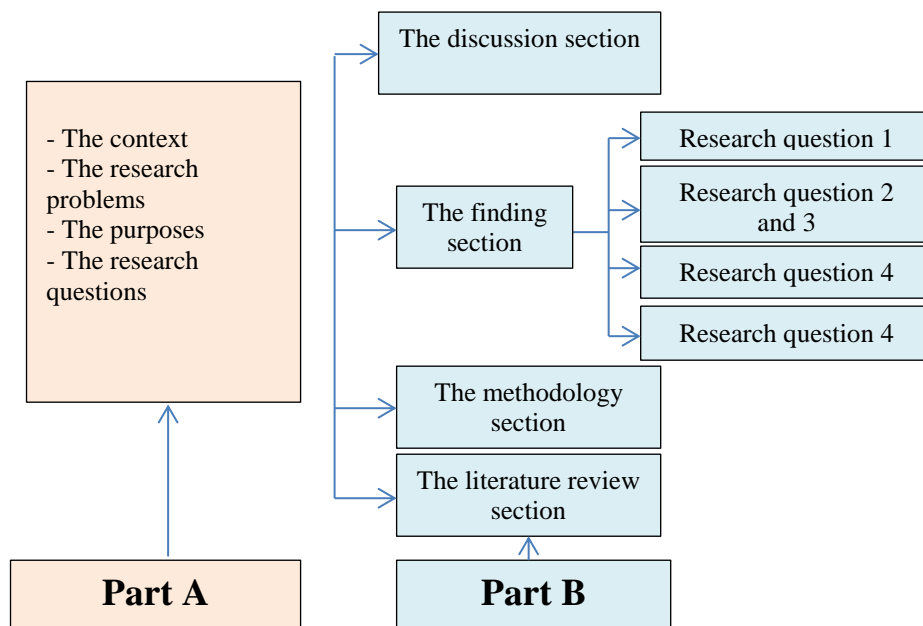
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# 1. Introduction

This introductory chapter to this thesis contains two main parts. The first part (part A, pink colour) presents an overview of Vietnam's social, historical and educational realities in its volatile political landscape regarding to 'North and South' of Vietnam as the context of the study. It also describes the demographic information of 'urban and rural' issues in Vietnam as well as the challenge of employment for young Vietnamese people. The statements of problem, the purposes and the research questions are then outlined. The second part (part B, blue colour) is called the outlines of the thesis. It is the main body of the chapter which portrays the entire picture of the thesis by providing the descriptions the content of each chapter correspondent with each research published paper. Figure 1 illustrates how chapter 1 is structured.

Figure 1: Structure of chapter 1 (Source by author)



# 1.1 The setting

## 1.1.1 The geography

Vietnam, officially known as the Socialist Republic of Vietnam, is a country located on the Eastern coast of the Indochina Peninsula. To the North Vietnam borders with China, to the West with Laos and Cambodia, and the South and East are next the Pacific Ocean. Hanoi is the Capital of the country. The country land area is 330,363 square kilometres. The land borders with China, Laos and Cambodia is 3,730 km and the coastline 3260 km long. Northern Vietnam and Southern Vietnam are two general regions within Vietnam (historyplace.com, 1999; see map 1).

Between two regions, the older is Northern Vietnam, where the Vietnamese culture originated over 2000 years ago in the Red River Delta, though Vietnamese people eventually spread south into the Mekong Delta. During the Trịnh-Nguyen War (1627–1673), the country was partitioned by two ruling dynasties.

The country was colonized by French for period from 1858 to 1954, and from 1954 to 1975; Vietnam was again divided into two separate nations, divided by the Ben Hai River at the 17th parallel, each with its own government.

Although the nation has been united since 1975, linguistic, cultural, and other differences serve to delineate the two regions from one another, with accompanying stereotypes. The traditionally more conservative, bureaucratic North has operated under socialism since the 1940s. The “renegade” South experienced domination for two decades by U.S. and Western influences until 1975 when the Americans withdrew (Engholm, 1995). It is said that the main difference between two regions is the people in North are more influenced by Communism and Confucian ideology and the democratically and Western style in South. For political aspect, the fact from independent day to now has proved that the most important powerful position general secretary has been from North and Prime Minister often from South.

The largest city in the North is Hanoi, the nation's capital, and the largest city in the South is Ho Chi Minh City (formerly called Saigon). Each region consists of

four subregions. Northern Vietnam includes the following subregions: Northwest, Northeast, Red River Delta, and North Central Coast. Southern Vietnam includes the following subregions: South Central Coast, Central Highlands, Southeast, and Mekong River Delta.

Map 1: Map of North and South Vietnam (Source: historyplace.com)



### **1.1.2 Vietnamese people**

Vietnam developed as an agricultural society and now has a population of over 90 million. Almost two fifths of the population are under 35 years of age; only 1.9 million people are currently attending higher education institutions; three fourths (62 million in 2007) are still living in rural areas; and 50% of the employed population works in agricultural activities, according to the statistic from General Statistics Office (GSO) of Vietnam in 2014.

It could be said that the people from North differs to the South in culture and living style (Nguyen, 2014). In the North, people strongly are influenced by Marxist-Leninist ideology or communist, whereas in the South is inherited the Western culture due to the French and US dominant period (Nguyen, 2014). However, after reunion from 1975, people are increasingly migrating to cities, increasing the population of Ho Chi Minh City, Hanoi, and other big cities. There are almost 60 ethnic minority groups in Vietnam, but the majority of the population is Vietnamese. The second largest ethnic group is Chinese, mainly living in big cities. Other ethnic minority groups are small, living in the remote mountainous areas.

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

### **1.1.3 The challenges of employment**

Vietnam is in the process of economic renewal, moving from a centralized planning management system towards a market economy under state management. More details from the International Labour Organisation (ILO) suggest that Vietnam is shifting from an agricultural economy to an industrial and service economy:

‘The biggest challenge to the youth nowadays is jobs. Millions of young people in the urban area are unemployed; the employed time of rural young people is less than 75% in a year. Less than 15% of young workers receive technical training, and very few have high skills. Many well-trained and capable young people are not properly employed’. (Vietnam's Youth Development Strategy by 2010, p. 2)

‘In Vietnam, as in many other developing countries, decisions on public education and training are made by the Government. Linkages between education and training and industry are inadequately developed. Yet such links are especially important in a country like Vietnam where the economy is undergoing industrialisation and restructuring. Dialogue between the relevant government ministries and industry is needed to ensure that schools and other education and training institutions are producing graduates needed by businesses. Furthermore such dialogue would facilitate early and better actions to deal with manpower mismatches which are inevitable in a rapidly changing economy’. (VCCI/ILO, 2007, p. 8)

The ILO reports highlighted the major challenges faced by the Vietnamese government, particularly the education system and Vietnamese employers. On the one hand, there is a need to address the issue of youth unemployment and to ensure that all young people have gainful employment. In order to achieve the skills that the young people must possess must also match the skills demands of industry and reflect the composition of the Vietnamese labour market. On the other hand, there is debate which considers how best to ensure that the Vietnamese youth are properly trained and the need to enhance better linkages between education and industry.

Unemployment is a serious threat to national security in Vietnam, especially with the country’s relatively youthful population. On a global scale, unemployment has been identified as a precursor to poverty and crime (AUSAID, 2006). One long-

term solution explored in this study is to investigate the VET sector and its ability to develop technical and entrepreneurial skills to boost Vietnam's economic activity and productivity in key sectors such as tourism, construction and agriculture.

#### **1.1.4 The history**

The history of Vietnam is characterized with war and colonialism. The Vietnamese nation originated in the Red River Delta, in what is today Northern Vietnam. The country was under Chinese imperial rule for almost 1000 years prior to its independent in 938, but continued to be influenced by Chinese Confucian ideas in culture, state management, education and politics to now. As the nation became stronger, the Vietnamese expanded southward in a process known as *nam tiến* (literally "southward march"). This culminated in the incorporation of territories formerly belonging to Champa and part of the Khmer Empire into Vietnam, quite relatively recently in Vietnamese history. Along with the troops sent to the South, civilians were also sent to cultivate the land, and in their contact with the native Chams and Khmers, slightly different regional cultures began to emerge. At the same time, it is important to note that Vietnamese of all regions still share a general Vietnamese culture.

In the 17th and 18th centuries, Vietnam was ruled by a figurehead emperor of the Lê Dynasty. Actual power rested in the Trịnh lords in the North, called *Đàng Ngoài* (Outer Expanse) and Nguyễn lords in the South, called *Đàng Trong* (Inner Expanse). The two sides ruled their own domain independent of the other, and frequently fought each other. The imposed separation encouraged the two regions to develop their own cultures.

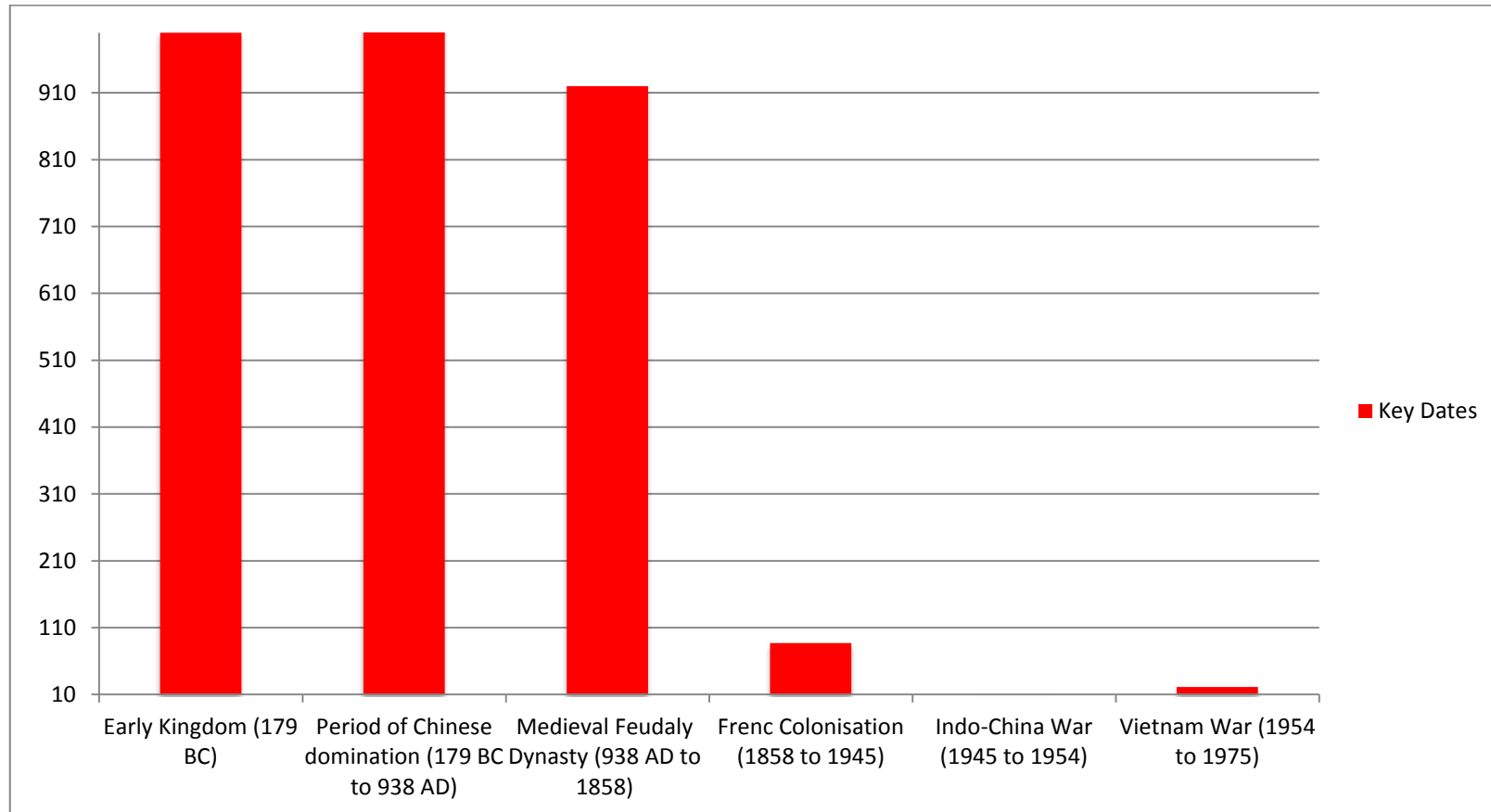
During French colonialism from the end of 19th Century and first half of the 20th Century, the French divided the country into three parts, directly ruling over Cochinchina (southern Vietnam) while establishing protectorates in Annam (central Vietnam) and Tonkin (northern Vietnam). Consequently, Cochinchina was more directly influenced by French culture than the other two regions.

Between 1954 and 1975, the country was again divided. The North, ruled by a communist regime, had more contact with China and the Soviet Union while the South had more contact with the United States.

When Vietnam was reunited under one communist government in 1975, it began a campaign of communist type economic changes. However, these changes turned out to be an economic disaster (Vuong, Dam, Van Houtte, Tran, 2011). In 1986, the government decided to change the economy again to make it more productive. In other words, it was a transition from a centrally planned economy to a market economy with socialist direction. These changes were called Doi Moi which means change and newness. From the *DOIMOI* policy was born, Vietnam has changed the way of cooperation with all other countries in the world with the slogan is friend to all. The goals have achieved to be Vietnam jointed World Trade Organization (WTO) in 2006 and Association of Southeast Asian Nations in 1995 and now is in the process of joining TPP 'The Trans-Pacific Partnership'. Figure 2 reflects key periods of history of Vietnam.



Figure 2: Key Historical Dates of Vietnam (Source: by author)



### **1.1.5 The political system**

According to the Constitution of the Republic of Vietnam in 2013, the Socialist Republic of Vietnam is a law-governed State and it is under the comprehensive leadership by the Communist party. The Vietnamese political system has established the Democratic Republic of Viet Nam from 1945 to present-day and which is comprised of the following:

i. The Communist Party of Vietnam is the vanguard of the Vietnamese working class, the working people, and the whole nation. It also is a loyal representative of the interests of the working class, the working people, and the whole nation. It is the most powerful organization in Vietnam. According to the constitution of Vietnam 2013 at the article number 4, it marked that the Communist Party of Vietnam leads comprehensively all aspects the nation. It means that all organizations and sectors in Vietnam must be under the leadership of the communist party.

ii. The National Assembly is the highest-level representative body of the people; the highest organ of state power of the Socialist Republic of Viet Nam; the National Assembly exercises three main functions: to legislate, to decide on important national issues, to exercise supreme supervision over all activities of the State

iii. The State President is the Head of State, elected by the National Assembly from among its deputies to represent the Socialist Republic of Viet Nam in domestic and foreign affairs. The President has twelve powers as provided by the Constitution, of which the most important are to declare the promulgation of the Constitution, laws and ordinances, to head the all people's armed forces and assume the Chairmanship of the National Defence and Security Council, to recommend to the National Assembly the election, removal or dismissal of the Vice President, the Prime Minister, Chief Justice of the Supreme People's Court, and Head of the People's Procuracy.

iv. The Government is the highest body of State administration of the Socialist Republic of Viet Nam. The Government has the same term of office as the National Assembly. The Government administers the implementation of the State's affairs in the fields of politics, economics, culture, society, national defence and security and foreign relations; ensures the efficiency of the State apparatus from central to grassroots levels; assures that the Constitution and laws are respected and executed; and guarantees the sustainability and improvement of the people's material and spiritual life. The Government consists of Prime Minister, who is a National Assembly deputy as provided by the Constitution, Deputy Prime Ministers, Ministers and other members.

v. People's Courts: The Supreme People's Court, local People's Courts, Military Tribunals and the other tribunals established by law are the judicial organs of the Socialist Republic of Viet Nam. Under special circumstances, the National Assembly may decide to set up a Special Tribunal. During trials, the Jury is equal to and independent from judges and shall only obey the law. Trials are held publicly except in cases stipulated by laws. Judgments of the People's Courts are made collectively and decided by majority. The Supreme People's Court is the highest judicial organ of the Socialist Republic of Viet Nam. It supervises and directs the judicial work of local People's Courts, Military Tribunals, Special Tribunals and other tribunals, unless otherwise prescribed by the National Assembly at the establishment of such Tribunals.

vi. People's Procuracies: The Supreme People's Procuracy oversees the enforcement of the law by Ministries, Ministerial-level organs, other Government agencies, local administration, economic entities, mass organizations, people's military organs and citizens. It exercises the right to prosecution, ensures serious and uniform implementation of the law. Local People's Procuracy and Military Procuracy oversee the execution of the law and exercise the right to prosecution as stipulated by the law.

vii. Social-political organizations and people's associations: These are organizations representing the interests of different social communities participating into the political system with their own principles, purposes, and

features. There are currently major social-political organizations in Viet Nam such as the Vietnamese Fatherland Front, Vietnamese Trade Union, Vietnamese Women's Union, Ho Chi Minh Communist Youth Union, and Veterans Association and other professional organizations.

In summary, the main difference between the Vietnamese political system and other like-minded political systems around the world is the comprehensive leadership of the Communist Party and, to some, its totalitarian dominance over the individual as expressed in the Vietnamese Constitution.

## **1.1.6 The development of the Vietnamese education system**

### **1.1.6.1 Education under the Feudalism**

Vietnam had been under the Chinese imperial rule for almost 1000 years, from 111 BC to 938. During this time, schools were established for the sons of the Chinese administrators, so that they could continue the rulings. This system continued until NgoQuyen defeated the Southern Han troops in 938, putting an end to the Chinese occupation and establishing the independent Vietnamese feudal state (Pham, 1995).

Throughout three dynasties Ngo, Dinh and Early Le (from 939-1009), education was provided in private and Buddhist schools, but was not developed extensively (Pham, 1995).

When the Ly Dynasty (1009-1225) began, education received more attention with much admiration for Confucius and love for learning and talents. The Temple of Literature in Thang Long (presently Hanoi) was built as the evidence to worship Confucius and study Confucianism in 1070. Six years later 1076, the Royal College was built in the Temple of Literature, aiming to provide moral education and training for princes and sons of dignitaries and mandarins (Marr, 1991). It was considered the first higher education institution to be built in Vietnam (Pham, 1995; Pham & Fry, 2002; MOET, 2004).

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

When King Le Thanh Tong started the Le Dynasty (1428-1778) in the fifteenth century, Confucian ideology, which valued knowledge, ethics and talents, was used as standards for ruling and national education, marking an era of flourishing education in Vietnam (MOET, 2004). In other words, Vietnam's Confucian heritage shaped its education system. In addition, the Confucian ideals and institutions shaped perceptions, attitudes and behaviours concerning education (London, 2011).

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

The curriculum for those competitive examinations was common for all types of schools (private, provincial schools, and the Royal College). The content was based on the set of Four Confucian Books (The Great Learning, The Doctrine of the Mean, The Analects of Confucius, and The Mencius) and Five Confucian Classics (The Ching, The Classic of Poetry, The Three Rites, The Classic of History, The Spring and Autumn Annals, and The Classic of Music). All teaching materials were written in Chinese; however, Vietnamese language

became compulsory in examinations in 1906 (MOET, 2004). The use of Vietnamese language was initially seen as undermining the status of scholars as it gave the masses access to literature, learning and literacy, which was previously unattainable (Marr, 1991; Pham, 1995).

The main learning method at that time was to learn all the teacher's sayings through rote learning (memorisation). In other words, learners achieved their knowledge passively (Tran, 2012). Students spent the majority of their time reciting and memorising texts and poems and were not encouraged to develop critical thinking or analysis. Gradually, rote-learning and memorisation constituted the learning method in Vietnamese education (Tran, 1998). This learning method is still applied in Vietnamese universities. In addition, Holliday (1994) found that a teacher from an Asian culture is considered the "fountain of knowledge, which is delivered without any question to students", and students must "struggle to attain" the knowledge delivered by the teacher. It is often understood that Asian students believe that learning is simply a combination of the memorisation of knowledge from books and the information provided by teachers in class (Tran, 2012).

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

### **1.1.6.2 Education under the French Colonialism**

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

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

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

Since the beginning of the twentieth century, the French imperialists began to establish higher education institutions in Vietnam. For example, the College of Medicine and Pharmacy was established in 1902; the Teacher Training College was established in 1917; College of Veterinary Medicine, College of Law and Administration and College of Civil Engineering were established in 1918; the College of Literature and College of Experimental Sciences were established in 1923; the College of Fine Arts and Architecture was established in 1924 (Pham, 1995). Although these institutions were called “Colleges”, the training content and purpose of the training were similar to professional (or vocational) education in present time (MOET, 2004; Pham, 1995). These colleges gradually became parts of the University of Indochina, which was established in 1906, providing a mixture of advanced secondary, technical and vocational schooling.

The Vietnamese education system in general and higher education in particular under the French colonialism was considered more developed than the feudal one. However, similar to other colonial regimes, the main objective of the education system was to train employees for the colonial apparatus (Pham, 1995), and thus provided access to a very small number of Vietnamese who could afford going further into higher education.

### **1.1.6.3 Education during the Resistance War against French Aggression (1945-1954)**

The victory of the August Revolution, led by Ho Chi Minh, in 1945 laid a foundation for the birth of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam (DRV) on the 2nd of September 1945. Immediately after proclaiming independence, the young government of DRV faced numerous challenges, including an empty bank account and 95 percent illiteracy rate (Dinh et al., 1999; Marr, 1991; Pham, 1995).

One of Ho Chi Minh's first actions as the president of the DRV was to declare a nationwide campaign to ameliorate illiteracy, which had been seen as an enemy (Marr, 1991). Quoc Ngu was made the official language at every level of education, including higher education (MOET, 2004). By the end of 1958, it was claimed that 93.4 percent of the lowland population aged twelve to fifty could read and write (Marr, 1991).

As one of the tasks to reconstruct the country, the young government of the DRV decided to apply the operations and structures of the education system inherited from the French colonial regime. The first reform of the education system carried out in this period was in July 1950. The principle of this reform was "nation, sciences and people", which was aimed to serve the resistance war and reconstruction of the nation (MOET, 2004, p.23). For the first time, it was understood by the public that Vietnamese education was aimed at improving the quality of the people's lives and to produce competent citizens for the future, beginning a new chapter of the educational system of an independent country (MOET, 2004; Pham, 1995).



#### **1.1.6.4 Education from 1954 to 1975**

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

##### **1.1.6.4.1 Education in Northern Vietnam**

Once peace was achieved in the North, the government took over the education system in the newly liberated area and actively prepared for the second education reform in 1956 in the context of economic rehabilitation: building the socialist society in the North and continuing to fight for the reunification of the whole country (MOET, 2004). The government of the DRV quickly adopted the Soviet model of higher education, which was characterized by mono-disciplinary universities such as Agriculture and Forestry University, Polytechnics and Economy University and University of Economics and Finance. Students were admitted to HEIs based on the results of competitive entrance examinations. Tuition was free, and graduates were assigned positions in the government organizations (Pham & Fry, 2002).

##### **1.1.6.4.2 Education in Southern Vietnam**

Education in Southern Vietnam during this period of time continued to follow the French model. The higher education system was designed around multi-disciplined universities. When the USA replaced France in Southern Vietnam in the 1960s, the higher education system adopted the American model, which was more academic than practice-oriented with focus on fundamental sciences, laws, economy and administration. By 1975, there were four public universities located in Saigon, Huu, Can Tho and Thu Duc, serving 130,000 students; three community colleges in My Tho, Nha Trang and Da Nang, serving 2,600 students; eleven private HEIs in various locations, serving 30,000 students (MOET, 2004; Pham, 1995). These universities were large and comprehensive, having multiple disciplines; for example, Saigon University had thirteen

colleges and 41 departments, Hue University had three faculties and two colleges. However, almost two-thirds of the total student population undertook social studies, mainly law and literature (MOET, 2004).

#### **1.1.6.5 Education before the “open door” policy, from 1975 to 1986**

After liberating the South from the American occupation, Vietnam reunified two regions and became the Socialist Republic of Vietnam. For general education, the third education reform happened following the Resolution Number 14-NQ/TW of the Fourth Congress of the Central Committee of the CPV in January 1979. This reform sought to unify the two systems and only applied to the general education from year 1 to year 12 (MOET, 2004).

Higher education institutions in the South were re-organized to follow the model of higher education in the North, aiming to build a united system of socialist HEIs. There were only public HEIs during this period. All private HEIs in the South were merged or became public HEIs since 1976. Higher education institutions included colleges (three-year programmes) and universities (five- to six-year programmes, depending on disciplines). Students attended colleges/ universities in three different categories: regular full-time; in-service; and short-term training. In the academic year 1980-1981, the country had 85 mono-disciplinary public universities and 33 public colleges, with 146,000 students and 17,300 academic staff (MOET, 2004).

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

#### **1.1.6.6 Education from 1986 to present**

The biggest challenge facing the Vietnamese education system in the early 1980s was that the State was not able to provide the financial resources. The country was deep in a serious financial crisis, due to the consequence of the

devastating wars and the impact of the centrally planned economy that was no longer appropriate in the world market. Education, like other social sectors, faced serious shortages of resources. Universities and colleges did not have adequate budgets for maintaining their regular activities, nor did they have any autonomy within the bureaucratic system (MOET, 2004).

In order to overcome the economic crisis, Vietnamese leaders planned for a major national reform, moving from the centralized planning system to the socialist market-oriented mechanism. As a consequence of this overall change in national policies, the education sector also needed reform. Higher education was no longer seen as training for only public organizations, but for various economic components including the private sector and to meet the diverse learning needs of the society. Instead of reliance on the state budget, all possible financial sources were to be mobilized and used. Instead of rigid training programmes, various flexible and diverse training programmes were developed to meet the requirements of the employment market and finding a job in the market-oriented economy (MOET, 2004).

## **1.1.7 Current education system in Vietnam**

### **1.1.7.1 Introduction**

According to London (2011, p.21), ‘The formal administrative organization of the education system in Vietnam is quite centralized’. To support for this statement, the author conducted an interview in 2006, one MOET official asserted that from his office it was possible to know what was being taught at any hour of any day in any corner of Vietnam (London, 2011). By 2008, the education system (that is, all public and non-public schools, institutes, and universities) accounted for well over 20 million students and 1.5 million personnel. Taken alone, the general education system (consisting of primary, lower secondary, and upper-secondary education) included some 16.2 million students and 789,000 teachers (GSO, 2014).

### **1.1.7.2 Pre-school education**

According to the Education Law of 2005, early childhood education caters (ECE) to children from 3 months to 6 years of age. It is not compulsory, and is offered by both the public and the private sectors. ECE institutions include crèches for children from 3 months to 3 years of age; kindergarten schools and classes for children from 3 years to 6 years of age; and young ‘sprout’ schools, combining crèches and kindergartens, for children aged 3 months to 6 years.

### **1.1.7.3 Primary education**

Primary education is part of general education and lasts five years (grades 1-5); it is intended for children in the age group 6-11 years and is compulsory. Pupils having successfully completed primary education receive a certificate issued by the principal of the school.

### **1.1.7.4 Secondary education**

General secondary education is divided into two cycles: lower secondary education, lasting four years from grade 6 to grade 9) and upper secondary education from grade 10 to grade 12 (see figure 2). Students having successfully completed lower secondary education at 15 years of age have two choices for further education. The first choice, students go to upper secondary education for keep going to pursue the academic stream. This choice is main trend of students at the moment. According to GDVT (2011), there were around 80% lower secondary students entering to the upper secondary education. Whereas, the second choice, they can enrol to the vocational education training providers or technical schools to get skill were only 4.3% (GDVT, 2011).

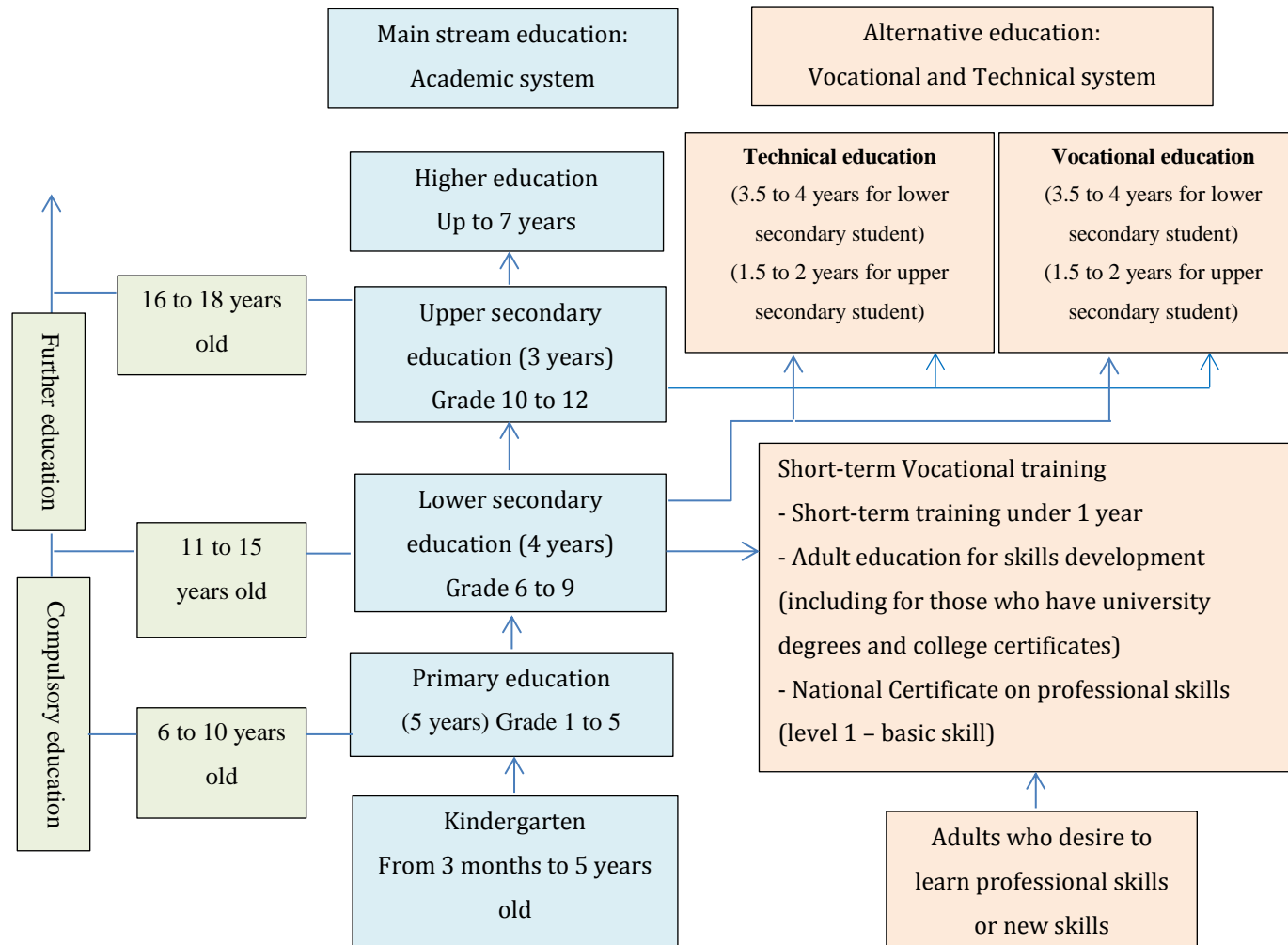
### **1.1.7.5 Tertiary and vocational education training**

Two main characteristics of Tertiary and Technical and vocational education in Vietnam could be said that firstly, the system has expanded quickly and secondly; it has fallen to meet the requirements from industries and shortage of skilled (London, 2011).

From 1981 to 2014, the number of colleges and universities in Vietnam increased 4 times, from 118 to 472, while the number of vocational schools (colleges) nearly trebled, from 84 to 209 from 1999 to 2008 (London, 2011). Today, over 1.6 million Vietnamese are attending colleges and universities in Vietnam; nearly double that of ten years ago. The role of non-state education has increased as well. Of the 330 colleges and universities in 2007, about fifty were non-state, accounting for roughly 12 per cent of tertiary students. By 2020, government targets stipulate that non-state providers of higher education will account for 40 per cent of enrolments. While higher education and vocational education are the fastest growing segments of the education system, they are arguably also the segments most in dire need of reform.

The higher education system and VET sector are failing to meet the increasing demand for skilled labour. According to the report from Asian Bank Development (ADB, 2014), the productivity growth in industry ranks the lowest among Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) countries. Low industrial productivity is a reflection of low skill levels in the labour force, among other things. In addition, the competitiveness decreased over the past 5 years, slipping from 64th place to 75th on the global competitiveness index (out of 134 countries). The level of competitiveness tends to be correlated with levels of education and training (ADB, 2014).

Figure 3: The Vietnamese Educational System (Source: London, 2011, p.20)



### **1.1.7.6 Summary**

It clearly states that the Vietnamese education system has been seen as embodying many characteristics borrowed from other countries due to the historical influences. The system has borrowed from the macro level such as the structures and management styles to the micro level such as the teaching, learning and evaluating methods. Up to now, these characteristics still remain. On the macro level, the management style works and operates the same the French style (central management). On the micro level and under the Confucian influences, the way of teaching, learning and assessing still remains as emphasising rote-learning and memorisation. With regards to the higher education system including the vocational education sector, multi-disciplined universities are still under the influences of French and United State of America, and mono universities continue to sit under the Soviet model.

### **1.1.8 The place of VET in Vietnam**

Vocational education forms part of the vocational and technical education sector in Vietnam and runs parallel with the mainstream pathway to higher education via the school system (see Figure 8). Within the sector, vocational education training (VET) exists alongside technical education and training (TET) and both are responsible for producing the skilled and technical workforce of the country. The VET system is under the management of the General Directorate of Vocational Training (GDVT), which is one of the departments of the Ministry of Labour Invalid Social Affair (MOLISA). Its counterpart, the Ministry of Education and Training (MOET), manages the TET field.

The main responsibility of the VET system and the TET system is considered to be the production of a skilled workforce, not only in the quantity of available workers but also in the quality of skills training required when implementing the government's socio-economic development strategy in the period 2011-2020. In 2011, under Vietnamese Prime Minister Nguyen (decision No. 630/QD-TTg, 2011), the vocational training development strategy (2011-2020) was implemented to increase the trained workforce by up to 55% (34.4 million

people) by 2020. Therefore in the contemporary context, the Vietnamese government is seeking to increase student enrolments in the VET sector.

The establishment of a nationwide network of VET institutions demonstrates significant government effort to promote skilled education to Vietnam's future generation. Recent statistics (GDVT, 2011, p.22) show that the VET network has 1,293 registered providers including 136 vocational colleges, 308 vocational secondary schools, and 849 vocational training centres. From 2006 to 2011, VET providers produced over 1,300,000 skilled workers with training lasting typically between 12 and 36 months. In the period from 2006 to 2011, a further 7,000,000 workers were produced during short-term vocational training lasting between 3 and 12 months. According to GDVT (2011, p.61), over 80% of students were successful in gaining employment immediately after graduation. In 2010, the GDVT (2011) reported that employment rates in the welding, automotive, and electrical divisions were approximately 90%. The VET sector is made more attractive by its salaries. In the technical fields such as electricity, welding, computing, and mechanics, vocational graduates were paid 10% more than academic graduates. In addition, the ratio of students holding bachelor's degrees, and even master's degrees that have been unable to secure employment and have, therefore, enrolled in vocational schools, is up by 30% (Huy, 2014).

### **1.1.9 Statement of the problems**

The study was conducted in the context of the Vietnamese Government's recent efforts to promote training in the vocational education sector as an alternative to university studies. This is evidenced in the funding records for the sector which has demonstrated a tenfold increase, from 49 million USD to 490 million USD, in the period 2001 to 2011. In addition, the expectations of government are that the funding will encourage an increased number of students to enrol in the VET sector which will, in turn, lead to a greater number of skilled workers. The expectation from government is the increase from 23.5 million in 2015 to 33.4 million skilled people by 2020 and becoming the industrialised country in 2020.



However, the majority of students and parents still prefer mainstream education pathways to higher education and university rather than the vocational education training (VET). As a result, the lower and upper secondary student enrolments in long-term VET programs, during the period of increased funding the numbers actually decreased. For example, in the academic year 2010-2011, following graduation, 80.36% of lower secondary students (year 9) continued into mainstream education and enrolled in high school compared to only 1.88% of lower secondary graduates who instead opted to enrol in the vocational education and technical education providers (GDVT, 2011, p.48). For students graduating from upper secondary schools (year 12) in the academic year 2011–2012, the statistics were equally discouraging, with 61.26% of students continuing to higher education level and only 10% enrolling to the technical and vocational education pathway (GDVT, 2011, p.48). Besides, once students enter vocational education, evidence of disengagement with the experience is evident. According to the report from the General Directorate Vocational Training (GDVT) in 2011, a considerably high student dropout rate of 15% (equivalent to 21,782 students) was recorded at the vocational secondary schools and vocational colleges in the academic year 2008-2011.

This leads to question whether students, parents and other key stakeholders understand the technical and vocational education training system enough to appreciate the benefits of the training and to question how this may influence their opinions, attitudes and perceptions about the quality and value of the technical and vocational education in Vietnam. These statistics also raise question about the current image of VET in attracting the student enrolments and sustaining robust retention rates.

### **1.1.10 Research purpose and objectives**

The overarching purpose of the present study is to explore the key stakeholders' perceptions towards the VET sector in Vietnam. The specific objectives are:

- i. Determine the image of vocational education training as perceived by lower secondary and, upper secondary school students, and current vocational students in North and South Vietnam.
- ii. Explore the parental perspectives towards the VET sector.
- iii. Explore the perceptions of the key stakeholders who have clear understandings of and close relationships with the VET sector.
- iv. Improve community awareness and participation in VET by proposing strategies for changing community attitudes and perceptions at local and national levels in Vietnam.

### **1.1.11 Research questions**

Based on the purposes of the study, the following research questions guided the study:

1. What are lower and upper secondary school students, and current vocational students' perceptions of the VET image?
2. To what extent does VET's image relate to students' loyalty to the VET programs?
3. To what extent does the image of VET influence lower secondary, upper secondary, and current vocational students' perceptions of and intentions to enrol and complete the VET programs?
4. What do key stakeholders consider the factors impacting on the quality of VET programs?

## **1.2 Outlines of the thesis**

### **1.2.1 Introduction**

This second part to the introduction chapter has six main sections (see figure 1, part B, Blue colour) corresponding with the six core chapters in the classical PhD thesis. They are: (1) Introduction; (2) Literature review; (3) Methodology; (4) Data analysis; (5) Discussions and (6) Conclusions.

The first section introduces the context of the study, the reasons why the study was taken, followed by the purposes of the study, leading to answer the research questions. At the end of the section, the outlines of the study are then presented. The second section sets the boundary of the research, corresponding to the literature review chapter. The third section describes the methodology which was employed in this study. The fourth section comprises four published papers which present the findings of the study. It corresponds with the data analysis chapter. The fifth section discusses the major findings of the study. The last section or conclusion chapter sums up the findings of the research, presents a series of recommendations for improvement the VET image and limitations as well as the implications of the study.

The purpose of this section is to highlight the main points of each pending and published research papers to portray the full picture of the entire research. The second section or literature review chapter is the next.

It is noted that this thesis is submitted by publication, so it should be expected there will be some element of duplication throughout the whole of the thesis.

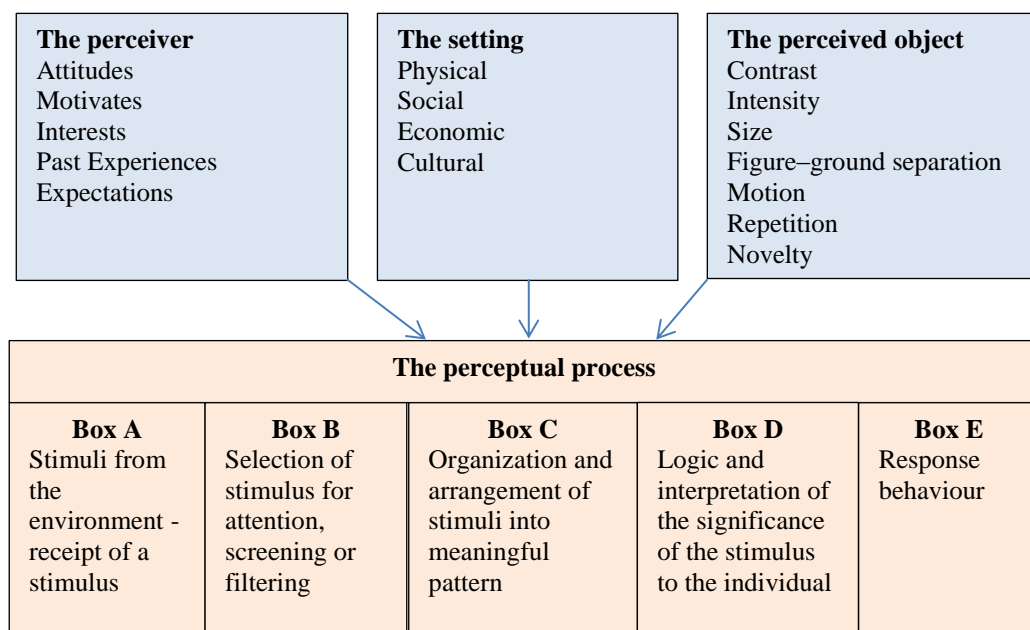
### **1.2.2 The literature review chapter**

The overarching purpose of this study is to explore the perceptions of key stakeholders towards the VET sector in Vietnam. Therefore, in an attempt to set boundaries for the study, this chapter focuses solely on perception and image of VET as an organization. It comprises of three parts. The first part consists of a review of the literature treating perception. The second involves a

review of literature treating the image of an organisation. The last part reviews the contextual study which is Vietnam. The concept of ‘perception’ was used to describe the participants understandings of VET because it goes some way to explaining why people have different point of view, angle of view, evaluation and thinking towards one phenomenon. The concept of ‘organizational image’ was used to describe VET and is the sum of the beliefs an individual has towards the organization (Landrum et al. 1998; Arpan et al. 2003; Alessandri, 2001). The image of VET was more easily measured if it was quantified by a series of dimensions instead of the whole aspects of the organization. The rationale for researching the contextual study is to apply existing perspectives on public perception in order to explain and describe how different the Vietnamese context is to other countries of the world.

The first part of the chapter provides a review of literature that focuses on the term of ‘perception’. It includes the concept of perception, stages of the perceptual process, factors influencing the perceptual process and common perceptual errors. In this study, the perceptual process and the influential factors have been seen as the powerful theoretical framework because it could explain why people having the different views on the same one phenomenon (see figure 4).

Figure 4: The influential factors on the perceptual process (Source: by author)



The second part relates with the image of an organization and comprises two main sections. In the first section, the concept of organizational image, the process of the image establishment, and the impact of the different source factors on the organizational image are included. In the second section, it focuses mainly on the term of 'loyalty'. Why the term 'loyalty' was used in this study and what the relationships between two terms 'organizational image' and 'loyalty' were answered fully in this section of the chapter.

The last part describes the context of the study, which is Vietnam. By reviewing and analysing two ideologies, Confucianism and Marxism-Leninism, this part attempts to draw the contextual picture of this study in terms of three issues: social-culture, economy, and politics. Confucian ideology was included because it still strongly influences and shapes the Vietnamese social culture. Besides, the influences of the Confucian ideology on the VET sector were presented. The Marxism-Leninism ideology was included because, at the moment, it still is used as the official tool in the economic development and the guide lines for the political system. Their influences on the VET sector also were critically analysed. The full details of each ideology and their influences on the VET sector are presented at the end of the chapter.

### **1.2.3 The methodology chapter**

In order to deal with the purposes of the research and to respond the research questions, the main purpose of this paper is to describe and defend the methodology employed in this study.

To gain a greater insight into the perceptions of various key stakeholders towards the VET sector, the published paper titled: A Mixed Method Approach Enabling the Triangulation Technique: Case Study in Vietnam answered the reasons why the mixed method used in this study, explained how the research design was developed and explained why each approach of collecting data was employed in this study, at the part two of the paper. The published paper can be found at: the website <http://doi.org/10.5430/wjss.v2n2p1> or see appendix 11

At the part three of the methodology paper, it outlines the detail of each step of each approach. For the quantitative survey questionnaire approach, the steps such as designing and developing the survey questionnaire, the sampling strategy and participant recruitment, and data analysis methods were presented in order. For the qualitative approach, the steps involving in creating the open-ended interview questions were outlined: These steps were (1) designing the open-ended interview questions; (2) sampling and (3) procedure and data analysis. Respect to the Nominal group technique (NGT) called semi quantitative approach (Dobbie et al., 2004), five steps namely: (1) the definition of the NGT; (2) the development of NGT; (3) participants, (4) preparing for an NGT workshop and (5) the data analysis process also were included. The full detail of each approach and the methodology could be found at the website [http: doi.org/10.5430/wjss.v2n2p1](http://doi.org/10.5430/wjss.v2n2p1)

## **1.2.4 The data analysis chapter**

The main purpose of this chapter is to present the results of the research. It was organized into three sections. The first section was the findings on the perceptions of students towards the VET image. The second section was the findings on the parental perspectives also on the VET sector. The third section was the evaluations, thinking and viewpoints of six key stakeholders on the VET as well. It begins with the students' perceptions on the VET.

### **1.2.4.1 The students' perceptions on the VET**

To measure the students' perception towards the VET image and find out the factors which influencing to the student's loyalty toward the VET programs or to answer the research question number one, two and three, this study used the survey questionnaire as the tool to collect data. A sample of 300 lower secondary school, 300 upper secondary school, and 300 vocational students was drawn from across the Northern to Southern regions of Vietnam. Several data analysis techniques such as mean data analysis, exploratory factor analysis (EFA) combination with the correlations analysis and linear regression analysis were applied to explore the perceptions of students towards the VET image.

#### **1.2.4.1.1 Students' perceptions on the VET image by the mean data analysis technique**

The main purpose of this paper was to explore the students' perception toward the VET image by using the mean data analysis technique or answering the research question one. The quantitative data, consisting of 900 student responses to 64 statements contained in the survey questionnaire were coded and entered into the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 19 for analysis. This technique determined what lower and upper secondary school students, and current vocational students thought, evaluated or perceived about the image of VET and loyalty towards the VET programs. The mean score from 1.00 – 1.80 was strongly disagree, 1.81 – 2.60 disagree, 2.61 – 3.40 neutral, 3.41 – 4.20 agree and 4.21 – 5.00 strongly agree. The main body of the paper which presented the results and discussions were found at the section 4 of the published paper titled: Vietnamese Students' Perception and Loyalty towards an Image of Vocational Education and Training or at the website: [http://www.ifrnd.org/Research%20Papers/V5\(4\)9.pdf](http://www.ifrnd.org/Research%20Papers/V5(4)9.pdf), Vol. 5, No. 4, p. 228-238, December 2014 or see appendix 12.

#### **1.2.4.1.2 Students' views on the VET image by the EFA technique combination with correlation analysis**

This paper also presented the views of students on the VET image by using the exploratory factor analysis (EFA) technique combination with the correlation analysis technique or answering the research question number two. Regarding to the EFA technique, it refined the dimensions which represented for the VET image and students' loyalty. At the final stage, the exploratory factor analysis identified seven new dimensions or independent variables that represented for the image of VET and two dimensions or dependent variables that represented for the students' loyalty. Regarding to the correlation analysis technique, seven new dimensions that represented for the VET image was analysed with each dimension that represented for the students' loyalty to find out which dimensions of the VET image having significant correlation with the dimension of students' loyalty. Full details of two techniques, the results and discussions on the results were presented at the section: Exploratory factor

analysis, page 44 and the section: Correlation analysis, page 46 of the published paper titled: The influence of vocational education training image on students' loyalty: Case study in Vietnam, (DOI: 10.5897/IJVTE2015.0178) or see appendix 13.

