



Conceptions of Quality of Pre-Service Teacher Education from Stakeholder Perspectives: A Case Study of a Vietnamese University

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ABSTRACT

This paper reports the findings of an investigation into pre-service teacher education (PTE) at a Vietnamese university. The qualitative case study focuses on the key stakeholders' conceptions of the quality of pre-service teacher education in the provision of two social science departments at the selected university. The study draws on key policy documents and in-depth interviews within an interpretive paradigm based on a sample of policymakers, institutional leaders, academic staff, and students. The study reveals the conceptions of quality of PTE from the perspectives of governmental bodies to the perspectives of the front-liners in the PTE, which point to an emphasis on the notion of 'quality as fitness for purpose' and the classic model of 'input-process-output quality'. The evidence suggests that while there is the stakeholders' receptiveness to and compliance with the policy of standards in education, there is a lack of critical ideas about the professional standards for teachers. The study enriches the conceptual understanding of education quality, informing the development of policy and practice of teacher education in the context of Vietnam.

1. INTRODUCTION

In recent decades, various countries around the world have always sought to address challenges in their education systems, such as the quality of student learning and the quality of teachers, which are closely related to developing the human capital required for economies to be globally competitive (OECD, 2014). This has led to the increase in political attention given to teacher education as 'around the world initial teacher education continues to be in a state of almost continual reform, even crisis' (Ellis & McNicholl, 2015). While there are a variety of ideas about how education systems can best respond to changing needs, not only scholars but also policymakers have advocated concentrating on teacher quality as a reform approach. Policy discussions of teacher education in relation to teacher quality have tended to focus more closely on debates about the nature of teacher preparation and teacher professionalism (Darling-Hammond, 2013; Klette & Hammerness, 2016; OECD, 2014; Tatto et al., 2018).

In Vietnam, teacher education quality has risen to the top of Vietnam's education policy agenda in the past fifteen years since the Vietnamese government introduced policy initiatives on teacher education and development (MOET, 2005; GoV, 2012; CPV, 2013; World Bank, 2016). The significance of improving the quality of the teaching force is related to the new demands for teachers in response to the educational reforms. Policymakers, academics and practitioners are convinced that teacher preparation and development is a key factors in teacher quality. In reality, the quality of pre-service teacher education (PTE) in Vietnam has been a matter of concern in recent years (CPV, 2013; World Bank, 2016).

The effort to assure the teaching force's quality shows an engagement with the idea of standards-driven education (CPV, 2013; World Bank, 2016). This has resulted in the application of a standards-based approach in the wider landscape of education. Teacher education programmes are without exception. The policymakers attempted to

redefine the quality of teachers, quality of teacher education and quality of teachers' professional development by a range of standards which are applied step by step in educational institutions (MOET, 2009, 2018).

This paper draws upon data from a broader piece of research aimed at examining the practice of quality management in PTE provided by a Vietnamese university. The primary aim of this paper is to provide empirical evidence on multiple stakeholders' conceptions of the quality of PTE, which paved the way for an investigation into the operation of PTE in the institution. This paper contributes to a conceptual understanding of quality in teacher education by incorporating a variety of perspectives. It can inform the development of policy and practice of teacher education in the context of Vietnam.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The research is concerned with the complex nature of quality, which is understood through an examination of diverse conceptions of quality in higher education (HE). The key concepts of *quality*, *stakeholders*, and *standards*, particularly in teacher education, are clarified to provide a conceptual underpinning for the research.

2.1. Quality in higher education

Quality is a highly contested concept and has multiple meanings to people who conceive HE and quality differently. From different perspectives, there are different, even conflicting and opposing, conceptions of quality.

One widely-known conception of quality, which originated in business management, is that of Crosby (1979, 1984), who sees quality as conformity to requirements. Crosby argues that quality must be defined in measurable and clearly stated terms to help the organisation take action based on tangible targets rather than on hunches, experience, or opinions. Quality is either present or not present: there is no such thing as differing levels of quality.

In contrast to those who adopt an industrial perspective, Harvey and Green (1993) describe quality as a relative concept. In an exploration of the nature of quality in HE, they argue that quality is relative to the stakeholders. The basis of this view is that quality is defined depending on the perception of the beholder. For example, a government will consider quality in terms of the pass/fail ratio, the dropouts and enrolment time, whilst an academic will define quality on the basis of good academic education, which is based on good knowledge transfer, a good learning environment and a good relationship between teaching and research. There is evidence to suggest that academics conceive quality differently from other stakeholders (Watty, 2003) and that academics continue to resist quality assurance processes in their institutions despite their clear commitment to quality in teaching and research (Newton, 2000, 2002; Anderson, 2006).

Harvey and Green (1993), in their much-quoted contribution, offer five interrelated conceptions of quality in education: exceptional, perfection, fitness for purpose, value for money, and transformative. Each of these conceptions has implications for the approaches and methods used to evaluate the desirable outcomes produced through the education process. One significant problem with the divergent views of quality is how to justify the purposes of HE, which has multiple purposes depending on different perspectives.

The notion that quality is 'stakeholder-relative' (Bogue, 1998; Harvey & Green, 1993; Green, 1994) is in nature similar to Barnett's (1994) idea of a relationship between different conceptions of HE, different approaches to quality, and the identification of different performance indicators. On the basis of a pluralistic view of quality, different groups of actors in HE have contributed to the debates surrounding quality and quality assessment that constitute a 'power struggle' (Barnett, 1994; Houston & Paewai, 2013).