#### **1.2.4.1.3 Students' views on the VET image by the regression analysis technique**

The most complicated data analysis technique which was applied in this study was the linear regression technique. This technique was the tool to find out which dimensions of the VET image impacting the students' loyalty towards the VET programs or answering the research question number three.

Based on the results of the correlation analysis technique in the previous paper, only the dimensions which represented for the VET image correlated significantly with the dimensions which represented for the students' loyalty were qualified for the linear regression analysis. The full details of the technique, the results and discussions on the results can be found at the section: Linear regression analysis, page 47 of the published paper titled: The influence of vocational education training image on students' loyalty: Case study in Vietnam, (DOI: 10.5897/IJVTE2015.0178) or see appendix 13.

It is noted that, at the end of the paper, it presented a discussion on the findings of the study.

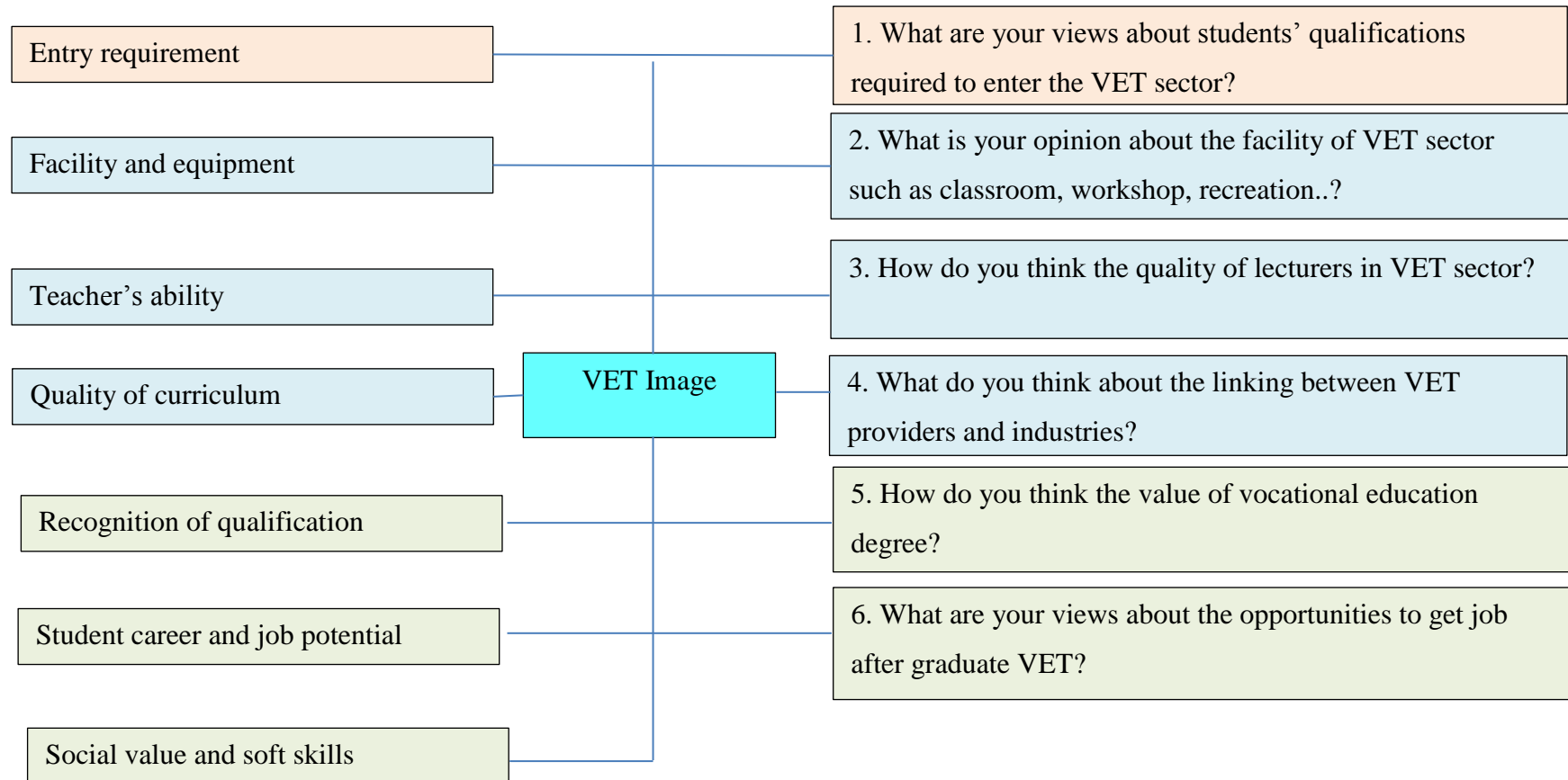
#### **1.2.4.2 The parental perspectives**

The previous section presented the results of the quantitative approach which explored and measured the students' perceptions and loyalty towards the VET image. In addition, it found out the factors that influencing to the students' loyalty towards the VET programs. This section would like to add one more qualitative approach by using the open-ended interview question to explore the parental perspectives towards the VET sector in Vietnam.



The reason the students' parents were the target in this study because they are the most important person in the Vietnamese context to support their children in finance and guideline them for the further education and career choices. Using the open-ended interview questions were the tool to collect data because of two reasons. Firstly, the set of questions focuses on only one topic (the VET) and could be prepared in advance. Secondly, open-ended questions allow participants the freedom to express their views in their own words and in their own time, in a place of their choosing (Kendall & Kendall, 2002). These questions were developed based on the dimensions represented for the VET image because the researcher would like to compare and triangulate data from the views of students and parents on the same phenomenon. It is the VET sector. Figure 5 presents how the set of open-ended interview questions were developed.

Figure 5: How the open-ended interview questions were developed (Source: by author)



Data pertaining to each question were entered into separate Excel spreadsheets. A thematic analytical framework was applied to analyse data in line with the inductive approach. An inductive approach is used in qualitative research to augment understanding of complex data using summary themes or categories from the raw data (Thomas, 2006).

The responses from the questions were grouped into three domains to explain the viewpoints of parents concerning the VET sector. In each domain, there were issues describing the detailed aspects of the sector. According to Ryan (2003), there are twelve techniques used to create themes and sub-themes. In this study, three techniques, namely (1) word repetitions, (2) key words in context, and (3) similarities and differences were applied to determine the common emerging themes in each issue. The next step was to identify sub-themes that link the research findings and the research questions through data analysis. Data are compiled by gathering them in the poles, themes and categories to understand the meaning of a phenomenon. The full findings of the approach can be found at the pages from 40 to 48 of the published paper titled: Parental Perspectives towards the Vocational Education Training Sector in Vietnam. It could also be seen at the website: [http://www.ifrnd.org/Research%20Papers/V6\(1\)5.pdf](http://www.ifrnd.org/Research%20Papers/V6(1)5.pdf) or see appendix 14. It is noted that there were the discussions at the end of each finding.

#### **1.2.4.3 The views from other key stakeholders**

The quantitative approach used the survey questionnaire to explore the perceptions of three groups of students towards the VET image. The qualitative approach applied the open-ended interview questions to investigate the parental perspectives also on the sector. This paper used the nominal group technique (NGT) which looks like the semi quantitative approach (Dobbie, Rhodes, Tysinger & Freeman, 2004) to unpack six key stakeholders' perceptions towards the VET sector.

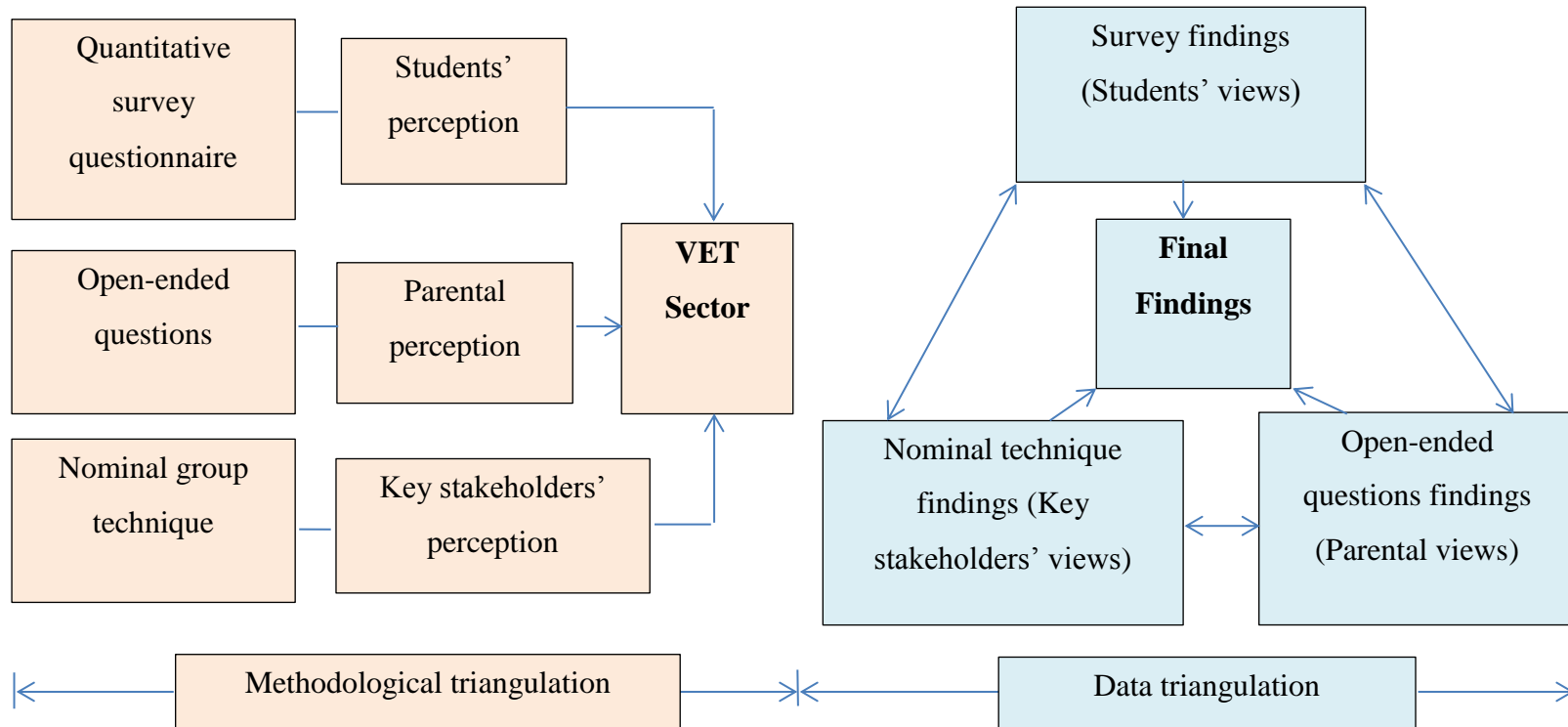
The reason six stakeholders were formally invited to the workshop based on their roles, the close relationship with and a clear understanding of the VET

sector. The roles of two policy makers from vocational education training sector and technical education training field will make policies and generate the mechanisms. The roles of principals of secondary schools will help students in advices and guiding career choice in the future. The appearance of manager of industry at the workshop will contribute the ideas on the roles of building up curriculum, evaluations and recruit VET graduates. The VET lecturer will present their understanding and experiences insights the VET sector.

The paper was organized into 4 sections. The first section introduced the place of the approach in this study and explained the role of each key stakeholder at the focus group workshop. The second section focused solely on the NGT in term of its definition, how to prepare for NGT workshop, the process of NGT and the advantages and disadvantages when using the NGT. The third section was the main body of the paper. It presented the findings of the study combination with the discussions followed by. The last section concluded the findings of the approach. Then the recommendations were given out. Full detail of each section was in the published paper titled: The use of nominal group technique: Case study in Vietnam, at the website: <http://dx.doi.org/10.5430/wje.v5n4p14> or see appendix 15.

In short, to explore the perceptions of various key stakeholders towards the VET sector, this study applied the mixed method including quantitative, qualitative and semi quantitative approaches. The foundation of the research was from the survey questionnaire. Based on dimensions on the VET image at the questionnaire, the open-ended interview questions and the question in the nominal group technique were developed. Using the data triangulation technique, the researcher expects the results from the survey questionnaire, open-ended interview questions, and nominal group technique will be compared to see if similar results emerge. If the conclusions from each of the methods are the same, then validity is established (Mays & Pope, 2000). Figure 6 describes how data will be triangulated.

Figure 6: Data triangulation method (Source: by analysis from author)



## **1.2.5 Discussion chapter**

The main purpose of this paper is to provide a discussion on the relationship between the VET providers and industries which emerged from the data triangulation technique. The technique revealed that the issue of the relationship between VET providers and industries scored in the results of all three methods, and this has been seen as the factor of convergence to impact the quality of VET programs.

The discussion on the relationships between two institutions begins with a review of the processes involved in forming a strategic partnership among key stakeholders in the VET sector and a discussion what factors enhance or constrain such strategic partnerships. Secondly, the models of relationships between VET providers and industries of the developing and developed countries in the world were described as examples for discussion. Lastly, based on these models, recommendations for boosting the comprehensive cooperation between VET schools and industries in Vietnam were proposed. The full detail of the discussion on the relationships between the VET providers and industries is presented at the published paper titled: “The relationships between the vocational education training providers and enterprises: Theory and practice”. At the website: <http://www.journals.aiac.org.au/index.php/IJELS/article/view/2406/2094>, or see appendix 16

## **1.2.6 Conclusion**

This chapter has provided an introduction to the study and an outline of each chapter of the thesis. At the first part, the setting of the study, the statement of the problems, the purposes of the study and the research questions were given out. By providing six published papers, the second part step by step introduced the main points of each published paper to aim helping the readers understanding the process of the study and drawing the main ways that building up the entire picture of thesis. The next chapter will define the boundaries of the project and looks at relevant literature in the field.

# Chapter 2: Perception and Image of the Organization

- 2.1 Introduction
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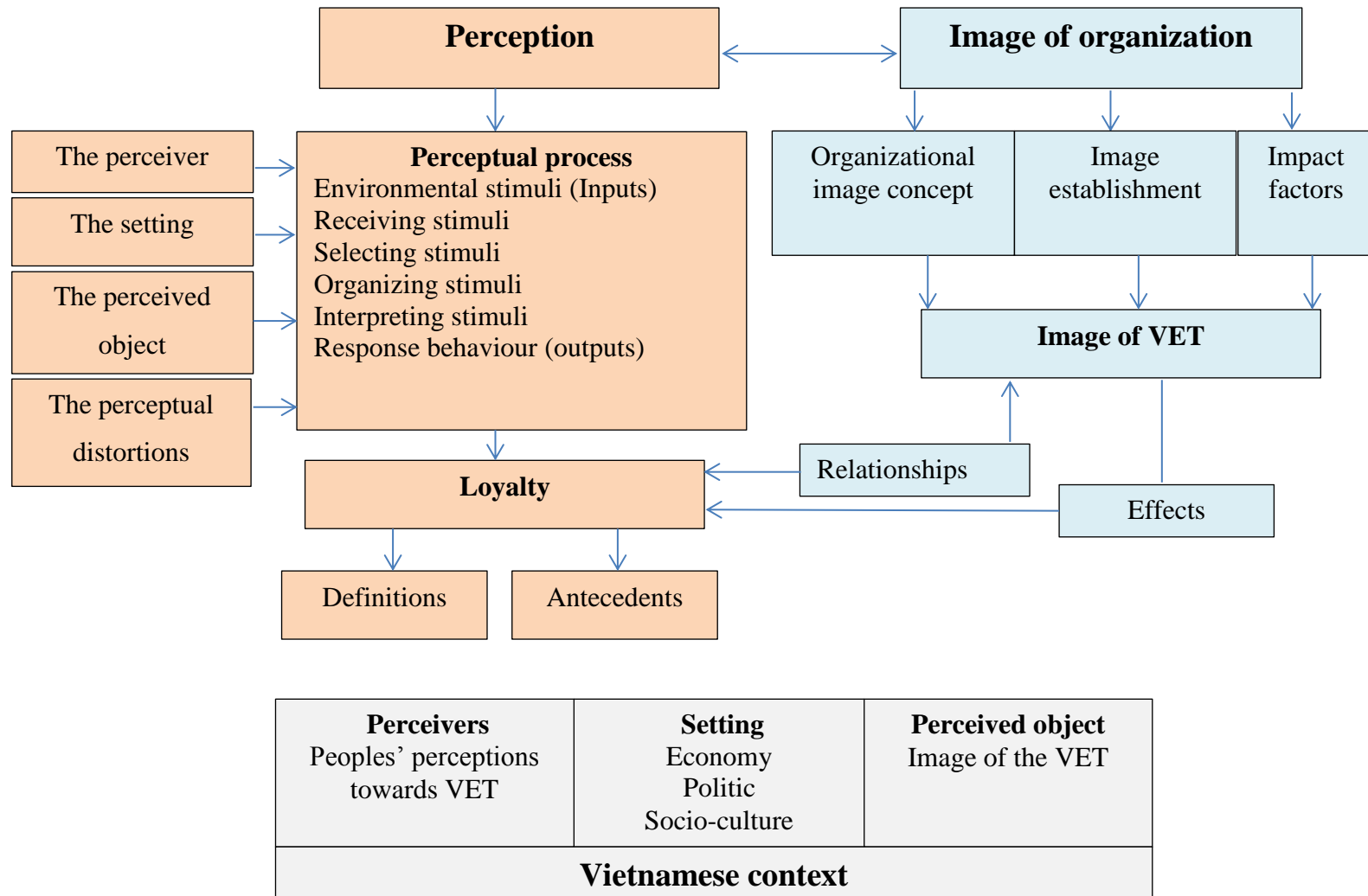
## 2.1 Introduction

The main purpose of this chapter is to define the conceptual and theoretical, and socio-cultural boundaries of the research study. Accordingly, this chapter reviews the available literature relating to the concepts of perception and organizational image, and concludes by examining the Vietnamese context and the socio-cultural influences that shape its peoples' views of vocational education and training.

The chapter has three parts (figure 7). The first part unpacks the concept of perception, the perceptual process and its relationship to an individual's loyalty of a brand or organisation. The second part exams the concept of organisational image including the VET sector. The final part describes and analyses the applicability and relevance of perception and organisational image to the Vietnamese context by providing a discussion of the factors that influence Vietnamese people's perceptions towards VET.



Figure 7: The conceptual structure of the chapter (Source: by analysis from author)



## **2.2 Perception**

The objectives of this section are fourfold, and are: (a) to examine the definitions of perception presented by experts in disciplines, such as psychology, marketing, management and organization behaviour; (b) to describe the perceptual process, and (c) to analyse the different stages of the perceptual process. This section also examines the factors which influence the perceptual process to explain why people see phenomena from different perspectives when viewing; and (d) to describe the common perceptual errors that influence an individual's perception.

### **2.2.1 The concept of perception**

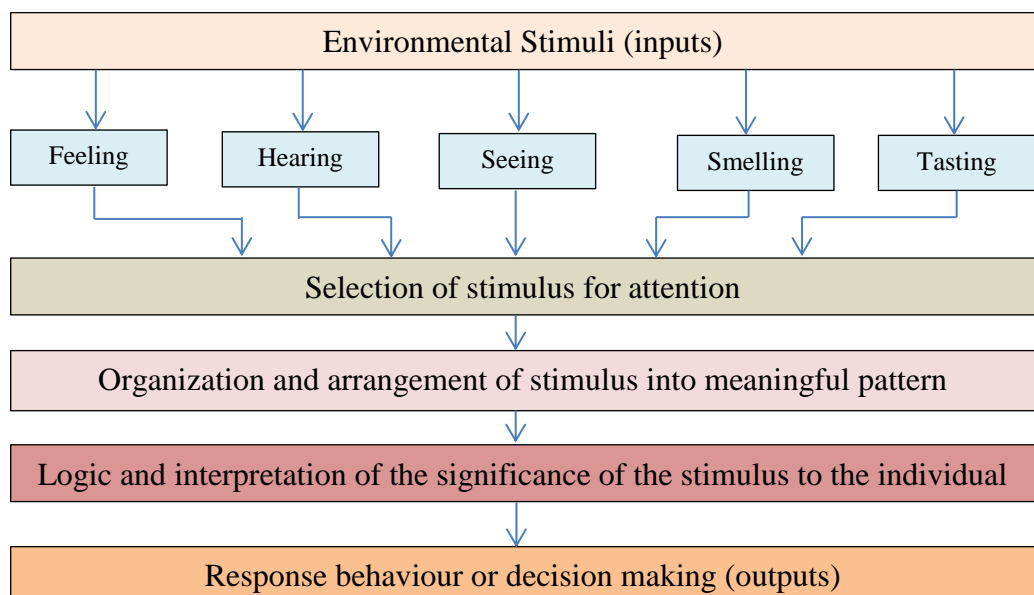
While perception is frequently used in daily life and in literature, it may be assumed that everyone knows what it is. However, perception is complex, and its meaning depends on context (Ben, Marius & Barney, 2003). For example, in the field of psychology in his book titled 'The Senses Considered as Perceptual Systems' (1966), James Jerome Gibson sees the senses of an individual as the perceptual system. In other words, perception is the ability of an individual to see, hear, or become aware of something through the senses. Alternatively, in the marketing field, Kotler (1967), Robbins et al. (2001), and Wood et al. (2001) all were writing about management and organizational behaviour, considering the perception of an individual to be a process that follows various stages. According to Robbins et al. (2001, p.45) and Wood et al. (2001, p.117), perception can be defined as a process by which individuals receive, select, organize, and interpret their sensory impressions in order to give meaning to their environment. Supporting the concept of perception as a process, Nahavandi and Malekzadeh (1999, p.150) also define perception as 'the mental process we use to pay attention selectively to some stimuli and cues and not to others'. In sum, in the scholars' views on the concept of perception as discussed above, there is a shared view of seeing notions of perception as involving the senses, a system of processes and processing, which may include stages of development.

## 2.2.2 The perceptual process

Robbins et al. (2001) and Wood et al. (2001) defined the perceptual process of an individual in a phenomenon consisting of five stages. They are: (a) receiving stimulus through the five senses (inputs), (b) selection of stimulus for attention, (c) organization and arrangement of stimulus into a meaningful pattern, (d) logic and interpretation of the significance of the stimulus to the individual, and (e) response behaviour (outputs) or decision-making.

People select information to which they attend through sense organs (i.e., sight, sound, smell, taste, and touch). People mentally arrange and organize the information so they can understand or make sense of it. Peoples' interpretations are subjective and based on values, needs, beliefs, experiences, expectations, involvement, self-concept, and other personal factors. Interpretation of information is based on past experience, the new situation, and others' opinions (Bruno, 2002; Parameswaran & Beena, 2006). This suggests that perception is not constant and pertains to all people regardless of culture. Perceptions are usually changing, biased, coloured, or distorted by our unique set of experiences. Thus, perceptions are personal interpretations of the real world (Wood et al., 2001). Figure 8 describes the perceptual process of a single phenomenon.

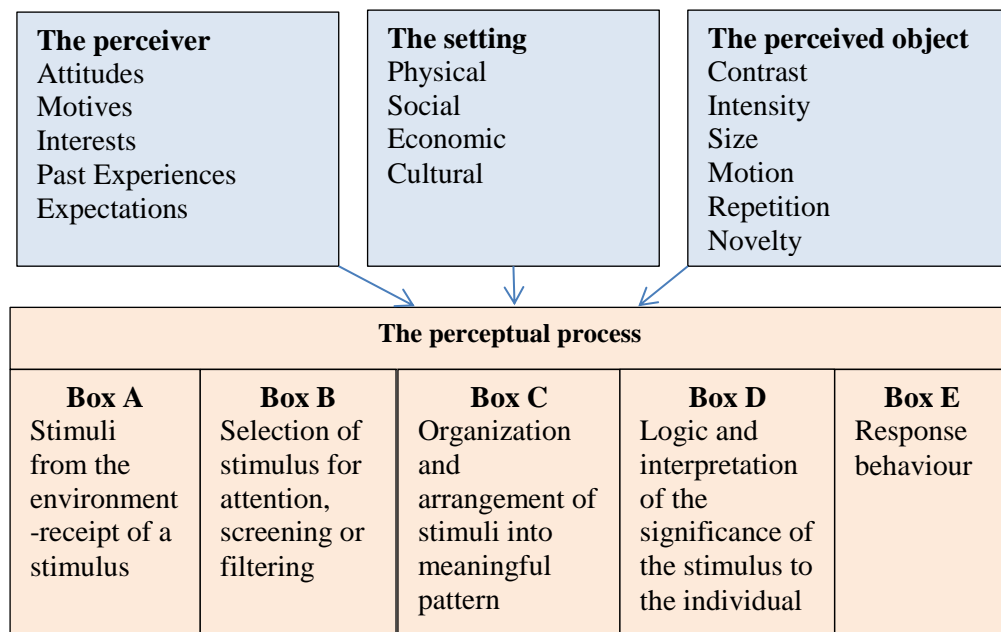
Figure 8: The perceptual process of a single phenomenon (Source: by analysis from author)



### 2.2.3 The stages of perceptual process

As a process, perception can be described as a sequence of events from the receipt of a stimulus to the response to it. It is common to see the stages of perception described as an information processing system. Figure 9 presents the perceptual process sourced from the work of Mullins (2007). There are four main stages in the perceptual process.

Figure 9: The perceptual process and the influential factors



#### 2.2.3.1 Receiving stimuli by the five senses

The first important process of perception is the receipt of the stimulus through five senses. Perception begins when a person is confronted with a stimulus or a situation. This confrontation may be with an immediate sensual stimulation or with a total physical or sociocultural environment.

An example in the organizational behaviour field is the employee who is confronted by his or her supervisor, or with the total formal organizational environment. Either one or both may initiate the employee's perceptual process. In other words, this represents the stimulus situation interacting with the person (Luthans, 1998). In certain circumstances, we may select

information out of the environment as a result of the way we categorize the world.

Another example related to the VET sector is if a student has been advised and recommended to enrol with a particular VET provider by his or her friends who say that this VET provider presents a good environment for study and has a reputation of graduates finding it easier to get a job, the student may be specifically looking for confirmation that those views are correct. This process is known as a top-down procedure (Wood et al., 2001) because the cognitive processes influence the perceptual readiness of the individual to select certain information (Wood et al., 2001). This emphasizes the active nature of the perceptual process. We do not passively digest the information from our senses, but we actively attend and indeed, at times, seek out certain information (Mullins, 2007).

### **2.2.3.2 Selection**

The next step is the selection. In this stage, the selected information towards one phenomenon is influenced strongly by three factors (Nahavandi & Malekzadeh, 1999; Robbins et al., 2001; Wood et al., 2001). They are: (a) the setting, (b) the perceiver, and (c) the perceived object.

#### **2.2.3.2.1 The setting**

The context in which we see the objects or events is an important factor influencing the perceptual process (Wood et al., 2001). The characteristics of the context are comprised of a physical issue (e.g. time or age), working environment, economic and political situation, and social status (Robbins et al., 2001; Wood et al., 2001). Supporting Robbins et al. (2001) and Wood et al. (2001), Nahavandi and Malekzadeh (1999, p.153) added one more important factor, 'culture greatly affects how we perceive our world and others around us'. The authors also indicated that culture includes the behaviours, norms, values, and assumptions associated with a certain group. For example, hearing a subordinate call the boss by their first name may be acceptable in Australia but not in Germany or Vietnam. In the case of Vietnam, for example, young

people normally respect older people and call them by a title such as older brother or sister, uncle, grandmother or grandfather, not their names (cultural context or social status).

### **2.2.3.2.2 The perceiver**

The next factor that influences the perceptual process is the perceiver. When an individual looks at a target and attempts to interpret what he or she sees, that interpretation is heavily influenced by the personal characteristics of the individual perceiver. Personal characteristics that affect perception included a person's attitudes, motives, interests, past experiences, and expectations (Robbins et al., 2001). It was noted that each personal characteristic of the perceiver in this section was analysed through the given examples or research studies for illustration.

#### **Attitudes**

According to Robbins et al. (2001, p.58), attitudes are evaluative statements, either favourable or unfavourable, concerning objects, people, or events. They reflect how one feels about something. For example, if I say 'I like my job', I am expressing my attitude about my work. In more detail, the example below demonstrates how attitude influences the perceptual process. Kim likes the practical lessons because she enjoys doing jobs with her hands. Alternatively, Peter prefers the academic lessons that relate to writing and reading (his preference). On the day of the practical lesson, both of them must attend the class. It should not surprise you to find that they interpret what they see differently. Peter sulks whereas Kim is happy. They both see the same thing (the practical lesson), but they interpret it differently. According to the work of Robbins et al. (2001), a major reason is that they hold divergent attitudes concerning the practical lesson. In other words, Kim and Peter have different preferences and attitudes.

#### **Motives**

Unsatisfied needs or motives stimulate individuals and may exert a strong influence on perception. This was dramatically demonstrated in a research

study on hunger (McClelland, Atkinson, Clark & Lowell, 1953). Individuals in this study had not eaten for varying numbers of hours. Some had eaten an hour earlier while others had gone as long as 16 hours without food. These subjects were shown blurred pictures; the results indicated that the extent of hunger influenced the interpretation of the blurred pictures. Those who had not eaten for 16 hours perceived the blurred images as pictures of food far more frequently than did those subjects who had eaten only a short time earlier.

### **Individual interests**

It should not be surprising that the supervisor who has just been reprimanded by her boss for a high level of lateness among her staff is more likely to notice lateness by an employee tomorrow than she was last week. Another example describes how the perceptual process is influenced by individual interest. If a student is preoccupied with a personal problem such as a financial issue, she or he may be distracted or may find it difficult to be attentive in the class. These examples illustrate that the focus of our attention appears to be influenced by our interests (Robbins et al., 2001). Because individual interests differ considerably, what one person notices in a situation can differ from what another perceives (Wood et al., 2001; Robbins et al., 2001).

### **Past experiences**

Just as individual interests narrow one's focus, so do one's past experiences. You perceive those things to which you can relate (Robbins et al., 2001). However, in many instances, past experiences will act to nullify an object's effects; objects that have never been experienced before are more noticeable than those that have been experienced in the past. For example, you are more likely to notice a machine that you have never seen before than a standard filing cabinet that is exactly like a hundred others you have previously seen. Similarly, you are more likely to notice the operations along an assembly line if this is the first time you have seen an assembly line. Another example related to the VET sector, if you studied in the VET providers, you would have behaviours or perceptions about the sector that are different from the people who have not attended any courses at the VET providers before. In other words, you gained the experience in the VET sector.

## **Expectations**

Finally, expectations can distort perceptions in that people see what they expect to see. If the expectation is that police officers are authoritative, young people are unambitious, human resource managers like people, or individuals holding public office tend to be power hungry, they may be perceived this way regardless of their actual traits (Wood et al., 2001).

### **2.2.3.2.3 The perceived object**

The last factor that influences the perceptual process is called the perceived object. The characteristics of the perceived object include repetition, size, contrast, novelty, intensity, and motion (Robbins et al., 2001; Wood et al., 2001).

#### **Repetition**

The repetition principle states that a repeated external stimulus is more attention-getting than a single one (Maka, 2013). Thus, a worker will generally hear better when directions for a dull task are given more than once. This principle partially explains why supervisors must give directions over and over again for even the simplest tasks (Luthans, 1998). Advertising and public relations often apply the repetition principle to increase awareness of a particular product or brand name. So, the more often something is repeated, the more likely it is that the message gets through to the level of consciousness. However, repetition can also lead to a sense of turning off from the awareness of the presence of a stimulus. This is called habituation (Maka, 2013). This can create hazards in a working environment if individuals frequently ignore warning signs that are always present, for example.

#### **Size**

The larger a particular stimulus is, the more likely it is that it will attract attention (Maka, 2013). For example, the maintenance engineering staff may pay more attention to a big machine than to a smaller one, even though the smaller one costs as much and is as important to the operation. In advertising, a



full-page spread is more attention-getting than a few lines in the classified section.

### **Contrast**

The contrast principle states that external stimuli that stand out against the background or that are not what people are expecting will receive their attention (Maka, 2013). For instance, a worker with many years of experience barely notices the deafening noise on the factory floor of a typical manufacturing operation. However, if one of the machines suddenly stops, the person would immediately notice the difference in noise level.

### **Novelty and familiarity**

The novelty and familiarity principle states that either a novel or a familiar external situation can serve as an attention-getter (Maka, 2013). New objects or events in a familiar setting or familiar objects or events in a new setting will draw the attention of the perceiver. For example, humans find it very easy to spot a familiar face among a crowd of strangers, or vice versa, to spot a new face in a crowd of familiar faces. Job rotation is another example of this principle. Recent research indicates that job rotation not only increased attention but also improved employee acquisition of new skills at a large company. Changing workers' jobs from time to time will tend to increase the attention they give to the task. In designing advertising campaigns, marketing specialists also use the aspect of novelty.

### **Intensity**

The intensity principle of attention states that the more intense the external stimulus, the more likely it is to be perceived (Maka, 2013). A loud noise, strong odour, or bright light will be noticed more than a soft sound, weak odour, or dim light. Advertisers use intensity to gain customers' attention.

### **Motion**

People will pay more attention to moving objects in their field of vision than they will to stationary objects (Maka, 2013). Workers will notice materials moving by them on a conveyor belt, but they may fail to give proper attention

to the maintenance needs of the stationary machine next to them. Advertisers capitalize on this principle by creating signs that incorporate moving parts. Las Vegas at night is an example of advertisement in motion. Any number of these factors may be present at a given time or in a given situation.

### **2.2.3.3 Organization**

The third step of the perceptual organization takes place after the information from the situation is received. In other words, the person's perceptual process organizes the incoming information selected in the previous step into schemas (Wood et al., 2001).

*Schemas* are cognitive frameworks that represent organized knowledge about a given concept or stimulus developed through experience (Wood et al., 2001). The authors sum up that there are three types of schemas.

A *self-schema* contains information about a person's own appearance, behaviour, and personality. A person with a decisiveness schema, for example, will tend to perceive himself or herself in terms of that aspect in many circumstances, especially those calling for leadership.

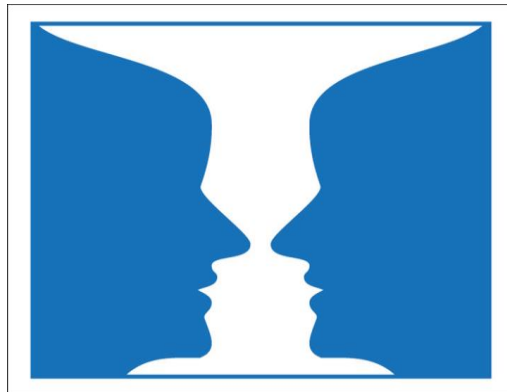
*Person schemas* refer to the way individuals sort others into categories, such as types or groups, in terms of similar perceived features (Wood et al., 2001). The term prototype, or stereotype, is often used to represent these categories; they are an abstract set of features commonly associated with members of that category. Once the prototype is formed, it is stored in long-term memory; it is retrieved when it is needed for a comparison of how well a person matches the prototype's features. For instance, you may have a 'good worker' prototype in mind, which includes hard work, intelligence, punctuality, articulateness, and decisiveness; that prototype is used as a measure against which to compare a given worker. Stereotypes may be regarded as prototypes based on such demographic characteristics as gender, age, and racial and ethnic groups (Wood et al., 2001).

A *script schema* is defined as a knowledge framework that describes the appropriate sequence of events in a given situation (Neisser, 1976; Srull & Wyer, 1988). For example, an experienced manager would use a script schema to think about the appropriate steps involved in running a meeting.

### **2.2.3.4 Interpretation**

The last step of the perceptual process is interpretation. After we have attended to a stimulus, and our brains have selected and organized the information, we interpret it in a way that makes sense using our existing information about the world. Interpretation simply means that we take the information that we have sensed and organized and turn it into something that we can categorize. For instance, in the Rubin's Vase illusion in figure 10, some individuals will interpret the sensory information as 'vase' while some will interpret it as 'two faces'. This happens unconsciously thousands of times per day. By putting different stimuli into categories, we can better understand and react to the world around us.

Figure 10: Figure-ground interpretation (Source: Mullins, 2007, Management and Organizational Behaviour, Pearson/Prentice Hall, p.216)



## **2.2.4 The common perceptual errors**

According to Robbins et al. (2001) and Wood et al. (2001), the perceptual errors are grouped into four types.

### **2.2.4.1 Fundamental attribution error (FAE)**

The FAE refers to the tendency to overestimate the internal and underestimate the external factors when explaining the behaviours of others, which is the result of our tendency to pay more attention to the situation rather than to the individual (Heider, 1958; Langton & Robbins, 2007). FAE is the tendency to overemphasize the dispositional, internal, personality-related aspects, to explain the behaviour of others while at the same time, underemphasizing the environmental/situational contributions to the behaviour (Gilbert & Malone, 1995). In general, according to Gholipour (2006), it is attributing the behaviour of other people to internal factors (their motivation/ability). However, according to Bierbrauer (1979) and Festinger and Carlsmith (1959), a study on FAE had a habit of understanding the effects the situation had on an event and behaviour.

#### **2.2.4.2 Actor-observer bias**

According to Jones and Nisbett (1971) and Storm (1973), the actor-observer bias is the tendency of an individual to draw on external situational explanations when interpreting his or her own behaviour, whilst attributing other's observed behaviour to internal and dispositional causes. Jones and Nisbett (1971) suggested that the actor-observer effect may occur due to differences in perspectives and salience of certain factors. This effect is reduced if we are making attributions to individuals who we know well (Aron, Aron & Smollan, 1992). It is suggested that because we have information about the needs, motivations, and thoughts of these individuals, we are more likely to account for the external forces that affect behaviour (Aron et al., 1992).

#### **2.2.4.3 Self-serving bias**

The self-serving bias is the tendency to attribute successes to internal factors and failures to situational and external factors (Langton & Robbins, 2007). This bias tends to increase as time passes after an event. Therefore, the further in the past an event is, the more likely people are to congratulate themselves for success and to blame the situation for failures. In the self-serving bias, we

tend to equate a success with internal and a failure with external attributes (Miller & Ross, 1975).

#### **2.2.4.4 Perceptual biases and errors in decision-making**

There are many different types of perceptual biases and errors in decision making (Robbins et al., 2001; Wood et al., 2001) such as overconfidence error, available heuristic, representative heuristic, escalation of commitment error, anchoring and adjustment heuristic, confirmation bias, and randomness bias. In the book titled 'Organizational behaviour', Robbins et al. (2001) indicated five common perceptual distortions that can make the perceptual process inaccurate and affect response behaviour. These are stereotyping, halo effects, selective perception, projection, and contrast effects.

##### **Stereotyping**

According to Hilton and von Hippel (1996, pp.237-271), stereotyping is a judgment of someone on the basis of one's perceptions of the group to which that person belongs. Religious remarks, racial remarks, sexual remarks, and gender remarks are the most prominent stereotypes. For example, people in the Confucian countries such as Vietnam and China tend to stereotype the VET sector as the place for students with low academic achievement (Awang et al., 2011).

##### **Halo effects**

A halo effect occurs when one attribute of a person or situation is used to develop an overall impression of the individual or situation (Wood et al., 2001). When meeting a new person, for example, a pleasant smile can lead to a positive first impression of a person as warm and honest overall. The result of the halo effect is the same as that associated with a stereotype. However, individual differences are obscured. Halo effects are particularly important in the performance appraisal process of an individual or organization (Wood et al., 2001; Stephen et al., 2001) towards the VET sector. For example, people with positive attitudes towards VET will view VET as a good place to gain skills and make it easier to find a job. Alternatively, those with negative

attitudes will see the VET as the second choice of study behind the academic stream and the outcome of VET is just to become a blue collar worker (Awang et al., 2011).

**Selective perception** is the tendency to interpret selectively what one sees on the basis of one's interests, background, experience, and attitudes (Robbins, Judge, Millett & Boyle, 2011, p.147). For example, if the parents of students enrolled in the VET provider before, they will guide their children to go to the VET sector as well because they had experiences and a background about the VET sector.

### **Projection**

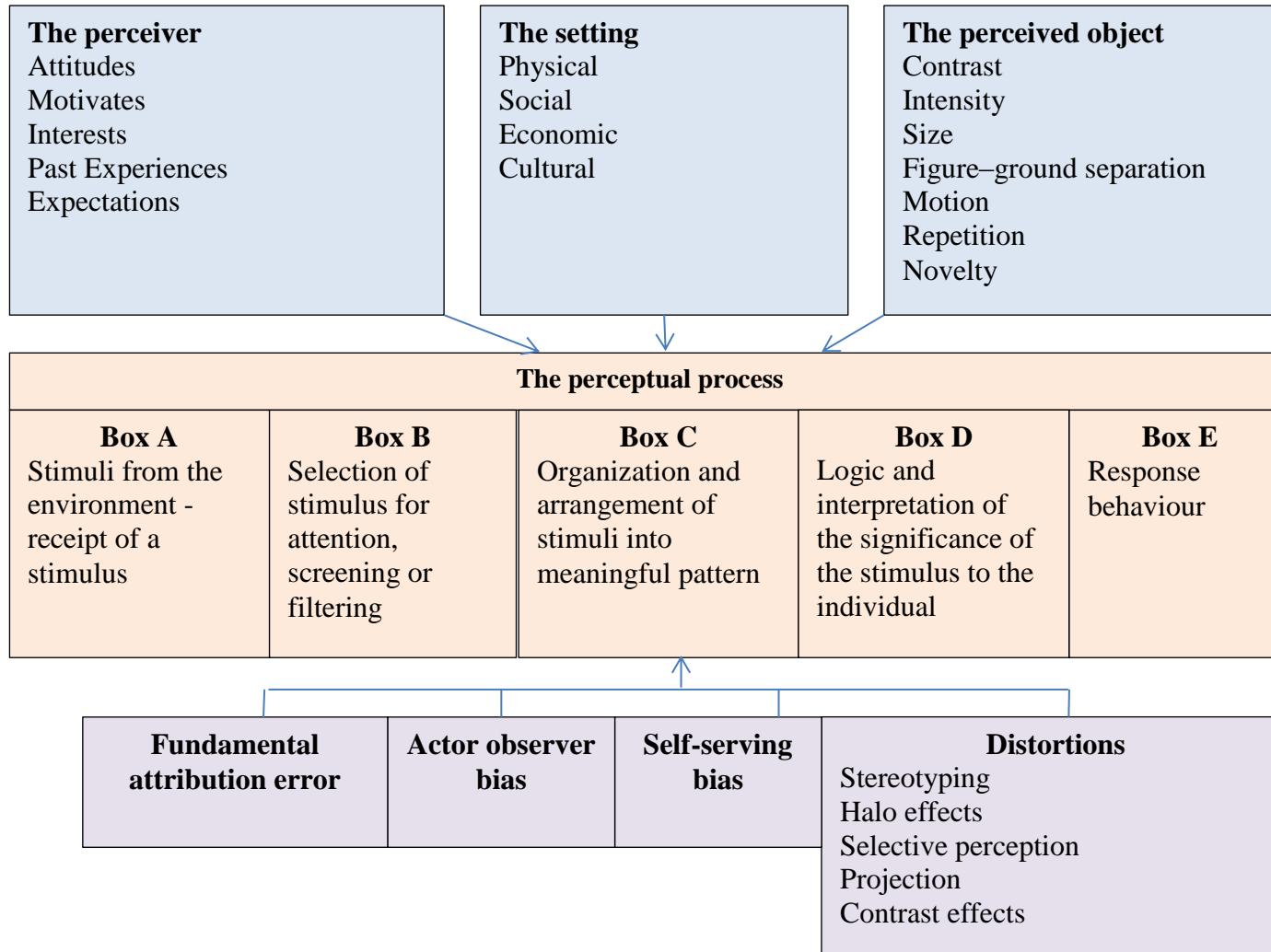
According to Wood et al. (2001, p.121), projection is the assignment of personal attributes to another individual. It is especially likely to occur in the interpretation stage of the perceptual process. For example, if you want challenge and responsibility in your job, you assume that others want the same. If you are honest and trustworthy, you take it for granted that other people are equally honest and trustworthy. This tendency to attribute one's own characteristics to other people, which is called projection, can distort perceptions made about others (Robbins et al., 2001). People who engage in projection tend to perceive others according to what they themselves are like, rather than according to what the person being observed is really like. When managers engage in projection, they compromise their ability to respond to individual differences. They tend to see people as more homogeneous than they really are (Wood et al., 2001).

**Contrast effects** refer to the evaluation of a person's characteristics that are affected by comparisons with other people recently encountered who rank higher or lower on the same characteristics (Robbins et al., 2011, p.148). For example, in a series of job interviews, interviewers can make distortions in any given candidate's evaluation, as a result of his or her place in the interview schedule. A candidate is likely to receive a more favourable evaluation if preceded by mediocre applicants and a less favourable evaluation if preceded by strong applicants.

### **2.2.5 Summary**

Individuals use the perceptual process to pay attention to, select, organize, and interpret information from the world around them. Schemas play a role in all of these stages, especially in the interpretation (Wood et al., 2001). People also use the perceptual process to deal with the information for decision making and action responses. It means that the outcomes of the perceptual process have been seen as the response behaviours of an individual towards one phenomenon. The outcome of the perceptual process is called the perception of an individual and is influenced by a variety of factors, including social and physical aspects of the situation as well as personal factors such as needs, experiences, values, attitudes, and personality. The perceptual errors, including fundamental attribution error, actor-observer bias, self-serving bias, and perceptual distortions also can affect response behaviour or decision making (see figure 11), in which, perceptual distortions are comprised of stereotyping, halo effects, projection, contrast effects, and selective perception.

Figure 11: Multiple influences on the perceptual process (Source: by analysis and summary from author)





## **2.3 Organizational image**

This part also is about a review of the literature on the second parent discipline, the organizational image, in which the VET image is included. To be suitable for the purposes of this study, this part is divided into two sections. The first section focuses on the concept of organizational image in terms of definitions, the process of the image establishment, and the effects of the different source factors on the organizational image. The second section reviews and analyses the definitions and antecedents of loyalty customers. In addition, the relationships between two terms, and the effects of the image of an organization on the key stakeholders' perceptions are presented.

### **2.3.1 The concept of organizational image**

The image represents people's perceptions of their own reality (Gotsi & Wilson, 2001). Ditcher (1985, p.75) defined an image as '...the total impression an entity makes on the minds of others'. Therefore, the image represents a simplification of the combination of a larger number of associations and slices of information connected to an object, person, organization, or place.

For Kotler and Fox (1995), image is an overall impression that a person has about an object. It may be based on incomplete information and may be perceived differently by the various stakeholders of an institution. Since organizations have several different stakeholders, a company does not convey a single message; instead, it projects multiple images (Dowling, 1988). By assessing image, an institution may reveal what strengths to emphasize to stakeholders and what precisely to communicate. Jenkins (1991) emphasized the need for organizations to have a visual identity, a way to project self-image.

Translation to the VET image, Landrum et al. (1998), Arpan et al. (2003) and Alessandri (2001) defined the image of vocational education and training (VET) as the sum of the beliefs an individual has towards the sector. Elements such as name, logo, tagline, colour palette, facilities, the teacher's ability, cost, course offering, course accreditation, academic reputation, VET provider

atmosphere, and employment opportunities are some of the elements that contribute to the representation of VET's image.

In regard to the works of Gutman and Miaoulis (2003), the authors took time to summarize and divide the university image or VET image into four categories: institutional, academic, social, and personal. For the institutional category, the dimensions such as geographic location, the number of years, size, facilities, popular vs. elitist, cost, administrative processes, international alliances, student exchange programs, university success, sports programs, and institutional communication are included. For the academic category, there are 13 dimensions. They are: academic reputation/prestige, teaching quality, employment opportunities, image of the course, university atmosphere, range of courses, quality of teaching staff, theoretical/practical, difficulty level, student-oriented, study resources, research visibility, and course accreditation. In regard to the social category, the dimensions such as opinions of family and friends, distance from companies, distance from society, security, and social atmosphere constructed to the university image. The personal category has two dimensions, personal aspirations and professional aspirations.