2.2. Stakeholder approach

Since the 1990s, with the development of Stakeholder Theory in a wide range of fields such as marketing, human resources, corporate governance, and public management, the theoretical approach to stakeholder management has become an organisational theory (Alves et al., 2010). Utilising Stakeholder Theory enables higher education institutions (HEIs) to gain a better understanding of what stakeholders actually expect and hence facilitate strategies to meet their needs. HEIs, especially universities, have to rethink their role and their relations with their stakeholders or communities in order to secure their place in the economy of knowledge (Alves et al., 2010). Existing literature on quality in HE suggests that knowledge of quality and quality management can be improved by endorsing a stakeholder approach. Srikanthan and Dalrymple (2003) argue that models of quality should represent stakeholder perspectives so as to be accepted by the HEI's communities. In a similar vein, Cullen et al. (2003) hold the view that 'as far as quality is concerned, the key issue is the ability of the quality concept to facilitate the perspective of a range of stakeholders' (p. 6).

The identification of stakeholders in HE is based on the notion that quality in HE is owned and determined by the stakeholders (Cheng & Tam, 1997; Green, 1994; Harvey & Green, 1993; Harvey and Knight, 1996). Cheng

& Tam (1997) identify internal and external stakeholders in the quality management process. Current students and academic staff are internal constituents in the quality management process, whereas employers, government funding bodies, institutional management, prospective students or professional bodies are external. This view is supported by Schindler et al. (2015), who hold the view that there are four main stakeholder groups in HE: providers (e.g. funding bodies, the community, taxpayers), users of products (e.g. students), users of outputs (e.g. employers), and employees of HE (e.g. academics and administrators).

The problem is that stakeholders do not always speak the same language when they discuss quality. There is neither an objective definition of quality nor objective standards. Still, a university has to cope with this problem. It is likely that the best way to talk about quality is to share a common concept which might be workable, such as quality is achieving the goals and aims set by the organisation, with the assumption that the goals and aims are formulated in dialogue and discussion with all stakeholders. Therefore, gaining consensus on the key stakeholder groups, their level of influence on the organisation and the impact the organisation's performance has on them is an important exercise when it comes to prioritising and balancing the different needs and expectations of these groups. It is also significant when deciding how the HEI will establish and maintain a dialogue with the different groups. It is a requirement that HEIs develop good relations with stakeholders with regard to identifying each stakeholder's present and future demands.

2.3. Quality in teacher education

The literature on quality in teacher education program design has emphasised the importance of conceptual orientation of the programme (Kennedy, 1991; Hoban, 2004). It is argued that the presence of a conceptual framework to guide teacher education design is an indicator of quality (Feiman-Nemser, 1990).

Taking a holistic viewpoint, Hoban (2004) proposes a conceptual framework based on four dimensions to consider quality in a teacher education programme. These include: (a) conceptual links across the university-based curriculum; (b) theory-practice links between schools and university experiences; (c) socio-cultural links between participants; and (d) personal links that shape the identity of teacher educators. A strong argument put forward by this author is that a focus on the links rather than independent elements of a teacher education program is important as the dynamics of teaching as a complex profession should be properly regarded.

Klette and Hammerness (2016), in their large-scale research on teacher education programmes in Finland, Norway, Chile, Cuba and the US, offer a conceptual framework for investigating quality features of teacher education. The framework includes three key components: (i) a clear and shared vision of good teaching; (ii) coherence as a consistent approach to teaching and learning aligned with the vision of good teaching; and (iii) opportunities to enact practice. Their empirical findings could support discussions on areas of focus and potential areas for exploration for teacher education programmes in different contexts.

In Vietnam, publications that concentrate on teacher education asserted that teacher education has a direct relation to teacher quality (It is frequently considered that the quality of prospective teachers/graduates from the programme is a major indicator of the quality of the teacher education provision (CPV, 2013; Nguyen, 2014; Phan, 2018; World Bank, 2016). There is a variety of factors that make a quality teacher, which cannot be neglected when considering the quality of PTE programmes. Nguyen (2010), in her paper on the quality of teacher education at a typical university of education, notes that quality of teacher education results from the training process, job experiences, continuous learning and professional enhancement. Four elements of teacher training quality include (i) quality of input (teacher-student competencies; teacher standards and the quality of the teacher education curriculum; training conditions. i.e. quality of lecturers; learning environment and infrastructure); (ii) quality of instructional processes; (iii) quality of outcomes; and (iv) policies for using and creating a working environment for the professional development of teachers (p. 190).

Whilst teacher quality and teacher education have commonly been investigated, nevertheless, there is a paucity of evidence-based literature focusing specifically on quality management in teacher training in Vietnam. Examining the quality of PTE from the angle of quality management processes, i.e. quality control, quality assurance and quality enhancement, has not been the focus of previous studies, although a search of the literature reveals a small number of published studies on quality assurance in Vietnamese HE.

2.4. Standards in teacher education

The last three decades have seen a growing movement towards quality and standards in education. The issues related to such themes as standards, quality, excellence, benchmarking, high-stakes testing have received attention from local, regional and national governments in many countries and many educational organisations across the globe since the early 1990s (Barnett, 1992; Dowson et al., 2007; Graham and Barnett, 1996; Morley, 2003; Tatto et al., 2018).

A general notion of standards is that ‘a standard is a guide for behaviour and for judging behaviour’ (Abbott & Snidal, 2011). Standards refer to fulfilling specific quality criteria; in other words, standards demonstrate quality. They are commonly considered to embody the expertise of a respective field in a relevant way (Botzem & Dobusch, 2012). In this sense, standards in education can function as a mechanism for assessing the quality of an educative process and enhancing coordination in that process.

In the Western world, adopting standards in order to enhance the quality and efficiency of education has been emphasised by international organisations such as the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), particularly through the implementation of standardised tests such as PISA or the improvement of teacher education standards and programmes (Elken, 2017; OECD, 1995, 2011). The powerful influence of standardisation in education is internationally recognised: as Sahlberg (2011) notes, ‘because the standardisation agenda promises significant gains in efficiency and quality of education, it has been widely accepted as a basic ideology of change, both politically and professionally’ (p. 148).

In the literature on education standards, tensions in the establishment and implementation of standards are discussed. Dowson et al. (2007) identify the controversial issues that deserve attention as: (a) who sets standards; (b) how to develop and implement appropriate education standards across diverse contexts; (c) efficacy of standards; and (d) equity of standards.

With regard to the issues related to standards-makers, there have been concerns about the representativeness of standards and the practical difficulties of involving the interests of multiple stakeholders in standards formulation. It is argued that standards serve different purposes for their users. The setting of standards, therefore, requires greater coordination and collaboration of stakeholders, including students, educators, employers and policymakers. For example, educators often emphasise academic standards whilst employers usually prioritise workplace-readiness standards. Thus the voices of disparate constituencies need full consideration to ensure a reasonable balance of varied interests.

In addition, the differences in the purposes of standards, their scope for application, and their level of specification make great hindrances to educational professionals, practitioners, and policymakers developing and implementing standards. Stakeholders often encounter difficulties in reaching a consensus about definitions, formats, and duration of standards application in a variety of contexts.

How to use standards effectively is additionally a matter of concern. In standards-driven education systems, clear standards can give users certain advantages to ensure consistent quality, i.e. standards provide a basis for curriculum designers and implementers to maintain the quality of education content, teaching and learning. However, the effectiveness of the implementation of uniform standards might not be fairly or accurately evaluated owing to the disparity of resources, as well as gaps in management capacities. As queries regarding resources for quality assurance need to be answered adequately before the quality is judged, Dowson et al. (2007) remind us that high standards may be regarded as a necessary but not sufficient condition for educational improvement.

Furthermore, as the employment of shared education standards usually means that quality of the education should be in line with the set-up expectations, it may create equity problems (Dowson et al., 2007; Sahlberg, 2011). In particular, standards-based assessments have brought their own problems when they have not given disparate learning and performance styles careful consideration. Another argument concerning the conflicts between standards and social justice is that standards have the potential to lead to the exclusion of some individuals from particular employment or educational opportunities (Dowson et al., 2007).

2.5. Standards for graduates of pre-service teacher education programmes in Vietnam

Standards for Teachers in the Secondary School was first introduced in 2009. While these standards are mainly aimed at in-service teachers, their scope of application includes stakeholders in pre-service teacher education as they provide a basis for developing programmes for secondary school teachers (MOET, 2009). These standards lay the foundation of the establishment of standards for graduates of PTE programmes in teacher education institutions in Vietnam.

While there have been substantial moves toward teachers’ standards between 2009 and 2018, the policy focus is on the standards legislation of 2009, as this was in force at the time of the research. The Geography and History PTE programmes examined in this research project, which were provided for four cohorts starting their studies in 2014, 2015, 2016 and 2017, only took the 2009 standards into account as the two programmes were designed and came into operation before 2018. In this regard, judgement or assessment regarding these programmes should be based on checking against the 2009 standards.

The Standards for Teachers in the Secondary School (version 2009) include six standards, specified by 25 criteria, which are concerned with six key areas: (1) political quality, professional ethics, and lifestyle; (2) competence in

understanding pupils and the educational environment; (3) competence in teaching; (4) competence in education; (5) competence in social-political activities; (6) competence in professional development (MOET, 2009b). Briefly, these six areas fall into four broad categories: (a) *personal qualities*, (b) *general competencies*, (c) *specialised academic competencies*, and (d) *professional competencies*. While these standards are mainly aimed at in-service teachers, their scope of application includes stakeholders in pre-service teacher education as they ‘provide a basis for designing and developing secondary school teacher education programmes’ (MOET, 2009b).

The figure below displays a summary of the standards for graduates, which illustrate the learning outcomes of the PTE. Graduates/prospective subject teachers are expected to meet the same standards of personal qualities, general competencies and professional competencies, while they must achieve particular standards of specialised academic competencies which differentiate a PTE course in a specific subject from others. Various PTE programmes differ radically in the standards of specialised academic competencies, while all of them apply the other parts of standards equally.