### **2.3.2 The value of organizational image**

Every organization has an image; the VET sector is no different. Whether planned or not, a good image can offer much to an organisation's success. A favourable corporate image is an important resource, as it provides organizations with a competitive advantage by stimulating potential publics. Sung and Yang (2008) reviewed the academic literature and found several studies showing that the corporate image is important to attract the potential publics, enhance buying intentions, develop loyalty, and increase sales. Although the study of the corporate image from a business perspective has long attracted the attention of researchers, according to several authors, much less attention has been paid to aspects concerning the image of non-profit organizations such as universities (Arpan et al., 2003; Kazoleas et al., 2001). However, the image of universities and VET could be a critical factor influencing the students' choice process (Nguyen & LeBlanc, 2001; Weissman,

1990). According to Litten (1980) and Yost and Tucker (1995), higher education choice process or VET choice process is not easy, in large part because it is an important and complex decision for students, not only in economic terms but also because it is a long-term decision that affects their future life. It can influence students' future career, friendships, future place of living, and personal satisfaction (Kotler & Fox, 1995). Furthermore, it is one kind of decision that in many cases is unique in life and often involves many costs aside from monetary (Smith & Cavusgil, 1984).

### **2.3.3 Sources of organizational image**

It is not an easy task to identify all of the sources of an image, especially when different people rely on different combinations of elements to build it (Paulo, Helena & Mário, 2010). Even, if one could identify all the sources and elements of image, it still would be very difficult modelling all of the relationships and interactions, mostly because image is a dynamic and complex construct, and the same institution has the power to generate distinct images in specific groups of audience members (Sung & Yang, 2008). This happens because images are the result of choices, actions, and social interactions of the involved stakeholders (Barich & Kotler, 1991).

To increase the complexity of the problem, some confusion has accompanied the concept of image since several studies interchangeably use the term with corporate identity and reputation (Abratt, 1989). Gotsi and Wilson (2001) revised the literature and found two schools of thought. The first school of thought considers the corporate reputation as synonymous to corporate image. The second one is not synonymous. On this specific issue, according to Barich and Kotler (1991), the corporate reputation may be considered a dimension of corporate image.

For Kennedy (1977), image has two components: a functional one and an emotional one. The functional component comprises a tangible stimulus that can be easily measured, such as physical properties, while the emotional component is related to psychological conditions that become perceptible in

feelings and attitudes. Several studies, such as Dobni and Zinkhan (1990), Keaveney and Hunt (1992), and Stern and Krakover (1993), indicated the importance of using both components to assess image. However, Bagozzi and Burnkrants (1985) argued that they should be treated separately in order to get better behavioural predictions, but it is crucial not to forget that they are interrelated and both shape the overall image (Baloglu & Brinberg, 1997). Until now, the consensus on the importance of both components has not yet been achieved (Paulo, Helena & Mário, 2010), so it remains important to study the effects of each component separately and together to foster research and discussion.

#### **2.3.4 Factors that influence organizational image**

Several authors have investigated which factors influence the image of an organization. For example, in the higher education sector, Treadwell and Harrison (1994) identified the commitment to academic excellence, being a well-regarded business school, students' friendship environment, whether graduates are proud of their education, school national image, faculty research image, cultural contribution to community, whether students party too much, adequate facilities, problems with athletes' academic performance, homogeneity of the student population, and academic reputation and costs as the dimensions that influence the image of the university.

Adding more factors that influence the VET provider image, according to Theus (1993), the author found that the size of the institution, location, appearance, scope of offerings, excellence of faculty, extent of endowments, diversity of students, campus morale, athletic prowess, service to the community, institutional visibility, and institutional prestige, were all sources of overall institutional image.

Kazoleas et al. (2001) and Arpan et al. (2003) conducted the foremost significant studies on the university image. The first study found seven components, namely: (a) overall image, (b) program image, (c) teaching and research emphasis, (d) quality of education, (e) environmental factors, (f)

financial reasons, and (g) sports programs represented for the university image that explained 54.75% of the total variance. In other words, these dimensions were significant factors influencing the image of the university.

The Arpan et al. (2003) study replicated and extended Kazoleas et al. (2001) study on the evaluation of the factors associated with university image held by different publics. Using data from all participants (students and non-students), they found that academic and athletic ratings and news coverage were significant to explain global image ratings.

Both studies stressed that factors controlled by the university such as the existence of particular programs, the strength of academic programs, sports programs, libraries, and technical facilities were stronger predictors of overall image valuations than were characteristics of respondents or factors related to the location, costs, and admission standards. Another factor that stood out distinctly was personal experiences with the university, which appeared to have a greater effect on overall image than did media exposure. However, contrary to Kazoleas et al. (2001), Arpan et al. (2003) found a significant direct relationship between news coverage and image evaluation.

The most recent study reviewed was conducted by Luque-Martínez and Barrio-García (2009). They reported the institution's services to society, its teaching activity, its administrative management, and the physical and technological infrastructure as the dimensions that influenced the image of the University of Granada formed by teaching and research staff, in decreasing order. Specifically, the factors with the strongest influence on image formation were the institutional presence in society and on the Internet, the cultural offer, the improvement in the management of administrative processes such as the introduction of e-administration, and the efforts to find jobs for graduates.

Concerning VET image, Awang, Sail, Alavi, and Ismail (2011) conducted a study exploring the perceptions of secondary school students and apprentices of the private institutes on the image of, and their loyalty towards, the technical education and vocational training in Malaysia. In this study, the authors

quantified the image of the VET sector into seven dimensions: (a) low entry qualification, (b) trainer credibility, (c) applicability of course contents, (d) training facilities and equipment, (e) recognition of qualifications, (f) future career potential, and (g) work ethics and social values. The results of the study indicated that four dimensions, namely: (a) recognition of qualifications, (b) work ethic, (c) social values, and (d) applicability of course content were the significant factors influencing the students' loyalty towards the technical education and vocational training programs. In other words, these factors seriously affected the image of VET.

### **2.3.5 Measuring the image of an organization**

Measuring image is not an easy and consensual task, mostly due to the multi-dimensional and subjective nature of the image construct, especially in service industries, because of the lack of objectivity and tangible attributes to measure (LeBlanc & Nguyen, 1995). The consensus around the idea that organizational image can only be interpreted and assessed by its stakeholders was emphasized by Arpan et al. (2003). They indicate that, independently of the signals or messages emanating from an institution, it is most likely that different stakeholder groups generate different images, as they use different criteria when evaluating organizational communication (Arpan et al., 2003; Williams & Moffitt, 1997).

To Leister and MacLachlan (1975), an image is an aggregative concept resulting from the various possible combinations of image source elements, and, therefore, must be measured using several factors at once in order to obtain meaningful and accurate information. After having studied image in different contexts, Keaveney and Hunt (1992) and Stern and Krakover (1993) reinforced this position, claiming that, to fully capture the richness of the image construct both the cognitive and affective components mentioned by Kennedy (1977) must be included.

There are many ways by which to measure image. Carlivati (1990) distinguished two broad classes of image measurement techniques: judgment

and response methods. In generic terms, in the first, the user provides a judgment of a stimulus using semantic differential scales and in the second, the researcher uses multidimensional scaling to obtain the information needed to evaluate the image.

Apart from the techniques mentioned above to measure image, few studies have attempted to create and validate a scale to reliably measure university image. A review of those studies shows that their measures exhibited a lack of internal consistency or conceptual structure. They used a variety of different sets of variables ranging from brand personality to satisfaction, passing by reputation, prestige, and physical environment (Arpan et al., 2003; Belanger et al., 2002; Kazoleas et al., 2001; Nguyen & LeBalanc, 2001; Palacio et al., 2002; Vaughn et al., 1978).

Based upon the works of Kazoleas et al. (2001) and Palacio et al. (2002), their research papers used a multi-item scale to measure image and test the relationship between some of the major sources of image found in the literature. The review of the literature has provided support for the belief that there is a direct link among course image, communication, job opportunities, university social atmosphere, and university overall image. However, as stated before, few studies have attempted to obtain a reliable measure for image, and ever fewer have tried to estimate the strength of the relationship between university image and image sources.

## **2.4 Customers' loyalty**

Measuring perception of an individual towards one phenomenon is still a big debate and a question mark for the researchers due to perception as a process and includes the stages (Robbins et al., 2001; Wood et al., 2001). To solve this problem, Adrian and Martin (2003) suggested that the outcomes of the perceptual process or the characteristics of the response behaviours, such as loyalty, opinions, point of view, and thinking could be used as tools, instead of perception.

To deal with research questions number one, two and three, the term loyalty is the outcome of the perceptual process representing the response behaviour of an individual applied instead of perception in this study. Therefore, this section would like to make clear the understanding of the concept of loyalty in terms of definitions and antecedents of customer loyalty. Furthermore, the relationships between, and the influences of, organizational image and loyalty are examined as well.

### **2.4.1 Definitions of loyalty**

According to the Oxford dictionary, the term loyalty is defined as the quality of being faithful in one's support of someone or something (Oxford dictionary, 2015). According to Robert, Philip, Kathy and Wendy (2005), loyalty to an object (e.g., a brand, store, service, or company) is shown by favourable propensities towards that object. Respecting the works of Beth, John, and Theodore (2007), the authors spent a great deal of time to sum up the definitions of loyalty from different fields with various views and angles. Table 1 shows 24 different definitions found in studies exploring loyalty. As the table suggests, loyalty has been defined in terms of (a) repeat purchasing, (b) a positive attitude, (c) long-term commitment, (d) intention to continue the relationship, (e) expressing positive word-of-mouth, (f) likelihood of not switching, or (g) any combination of these.



Table 1: Definitions of loyalty (Source from Beth, John, and Theodore, 2007)

No.	Author	Definition
1	Biong, (1993)	<i>Loyalty</i> expresses the degree to which the retailers want the company as a supplier in the future. It parallels the continuity measure and could comprise both favourable attitude and perceived or real lack of alternatives.
2	Bloemer & Kasper, (1995)	<i>Loyalty</i> is (1) the biased (i.e., non-random), (2) behavioural response (i.e., purchase), (3) expressed over time, (4) by some decision-making unit, (5) with respect to one or more alternative brands out of a set of such brands, which (6) is a function of psychological (decision making, evaluative) processes resulting in brand commitment.
3	Caruana, (2002)	<i>Service loyalty</i> is the degree to which a customer exhibits the repeat purchasing behaviour from a service provider, possesses a positive attitudinal disposition towards the provider, and considers only using this provider when a need for this service exists.
4	Dick & Basu, (1994)	<i>Loyalty</i> is the strength of the relationship between a customer's relative attitude and repeat patronage.
5	Ellinger et al., (1999); Daugherty et al., (1998)	<i>Loyalty</i> is a long-term commitment to repurchase involving both repeated patronage (repurchase intentions) and a favourable attitude (commitment to the relationship).
6	Estalemi, (2000); Bubb & Van Rest, (1973)	<i>Loyalty</i> is the behavioural tendency of the consumer to repurchase from the firm.
7	Ganesh et al., (2000)	<i>Loyalty</i> is a combination of both commitment to the relationship and other overt loyalty behaviours.
8	Hennig-Thurau et al., (2002)	<i>Loyalty</i> focuses on a customer's repeat purchase behaviour that is triggered by a marketer's activities.
9	Kandampully & Suhartanto, (2003)	A <i>loyal customer</i> is one who repurchases from the same service provider whenever possible, and who continues to recommend or maintains a positive attitude towards the service provider.
10	Khatibi et al., (2002)	<i>Loyalty</i> refers to the strength of a customer's intent to purchase goods or services again from a supplier with whom they are satisfied.
11	Jacoby & Kyner, (1973); Maignan et al., (1999)	<i>Loyalty</i> is the non-random tendency displayed by a large number of customers to keep buying products from the same firm over time and to associate positive images with the firm's products.
12	Mittal & Lassar, (1998)	<i>Loyalty</i> is defined as the inclination not to switch.

13	Neal, (1999)	<i>Loyalty</i> is the proportion of times a purchaser chooses the same product or service in a specific category compared to the total number of purchases made by the purchaser in that category, under the condition that other acceptable products or services are conveniently available in that category
14	Oliver, (1999); McMullan & Gilmore, (2003)	<i>Loyalty</i> is a deeply held commitment to rebuy or repatronize a preferred product/service consistently in the future, thereby, causing repetitive same brand or same brand-set purchasing, despite situational influences and marketing efforts having the potential to cause switching behaviour.
15	Olsen, (2002)	<i>Loyalty</i> is a behavioural response expressed over time.
16	Pritchard et al., (1999)	Loyalty (L) is a composite blend of brand attitude (A) and behaviour (P[B]), with indexes that measure the degree to which one favours and buys a brand repeatedly, where $L = P[B]/A$
17	Proto & Supino, (1999)	<i>Loyalty</i> is the feeling of attachment to or affection for a company's people, products, or services.
18	Reynolds & Arnold, (2000)	<i>Salesperson loyalty</i> is a commitment and intention to continue dealing with the particular sales associate. <i>Store loyalty</i> is commitment and intention to continue dealing with the particular store.
19	Ruyter et al., (2001)	<i>Loyalty</i> intention reflects customers' motivations to continue the relationship.
20	Selnes & Hansen, (2001)	<i>Loyalty</i> is an assessment of expected future customer behaviour. It is the motivation to continue the relationship, to talk favourably about the supplier, and to expand the relationship.
21	Selnes, (1993)	<i>Loyalty</i> expresses an intended behaviour related to the product of service, including the likelihood of future purchases or renewal of service contracts, or conversely, how likely it is that the customer will switch to another brand or service provider.
22	Sirdeshmukh et al., (2002)	<i>Consumer loyalty</i> is indicated by an intention to perform a diverse set of behaviours that signal a motivation to maintain a relationship with a focal firm, including allocating a higher share of the category wallet to the specific service provider, engaging in positive word-of-mouth and repeat purchasing.
23	Stank et al., (2003)	<i>Loyalty</i> is a long-term commitment to repurchase involving both a cognitive attitude towards the selling firm and repeated patronage
24	Wind, (1970)	<i>Source loyalty</i> stems from the offerings (quality, quantity, delivery, price, service), buyer's past experience with suppliers, work simplification rules, and organizational variables—pressure for cost savings, dollar value of order, and number of complaints

In translating the definition of customer loyalty to student loyalty towards the VET programs in this study, its meaning was slightly different depending on the subgroups of students. For current vocational students, who are currently studying with vocational education training providers, loyalty was defined as the intention to continue with their studies or intention to continue the relationship with VET providers. For students who are currently studying in the lower and upper secondary schools, loyalty was defined as demonstrating positive thinking towards the VET sector and expressing positive word-of-mouth to other students.

## **2.4.2 Antecedents of customer loyalty**

Ball et al. (2004) reviewed the literature regarding the antecedents of loyalty, both in the business-to-business and business-to-consumer cases. They mentioned that measuring customer loyalty and its determinants in different markets and countries might bring out significant variance in the explanation of loyalty. Furthermore, to earn the loyalty of an individual, the authors recommended five antecedents of the loyalty, which must be considered carefully. They are: (a) service quality, (b) customer satisfaction, (c) trust, (d) commitment, and (e) communication.

### **2.4.2.1 Service quality**

According to Fogli (2006), service quality is ‘a global judgement or attitude relating to a particular service; the customer’s overall impression of the relative inferiority or superiority of the organization and its services. Service quality is a cognitive judgement’ (Fogli, 2006, p.4). For example, in the insurance field, Toran (1993) argued that quality should be an essential element of insurance services. Stafford et al. (1998) indicated that insurance providers are putting increasingly more emphasis on service quality and customer satisfaction. They further noted that service quality in the insurance industry is measured through complaint ratio, which is the number of received complaints divided by the measure of insurance businesses in force (Wells & Stafford, 1995).

With respect to the work of Boulding et al. (1993) and Parasuraman et al. (1991), the findings indicated that good service quality positively related to customer loyalty. In other words, customers are happy to recommend the company to others (Zeithaml et al., 1996) and willing to pay more (Baker & Crompton, 2000).

In another aspect, Wong and Sohal (2003) attempted to assess the effects of the service quality dimension on customer loyalty at two levels of retail relationships (i.e., interpersonal [person to person] level and store [person to firm] level). Their findings suggested that there is a positive association between service quality and customer loyalty and this association is stronger at the company level than at the interpersonal level with tangibles being the most significant predictor of loyalty at the store level and empathy at the interpersonal level.

#### **2.4.2.2 Customer satisfaction**

Oliver (1980) explained that customer satisfaction arises when customers weigh their perceptions of actual service performance against their expectations, and any discrepancy between the two generates disconfirmation, which can be of three types:

- Positive disconfirmation: high satisfaction,
- Negative disconfirmation: high dissatisfaction, or
- Zero disconfirmation.

Oliver (1997, p.33) stated, ‘satisfaction is the consumer fulfilment response. It is a judgment that a product or service feature, or the product or service itself, provided (or is providing) a pleasurable level of consumption-related fulfilment, including levels of under-or over-fulfilment’.

Over the years, several researchers (Ganesan, 1994; Mittal, Ross & Baldasare, 1998; Mittal & Kamakura, 2001) have exhibited customer satisfaction to be influencing the factors that signify customer loyalty, in other words, the long-

term orientation of a relationship. Geyskens, Steenkamp and Kumar (1999) considered customer satisfaction an essential factor responsible for the long-term association between suppliers and buyers. It has often been enunciated that the affect component of satisfaction could stimulate a satisfied customer to patronize the service provider as well as referring its services to others. The positive effect of customer satisfaction on these dimensions of loyalty has repeatedly been voiced in the literature.

### **2.4.2.3 Trust**

Moorman et al. (1993) and Morgan and Hunt (1994) presented trust as a vital element of relationships. Mayer et al. (1995) defined trust as ‘the willingness of the party to be vulnerable to the actions of another party based on the expectation that the other will perform a particular action important to the trust or, irrespective of the ability to monitor or control that other party’ (p.712). Kumra and Mittal (2004) suggested that trust in honesty denotes faith in partner’s openness and truthfulness in business communication.

Lim and Razzaque (1997), Garbarino and Johnson (1999) and Chaudhuri and Holbrook (2001) underlined the significance of trust in explaining loyalty. Garbarino and Johnson (1999) and Chaudhuri and Holbrook (2001) found credibility trust to affect loyalty whereas Singh and Sirdeshmukh (2000) and Sirdeshmukh et al. (2002) proposed benevolence as a component of trust that explains loyalty. Ball et al. (2004) contended that, in a competitive market, lack of trust obstructs loyalty formation. Kassim and Abdullah (2010) studied the link between trust and customer loyalty in two cultural contexts (i.e., Malaysia and Qatar) and found it to be significant. Nguyen and Leclerc (2011) posited that customers in the service industry tend to hold positive behavioural attitudes towards the brand they trust. Zeithaml et al. (1996) and Castaneda (2011) perceived trust as a significant marker of customer loyalty.

### **2.4.2.4 Commitment**

Thibault and Kelley (1959) recognized commitment as a construct that belongs to the literature of social exchange. The relationship literature also regarded

commitment as an important dimension. Moorman et al. (1992) opined that commitment in a relationship is a psychological state where a client has plans to continue the relationship with his or her existing supplier. Highlighting the role of commitment in relationships, Parasuraman et al. (1991) stated, 'relationships are built on the foundation of mutual commitment' (p.139). Moorman et al. (1992) defined commitment as 'an enduring attitude or desire for a particular brand or firm. It is the degree to which customers as members of an organization are emotionally connected to an organization, its brand or product, sustained by the continued desire to maintain membership'.

Jones et al. (2010) investigated the dimensionality of commitment as a construct and concentrated on the differential effects of affective, normative, and continuance dimensions on an array of consumer responses signifying loyalty such as repurchase intentions, willingness to pay more, fidelity, advocacy, and altruism. They reviewed marketing literature and noted that affective commitment found a place in different contexts (e.g., channels, sales, and services) as a leading factor for varied focal responses of customers in the form of repurchase intentions, switching intentions and relative attitude (Jones et al., 2010)

#### **2.4.2.5 Communication**

Anderson and Narus (1984) perceived communication as partaking of significant and well-timed formal and informal information between a customer and a supplier. Anderson and Narus (1990) also perceived communication as an interactive dialogue between the company and its customers during the pre-selling, selling, consuming, and post-consuming stages.

In addition, Johanson and Mattsson (1997) underscored the significance of communication in developing and retaining a relationship. Whereas, Sigauw et al. (2003) argued that it aids in continuing the relationship in time. Claycomb and Martin (2002) stressed the importance of regular communication with customers while suggesting that extended durations where customers are not

contacted should be avoided, as regular interactions reduce the perceived risks associated with purchasing.

Furthermore, Ndubisi and Chan (2005) suggested that in the context of relationship marketing, communication involves rendering trustworthy information, fulfilling promises and informing in the case of delivery-related problems. Jayachandran et al. (2005) proposed that the quality of the relationship is likely to be improved if customers find it easy to communicate within relational information processes.

### **2.4.3 The relationship between organizational image and loyalty**

According to Gronroos (2001), a relationship existed between the image of a university and its students' loyalty. He concluded that university image and service quality were antecedents for students' loyalty. Similarly, students' satisfaction with service quality and university image was the mediating variables that can be considered to form part of student loyalty. Consequently, student satisfaction with the service provided by the university was assumed to have a positive association with the image of the university (Helgesen & Nettet, 2011).

University image has been shown to affect student perceptions, thus, a favourable and well-known image is an asset for the education provider (Gronroos, 2001). Similarly, Rossetti's (1990) research found a positive relationship between the image of vocational education and a number of students enrolled in VET. Conversely, negative image leads to a decrease in the number of students enrolling in VET. Awang et al. (2011) investigated upper secondary and vocational student perceptions, thoughts, and feelings about VET in Malaysia, revealing that recognition of a VET qualification, work ethic, and social values of graduates and applicability of course content to contemporary society were major predictors of student loyalty towards the VET sector.

According to Wu (2011), corporate image has been assessed as an important antecedent of loyalty. Martineau (1958) stated that if consumers favoured the image of the store or organization, they would probably develop a certain degree of loyalty. Furthermore, Aaker (1991) suggested that an organization with a strong image emphasising high equity would have a greater number of loyal customers, leading to high and continued interaction and communication between customers and brands or organizations. Selnes (1993) also confirmed the influence of corporate brand image on brand loyalty. In contrast, Davies and Chun (2002) found that corporate brand had an indirect influence on brand loyalty via customer satisfaction when personality traits are used to portray corporate brand in an off-line setting.

In the field of tourism, a marketing study carried out by Court and Lupton (1997) revealed that destination image had a positive effect on the intentions of visitors to revisit a destination. A study carried out by Bigne et al. (2001) concluded that tourism image affected holidaymakers' preferences for a destination, recommendation, and satisfaction. Choi et al. (2007) studied the experience of Russian tourists in Korea suggested that the destination image affected destination loyalty. Chen and Tsai's (2007) study of tourism in the Kengtin region of Taiwan revealed a significant affiliation between destination image and destination loyalty. In short, the evidence presented here suggests that destination image affects the intent of visitors to revisit a destination and the tendency to make positive recommendations about the destination to others. These studies also highlight how image, whether it is in the form of travel destination, corporate branding, or the image projected by a university, had an effect on the loyalty of users.

#### **2.4.4 The influence of organizational image on customer loyalty**

Research by Nguyen and Leblanc (2001), Bloemer and de Ruyter (1998) and Helgesen and Nasset (2011) revealed university students' retention and loyalty was strongly affected by institutional image and reputation. According to Eskildsen et al. (1999), this variable was the main influence on students'



continued loyalty and commitment to completing programs and maintaining a positive attitude towards an institution. In comparison, in the field of marketing, a loyal customer was defined as one who would continue to purchase goods or services from the same company whenever possible, and who continues to maintain positive perceptions towards goods and services from the company (Caruana, 2002). According to Oliver (1999), if situational influences and marketing efforts were ignored, customer loyalty is defined as a self-promise to repurchase or re-choose a preferred product or service. This action, which will continue in the future, causes repetitive same brand or same brand series purchasing.

If we apply the concept of customer loyalty to higher education, according to Webb and Jagun (1997), it represents a student's willingness to recommend an institution to others, making positive recommendations and demonstrating a readiness to return later to continue his or her studies. After graduating, a loyal student may continue to support his or her academic institution on a financial basis, through encouraging reports to current or former students, or even through some form of cooperation (Henning-Thurau et al., 2001).

From another perspective, research by Nguyen and LeBlanc (2001) conducted in the context of business education indicated that loyalty is measured by a student's intention to: (a) consider business as his/her first choice of higher study, (b) continue his or her program at a business school, and (c) encourage friends to study at the same business school as well as the intention to recommend it as the best in its area. In the same way, for Athiyaman (1997), loyalty is the combination of student willingness to talk positively about the institution and to provide information to new candidates.

## **2.5 The context of the study**

The first part described and analysed the first parent discipline, the concept of perception. The second part reviewed the second parent discipline, the image of an organization. This part focuses on the context of study which is Vietnam. It has two sections. By reviewing and analysing two ideologies, Confucianism

and Marxism-Leninism, the first section is intended to provide a contextual picture which focuses mainly on three issues: (1) culture, (2) economy and (3) politics. According to Wood et al. (2001) and Robbins et al. (2001), the rationale the Vietnamese context was researched because it is one of three main factors influencing the perceptual process of an individual towards the phenomenon. It is noted that at the end of each ideology, the influences of three issues on the VET sector are provided.

According to Engeström (2001, p. 134), ‘the insertion of cultural artefacts into human actions was revolutionary in that the basic unit of analysis now overcame the split between the Cartesian individual and the untouchable societal structure. The individual could no longer be understood without his or her cultural means, and the society could no longer be understood without the agency of individuals who use and produce artefacts’. In addition, respecting Vygotsky’s work, the sociocultural tool is the mediation between the subject (the individual) and the object such as an idea, notion, or cultural entity (Vygotsky, 1978). In other words, the opinions, notions, and perceptions of the classes in the Vietnamese society towards the VET sector have transmitted a part of the Vietnamese socio-culture on this subject.

## **2.5.1 The social-cultural context of Vietnam: Confucian ideology**

It could be said that Confucian ideology has shaped the Vietnamese social culture (London, 2011). By providing reviews on the main points of the Confucian philosophy, this section draws the full picture of the Vietnamese social-cultural reality.

### **2.5.1.1 The ideology**

The Confucian philosophy was developed by the Chinese philosopher and educator. It has been firmly established as an undeniable, unofficial, but powerful system of moral, political, and social principles governing nearly almost every aspect of Chinese life from the Han Dynasty (206 BC - AD 220) until today. As a philosophy considering proper behaviour and human

relationships in society (Tamai & Lee, 2002), Confucian influence has expanded to and crossed borders to many other Asian countries, including Japan, Korea, Singapore, and Vietnam (Emery, 1999) due to migration and many other historical evolutions since then.

According to Buttery and Leung (1998), the centre of Confucian philosophy was the harmony, hierarchy, development of moral potential, and kinship. In other words, Confucius expected a stable and harmonious society based on the moral system and hierarchy. Under the views of Berling (1982), Confucian thought can be understood in two ways.

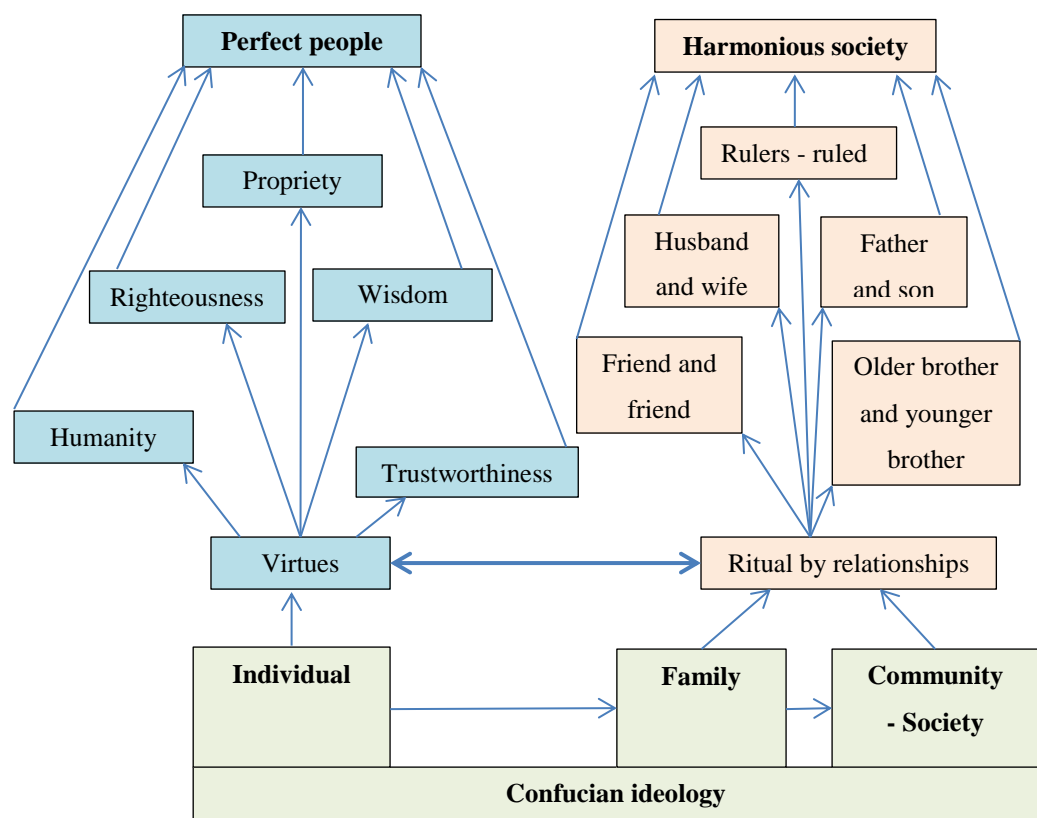
One side of Confucianism is the affirmation of accepted values and normal cultural characters of the individual behaviour in social institutions and human relationships. As a moral system, he proposed the social management system through five relationships. They are: (a) between rulers-ruled, (b) father-son, (c) husband-wife, (d) elder brothers-younger brothers, and (e) friend-friend. All of these relationships involve a particular set of defined roles, characters, and views that might present mutual obligations. Each individual should conform to his or her proper role and act properly to perfect the society (Berling, 1982).

The other side of Confucian ideology relates to the characteristics of individuals represented by five main virtues: (a) humanity-benevolence, (b) righteousness, (c) propriety, (d) wisdom, and (e) trustworthiness. Among them, humanity-benevolence is the source of all virtues. It nurtures the most basic in-mind character of the person and furthers his or her maturity.

Family, where each member lives, has been seen as the cornerstone of society, a microcosm of society (Schuman, 2015), and is called one unit constituting a society. In this environment, the author indicated that Confucian moral thought is grounded in the concept of five basic hierarchical human relationships: ruler and subject, father and son, husband and wife, older brother and younger brother, and between friends. These relationships are essential to comprehend the characteristics of society. Even today, in traditional families in Confucian countries, the father has an imperative role as the ruler of the family (Grace &

Mary, 2012). In contrast, in Western countries, the emphasis on the individual is a priority (Paul & Ronald, 2009, p.111). Moving up to the higher level of hierarchy, it prescribes a lofty idea for the state-the governor is the overseer of his people and is mandated to take a good look and care of their basic needs. In other words, the government is to have the role of improving people’s living standards, and absolute ethical values exist. Figure 12 draws the framework of Confucian ideology that is still relevant today in the Confucian countries such as China and Vietnam.

Figure 12: Confucian ideology framework (Source: by analysis from author)



Confucian thought was born in the context of China having conflicts between numerous feudal states. He believed in the doctrine of virtue that could bring prosperity back to China. The purpose of the doctrine was to restore peace and social order or a stable and harmonious nation. Based on the moral system, it was begun by individuals. First, his ideology introduced the concept of ‘perfect people’ who have five main virtues, namely: humanity-benevolence, righteousness, propriety, wisdom, and trustworthiness. Through the education system and self-cultivation of education or long-term-oriented, these people

will become servants of the nation. Then, second, moving up to organize, manage, and control family, community, and society, he introduced the concept of 'ritual' that five principal relationships: ruler and ruled, father and son, husband and wife, older brother and younger brother, and between friends were used to define the main characters and duties of each individual from the family level to the societal level. In addition, according to Dang (2012), virtues and ritual have a mutual relationship. Anyone breaking the rule of five relationships is the people who violates the moral system, and is not worth becoming a servant or a 'perfect person'. Alternatively, anyone who follows the ritual is a virtuous people.

### **2.5.1.2 Core values of Confucianism**

Confucianism is considered to be a form of religion, a branch of ethics, and came to life more than two thousand years ago. However, it still has great effects on various fields of social life in a number of Asian countries such as China, Japan, North Korea, South Korea, and Vietnam. According to his book titled, 'Confucius and the World He Created', Schuman (2015) cannot believe the influence of a scholar who died over 2,000 years ago is still felt in the boardrooms, bedrooms, and classrooms of nearly a quarter of humanity. It means that the core values of the philosophy are still relevant for the development of society today. To explain the sociocultural influence or Confucian influence on learner needs, motivations, customs, and beliefs, five virtues that one pursues and their relations are noted. These generate the behaviour patterns and structures of the family, community, and society (Park & Cho, 1995).

#### **2.5.1.2.1 Five Virtues**

There are five basic virtues that an individual must pursue in this theorem: ren (humanity), yi (righteousness), li (propriety), chih (wisdom or knowledge), and shin, which shows trustworthiness. There are also other dependent virtues that address filial piety, loyalty, respectfulness, and integrity (Cua, 2000). These virtues that are addressed are considered fundamental in leading or guiding

action and shaping the perceptions identified. They are cardinal in nature, and they are evenly comprehensive.

### **Ren-Humanity**

Ren is mostly commonly translated by the philosopher as benevolence, altruism, humanity, or being, and human-hearted approach (Zhang, 2002). The Chinese character represents the figure of two people, as is much more possible only when one human being is in a relationship with another; one cannot be a specific ren in nature. Ren might also mean that quality is that which is required to be in a human being (Ni, 2002). Ren also refers to the concern for the well-being of persons in one's community (Billington, 1997; Cua, 2000). Confucius also said that ren requires that humans do not need to impose upon others what they do not want. This shows that there is love for all of the people involved in a society (Confucius, 1983). Contrarily, the philosopher shows that there is a different formation of the general humanitarian kind of love for all of the public. It starts from one's own home and family. Love for parents is the first of the ren. The second is the love of his/her siblings. Therefore, ren starts from very specific and close relationships. In this way, it does differ from the approach of human nature. For example, Mencius particularly criticized Mo Zi, who claimed that one should treat everyone equally and this was by stating that one who cannot differentiate his/her own parents from others is no different from an animal (Mencius, 2004).

### **Yi-Righteousness**

Yi is translated as the sense of rightness. This is a notion that when one acts, one's intention and the action should be righteous. People should be able to recognize when non-righteous things or situations fall outside the scope of li, or proper social conduct (Cua, 2000). Yi and ren are the most important basic virtues of early Confucianism. They are paired concepts because each is viewed as a condition of the other, rather than each as standing alone. Because ren is about the humane projection of the heart, it can be used as a basis for favouring those who are closer to oneself over strangers. Loving others is made possible by restraining oneself. For example, it is natural when a student is loved by one teacher who is the actual parent. However, if the teacher shows

his/her love to his/her child over other students, he/she will never be a good teacher or a good parent.

Through cultivation, one can reach a state that is always on the right side (Mencius) and is devoted to principle. However, this should not be in an inflexible way (Confucius). Even though they show that ren is a natural, humane quality, it can only be achieved and fully embodied through cultivation. For instance, for those who are in the position of being superior, one is not separate from the other. In this case, these pointers are usually referred to as a pair, differently from each virtue standing on its own. This property is another virtue, and received more attention and was more reinforced by rulers than that shown by the yi, who used li's values to systematically reinforce their ideologies and the existing political regimes. This is much more emphasizing on the right of the first son and his family over other siblings. Alternatively, rebels used yi as the basis to demand justice from a corrupt king or, more rarely, as grounds for a revolution that ultimately resulted in regime change.

### **Li-Propriety**

Li defines the boundaries of proper behaviour, provides opportunities for satisfying the desires of moral agents within these boundaries, and encourages the development of a noble character that embodies cultural refinement and communal concerns (Ni, 2002). Li is also a broader concept than the etiquette that is emphasized here. It mainly encompasses not only proper behaviour in the social system, but also ritual propriety, social order, effective modes of action, modes of education, and self-cultivation.

Whilst the ren is possible only in relation to other living people, li (propriety) is possible only in the context of relationships and social structures. An individual should know one's own social position and conduct oneself accordingly. The philosopher also said that there are rulers for followers and fathers for sons. This is mainly because li involves one's unique position in the social web. One needs to establish one's position in relation to others. Within the extended family, one's position in the family tree is important.

Traditionally, those who are on the same family line share the same designated character in their name to indicate their position in the genogram. In social relationships, age is the critical factor in establishing relative orientation. Elderly people have different social expectations on how to behave and what to expect from their younger counterparts, and vice versa. In summary, it is still common for the Confucian countries to ask about the age of another, especially when one encounters people who are complete strangers. There are rather many more sophisticated ways to ask about the specific ages, such as inquiring about the year of a class. Orienting or disorienting oneself in the context of a specific social web is an important social activity among many of these countries.

Many have criticized the Confucian emphasis on the value of property, or proper behaviour, as having a limiting and negative effect on behavioural expression. This criticism may involve a misunderstanding of Confucian ideas. The authority of the older is neither absolute nor isolated. Expectations for proper behaviour are accompanied by the particular expectations for guiding the young. This also points to the need to being a good role model for the young person. Confucian teachers criticize the notion presented by the values of li (propriety) while having no ren (humanity) or those of the yi (righteousness). The theorist specifically emphasized the embodiment of virtue by self-cultivation in a superficial manner or shallow actions that are focused on petty or small details. Even though the basic human relationship is always viewed as rather hierarchical in Confucianism, one's duties towards others are well distributed and fair.

### **Chih-Wisdom**

Wisdom in this instance refers to the state of not knowing about something, but rather to the capability to recognize and differentiate between good and bad (Zhang, 2002). To address this, learning is meant to describe the objectivity of the knowing process. Alternatively, thinking describes a process of critical understanding, thinking, and the reflection necessary to incorporate or assimilate the knowledge acquired (Zhang, 2002). The theorist in this



Confucius philosophy stated one without the other leads to a total imbalance in knowledge acquired.

### **Shin-Trust**

The Chinese character of shin refers to trust. However, as one of the five virtues, it is interpreted as the state of mind that is without deception or lies (Zhang, 2002). This is a character that is important when relating to others. In one's social life, if one is to have a meaningful relationship with others, one should be trustworthy without cheating or lying. Also, if a person treats others with shallow friendship or pretentious etiquette, the person is not trustworthy nor has propriety (Zhang, 2002).

### **2.5.1.2.2 Five relationships**

Embedded within these addressed values are five principal relationships by which each person defines identity and duty while also showing responsibility. These five principal relationships are ruler and subject, who are perceived as the government and the people, the parent and child, husband, and wife, the older sibling and younger sibling, and a friend and another friend. To say that someone is a ruler implies a certain attitude that one is to have towards the ruler and the ruler towards the ruled. Hence, each of the relationships is characterized by two sets of expectations expressing virtues or responsibilities to be displayed by each member (Zhang, 2002). Xu et al. (1999) gave an explanation of the characteristics of each of these members in the relationship. The father is to be compassionate while the son is to be filial; the elder brother kind, and the younger brother respectful; the husband just, and the wife obedient; the older person, gracious, and the young compliant; and the ruler benevolent, and the minister loyal.

### **The relationship between government and citizen**

The relationship between the ruler and citizen is the ideal that shows that it is combined with a sense of righteousness or a sense of integrity. Ideal rulers or superiors are to be fair and just. Among the most common criticisms of Confucianism is that it promotes dictatorship or corruption. Differently, it is interesting to note that instead of the basic virtue of humanity, the most

important aspect of the government is regarded to be fair. Above all, he should be an example for them by his own actions. He thought that by being realistic and truthful, other people would definitely follow suit in this action of honesty. Alternatively, the leader should ensure he meets all the needs. This is to avoid any form of chaos that might appear, to avoid a coup of any sort (Zhang, 2002).

### **Parents and children**

There should be closeness between parents and children (Dang, 2012). In a family, the leader is the parent. However, the guidance and discipline that parents give to their children should be based on emotional closeness and love. Mostly, others do argue in front of parents. They should be honest when making judgements and decisions for their young ones.

### **Husband and wife**

The value that governs the husband-wife relationship is based on a principle of mutuality (Dang, 2012; Zhang, 2002). The underlying spirit is not dominance, but the division of labour. It is also important to note that a value of duty looms in Confucian family ethics. If children are involved, the role of the mother should take precedence over the role of wife.

### **Older and younger siblings**

Between the siblings, the older sibling is also expected to be a role model for his or her younger sibling (Dang, 2012; Zhang, 2002). In turn, younger ones are to respect the older ones. The eldest of the siblings usually acts as the surrogate for parents in their absence. When these resources are limited, the oldest son typically is supported in his education, whereas the other siblings are expected to support the family and the oldest. In essence, the oldest is expected to support and to be a representative of the whole family (Dang, 2012).

### **Relationship between friends**

It is worth emphasizing that the reciprocity and equality of friendship strike many as an inherent and natural reflection of the nature of the friendship relation. Furthermore, friendship is essential to a flourishing human life; it is a truly deep and essential aspect of human existence. Increasingly, it is in the nature of things for equals to treat each other with mutual respect, and not in

asymmetrical deference, as an attitude of deference to one's equal is itself unnatural. With its robust equality, mutuality, and reciprocity, friendship is a core and natural human relationship that lacks the characteristic paternalistic authority of the parent-child.

To sum up, among the five basic human relationships, three of them are family relationships. This confirms a strong representation of the notion that family is the base of a society. In Confucianism, both community and society are a mere extension of the family. Thus, the ideal social relationship is the one that demonstrates qualities that parallel those found in family life. A person who does not do well within family relationships cannot do well in society. It emphasizes that the five relationships involve mutual respect and reciprocity between two parties. All of these relationships were seen as mutual exchanges. There was never a demand for absolute obedience for a son to father, minister to ruler, or wife to husband (Zhang, 2002).

### **2.5.1.3 The social cultural influences on VET sector**

Although Confucianism is no longer used as the official state ideology today, it remains a distinctive feature of the life and mores of the region (Oldstone-Moore, 2002). With respect to the educational field, Hayhoe (1993) argued that the theory has deeply affected Vietnamese higher education through the notion of Official-Scholar (OS). The OS were the elite class in Vietnamese history by virtue of their mastery of literary skills (Thompson, 1979).

For more than two thousand years, this had definitely been the ruling protocol in Vietnam, and they still are (Weber, 1964), and are still relevant in Vietnamese society. As a rule, the OS strove for princely service both as a source of income and as a normal field of activity (Weber, 1964). For many centuries, social ranks in Vietnam have been determined more by qualification for office than by wealth. According to Park and Chesla (2007), there are four social strata based on occupation: scholars, farmers, workers, and businesspersons. The authors explain that the highest class, scholars, did mental work and usually made the decisions that influenced the whole society.

In the second level, the farmers gained respect as they provided sustenance to the whole society. Third, workers relied on their individual labour and skills to survive. The lowest class, businesspersons, are primarily focused on self-interest to function. However, the social statuses of these business classes have transformed to be more respectful than before. The establishment of the Vietnamese business association in 2004 was a signal of the perceptual change of the society in this class.

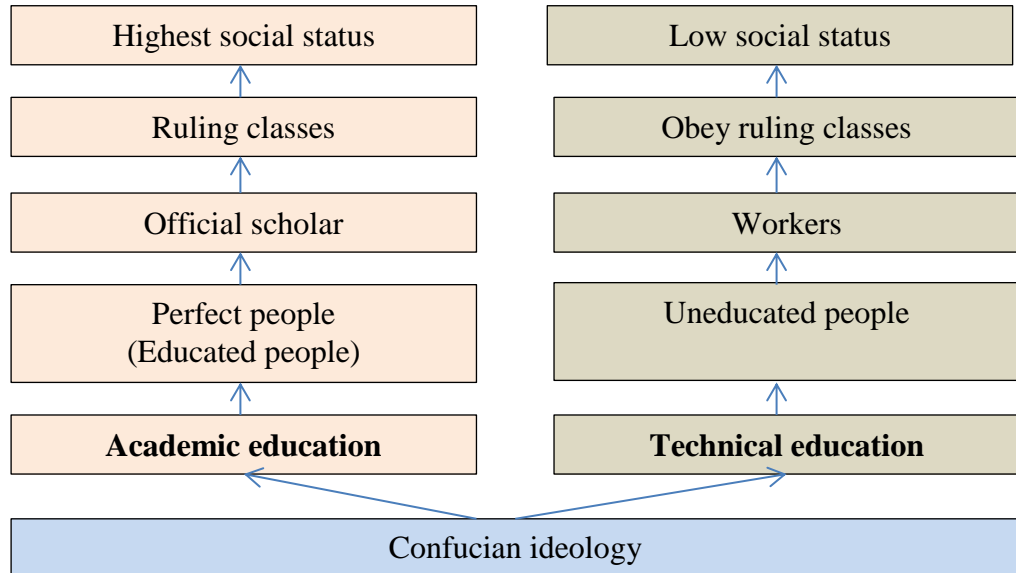
In the Confucian countries such as China and Vietnam, the qualification of education and social class have a relationship, and they are determined by education, especially by examinations (Weber, 1964), which are known as Imperial Examinations (IE). In IE, moral values (five virtues) always played a more significant role than specialist knowledge (CEDEFOP, 1987, p.24). According to Ogden (1995, p.19), the ruling classes are educated as the scholars of the classics, and are experts in morality, rather than in any particular (technical) (e.g., agriculture, law, commerce, industry, and science) and will administer the country. It means that people, who held higher education qualifications such as bachelor's, master's, and Ph.D. level, have huge opportunities to enter the ruling class.

Although 'the pathway to get the official position in the public sector through the examination system was the narrowest and most difficult' (Hayhoe, 1992, p.12), common people still believe that it is the only way to improve their social status. Success with the IE brought opportunity for an OS career, which means the status of privilege and success. Undoubtedly, it was this ambition that motivated the majority of students (Thompson, 1979, p.112).

Dominated by the Confucian ideology, higher education has become a tool for people to realize their goals to be an OS. This is the rationale for us to understand the negative effects of Confucianism on VET. First, the goal to be an OS reflects the people's rejection of vocational education. The reason is that in the social hierarchy of the Confucian state, officials occupied the highest position, above the peasants, craftsmen, and merchants (CEDEFOP, 1987, p.23). Preference was given to a classical (academic/general) education, which

was the basic element in the preparation for a career in the administration, rather than to specialized education (CEDEFOP, 1987). Second, the goal to be an official scholar fosters the environment of disdain for VET in the society, which causes graduates of VET to have disadvantages in employment. Most employers prefer graduates with general university degrees rather than graduates of VET. VET is defined as the junior level of tertiary education and mainly focuses on two years of college, in which graduates do not attain degrees, but get diplomas. Therefore, inequalities in employment make the further development of VET difficult. It is true that VET is challenged by the Confucian notion of the OS. Development of VET calls for an ideological transformation. Figure 13 describes the pathways to reach the social status between academic education and technical education under Confucian ideology. It indicates why VET has more disadvantages than academic education.