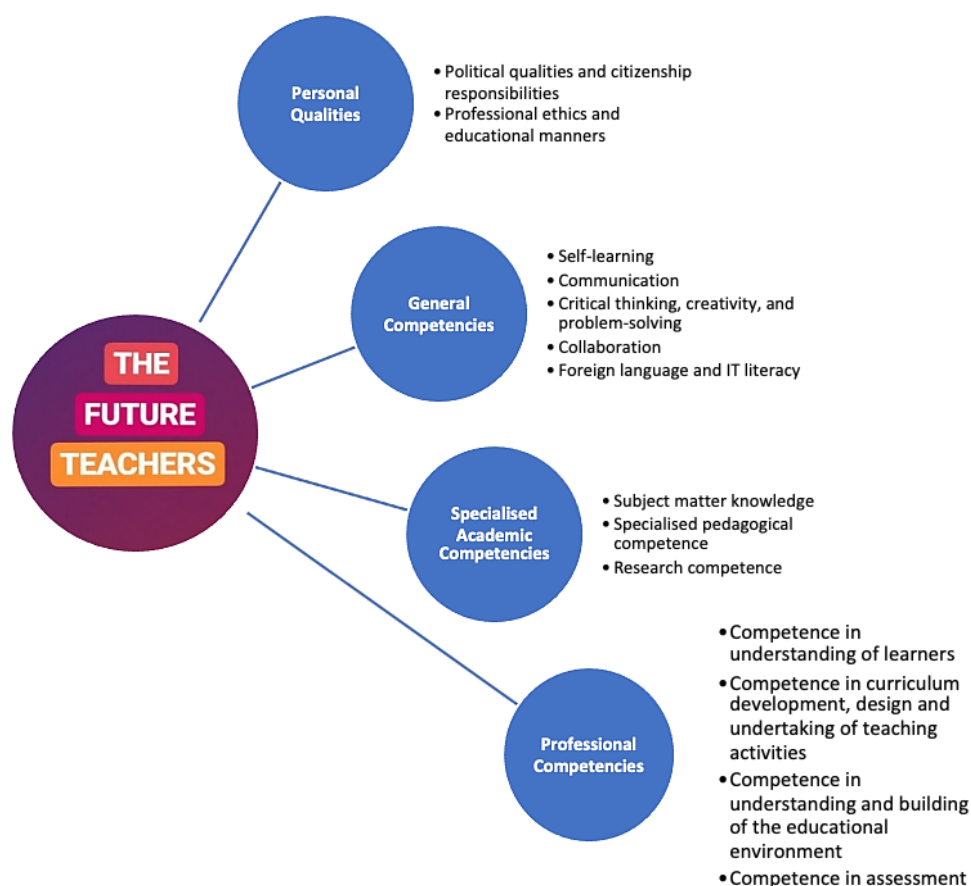


Figure 1. Standards for PTE Graduates

These standards have recently been replaced with the Professional Standards for Teachers in the Primary and Secondary School issued in October 2018 (MOET, 2018). The newest version presents five key standards covering five areas: (1) *educator attributes*; (2) *competence in professional development*; (3) *competence in building the educational environment*; (4) *competence in developing the relationship among school, families and society*; (5) *competence in using foreign languages or minor ethnicity languages, and harnessing IT in education*. The reference to the newest standards is to underline the most recent change to the national standards for teachers, which is useful for further discussion of the respective policy developments in Vietnam.

3. MATERIALS AND METHODS

A case study approach was adopted to bring the strength of individuality in the interpretive paradigm into my research. Since the studied phenomenon - quality management in PTT - covers a range of possibilities, my research is an example of a circumstance that is different from what was originally intended. With its flexibility, a case study

is useful for capturing the complexities of the phenomenon (Yin, 2009; Simon, 2009). The exploration of perceptions of different stakeholders, which has a pivotal role in this research, requires a flexible design like a case study.

The study is concerned with the voices of the actors in a typical provision of PTE in Vietnam. The key stakeholders are involved in the quality of the PTE to different extents. The relevant policy-makers are directly involved in formulating policy on teacher education and quality management, while the students and the members of staff at the university have direct, active involvement in the provision of the PTE programmes.

The particular focus of this case study is the provision of PTE in two social science and humanity departments - the Department of History and the Department of Geography at a university specialising in teacher education. For ethical considerations, this institution is anonymised by the pseudonym 'University'. Basic coding was used to generate pseudonyms for all the research participants. Where quotations from individuals were used in the research, pseudonyms were adjusted to reflect more realistic names.

The investigation involves critical analysis of policy documents at national and institutional levels. The criteria for selection are pertinence and relevance for teacher education and quality management. Data collection also involves interviews with two governmental officials (called Management Policymaker and Teacher Development Policymaker), the University leader (Vice-Chancellor), two heads of office regarded as middle leaders (Head of Academic Affairs Office, Head of Quality Assurance Office), two heads and two deputy heads of the two departments (called Geography Head and Deputy Head, History Head and Deputy Head), a senior academic who worked as quality assurance and accreditation consultant for the Board of the University (called Specialist); eight lecturers (called Lecturers 1 to 4; A to D); and sixteen students distributed evenly in the two departments (called Students 1 to 8; A to H).

A total of 30 participants were interviewed one-to-one and face-to-face in an in-depth, semi-structured style. Every participant had been informed that each interview would take no longer than one hour and would be audio-recorded. The interview schedules were tailored to each type of participant. The semi-structured in-depth interviews were aimed at exploring how different stakeholders' conceptions of the quality of PTE. The information regarding the research participants is summarised in the table below.

Table 1. Details of Anonymised Participants

Policymakers	University Staff	Department Staff		Students	
MOET senior officials	University Leader and Office Heads (middle leaders)	Department of Geography	Department of History	Department of Geography	Department of History
Quality Management Policymaker	Vice Chancellor	Head Deputy Head	Head Deputy Head	Students 1, 2 (first year)	Students A, B (first year)
Teacher Development Policymaker	Head of Academic Affairs Office	Lecturers 1, 2, 3, 4	Lecturers A, B, C, D	Students 3, 4 (second year)	Students C, D (second year)
	Head of Quality Assurance Office			Students 5, 6 (third year)	Students E, F (third year)
	Specialist			Students 7, 8 (fourth year)	Students G, H (fourth year)
Subtotal	2	4	4	8	8
Grand total		30			

The qualitative analysis in this study mainly considered Miles and Huberman's (1994) three actions of analysis: data reduction, data display, and drawing/verifying conclusions. Data were thematically analysed. The most important themes from the interview data were 'extracted, abridged and extracted' in order to condense the data's meaning (Lee, 1999). Along with meaning condensation, the data was also organised into categories. An organising conceptual structure serving as the basis for subsequent category-determination was selected (Lee, 1999). Within each major theme, several emerging sub-themes were also categorised and coded accordingly. The data were then organised in thematic conceptual matrices with several revisions during the process of analysis. This technique

enabled me to see patterns, and themes that emerged in the case. Cognitive maps were also used to display the person/group's representation of concepts about a particular domain, showing the relationships among them (Miles and Huberman, 1994, pp. 131-134).