Figure 13: Confucian ideology on the academic and technical education  
(Source: by analysis from author)



#### 2.5.1.4 Summary

By describing, reviewing, and analysing the main points of the Confucian philosophy, this part portrayed the full picture of the Vietnamese sociocultural reality. At the moment, the moral system (five virtues) and the hierarchy relationship (five relationships) still affect all aspects of the society. Regarding

the educational system, the mainstream education pathway to train the perfect people still is the primary choice of the Vietnamese people to follow. In means that the VET pathway is facing difficulties in attracting young people to follow it (GDVT, 2011)

## **2.5.2 The economy and politics in Vietnam: Marxist-Leninist ideology**

According to the guideline of the Vietnamese Constitution in 2013, Vietnam still continues to take Marxism-Leninism as the official ideology to build and retain the socialist state. By providing a review of the main points of Marxism-Leninism, this section would like to highlight the economic and political characteristics of Vietnam. In addition, the effects of the economic and political dimensions on the VET sector are presented. The rationale analysing the economic and political dimension is that Vietnam has applied the socialist model from 1954 in the North and from 1975 in the South to now.

Marxism-Leninism is a political philosophy seeking to establish socialist states and develop them further. Marxists-Leninists espouse a wide array of views depending on their understanding of Marxism and Leninism, but generally they support the idea of a vanguard party, one-party rule, state dominance over the economy, internationalism, opposition to bourgeois democracy, and opposition to capitalism (Pons & Service, 2012). At the moment, four countries in the world (i.e. China, Cuba, Laos, and Vietnam) still retain Marxist-Leninist theory as the political ideology for leading and controlling the nation.

The goal of Marxism-Leninism is the development of a state into a socialist republic through the leadership of a revolutionary vanguard, the part of the working class who come to class-consciousness as a result of the dialectic of class struggle. The socialist state, representing a ‘dictatorship of the proletariat’ (as opposed to that of the bourgeoisie), is governed by the party of the revolutionary vanguard through the process of democratic centralism, which Vladimir Lenin described as ‘diversity in discussion, unity in action’ (Michael & Robin, 1981, p.24-25). It seeks the development of socialism into the full

realisation of communism, a classless social system with common ownership of the means of production and with full social equality of all members of society (Charles, 1994, p.140).

### **2.5.2.1 The economic characteristics of the theory**

There are several different types of economic systems employed by nations. Two such types, socialism and capitalism, are the most common (Kristina, 2014). Capitalism is often referred to as a free market economy in its purest form, which the United States of America represents. The main characteristics of capitalism are: (a) the economy is run by the individuals (or corporations) who own and operate companies and make decisions as to the use of resources; (b) profit motive, which companies exist to make a profit; and (c) minimal government intervention. In other words, capitalist societies believe markets should be left alone to operate without government intervention; (d) competition or true capitalism needs a competitive market; and (e) willingness to change by applying technological change.

According to Biswanath (2009, p.119), four main characteristics of socialism are as follows: (a) government ownership of productive resources. The role of private property is to be lessened as key industries are nationalised, (b) planning, socialist economy is a planned economy. Instead of permitting the free play of profit motives in a laissez-faire market economy, co-ordinated planning is introduced. Sometimes, the programme of ‘production for use rather than profit’ is advocated, advertising expenditure on gadgets is reduced, workers and professional people are to develop instincts of craftsmanship and social service so that they will be guided by other motives than those of ‘acquisitive society’, (c) redistribution of income or inherited wealth and swollen incomes are to be reduced by militant use of government taxing powers. Social security benefits, free medical care, and cradle to grave welfare services provided by the collective purse are to increase the well-being of the less privileged classes and guarantee minimum standards of living. Equitable distribution of income is central to socialism and, (d) social welfare rather than private profit characterises a socialist society’s goals.

At the moment, the Vietnamese government and the communist party still pursue the slogan of the socialist model 'from each according to their ability to each according to their need'. Also, they still believe shared ownership of resources and central planning offer a more equitable distribution of goods and services. However, the collapse of the socialist network starting in 1982 from the Soviet Union and Eastern Bloc countries provided extremely valuable experiences for the Vietnamese communist party. Because of the globalization and internationalization dimensions, the Vietnamese economic system now gradually is changing from state ownership to individualism but under the influence of the communist party and receives the central management from government.

### **2.5.2.2 The political characteristics of the theory**

Marxism-Leninism supports the creation of a one-party state led by a Marxist-Leninist communist party as a means to develop socialism and then communism (Alexander, Robert & Daniel, 2003, p.18). The political structure of the Marxist-Leninist state involves the rule of a communist vanguard party over a revolutionary socialist state that represents the will and rule of the proletariat (Michael & Robin, 1981, p.25). Through the policy of democratic centralism, the communist party is the supreme political institution of the Marxist-Leninist state. Generally speaking, the socialism represented for the vanguard party, one-party rule, state dominance over the economy, opposition to bourgeois democracy, opposition to capitalism, and using the struggling classes to protect the party (Pons & Service, 2012).

At the moment, the communist party is unique and the most powerful organization in Vietnam. Its responsibility is to orient the direction of all aspects of Vietnam from the micro to macro level. It is the leadership. Alternatively, government is the organization to implement the guidelines from the communist party. It is the management. However, it is argued that too much power from the communist party and no competition from other parties lead to the appearance of a dictatorship of the proletariat in the party and corruption in the government (Alexander et al., 2003).



### **2.5.2.3 The political and economic influences**

In the Vietnamese context, according to article number 4 of the Vietnamese Constitution guidelines in 2013, the Vietnamese Communist Party has responsibility to lead comprehensively on all sides from the micro to macro level of the country and the Vietnamese government has responsibility for caring for all aspects of society; the VET sector is no different. It means that the Vietnamese government can establish the new sectors that suit the purpose of the economic development of the nation. However, these sectors must be under the leadership of the Vietnamese communist party, and accept the central management of government.

As many established sectors for serving economic development, the Vietnamese VET system was established in 1969 with the main purpose of providing the labour workforce for the state companies (GDVT, 2011). The government gave land, employed staff, and invested the facilities for the VET schools. The main responsibility of VET schools was only to train the skilled workforces with the curriculum designed by GDVT, whereas the responsibility of government was to deliver these skilled workforces to the state companies for work. It means that all VET graduates are guaranteed a job after training at the VET schools. In short, in the pure socialist period from 1954 to 1985, the VET sector had been seen just a tool to produce the skilled workforce for the state companies. It did not run as the real sector to serve the needs of the labour market. The people's perception towards the VET sector in that period had been just to enrol the VET sector and had no pressure for looking for a job because it was the responsibility of the government.

However, the collapse of the socialist network starting in 1982 with no supports from other socialist countries, the embargo from the United State of America and other Western countries on the economic system, and the poor economic situation in Vietnam. As a result, the Vietnamese government faced a very serious situation such as not enough money to subsidize the state sectors, even in providing food to people. To deal with this serious situation, in 1986, the Vietnamese communist party introduced the open door policy. It was

intended to reform the economic system so the country could survive. The most important point of the policy was to accept the private sector and accept the economic market, but under the orientation of the Communist Party while the political issue still remains under the leadership of the communist party.

In the process of the economic transition of the country from 1986 to the present (2016), the role of the VET sector has also shifted from not only training the skilled workforce for the state companies but also for the international organizations located in Vietnam, the private sector, and individual needs. At the moment, there is no research in Vietnam or overseas to evaluate the effects of political and economic issues on the VET sector. There are only the reports from international organizations such as ABD, ILO, WB, and two reports from GDVT in 2011 and 2012 on the VET sector. However, these reports only evaluated the strong points of the VET sector, and indicated the weak points that need to improve. Currently, the VET sector is still under the orientation of the Vietnamese communist party, and receives central management from the government.

#### **2.5.2.4 Summary**

As with the same previous approach, this section described, reviewed, and analysed the main points of Marxist-Leninist theory to draw a picture of the economic and political realities in Vietnam. At the moment, Marxist-Leninist theory continues strongly effects on politics, economy, and education. In the political aspect, the ruling and single communist party keeps going to hold Marxism-Leninism as the official ideology to control the country. However, the economy has made significant changes towards the privatization (London, 2011) but still under the orientations of the communist party.

The VET sector, one of the zones, training the skilled workforce to serve the economic system, has reformed itself. Its role has expanded not only to train the skilled for state companies but also to meet the needs of the international organizations, the private sector, individuals and the economic market needs. However, the central management of government in the VET sector still

appears in every corner. The clear evidence in controlling the curriculum design and employing staff for the VET providers are good examples to illustrate the statement. In other words, the VET system does not receive full autonomy in its actions (Thomas & Ben, 2007). For political influence, VET has been seen as a tool to train the skilled workforce under the guidelines from the communist party rather than a real technical and vocational education sector (Thomas & Ben, 2007). For example, Marxist-Leninist theory is always a core and compulsory unit in designing the curriculum for all of the VET programs at the VET providers and the universities.

## **2.6 Conclusion**

The red line going throughout and linking three parts of the chapter is the perception of an individual towards the phenomenon. Wood et al. (2001) and Robbins et al. (2001) indicated that three factors, namely; (1) the perceiver, (2) the setting, and (3) the perceived object have influenced directly on the people's perception and make them having the different views, thinking, evaluations and loyalty. The first part of the chapter described and analysed critically the concept of perception, the perceptual process and the influential factors. The second part of the chapter, reviewed the primary factor that influences the perception of an individual: the perceived object or the image of an organization. In addition, in order to measure the relationships between and determine the impacts of organizational image and perception of an individual, one of the outcomes of perception, loyalty, was proposed, defined and reviewed. The last part of the chapter related to the primary socio-cultural aspect of the Vietnamese culture that influences its peoples' perception: the setting. By reviewing and analysing the main points of the Confucian and Marxist-Leninist ideologies, this part presented the global picture of the social-cultural, economic and political stability of Vietnam. These issues directly influence the perception of Vietnam's people have of the VET sector.

## Chapter 3: Methodology

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## **A Mixed Method Approach Enabling the Triangulation Technique: Case Study in Vietnam**

Vi Hoang Dang<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Namdinh Vocational College, Vietnam

Correspondence: University of New England, Armidale, 2350, NSW, Australia. Tel:

61-2-6773-2038. E-mail:

hdang2@myune.edu.au

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### **Abstract**

An exploratory study was conducted to investigate the perceptions of various key stakeholders about the current vocational education and training (VET) sector in Vietnam using three methods. The quantitative method adopted was a data gathering questionnaire aimed to measure students' perceptions of the VET sector and identify factors that impact students' intentions in enrolling and completing VET programs in Vietnam. The qualitative method was then used to explore other views about the VET sector from the students' parents using the open-ended interviews. The third approach used a nominal group technique to investigate other key stakeholders' perceptions of Vietnam's VET sector. Through triangulation, the reliable findings of the research indicated that the "real" issue impacting the VET sector was the relationship between VET providers and industries. This should be considered and researched carefully in the design of a VET curriculum. In addition, this study revealed that a web of influences was created which impacted significantly in both positive and negative ways on the students' perception of the VET sector.

**Keywords:** Research design, triangulation, Vietnamese vocational education and training

## **3.1 Introduction**

This chapter presents the methodology of an exploratory study carried out in Vietnam in 2014-2015 on the perceptions of key stakeholders of the vocational education and training sector. It has two parts. The first part describes why mixed method including quantitative, qualitative and semi quantitative approaches were used in this study. The research design follows a cumulative effect of answering sub-questions related to stakeholder perceptions on VET image in Vietnam.

It is noted that author copied and pasted the main parts in the published paper, then put them into the chapter to aim eliminating the duplications. For the full details of the paper and references, please go to appendix number 11.

## **3.2 Research methodology and design**

### **3.2.1 Research methodology**

To gain a greater insight into the perceptions of various key stakeholders towards the VET sector, the researcher applied a mixed-method approach, which comprises of three methods to collect data. First, the quantitative method was employed, which involved a survey questionnaire to explore students' perceptions. Second, a qualitative method was used consisting of open-ended interviews to explore parental perspectives on VET and the general views on higher education in general. Third, the last method involved using the nominal group technique to unpack the perceptions of six key stakeholders who have a clear understanding of and close 'working' relationship with the VET sector. The combination of the three methods contributes towards a method- and data-triangulation by answering and validating key questions that help to strengthen the methodology employed and, in terms of logical format, to provide clear evidence (Lincoln & Guba, 2000). According to Denzin (2010, p.420), methodological triangulation involves multiple qualitative and/or quantitative methods for investigating a certain issue, while data triangulation uses dissimilar sources of data or different data from the same source to examine the same object.

### **3.2.1.1 The reason using the mixed method approach**

The mixed method system does not have universal support amongst scholars, and some claim that the two methods cannot be merged (Smith & Heshusius, 1986). Smith and Heshusius argue that a mixed methods approach provides an insight into the research topic from different perspectives and that the combination of methodologies “can provide particularly rich and robust data” (Australian National Health and Medical Research Council, 2005). Sale, Lohfeld, and Brazil (2002) explained that there were two significant benefits from using mixed methods. First, it provides cross validation by triangulations. Second, it gains complementary results by using the strengths of one method to improve the other. According to Teddlie and Tashakkori (2003, p.35), the use of a mixed methods approach is particularly valuable in complex educational and sociological research where the researcher needs to address multiple questions (Newman, Ridenour, Newman, & DeMarco, 2003). Examples of mixed method research involving studies with governance arrangements include:

- A 1998 study, reported by Nir (2002), of the Israeli education system, the purpose of which was to gauge the impact of school-based management on teacher commitment. This research combined quantitative data from questionnaires with qualitative information from interviews.
- The research of Walker (2002) into school-based management in New Jersey, in which she used questionnaires and focus-group discussions as the basis of her mixed method investigation.
- Timperley and Robinson (2003) studied partnership as an intervention strategy in self-managing schools in New Zealand and combined data from questionnaires, interviews, and observations.

### **3.2.1.2 Methodology justification**

To portray the whole picture of the VET system with the views of multiple participants, in this study, the author applied the mixed methods approach by using a survey questionnaire, followed by open-ended interviews, and the

nominal group technique to verify data. It seemed apparent that this approach was more appropriate for analysing and interpreting data, particularly when contextual factors in Vietnam may differ from that of other countries in the world.

With the survey questionnaire approach, there is opportunity to investigate the perceptions of students of the VET programs. The reason these students were the target of the first research methods was because they are directly associated with making a final decision to enrol, to continue their studies, and to complete VET training. One of the biggest advantages of this method is that it is the most efficient means of gathering information from a large sample in a limited period of time. In the case of this research, the survey analysis provided a convenient means of identifying and categorising ethnographic details, personality traits, perceptions and loyalty of three groups of students, namely, lower, upper secondary, and current vocational students (Johnson, 1994).

With the open-ended interview method, this provided an opportunity for exploration of parental perspectives of the VET sector. In the Vietnamese context, parents have long been seen as the most influential in helping choose a vocation/career for their children. This method is one of the most important techniques for collecting data because it enables the researcher to delve deeply into the opinions and perceptions of the interviewee and elicit much valuable information (Creswell, 2002). Thus, a broader and deeper insight into the perceptions of parents of the VET system was collected and analysed for further study.

With the nominal group technique approach, this provided the opportunity to unpack the opinions of other key stakeholders of the VET sector. This study, six key stakeholders were formally invited based on their roles, their close relationship to the VET sector and a clear understanding of the Vietnamese higher education system. The roles of two Ministerial policy makers from vocational education training sector and technical education training fields made policies and generated nation-wide initiatives for implementation. The roles of principals of secondary schools helped students in advising and



guiding career choice for prospective students into their respective futures. A manager of industry contributed his ideas on the roles of improving curriculum, evaluations and the recruitment of VET graduates. The attendance of a VET lecturer provided his or her personal experiences and insights of the VET sector. These key stakeholders were considered to equal voice in contributing to ideas, minimising the domination of the process by more confident or outspoken individuals, and a quick and expedient way of receiving the results quickly at the end of the workshop (Vella, Goldfrad, Rowan, Bion & Black, 2000).

### **3.2.2 Research design**

The purpose of this study was to explore the perceptions of various key stakeholders towards the vocational education training sector in Vietnam. The mixed methods approach, which uses triangulation to strengthen and ensure accuracy of data (Lincoln & Guba, 2000) was applied. In this study, involved methodological triangulation because one phenomenon was researched, namely the VET sector. The advantage of methodological triangulation is that the weaknesses of one method can be compensated for by the strengths of the other (Malterud, 2001; Thurmond, 2001). Additionally, the results from three methods, namely, a quantitative survey questionnaire, open-ended interviews, and the nominal group technique were compared to see whether similar results emerged. If the conclusions from each of the methods were the same, then validity was established (Mays & Pope, 2000). The data triangulation technique was used in this study to improve the accuracy of data.

Figure 14: Research design framework (Source: by analysis from author)

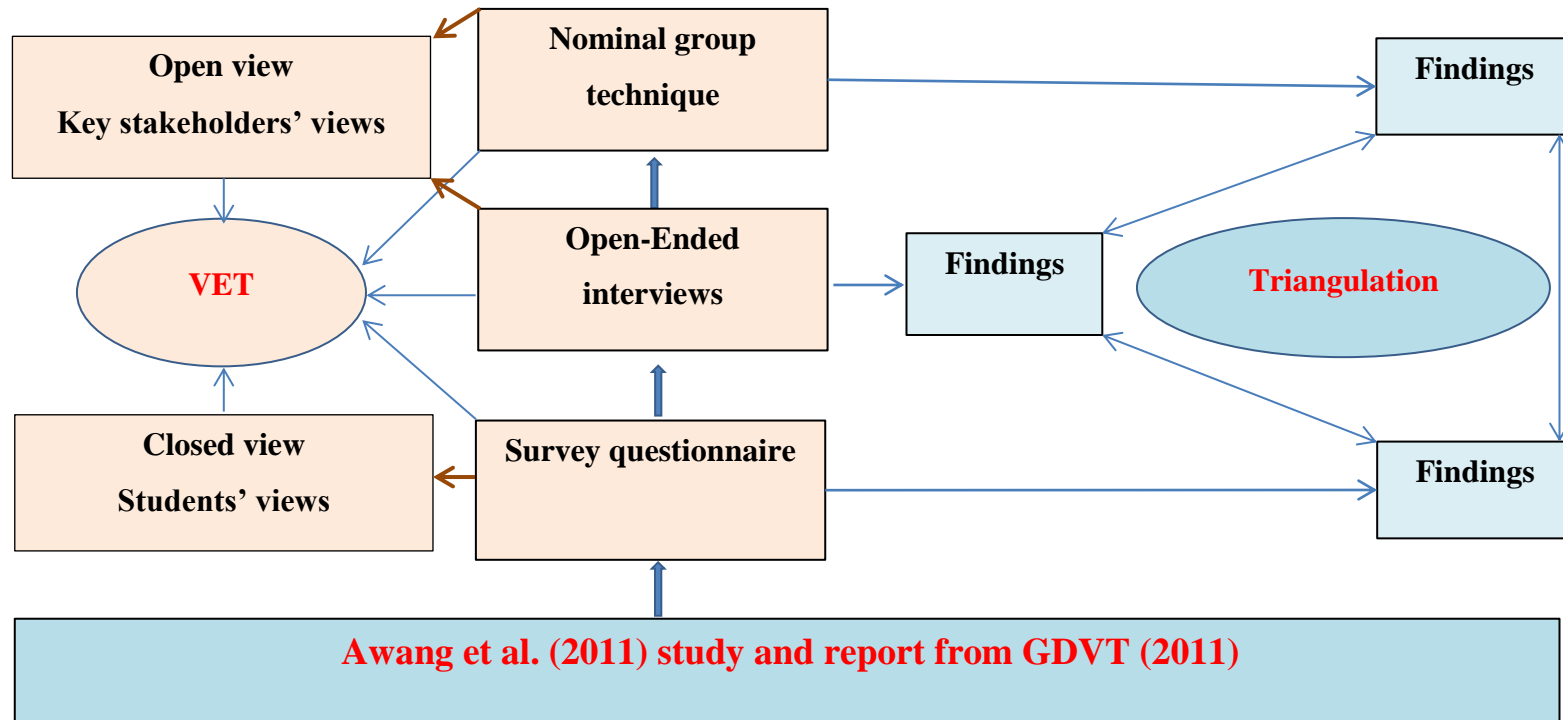


Figure 14 provides an overview of the research design framework used in this study to explore key stakeholders' perceptions of the VET sector. Three perspectives of lower-, upper-secondary, and current vocational students were obtained using the survey questionnaire approach, which was developed and modified based on the Awang (2011) study, and the study from the General Directorate of Vocational Training (2011). The two studies mentioned above were the foundation for the development of the survey questionnaire and the research design in this study and attempted to answer the research question number one, two and three. The open-ended interviews method explored the parental perspectives of the VET sector which attempted to answer the research question number four. It was designed to explore VET image based on influential factors of parents coupled with data collected from the surveys. The nominal group technique utilised a focus-group approach to capture the opinions of other key stakeholders in the VET sector who exercise considerable influence from a policy and practice standpoint.

The three methods were grouped by closed view and open view (identified in purple in Figure 14) corresponding with the quantitative and qualitative views of the participants in this study. The closed views described the perceptions of students towards the VET sector through the survey questionnaire. The open views comprised two methods; open-ended interviews explored the perception of parents of the VET sector, and the nominal group technique disclosed the key stakeholders' perception of the VET sector.

Data collected from participant groups from the three methods (in orange in Figure 14) were compared to find common themes, patterns, and or conflicting information for further analysis.

### **3.3 The three approaches**

#### **3.3.1 Survey questionnaire approach**

##### **3.3.1.1 Development and design of the questionnaire**

The principle source for the image dimensions represented for the VET sector was the survey instrument deployed by Awang et al. (2011) in an attempt to

investigate students' perceptions and loyalty to the VET programs in Malaysia. This instrument was modified with consideration given to the 12 principle dimensions used to describe the VET system in Vietnam (GDVT, 2011). The 12 principle dimensions that quantify and describe the VET system in Vietnam were used to provide cultural points of reference that could be blended into the modified scale.

In the modified model of Awang et al. (2011), the seven dimensions that explained the image of VET included: 1) entry requirements, 2) facility and equipment, 3) teachers' ability, 4) recognition of qualification, 5) student career and job potential, 6) quality of curriculum, and 7) social value and soft skills.

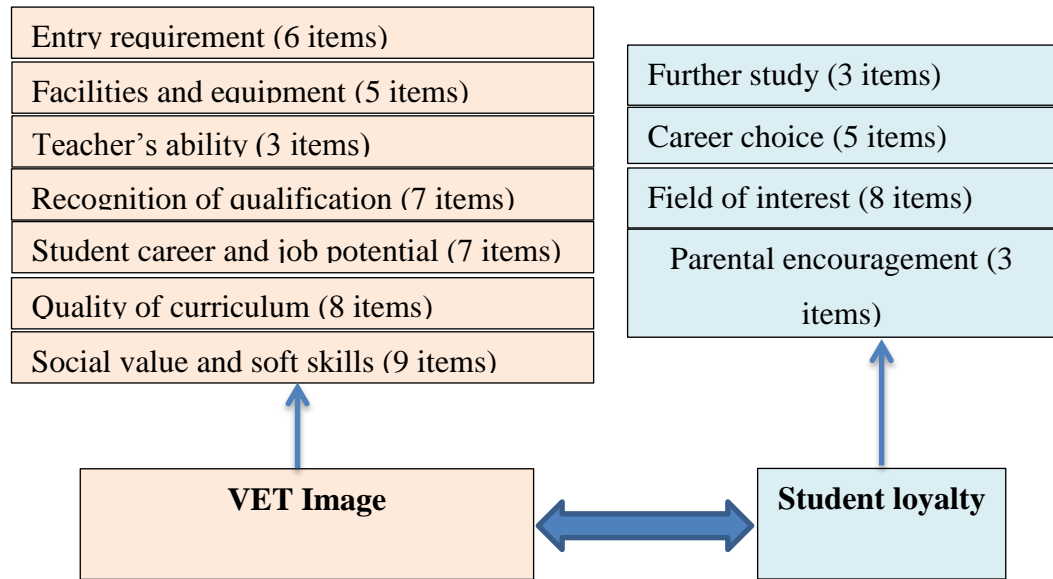
The measure of student loyalty was again based on a combination of the work of Awang et al. (2011) and the GDVT (2011), and modified for use taking into account the Vietnamese context and culture. Four subjective measures of students' loyalty to the VET sector were explored by asking students' intentions concerning further study, field of interest, career choice, and parental encouragement. The model was then re-formulated (see figure 15) in an attempt at answering the three first research questions.

The two main parts of the questionnaire were the main instruments used to explore students' perceptions, and measure the relationship and impact between VET's image and students' loyalty to the VET sector. The first part was designed to collect demographic information of students. The second part examined students' perception of the VET system, which was quantified by the seven dimensions as mentioned previously.

The survey questionnaire utilised a five-point Likert scale measuring the perception of three groups of students on the image of VET and the student's loyalty to VET based on responses to five categories (1 = strongly disagree; 2 = disagree; 3 = neutral; 4 = agree; 5 = strongly agree). Students were asked to provide the most appropriate answer to a set of 77 questions. The seven dimensions making up the image of VET (independent variable) were

measured using 45 questions that sought students' evaluation based on their experience and knowledge of the sector. The four dimensions measuring students' loyalty (dependent variable) were measured using 19 questions asking their intentions to enrol and complete the VET programs.

Figure 15: Model of the VET image and student loyalty to the VET programs  
(Source: by analysis from author)



### 3.3.1.2 Sample and procedure

This study used a survey approach to collect data from lower-secondary, upper-secondary and current vocational students from across both the Northern and Southern regions of Vietnam. Six provinces were purposively selected based on the researcher's experiences of Vietnam. In the Northern region, the provinces investigated were NamDinh, NinhBinh, and HaiDuong. In the Southern region, the provinces included BinhPhuoc, DongNai and VungTau. The distance between data collection points from each province was approximately 100 km.

In each province, six schools (2 lower secondary, 2 upper secondary schools and 2 current vocational education training providers) were then randomly selected and approached to participate in the study. In each school, 25 students were chosen to participate in the survey using a systematic selection technique

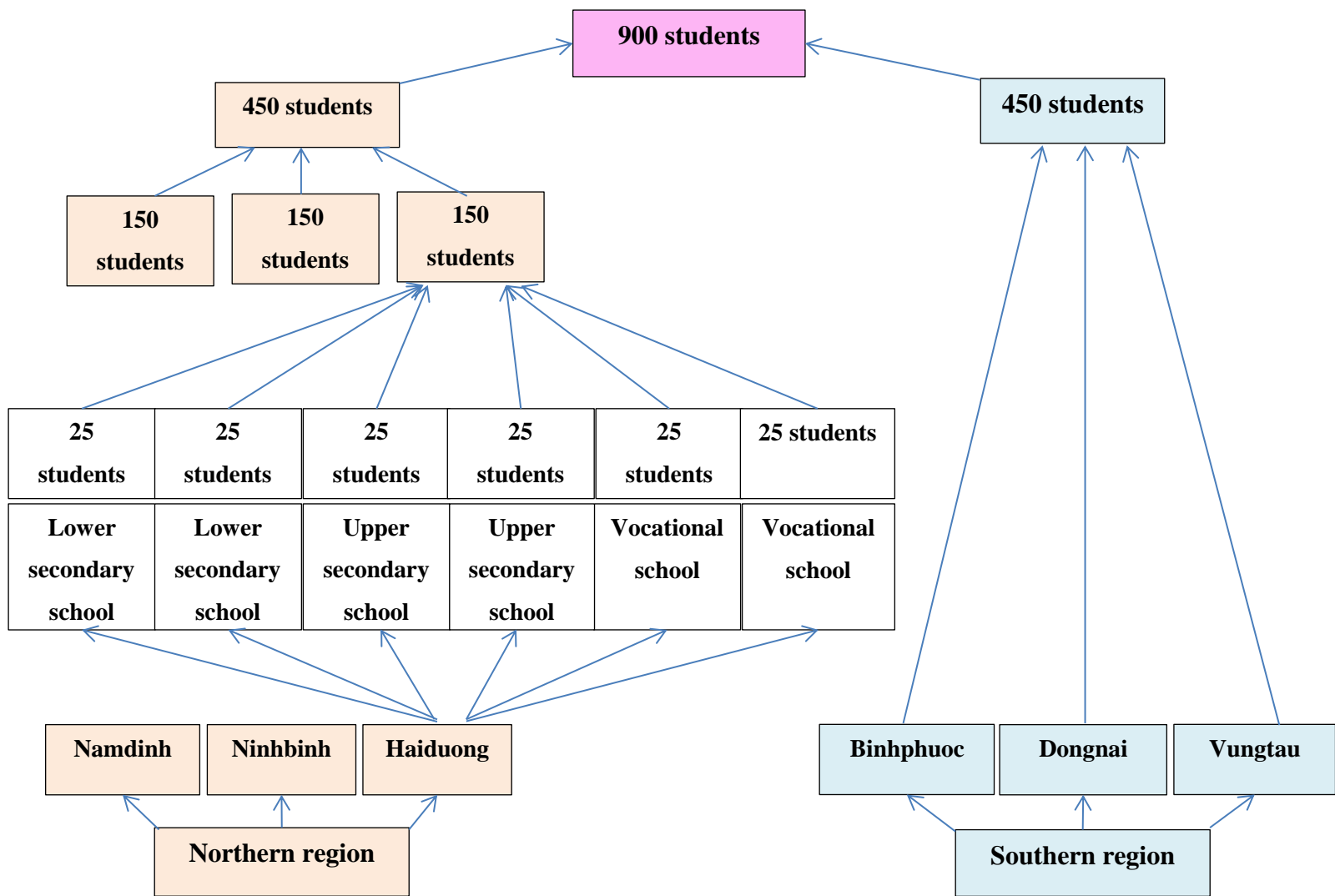
applied to the class roll or the students' checklist. Beginning at student number one, every third student on the list was selected until the 25th student was reached. In each province, 6 schools were sampled and a total of 150 surveys gathered. A total of 450 participants were recruited from both the Northern and Southern regions providing 900 data points.

It should be noted that at the end of each survey, the researcher checked the students' responses. Students who had not fully completed the survey were given more time to finish. If someone selected from the list did not want to take the survey, then the researcher invited the next student on the list based on the systematic selection process mentioned above. This ensures that the target final sample size of 900 completed surveys was reached. Surveys were distributed upon approval from school principals, and upon completion of the survey questionnaire, the surveys were collected by teachers and placed in envelopes in an attempt to minimize any concerns about power-distance between research and student respondents. Figure 16 describes the process for selecting students to complete the survey questionnaire.

### **3.3.1.3 Analysis of the quantitative data**

A total of 900 survey questionnaires were distributed and all were returned completed. The data were coded and analysed using SPSS software version 19. To answer the three first research questions, three main data analysis techniques were applied. First, in research question number 1, a means analysis technique was used to determine the students' thoughts, evaluations and perceptions of VET's image and their loyalty to the VET sector. The mean score from 1.00 – 1.80 was strongly disagree, 1.81 – 2.60 disagree, 2.61 – 3.40 neutral, 3.41 – 4.20 agree and 4.21 – 5.00 strongly agree. In the second research question, the correlation analyses were conducted to examine the relationship between the VET's image and students' loyalty to the VET programs. Finally, in research question number 3, regression analyses, based on the findings from the correlation studies, were conducted to find out the factors impacting on the students' intention to pursue and complete the VET programs.

Figure 16: The process of participant selection (Source: by analysis from author)



## **3.3.2 Open-ended interview approach**

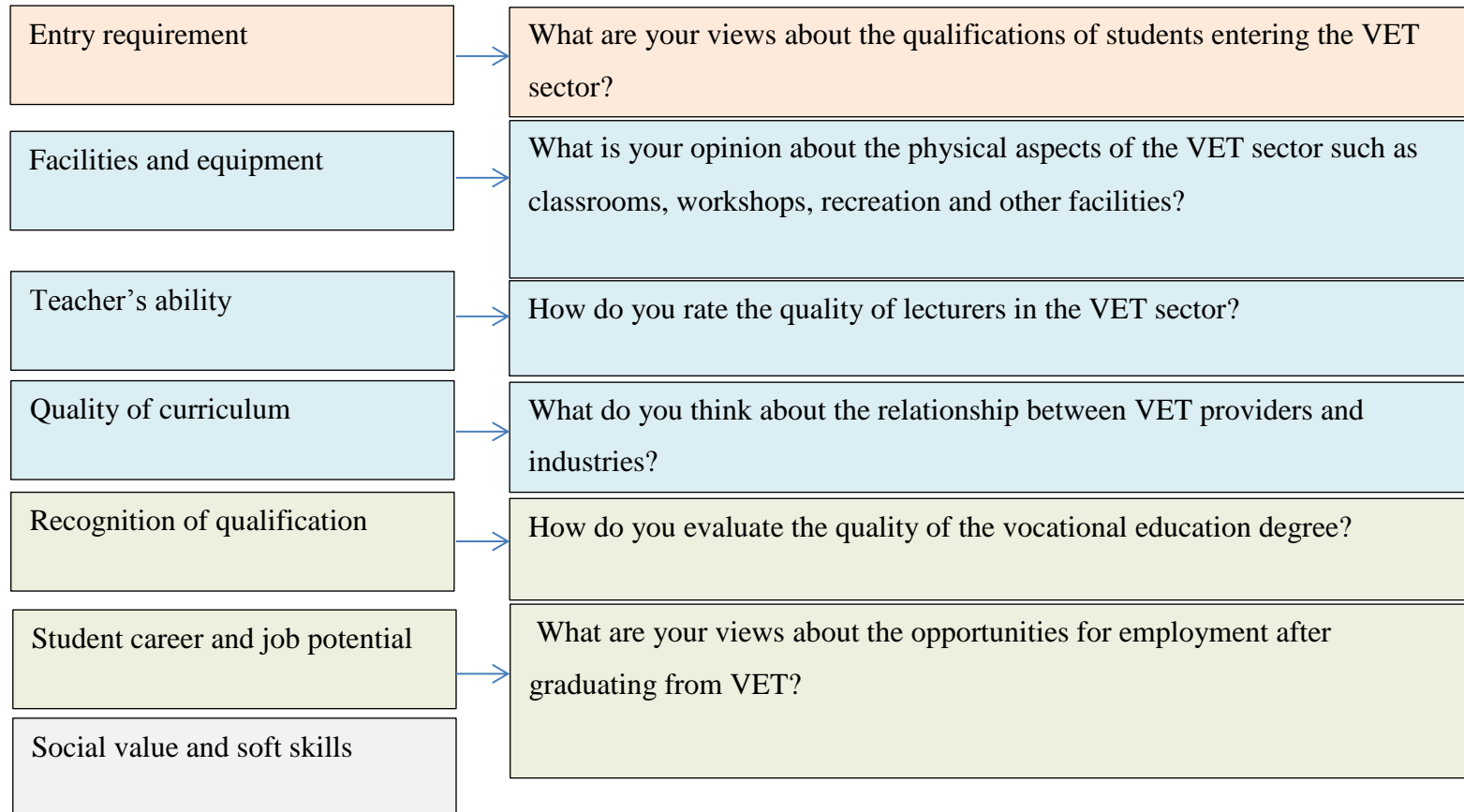
### **3.3.2.1 Designing open-ended interview questions**

The purpose of the study is to explore the perceptions of key stakeholders of the VET sector. The survey questionnaire approach measured students' perceptions. However, due to subjectivity, a limited amount of information was asked without explanation (University of Leicester, 2009). Therefore, open-ended interviews were subsequently included as an additional approach to overcome the limitations of the survey questionnaire. One of the advantages of this approach is that interviews can generate large amounts of data, thus providing a deeper and broader understanding of one phenomenon (Denzin, 2010). Additionally, open-ended interviews allow the respondent to express an opinion without being influenced by the researcher (Foddy, 1993).

The set of open-ended interview questions was designed based on the dimensions that represented the VET image in the previous quantitative phase. In the quantitative phase, the VET sector was quantified by seven dimensions namely: (1) entry requirements; (2) facility and equipment; (3) teachers' ability; (4) recognition of qualification; (5) student career and job potential; (6) quality of curriculum, and (7) social value and soft skills. The purpose of this design was to provide the interviewed parents with a wide spectrum of features of the VET sector in order to explore their perceptions more broadly. There were two primary considerations in selecting open-ended interview questions as the means of data collection in this study. First, the set of questions focused on only one topic (the image of VET) and could be prepared in advance (Denzin, 2010). Second, open-ended questions allowed participants the freedom to express their views in their own words and in their own time, and in a place of their choosing (Kendall & Kendall, 2002). Figure 17 depicts how the six open-ended interview questions were developed.



Figure 17: Open-ended interview question development (Source: by analysis from author)



### **3.3.2.2 Sampling**

The goal was to meet a quota of 50 parents to participate the open-ended interview questions. These parents had children enrolled in year 9 or year 12 or in vocational schools in the previous phase (quantitative survey questionnaire). They were formally invited to answer the open-ended interview questions. However, only 32 parents affirmed to respond to all six open-ended interview questions; 18 parents came from the North, and 14 parents came from the South.

### **3.3.2.3 Procedure and data analysis**

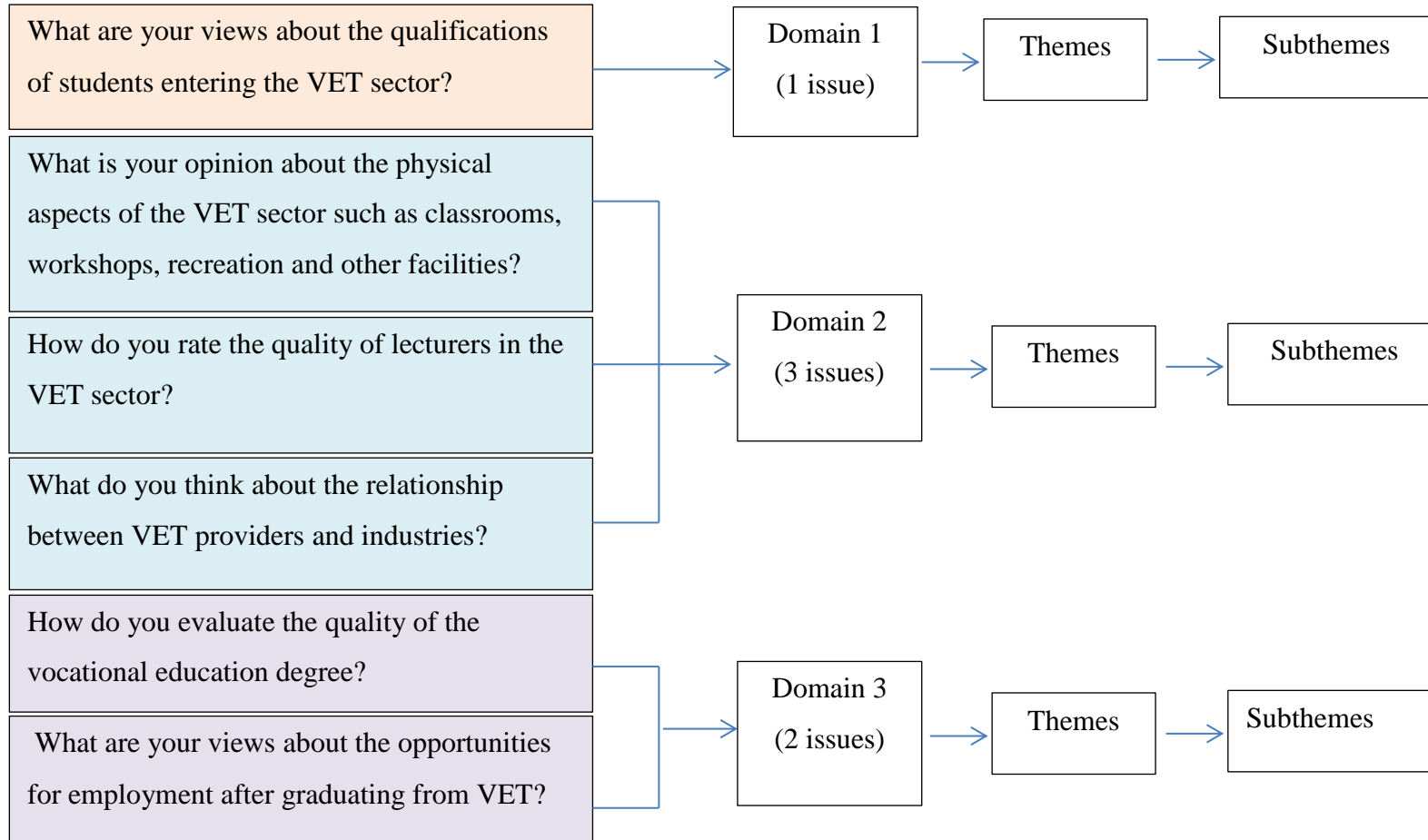
Collecting and recording data from open-ended questions can be done in various ways. The method employed in the present study was to prepare a paper-based form which listed all six open-ended questions for parents to answer and complete. The principal advantage of this strategy is that it allows plenty of time for parents to answer the questions. However, lack of opportunity to observe the feelings of parents about the topics and further explanation of the questions are acknowledged as limitations (Kendall & Kendall, 2002).

The completed forms were collected two weeks after distribution and were translated immediately from Vietnamese into English. Data pertaining to each question were entered into separate Excel spreadsheets. A thematic analytical framework was applied to analyse data in line with the inductive approach. An inductive approach is used in qualitative research to augment the understanding of complex data using summary themes or categories from the raw data (Thomas, 2006). It should be noted that the parents' answers in the following analysis reflect the actual transcripts as closely as possible, with minor editorial changes to make them more readable.

The responses from the six open-ended questions were grouped purposively into three domains to explain the viewpoints of parents concerning VET sector (see figure 18). In each domain, there were issues describing the detailed aspects of the VET sector. According to Ryan (2003), there are twelve

techniques used to create themes and sub-themes. In this study, three techniques, namely (1) word repetitions, (2) key words in context, and (3) similarities and differences were applied to determine the common emerging themes in each issue. The next step was to identify, through data analysis, sub-themes that linked the research findings and the research questions. Data were compiled by gathering them in the themes and categories to understand the meaning of a phenomenon.

Figure 18: Data analysis process (Source: by analysis from author)



### **3.3.3 Nominal group approach**

#### **3.3.3.1 Definition**

Nominal (meaning in name only) Group Technique (NGT) is a structured variation of a small-group discussion to reach consensus (Van de Ven & Delbecq, 1971). Originally, the NGT was introduced by Van de Ven and Delbecq (1971) as a tool to help disadvantaged citizens in community settings. The technique includes two main stages, namely, the focus group discussion, and the voting phase. It produces semi-quantitative data and its format is used to promote meaningful, interpersonal disclosures among participants by gathering equally weighted responses. NGT evaluation tends to offer valid representation of group views and is well suited to group evaluation activities (Pokorny & Lyle, 1988). The technique has been widely applied in health, social services, education, and government organisations. The contributors participating in the nominal group technique approach can be whole cohorts or representative groups of participants.

#### **3.3.3.2 Development**

Since its original development, researchers have modified and adapted the process of the NGT, but basic tenets remain central to the NGT process which comprises of two core stages (1) identification of the problems by discussion and (2) voting to make decisions quickly. NGT requires direct participant involvement, in a way that is non-hierarchical, and where all participants have an equal voice and all responses to the posed question have equal validity (Harvey & Holmes, 2012). The generation of the responses to the posed question takes place in silence, with no conferring with other participants, nor seeking elucidation or clarification from the researcher. This silent approach to ideas generation enables participants to develop their own thoughts and ideas, without interference or pressure from others, lessening group dynamics that may be unhelpful or undermining to the overall process (McMurray, 1994). Valuing of participants' individual contributions is enhanced by the fact that through the NGT process, the collection of data, and the analysis following ranking of responses, all participants remain anonymous (Steward, 2001), thus

allowing all involved to be heard, regardless of their position held outside of the participant group.

### **3.3.3.3 Participants**

There has been debate as to what constitutes the optimal size of group for NGT. Van de Ven and Delbecq (1971) suggested that NGT groups should be made up of no more than five to nine participants, but that large groups (9 – >200) could be accommodated within this process whereas, Horton (1980) identified his groups as ranging from seven to ten individuals and Steward (2001), in her work with Occupational Therapy and Physiotherapy students, had groups of between five and eight. Allen et al (2004) worked on a number of participants between nine and 12, noting that this afforded the researcher a group that would be manageable, but that would also allow for the generation of a range of opinions, whilst Harvey and Holmes (2012) suggested that a group of between six and 12 was ideal. Interestingly, Carney et al. (1996, p.1024) noted that from their pilot project findings, a minimum of six participants was required in order to engender a sense of “safety” within the group, illustrating this point by outlining that one of the pilot groups in the study had only contained five members and it was perceived that this could be felt as “mildly threatening”.

### **3.3.3.4 Preparing for an NGT workshop**

#### *The Meeting Room*

The meeting room used for the focus group was large enough to accommodate five to nine participants. Tables were arranged in a U-shape, with a flip chart at the open end of the ‘U’. Participants were provided with pens, papers, pencils, and 75 mm x 125 mm sticky notes.

#### *Opening Statement*

The opening statements consisted of four main parts, namely: (1) A warm welcome to all participants in the workshop followed by an explanation of the purposes of the workshop or the importance of the task, (2) Introduction of the role of each participant and a mention of the importance of each member’s

contribution, (3) Presentation by the moderator of the guidelines of the NGT process to ensure all members of the group fully understand these, and (4) An indication of how the group's outputs will be used.

### 3.3.3.5 Process of NGT

This section details the NGT process which was applied to the workshop in Vietnam. The process is a combination of the focus group discussion and voting phase that was developed by Varga-Atkins (2011). It has 5 phases namely: (1) Present key question to the participants; (2) Silent phase; (3) Round Robin phase; (4) Discussion/item clarification phase, and (5) Voting phase.

It should be noted that all members of the group were given instructions on the technique one week before the workshop so that all participants had time to review the guidelines of the technique. The reason for distributing early instructions of the technique was that the majority of the participants were not familiar with the technique. Before the first step of discussion, the instructions of the NGT were explained once more by the author to ensure that all participants had a full and clear understanding of the process. Table 2 and figure 19 below describe the instructions of the technique including the five steps.