Triangulation was employed to strengthen the credibility of my interpretation and findings. In applying 'triangulation within methods' and 'triangulation between methods' (Denzin, 1989), I made a comparison of data gathered from the interviews with the different stakeholder groups. Since the deployment of a single source of information was not without limitations, data generated via the analysed documents and interviews were compared against one another. Another reason for such methodological triangulation was that information provided by the informants might be very different from what happened in an actual setting. Thus data from different sources, including relevant documents and the interviews, were compared against each other, facilitating corroboration and validation of the interpretation.

When employing the data collection methods, I maximised the potential for the participants to contribute to 'shaping the conversation' (Bush, 2012, p. 79) and to regard each participant as a unique person. I myself worked as a research instrument in interviewing, and I maintained that the setting studied has been in a state of flux. As changes in the context are completely possible, they were taken into account in both the analysis and the reporting of my research.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Based on identifying the layers of management and the extent of participation in the PTE, the study gives an analysis of the stakeholders' conceptions of PTE quality in these main aspects: (i) senior management conceptions, devoted to the views of government officials and the University leader and middle leaders; (ii) department conceptions, devoted to the views of the heads and deputy department heads and the lecturers at two departments; and (iii) student conceptions, devoted to the views of the students following the programmes.

The scope of the interview contents was explained to all the interviewees so that in the conversations between the participants and the researcher, 'quality' or 'education quality' or 'teacher education quality' were used as shorthand for 'pre-service teacher education quality'.

4.1. Governmental conceptions

From the central management angle, the policymakers viewed quality as fitness for purpose. The Quality Management Policymaker considered PTE quality based on his opinion about quality in HE in general, which was 'a very hot issue in Vietnam'. While he accepted that there were many different conceptions of quality, he adhered to the MOET's view that *'quality is fitness for purpose which is set by the particular institution, but the definition of the purpose must be based on the institution's specific conditions and in accordance with the requirements of the stakeholders.'*

According to this official, Vietnam had a conception of quality in education that echoed international communities, as he found that considering 'quality as fitness for purpose' was 'suitable for Vietnam' and this conception was 'in line with the world's general concept, especially like INQAAHE (International Network for Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education)'.

In the position of a policymaker in teacher development, the second MOET's official participating in the interview defined the quality of PTE as 'quality of the graduates'. He believed that when quality is taken into consideration, the education outcomes which are supposed to be in compliance with the national standards for teachers should be taken into account. An emphasis was placed on the MOET as the regulator, as he said that 'quality of teacher education is the outcomes enabling one to become a teacher, and these outcomes should be associated with the professional standards for teachers which are being supervised by the MOET'.

As such, the purpose is contextualised by the conditions and resources of a particular institution and should be in accordance with the needs and interests of multiple stakeholders. PTE quality should be in compliance with the national standards for teachers.

4.2. University conceptions

Overall, there is a clear consensus over the conceptions of PTE quality among the staff at multiple levels at the university, as most of them support the 'input-process-output quality' model.

In order to understand how the quality of PTE is defined by the University administrative body, the data was gathered from four interviewees, including (1) the Vice Chancellor, (2) the Head of Academic Affairs Office, (3) the Head of Quality Assurance Office, and (4) the Quality Assurance Specialist, were categorised into the University conceptions.

While the interviewees had divergent notions of PTE quality, they shared a similar opinion about this phenomenon; in particular, they believed that PTE quality is demonstrated in the end product - the graduate or the student to be a teacher. The Head of the Quality Assurance Office suggested that the quality of an education process should be shown in a 'good product' that 'can meet the educational goals of the institution'. In this sense, the quality of an object is usually associated with its positive and useful aspects. Such a quality product, in her view, should be made from a consolidation of 'good programme, good learning environment, and good career support'. This is similar to the opinion of the University leader, who stated 'good quality is formed by a coalescence of various educational resources.' As an integration of several elements was needed, PTE quality was viewed as a whole depending on the capacities of a programme provider.

In the Vice Chancellor's view, quality is 'a combination of quality of input, education process and output' in which 'the education process is more important than the input and the output'. As such, quality resides in all components of the education provision, but the operational stage of education is of particular interest. This view links to the idea that the education is similar to a production process where the student is seen as the raw material or part of the input to be transformed into the product of the system. It also relates to total quality management, which deals with quality in a continuous process and encourages an entire organisation approach.

From a senior academic viewpoint, quality should be examined in 'three main areas of a university, i.e. education, research, community service' (Specialist). This suggestion completely matches the university's mission, which includes 'satisfying the demands for high-quality teacher education, meeting the needs for advanced research and serving the education and socio-economic development of the region and the country' (University website, 2018). This statement reflects a holistic approach to quality which deals with systems as a whole and recognises the changing roles of universities in connection with external beneficiaries such as communities. It echoes a widely-accepted view that the three main roles or core functions of universities in the 21st century are teaching, research and community involvement (Altbach, 2008).

While the Head of Quality Assurance Office defined quality as a match between the end product and the goals of the institution, the Head of Academic Affairs Office noted that 'quality is seen in the reputation of the University and the recognition of the community for the university'. In the latter PTE quality is associated with the community's appraisal of the prominence of the institution, which shows the stakeholder's interest in the social status of the institution in identifying education quality. The Head of the Academic Affairs Office showed support for customer-oriented quality, claiming that 'I think the one who can make the fairest judgment about the PTE quality is the recruiter or the employer'. She referred to the recruiters' interest in the university's graduates as proof of the PTE quality, stating that 'the recruiters have been in preference of the products of the university'.

Quality, in this regard, is judged based on 'consumer' or 'user' expectations about the performance of the 'product' and their feedback on the actual experience of the product. As the relationship between 'graduate' and 'education goals' is taken into account, quality is aligned with the idea of 'quality as fitness for purpose' (Harvey and Green, 1993) which requires applying considerable thought to the question of whose purpose or goal is being served and how it is to be assessed. Recognition of the purpose of providing an appropriately educated workforce was shown in a goal of the university:

The university focuses on becoming a typically high-quality centre for higher education. In order to supply society with a high-quality human resource, the university aims to produce teachers and educators who have deep professional knowledge, capabilities of doing education, teaching and lifelong learning, and personalities and virtues of a teacher. (The University website, 2018)

As the concept of fitness for a purpose is articulated by a description of the characteristics of the graduate expected to meet the needs of society, it is simultaneously related to customers' needs. The evidence suggests the community was mainly counted as the customer, and the school employing the graduate was counted as the product user. While the university identifies itself as the teacher-producer and the society as the customer, none of the senior staff mentioned any other kinds of customers. The idea of the customer could be expanded on, making it worth considering whether the lecturers, the students or the managers themselves are customers, what the customers' needs are, and how some implied needs are recognised alongside the stated needs.

4.3. Department conceptions

This section presents an analysis of opinions given by heads, deputy heads and eight lecturers distributed evenly at the Department of Geography and the Department of History. In the analysis, conceptions of the staff at the two departments are combined into a category while their views are holistically considered.

From the academic leader's perspective, it was asserted that 'education quality is the capacities of the graduate' (Geography Head). This notion is supported by the leader of the History Department, who indicated that three significant elements to consider in PTE quality are subject knowledge, professional skills, and professional ethics, which graduates of the programme should achieve. According to the History Head, whether the education quality is satisfactory or not is closely related to what level of those three aspects the graduates achieved. Professional skills can be honed, and professional ethics can be improved in practice, whereas it is likely to be much harder to remedy shortcomings in fundamental domains like subject knowledge. Hence, he regarded student teachers' mastery of subject matter knowledge as good proof of PTE quality.

Not only the academic staff but also the students considered quality as shaped from output standards. The stakeholders' awareness of standards in various aspects indicates that standardisation is taken for granted across the institution.

Output standards were referred to as a significant conception of quality. While it was believed that 'the education quality should be only satisfactory if the capacities get to around 80 to 90 per cent of the output standards' (Geography Head), emphasis was placed on a necessary link between what the output standards include and what the community needs: as the former Geography Head said, 'education quality should show a balance between the output which indicates the real quality of graduates and the requirements of the society'.

In a similar vein, it was that believed there is a close relationship between the quality of an education process and the quality of output: as a lecturer stated, 'quality is shown in quality of output, quality of the students, particularly how effectively the graduates can work, and how they are recruited into educational organisations' (Lecturer 2).

With respect to the expected capacities of a teacher, a young lecturer who concurrently worked as a high school teacher conceptualised three features of a good-quality teacher that the education should include. This can be seen in the following statement:

From my point of view, quality of education is about how to train teachers with extensive subject knowledge, good pedagogical ability and good professional qualities. There are three factors: the first is the subject matter knowledge, the second is the pedagogical capability, and the third is the moral character of a teacher (Lecturer 3).

In actuality, there is a general consensus on the idea of identifying quality based on output standards. Under the recent education reform (MOET, 2013), standards and standardisation have been frequent discourses. Standardisation can be found in many different fields and many different components of the education system, such as curricula, programmes, physical resources, especially the teaching force both in schools and HEIs.

In the discussion of crucial features of education quality, education purposes and education goals were also taken into account. A lecturer at the Department of History believed that 'PTE quality means how education outcomes eventually look, how graduates will be, what education goals they achieve' (Lecturer A). This lecturer emphasised that quality only existed as regards the graduate's attainment of the education goals, saying 'there is no quality or the quality is just low or even valueless if a graduate fails to meet the pre-set requirements'.

According to all the lecturers from this department, the extent to which a graduate achieves education goals is a mirror of education quality. For instance, a lecturer at the History Department claimed that 'in a nutshell, quality means the product was coming out at the end of the education that should achieve the goals stated in the programme' (Lecturer B). In addition, another respondent contended that 'quality is defined by whether graduates meet the programme's goals, the society's common demands, as well as the requirements with reference to similar PTE programmes in other higher education institutions' (Lecturer D).

In another History lecturer's opinion, quality means the volume of knowledge and the system of skills that the student attains after completing the programme (Lecturer C). Notably, he considered student performance, which is assessed by marking and grading systems as an aspect of quality. He also regarded the practical competencies of graduates as a significant indicator of quality, saying that 'quality lies in how graduates would prove their working capability in schools'.

Both the department leaders and the academic staff at the two departments expressed a strong belief that an education provider should regard the quality of education as their commitment to the community who will precisely tell what the quality of education looks like. For example, according to a lecturer, 'quality of PTE is specifically shown by how it meets the needs of the society, i.e. how graduates meet what schools need' (Lecturer 1). This opinion is similar to a former department leader's view suggesting that quality should be evaluated based on the institution's commitments to society, which should be aligned with labour market needs. Interestingly, this respondent stressed the significance of standards, which he believed to embody the university's quality and the considerations of community demands, stating: Our output standards are our commitments to the society regarding the quality of

education. We have built up the programmes and the output standards based on the needs of socio-economic development, and the needs of the labour market. Look at how the education could meet them, and then we could affirm the education quality.