Figure 19: Nominal group technique process (Source: by analysis from author)

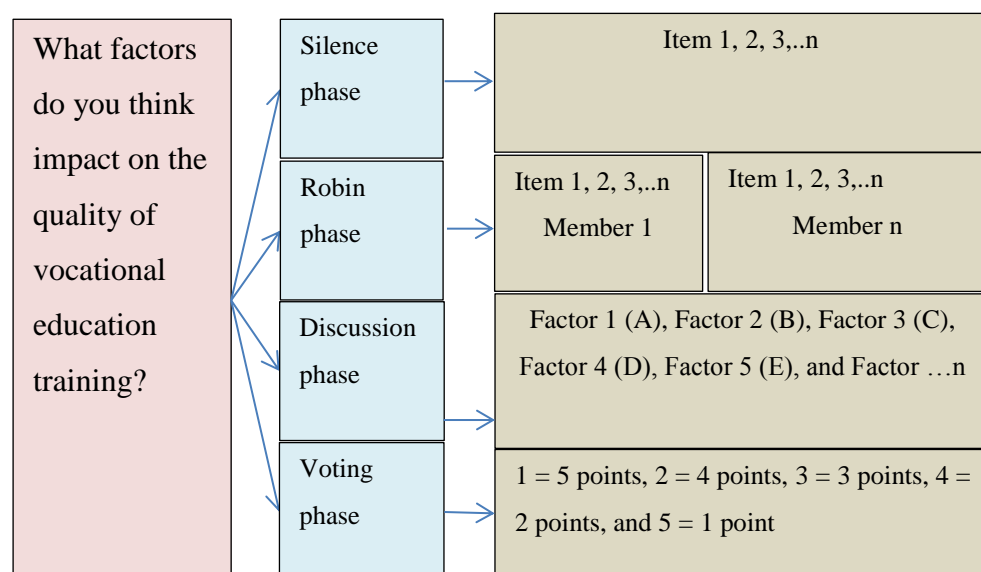


Table 2: Instructions for performing the Nominal Group Technique (Source: by analysis from author)

Phases	Activities
Phase 1	<p>Present key question on the flip chart and read loudly to the participants requesting feedback.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- What factors do you think impact the quality of vocational education training?</li> </ul>
Phase 2	<p>Silent phase</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Without conferring or group discussion, based on the participants' knowledge and experience, they write down all factors (items) that they think impact on the quality of vocational education on the sticky notes (one factor per sticky note).</li> </ul>
Phase 3	<p>Round-robin phase</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- In turn, participants stick one sticky note on the flip chart without comment or discussion until all ideas are exhausted or sticky notes run out. There is no comment or discussion in this phase to prevent some participants from advocating for their position and influencing other members in the group.</li> <li>- If one idea (factor) of the participant on the sticky note is the same or similar to another's, then the facilitator comments and groups these together.</li> </ul>
Phase 4	<p>Discussion/item clarification to make themes</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- All members of the group clarify and discuss the unclear factors or items until everything is understandable</li> <li>- All these items are grouped, edited, and given theme names. No item is discarded.</li> <li>- The facilitator lists and assigns letters A, B, C, and so to these themes in order of popularity on the flip chart.</li> </ul>
Phase 5	<p>Voting phase</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Based on the list of the themes, participants write down all themes with the letters on the paper, and rank their top five factors from 1 to 5.</li> <li>- Participants award 5 points to their top item, 4 to the second, and so on.</li> <li>- The facilitator collects these papers for data analysis.</li> </ul>



### **3.4 Conclusion**

The first part of this chapter described the research methodology undertaken in this study, as well as its justification. Data collection instruments used included: survey, open-ended interview questions and nominal group technique. The primary objective of the design was to identify and measure the perceptions of various key stakeholders especially focusing on students towards VET. The second major part of the chapter has provided a descriptive and pictorial overview of three approaches in terms of the sampling, data collection procedure and data analysis method. The next chapter will bring to the readers the findings of three approaches used in this study.

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Name of Candidate: VI HOANG DANG

Name of Principal Supervisor: SENIOR LECTURER, DR BRIAN DENMAN

Candidate

Date

VI HOANG DANG

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Principal Supervisor

Date



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**Higher Degree Research Thesis by Publication  
University of New England**

**STATEMENT OF AUTHORS' CONTRIBUTION**

(To appear at the end of each thesis chapter submitted as an article/paper)

We, the Research Master/PhD candidate and the candidate's Principal Supervisor, certify that all co-authors have consented to their work being included in the thesis and they have accepted the candidate's contribution as indicated in the *Statement of Originality*.

	<b>Author's Name (please print clearly)</b>	<b>% of contribution</b>
Candidate	VI HOANG DANG	100%
Other Authors		

Name of Candidate: VI HOANG DANG

Name/title of Principal Supervisor: SENIOR LECTURER: DR BRIAN DENMAN

VI HOANG DANG  
Candidate

03/06/2016  
Date



\_\_\_\_\_  
Principal Supervisor

03/06/2016  
Date

## **Chapter 4:**

# **Student and parental perspectives**

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- 4.2 Students' perception on the VET image
  - 4.2.1 The mean data analysis technique
    - 4.2.1.1 Students' perceptions towards the VET image
      - 4.2.1.1.1 Entry requirement
      - 4.2.1.1.2 Facilities and equipment
      - 4.2.1.1.3 Teacher's ability
      - 4.2.1.1.4 Recognition of vocational qualification
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      - 4.2.1.1.6 Curriculum
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**Vietnamese Students' Perception and Loyalty towards an Image of  
Vocational Education and Training**

\*Vi Hoang Dang<sup>1, 2</sup>, Tanya Hathaway<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Namdinh Vocational College - Vietnam

<sup>2</sup>University of New England – Australia

[\\*hdang2@myune.edu.au](mailto:*hdang2@myune.edu.au)

**Abstract:** Stakeholders' perceptions towards a career in vocational education and training (VET) in Vietnam negate the country's industrial development plan. During the last 15 years, the Vietnamese Governments investment in to the sector increased annually. However, parents and their children still pursue the goal of higher education via the mainstream rather than a career path way using the vocational education and training system. Although stereotypical views of vocational students are being challenged, Confucian ideology maintains some influence over stakeholders' educational decisions leading to the sustained popularity of higher education. This study explores the perceptions of students on the image of and their loyalty towards vocational education and training. A sample of 300 lower secondary school, 300 upper secondary school, and 300 vocational students was drawn from across the Northern and Southern regions of Vietnam. A survey questionnaire was used to collect data and mean analysis conducted to explore the data. The findings indicate that agreement with statements about facilities and equipment, teacher's ability, curriculum, and soft skills are the clearest indicators of enhanced perceptions about the image of vocational education and training. Encouragement from parents appears most influential to positively affecting lower secondary students' loyalty. Unexpected was that vocational students had less interesting continuing in vocational education and training compared to lower and upper secondary school students inclination towards a career in VET. First-hand experience seemingly leads to diminished perceptions and loyalty towards vocational education.

**Keywords:** *Vocational education and training, students, image, loyalty and perception*



## **4.1 Introduction**

This chapter presents the data analysis techniques that are applied to quantitative data collected from students using a survey questionnaire and qualitative data collected from parents using open-ended interviews, and includes the main findings of the research study. The chapter contains two main parts: the first part presents the analysis and findings of the perceptions of students towards the image of VET, corresponding with the quantitative data; the second presents the analysis and findings of parental perspectives of the VET sector, corresponding with the qualitative data.

It is noted that author copied and pasted the main parts in the published paper, then put them into the chapter to aim eliminating the duplications. For the full details of the paper and references, please go to appendix number 12.

## **4.2 The views from students on the VET sector**

This section describes the quantitative findings collected using the survey questionnaire tool. Its purpose was threefold: (1) to measure the students' perception towards the VET image by using an analysis of means, (2) to examine the relationships between the VET image and students' loyalty towards the VET programs, and (3) to reveal the factors impacting students' intention to pursue and complete the VET programs.

### **4.2.1 Students' perception of the VET image by mean analysis**

To explore students' perceptions of the VET image, the quantitative data, consisting of 900 student responses to 64 statements contained in the survey questionnaire, were coded and entered for analysis into the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 19.

It is noted that at the end of each survey completion, the researcher manually checked the students' responses for incomplete data. If a student did not fully complete the survey, then the researcher gave him or her more time to finish. If

a student in the list did not want to take the survey, then the researcher invited the next student based on the systematic selection mentioned in the methodology chapter. It ensured that 25 participants were involved in each episode of data capture, and the final sample size of 900 students was achieved. A means analysis technique was applied to determine what lower and upper secondary school students, and current vocational students thought, evaluated or perceived about the image of VET and loyalty towards the VET programs. The mean score from 1.00 – 1.80 was strongly disagree; 1.81 – 2.60 disagree; 2.61 – 3.40 neutral; 3.41 – 4.20 agree and; 4.21 – 5.00 strongly agree.

## 4.2.1.1 Results

### 4.2.1.1.1 Entry requirement

Table 3: Entry requirement (Source: by analysis from author)

<b>Dimension: Entry requirement</b>	<b>Mean Year 9 students</b>	<b>Mean Year 12 students</b>	<b>Mean Vocational students</b>
All year 9 students who have graduated onwards can enter VET	4.05	3.83	3.90
Vocational students are low academic achievers	2.03	2.01	2.12
Vocational students have disabilities	1.80	1.79	1.93
Requirements to enter VET are low and flexible	2.72	2.78	2.81
Vocational students are juvenile delinquents and problematic	1.70	1.64	1.93
VET is for people who not aspire to a higher level of education	2.71	2.31	2.46

Table 3 describes the mean scores of the first dimension of the VET image, entry requirement. All student groups recognised that VET is accessible to all secondary school students graduating from year nine onwards. On the other hand, all three groups disagreed, some more strongly than others, that vocational education training students have low academic grades and that the

VET sector is wholly for disabled students, juvenile delinquents and problematic students.

#### 4.2.1.1.2 Facilities and equipment

Overall, students expressed positive perceptions in the facility and equipment dimension as shown in table 4. This may be the result of recent financial investment in VET institutions. The dimension measures perceptions about the efficacy of VET teaching and learning, and recreational facilities to supporting quality education including students' social outcomes.

Table 4: Facilities and equipment (Source: by analysis from author)

<b>Dimension: Facilities and equipment</b>	<b>Mean Year 9 students</b>	<b>Mean Year 12 students</b>	<b>Mean Vocational students</b>
The laboratory/workshop is suitable for teaching and learning	3.83	3.69	3.5
The laboratory/workshop is advanced	3.43	3.5	3.25
Equipment is fit for purpose and the latest technology	3.4	3.53	3.31
The classes have sufficient space to support quality education	3.83	3.84	3.61
VET providers offer sports and recreational facilities	3.86	3.85	3.45

#### 4.2.1.1.3 Teacher's ability

Table 5 indicates that secondary school students were more positive about the ability of VET teachers than current vocational students. While current vocational students were in agreement, they were less enthusiastic perhaps reflecting their concrete experiences of VET teachers.

Table 5: Teacher's ability (Source: by analysis from author)

<b>Dimension: Teacher's ability</b>	<b>Mean Year 9 students</b>	<b>Mean Year 12 students</b>	<b>Mean Vocational students</b>
Vocational teachers/instructors are helpful	4.28	4.1	3.81
Vocational teachers/instructors are experienced	4.36	4.07	3.93
Vocational teachers/instructors are highly qualified	3.99	4.06	3.93

#### 4.2.1.1.4 Recognition of vocational qualification

Table 6: Recognition of vocational qualification (Source: by author)

<b>Dimension: Recognition of vocational qualification</b>	<b>Mean Year 9 students</b>	<b>Mean Year 12 students</b>	<b>Mean Vocational students</b>
A vocational qualification provides opportunities for further education	3.66	3.71	3.67
A vocational qualification makes it is easier to find a suitable job	3.6	3.73	3.67
A vocational qualification is recognized by foreign companies	3.04	3.28	3.24
A vocational qualification is recognized by private companies	3.14	3.2	3.39
A vocational qualification is recognized by universities in Vietnam	3.51	3.42	3.3
A vocational qualification is recognized by overseas higher education	3.15	3.17	3.02
Higher education degrees are more valuable than vocational degrees	3.68	3.43	3.32

All students had less favourable perceptions about the credence of a qualification gained from VET in terms of recognition by foreign and

private companies, and overseas higher education institutions (see table 6). Conversely, students had more positive perceptions about the adequacy of a VET qualification to influencing their ability to gain suitable employment. Overall though, they were in agreement that a degree gained in the higher education sector was of a higher status than a vocational degree.

#### 4.2.1.1.5 Student career and job potential

In general, students had positive perceptions about the future availability of job opportunities and professional growth opportunities for VET graduates in the workforce (see table 7). This was reflected in their disagreement that employment in the VET sector was a high risk venture suggesting they perceived employment in VET as having a secure future. In terms of national industrial workforce needs, students perceived VET offered a positive contribution.

Table 7: Student career and job potential (Source: by analysis from author)

<b>Dimension: Student career and job potential</b>	<b>Mean Year 9 students</b>	<b>Mean Year 12 students</b>	<b>Mean Vocational students</b>
Produces highly skilled trainees	3.46	3.64	3.36
Produces trainees with a wide range of job opportunities	3.63	3.68	3.63
Work is at a high level of risk	2.28	2.51	2.62
Gain adequate welfare payment	3.38	3.42	3.51
Provide professional growth opportunities	3.69	3.8	3.67
Meet the national industrial workforce needs	3.66	3.73	3.68
Gain a job immediately after graduation	3.4	3.55	3.51

#### 4.2.1.1.6 Curriculum

Table 8 indicates that, in general, all student groups had positive perceptions of the robustness of the VET curriculum. Interestingly, whilst the mean responses to item 46 demonstrated that students were ambivalent to the level of challenge

offered by the VET curriculum, they perceived it offered a course tailored to low academic achievers.

Table 8: Curriculum (Source: by analysis from author)

<b>Dimension: Curriculum</b>	<b>Mean Year 9 students</b>	<b>Mean Year 12 students</b>	<b>Mean Vocational students</b>
Provide an integration of academia and skills	4.07	3.8	3.64
Provide for a very specific career field	4.01	3.79	3.75
Provide a foundation for trainees who are planning to attend further study	3.88	3.9	3.74
Many of the course options offered are very interesting	3.98	3.72	3.38
A hands-on simple education and training	2.54	2.92	2.99
Have an excellent remedial program for academically low achieving trainees/students	3.70	3.64	3.51
Have good connections between vocational school and industries	3.77	3.71	3.49
Have good connections with community	3.92	3.71	3.63

#### **4.2.1.1.7 Soft skills**

Overall, students agreed with almost all of the items in the dimension of soft skills (see table 9). They perceived that students graduating from the VET sector are able to make a valuable contribution as key co-workers. In contrast, it appears that graduating from VET is not linked with the ability to be self-directed as demonstrated by being able to work independently, demonstrate leadership and communication skills students where student responses were neutral. This suggests that career training through VET is not seen as providing the skills to promote noticeable individuals the field of employment.

Table 9: Soft skills (Source: by analysis from author)

<b>Dimension: Soft skills</b>	<b>Mean Year 9 students</b>	<b>Mean Year 12 students</b>	<b>Mean Vocational students</b>
VET graduates have responsibility for their work	3.68	3.75	3.73
VET graduates work independently	3.06	3.25	3.21
VET graduates are valuable citizens in society	3.63	3.74	3.7
VET graduates are creative and innovative	3.59	3.67	3.73
VET graduates have teamwork skills	3.68	3.71	3.78
VET graduates have self-discipline	3.38	3.5	3.43
VET graduates have information and communication technology skills	3.65	3.46	3.58
VET graduates have leadership skills	3.11	3.19	3.26
VET graduates have communication skills	3.21	3.38	3.5

## Summary

In general, lower and upper secondary school and current vocational students had a positive evaluation or perception towards the image of VET (Chart 1 and table 10). The responses from upper secondary students were positive in all dimensions, with the exception of entry requirement. All groups had a neutral perception or disagreed, sometimes strongly, with respect to VET students having low academic grades, being disabled, demonstrating juvenile delinquency and being problematic. These indicate that stakeholders are able to see beyond the stereotypical images of VET students and the implications for vocational education, to more accurately perceive that VET is not an easy option undertaken by students demonstrating negative social traits. Overall, the mean scores depicted in table 10 reveal that lower secondary students were the most positive about VET teacher's ability, perhaps reflecting untainted beliefs about VET and an idealised image. Whilst positive, current VET students' perceptions of their teachers' ability were lower, perhaps reflecting their first-hand experiences of the VET sector.

Chart 1: Mean scores of independent variables (Source: by analysis from author)

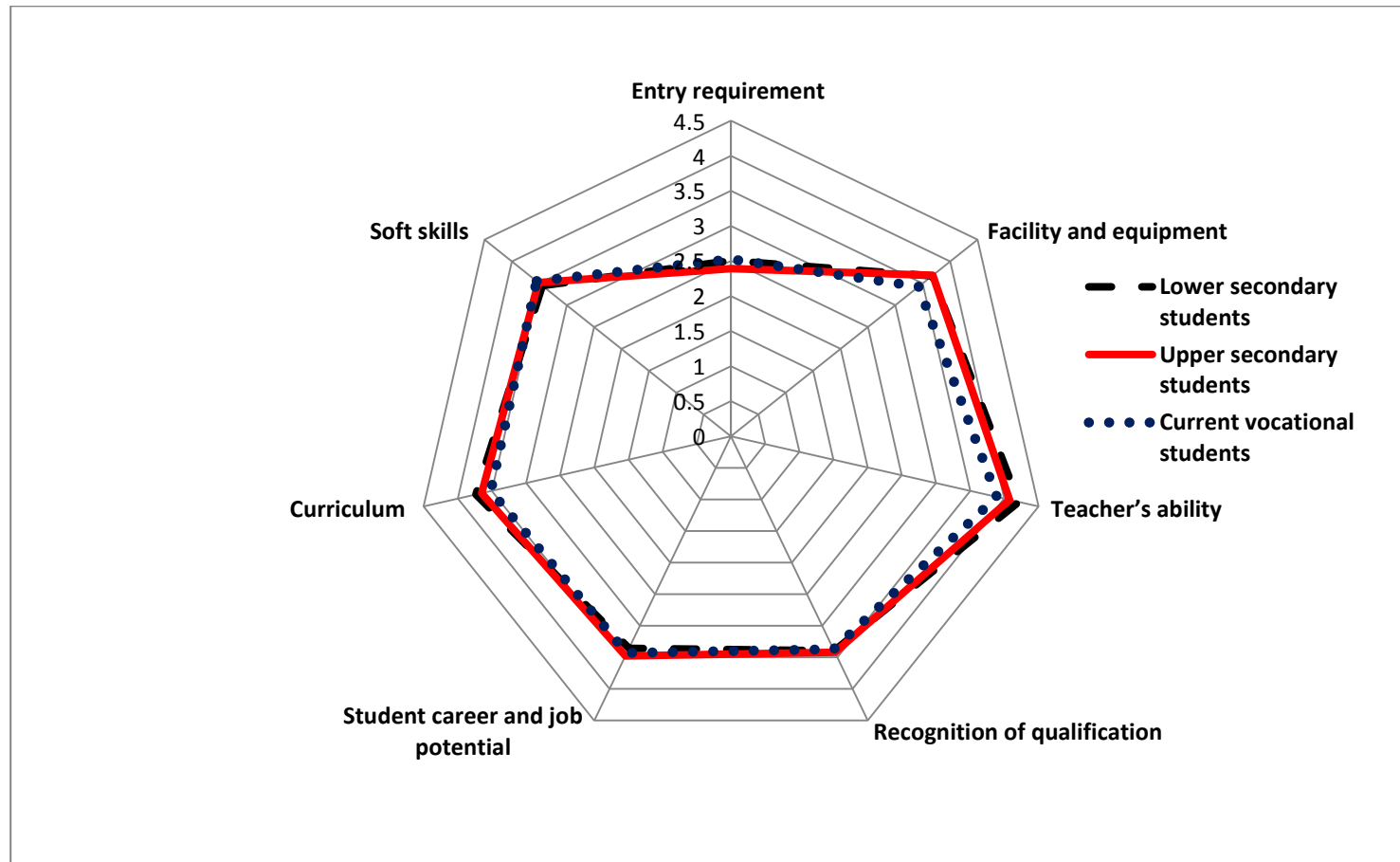




Table 10: Mean scores of dimensions (Source: by analysis from author)

Student	Entry requirement	Facility and equipment	Teacher's ability	Recognition of qualification	Student career and job potential	Curriculum	Soft skills
Lower	2.5017	3.6700	4.2100	3.3957	3.3571	3.7333	3.4426
Upper	2.3922	3.6813	4.0778	3.4224	3.4762	3.6479	3.5163
Vocational	2.5256	3.4253	3.8911	3.3729	3.4276	3.5179	3.5485

### 4.2.1.2 Students' loyalty towards VET

The total score for students' loyalty towards the VET sector was obtained from the summation of responses based on the four item statements shown in table 11. A lower mean score indicates a lower level of students' loyalty and inversely, a higher mean score indicates a higher level of students' loyalty. The items with the highest means of students' loyalty, expressed as agreed, were parental encouragement (M=3.70; M=3.59, and M=3.56), further study (M=3.50, M=3.50, and M=3.60) and career choice (M=3.48, M=3.49 and M=3.38) with the exception of vocational students. However, Table 11 shows field of interest had slightly low mean scores (M=3.04, M=3.12 and M=3.09) indicating an overall neutral response. In conclusion, students almost universally demonstrated loyalty towards VET although it was not necessarily their primary field of interest.

Table 11: Student's loyalty towards the VET sector (Source: by analysis from author)

<b>Item</b>	<b>Mean Year 9 students</b>	<b>Mean Year 12 students</b>	<b>Mean Vocational students</b>
Further study	3.5089	3.5011	3.6056
Career choice	3.4833	3.4980	3.3873
Field of interest	3.0492	3.1279	3.0996
Parental encouragement	3.7067	3.5900	3.5644

### 4.2.1.3 Discussion

This part sought to examine what three types of student perceive with respect to the image of VET and their loyalty toward the VET programs. The findings above lead to the conclusion that in general students have positive perceptions and loyalty towards the image of VET. The dimensions of facility and equipment, teacher's ability, curriculum, and soft skills were considered the clearest indicators of students' agreement with the image of VET, although

current vocational students' perception was less optimistic in these areas. Overall, lower and secondary school students tend to have enhanced perception of the image of VET compared to current vocational students, with the exception of the dimension soft skills. It seems that first-hand experience of VET lowers individual agreement with its positive features.

In terms of students' loyalty and future intentions to the VET sector, parental encouragement and opportunities for further study were experienced most strongly. Support and advice from parents appear to be a critical feature of lower secondary students' loyalty and key to improving efforts to attract young people into the VET sector, although over time, and with increasing student age, this influence may decrease. The findings suggest that students are more likely to pursue VET if clear linkage between the sector and the higher education system is visible, as required in the 2005 Education Law. As with the image of VET, current vocational students demonstrated less loyalty than lower and upper secondary students. It appears that first-hand experience of VET leads to diminished perceptions and reduced loyalty. These findings have important implications for the promotion of VET to young people. Quality of facilities and equipment, teacher's ability, curriculum, and soft skills should be promoted widely through the media such as radio, television, internet, and conferences. Furthermore, dissemination of information to students, parents and other stakeholders, by exhibition should be organized annually from the district to state level to promote VET more widely, and to attract and encourage secondary school students to enrol in VET. Early promotion of the VET sector to students while still at school may be more effective if parents are included.

Public perceptions of the VET sector can be altered by informed publicity highlighting the career success of the skilled workforce via documentary films or television. As young people and students are more influenced by the opinions of others around them, stories depicting successful skilled workers may have greater impact if brought directly into school classrooms. It is therefore vital that schools and careers services offer timely, good quality information and advice about VET. With industry's increasing demands for

skilled workers, the GDVT should seize this moment of opportunity to disseminate information in a bid to attract more youths to enrol in VET.

Finally, the continued influence of Confucian ideology in Vietnam should not be ignored or underestimated. The principle doctrine of the Confucian philosophy is to train the perfect people to serve for government and lead other people. University education is central to this belief. As the results reveal here, whilst students are generally positive towards VET, mainstream education persists as the primary route for students to higher education. However, the future is optimistic. The findings from this study reveal that the widespread perception that students who undertake vocational education are academically weak and disruptive is now being challenged. In addition, the influence of the 'open door' policy and the dimensions of internationalization and globalization, means that these perceptions are finally beginning to shift.

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Name of Principal Supervisor: SENIOR LECTURER, DR BRIAN DENMAN

Candidate

Date

VI HOANG DANG

05/06/2016

Principal Supervisor

Date



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	<b>Author's Name (please print clearly)</b>	<b>% of contribution</b>
Candidate	VI HOANG DANG	80%
Other Authors	TANYA HATHAWAY	20%

Name of Candidate: VI HOANG DANG

Name/title of Principal Supervisor: SENIOR LECTURER: DR BRIAN DENMAN

VI HOANG DANG  
Candidate

03/06/2016  
Date



\_\_\_\_\_  
Principal Supervisor

03/06/2016  
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**The influence of vocational education training image on students' loyalty:  
Case study in Vietnam**

**Vi Hoang Dang<sup>1</sup> and Tanya Hathaway<sup>2\*</sup>**

<sup>1</sup> Vocational Education - Namdinh Vocational College – Vietnam, University  
of New England, Australia

<sup>2</sup> Learning Innovations Hub - University of New England, Australia

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**Abstract:** A model of the dimensions that measure the way students perceive and think about the image of vocational education training (VET) was developed together with an instrument to measure the impact of VET's image on students' loyalty towards the VET sector in the Vietnamese context. The data were collected from 900 students: 300 in lower secondary school, 300 in upper secondary school and 300 in vocational education and training using a face-to-face administered survey questionnaire. Exploratory factor analysis was conducted to determine the nature of the constructs or dimensions quantifying the image of vocational education and students' loyalty towards VET. Correlation analysis was used to examine the relationships between the independent variables that comprised the image of VET and the dependant variables of students' loyalty and, finally, regression analysis was used to measure the impact of the image of VET on the students' loyalty. Three main findings emerged from the study: (1) the image of VET was constructed by seven dimensions (entry requirement, facility and equipment, recognition of qualification, student career and job potential, quality of curriculum, social skills and soft skills); (2) students' loyalty was constructed by two dimensions (future study choice and earning potential); and (3) students' loyalty towards VET, namely the rationale underlying their decisions about whether to continue their future studies in higher education or VET, and their perceptions of the earning potential offered by obtaining a qualification in VET, were impacted significantly by their perceptions of the relevance or quality of the VET curriculum to the emerging industrialised and market-led economy of Vietnam, and the level of entry requirements for VET courses, with exception of lower secondary students.

**Key words:** Influence, vocational education training, image, loyalty, and students.

## **4.2.2 Students' perception of the VET image by exploratory factor analysis and correlation**

It is noted that author copied and pasted the main parts in the published paper, then put them into the chapter to aim eliminating the duplications. For the full details of the paper and references, please go to appendix number 13.

### **4.2.2.1 Instrumentation**

A model of the image of VET and student's loyalty towards VET was developed which was based on data from a variety of sources. The principle source for the image dimensions being the survey instrument deployed by Awang et al. (2011) to investigate students' loyalty towards VET in Malaysia. The 12 principle dimensions that quantify and describe the VET system in Vietnam (GDVT, 2011) were used to provide cultural points of reference that could be blended into the modified scale.

In the final model, seven dimensions explained the image of VET. These are: (1) entry requirements, (2) facility and equipment, (3) teacher's ability, (4) recognition of qualification, (5) student career and job potential, (6) quality of curriculum, and (7) social value and soft skills. The measure of student loyalty was again based on that devised by Awang et al. (2011) and the GDVT (2011), and was modified for use taking into account the Vietnamese context and culture. Four subjective measures of students' loyalty towards the VET sector were considered by asking students' intentions on: (1) further study, (2) field of interest, (3) career choice and (4) parental encouragement.

The scale measuring the impact of the image of VET on students' loyalty consisted of three sections and was in the form of a survey questionnaire. The first section was designed to collect demographic information using 13 items. The second section examined students' perception of the hypothesised image of VET and included 45 items. The third section contained 19 items describing students' beliefs about VET education and was used to determine their loyalty towards VET. The survey questionnaire utilised a five-point Likert scale measuring the image of VET and student's loyalty towards VET based on

responses to five categories (1 = strongly disagree; 2 = disagree; 3 = neutral; 4 = agree; 5 = strongly agree). Students were asked to provide the most appropriate answer to a set of 64 statements. The seven dimensions making up the image of VET (independent variable) were measured using 45 questions that asked students' evaluation based on their experience and knowledge of the sector. The four dimensions measuring students' loyalty (dependent variable) were measured using 19 questions asking their intentions towards the VET sector. To overcome the students' fatigue when responding the random questions, the authors designed different types of the questionnaire altering the order of the items for example the VET image including 45 items was quantified by 7 constructs separately and each constructed comprised of small numbers of items.

#### **4.2.2.2 Exploratory factor analysis**

##### **4.2.2.2.1 The VET image**

A sample size of 900 participant responses gathered from 45 items measuring the image of VET was sufficient for an exploratory factor analysis. An examination of the Kaiser-Meyer Olkin measure of sampling adequacy being 0.876 confirmed that the sample was factorable. The exploratory factor analysis was conducted using principal components analysis for extraction and rotation. Seven factors emerged with eigenvalues greater than 1, which cumulatively accounted for 60.8% of the variance. The factor loadings and factor names are represented in appendix 9.

#### **Refining the scale**

In order to refine the items that emerged from the exploratory factor analysis, the reliability of each new factor was determined using a combination of Cronbach alpha and the Scale if item deleted feature of SPSS. Items extracted with a factor loading of greater than 0.5 were retained in the factor structure. A factor loading or cut-off point of 0.5 was used as the threshold to ensure practical significance for further analysis (Worthington & Whittaker, 2006). Consequently, 17 items with low loadings were removed from the initial analysis and a further two during refinement. Twenty six items remained after

refinement and formed the seven factors. The reliability of each new factor was indicated by a Cronbach alpha measure of greater than 0.6. Items with a total correlation measuring less than 0.3 were removed from any subsequent analysis. Table 12 summarises the results of the reliability tests conducted on the remaining items after scale refinement.

Table 12: Reliability tests for image of VET scales (Source: by analysis from author)

	Scale	Items after EFA	Items after refinement	Cronbach alpha
1	Entry requirement (ER)	4	4	0.707
	Facility and Equipment			
2	(F&E)	4	4	0.792
	Recognition of			
3	qualification (ROQ)	4	4	0.751
4	Student career and job			
	potential (SC&JP)	5	4	0.793
	Quality of curriculum			
5	(QOC)	5	5	0.832
6	Social skills (SS1)	3	3	0.742
7	Soft skills (SS2)	3	2	0.745
		28 items	26 items	

The exploratory factor analysis identified seven independent variables that measure the image of VET comprising of the following elements:

*Entry requirements:* this dimension reflects students' perceptions about the level or standard of entry requirements for vocational educational and training courses and the type and quality of students' currently enrolled.

*Facility and equipment:* this dimension depicts students' perceptions about the currency and affordances of leisure and educational resources accessed at VET institutions.

*Recognition of qualification:* this dimension reflects students' perception of the status of a degree gained in VET amongst employers and higher education providers, both in country and overseas.

*Student career and job potential:* this dimension reflects students' perception of the employment potential following graduation from a VET school.

*Quality of curriculum:* this dimension reflects perceptions of the curriculum content and its applicability to contemporary society's needs.

*Social skills:* this dimension reflects perceptions about the degree of social skills that VET graduates hold that are valued not only in skilled workers but also in society.

*Soft skills:* this dimension reflects perceptions about how effective VET is at equipping graduates with the soft skills that facilitate effective interpersonal relationships in the workplace.

#### **4.2.2.2.2 Students' loyalty toward VET**

The analytical procedures for the first factor analysis were repeated when determining the dimensions of students' loyalty towards VET. Again, a sample size of 900 participant responses was gathered from 19 items measuring students' loyalty towards VET. For this scale, the Kaiser-Meyer Olkin measure of sampling adequacy was 0.714, confirming that the sample was factorable. Two factors emerged with Eigenvalues greater than 1, which cumulatively accounted for 55.7% of the variance (See table 13 and appendix 9).

Table 13: Reliability tests for students' loyalty towards VET scales (Source: by analysis from author)

	Scale	Items after EFA	Items after refinement	Cronbach alpha
1	Future study choice	4	4	0.639
2	Earning potential	3	3	0.698
		7 items	7 items	

The exploratory factor analysis identified two dependent variables that measure students' loyalty towards VET comprising of the following elements:

*Future study choice:* This dimension reflects participants' perceptions about the influences on students' choice of future study pathway, be it mainstream education or VET.

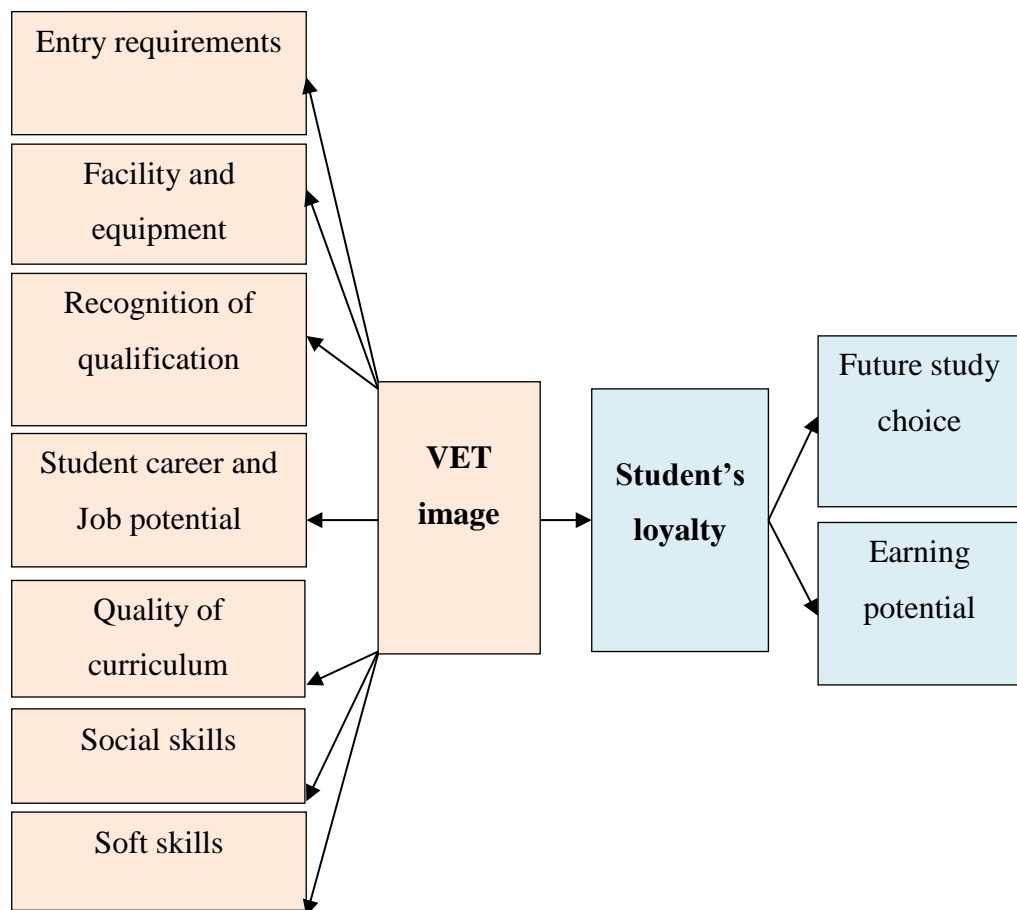
*Earning potential:* This dimension depicts students' beliefs about the VET ability to provide legitimate employment and sufficient income to sustain a reasonable standard of living.

### **Establishing the reliability of scales**

The measures for the dimensions of the image of VET and students' loyalty towards VET were then scrutinised for reliability and validity. The exploratory factor analysis used data collected in the Vietnamese context and it was expected that cultural differences would emerge and influence the arrangement of items in the scales and the scales themselves. The hypothesised dimension teacher's ability did not emerge from the analysis of the independent variable data measuring the image of VET. However, the hypothesised dimension of social values and soft skills was extracted and grouped into two separate dimensions named social skills and soft skills. The Cronbach alpha values for each of the subscales making up the image of VET scale were all above the threshold of 0.7 (Nunnally, 1978) indicating reliability of the scales.

Disappointingly, only two dimensions of students' loyalty were condensed (see table 2). The arrangement of items differed from any of the hypothesised dimensions and the new scales were named future study choice and earning potential. The Cronbach alpha values for both scales measured just below the threshold of 0.7 but were retained in the later correlation and regression analysis on the basis of the sample number (900 data points). Having established the reliability of scales and modelled the relationship between the dependent variables and independent variables (see figure 20) the answers to the research questions of the study could be exposed.

Figure 20: Final model of the dependant and independent variables (Source: by analysis from author)



#### 4.2.2.3 Correlation analysis

In order to address the first research question, correlation analysis was determined to be, in the first stage, the most appropriate method of data

analysis to test for linear relationships and the degree of association between variables. Four analyses were undertaken, one over the whole sample and the other three over lower, upper secondary and vocational students, respectively. In each analysis, two measures of relationship were conducted. The first was a measure of the relationship between all seven dimensions of the image of VET and students' loyalty, specifically the dimension future study choice. The second was a measure of all seven independent variables representing the image of VET and the dependant variable students' loyalty, specifically the dimension earning potential.

#### 4.2.2.3.1 The first correlation analysis

It was observed that quality of curriculum (QOC) shows a statistically significant moderate (Strath University, 2014, table. 3) and strong positive, correlation with future study choice in all groups (see table 14). The lower secondary student grouping, quality of curriculum shows a statistically significant and strong positive correlation ( $r = .540, P < .01$ ), with future study choice. The other three groups ( $r = .488$  all students;  $.453$  vocational students; and  $.421$  upper secondary students,  $P < .01$ ) had moderate correlations.

Table 14: Correlations statistics between the independent variables and the variable, future study choice (Source: by analysis from author)

Groups	SC&J						
	QOC	P	F&E	ROQ	SS1	ER	SS2
All students	<b>.488**</b>	<b>.288**</b>	<b>.154**</b>	<b>.179**</b>	<b>.180**</b>	-	<b>.150**</b>
Vocational students	<b>.453**</b>	.079	.043	<b>.197**</b>	.019	-.002	.031
Upper secondary students	<b>.421**</b>	<b>.313**</b>	<b>.126*</b>	<b>.209**</b>	<b>.243**</b>	-.062	<b>.197**</b>
Lower secondary students	<b>.540**</b>	<b>.125*</b>	-.028	<b>.198**</b>	.043	-.108	.087

\*\* p<.01; \*p <.05

#### 4.2.2.3.2 The second correlation analysis

Table 15 displays the correlations between each of the seven independent variables defining the image of VET and the dependant variable, earning



potential. Only the quality of curriculum dimension demonstrated a statistical significant and negative modest correlation with earning potential ( $r = -.124$ ;  $-.148$ ;  $-.157$ ; and  $-.165$ ,  $P < 0.01$ ) for all four groupings. However, two dimensions namely recognition of qualification and social skills showed a negligible correlation with earning potential and were removed from the analysis.

Table 15: Correlations statistics between the independent variables and the variable, earning potential (Source: by analysis from author)

Groups	QOC	SC&JP	F&E	ROQ	SS1	ER	SS2
All students	-	-	-	.043	-	<b>.218**</b>	-.008
	<b>.124**</b>	<b>.127**</b>	<b>.084*</b>		<b>.117*</b>		
					*		
Vocational students	<b>-.148**</b>	<b>-.179**</b>	-.036	.062	-	<b>.161**</b>	.035
					<b>.167**</b>		
Upper secondary students	<b>-.157**</b>	-.108	<b>-.134*</b>	.036	-.094	<b>.331**</b>	-.017
Lower secondary students	<b>-.165**</b>	<b>-.121*</b>	-.071	-.034	<b>-.115*</b>	.100	-.027

\*\* p<.01; \*p <.05

### 4.2.3 Students' perception of the VET image by regression analysis

In regression analysis, independent variables are considered for their ability to predict dependant variables. In this study, students' loyalty was hypothesised as the dependent variable being influenced by the independent variable, the image of VET. In other words, these analyses examine the impact of students' perceptions of the image of VET on students' loyalty toward the VET sector.

As with the correlation analysis, four linear regression analyses were performed. One for each of the groupings described above. For each analysis, two measures of impact between the independent variables and dependent variables were conducted. The first was a measure of impact between all of the qualifying independent variables representing the image of VET and the variable of students' loyalty, future study choice. The second was a measure of

all qualifying independent variables and the dependant variable of students' loyalty, earning potential.

#### **4.2.3.1 Linear regression between the image of VET and future study choice**

Table 16 describes the results of the analysis estimation of the linear regression between all qualified independent variables and dependent variable, future study choice. The findings indicate that only quality of curriculum impacted significantly on future study choice ( $B = .477$   $p < .001$  for all students;  $.435$   $p < .001$  for vocational students;  $.388$   $p < .001$  for upper secondary students; and  $.553$ ,  $p < .001$  for lower secondary students). The  $R^2$  of each model was 0.25; 0.21; 0.30 and 0.19 respectively suggesting that 25%; 21%; 30 % and 19% of the variance in further study choice can be explained by quality of curriculum. Multicollinearity was absent in the data for all four cases, confirmed by the collinearity statistics for variance inflation factor that were under the cut-off point of 10 (Belsley, Kuh, & Welsch, 1980).

#### **4.2.3.2 Linear regression between the image of VET and earning potential**

Table 17 describes the linear regression coefficients of the independent variables with the dependent variable, earning potential. The findings indicate that entry requirement impacted significantly on earning potential ( $B = 0.205$ , all students  $p < 0.01$ ;  $B = 0.145$ , vocational students  $p < 0.01$ ;  $B = 0.315$ , upper secondary students  $p < 0.01$ ). For the grouping lower secondary students, quality of curriculum impacted significantly on earning potential ( $B = -.134$ ,  $p < .05$ ). The  $R^2$  of the model was 0.06; 0.07; 0.13; and 0.04 separately, suggesting that about 6 %, 7%, and 13% of the variance in earning potential can be explained by entry requirement and about 4% by quality of curriculum. As with the previous analysis, the collinearity statistics for variance inflation factor was below 10 confirming the absence of multicollinearity in the data.

Table 16: Regression statistics of qualified independent variables with the dependent variable future study choice (Source: by analysis from author)

Future study choice	All students		Vocational students		Upper secondary students		Lower secondary students	
	Beta coefficient	Significant	Beta coefficient	Significant	Beta coefficient	Significant	Beta coefficient	Significant
(Constant)	2.125		2.034		2.197		1.722	
ER	-.054	.071						
F&E	-.054	.117			-.086	.172		
ROD	-.003	.925	.006	.883	-.041	.536	.011	.838
SC&JP	.060	.126			.117	.128	-.052	.320
<b>QOC</b>	<b>.477</b>	<b>.000</b>	<b>.435</b>	<b>.000</b>	<b>.388</b>	<b>.000</b>	<b>.553</b>	<b>.000</b>
SS1	-.019	.588			.061	.969		
SS2	-.002	.959			-.025	.699		
Explained variance in dependent variable (R <sup>2</sup> )	25%		21%		30%		19%	
** p<.01; *p <.05								

Table 17: Regression statistics of qualified independent variables with dependent variable earning potential (Source: by analysis from author)

Earning potential	All students		Vocational students		Upper secondary students		Lower secondary students	
	Beta coefficient	Significant	Beta coefficient	Significant	Beta coefficient	Significant	Beta coefficient	Significant
(Constant)	2.781		3.263		2.658		3.440	
<b>ER</b>	<b>.205</b>	<b>.000</b>	<b>.145</b>	<b>.002</b>	<b>.315</b>	<b>.000</b>		
F&E	-.031	.415			-.080	.181		
ROD								
SC&JP	-.040	.350	-.099	.074			-.056	.422
QOC	-.030	.457	-.069	.176	-.083	.166	<b>-.134</b>	<b>.030</b>
SS1	-.069	.064	-.090	.089			-.040	.566
SS2								
Explained variance in dependent variable (R <sup>2</sup> )	6%		7%		13%		4%	
** p<.01; *p <.05								

## 4.2.4. Conclusions

### Exploratory factor analysis (EFA)

The findings from the EFAs have identified seven distinct latent variables that influence students' loyalty towards the VET sector, comprising the following elements: entry requirement; facility and equipment; recognition of qualification; student career and job potential; quality of curriculum; social skills; and soft skills. The above findings are compared with the preceding study by Awang et al. (2011) that investigated the dimensions of the image of VET that influence students' loyalty towards VET in Malaysia. The comparison with the Vietnamese context revealed two interesting conclusions. First of all, five out of seven variables depicting the image of VET appear to have remained relatively stable across the studies, independent of cultural context. Second, two new variables were isolated; formed by the separation of the hypothesised social values and soft skills variable.

Interestingly, it appears that when thinking about VET, for Vietnamese students, the hypothesised dimension teacher ability is not important, as it did not emerge in the EFA. This appears contradictory to Confucian ideology and its ideal of respecting the role of the teacher. In the educational environment, such as schools, teachers are always central to the learning and teaching process and other activities. It suggests that the influence of the doctrine is weakening amongst the younger generation and that the role of the vocational teacher is not central to the teaching process any more. The absence of the dimension teacher ability indicates that students do not hold VET teachers' knowledge and skills in high regard. These findings support those presented by GDVT (2011) that reveal the limitation of vocational teachers. Vocational teachers were found to have limited occupational skills and competences and, low foreign language and information technology capabilities that were a barrier to updating knowledge and technological advancements required to teach vocational education.

Of further interest in the analysis of the image of VET, is the division of the hypothesised dimension, social value and soft skills into two independent

variables, social skills and soft skills. These findings demonstrate that the acquisition of soft skills such as communication and leadership skills, as well as social skills that include creativity, innovation and those of being a valuable citizen are important and as necessary as subject based knowledge acquired through academic study in mainstream education. This finding mirrors the statement of the Vietnamese President Truong (2014) that ‘For a long time, in the past, we only focused on the academic subjects such as Math, Physics, Chemistry, Biology, Literature and English for examination to get a place at university. We did not pay much attention to teaching and the training of children to build up their social values and soft skills while at school’.

### **Correlation analysis**

The findings from the correlation analyses indicate that all the independent variables defining the image of VET had statistically significant correlations (weak, with the exception of quality of curriculum, all positive with the exception of entry requirement) with the two dependent variables (further study choice and earning potential) representing students’ loyalty towards VET. These results suggest that in order to encourage and attract students to enter the VET sector, its policy makers, managers and especially principals of VET institutions must consider carefully the seven dimensions that contribute to the projected image of VET and take these into account when formulating marketing strategies that will promote the sector to all areas of society, especially young people and their parents.

### **Regression analysis**

This chapter concludes that student perceptions about the image of vocational education and training, specifically its efficacy and the quality of the curriculum and entry requirements play a decisive role in predicting students’ loyalty towards the sector or their willingness to pursue either further study in vocational education or their inclination towards completing a course of study they are currently enrolled on.

Consistent across all groupings of students were perceptions of the quality of curriculum as a predictor of students’ choices about further study. Low

expectations of the curriculum, in particular its perceived focus on skill development rather than the furthering of knowledge mean that students believe their future study choices are more influenced by parents. When the curriculum is perceived as vibrant and able to fulfil the expectations of a market-oriented economy, students believe they have parental support to make the choices they wish for further study

It appears that lower secondary students look towards the future and assessing the suitability of the content of the vocational curriculum to equipping them with the knowledge and skills needed to ensure the longevity of their employment prospects and ultimately their earning potential. This differed from the overall perceptions of the whole sample, and specifically the older students in upper secondary and vocational education, who saw their future economic prospects, associated with undertaking vocational training, to be a feature of the initial quality of entrants into vocational education courses and their social status. It suggests that the criteria students use to assess the viability of VET as a career pathway may be related to their maturity and reflect differences in the decision-making processes students use. It may also reflect students changing position in relation to how they see their influence on the world with an improved understanding of how identity affects an individual's interaction with society.

Out of all four groupings, it is surprising that only lower secondary student loyalty towards VET was not impacted by their perceptions of the entry requirements for VET, but was impacted by quality of curriculum. It may be concluded that the driver of students' loyalty, represented by earning potential is a significant influence for all students, and at the level of vocational students and upper secondary students. However, this was not the case for lower secondary students when analysing the group. Instead quality of curriculum was the main predictor of earning potential.

Students' beliefs about the earning potential related to training in VET impacted their perceptions of the entry requirements to enroll on a course of study in VET, with the exclusion of lower secondary students. The findings

concur with those of Awang et al. (2011) who found that few of the identified dimensions impacted students' loyalty. They determined three dimensions: recognition of qualification, work ethics and social values, and applicability of course content were major predictors of students' loyalty toward the technical education and vocational training field in Malaysia. This comparison reveals that factors impacting student loyalty in Vietnam tend to be similar to those in Malaysian contexts, with quality of curriculum playing key role. It may be concluded that the driver of students' loyalty is no different between the two countries. In the Vietnamese context, entry requirement also presents as a driver of students' loyalty.

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Name of Candidate: VI HOANG DANG

Name of Principal Supervisor: SENIOR LECTURER, DR BRIAN DENMAN

Candidate

Date

VI HOANG DANG

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Principal Supervisor

Date



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	<b>Author's Name (please print clearly)</b>	<b>% of contribution</b>
Candidate	VI HOANG DANG	80%
Other Authors	TANYA HATHAWAY	20%

Name of Candidate: VI HOANG DANG

Name/title of Principal Supervisor: SENIOR LECTURER: DR BRIAN DENMAN

VI HOANG DANG  
Candidate

03/06/2016  
Date



\_\_\_\_\_  
Principal Supervisor

03/06/2016  
Date

**Parental Perspectives towards the Vocational Education Training Sector  
in Vietnam**

Vi Hoang Dang

Namdinh Vocational College, Vietnam

University of New England, Australia

[hdang2@myune.edu.au](mailto:hdang2@myune.edu.au)

**Abstract:** The main purpose of this study is to explore the parental perspectives of the vocational education and training (VET) sector in Vietnam. The data were collected from 32 parents in the Northern and Southern regions using six open-ended interview questions focussing on the vocational education training system. Several techniques, namely word repetitions, key words in context, and similarities and differences were applied to discover the common emerging themes and sub-themes. The issues which corresponded with the six questions were (1) quality and types of VET input, (2) VET teachers' ability, (3) facilities and equipment, (4) the relationship between VET providers and industries, (5) recognition of VET qualifications and (6) job potential. The results indicated two main positive and negative themes emerging in five of the issues, the exception being the relationship between VET providers and industries. The issue of job potential was evaluated positively by parents. However, the findings indicate wastage of trained manpower due to the weak relationship between VET providers and industries. The recommendations are that Government agencies should be more involved in the VET sector by providing teaching protocols and implementing policy concerning two-way collaboration between VET providers and enterprises, making the sector more attractive to parents, students, industries and other key stakeholders with the primary aim of changing perceptions of the VET sector positively.

**Keywords:** *Vocational education training sector, parental perspectives, Vietnam, open ended questions*

## **4.3 Parental perspectives on the VET sector**

### **4.3.1 Introduction**

This part examines the views of parents on the VET sector. It has two sections: (1) the first section describes the instrument and the procedures which were used in this study as well as the background of participants; (2) the second section presents the findings of the research based on the parental perspective.

It is noted that author copied and pasted the main parts in the published paper, then put them into the chapter to aim eliminating the duplications. For the full details of the paper and references, please go to appendix number 14.

### **4.3.2 Instrument**

In the second phase of the study, a qualitative approach was adopted to explore parental perspectives on the VET sector, using an interview protocol involving six open ended questions exploring the parental perspectives of six issues, namely: (1) quality of VET input; (2) VET teachers' ability; (3) VET facilities and equipment; (4) linkages between VET providers and industries; (5) recognition of VET qualifications; and (6) job potential of the VET sector. The questions (see figure 21) were designed based on the seven dimensions that represented the VET image in the previous phase (see chart 2) combined with findings from the General Directorate Vocation Training (GDVT, 2011).

There were two primary considerations in selecting open-ended interview questions as the means of data collection. Firstly, the set of questions focuses on only one topic (the image of VET) and could be prepared in advance. Secondly, open-ended questions allow participants the freedom to express their views in their own words and in their own time, in a place of their choosing (Kendall & Kendall, 2002).

### **4.3.3 Procedures**

Collecting and recording data from open-ended questions can be done in various ways. The method employed in the study was to prepare a paper-based

form (see appendix 10) which lists all six open-ended questions for parents to answer and complete. The principal advantage of this strategy is that it allows plenty of time for parents to answer the questions. However, lack of opportunity to observe the feelings of parents about the topics and further explanation of the questions are acknowledged limitations (Kendall & Kendall, 2002).

The completed forms were collected two weeks after distribution and were translated immediately into English. Data pertaining to each question were entered into separate Excel spreadsheets. A thematic analytical framework was applied to analyse data in line with the inductive approach. An inductive approach is used in qualitative research to augment understanding of complex data using summary themes or categories from the raw data (Thomas, 2003). It is noted that the parents' answers in the following analysis reflect the actual transcripts as closely as possible, with minor editorial changes to make them more readable.

The responses from the questions were grouped into three domains to explain the viewpoints of parents concerning VET programs. In each domain, there were issues describing the detailed aspects of the VET sector. According to Ryan (2003), there are twelve techniques used to create themes and sub-themes. In this study, three techniques, namely (1) word repetitions, (2) key words in context, and (3) similarities and differences were applied to determine the common emerging themes in each issue. The next step was to identify sub-themes that link the research findings and the research questions through data analysis. Data are compiled by gathering them in the poles, themes and categories to understand the meaning of a phenomenon.

#### **4.3.4 Respondents' background**

Table 18 describes the background of parents in the Southern and Northern regions who participated by responding to the six open-ended questions in the period from 10 March to 10 April, 2014.

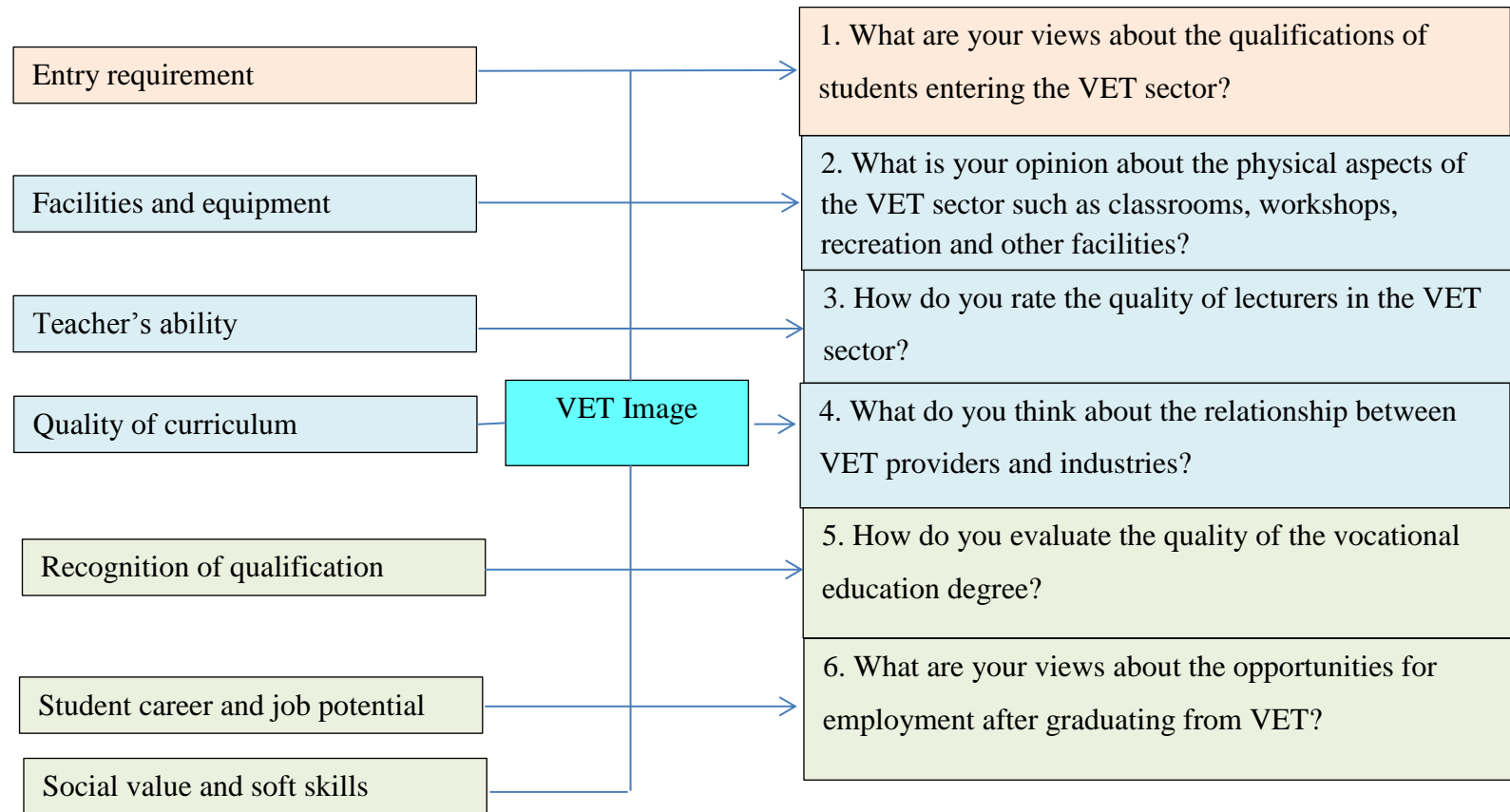
Table 18: Respondents' background (Source: by analysis from author)

No	Region	Province	Age	Educational level	Job
1	North	Namdinh	52	Master	Lecturer
2	North	Namdinh	42	Advanced diploma	Officer
3	North	Namdinh	38	Bachelor	Teacher
4	North	Namdinh	44	Graduated year 12	Farmer
5	North	Namdinh	39	Advanced diploma	Officer
6	North	Ninhbinh	41	Bachelor	Officer
7	North	Ninhbinh	52	Graduated year 12	Farmer
8	North	Ninhbinh	46	Advanced diploma	Skilled worker
9	North	Ninhbinh	39	Bachelor	Teacher
10	North	Ninhbinh	39	Diploma	Technician
11	North	Ninhbinh	51	Bachelor	Teacher
12	North	Ninhbinh	47	Graduated year 12	Worker
13	North	Haiduong	56	Graduated year 9	Farmer
14	North	Haiduong	47	Bachelor	Officer
15	North	Haiduong	42	Diploma	Worker
16	North	Haiduong	50	Bachelor	Officer
17	North	Haiduong	43	Graduated year 9	Farmer
18	North	Haiduong	51	Master	Teacher
19	South	Dongnai	42	Advanced diploma	Technician
20	South	Dongnai	45	Graduated year 12	Farmer
21	South	Dongnai	50	Graduated year 12	Farmer
22	South	Dongnai	47	Bachelor	Policeman
23	South	Dongnai	39	Advanced diploma	Technician
24	South	Dongnai	54	Bachelor	Teacher
25	South	Binhphuoc	40	Diploma	Skilled worker
26	South	Binhphuoc	48	Graduated year 12	Unemployed
27	South	Binhphuoc	46	Bachelor	Business man
28	South	Vungtau	39	Bachelor	Officer
29	South	Vungtau	41	Bachelor	Teacher
30	South	Vungtau	49	Bachelor	Business woman
31	South	Vungtau	47	Master	Lecturer
32	South	Vungtau	48	Graduated year 12	Business man



The goal was to meet a quota of fifty parents who have children enrolled in year 9 and year 12 and in vocational schools in the previous phase (quantitative survey questionnaire); these parents were formally invited to answer the open-ended questions. Thirty-two parents responded; eighteen parents came from three provinces: Namdinh, Ninhbinh and Haiduong in the North, and fourteen parents were from Dongnai, Binhphuoc and Vungtau provinces in the South. Eight parents were over 50 years of age, eighteen parents were aged from 40 to 50, and six parents were from 38 to 39 years old. Three parents were graduates at Master level; 12 respondents had a Bachelor level education, eight parents had diploma or advanced diploma qualifications, and nine parents had lower or upper secondary certificates. There were eight parents who have jobs in the education sector and are working as lecturers or teachers, six parents worked in the public sector as officers, seven parents worked as technicians and skilled workers and six participants were farmers. Three parents were businessmen or women, one parent was a policeman and one parent was unemployed.

Figure 21: Development of the open-ended interview questions (Source: by analysis from author)



### **4.3.5 The findings**

Six open-ended questions have been grouped into three domains. The first domain describes the parents' evaluations and opinions of entry requirements to enter VET programs, and is called the quality and types of VET input. Question number 1 (see figure 21) provides data for the domain. The second domain comprises questions number 2, 3 and 4 and is called VET process, providing information about parental perspectives on three issues: (1) VET teachers' ability, (2) facilities and equipment, and (3) the relationship between VET providers and enterprises which enhances the knowledge and skills of VET students. The third domain covered two issues, namely recognition of VET qualifications, and job potential. Questions 5 and 6 deliver data for this domain, which reflect the parents' viewpoints of the outcomes of the VET sector.

#### **4.3.5.1 Domain 1: Quality of VET input**

Domain 1 describes parents' evaluation of the quality of students enrolled in VET programs, and types of current VET students. The parental perceptions were divided into positive and negative themes.

##### **4.3.5.1.1 Positive theme**

There were two positive points from the parents' point of view concerning the quality of VET input. The first is that parents from the Southern region believe that students enrolled in the VET sector could study successfully to gain skills from basic to advanced levels from VET providers even if they had a poor academic record. They explained that an outcome of vocational study is to produce a skilled workforce and not for the purpose of research, so lower achieving students could undertake the curriculum of the VET providers and become skilled workers after completing the VET course.

*'Generally, students who enrolled with VET providers can study successfully and will achieve at a range of levels. At VET schools, students are taught in a hands-on way, and do not spend too much time on the theory.'* (Mother, south)

The second positive point depicts the parents' belief that VET students are more creative and interested in practical aspects. Parents pointed out that studying theory can be boring, time consuming, and not interesting. They also believe that practical lessons trigger the students' creative abilities and promote interaction with other students.

*'VET students do not have enough patience to study academic subjects. However, they become actively and innovatively interested in practical lessons.'* (Mother, north)

#### **4.3.5.1.2 Negative theme**

Overall, parents in both Northern and Southern regions had a negative perception of entry requirements and types of students enrolling in VET programs. This theme is grouped into three sub-themes to describe the viewpoints of parents on the issue.

The first sub-theme associates VET students and low academic results. There was consensus of parents in both Northern and Southern regions that only students who achieved average and poor results enrolled in VET programs. Parents believed that these were students who did not pass the examination to go to year 10 of upper secondary level (year 9 students), or failed to get a place in university (year 12 students), and that they had limited avenues for the future, so registering in the VET sector was a good option, even a last resort for them.

*'Students who enrolled in the VET sector had poor results in the lower or upper secondary schools. They didn't get enough marks to pass the examination at the end of year 9 to go to year 10, or did not pass the university entrance examination. As a last resort, they entered the VET sector.'* (Father, south)

The second sub-theme was the parental view that VET students frequently came from a lower economic status background, from mountainous or rural areas, or there were other specific, extenuating circumstances. One of the mothers from the North said that.

*'Students joining VET programs were mainly from difficult economic status families and from rural areas. There were only small numbers of students from urban zones entering the VET sector, their main motivation being to avoid recruitment into the army, or to study temporarily in the VET sector while waiting for the next university examination.'* (Mother, north)

The last sub-theme focussed on the premise that VET students do not understand clearly the way to select a career or had insufficient or poor guidance. Parents said.

*'Students who enter the VET sector did not have enough information about the VET sector from the career guidance counsellor in the school, or advice from their relatives, especially their parents.'* (Father, north)

Also, parents indicated that.

*'Students did not make a confident choice. They just enrolled in VET programs because they were following their friends or had no other opportunity for study after they failed the university examination.'* (Mother, north)

#### **4.3.5.1.3 Discussion**

An emphasis on mainstream academic education in Vietnamese society has disadvantaged current VET students as well as those students who would like to enrol in VET programs, and the limitations in career guidance and weak implementation of the policy of streaming lower-achieving students at the end of year 9 to VET providers are two main reasons explaining why VET students receive negative perceptions from society and parents, discouraging other students from VET programs.

The first reason is the excessive focus on the academic aspect of education adopted by all classes of society in Vietnam, especially by parents. 'It is widely accepted that from primary through to secondary education levels that the main processes of the school such as the teaching method of the teachers, the learning process of students and assessment of students focuses predominantly

on the goal of gaining good marks and passing the university entrance examination (Nguyen, 2014). In addition, parents are competitive in wanting their children to achieve good results at school. Other skills and interests of their children are neglected and seen as unimportant. This is also seen as a reason students neglect considering VET programs. Also, parents often promote examples of excellent academic students for their children to follow, but they rarely mention students who are successful in skilled jobs or trades (Cao, 2015).

The second reason is guidance counsellors' limited knowledge about VET programs, and the unsuccessful implementation of policies for streaming secondary students (GDVT, 2011). The understanding of the VET system by guidance counsellors at secondary schools is weak and confused. Vice director of GDVT, Cao (2015) has recognized that the staff and teachers at vocational training institutions, and guidance counsellors at secondary schools do not understand fully, nor know clearly, the content of VET programs necessary to advise and inform their students. From the student's perspective, according to Mori (2014), high school students are really hungry for information about the VET sector and are insufficiently advised of the number of programs that are available through VET providers, and are not made familiar with updated information about the labour market. A survey conducted by MOET (2012) indicates that 57% of 30,648 respondents found information for choosing a career independently (Hoang, 2010) without the assistance of a career guidance counsellor.

As far as the policy of streaming of year 9 students is concerned, the implementation was unsuccessful (GDVT, 2011). There were only approximately 2% of year 9 students going into the VET sector. According to the Vice Minister of MOET (Bui, 2013), three main explanations describe the failure of the streaming policy. Firstly, knowledge about VET programs by individuals, schools and society in general is limited. Secondly, students and their families do not themselves fully understand the ramifications of the academic ability of their children, and even their economic position. If they understood fully these situations, they could see that vocational education may

be a good way for them to reduce the stress of the financial issue and be able to enter the labour market earlier. Finally, the labour market information system is poor and not updated regularly.

In conclusion, this domain revealed two positive and three negative points concerning parental perspectives of the quality and types of VET input. The negative perceptions from parents on the aspect of the low quality of VET input concur with those in the report of the Asian Development Bank (ADB). This report warned the Vietnamese Government, economists and educators that ‘pushing low-performing students into technical and vocational training may yield low-quality graduates and result in employers devaluing these programs’ (ADB, 2013).

#### **4.3.5.2 Domain 2: The VET process**

This domain is comprised of three issues that influence the acquisition of skills essential for VET students. These are teacher’s ability, facilities and equipment, and the relationship between VET providers and enterprises.

##### **4.3.5.2.1 Ability of the VET teacher**

As with the aspect of quality of VET input noted in domain 1, parents were divided in their points of view regarding the ability of VET teachers.

##### **Positive theme**

Among 32 interviews, there were only two positive comments with regard to the ability of VET teachers. The first arose from the fact that the qualification of VET teachers had been standardised to meet the requirements of the teaching professionals in the GDVT and VET institutions. According to Vu (2013) “generally, the VET teachers have met the standard GDVT requirements of the teaching process in both academic knowledge and practical skills”. The statement from GDVT (2011) is in line with the view of a parent who happens to work in the VET sector. He explains that at the moment, to become academic VET teachers, the minimum qualification must be a bachelor degree. In addition, following employment in the sector, not only a teaching

certificate but also certificates of foreign language and information must be added. Some teachers who teach practical sessions are recruited and selected from highly skilled workers and artisans. In the view of the parent, only the theoretical or academic skill of the VET teacher was evaluated highly.

The other positive points concerning VET teachers were enthusiasm for and responsibility in their job. One of the parents who had studied in VET programs previously said that

*'VET teachers have a high responsibility in conveying not only academic skills but also soft skills to their students in the class.'* (Mother, south)

Parents were also very impressed with the way that VET teachers worked diligently with students when they were in practical lessons. It is noted that in these evaluations VET teachers were compared favourably with lecturers in the higher education sector.

*'Vocational teachers were more enthusiastic and responsible than the university lecturers. They live simply and ethically.'* (Father, north)

This positive point of view was in line with the Vu (2013) study, "Almost all VET teachers are dedicated to their teaching and training job and have good ethics".

### **Negative theme**

However, in contrast to the previous observations, parents generally had negative evaluations of VET teachers' ability. These evaluations were grouped in to two sub-themes.

The first sub-theme was the limitation and weakness in practical skills of VET teachers which was mentioned in almost 85% of the evaluations of the 32 parents surveyed. The parents explained that VET teachers had either good academic or good theoretical skills. This evaluation fits well with the positive point mentioned above. However, the teachers had not had sufficient



experience practising skills in the workshop during their own study period at university, nor had they had opportunities to enhance their practical skills in industry in their time working in the VET school. Parents also indicated that VET teachers focus more on theory in the classroom. In addition, the practical lessons given were not highly valued because of the teachers' inexperience and lack of expertise in the field.

*'The VET teachers have good academic knowledge however they are weak and limited in practical skills because of inexperience in their field of teaching.'*  
(Father, north)

The second sub-theme was the poor response to the updating of information technology skills and the learning of a foreign language by VET teachers.

*'VET teachers have good knowledge in theory. However, their foreign language and information technology skills are weak and limited.'* (Mother, south)

This subtheme is in line with the report from GDVT (2011) 'Science research, foreign language and applied Information Technology competences among vocational teachers are still limited. Therefore, their ability to keep themselves updated with new knowledge and technology is yet to be satisfactory'.

In another response, one of the parents said that

*'Vocational teachers do not have an optimal or desirable motivation for acquiring good teaching methods for transmitting vocational experiences and knowledge to their students.'* (Mother, north)

The quotation above describes the viewpoint of a parent regarding the teaching methods needed by VET teachers in order to convey their knowledge and experience to students. Parents want the VET teachers to enthuse their students and stress the worth of vocational education. This would encourage students to have more confidence in the potential of gaining employment or opening their

own business at some stage in the future, using the knowledge and skills which were studied at the school.

### **Discussion**

Two explanations can be posited as to why VET teachers receive negative parental evaluations concerning the issue of practical skills.

Firstly, there are not many current teachers who can teach both theory and practical units. In the Vu (2013) study, results revealed that there were only 7.05% teachers who teach at vocational college institutions who possessed a high level of practical skills, and 0.04% of artisans joining the VET sector who were competent in the teaching area. The proportion of VET teachers with high practical skills and artisans at the secondary vocational schools were 5.4% and 0.32% respectively, whereas the ratio of VET teachers teaching academic units was a high 63.4% at vocational college level, and 53.9% at secondary vocational levels.

Secondly, there are few institutions training VET teachers (GDVT, 2011). According to a report (2011) from the General Directorate of Vocational Training, vocational teachers are currently sourced from three sectors. The main source of VET teachers is from university. They have the responsibility of the transmission of academic knowledge to students, and unfortunately their practical skills and teaching methods are limited through inexperience. The second VET teacher source is from five vocational teacher training institutions (four universities and one at college level). They have studied and are equipped with knowledge in the areas of teaching method, academic knowledge and have practical skills acquired in the industry. Their weakest point is limited or insufficient experience in industry. The last VET teacher source is from highly skilled workers and artisans. They are strong in the practical area and highly skilled in their particular field; by contrast, however, they are inexperienced in teaching method and lack academic knowledge.

In conclusion, regarding the issue of quality of VET input, the aspect of the VET teacher's ability in general had a predominantly negative perception by

parents. Only two positive points were noted compared with two negative sub-themes and some single negative points, pointing to the reality of the lack of expertise of VET teachers in Vietnam.

#### **4.3.5.2.2 Facilities and equipment**

The open ended question in the dimension of facilities and equipment also revealed two main streams. While parents believe that VET providers have acquired the basic points of teaching and understand the learning process, they evaluated VET poorly in relation to infrastructure, and commented on out-of-date equipment being used at VET schools.

##### **Positive theme**

The results in the research by Vu (2013), which focused on the evaluation of facilities and equipment used by the VET sector, correspond with the assessments from parents in the present study. There was only one positive evaluation from Northern parents.

*‘The facilities and equipment of the VET providers have met the requirements of teaching and learning process.’  
(Mother, north)*

The survey conducted by Vu (2013) revealed that only 2.3% of evaluations by VET teachers, VET managers and managers of industry considered that the facilities and equipment for teaching and learning were sufficient, whereas 83.5% participants said that these aspects of VET were inadequate.

##### **Negative theme**

Three sub-themes were emergent in this theme. The first sub-theme was poor infrastructure of VET providers. Parents had mainly negative evaluations of the facilities such as class rooms and workshops. Also, they were disappointed with other facilities affecting the standard of living and learning at the school such as the water system, electricity and toilets.

*‘My son, who is studying with a VET provider, said that the workshops for practical lessons are small with not*

*enough light for teaching and practical work. The safety equipment and air ventilation system at the workshop are not installed.’ (Mother, south)*

Another parent said that

*‘The water system does not meet the minimum requirements for bathing and washing. Besides, the quality of water resource is not guaranteed. The toilet was dirty and not cleaned regularly.’ (Mother, north)*

The second sub-theme revealed that there were insufficient materials for the teaching and learning process. Parents in both the North and South had complained about this issue.

*‘The materials and supplies for practical lessons are not enough for the students to work with.’ (Father, north)*

The third sub-theme identified concerned the old and outdated practical equipment. One of the parents from the South said

*‘The equipment for practical teaching is out of date; some machines from 1950 are still being used for teaching. They are not compatible with nor suitable for the reality of modern manufacturing.’ (Mother, south)*

## **Discussion**

The results of the open-ended question concerning the issue of facilities and equipment were compared with the Vu (2013) study and the GDVT (2011) report.

The first similarity in all three studies (present study, Vu (2013) study, and GDVT (2011) report) was the low level of positive evaluation of the facilities and equipment available to the VET sector.

In the present study, only one parent said that ‘the facilities and equipment of the VET providers have met the requirements of the teaching and learning process’. (Mother, north)

The results shown by Vu (2013) revealed only 2.3% of participants agreed that the infrastructure and equipment available was sufficient for good teaching and learning experiences.

The report from GDVT said that ‘a small percentage of VET institutions are sponsored by core occupations or receive funding from the Official Development Assistance (ODA) or the National Target Program and hence are equipped with modern equipment on par with regional standards’ (GDVT, 2011).

The Government of Vietnam has made large investments into the VET sector for the purpose of changing social perceptions especially of parents and in the hope of attracting students to VET programs. This is evidenced in the funding records for the sector which demonstrate an increase annually, and tenfold, from 49 million USD to 490 million USD, in the period from 2001 to 2011. Notably, 40 of the 1293 VET providers in the network across the country have received these massive investments from National Target Program with the aim improving their facilities to meet the regional standard requirements (GDVT, 2011). The expectations of Government are that funding will have a positive impact and attract greater numbers of skilled workers, increasing from 23.5 million in 2015 to 33.4 million by 2020, to join the Southeast Asian labour market in 2015. The reason why only 40 VET institutions received the immense Government funding while over 1200 institutions did not benefit was not mentioned in the report. However, this fact offers an explanation as to why the issue of facilities and equipment received such a small percentage of favourable evaluation.

Consequently, the second similarity in the three studies is the high proportion of negative evaluations concerning the issue of out-dated or lack of equipment of VET institutions. The GDVT (2011) report recognized that ‘equipment is one of the crucial factors for ensuring quality of vocational training provision. At present, however, this is still lacking and out-of-date equipment is the norm in almost all vocational institutions’. The parental view that the equipment for practical teaching is out-of-date, and the observation that some machines from

1950 are still being used for teaching support this. The results of the research by Vu (2013) revealed 83.5% of participants agreed that facilities and equipment currently provided are not adequate for effective teaching and learning.

The third similarity is found in the negative evaluation by parents and also contained in the GDVT (2011) report in regard to the area of the class rooms and workshops of the VET providers. Parents reported that the workshops for practical lessons are small and there is insufficient light for teaching and practising skills. The GDVT (2011) report recognized that ‘the practical workshops for students are yet to meet the training needs, with a very small floor area which is inadequate for installing equipment and arranging workplace seats for students; and they do not satisfy standards in construction design such as lighting, fire safety, ventilation or load standards’.

There is one inconsistency noted between the DGVT (2011) report and parental views in the present study concerning the issue of the facilities and equipment component of the VET sector. Parents detailed that there were not enough materials for students for practical work in subjects such as welding and the automotive field. The DGVT report did not comment on this issue. Vu (2013) noted that ‘VET providers have focused primarily on building up programs which have lower funding requirements such as financial and economic occupations and information technology programs, whereas occupations in the automobile industry and mechanical careers with high demands from industries are receiving less government funding’.

#### **4.3.5.2.3 Linkages between VET providers and industry**

In the view of parents participating in the survey, responses concerning the issue of a two-way relationship between VET providers and industry fell into three categories. The first category identifies a weak connection between VET providers and industry.

*'Currently, businesses and vocational schools are not linked to each other. There are not common voices in the process of vocational education training.'* (Father, south)

*'The cooperation between enterprises and vocational schools is limited. Vocational schools are failing to meet the demands from businesses in both quality and quantity of VET outcomes.'* (Mother, north)

*'Presently, there are only weak links, even no links between vocational training institutions and enterprises. In the future, I would like to see close links between the two stakeholders, and the link bonded through policies and mechanisms.'* (Mother, north)

The loose relationship between the two stakeholders is explained in two ways. The first reason is the macro management by government. There are no uniform principles or detailed policies by the Government concerning the relationship. According to Vocational Law 2006, chapter 5, article 55, Government merely encourages the relationship between VET providers and enterprises. There are not any policies or detailed mechanisms that specify the rights and responsibilities of each stakeholder. Vice director of General Directorate Vocational Training (Tran, 2009) acknowledged that 'the partnership between VET providers and industries has been established but not closely. Businesses have not paid sufficient attention to cooperation with VET schools. On the other hand, VET schools are not actively building up relationships with industry. The policies are not uniform and the ways of encouraging cooperation not established'. The second reason is the tenuous relationship between VET schools and industries. The VET institutions teach using their available programs and their current (not updated) facilities. The results are that the VET graduates do not meet the requirements of industry. The VET outcomes are not consistent with industry requirements. On the other hand, industries are not sufficiently involved in designing the curriculum, specifying content or participating in evaluations of VET providers (Tran, 2009). With the current situation, industries have the advantages in that they can have the benefit of trained employees with no obligation to make contributions in return to the VET providers.

The second category is the clear awareness of parents of the importance and benefits of a healthy two-way relationship between the two key stakeholders.

*'Vocational schools and businesses working together provide opportunities for students to access the world of efficient work.'* (Mother, south)

*'It is necessary to have the cooperation of vocational schools with businesses become closer through specific policies. It enables students to practise skills while studying at vocational schools and have the opportunity to find a job in the future.'* (Father, north)

*'It is necessary to build up the cooperation between vocational training institutions and business enterprises. There should be policies and appropriate mechanisms to facilitate business and vocational schools having a dynamic relationship in a spirit of cooperation for the mutual benefit in both groups.'* (Mother, north)

According to Nguyen (2015), who is the Chairman and CEO of Neway Group Company in Vietnam, a good working relationship between vocational training and industry is now an objective and a necessity in the context of Vietnam having joined the World Trade Organisation from 2007, and with the serious current imbalance of labour requirements and lack of a skilled workforce. This is based on the economic law of supply and demand to ensure mutual benefits for both parties.

Ensuring that vocational training institutions are associated with industry will improve the quality of vocational education training. The quality of vocational education training is enhanced due to the necessity to appropriately adjust programs to comply with the requirements from industry; students will have more real time for experience within the industry, the classroom input of the VET provider will be more accurate and appropriate as a result of participation in the process of industry expertise, and most importantly, teachers will increase and improve their practical capacity as well as have opportunities to access modern machinery and new technology.



The major benefit of the cooperation between industries and VET providers is the assurance of skilled human resources for the company. The second benefit is partnership; businesses will have the assistance and availability of consultancy of good teachers in addressing difficult situations that can arise in the production process. In addition, industries can reduce the cost of training and retraining their workers, thereby increasing the financial prospects of the business.

The third category is the expectation by parents that there will be comprehensive cooperation between the two key stakeholders and that this will be affected through the policies and mandates of Government. These expectations are evident as parents point out the ineffective relationships of the three key stakeholders.

Of the Government role in the relationship, one of the parents from the South said that ‘at the moment, there are not any policies or detailed instructions from Government to develop the cooperation in law between the two sides’. This statement from a parent is in line with the study by Tran (2009). ‘We haven’t got the mechanisms to bond the two-way relationship between vocational training institutions and industries for the undertaking of training with VET providers, or industrial based training at industries’.

Of the role of industry as a key stakeholder, parents said that ‘the collaboration between schools and businesses in vocational training is low due to businesses not seeing sufficient benefits in this link’.

From the VET school perspective, parents expect that ‘VET schools should collaborate effectively with industries for the benefit of both sides’.

Interestingly, the expectations of parents regarding the link between VET institutions and businesses with the involvement of Government fits in well with the Triple Helix model (Etzkowitz & Leydesdorff, 2000), which was modified from a two-way relationship between university and industry to a triadic relationship between university-industry-government. The Triple Helix

relationship has been seen as the potential model for innovation and economic development in a Knowledge Society. The Triple Helix is a metaphor for university, industry, and government interacting closely while each maintains its independent identity. Based on the expectations from parents and the Triple Helix model, it is suggested that Government should be involved and act as a referee to control the two-way relationship between the other two stakeholders through the implementation of policies and other suitable mechanisms.

Generally, the current relationship between the two key stakeholders is not very close, and neither has formulated possible common points because there are no clearly defined responsibilities and rights of each. In fact, VET schools are teaching the programs they have designed whereas the requirements from industries are quite different from what students are learning at the schools. Therefore, it is desirable and necessary to have the participation of Government as a referee to control the relationship through legislation and policy.

#### **4.3.5.3 Domain 3: VET outcomes**

##### **4.3.5.3.1 Recognition of VET qualifications**

The first issue arising from the VET outcomes domain of the survey is the recognition of VET qualifications. This domain looks at the values and skills VET holders acquire through VET provider education. The responses from parents to the interview question were grouped into negative and positive themes

##### **Positive theme**

Parents have recognized the importance and high demand for a trained human resource by service and manufacturing industries, and the need for this to facilitate Vietnam's smooth and effective transition from an agricultural economy to an industrial one.

*'A skilled workforce has been highly valued in society especially in the context of industrialization and modernization of the country. The value of VET qualifications needs to be made known to all classes in*

*society and even more to the younger generation.'*  
(Mother, north)

Parents have also recognized the high value of VET degrees. This is the primary requirement by employers for obtaining a job or for going on to further study.

*'VET degrees are valuable in recognizing a basic level of achievement of vocational students, ensuring that students can enter the labour market and be able to improve and upgrade their study in the future.'* (Father, north)

*'Practical knowledge or skills without an academic certificate is useless in seeking employment in Vietnam.'*  
(Father, south)

*'The VET degree is a passport for VET students to get a job. It is also the basic qualification for those having motivations for the next step of further academic study.'*  
(Mother, north)

*'The VET degrees have high value at the companies which require skilled qualifications, and have been beneficial in being selected for a job. They have also assisted in being recruited for working overseas through the contracts of skilled workforce recruitment between two Governments.'*  
(Mother, south)

### **Negative theme**

Parents responded that the perceived value of VET degrees or VET holders has resulted in discrimination in matters such as benefits, social status and salary in Vietnamese society. The degrees are compared unfavourably with other mainstream educational qualifications.

*'Although VET certificates or degrees are recognized nationally, they are not still accepted in many businesses. There is still prejudice in the areas of social perception and there is a stigma surrounding VET qualifications. The salary of VET holders in public or government companies is always lower than that of employees with mainstream education degrees.'* (Father, north)

*'VET degree holders find it difficult to find a job compared with applicants with qualifications from the mainstream education system. They still are discriminated*

*against and receive negative views from society.’ (Mother, north)*

*‘VET qualifications are not highly valued in society. The VET holders become merely workers in the companies. The VET degree holders are not thought worthy to be considered for promotion to high positions in society.’ (Mother, south)*

Another parental response concerns the perceived low competence of VET holders; that the quality of the skilled workforce is not valued highly by the community and the requirements of industries are not met.

*‘The value of VET diplomas is low and not accepted by most companies now. VET graduates are yet to meet immediately the requirements of industries. They have to retrain to acquire the other skills required by the companies before presenting themselves to the labour market.’ (Father, south)*

Obviously, parents have realized the importance of a skilled workforce in the context of Vietnam moving away from having a backward agricultural society towards the goal of a modern industrial economy by 2020. In addition, parents also pointed out the perceived discriminatory attitude of all levels of society towards the vocational training system, the gaps in wages and social status and limited opportunities for promotion in careers in the future. The concerns of how to change these perceptions in all strata of society and the best way to fill the gaps in the vocational education training system are raised. The answer is to have strong intervention by the government in the sector through policies and specific mechanisms (Tran, 2009). In addition, the VET system in general and each VET provider in particular must be reorganized in order to improve the quality of vocational education so that it meets the demands of business and industry (Cao, 2015). Students must also have a realistic assessment of their capabilities and interests and make appropriate career choices.

#### 4.3.5.3.2 Job potential

One of the issues of high consensus receiving positive evaluations from parents is the potential for VET students to gain employment following study with VET providers.

*'The employment opportunities for VET students after graduation are huge. There are many firms wanting to recruit employees who have been trained by VET providers.'* (Mother, north)

*'Students who have studied at vocational schools have more opportunities and find it easier to get jobs than main stream education graduates and unskilled workers.'* (Father, south)

*'VET students have a chance to work not only for domestic companies but also for international enterprises in Vietnam and overseas.'* (Mother, south)

However, parents also indicated that the issue of job potential has some disadvantage as a consequence of the type of job available to VET students.

*'After graduation from VET schools, students have many high opportunities to get a job; however, they just are workers with a low salary.'* (Mother, north)

*'Graduated students of vocational schools are now receiving employment in mostly unskilled jobs in industrial enterprises. These positions are not commensurate with, or have a limited relationship with their knowledge, skills and training gained at the schools.'* (Father, north)

Generally speaking, parents have an optimistic outlook concerning the issue of job potential of VET students. The evaluations from parents also fit well with the GDVT (2011) report. According to this report, over 80% of students were successful in gaining employment immediately after graduation. Significantly, in 2010, the report indicated that employment rates in the welding, automotive, and electrical divisions were approximately 90%. The results suggest that GDVT should expand the information system available to the labour market (ADB, 2013) and include an estimate of the number of the VET graduates each

year in order to match available jobs with the students' acquired knowledge and skills, thus avoiding wastage of skilled personnel. The GDVT report did not include data of percentages of VET graduates gaining appropriate jobs.

### **4.3.6 Conclusions**

Table 19 summarises the main themes and sub-themes of parental perspectives of the six issues regarding the VET sector. The total picture included both positive and negative observations; generally, the VET sector was viewed by parents in a more negative way, but with some positive highlights. More specifically, five issues divided into positive and negative themes with varieties of sub-themes. The viewpoints from parents concerning the issue of the relationship between VET providers and enterprises grouped into three main themes, describing the importance and benefits of the relationship for both the industries and VET providers. However, parents evaluated the current casual connections poorly. Therefore they expected that Government should be involved in instigating these links and exercise some control in this area by identifying clearly the responsibilities of, and benefits for, each stakeholder, through direct policy implementation.

Generally, the result of this phase is in agreement with the conclusion of the study by Tushar (2013). The researcher evaluated the system of vocational and technical education in the South East Asian region including Vietnam. 'The VET sector is characterized by low enrolment, high drop-outs, poor quality of teachers, inequitable access for women and rural populations, limited private sector involvement, limitation in connections between enterprises and VET schools, and very inadequate budgetary allocations. In other words, vocational education training in South East Asia is not supporting a high economic growth rate or expanding global markets. The entire system requires fundamental review and restructuring'.

Table 19: The main themes and sub themes of the VET sector (Source: by analysis from author)

Domains	Issues	Themes	Sub-themes
Quality of VET input	Quality and types of VET input	Positive	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Courses are adaptable and versatile, ranging from low to high skill levels of training</li> <li>▪ Courses are more creative and interesting – provision of practical experience</li> </ul>
		Negative	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Low academic standard</li> <li>▪ Students come from difficult economic status and rural areas</li> <li>▪ Students do not understand clearly the way to make career choices</li> </ul>
VET teaching process	Teacher's ability	Positive	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Have met the standard requirements from GDVT</li> <li>▪ Enthusiasm and responsibility</li> </ul>
		Negative	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Low standard of practical skills</li> <li>▪ Slow or poor uptake in updating information technology and learning foreign language</li> <li>▪ Weakness and limitations in teaching methodology</li> </ul>
	Facilities and Equipment	Positive	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Have met the necessary requirements for the teaching and learning process</li> </ul>
		Negative	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Poor infrastructure of VET providers</li> <li>▪ Not enough materials for the teaching and learning process</li> <li>▪ Old and out-dated practical equipment and machinery</li> </ul>
Relationship between VET providers and industries		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ The clear awareness of parents of the importance and benefits</li> <li>▪ Weak connection between VET providers and industry</li> <li>▪ The expectations of comprehensive cooperation</li> </ul>	
VET outcomes	Recognition of qualifications	Positive	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ The importance and high demand for trained personnel</li> <li>▪ The value of VET degrees</li> </ul>
		Negative	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ The value of VET degrees or VET holders is diminished in the eyes of the community and industry</li> <li>▪ The low competence of VET holders and the poor quality of the potential skilled workforce</li> </ul>
	Student career and job potential	Positive	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Bright future for VET students in gaining employment</li> </ul>
		Negative	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ The discriminatory views of VET students by enterprises</li> </ul>

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Name of Principal Supervisor: SENIOR LECTURER, DR BRIAN DENMAN

Candidate

Date

VI HOANG DANG

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Principal Supervisor

Date



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	<b>Author's Name (please print clearly)</b>	<b>% of contribution</b>
Candidate	VI HOANG DANG	100%
Other Authors		

Name of Candidate: VI HOANG DANG

Name/title of Principal Supervisor: SENIOR LECTURER: DR BRIAN DENMAN

VI HOANG DANG  
Candidate

03/06/2016  
Date



\_\_\_\_\_  
Principal Supervisor

03/06/2016  
Date

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## **The Use of Nominal Group Technique: Case Study in Vietnam**

Vi Hoang Dang<sup>1,\*</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Namdingh Vocational College, Vietnam

\*Correspondence: University of New England, 3/3 Wigan Avenue, Armidale, 2350, NSW, Australia. Tel: 61-2-6773-2038. E-mail: [hdang2@myune.edu.au](mailto:hdang2@myune.edu.au)

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### **Abstract**

The Nominal Group Technique (NGT) is a structured process to gather information from a group. The technique was first described in early 1970s and has since become a widely-used standard to facilitate working groups. The NGT is effective for generating large numbers of creative new ideas and for group priority setting. This article reports on a case study carried out in Vietnam on exploring the perceptions of key stakeholders towards the vocational education training (VET) sector where the study applied the NGT. Therefore, this article has two purposes: (1) describing what NGT is and outlines how to use it; and (2) describing the case study findings by providing an analysis of data generated during a workshop led by the author. The findings of the case study indicated that the Government policy factor or the roles of Government on the VET sector are ranked as the most important force impacting upon the quality of VET programs in Vietnam. Both the established research technique used to collect data and present the findings of the case study have particular significance as they contribute to a major problem which has not been researched seriously in Vietnam in the past as has happened in many other countries. Importantly, the study provides an overview of the Vietnamese VET system which both VET experts in Vietnam and international scholars will be able to understand.

**Keywords:** *Nominal Group Technique, Case Study, Key Stakeholders, Vocational Education Training Sector*

## **5.1 Introduction**

The quantitative approach to data collection used the survey questionnaire to explore the perceptions of three groups of students towards the VET image. The qualitative approach applied the open-ended interview questions to investigate the parental perspectives also on the sector. This chapter uses the nominal group technique (NGT), a quasi-quantitative approach (Dobbie, Rhodes, Tysinger & Freeman, 2004) to unpack six key stakeholders' perceptions towards the VET sector. The chapter is presented in 2 main parts: the first part introduced solely on the NGT in term of its definition, how to prepare for NGT workshop, the process of NGT and the advantages and disadvantages when using the NGT, and the second part was the main body of the paper. It presents the findings of the study in combination with discussions.

Six stakeholders were formally invited to the workshop based on their roles, and the closeness of their relationships with and a clear understanding of the VET sector. The roles of two policy makers from vocational education training sector and technical education training field will make policies and generate the mechanisms. The roles of principals of secondary schools will help students in advices and guiding career choice in the future. The appearance of manager of industry at the workshop will contribute the ideas on the roles of building up curriculum, evaluations and recruit VET graduates. The VET lecturer will present their understanding and experiences insights the VET sector.

It is noted that author copied and pasted the main parts in the published paper, then put them into the chapter to aim eliminating the duplications. For the full details of the paper and references, please go to appendix number 15.

## **5.2 Nominal Group Technique**

### **5.2.1 Definition**

Nominal (meaning in name only) Group Technique (NGT) is a structured variation of a small-group discussion to reach consensus (Van de Den &

Delbecq, 1971). Originally, the NGT was introduced by (Van de Den & Delbecq, 1971, 1971) as a tool that helps disadvantaged citizens in community settings. The technique includes two main stages namely focus group discussion, and voting phase. It produces semi quantitative data and its format is used to promote meaningful, interpersonal disclosures among participants by gathering equally weighted responses. NGT evaluation tends to offer valid representation of group views and is well suited to group evaluation activities (Pokorny & Lyle, 1988). The technique has been widely applied in health, social services, education and government organisations. The contributors taking focus group can be whole cohorts or representative groups of participants.

### **5.2.2 Development**

Since its original development, researchers have modified and adapted the process of the NGT, but basic tenets remain central to the NGT process which comprises of two core stages (1) identification the problems by discussion and (2) voting to make decisions quickly. Nominal Group Technique requires direct participant involvement, in a way that is non-hierarchical, and where all participants have an equal voice and all responses to the posed question have equal validity (Harvey & Holmes, 2012). The generation of the responses to the posed question takes place in silence, with no conferring with other participants, nor seeking elucidation or clarification from the researcher. This silent approach to ideas generation enables participants to develop their own thoughts and ideas, without interference or pressure from others, lessening group dynamics that may be unhelpful or undermining to the overall process (McMurray, 1994). Valuing of participants individual contributions is enhanced by the fact that through the NGT process, the collection of data and the analysis following ranking of responses, all participants remain anonymous (Steward, 2001), thus allowing all involved to be heard, regardless of position held outside of the participant group

### **5.2.3 Participants**

There has been debate as to what constitutes the optimal size of group for NGT. Van de Ven and Delbecq (1971) suggest that NGT groups should be made up of no more than 5-9 participants, but that large group (9-more than 200) can be accommodated within this process. Whereas, Horton (1980) identified his groups as ranging from 7-10 individuals, whilst Steward (2001) in her work with Occupational Therapy and Physiotherapy students had groups of between 5 and 8. Allen et al. (2004) worked on a number of participants between 9 and 12, noting that this afforded the researcher a group that would be manageable, but that would also allow for the generation of a range of opinions, whilst Harvey and Holmes (2012) suggested that a group of between 6 and 12 would have been ideal. Interestingly, Carney et al. (1996) noted that from their pilot project findings, that a minimum of six participants was required, in order to engender a sense of 'safety' within the group, illustrating this point by outlining that one of the pilot groups in the study had only contained five members and it was perceived that this could be felt as 'mildly threatening'.

### **5.2.4 NGT versus focus group discussion**

According to Calder (1977), the author distinguishes among the exploratory, clinical, and phenomenological dimensions of qualitative research. Although NGT possesses some characteristics of each of these dimensions, it is perhaps closest to what Calder defines as exploratory research. As he points out, a major strength of exploratory methods is the ability to identify major issues or attributes associated with a particular research problem. However, there are several characteristics of standard focus groups that restrict this method to exploratory applications. First, the output of the session is relatively unstructured. Although the session can provide an extensive list of attributes, the process does not facilitate establishing attribute priorities. Second, a small subset of the participants may be outspoken and dominate or intimidate the rest of the group. Third, to minimize this potential domination and to ensure the desired depth of coverage, a highly trained session leader is required. Finally, the necessity to bring participants to a meeting room virtually precludes the use



of probability sampling procedures. However, the quota sampling methods usually adopted are entirely consistent with the exploratory nature of the focus group process.