In this regard, the institution's commitments were equated with the output standards made known to the public. There was also a strong belief that an education provider should regard the quality of education as their commitment to the community who will precisely tell what the quality of education looks like.

4.4. Student conceptions

While accepting the necessity of output standards, the students saw a positive connection between output standards applied with the possibility that graduates could be effective in teaching practice. The students added a practical dimension to quality by drawing attention to how the education should properly prepare the learners for teaching in the workplace, saying that 'quality of teacher education means the graduate must have sufficient knowledge, skills, and moral qualities of a teacher' (Student 8), or 'quality means that what students learn must be practical. In other words, it is something useful for graduates at work' (Student 7).

While the emphasis placed on the practicality of education was clearly shown, employability was highlighted as a signal of quality. Such a view was discussed by half of the 16 students. For example, it was stated that 'the education received must be effective in use, effective for getting a job later' (Student 5); 'the foremost sign of a good higher education institution is that the graduates are employed right after leaving the university and they are ready to work' (Student 1); 'PTE quality means the education is to produce graduates who will be accepted and employed by recruiters' (Student C).

Interestingly, the consensus of the opinions given by staff and students about the policy being exercised is demonstrated by student voice, which indicates their awareness of a link between education quality and official regulations on output standards. For example: 'In order to judge the quality of teacher education, we should look at, first, criteria of the Ministry of Education, which are related to objectives, criteria, output standards of the University; organisational structure, education management and processes of assessment should be looked at, too'. (Student 8)

What is directly reflected in the student conceptions of quality is the emphasis on a pragmatic approach. Evidence shows that all the students regarded employability as the main motivation for their learning, while some of them paid attention to how to succeed in the exams, which was a real motivation. None of them spoke of whether they were driven by internal rewards but most of them mentioned extrinsic rewards or reinforcements. As the pragmatic reasons such as jobs, examinations and assessments generated their learning motivation, and there was seemingly domination of extrinsic over I intrinsic motivation for their learning.

4.5. Discussion

Clearly emerging from the findings is the 'input-process-output quality' model, which was highlighted by the stakeholders actively involved in the PTE, particularly by the university staff, and the students. This pattern of the stakeholders' views implies the significance of considering how the input, the process, and the output of the PTE are managed by the education provider. Meanwhile, there is seemingly scant attention paid to an approach to quality associated with the concept of HE. It can be inferred from the evidence that policymakers, university staff, and students tend to perceive higher education as the process of fulfilling particular slots in the labour market with individuals who are going to be "productive" (Barnett, 1992, p.16). Therefore, in their quest for the quality of PTE, they give serious consideration to the envisaged destinations of the students, i.e. schools. Typically, it is expected that PTE graduates end up in the teaching profession. Quality appears to be conceptualised within the idea of students as products of the system. Apart from the Quality Assurance Specialist and one Geography lecturer's reference to a conception of the mission and roles of HE, there is no more discussion of definitions of quality from a different value position. Therefore, it is worthwhile to listen to Barnett's argument (1992, p. 20) that in a HE system geared to input-process-output quality, 'the educational experience of students is neglected unless it turns out that there is something amiss with the output (when employers complain, for example, that their graduate employees are either insufficiently specialised), or - increasingly today - are insufficiently "flexible" - a code word for more general knowledge and skill'.

The evidence indicates that the stakeholders considered the quality of the PTE in terms of 'fitness for purpose'. From this point of view, on the one hand, the purpose is defined by the institution to meet the requirements reflecting the institutional mission and the programme objectives; on the other hand, the purpose is defined by the external professional bodies, including the state regulator. In addition, the quality of the PTE seems to be judged with reference to whether the quality-related intentions of the institution are sufficient. In this sense, the quality of the PTE is not

defined as quality per se but attached to the particular purpose of teacher education, which is tied to the institutional objectives. According to not only the administrative staff but also the academic staff, the PTE should include consideration of how the degree prepares the teacher students for employment, which is the primary educational purpose of an undergraduate HE. The notion of quality as 'fitness of purpose' implies that the quality of the PTE can be measured by the labour market outcomes of the graduates. The labour market for the graduates, in the stakeholders' views, is essentially the school system. This finding shows a marked tendency towards utilitarianism in education, which views always learning as a means to some social end, concerned with 'practice' and coupled with survivalism, which places a heavy emphasis on the degree holder's skills for earning a living (Goodlad, 1995).

As the conception of quality as 'fitness for purpose' is often associated with a check on how education achieves social-economic purposes, the quality of the PTE is considered in terms of how it meets the needs of schools and society. In this regard, quality PTE makes quality graduates the prospective teaching force. It is generally accepted that what is considered good teacher education depends on views of what is a good teacher. While the stakeholders expressed several ideas about what is meant by a 'good teacher', most of them, especially the lecturers and the students are of the opinion that what constitutes a 'good teacher' is concerned with quality in three key areas: subject knowledge, teaching methods or instructional skills, and professional ethics.

However, what makes a good teacher as regards the teachers' standards were vague, as the respondents did not enter into in-depth discussion of what are professional teacher standards' requirements. While the findings reveal the stakeholders' strong advocacy of standards in education, including the field of teacher education, there is very little evidence on how the respondents elaborate on the contemporary teachers' standards. The respondents' silence regarding further clarification of their conception of quality in connection with the national teachers' standards implies their limited understanding of these subjects. The lack of information provided indicates the difference in the policymakers' and the academics' interpretation of quality from the policy and practice angles. Whilst the official policy has gained great acceptance among the multiple stakeholders, there is a gap between their conceptual understanding of quality and standards and the implementation of the respective policy. Contextually, the fact that the current teachers' standards lack detailed guidance as to how trainee teachers achieve those standards could be a plausible reason for the knowledge gap.