Nominal Group Technique shares with exploratory focus groups the facility for identifying issues relevant to target consumers, and also adds a number of other very useful features. First, in addition to providing an extensive listing of issues or attributes, NGT enables the researcher to identify priorities for each individual session participant. Second, an advantage of NGT is that the structuring and establishing of priorities makes it possible to analyse similarities and differences across multiple NGT sessions. Third, because of the procedural rules established at the outset of the session, the NGT session leader is able to ensure that all participants have an equal voice in the session. Fourth, the authors' experience indicates that the added structure of NGT sessions simplifies the process of training session leaders. In other words, session leadership is somewhat less of an art than appears to be the case with focus group sessions. Despite these advantages, it must be remembered that NGT shares with focus groups the need to assemble participants in the meeting room, and, hence, the necessity to adopt quota sampling procedures.

## **5.2.5 How to prepare for NGT workshop**

### **5.2.5.1 The Meeting Room**

Prepare a room large enough to accommodate from five to nine participants. Organize the tables in a U-shape, with a flip chart at the open end of the U. Each participant is provided pens, papers, pencils, and 3" x 5" sticky notes.

### **5.2.5.2 Opening Statement**

The opening statements have four main parts namely (1) warm welcome to all participants to take part the workshop followed by the purposes of the workshop or the importance of the task, (2) introducing the role of each participant and a mention of the importance of each member's contribution, (3) Moderator presents details the guidelines of the NGT process until to all

members of the group fully understand, and (4) an indication of how the group's outputs will be used.

### 5.2.6 The process of NGT

This section details the NGT process which was applied to the workshop in Vietnam. The process is a combination of the focus group discussion and voting phase that was developed by (Varga-Atkins, 2011) and supported by (James et al., 2004; Alison et al., 2004; Anthony, 2013) studies. It has 5 phases namely: (1) Present key question to the participants; (2) Silent phase; (3) Round Robins phase; (4) Discussion/item clarification phase, and (5) Voting phase.

Figure 22: Nominal group technique process (Source: by analysis from author)

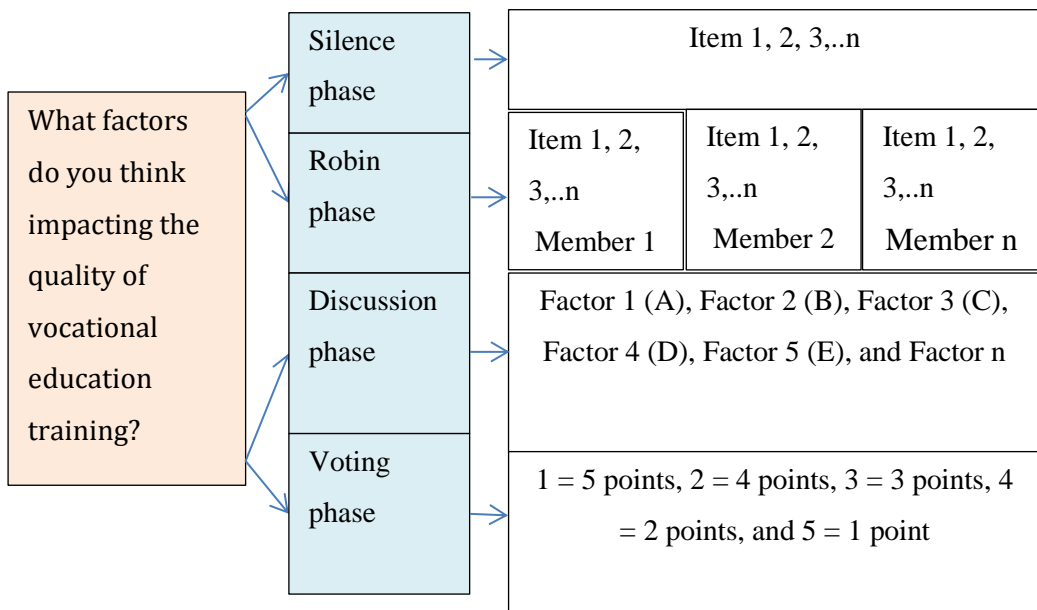


Table 20: Instructions for performing the Nominal Group Technique (Source: by analysis from author)

Phases	Activities
Phase 1	Present key question on the flip chart and read loudly to the participants for feedback
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What factors do you think impact the quality of vocational education training?</li> </ul>
Phase 2	Silent phase
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Participants will be formed a group of six with a flip chart and pens.</li> <li>• Issue the pink sticky notes to each participant.</li> <li>• Without conferring or group discussion, based on the knowledge and experience of participants, they write down all factors that they think impact to the quality of vocational education on the pink sticky notes (one factor per one pink sticky note).</li> </ul>
Phase 3	Round-robin phase
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• In turn, participants stick one pink sticky on the flip chart without comment or discussion until all ideas or pink sticky notes are exhausted or run out. No comment and discussion in this phase because of preventing some participants from advocating for their position and influencing other members in the group.</li> <li>• If one idea (factor) of the participant on the stick note is the same or similar to another's, then facilitator comments and sticks or groups these together.</li> </ul>
Phase 4	Discussion/item clarification to make themes
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• All members of the group clarify and discuss the unclear factors or items until everything is understandable</li> <li>• All these items are grouped, edited and named into themes, without discarding any item.</li> <li>• The facilitator lists and letters A, B, C, and so on these themes in order of popularity on the flip chart.</li> </ul>
Phase 5	Voting phase
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Based on the list of the themes, participants write down all themes with the letters on the paper, and rank their top five factors from 1 to 5.</li> <li>• Participants award 5 points to their top item, 4 to the second, and so on.</li> <li>• The facilitator collects these papers for data analysis.</li> </ul>

It is noted that all members of group were handed out the instructions of technique one week before the workshop opening so that all participants have time to review the guidelines of the technique. The reason of handing out early instructions of the technique was the majority of the participants who had not used the technique before. Before the first step of discussion, the instructions of the NFGT are explained one more time by author to make sure all participants understand fully and clearly. Table 20 and figure 22 describe the instructions of the technique including five steps.

## **5.2.7 Advantages and disadvantages of NGT**

### **5.2.7.1 Advantages**

The primary advantage of the NGT over other strategies is the enhanced opportunity for all participants to contribute ideas and to minimize the domination of the process by more confident or outspoken individuals (Vella, Goldfrad, Rowan, Bion & Black, 2000). Other advantages (Nelson, Jayanthi, Brittain, Epstein & Bursuck, 2002; Ko de Ruyter, 1996; Brahm & Kleiner, 1996) include:

- The generation of a greater number of ideas than other group processes.
- The generation of more creative ideas than other group processes.
- The ease of interpreting the results (as ideas are generated, voted on/ranked, and evaluated at the session itself).
- A greater sense of accomplishment for members (as the results are available immediately after the session).
- The minimal resource requirements (a venue, facilitator, whiteboard, paper, sticky notes and pens).
- The comparatively efficient use of time.

### **5.2.7.2 Disadvantages**

However, it is important to recognise the disadvantages or limitations of nominal groups (de Ruyter 1996; Brahm & Kleiner, 1996). These include:

- The limited number of topics and issues that can be covered (tend to be single-topic sessions).
- The limitation of idea generation to the meeting itself (i.e., no opportunity for participants to think about the issue in depth and generate additional ideas in their own time).
- The need for participants to feel comfortable with, and remain within, a very structured group process.
- The lack of anonymity, which may limit participants' willingness to express their views.
- The necessity for all members to be capable of, and comfortable with, expressing their ideas in writing and then communicating them verbally to the group.
- The time commitment required from participants, and the necessity for them to attend a specific location at a given time, which may limit participant numbers.
- The lack of generalizability of the results to the wider population due to the specific characteristics of the participants (both in terms of who is nominated to attend, and who agrees to participate).
- The limited nature of the data (i.e, in terms of number of respondents) often requires a follow-up survey or other quantitative methodology prior to making final decisions about an issue.

## **5.3 Findings and discussions**

### **5.3.1 Introduction**

It is noted that this section provides an overview of VET sector from the perspectives of six key stakeholders who have a clear understanding on, and close relationship with the VET sector. The references in this section were cited and quoted by Vietnamese VET experts and officers from Government who have direct responsibilities, and are in charge of the VET sector. It is acknowledged that a major limitation on the findings is the small sample size but given the exploratory nature of the study, the input of the chosen stakeholders was nevertheless valuable. The views from the six key

stakeholders and references from reports by the organizations such as the General Directorate of Vocational Training (GDVT), the Asian Development Bank (ADB) and the World Bank are the main official sources to portray the workings of the whole VET sector in this study.

This section provides a series of items to impact upon the quality of VET sector and to point out the weaknesses are exist in the VET system. Six key stakeholders contributed total of 43 individual items and these were generated into 5 themes or factors namely Government policies, Curriculum, The teachers' ability, Facility and equipment, and Perception of society on the VET sector in answering the research question. At the end of the workshop, they voted the factor of Government policies or the role of Government as the most important issue impacting the quality of VET programs. Table 21 shows the results of Nominal group technique.

Facilitator: Vi Hoang Dang

Date: 26 March 2014

Numbers of participants to participate the workshop: 6

Numbers of factors for voting: 5

Topic or question: Please find out what factors do you think impact the quality of vocational education training?

Table 21: Results of Nominal Group Technique (Source: by author)

Factors	Voted received 1 is most important = 5 points, 5 is least = 1 point	Total Score (points)	Ranking
1. Government policies on the VET sector	1+1+1+1+2+3	27	1
2. Curriculum	1+2+2+3+3+5	20	2
3. The teacher's ability	1+2+2+4+4+5	18	3
4. Facility and equipment	2+3+4+4+5+5	13	4
5. Perception of society on the VET sector	3+3+4+4+5+5	12	5

## **5.3.2 The results and discussions**

### **5.3.2.1 Factor 1 - Government policies on the VET sector**

Based on the analysis and discussions of six key stakeholders, the factor of Government policies on the VET sector has been ranked as the most important force to impact the quality of VET programs. Stakeholders indicated the policies need to be changed, updated or edited.

Regarding the micro level policies on the VET sector such as the policies on the VET system, six stakeholders have pointed out that the complexity of the skilled trained human resource system is the main reason impacting the quality of vocational education training programs. Currently, Vocational Education Training is under the management of the Ministry of Labour Invalid Social Affairs (MOLISA), and Technical Education (TE) belonging the Ministry of Education and Training (MOET) are both responsible for producing the skilled and technical workforce of the country. According to the statistics from MOLISA (2013), at the moment, there were 1337 VET providers, and 500 Technical schools (MOET, 2007). As result, the investment from Government on VET sector appears dilute, and not efficient (Vu, 2015). Thus, six key stakeholders suggested Government should merge the two systems mentioned above into one system to be called Technical and Vocational Education Training system (TVET). This idea is in accordance with the decision of the Prime Minister (630/QD-TTg dated 29-05-2012) to assign to the concerned ministries responsibility to design the National Qualification Framework (NQF). Such action would result in the merging of the two systems (VET and TE), and help with the recognition of the skills and qualifications of the workforce among the countries in the South East Asian region and other nations in the world. Interestingly, the Vietnam Congress passed the Occupation Education Law dated 27-11-2014 to unify and merge VET and TE to become one Occupation Education system under the direct management by the Prime Minister. In addition, six key stakeholders suggested that the Government should issue more preferential policies to attract and encourage the domestic and international investors to take part in the field of VET. Currently, the policies of the Government just stand at tax breaks for investors

(Vocational Law, 2006). As reported by (GDVT, 2011), only 2.4% of domestic and oversea companies participate in vocational training activities. The companies have established the VET providers for the purpose of training the skilled workforces in order to achieve growth and development of these companies.

In relation with the autonomy policies and mechanism, the participants at the workshop also recommended that Government approve the full autonomy of public VET schools. This would allow VET providers to decide issues such as curriculum, training time, admissions, scientific research, production-business, organization, personnel, and finance. However these decisions must be accountable to the society especially school activities related to the quality of vocational training (Vu, 2015). In fact, Government just only encourages VET providers autonomously but the detail policies and full instructions for this are not still available.

Regarding the policies related to VET students and VET lecturers, six stakeholders also proposed to change, modify and supplement VET policies in order to attract and encourage students to participate the VET programs. VET policy maker who joined the workshop argued that currently the Government has issued the policies to encourage students to participate VET sector by the 50% reduction of tuition fee. However, the reduction has not been effective to increase enrolments. The solutions to attract secondary students to enrol in VET programs are pointed out by Vice minister of MOLISA (Nguyen, 2014) who suggested that graduated year 9 students who enrol in VET programs receive 100% reduction of tuition fee. He also reminded that the VET institutions must look for the enterprises for cooperation in vocational education. The ultimate goal is to make the best opportunities for students to find the job.

At the workshop, six key stakeholders indicated that, the Government need to promulgated wage framework at each level such as vocational college and vocational secondary. Based on the salary bracket, the enterprises will pay salary to VET graduates suitable with their qualification, knowledges and



experiences. Another disadvantage for VET graduates currently, the Government has no policies and mechanisms to encourage and stimulate employers and enterprises to recruit skilled employees and VET graduates. There are some small and medium businesses employing unskilled workers to work in the company. These businesses only train some employees to meet the needs of the production process in order to make employees to remain with the business for the long term. Presently, businesses are benefiting from the recruitment of skilled workers at no cost including not paying taxes which may be directed to the VET providers (Cao, 2015).

In relation with the policies on the remuneration and salary of the VET lecturers, six key stakeholders have indicated that these policies for VET trainers have many shortcomings. The policies do not encourage or attract potential people to become VET lecturers nor create their loyalty and dedication to the occupation. The requirement to be a VET lecturer necessitates candidates to be a teacher and have technical skills and expertises. However, the wage policies do not show the preferential distinctiveness of being a VET lecturer. In addition VET lecturers do not have their own the salary framework. Their salary is paid according to the salary of the high school teachers (Decree No. 204/2004 / ND-CP, dated 14-12-2004) and is not equal to the salary of lecturers in the higher education sector. Vice director of the VET research department (Pham, 2015) indicated that the unattractive salary for VET teacher is one of the main reasons for the failure to attract qualified, skilled and experienced people to become VET lecturer. He warned that many skilled and qualified people who work in the VET sector want to move out to other sectors to get higher incomes. In addition, there are no policies to encourage VET teachers to improve their qualifications including the absence of mechanisms for businesses and vocational training institutions to facilitate the VET lecturers for engagement with industries in order to annually improve their knowledge and experiences.

According to the Asian Development Bank (ADB, 2014), the present salary level of vocational teachers is comparatively low, and does not encourage or reward improvement of professional and technical skills. These low salary

levels make it difficult to recruit skilled technicians or production managers from industry to become VET teachers. There is no incentive program to attract people with extensive industry experience into the teaching profession. Viet Nam does place a high value on teaching and the role of teachers in society, which may explain the absence of policies to improve the status of technical teaching.

One of the problems which six key stakeholders discussed was the policies and mechanisms related to the relationship between VET providers and businesses. According to the Vocational Law (2006), the Vietnamese Government has no specific policies to determine the rights and responsibilities of both organizations involved in this relationship. Enterprises have not seen any advantages in this link whereas VET institutions provide what programs they have available. This relationship does not generate common points between VET providers and enterprises thus leading to VET graduates being disadvantaged because they do not meet the requirements of employers. On the industrial side, enterprises have to invest money and efforts to retrain VET graduates. They are also passive in the process of personnel recruitment (Hoang, 2014). Whereas, VET providers face the difficulties of raising the numbers of student to enrol in VET programs while subjected to the impact of negative social strata (Cao, 2015). For the Government there is wastage of trained manpower. According to the (GDVT, 2011) report, there was 34.27% of VET graduates did not find a job after 6 months of graduation from VET providers. In other words, the VET graduates do not meet the requirements of industries due to the weak relationship between VET providers and industries. It was the consensus of the key stakeholders at the workshop that the Government has not developed detail policies and mechanisms to identify the rights and responsibilities of the two stakeholders in this relationship. The absence of necessary policies is identified as the reason why the VET outputs are not been recognized by society and industry.

Another issue discussed was the implementation of a streaming policy for year 9 and year 12 students. According to GOVT (2011) report and Hoang (2012) the implementation of a streaming policy of year 9 students was failure. “There

were only 2% of year 9 students enrolled to VET providers” (GDVT, 2011). According to the Vice Minister of MOET (Bui, 2013), there are four main explanations for the failure of the streaming policy. Firstly, knowledge about VET programs by individuals, schools and society is generally limited. Secondly, students and their families do not fully understand the ramifications of the academic ability of their children nor their economic potential. If they understood these situations, they would see that vocational education may be an attractive way for them to reduce their financial stress and be able to enter the labour market earlier. Thirdly, the labour market information system is poor, not transparency and not regularly updated, whereas the employment potential for VET graduates is positive. Lastly, the diversity of the upper secondary school such as public high schools, semi-public high schools and continuing education centres make the implementation of streaming policy difficulty (Bui, 2014). For example, 2014 enrolment in grades 10 at the public upper secondary level in Hanoi city occupied approximately 70 % of the total of 71,278 the year 9 students. This does not include the intakes of enrolment of the semi-public schools and continuous education centres (GDDT Hanoi, 2014). This example reveals that the VET pathway has few year 9 student graduates to enrol.

### **5.3.2.2 Factor 2 - Curriculum**

The second important factor affecting the quality of VET programs comes from the VET curriculum. Three weak points in the design of the VET curriculum were pointed out.

Firstly, the VET curriculum currently is not designed based on the output standards or learning outcomes. In other words, the requirements from society especially from industries must be the foundations for the designing of VET curriculum. This statement is in line with the results of the conference title “Development the skilled manpower to meet the needs of society” hosted by MOLISA. The focus was upon the importance of the VET meeting the needs of industries. It is argued that VET providers provide their available programs

which are based upon a curriculum not designed to pay attention to the requirements of industries and the realities of manufacture (Cao, 2015).

Secondly, the key stakeholders recommended the VET curriculum should be developed to equip students with the theory plus practical and soft skills. In addition, it should be linked to other academic streams to ensure students and VET graduates recognise the need for long life learning. Currently, Vietnam has no national qualification framework (NQF) which identifies the links with other educational pathways. However, the NQF is in the process of designing and is expected to finish at the end of 2015 (Hoang, 2014).

Thirdly, VET curriculum should be designed based on the training of relationship between VET schools and enterprises. The six key stakeholders suggested that the model of Germany's dual vocational training system should be applied to the Vietnamese context. The German VET system provides opportunities for students to be practiced and have the skills to immediately apply their theoretical knowledge in the manufacture environment. Also, students are immersed in a real professional working environment, thus promoting a sense of responsibility and instilling the culture of the company. For students, any mistakes at the enterprise will make a real actual loss, therefore it is lessons for them to self-adjust and improve their skills quickly in the future. On the industrial side, they can control the human workforce in the future and identify the numbers of workers to meet the needs of the company and enterprises can evaluate exactly the quality of each graduated student.

### **5.3.2.3 Factor 3 - Teacher's ability**

One of the factors of the six key stakeholders concerning to impact the quality of VET programs was the ability of VET lecturers. At the workshops, they identified three weak points of VET lecturers that need to be improved.

Firstly, basically VET lecturers have a good theoretical knowledge but their practical experiences in industry and teaching methods are limited. This evaluation from six key stakeholders is in line with the Vu (2013) study results

which revealed that only 7.05% of teachers who teach at vocational college institutions possess a high level of practical skills, and 0.04% of artisans joining the VET sector were competent in the teaching area. The proportion of VET teachers with high practical skills and artisans at the secondary vocational schools were 5.4% and 0.32% respectively, whereas the ratio of VET teachers teaching academic units was a high 63.4% at vocational college level, and 53.9% at secondary vocational levels. In addition, there are few institutions training VET teachers (GDVT, 2011). According to a report (2011) from the General Directorate of Vocational Training, vocational teachers are currently sourced from three sectors. The main source of VET teachers is from university. They have the responsibility of the transmission of academic knowledge to students but unfortunately their practical skills and teaching methods are limited through inexperience. The second, VET teacher source is from five vocational teacher training institutions (four universities and one at college level). They have studied and are equipped with knowledge in the areas of teaching method, academic knowledge and have practical skills acquired in the industry. Their weakest point is limited or insufficient experience in industry. The last, VET teacher source is from highly skilled workers and artisans. They are strong in the practical area and highly skilled in their particular field by contrast; however, they are inexperienced in teaching method and lack academic knowledge. This finding from the workshops also was in line with the report from (GDVT, 2011, p.47). “Vocational teachers had limitations in occupational skills and competences”.

Another weakness of vocational lecturers was the poor response to the updating of information technology skills and the learning of a foreign language. The report from (GDVT, 2011, p.47) documented that “science research, foreign language and applied information technology competences among vocational teachers are still limited. Therefore, their ability to keep themselves updated of new knowledge and technology is yet to be satisfactory”.

The last issue impacting upon the quality of VET programs identified by the six key stakeholders was the ratio of VET teacher to meet the standard

requirements of the General Directorate Vocational Training. According to the report from GDVT (2011, p.45), only 57.8% of VET teachers met the standards of occupational skill (level 4 per 7, or equivalent and higher). In regards to the academic skills, the ratio of vocational teachers in vocational colleges was 80.8%, in secondary vocational schools 71.2%, and at the vocational centres 53.5%.

#### **5.3.2.4 Factor 4 - Facility and equipment**

The next factor that impact to quality of VET programs was the infrastructure and equipment at VET providers. Six key stakeholders listed a series of weaknesses.

- The theoretical studying room and practical workshop have small and insufficient space for practise.
- The place for recreation and sport is not enough.
- The infrastructure such as water system, electricity and toilets to serve at dorm are poor and bad services.
- The equipment for teaching and practising is not enough.
- The equipment for practical lessons was outdated. They always are the old versions compared with the machines and technology of industries. They are not compatible with, nor suitable for the reality of modern manufacturing.
- The materials for practical lessons are not enough, especially with the mechanical occupations such as welding and automobile.

The main reason for the negative evaluations from the key stakeholders on the issue of facility and equipment is the spread and extensive investment by the Government on the public VET providers (Vu, 2015). According to a report from the Institute for Scientific Research Vocational Education (2013), by the end of September 2013, VET network had 1,337 vocational training institutions, including 159 vocational colleges, 305 vocational secondary schools and 873 vocational training centres, increasing 1.5 times more than in 2006. Thus the government cannot have sufficient financial resources to invest

in all of the VET providers mentioned above (Vu, 2015). Besides, the vocational socialization is also facing difficulties due to the lack of specific policies and support mechanisms for investors in the VET sector (Cao, 2015). Interestingly, Vietnamese Government has considered these problems and Vice Prime Minister Vu Duc Dam stressed that the VET sector must be reformed and innovated. He said that "VET sector must look into the facts, review all VET providers and reorganization whole the VET system. Government cannot continue to cover all the ineffective schools."

### **5.3.2.5 Factor 5 - Perception of society on VET sector**

The last factor to impact the quality of VET programs was the perceptions in society of the VET sector. At the meeting, six key stakeholders were in consensus and admitted that the perception of society towards VET pathway was that it had disadvantages in comparison with other academic streams.

The most negative view to the VET sector comes from perceptions of parents and students. Vice minister of MOLISA Nguyen (2015) said that:

*'The biggest difficulty for the VET system now is the thinking and perception of parents. Parents always want their children to become the manager. They will not accept if their children working in an industrial environment or becoming blue collar level. Besides, the students do not understand clearly their real capabilities and preferences. They only enrol in VET programs if they have no other studying options'.*

Also at the conference, he indicates the solution to improve parents' perceptions towards VET programs was that:

*'Communication is the powerful tool to change the perception of not only students but also parents and other classes in society. Along with consulting the career choice at the high schools and marketing VET programs on the media, we have to make the mechanisms and policies more attractive to encourage young people going to VET programs such as no tuition fee for VET students whereas if students go to university pathway, they must pay huge tuition fee.'*

The following negative view is from the industrial side. The manager of Information Technology Company (one of the members in the panel of the discussion) said that currently, enterprises have priorities or prefer to employ academic graduates, although the jobs require VET graduates. The director explained that the quality of VET inputs (weak academic results at secondary schools) is low. Furthermore, the quality of vocational education training at the VET providers is not highly appreciated. While, annually there over 162,000 bachelors, engineers, even master graduates who do not find a job (MOLISA, 2014).

Another negative view was the knowledge of guidance counsellors at secondary schools on the VET programs is limitation. The principal of lower secondary school (one of the member at the workshop) said that “the understanding of the VET system by guidance counsellors at secondary schools is weak and confused”. This statement was in line with the recognition of the Vice director of GDVT (Cao, 2015). He has recognized that the staff and teachers at vocational training institutions and guidance counsellors at secondary schools do not understand fully, nor know clearly, the content of VET programs necessary to advise and inform their students. Moreover, schools want their students to achieve good results at the end of academic year as illustrated by the percentages of students to enrol to year 10 (lower secondary school) and the ratio of high school student who pass the university examination. Teachers at these schools are normally unhappy if their students do not enter the academic pathways.

The next negative view is the role of the media on the VET sector. Six key stakeholders pointed out that the media favoured the mainstream educational pathways, whereas the programs of vocational education training have not received adequate attention, commensurate with its role in the industrialization and modernization of the country. In addition, according to Hoang (2014), currently, the educational system of Vietnam is too complicated with unclear definition of the educational levels such as the technical education level, vocational education levels, academic college level and higher educational levels. Also, the connection between other levels of education pathways is



limitation, as results it has created the confusion as to the TVET system and does not create confidence in students, parents and employers.

The last negative view from six key stakeholders is the responsibilities of Government towards VET sector. They blamed to the role of Government on opening too many universities in a short period. In this context, VET programs have been disadvantaged in comparison with others academic streams and lack the skilled human resources to serve industry to 2020. According to (MOET, 2014) statistic in the period from 1999 to 2013, 222 universities and colleges were established and upgradated. As result, VET pathway always is the last choice of student to enrol, leading to low recruitment. According to Cao (2015) pointed out that the opening of the both public and private universities has absorbed almost all potential secondary students resulting in few potential students to enrol in the VET programs. As far as the massive establishment of the universities in the short time is concerned, Professor Thuyet (2014) argued that the series of university development in recent times is not reasonable. He said that "In my opinion, to solve the right problem to develop the higher education size, it must be based on at least three parameters. Firstly, it is the demand for manpower in the period of industrialization and modernization of the country. Secondly, it depends on the current capacity of the national economy. Thirdly, it is the ability of the university to meet the requirements of industries and society. In other words, it is the health of the higher education system such as facility and equipment for teaching and learning, and the lecturers' ability". However, the plan of Government on the establishment the higher education system does not rely on these parameters (Nguyen, 2014). According to decision 121/2007/QĐ-TTg of Prime Minister, the development plan of higher education size in 2020 will be 467 universities and colleges not including the institutions in four big cities Hanoi, Ho Chi Minh, Danang and Can Tho. At the moment, the opening too many universities in the short time resulting in three first months of 2014, there were over 162,000 bachelors and masters do not find a job (MOLISA, 2014) whereas lack of high skilled workforce to serve for industries.

### 5.3.3 Summary

This part presented the history, development, preparation and process of the NGT approach as well as the advantages and disadvantages of the technique in investigating six key stakeholders' perceptions towards VET sector. The use of the nominal group technique enabled six key stakeholders to obtain an extensive and varied list of factors that impact the quality of VET. Five most important factors namely Government policies on the VET sector; Curriculum; the teacher's ability; Linking between VET providers and industries; Facility and equipment; Perception of society on VET sector emerged; and Government policies on the VET sector was ranked firstly impacting to the quality of VET programs.

The explanation why six key stakeholders voted the factor of Government policies on VET sector as the most important is linked to the definition of perception. The reality or the setting changes, the individual's perceptions and attitudes on a phenomenon will be changed (Steven & Mary, 2003). In other words, Government policies or the roles of Government are key and conclusive factor to make reality changing, as result leading to change the perception. The finding from approach indicates that the current policies of Government on the field of vocational education training such as the policies and mechanisms on the relationship between VET providers and enterprises or the policies on the salary of VET teachers are not strong enough to change the perception of the social strata, especially from students, parents and industries.

The second most important factor: Curriculum impacting the quality of VET programs is linked to the Hoang (2014) statement. "The current TVET curriculum has a big jump of changing towards associated with the capacity standards or skill standards. However, a training program is built well and linked to the needs of the labour market. It just stops in the blueprints". He argued that the quality of VET is related with the activities such as the implementation of teaching and learning process, the assessment, the ability of lecturer, the facilities and equipment, the monitor on the quality of Government and the motivations and attitudes of the learner that they are the key factors. He

employed the metaphor of the theatre to explain, that is, a well-designed curriculum that is actor poor (lecturers) plus lack of props (facilities and equipment) will not perform well as the script.

The next part will present the data triangulation technique to triangulate the results from survey questionnaire, open-ended interview questions and nominal group technique.

## **5.4 Triangulation in action**

Through the triangulation technique, the results from survey questionnaire, open-ended interview questions and nominal group technique were compared and triangulated to see if similar results emerge. If the conclusions from each of the methods are the same, then validity is established (Mays & Pope, 2000).

In the final process, two reliable findings emerged from the research. First, it revealed that the issue of the relationship between VET providers and industries scored in the results of all three methods, and this has been seen as the factor of convergence to impact the quality of VET programs. The second finding emergent from the data triangulation was that a web of influences on the students' perception of the VET sector was mapped.

### **5.4.1 The first reliable result**

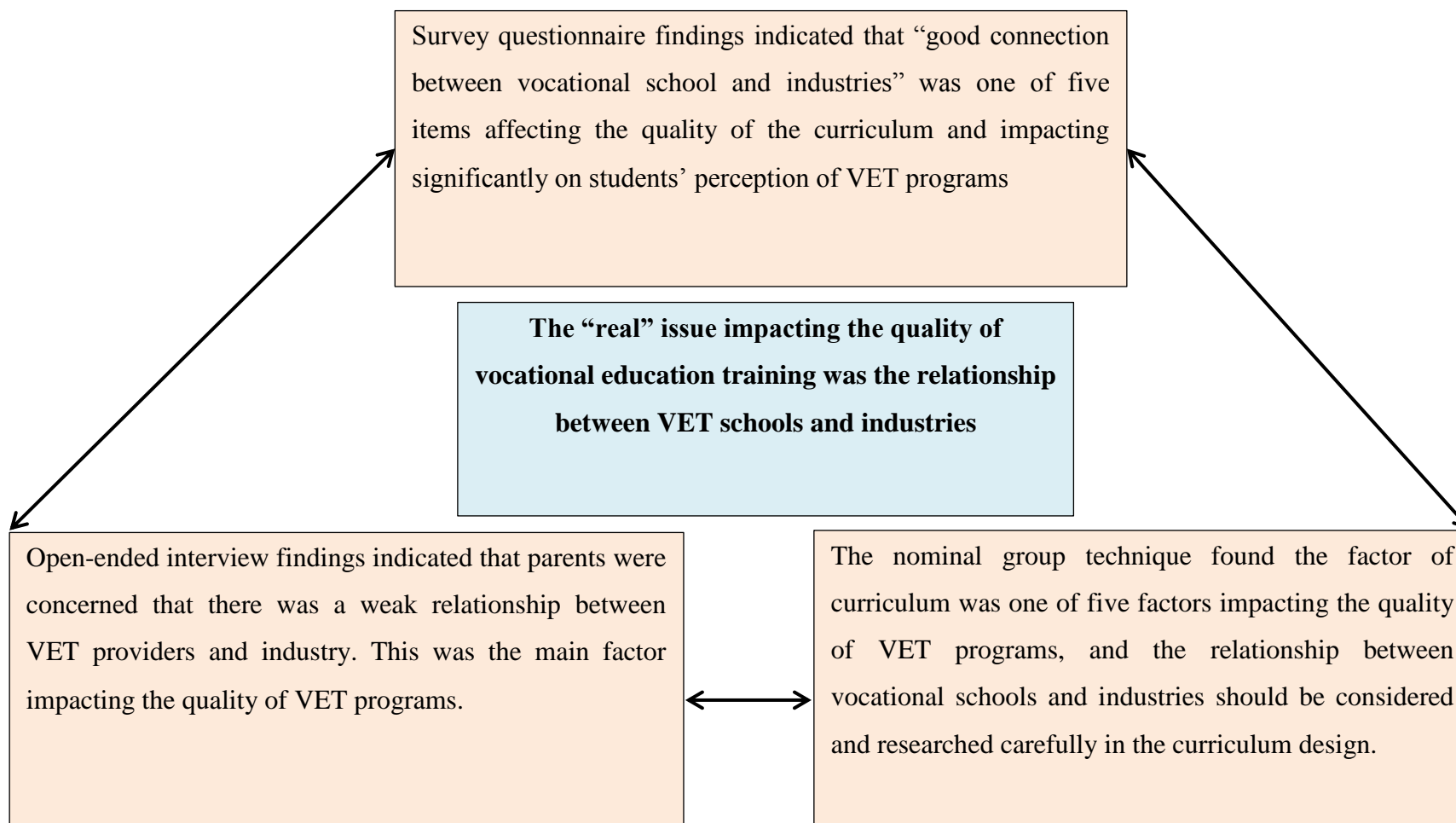
The findings from the survey questionnaire indicated that the VET's image had a direct correlation in both positive and negative ways with the students' perceptions on pursuing and completing VET programs. Moreover, the dimensions of quality of curriculum and entry requirements impacted significantly on the students' perception of the VET programs. In other words, they were the predictors of students' perception. In this, the dimension of quality of curriculum was constructed by 5 items. One of these was to provide a good relationship between VET providers and industries.

The findings from the open-ended interview questions also indicated that parents had both negative and positive perceptions of the VET sector, but

leaned towards the negative side. Parents were also concerned that at the time of the interviews, there was a weak relationship between VET providers and industries and that this issue was the main problem impacting on the quality of VET programs. They therefore felt that it was essential for the Government to foster more cooperation between VET providers and the industrial sector.

Using the nominal group technique, six key stakeholders discussed and listed the five issues that emerged as the most important forces impacting upon the quality of VET programs in Vietnam. One of these issues was the curriculum and it was ranked as the second most important issues after the issues of Government policies. At the workshop, six key stakeholders pointed out that three weak points in the design of the VET curriculum were (1) the VET curriculum was not designed based on the output standards or learning outcomes; (2) the VET curriculum does not equip fully students with the theory, the practical and soft skills needed; and (3) the relationship between the VET schools and industries should be strengthened and that there should be more input from industry when compiling VET curriculum. So the issue of the relationship between VET providers and industries was mentioned again as an important issue impacting the quality of VET programs (see figure 23).

Figure 23: Data triangulation result (Source: by analysis from author)



## **5.4.2 The second reliable result**

The second finding emergent from the data triangulation was that a web of influences on the students' perception of the VET sector was mapped. These influences were grouped into internal and external issues. The internal issue contained the influences from family/parents and school/guidance counsellors. The external issue comprised of four influences namely: (1) government policies; (2) social perceptions; (3) VET image; and (4) media (see figure 24).

The first influence came from family especially the roles of parents. The finding was revealed in the qualitative approach open-ended interview questions and the discussions at the nominal group technique workshop.

The second influence was from the guidance counsellors who had a special role in guiding and helping students to choose the right career choice. This finding emerged in the qualitative approach open-ended interview questions.

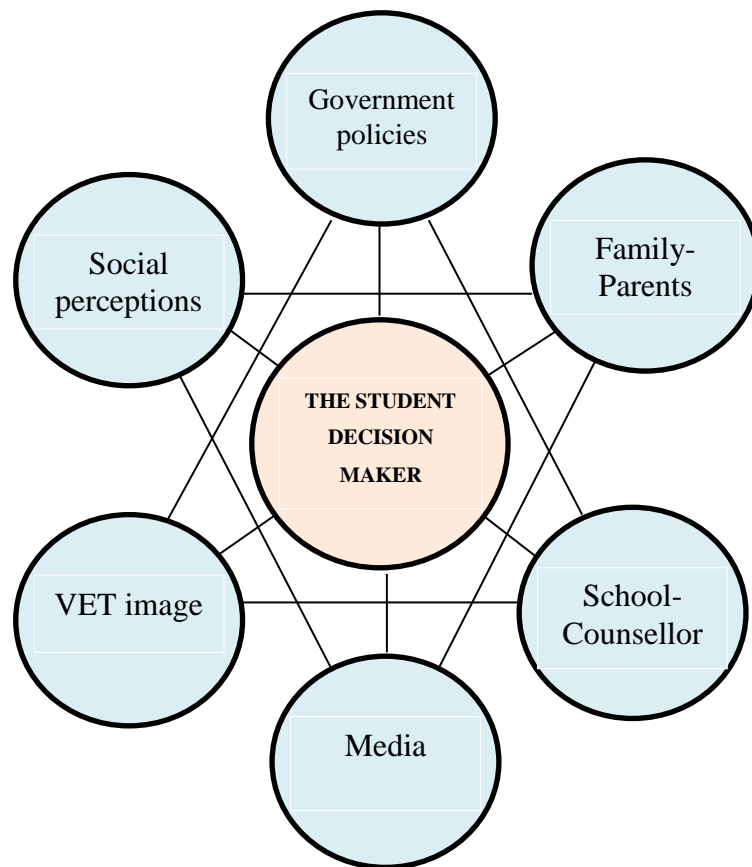
The third influence came from the government policies. It was the finding from the nominal group technique approach and was ranked as the most important issue impacting the quality of the VET program.

The fourth influence was from the social perceptions such as the stigma in the society on the sector and the priorities of the media on the mainstream pathway. This finding was found at the open-ended interview questions approach and the nominal group technique.

The fifth influence came from the VET image itself. This finding was revealed not only in the quantitative approach such as dimensions of entry requirement and curriculum but also in the qualitative approach such as the evaluations from parents on the issue of the teacher's ability, and facility and equipment.

The last influence was from the media. This finding was found by the consensus of 6 key stakeholders at the nominal group technique workshop.

Figure 24: Web of influences (Source: by analysis from author)



## 5.5 Conclusions

To explore various key stakeholders' perceptions towards the VET sector, this study used a mixed method approach including quantitative, qualitative and semi quantitative approaches. The quantitative approach survey questionnaire explored the perceptions of three types of student (300 lower, 300 upper secondary and 300 vocational students) across Vietnam from North to South.

Using the mean data analysis technique, the findings indicated that in general students had positive perceptions towards the VET image and loyalty on the VET programs. Using the EFA technique, the model of VET image and students' loyalty was established, in which seven dimensions namely (1) entry requirement; (2) facility and equipment; (3) recognition of qualification; (4) student career and job potential; (5) quality of curriculum; (6) social skills; and (7) soft skills represented for the VET image and two dimensions namely (1) future study choice and (2) earning potential represented for students' loyalty

towards the VET programs. Applying the correlation analysis, the results revealed that all dimensions of VET image correlated significantly with two dimensions of students' loyalty towards the VET programs with exceptional being the recognition of qualification and social skills dimensions on earning potential dimension. Using the linear regression analysis, the findings showed that the quality of curriculum and entry requirement dimension impacted significantly to the students' loyalty towards the VET programs. Through the data triangulation technique, two reliable findings emerged. First, it revealed that the issue of the relationship between VET providers and industries scored in the results of all three methods, and this has been seen as the factor of convergence to impact the quality of VET programs. The second finding emergent from the data triangulation was that a web of influences on the students' perception of the VET sector was mapped.



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Name of Principal Supervisor: SENIOR LECTURER, DR BRIAN DENMAN

Candidate

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VI HOANG DANG

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Principal Supervisor

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Candidate	VI HOANG DANG	100%
Other Authors		

Name of Candidate: VI HOANG DANG

Name/title of Principal Supervisor: SENIOR LECTURER: DR BRIAN DENMAN

VI HOANG DANG  
Candidate

03/06/2016  
Date



\_\_\_\_\_  
Principal Supervisor

03/06/2016  
Date

## Chapter 6: Discussions

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## **The relationships between the vocational education training providers and enterprises: Theory and practice**

Vi Hoang Dang

Namdinh Vocational College, Vietnam

University of New England, Australia

Email: [hdang2@myune.edu.au](mailto:hdang2@myune.edu.au)

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### **Abstract**

The importance of the relationships between industry and academia is stressed by strategists, politicians, Vocational Education Training (VET) policy makers, and industrial planners. Industry without knowledge surely dies, and knowledge without application of that knowledge is valueless. This paper focuses on the relationships between the VET providers and industries. More specifically, the purpose of this paper is (1) to discuss the factors which enhance or constrain the strategic partnership, (2) to present the experiences of this relationship in the developing and developed countries, (3) to propose a model that links the two institutions, the VET providers and industries, in the Vietnamese context.

**Keywords:** The VET provider-industry relationship, theory, practice, and Vietnam

## 6.1 Introduction

Emerging from the data analysis and findings presented in this thesis is the understanding that the concept of VET in Vietnam is described and understood in a number of different ways by different stakeholders. This gives an intriguing insight into possible reasons why there has been no consistent support for, and implementation of, VET in Vietnam. If stakeholders have different ideas about what VET is, and what the benefits of implementing VET programs are, then we cannot expect a concentrated and united effort.

Nevertheless, in this study, evidence demonstrates that there is some degree of stakeholder consensus on the issue of the relationships between the VET providers and industry and their direct impact on students' perception towards VET programs. In relation to students' views, the issue of relationship between VET providers and industries significantly impacted students' students towards VET programs. Parental perspectives indicated a weak relationship between VET providers and industry. This was the main factor impacting the quality of VET programs. The views from six key stakeholders at the nominal group workshop, indicated that issue of government policies were a primary concern, followed by the relationship between vocational schools and industries primarily focused on curriculum design which should be carefully considered and researched.

This chapter is structured to expand the discussion on the issue of the relationship between VET providers and industry. It begins with a review of the different approaches that may be taken to form strategic partnerships among key stakeholders in the VET sector and a discussion of the factors that enhance or constrain the associated strategic partnerships. Secondly, models depicting the relationships between VET providers and industry in developing and developed countries in the world are described as examples for discussion. Lastly, based on these models, recommendations for boosting the comprehensive cooperation between VET schools and industries in Vietnam are proposed.



It is noted that author copied and pasted the main parts in the published paper, then put them into the chapter to aim eliminating the duplications. For the full details of the paper and references, please go to appendix number 16.

## **6.2 Shaping the strategic partnerships between stakeholders in VET**

The term strategic partnership has gradually emerged to describe a new form of governance. According to Mitchell (1998, p. 10), “a strategic partnership involves some shape of formal agreement between two (a bilateral partnership) or more (a network partnership) parties that have agreed to share finance, skills, information, and/or other resources in the pursuit of common goals.” Key stakeholders are involved in three levels of relationship namely the micro, macro and meso level (Mitchell, 1998).

### **6.2.1 Macro to micro level stakeholder involvement**

At the macro level, partnership involves the governmental bodies of a VET system. According to Atchoarena (1999) and Mitchell (1998) there must be strong political ties for forming partnerships in the VET sector in order to make connections between the working world and the education system. Macro level partnerships may involve government systems, national policies on training and worker representation, all the way to materials donated by businesses.

Meso level partnerships take place in the sector area. According to Mitchell (1998), meso level partnerships may involve public and private institutions involved in the automobile industry or even donations of big manufacturers to schools involved in the same sector.

Mitchell (1998, p. 12) argues that the micro level partnerships take place “between individual firms and public training institutions, and may also involve the local government and public and private training providers, including voluntary agencies”

## **6.2.2 Factors affecting strategic partnerships**

A multitude of factors affect the success of strategic partnerships. However there is some consensus as to which issues are most important when generating ideas regarding strategic partnerships in the VET sector. According to Mitchell (1998), there are three main factors that enhance or constrain strategic partnership: (1) the first involves the economic situation, the degree of technological progress, and the extent of private sector development in a context of increased global competition of the given country, (2) the second is the strong political commitment required to shape the links with industry. According to Atchoarena (1995), in order to create the appropriate environment for a partnership to develop, it is the government's task to formulate the laws, policies, and mechanisms enabling the stakeholders to take responsibility and participate, not only to defend their own views, but in the best interest of all parties. Strategic issues for which clear legislation are required include access, provision, financing, certification, and social dialogue; (3) the third factor that constrains or enhances the strategic partnership is the involvement of local key stakeholders. They have been seen as the main actors in the vocational education and training field and impact significantly on the skill development of the local workforce (Bünning, Frank, Schnarr, & Alexander, 2007). According to Mitchell (1998), the ever changing local needs can be responded to if partnerships are responsive towards local demand. Sustainable partnerships depend greatly on the power granted by governments to the private sector and the government's degree of control over shared systems with the private sector. Also the strengths and weaknesses of each partner must be taken into consideration at all three levels of partnership in order to make collaborations effective.

## **6.3 Examples of the relationships between the VET providers and industries**

### **6.3.1 Germany - a dual system**

A dual system of vocational education law is implemented in Germany for vocational education and training. In the first part of the system, the aim of vocational education is explained in detail. In the second part the places of learning are identified as industry-based training provided by individual companies, and a separate school-based component. The law mandates a partnership in which the two learning locations namely; industry and vocational education providers must co-operate.

The responsibility of the Vocational Training Directive Department is to determine the scale and content of an occupation. According to Bünning, Frank, Schnarr and Alexander (2007) vocational schools in Germany have a “curricular remainder function” this adds to general and vocational subjects during vocational training in companies. Students are not required to sign contracts with regard to vocational training with schools but they are with the company and depending on part-time or full time study students they may be required to work on site.

### **6.3.2 France - a school-based system**

Vocational training in France involves full-time study at vocational schools. Learners in France must choose from four possible pathways after completing their secondary education. The first pathway involves the usual route that leads to university. The second pathway involves studying at a technical school and continuing a technical subject all the way to university. The third pathway involves attending vocational high school in order to be directly prepared for work, leading to a professional qualification. The fourth pathway vocational training is provided by the employer and the responsibility of theoretical component is left to education centers so that the school and company share equal responsibility. The student must sign a training contract with the

company involved and in return the student will receive a monthly salary of between 30-80% of the companies' minimum wage. The duration can vary between 1 to 3 years. This pathway according to Bünning, Frank, Schnarr, & Alexander (2007) is chosen by a third of French learners enrolled in vocational education.

According to Bünning, Frank & Schnarr, and Alexander (2007), in France, the relationship between the VET providers and industries is not valued highly because, the VET system is strongly centralized and the government is in charge of all laws governing vocational education and training. However, this relationship makes it easier for the companies to take in students who are prepared for work through the training contract.

### **6.3.3 Great Britain - an industry-based system**

In Great Britain many organizations can issue a national vocational qualification (NVQ) under the governance of the Qualification and Curriculum Authority (QCA). The vocational education system in Great Britain is founded on the belief that regardless of the circumstance any person can acquire a vocational qualification. The NVQ is not concerned with the way the qualifications are obtained, rather it focuses on the required qualifications and how one performs with regard to a specific job.

Programs for these qualifications are based on the principle of combining different learning units without any time restrictions, and the actual skills of the students are assessed. Further education institutions, VET providers and employers undertake the training of students. The focus of the QCA is on the qualifications necessary for specific job rather than on the way the qualification is obtained. As a result there are no partnerships between vocational education training providers and industry. Bünning, Frank, Schnarr and Alexander (2007) argue that "In this system, consideration is given to establishing national mechanisms, ensuring a level of autonomy and decentralization on the local

level, considering the characteristics of the private sector, and creating a positive attitude among all partners”.

### **6.3.4 South Korea - contract-based training**

This model involves specific vocational training as identified by required by industry and companies to be undertaken within technical high schools. This model is characterized by a temporary contract between all parties involved namely, the school, company and the student. Certain obligations must be met by the parties involved, these include:

- Contract based training (CBT) to be offered by the company and undertaken by a technical high school.
- The school and the company agree on the way CBT is implemented.
- The CBT program is designed and carried out by the school.
- Students who complete CBT are guaranteed employment with the company.
- The students must agree, with their parent’s understanding, to work for 2 years with the company after graduation.

In CBT the school must seek and find the company to initiate the partnership and it is also in charge of student enrolment. Students work in their sponsoring companies after completion of CBT. In return the school receives financial and organizational government support.

### **6.3.5 China**

At a national education conference held in China in 1994, practice in the workplace combined with studying was found to be crucial to socialist education and so cooperation between vocational education training institutions and the industry are seen as essential to improving vocational education training capacity and outcome. Wu (2009) describes four main models of cooperation, each is explained below in detail.

### **6.3.5.1 The “Mutual Cooperation between Enterprise and School” model**

This model involves the enterprise finding an advisable school partner. Thus an enterprise will search for a reputable vocational education training school and form an agreement that clearly states the responsibilities of both the enterprise and the school. This model is beneficial for both enterprises and schools and can aid with the enterprises’ production process.

### **6.3.5.2 The ‘Training by Order’ model**

In this model, unlike the first model, the job of choosing is left to the school and the school must search for a suitable enterprise. The role of the enterprise is to provide funding and equipment and also to be part of the management board at the school. The role of the school is to design training programs and courses to suite the enterprise needs. Once the students graduate they will be involved in paid employment at the enterprise as part of the contract between the school and the enterprise.

### **6.3.5.3 The “Combined School – Factory” model**

In the combined school-factory model the vocational education training school work together with an enterprise and run a joint program with the aim of aiding the local economy. Both the school and enterprise profit greatly from this joined venture. In this model the principle of the VET school has two roles, not only as the head of the school but also as a director for the enterprise. Teachers also play an important role in increasing production in the industry and also increase the schools profits. Students enrolled also receive high recognition by the community and are highly valued by employers in the industry. The school itself is also admired in the community for its high standards of teaching.

### **6.3.5.4 The ‘International Cooperation’ model**

In the international cooperation model as the name implies is an international cooperation between enterprises and VET providers. Its aim is to improve the

standard of teaching and services to the local economy. VET institutions in China gain from this international cooperation with foreign vocational-oriented institutions by setting up international networks for collaboration. A successful example of this model is the Beijing Transportation and Communication School. Its aim is to provide VET in order to aid the transportation and communication in Beijing and improve the overall economy of the city. The Beijing VET School has been modernized by using a western approach. By collaborating with the Toyota Company from Japan in 1994, the Beijing Transportation and Communication School has made great contributions to the automotive industry in China by providing skilled labor.

## **6.4 The lessons for the VET system in Vietnam**

### **6.4.1 Linkage between VET providers and industry**

According to Bünning, Frank, Schnarr, and Alexander (2009), there are three main types of vocational education training delivery. The first type is known as school-based training, of which the French system is a good example. The second type is industry-led, where industry sets the standards for the skills required in the workplace. The good example of model of this the industry-based training practiced in Great Britain. The last type involves the combination of two training places (school and industry), of which the dual German system is a good example.

Currently, the Vietnamese VET system operates as a school-based training system that resembles the French VET system (London, 2011). There are two main characteristics of this type of system. Firstly, the government has major responsibility for regulating the system. An example of this is, Law on Vocational Training that was introduced by the Vietnamese government in 2006 and passed by the National Assembly. However, regarding the relationship between the VET providers and industries, according to the Law on Vocational Training 2006, Chapter 5, Article 55, the government merely

encourages this relationship. There are not any policies or detailed mechanisms that specify the rights and responsibilities of each institution.

Currently, VET providers only deliver the training programs that were designed using the Developing a Curriculum (DACUM) process which did not involve industry input (Nguyen, 2013). This was done under the aegis of the Ministry of Labour Invalids and Social Affairs (Vocational law, 2006). The DACUM process is used to determine the competencies that should be addressed in a training curriculum for a specific occupation. In 2013, MOLISA approved 126 specific occupations at the national level, called National Occupational Skill Standards (NOSS). This demonstrates that the VET providers have driven the skilled human resource market. In other words, the VET schools are the main institutions responsible for producing the skilled workforce for the labor market. The NOSS have many benefits - they assist agencies supplying labor by specifying the skills required of local and foreign workers; and they assist in remuneration decision-making. NOSS also help the training institutions in providing the basis for curriculum development; developing their teaching, learning and assessment resources; assisting in the design of buildings and equipment; and identifying the plant, materials, and equipment for effective training.

However, the main weak point of NOSS is the lack of or limited involvement of industries in designing the curriculum and evaluation in the training process (Nguyen, 2013). As result, VET graduates do not meet the requirements of industry (Hoang, 2014). In addition, industry has not seen much benefit in this cooperative relationship (Mac, 2009). In the current situation, industries have the advantage that they benefit from trained employees but have no obligation to contribute in return to the VET providers.

Secondly, Vietnamese students spend almost all their time in learning and practicing at the schools, with practical time in industries amounting to only about 15% - 25% of the total (GDVT, 2011). Table 22 summarizes the time that advanced diploma level students spend in school and industry (GDVT,



2011). As mentioned, Vietnamese students spend only about 20% of their time in industry gaining on-site skills. This is in contrast to the French situation where students are required to spend 50% of their time in the industry working environment, and in Germany where they spend three or four days each week working in an industrial environment and only one or two days studying theory in school (Bünning, Frank, Schnarr, & Alexander, 2007).

Table 22: Time students spend learning and practicing in school, and working in industry (Source: by analysis from author)

Units	Total time (hours)	Theory time	Practical time	Exam time
General units (in school)	450	220	200	30
Professional units (in school)	2400	656	1584	160
Practical units (in industry)	640	36	544	60

## 6.4.2 The lessons for Vietnam

From the examples of the various types of partnership between VET schools and enterprises described above, Vietnamese VET policy makers can learn two important lessons about linkages between the two institutions.

The first lesson concerns the involvement and intervention of government in orientation, guidance and support through the policies and mechanisms of the cooperation. The examples from Germany (the government legislates on the relationship between two organizations), and South Korea (students and enterprises have contracts based on the policies and mechanisms set by the government) are valuable references for Vietnamese VET policy makers. Interestingly, the link between VET institutions and businesses with the involvement of the government fits in well with the Triple Helix model

(Etzkowitz, 1993; Leydesdorff, 1995). The concept of the Triple Helix model developed out of the shift from the dominant industry-government dyad existing in industrial society to a growing triadic relationship between university-industry-government in the knowledge society, in which industry operates in the Triple Helix as the locus of production; the government as the source of contractual relations that guarantee stable interactions and exchange; and the university as a source of the production of new knowledge and technology.

The second lesson concerns the strong autonomy of VET providers have in developing partnerships with enterprises. All the examples of relationships between VET providers and industries in China are valuable models for VET policy makers and principals of VET schools to consider. This means that the heads of VET schools are not only the educators but also have the role of initiating and developing the relationships with industries.

From these two important lessons, four recommendations for Vietnamese policy makers, industrial managers, and principals of VET schools emerge. It should be noted that the government has a role as the adjudicator in the orientation, guidance, and support of this cooperation, and VET schools lead and drive the establishment of the relationships. On the other hand, the role of industries has been seen as the best environment to support students in practicing what they have learnt at school.

First, as the referee in the relationship, the government should clearly identify the rights and responsibilities of the state, communities and industries in the vocational education training field. In addition, to support the relationship more effectively, the government should provide more opportunities for VET schools and enterprises to meet to discuss the requirements of each institution. For example, an action that the government can take would be to establish a committee or a forum where representatives from both sides could discuss the current and future needs, and other conditions of the relationship. These committees or forums could be established at both national and local level

because the needs and the requirements of the two organizations are different at each level. Furthermore, with the agreement of the government, consideration should be given to providing the VET schools with more autonomy in curriculum design. The various approaches in developing partnerships between VET schools and industries in China are useful examples for the heads of VET school to follow.

Second, industries are seen as the most important stakeholders and provide the best opportunities for students to practice in a real-life working environment. Therefore, industries should have a positive attitude and welcome students as genuine workers in the company. The big question is how to nurture a positive attitude among industry leaders and allay their concerns about having students in their workplace. According to Mac (2009), the solution to this situation is linked to the roles of the government. In this case, government should clearly identify and point out the rights of and benefits to industrial enterprises, and support them in this linkage by, for example, reducing their tax or granting them land to establish the VET schools inside the enterprises (Vocational Training Law, 2006).

Another important recommendation to industry leaders concerns their role in supplying more information to VET providers about what they require from the skilled workforce. In other words, the industries should point out clearly the job standards, and detail their requirements to VET schools. To achieve, the involvement of industry leaders on the managerial boards of VET schools should be encouraged so that they can contribute to curriculum design and evaluation of the training process (Mori, 2013). In addition, there should be open channels of communication between these industry leaders and the VET schools so that the schools can consult quickly and easily with a nominated contact person from the industry side (Mori, 2013).

Fourth, two recommendations are proposed to assist the VET providers in establishing effective cooperation. First, the VET providers should initiate the establishment of partnerships with industrial enterprises (the experiences from

South Korea and China). According to Rees (2015), “at least, the VET providers have to know what the local businesses need and require”. Supporting Rees's view, Cao (2015), the Deputy Director of the General Department of Vocational Training (GDVT), affirmed that making connections between local businesses and vocational schools will be the target of the Vietnamese VET sector in the future. To develop these linkages, the GDVT should consider the relationship between VET providers and industries as one of the requirements in the accreditation framework. Second, the VET schools should improve, enhance and update the training programs with the permission of the government. At the moment, the GDVT allows the VET schools to adjust the curriculum and training programs by up to 30%. However, according to Mori (2013), the VET institutions do not use this opportunity to increase the practical, industry-based component of the curriculum.

### **6.4.3 The model for the linkage between the VET providers and industries**

Considering the Vietnamese context, political issues, the examples, and the discussion on cooperation between VET providers and industries in the previous section, a suitable model is proposed called “school-based apprenticeships”. Interestingly, this model fits in well with the model of Nguyen (2013) described in his PhD thesis.

#### **6.4.3.1 What is the involvement of the key stakeholders in the model?**

The model is comprised of three components being a combination of secondary school subjects, paid work, and vocational education training undertaken on the job. There are four key stakeholders involved in this model. The first key stakeholder is the student who will enter the VET programs. The apprentice/trainee must obtain at least a year 9 certificate (Education Law, 2009). This means that any student who has passed year 9, 10, 11 or 12 would be eligible to apply. The second key stakeholder is the VET provider who provides both secondary subjects and the vocational education training. The

third key stakeholder is the industry that provides the workplace for the students to practice, to work and get paid through the contract they have with the students. The fourth key stakeholder is the government, represented by Ministry of Labor Invalid Social Affair (MOLISA). MOLISA is responsible for providing information and support to apprentices, trainees, and employers regarding all aspects of the apprenticeship or traineeship including incentives available. Table 23 describes the current model of the relationship between VET providers and industries, and the proposed model.

Table 23: Current and proposed model of the relationship between VET providers and industries (Source: by analysis from author)

<b>Current model</b>	<b>Proposed model</b>
The school-driven mode that offers the currently available programs	The industry-driven mode that offers services and meets the requirements of the labor market and industries.
The training curriculum is fixed with limited involvement of industries in the design of curriculum.	The training curriculum is flexible with the strong involvement of industries in the design and evaluation.
Graduated student seeks a job by himself or herself.	Students sign a contract with the employer.
The role of government is centralized and inflexible.	A decentralized, flexible and diversified VET system that offers multiple entries and exits for all.
Industry stands outside of the training process.	Industry is a part of the training process.

#### **6.4.3.2 The benefits of this model**

The main reason this model is proposed is because it has been shown to meet the requirements of students, community, and industries. On the student side, this model not only provides lower secondary student graduates, students who

have completed year 10, 11 and 12 opportunities to enter the VET sector, but also provides work experience in industries. In other words, it offers real flexibility and variety (Queensland Government, 2015). The secondary students comprising of lower secondary graduates (year 9), students year 10, 11 and 12 who enroll in the VET sector firstly have an opportunity to get the Higher School Certificate and secondly to attain a nationally recognized Vocational Education and Training (VET) qualification. In addition, they gain valuable work skills and experience and get paid through their contract with industries. After completion of the VET program, students have the choice of immediate employment or entering the higher education pathway.

This model also contributes to the community. Employers who take on school-based apprentices can make a real difference by motivating young people to work towards their future goals and giving them realistic exposure to their industry or sector.

In addition, this model is very satisfactory for the employers and the industry leaders. Employers and supervisors often experience a great deal of satisfaction with the process as they help individuals acquire new skills and gain confidence in a work environment. There is confidence that once students have left school, they will meet the requirements of their employers.

#### **6.4.3.3 The challenges**

However, there are two main challenges for the VET sector in putting this model into practice. First, the model of school-based or school-driven training has been entrenched in the VET sector since it was established in 1969. Thus it is ingrained in the perception of all classes of society. The shift from the school-driven model to the industrial-led model requires not only the involvement of the government but also the positive support of industries. This shift will also require the VET providers to take the initiative in developing partnerships with industries. Second, the VET sector is negatively perceived by students, parents and industry. With the concerted efforts of the government and significant investment in the sector, it is vital that the image of the sector is

improved. A campaign to market the sector needs to emphasize the fundamental reforms proposed.

## **6.5 Conclusions**

In summary, this chapter examines the terms of strategic partnership; the factors that enhance or constrain the linkage between VET providers and industry; and the various models of partnerships in five countries provide a range of experiences. Vietnamese VET policy makers can learn from these models and adopt elements of them as they deem appropriate. However, it is important that the school-business collaboration does not become dominated by one of the partners, the government, schools, or industry, each of which may run independent of one another or alternate in value during the relationship stages.

The government takes importance because of its managing, planning and coordinating duties. The government provides financial resources and gives merit to legal cooperative action.

The school takes importance because of its role in implementing training programs and providing enterprise specific services, it carries out school run enterprises that focus on teaching and production.

The industry takes importance for beginning the collaboration and by utilizing the resources available to VET schools, helps to produce quality outcomes.

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Name of Principal Supervisor: SENIOR LECTURER, DR BRIAN DENMAN

Candidate

Date

VI HOANG DANG

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Principal Supervisor

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Candidate	VI HOANG DANG	100%
Other Authors		

Name of Candidate: VI HOANG DANG

Name/title of Principal Supervisor: SENIOR LECTURER: DR BRIAN DENMAN

VI HOANG DANG  
Candidate

03/06/2016  
Date



\_\_\_\_\_  
Principal Supervisor

03/06/2016  
Date

## **Chapter 7: Conclusions**

7.1 Overview

7.2 Key conclusions

7.3 The way forward – recommendations

7.4 Implications of the study

7.4.1 Contribution to available body of knowledge of VET

7.4.2 Improving VET awareness and participation

7.4.3 Enhancement of Vietnamese's human resource planning capability

## 7.1 Overview

The VET sector has been burdened with countless problems which have affected its ability to provide an effective platform for service delivery. This study examined the perceptions of key stakeholders in selected provinces of Vietnam to understand some of the key issues and barriers affecting the sector. This chapter draws the key conclusions from the evidence presented and provides some key policy recommendations, which the researcher strongly believe Vietnamese Government, policy makers and its allied partners should consider addressing, and from which, where relevant, the VET sector could derive the opportunities.

## 7.2 Key conclusions

This study used a mixed method approach including the quantitative, qualitative and semi quantitative approaches as the tools to explore the key stakeholders' perceptions towards one phenomenon which is the VET sector in Vietnam. Findings of this study are the result of the analysis of the quantitative data from the survey questionnaire, the qualitative data from the open-ended interview questions and the semi quantitative data from the nominal group technique. The key findings of each approach were listed following:

With respect to the survey questionnaire findings, the results indicated that generally students had positive perceptions towards the image of VET and loyalty towards the VET programs if applied the mean analysis technique. Regarding to the EFA technique combination with correlation analysis, all the dimensions defining the image of VET had statistically significant correlations with the two dimensions (further study choice and earning potential) representing for the students' loyalty towards the VET programs. In regards with the linear regression analysis technique, the results indicated that two dimensions (1) entry requirement and (2) the quality of curriculum impact significantly on the students' loyalty towards the VET programs.

Respect to the open-ended interview findings, the results indicated that generally, VET received both positive and negative observations from parents,

in which a more negative way than some positive highlights. In addition, the viewpoints from parents concerning the issue of the relationship between VET providers and enterprises grouped into three main themes namely (1) a weak connection between VET providers and industry, (2) the clear awareness of parents of the importance and benefits of a healthy two-way relationship between the two key institutions and (3) the expectations by parents that there will be comprehensive cooperation between the two key stakeholders and that this will be effected through the policies and mandates of Government. They pointed out the importance and benefits of the relationship for both the industries and VET providers. However, parents evaluated the current casual connections poorly.

Respect to the nominal group technique findings, six key stakeholders had a high consensus and voted five most important factors namely (1) Government policies on the VET sector; (2) Curriculum; (3) The teacher's ability; (4) Facility and equipment and (5) Perception of society on the VET sector, that influencing to the quality of the VET programs, in which the factor of government policies was ranked firstly and the factor of the relationship between the VET providers and industries secondly.

Through the data triangulation technique, two reliable findings emerged from the research. First, it revealed that the issue of the relationship between VET providers and industries scored in the results of all three approaches, and this has been seen as the factor of convergence to impact the quality of VET programs. The second finding emergent from the data triangulation was that a web of influences on the students' perception of the VET sector. This was visualised through a mapping process. These influences were from (1) family/parents, (2) school/guidance counsellors (3) government policies; (4) social perceptions; (5) VET image; and (6) media.

## 7.3 The way forward – recommendations

This section provides the recommendations; step by step the perceptual change would occur on the VET sector and presents the ways to improve the VET image. There are four recommendations as following:

The first recommendation of this study based on the finding from nominal group technique is that old understandings and notions of VET be eliminated and replaced by an inclusive and revolutionary system under a new name and programme which facilitates smoother transition between school and work. VET system at the moment is not a suitable title to describe the evolution and new direction of technical and vocational training and education in Vietnam as the country seeks to maximise its engagement on the world stage through sustainable economic growth. The name ‘VET’ has played its part for Vietnam’s education system and it must be left in history together with its old identity and understanding. What is needed is a new name, a new identity that adequately captures the vision, innovation and inclusiveness of the new discourse about technical and vocational education and training in Vietnam. This recommendation is linked to the framework of three factors that influencing to the perceptual process of an individual towards the phenomenon (Wood et al., 2001; Robbins et al., 2001). One of characteristics in the factor of the perceived object is the novelty. In this study, VET sector is the perceived object and has reformed itself by the new name with the new responsibilities.

The second recommendation is proposed based on the convergence finding of the study. It is the relationship between the VET providers and industries which is one of the backbone parts in designing the VET curriculum. However, according to the career education law which was passed by Vietnamese national assembly in 2014, how to set up the linkage, the rights and the responsibilities of each key stakeholder such as Government, the VET providers and industries involving in this relationship did not detail clearly. Therefore, this recommendation focuses on the proposal of new relationship namely ‘school-based apprenticeships’. In this proposal, the discussions, the examples of the linkage between two institutions and the roles of each key

stakeholder were given. The main reason this model was proposed, because it has been shown to meet the requirements of students, community, and industries. On the student side, this model not only provides opportunities to enter the VET sector for lower secondary student graduates, students who have completed year 10, 11 and 12, but also provides work experience in industries. This model also contributes to the community. Employers who take on school-based apprentices can make a real difference by motivating young people to work towards their future goals and giving them realistic exposure to their industry or sector. In addition, this model is very satisfactory for the employers and the industry leaders. Employers and supervisors often experience a great deal of satisfaction with the process as they help individuals mould new skills and gain confidence in a work environment. There is confidence to state that with this model the VET image will be enhanced and gradually eliminate the negative perceptions towards the VET sector as well. The full detail of this model is presented in the chapter 5: discussion or at the published paper titled: The relationships between the vocational education training providers and enterprises: Theory and practise.

The third recommendation to enhance the VET image is to conduct a promotional campaign. This recommendation is proposed based on the finding of the nominal group technique. At the workshop, six key stakeholders pointed out that the media favoured the mainstream educational pathways, whereas the VET image and the programs of vocational education training have not received adequate attention, commensurate with its role in the industrialization and modernization of the country. This recommendation is linked to the term of 'repetition' which is one of the characteristics in the perceived object factor that influencing to the perceptual process of individual (Wood et al., 2001; Robbins et al., 2001). The repetition of the VET sector or the marketing campaign on the media means helps people understanding more about the VET sector. The main focusing of the campaign should promote the vocational pathways as viable education options for young people, alongside higher education. It is also important to give young people access to vocational training at an early age to improve their understanding of training pathways and possible careers. With this in mind, options such as taster days for school

children to go to training institutes and workshops could be adopted as part of a promotional strategy. Any campaign aiming to improve the image of VET must be targeted directly at the stakeholders it wishes to influence, particularly parents, who are the key providers of careers advice, and young people. The campaign should focus on sectors where the financial and career benefits of pursuing a VET related career are clear. In addition, it is essential to promote those trades that are in high demands such as nursing, welding and auto-mechanics because they have the potential to absorb high numbers of young people.

The fourth recommendation is to develop the careers advice and guidance system. This recommendation is proposed based on the findings from the semi quantitative approach nominal group technique and the qualitative approach the open-ended interview questions. Careers guidance and counselling are important for providing relevant pathways to young people. It is recommended that the GDVT takes steps to re-introduce guidance and counselling co-ordinators into both formal and informal training systems. GDVT will need to collaborate with the MOET to optimise current and future provision, develop a careers guidance framework and improve transferability between different learning pathways. There is also a need to train teachers to ensure that they are able to understand and communicate the different options open to young people, as well as information about where these options may lead and employers' workplace expectations. Improved labour market information also will enhance the ability of advisors to understand where opportunities lie within the labour market and is a key requirement to improve the supply and demand of skills.

Four recommendations mentioned above aim to change the Vietnamese people's perception towards the VET sector positively. However, changing perception of an individual towards the phenomenon is a long process and takes time. In this study, the quantitative, qualitative and semi quantitative data identified two key influential sources in the lives of students: (1) the relationships between two institutions and (2) a web of influences. They were from the career guidance counsellors, the parents, the characteristics inside the



students such as the interest, expectation, experience and motivation, the social culture, the political issue, media and the dimensions from the VET sector. Interestingly, these key influential sources dropped fully in three factors namely (1) the perceiver, (2) the setting and (3) the perceived object (Wood et al., 2001 and Robbins et al., 2001) that influencing to the perceptual process of an individual towards the phenomenon. The next question is raised that which influential factor in the perceptual process of an individual towards the phenomenon is the easiest to change.

For the perceiver factor, firstly, from the characteristics inside students, they should understand clearly what they like or their ‘interest’ and what they ‘expect’. Secondly, from the outside views, parents and guidance counsellors should encourage students to pursue what they like and should not put too much pressure on them about what parents like and expect if it is not suitable with the ability of the students. In other words, students should have their own opinions and ideas based on their interests, expectations and the guidelines from parents at home and guidance counsellors at school.

Regarding to the setting factor which comprising of three main characteristics (1) the social culture, (2) economy and (3) politics, it is the most difficult issue to change. According to Bauer and Jenny (2013, p.278), culture-change is difficult, slow and unpredictable. The political characteristic which generates the perception of an individual also is hard to change (Kornai, 2000) because it relates with the power and benefits of each individual or the group of people in each nation. It is especially true in the dictatorial countries which have no democracy (Zheng & Lance, 2015, p.27).

Seven main findings from this study which relate directly to the VET sector suggest that the best way to change the perception of an individual towards the VET sector positively is to change the perceived object. In other words, the VET sector must change itself in the following ways: (1) by changing the VET sector itself and introducing an element of ‘novelty’ in some ways such as changing the name of the system, the relationships between the VET providers and industries, improvement the teachers’ ability, the careers advice and

guidance system and teaching methods, (2) expanding the 'size' of the VET sector with the supports from Government and (3) by making a promotional campaign 'repetition' on the VET sector through the media means, the VET image definitely will be enhanced and flower under the eyes of key stakeholders especially young people, their parents and other classes in the society. It is the last recommendation for this study based on the emerged findings.

## **7.4 Implications of the study**

### **7.4.1 Contribution to available body of knowledge of VET**

Findings from this study will contribute significantly to the available body of knowledge on the development of attitudes and perceptions about VET in the fields of sociology and education. From a sociological perspective, readers of this thesis will be able to grasp the findings of this research in terms of the nexus of social factors and pressures regarding school-to-work transition. Educationists on the other hand will be informed about the significant role of the community and education system in addressing the disparities and misconceptions that exist about VET in the community.

Education in Vietnam is changing and adapting to stresses of globalisation and in response to socio-economic challenges in the region. Technical and vocational education can and does play a major role in helping the developing countries such as Vietnam meet their Millennium Development Goal. However, there is concern about the continuing emphasis on academic education and there is fear that vocational education may not be effectively attuned to the needs of Vietnamese communities. This thesis offers an innovative investigation of the situation in Vietnam that could be applied to other countries having the same social culture, politics and economic status.

## **7.4.2 Improving VET awareness and participation**

This study will create awareness for major stakeholders such as government officials, school administrators, parents, teachers, students and employers about the differing perceptions and attitudes that currently exist in Vietnam about VET. This knowledge and awareness is necessary for these stakeholders especially those at policy-making level to be able to make sound judgments and decisions about the future of technical vocational education and training in Vietnam.

Findings from this study can pave the way for more effective awareness programs about vocational education in Vietnam. Strategies can be developed to improve community understanding and participation in technical vocational education at school, village / community levels. Researchers and Non-Government organisations can be utilised to deliver the message about technical and vocational education to the grassroots, especially to those in remote rural locations.

This study reveals that the most influential people in the community are parents, teachers and policy makers. These are the groups of people that need to be mobilised to facilitate awareness programmes about technical and vocational education in the community. The reason is because these are the people who have positions of authority and respect in the home, village and community. They are reliable sources of knowledge and community wisdom. Therefore to affect change at grass-roots level in favour of vocational education will require their concerted effort and cooperation.

Finally there is a more inclusive alternative for VET or vocational education that is promoted in this study and that is the 'school-based apprenticeships'. This new programme hopefully has the potential to break the old colonially-derived barriers that normally existed against VET. This programme comes with a new name, a new identity and a new territory.

### **7.4.3 Enhancement of Vietnamese's human resource planning capability**

An outcome of this research will be its contribution to human resource planning capability of Vietnam. Findings emphasise the necessity for key stakeholders to provide accurate information on human resource needs to the MOET, MOLISA and to the public in general so that parents, teachers and students have the opportunity to discuss their options and interests before venturing into decision making about young people's education and careers. It is hoped that through this process, Vietnam will be able to strategically reduce its overproduction of graduates in certain fields of academic study, while simultaneously achieving the appropriate number of 'school-based apprenticeships' graduates needed for a sustainable workforce.

This is the outcome that the new 'school-based apprenticeships' programme could achieve for Vietnam. Subjects taught in the VET providers will become more relevant and aligned to careers because of its dual curriculum model. Students will not be intimidated by difficult and irrelevant subjects any more. They only take subjects with the appropriate difficulty level that their career orientation requires. There will be less threat of failure because of this. Another advantage of 'school-based apprenticeships' would be that students are in school are encouraged to early awareness of their primary career pathway and options.

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## **Appendix 1: Information Statement**

### **Information Statement for the Research Project titled: Vocational Education Training in Vietnam: Perceptions and Improvement of Image**

*Conducted by Brian Denman, Tanya Hathaway and Vi Hoang Dang*

You are invited to participate in the research project identified above which is being conducted by Senior lecturer Dr Brian D Denman, Dr Tanya Hathaway and Vi Hoang Dang from the Faculty of Education, University of New England, Australia. The research is part of Vi Hoang Dang's PhD studies at the University of New England, Australia.

#### **The purpose of the research**

The overarching purpose of the present study is to explore the key stakeholders' perceptions towards the TVET sector in Vietnam. The specific objectives are:

1. Determine the image of vocational education training as perceived by lower secondary and, upper secondary school students, and current vocational students in North and South Vietnam.
2. Explore the parental perspectives towards the TVET sector.
3. Explore the perceptions of the key stakeholders who have clear understandings of and close relationships with the TVET sector.
4. Improve community awareness and participation in TVET by proposing strategies for changing community attitudes and perceptions at local and national levels in Vietnam.

#### **Significance of the study includes the following:**

This importance of this research is its significance to the future of young people in Vietnam and the economic sustainability of the country. Findings from this research will provide stakeholders with data and information based on solid research for informing the necessary initiatives in developing programs, promotion, and making policy changes to facilitate a change of mindset and attitude towards VET at school, provincial and government levels.

These initiatives and programs may mean that VET is eventually regarded as equal to mainstream academic study in Vietnam's education system. This will improve the career options and employability of school leavers in Vietnam.

This research initiative will focus on perceptions of lower, upper secondary and current vocational students towards VET. In addition, perceptions from key stakeholders on VET will be explored for the suggestions improving VET image. Lower and upper secondary students' parent, vocational teachers, principals from lower and upper secondary school, managers of industries and senior officers from MOET and MOLISA are key stakeholders can participate in this research. Participation is entirely voluntary. Whether or not you decide to participate, your decision will not disadvantage you in any way and will not affect your situation in your school, workplace or community. Lower, upper secondary students and current vocational students will be asked to complete an anonymous survey, which should not exceed 30 minutes. Parent will take the open-ended interview questions. Other key stakeholders will be invited formally to participate in nominal focus groups. Venues and times will be arranged to the convenience of participants. The student researcher Vi Hoang Dang will conduct nominal focus groups which will be video recorded. All participants will be given the opportunity to review, edit and erase nominal focus group record.

During the research period, all records will be kept in a secure place to which only the researchers have access. After five years, the consent forms, surveys and transcripts will be destroyed by a shredder machine, and the tapes erased.

We cannot promise you any personal benefit from participating in this dissertation; nevertheless your views and opinions can help provide an informed understanding of attitudes towards VET in Vietnam.

Please read this information statement carefully and be sure you understand its contents before you agree to be involved. If there is anything you do not understand, or you have questions, contact the student researcher. If you would like to participate, please tell the student researcher.

Thank you for taking the time to read about our project and considering this invitation.

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Vi Hoang Dang (Student Researcher)

If you would like further information please contact:

Principal supervisor: Senior lecturer, Dr Brian D Denman Email: <a href="mailto:bdenman@une.edu.au">bdenman@une.edu.au</a> Phone: +61 2 6773 2269	Co – supervisor: Dr Tanya Hathaway Email: <a href="mailto:thathawa@une.edu.au">thathawa@une.edu.au</a> Phone: +61 2 6773 2476
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## Appendix 2: Questionnaire

### Vocational Education Training in Vietnam: Perceptions and Improvement of Image

#### A. Demographical information

1. Gender (please tick) Male  Female

2. Ethnicity .....

3. Select the answer that best describes the average result of your study?

a. 0.0 – 4.9 (Fail)

b. 5.0 – 6.4 (Pass)

c. 6.5 – 7.4 (Credit)

d. 7.5 – 8.4 (Distinction)

e. 8.5 – 10.0 (High Distinctions)

4. Where do you live?

a. KV1

b. KV2

c. KV2 NT

d. KV3

5. What is/was your father's level of education?  
(Please circle)

a. Did not complete high school

b. Graduated high school

c. Graduated college

d. Graduated university

e. Masters level

f. PhD level

g. Not sure

6. What is/was your mother's level of education? (Please circle)

a. Did not complete high school

b. Graduated high school

c. Graduated college

d. Graduated university

e. Masters level

f. PhD level

g. Not sure

7. What is/was your father's main occupation?  
(Please circle)

a. Government officer (Doctor, teacher, lawyer...)

b. Military and Police

c. Technician

d. Private company

e. Other

8. What is/was your mother's main occupation? (Please circle)

a. Government officer (Doctor, teacher, lawyer...)

b. Military and Police

c. Technician

d. Private company

e. Other

9. Which of the following statements best describes your family economic situation majority of the time? (Select only one response)

- a. Your family has a hard time getting enough money for food, clothing, and basic living costs
- b. Your family has just enough money for food, clothing, and basic living costs
- c. Your family has a few problems buying what your family needs
- d. Your family has no problems buying what your family needs and is able to buy special things

**10. Where do you get information about continuing education opportunities?**

- Internet
- Direct from college or institute
- School counsellor
- Parent
- Friends & relatives
- Radio / TV
- Newspapers and magazines
- Others

**11. I want to start with VET then change to Higher Education in a few years**

Yes

No

**12. Select the answer that describes who is the most influence to your career choice (Circle only one choice)**

- a. Parent
- b. Friends
- c. Teacher
- d. Politician
- e. Other

**13. What do you consider the most effective marketing strategies for informing lower and upper secondary students about vocational education training?**



## B. Image of VET (Modified version of Ismi et al. 2009)

Please answer the following questions as best you can on a scale from **strongly disagree** to **strongly agree**. We are interested how you think about vocational education training. When you are answering these questions, please give us your beliefs about your experience.

1. Low entry qualification	Levels of your agreement or disagreement				
	Strongly Disagree (SD)	Disagree (D)	Neither Disagree nor Agree (N)	Agree (A)	Strongly Agree (SA)
All secondary school students can enter to VET	1	2	3	4	5
Vocational students are low academic grade	1	2	3	4	5
Vocational students are disabilities	1	2	3	4	5
Requirements to entry VET are low and flexible	1	2	3	4	5
Vocational students are juvenile delinquent and problematic	1	2	3	4	5
VET is for people who not aspire to higher level	1	2	3	4	5
<b>2. Quality of training facilities and equipment</b>	(SD)	(D)	(N)	(A)	(SA)
The laboratory/workshop is suitable for teaching and learning	1	2	3	4	5
The laboratory/workshop is advance	1	2	3	4	5
Equipment is useful advance and latest technology	1	2	3	4	5
The classes are sufficient space to support quality education	1	2	3	4	5
VET providers are availability of sports and recreational facilities	1	2	3	4	5
The facilities are easy to access	1	2	3	4	5
<b>3. Trainer credibility</b>	(SD)	(D)	(N)	(A)	(SA)
The vocational teachers / instructors are helpful	1	2	3	4	5
The vocational teachers/ instructors are experience	1	2	3	4	5
The vocational teachers / instructors are high qualification	1	2	3	4	5
VET provides 'real life' working experience	1	2	3	4	5
VET helps students develop their career plan	1	2	3	4	5
<b>4. Recognition of qualification</b>	(SD)	(D)	(N)	(A)	(SA)
Vocational qualification provides opportunities to further education	1	2	3	4	5
Vocational qualification is easy to find a suitable job	1	2	3	4	5
Vocational qualification is recognized by foreign companies	1	2	3	4	5
Vocational qualification is recognized by private companies	1	2	3	4	5
Vocational qualification is recognized by universities	1	2	3	4	5
Vocational qualification is recognized by overseas higher education	1	2	3	4	5
Higher education degrees are more valuable than vocational degrees	1	2	3	4	5
<b>5. Student career and job potential</b>	(SD)	(D)	(N)	(A)	(SA)

Produce highly skilled trainee	1	2	3	4	5
Produce academically prepared trainee	1	2	3	4	5
Produce trainees with a wide range of job opportunities	1	2	3	4	5
Work at high level of risk	1	2	3	4	5
Gained adequate welfare payment	1	2	3	4	5
Prepare only for unskilled work	1	2	3	4	5
Provide professional growth opportunities	1	2	3	4	5
Meet the national industrial workforce needs	1	2	3	4	5
Gained a job immediately after graduation	1	2	3	4	5
Does not prepare a trainee for advancement in an occupation	1	2	3	4	5
<b>6. Applicability of course content</b>					
	(SD)	(D)	(N)	(A)	(SA)
Most courses do not guarantee interesting career prospects	1	2	3	4	5
Provide integration of academic and skills	1	2	3	4	5
Provide for a very specific career field or industry	1	2	3	4	5
Provide foundation for trainees who are planning to attend college	1	2	3	4	5
Provide foundation for trainees who are planning to attend university	1	2	3	4	5
Many options of courses offered are very interesting	1	2	3	4	5
A hands-on and simple education and training compared to academic stream	1	2	3	4	5
Have an excellent remedial program for academically low achievement trainees/students	1	2	3	4	5
Have a good connection between vocational school and industries	1	2	3	4	5
Have a good connection with community	1	2	3	4	5
<b>7. Work ethics, social values and soft skills</b>					
	(SD)	(D)	(N)	(A)	(SA)
VET graduate students have responsibility for their work	1	2	3	4	5
VET graduate students work independently	1	2	3	4	5
VET graduate students are valuable citizen for society	1	2	3	4	5
VET graduate students are creativity and innovativeness	1	2	3	4	5
VET graduate students have teamwork skills	1	2	3	4	5
VET graduate students have self-discipline	1	2	3	4	5
VET graduate students have information technology and communication (ICT) skills	1	2	3	4	5
VET graduate students have leadership skills	1	2	3	4	5
VET graduate students can be participation in community service	1	2	3	4	5
VET graduate students have communication skills	1	2	3	4	5
VET graduate students have inculcate entrepreneurship curiosity	1	2	3	4	5

### C. Student's belief (Modified version of Ismi et al. 2009)

The following statements are designed to help us understand your **perception towards vocational education training**. Based on all you know or have heard, please provide your best response to the following statements.

<b>1. Further study</b>	(SD)	(D)	(N)	(A)	(SA)
I believe VET is easier than higher education	1	2	3	4	5
I believe VET enables people to continue with university studies afterwards	1	2	3	4	5
I believe most students suppose VET in relation with specific job rather than academic skill	1	2	3	4	5
<b>2. Career choice</b>					
	(SD)	(D)	(N)	(A)	(SA)
I believe all students choose career choice based on their interest	1	2	3	4	5
I believe all students choose career choice based on their economic background	1	2	3	4	5
I believe all students choose career choice based on the income of the job	1	2	3	4	5
I believe all students choose career choice based on needs of the society	1	2	3	4	5
I believe all students choose career choice based on the orientation of the family	1	2	3	4	5
<b>3. Field of interest</b>					
	(SD)	(D)	(N)	(A)	(SA)
I believe higher education degree associates with important position in society	1	2	3	4	5
I believe that vocational training leads to jobs which are not well regarded in society	1	2	3	4	5
I believe VET income is less than that of higher education	1	2	3	4	5
I believe VET income is not enough for standard living	1	2	3	4	5
I believe VET training duration is shorter than that of HE	1	2	3	4	5
I believe VET graduate has higher job opportunity than HE graduate	1	2	3	4	5
I believe VET graduates can set up their own business	1	2	3	4	5
I believe studying at VET providers in urban is better than in rural	1	2	3	4	5
I believe VET sector links strongly with industries					
<b>4. Parental encouragement</b>					
	(SD)	(D)	(N)	(A)	(SA)
I believe that parental intention to encourage their adolescent to follow mainstream education	1	2	3	4	5
I believe that parent respect the adolescent intention to follow mainstream education or VET pathway based on adolescent's interest	1	2	3	4	5
I believe that if parent went to VET pathway they would guide their children to follow	1	2	3	4	5

**Thank you for your cooperation**

## **Appendix 3: Ministry of Education and Training letter**

### **To whom it may concerns**

Vietnamese Ministry of Education and Training introduces PhD candidate Vi Hoang Dang who is studying PhD at University of New England, Australia and taking the

#### **Research project titled: Vocational Education Training in Vietnam: Perceptions and Improvement of Image**

##### *The purpose of this study*

The overarching purpose of the present study is to explore the key stakeholders' perceptions towards the TVET sector in Vietnam. The specific objectives are:

1. Determine the image of vocational education training as perceived by lower secondary and, upper secondary school students, and current vocational students in North and South Vietnam.
2. Explore the parental perspectives towards the TVET sector.
3. Explore the perceptions of the key stakeholders who have clear understandings of and close relationships with the TVET sector.
4. Improve community awareness and participation in TVET by proposing strategies for changing community attitudes and perceptions at local and national levels in Vietnam.

##### *Significance of the study includes the following:*

This importance of this research is its significance to the future of young people in Vietnam and the economic sustainability of the country. Findings from this research will provide stakeholders with data and information based on solid research for informing the necessary initiatives in developing programs, promotion, and making policy changes to facilitate a change of mindset and attitude towards VET at school, provincial and government levels. These initiatives and programs may mean that VET is eventually regarded as

equal to mainstream academic study in Vietnam's education system. This will improve the career options and employability of school leavers in Vietnam.

Ministry of education training acknowledges that the research is independent and student researcher Vi Hoang Dang will approach the Principals of school for their individual permission. Any assistance from you will be appreciated highly

Print Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_ Institutional Stamp: \_\_\_\_\_

## **Appendix 4: Parent’s consent form for open-ended interviews**

I understand that my participation in this study is strictly voluntary and I may discontinue my participation at any time without prejudice. I understand that the overarching purpose of the present study is to explore the key stakeholders’ perceptions towards the TVET sector in Vietnam. The specific objectives are:

1. Determine the image of vocational education training as perceived by lower secondary and, upper secondary school students, and current vocational students in North and South Vietnam.
2. Explore the parental perspectives towards the TVET sector.
3. Explore the perceptions of the key stakeholders who have clear understandings of and close relationships with the TVET sector.
4. Improve community awareness and participation in TVET by proposing strategies for changing community attitudes and perceptions at local and national levels in Vietnam.

I further understand that any information about me that is collected during this study will be anonymously processed. Students will be asked not to provide a name with the survey. This permission slip will accompany the survey, only to assure parental consent has been given for minors. Surveys received without consent forms cannot be used. Any association of surveys to particular students will be held in the strictest of confidence and will not be a part of permanent school records. The results and interpretations of the study will be made public. I understand that at the conclusion of this study all records, which identify individual participants, will be destroyed.

Signature of Parent \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## **Appendix 5: The request letter to Principal**

### *Dear Principal of the school*

I am a PhD student at University of New England, Australia. Presently, I would like for you to volunteer in responding to questions related to my PhD research project entitled: Vocational Education Training in Vietnam: Perceptions and Improvement of Image

### *The purposes of study:*

The overarching purpose of the present study is to explore the key stakeholders' perceptions towards the TVET sector in Vietnam. The specific objectives are:

1. Determine the image of vocational education training as perceived by lower secondary and, upper secondary school students, and current vocational students in North and South Vietnam.
2. Explore the parental perspectives towards the TVET sector.
3. Explore the perceptions of the key stakeholders who have clear understandings of and close relationships with the TVET sector.
4. Improve community awareness and participation in TVET by proposing strategies for changing community attitudes and perceptions at local and national levels in Vietnam.

### *Significance of the study includes the following:*

This importance of this research is its significance to the future of young people in Vietnam and the economic sustainability of the country. Findings from this research will provide stakeholders with data and information based on solid research for informing the necessary initiatives in developing programs, promotion, and making policy changes to facilitate a change of mindset and attitude towards VET at school, provincial and government levels. These initiatives and programs may mean that VET is eventually regarded as equal to mainstream academic study in Vietnam's education system. This will improve the career options and employability of school leavers in Vietnam.

The survey will be conducted by a validated questionnaire that will be administered to lower, upper and current vocational students.

I would like to have an authorisation from you for the respective final year students to administer the questionnaires.

The support from you would be highly appreciated to this research.

Best regards

VI Hoang Dang – Researcher

Signature of Principal and stamp



## **Appendix 6: The request letter to Head of department**

*Dear Principal of the school and Teachers*

I am a PhD student at University of New England, Australia. Presently, I would like for you to volunteer in responding to questions related to my PhD **Research Project: Vocational Education Training in Vietnam: Perceptions and Improvement of Image**

*The purposes of study:*

The overarching purpose of the present study is to explore the key stakeholders' perceptions towards the TVET sector in Vietnam. The specific objectives are:

1. Determine the image of vocational education training as perceived by lower secondary and, upper secondary school students, and current vocational students in North and South Vietnam.
2. Explore the parental perspectives towards the TVET sector.
3. Explore the perceptions of the key stakeholders who have clear understandings of and close relationships with the TVET sector.
4. Improve community awareness and participation in TVET by proposing strategies for changing community attitudes and perceptions at local and national levels in Vietnam.

*Significance of the study includes the following:*

This importance of this research is its significance to the future of young people in Vietnam and the economic sustainability of the country. Findings from this research will provide stakeholders with data and information based on solid research for informing the necessary initiatives in developing programs, promotion, and making policy changes to facilitate a change of mindset and attitude towards VET at school, provincial and government levels. These initiatives and programs may mean that VET is eventually regarded as equal to mainstream academic study in Vietnam's education system. This will improve the career options and employability of school leavers in Vietnam.

The nominal focus group meeting will be conducted on the weekend that avoids the working days and not disturb the works at the office. I would like to have an authorisation for the senior officer to participate the meeting.

The support from you would be highly appreciated to this research.

Best regards.

Vi Hoang Dang – Researcher



## Appendix 8: Factor loadings of the independent variables

Dimensions	Factor 1	Factor 2	Factor 3	Factor 4	Factor 5	Factor 6	Factor 7
<i>Entry requirements</i>							
Vocational students are disabilities	.825						
Vocational students are low academic grade	.743						
Vocational students are juvenile delinquent and problematic	.739						
Requirements to entry VET are low and flexible	.587						
<i>Facility and Equipment</i>							
Equipment is useful advance and latest technology		.824					
The laboratory/workshop is advance		.820					
VET providers are availability of sports and recreational facilities		.694					
The classes are sufficient space to support quality education		.607					
<i>Recognition of qualification</i>							
Vocational qualification is recognized by private companies			.744				
Vocational qualification is recognized by foreign companies			.742				
Vocational qualification is recognized by overseas higher education			.703				
Vocational qualification is recognized by universities in Vietnam			.660				
<i>Student career and job potential</i>							
Produce highly skilled trainee				.712			
Vocational qualification provides opportunities to further education				.700			
Produce trainees with a wide range of job opportunities				.675			
Vocational qualification is easy to find a suitable job				.641			
<i>Quality of curriculum</i>							

Provide integration of academic and skills					.764		
Have a good connection with community					.744		
Have a good connection between vocational school and industries					.719		
Provide for a very specific career field					.694		
Many options of courses offered are very interesting					.635		
<i>Social skills</i>							
VET graduate students are creative and innovative						.794	
VET graduate students have teamwork skills						.774	
VET graduate students are valuable citizen for society						.646	
<i>Soft skills</i>							
VET graduate students have communication skills							.829
VET graduate students have leadership skills							.793
<i>Total explained variance (60.8%)</i>							

### Appendix 9: Factor loadings of the dependent variables

Dimensions	Factor 1	Factor 2
<i>Future study choice</i>		
I believe VET is easier than higher education	.684	
I believe all students choose career choice based on their interest	.579	
I believe that parental intention to encourage their adolescent to follow mainstream education	.681	
I believe that parent respect the adolescent intention to follow mainstream education or VET pathway based on adolescent's interest	.734	
<i>Earning potential</i>		
I believe that vocational training leads to jobs which are not well regarded in society		.778
I believe VET income is less than that of higher education		.767
I believe VET income is not enough for standard living		.790
<i>Total explained variance (55.7%)</i>		

## Appendix 10: The open-ended questions

Participant's name (optional):

Age:

Education level:

Occupation:

Region:

Province:

Question 1: What are your views about the qualifications of students entering the VET sector?

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Question 2: What is your opinion about the physical aspects of the VET sector such as classrooms, workshops, recreation and other facilities?

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Question 3: How do you rate the quality of lecturers in the VET sector?

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Question 4: What do you think about the relationship between VET providers and industries?

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Question 5: How do you evaluate the quality of the vocational education degree?

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Question 6: What are your views about the opportunities for employment after graduating from VET?

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