It appears that the Government and the University subscribed to rhetoric of professional standards and standardisation. This approach proves to be welcome as the key to improving the quality of teacher education as well as the teaching force in Vietnam. The acknowledgement of the creation and implementation of teachers' standards would raise questions concerning what is meant by *quality* in teaching and learning, what is the essence of high-quality education, and the extent to which prospective teachers and teacher educators should be professionally prepared for service.

Although the stakeholders' receptiveness to and compliance with the policy of standards in education was clearly expressed, there was a lack of critical ideas about the teachers' standards. The respondents' knowledge about the teachers' standards appears to be loosely connected to their knowledge about the standards documents that institutionally define the object of evaluation of teachers. It is rather a reduction of their prior knowledge regarding a traditional model of a good teacher with reference to background knowledge, subject knowledge, pedagogical skills and notably, the good teacher as a moral authority. Interestingly, there is a shared conception amongst the lecturers and the students that a good teacher is a charismatic individual, especially tough influence on student learning and moral transformation. The charismatic influence and moral authority of the good teacher is consistent with popular culture and Confucian tradition (Moore, 2004).

While there was a strong emphasis placed on the teacher's knowledge, skills and professional ethics required for a tightly-controlled school curriculum, the stakeholders' ideas about these three aspects of the teacher model are very generic. The key requirements for teachers, such as good subject knowledge and good instructional skills, received special attention from the lecturers and the students. However, these are not sufficient prerequisites for becoming a good teacher in the sense that teaching is a complex educational process. In other words, teachers are required to be 'not only pedagogically competent and knowledgeable about what they teach, but able to enthuse, motivate and engage the learners, who are able to be at their best at all times' (Day and Smethem, 2009, p. 7). The evidence suggests that there is scant attention paid to some bodies of substantial knowledge and skills expected of teachers in modern society, such as knowledge of pupil behaviour management, and learners with special educational needs and disabilities, which have become reasonable requirements for teachers in developed education systems (OECD, 2011). From an international perspective, this implies that there is a gap in the Vietnamese lecturers' and teachers' knowledge of a modern view of teacher professionalism and standards. Thus, evidence suggests that it is important

for the key stakeholders to address what is involved in becoming a good teacher, a high-quality teacher, or an ideal teacher in changing times. Inquiry into this issue should refer to the teachers' standards regularly as standardisation of the teaching force remains the national policy.

Understanding of such contentious concepts of a teacher depends on differing views of the role of the teacher and the aims of teacher education, as teacher education programmes are designed based on certain conceptual orientations reflecting educational ideologies or traditions (Furuhagen et al., 2019). There are common key components of a 'good teacher', a 'high quality teacher' and an 'ideal teacher' which are considered to be qualities involved in being and becoming a teacher that the teacher should possess in time. However, the concepts of a good, high quality, ideal teacher have subtle nuances of meaning. A 'high-quality teacher' is described according to the standards for teachers and the programme standards which include the requirements of an input-process-output model of teacher preparation. A 'good teacher' or an 'ideal teacher' is recognised in terms of possessing required professional qualities, demonstrating successful teaching practice and satisfying the stakeholders', especially the learners', expectations. While both good and ideal teachers are defined in terms of political and moral ideals, a 'good teacher' is not necessarily an 'ideal teacher', as 'ideal' is close to 'perfect' and sometimes means going beyond established standards.

5. CONCLUSION

The investigation into the stakeholders' conceptions of quality of PTE indicate that there is a convergence of ideas about quality of PTE that strongly supports 'quality as fitness for purpose' and the classic model of 'input-process-output quality'. In myriad ways, the stakeholders underlined a special need for well-prepared teachers/the products of the PTE to meet customer requirements. The main message conveyed by multiple stakeholders, from the teacher education provider to the students, is that there is still a significant gap between the prospective teachers' ability to respond to practical demands in the context of Vietnamese school education. Clearly, there is a need for PTE change that can be seen in heightened expectations for close-to-practice PTE. This implies that it is important for policymakers, university-led teacher education providers, especially the PTE curriculum developers, academic staff, and teachers to define teaching professionalism clearly. While one-quarter of the century has elapsed, a profound understanding of the role, qualities and skills of the 21st-century teacher is always significant to developing appropriate teacher-related policies. In order to enable teachers to effectively respond to higher social and economic expectations, teacher education policy should be aligned with a wider concept of teaching professionalism.

Given the evidence on the stakeholders' conceptual consensus on the quality of PTE, the findings carry implications of an examination of how the quality of the PTE in the particular programmes is managed in practice and an acceptance of the notion of stakeholder-relative quality. As for the university leader, middle leaders and academic staff, the shared notion of 'input-process-output quality' should be considered with respect to significant dimensions of quality management, including quality control, quality assurance, and quality enhancement. An examination of the practice of quality assurance in terms of the 'input- process- output' and the 'fitness for purpose' at the studied university, which is a typical teacher education provider, can yield insights into the picture of PTE provided. Further research should explore the quality of PTE at the operational level, which will potentially reveal similarities and differences in the stakeholders' perceptions of the PTE. Thus, it would inform stakeholders in PTE of empirical evidence and provide a basis for developing education management policy and enhancing the quality of teacher education in Vietnam.

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