

# Citizenship and the Shifting Values of Vietnam's Higher Education: Perspectives of Vietnamese Overseas-educated Academics and University Leaders

## Abstract

This chapter explores perceptions and experiences of Vietnamese overseas-educated academics and university leaders about higher education reform in Vietnam. Drawing on Gerard Delanty's (2001) concept of citizenship and Pierre Bourdieu's (1977, 1990) theory of practice, the chapter makes two propositions. First, university academics and leaders in this study hold contested values about citizenship and their role in Vietnam's higher education reform. Both academics and leaders align with the policy mission of education for economic participation, which emphasises contributions of graduates to vocational needs of a transitional economy. At the same time, they both follow the Vietnamese universities culture that value hierarchy of knowledge within existing social relations. Second, contested values lead to competing forms of technological and cultural citizenship, which may counter the momentum of reform. The academics nevertheless mediate modes of knowledge in accordance with cultural norms in order to enable changes in individual teaching practices. The chapter offers some broader implications about linking citizenship with higher education in the context of transitional economies such as Vietnam.

**Key words:** citizenship, capital, Vietnam, overseas-educated academics, higher education, reform, knowledge economy

## Introduction

Vietnam's shift to market-based economies have led to dynamic economic growth in the last four decades. Alongside this shift, the state aims to reform higher education in order to improve quality of education and equip students to participate in the local and global labour markets (Pham & Fry 2004). In 2005, Education Law and Higher Education Reform Agenda (HERA) was implemented alongside the Strategies for Socio-Economic Development (2010-2020) in order to support socioeconomic development and facilitate international trades (Hayden & Lam 2010). The focus on integration into the global economy, a key element of Vietnam's *Doi Moi* (Renovation) economic reform, has also resulted in strategies of international integration in HERA. The parallel higher education reform with market-based economic reform and international integration led to a regulatory framework for foreign cooperation and investment in Vietnam's education and training.<sup>1</sup> Subsequent to gaining membership with the World Trade Organisation in 2007, and compliance with the General Agreement on Trade in Services, numerous Western universities were able to enter Vietnam to provide educational services for profit (Fry, 2009; MOET, 2013). HERA also created incentives for sending students and academics abroad<sup>2</sup>, which has resulted in significant increase of students studying abroad in the last two decades (from 1,139 students in 1999 to 130,000 in 2016 (VIED 2017)).

The assumptions underpinning this shift in Vietnamese higher education are threefold. First, there are shared values among students, parents, universities, employers, and the state about universities' role in knowledge production and transfer for the economy. Second, university leaders, staff, and students have the capacity to engage in the reformed teaching and learning processes and acquire necessary knowledge and skills to meet the demands of this new knowledge economy. Third, universities can foster an enabling culture for transformative practices that HERA envisions. However, literature on Vietnamese higher education reform and internationalisation has consistently

---

<sup>1</sup> Decree 6, 2000 (Nguyen, 2018)

<sup>2</sup> Project 911, 322 and 599 for 2010-2020 are government scholarship projects sending students and university academics abroad at undergraduate and master's level (MOET website).

pointed out numerous challenges relating to these assumptions. There are issues of quality control of transnational programs as a result of institutional issues including lack of funding, lack of autonomy, lack of staff capacity, lack of infrastructure, lack of commitment to international partnerships, lack of knowledge about international networks (Welch, 2010; Nguyen et al., 2016; Vi, 2004). Other issues relate to foreign programs' effectiveness due to lack of consideration for local, historical, social, and cultural dimensions in Vietnamese educational context (Nguyen & Tran, 2018). Brain drain remains a pertinent issue (Welch, 2010; Nguyen, 2011; Tran, 2014). Although increased employability has been reported as impact of studying abroad for returnees (Pham, 2014; Mellors-Bournes et al., 2014), studies also point to cultural shocks and lack of opportunities to apply research or technical knowledge and skills (Pham, 2019).

This chapter aims to explore the perceptions and experiences of Vietnamese overseas-educated academics about HERA through the lens of citizenship. Citizenship is defined by Marshall (1950) as equality of membership, participation, and status or standing of individuals with a bounded realm. It is a useful concept since responsibilities and citizenry underpins the mission of HERA in development of human resources for the knowledge economy. Citizenship has application to individuals and the institutions because the latter is the community in which the individuals operate, create and maintain. In the context of Vietnam's higher educational reform, or for any higher education system with similar trajectory of development, to understand whether universities are serving the needs of the people and the country, we must ask the question about how university academics see themselves as part of that reform.

After introducing and defining two important concepts of citizenship that frame this chapter: technological and cultural, the next section discusses Pierre Bourdieu's theory of social practices to guide the chapter's analysis of citizenship. The findings of a case study of international Vietnamese overseas-educated academics teaching in Vietnamese universities are discussed to provide insights into their perceptions of HERA, their teaching practices or other modes of participation in HERA. The concluding section offers some broader implications about linking citizenship with higher education in the context of transitional economies like Vietnam.

### ***Two Concepts of Citizenship***

Following Delanty (2001), technological citizenship refers to citizens of the "technological" age making their ways through global exchange of information system and in doing so, remaking their society through the knowledge economy. "Technology" includes physical tools like information, media, internet, computers and organisational artifices that govern its availability and use. It also includes people's awareness of applying technologies or building technological infrastructure to strengthen their capacities (Frankenfeld, 1992). Technological citizenship is understood in this chapter to be about the knowledge, skills and attitudes that can permit citizens to participate in a knowledge economy.

Delanty (2001) argued that citizenship is a process that is inherently cultural in that ideas regarding members of a society or citizenry are based on cultural assumptions. People can take up citizenship positions that accord with or diverge from the culture of their community, institution, or country (Volpp, 2007). This is because in identifying themselves within the collective, people bring specific cultural values, and at the same time they take on the values of the collective. Cultural citizenship is conceived within specific cultural groups - common culture of norms, values and practices – and as a result makes some citizens feel more or less accepted than others (Delanty, 2001).

Technological and cultural citizenship work interdependently in that where technology is taking place as part of an economic or educational shift, whether people can equally take part in that shift depends on the norms, values, practices that people engage in, in order to normalise the "technology" enabling the shift to take effect. It is necessary to understand both technological and cultural citizenship in order to understand how a person may make claim to full participation in certain institutions by their fellow members rather than they have a right or responsibility to make that claim based on policy statements or legislation (Delanty, 2001). On its own, possession of greater or

lesser qualifications that may bring about skills and knowledge as *means* of academics' practices or production, in fact, explains very little about ways in which transitional universities generate or transfer knowledge. We need to know how academics constitute themselves as cultural groups, by status of their overseas qualifications in light of international integration objectives of HERA, or by internalising the local culture and knowledge system of the Vietnamese university.

## **Capital, Habitus and Field as Formative Conditions and Mobilisation of Citizenship**

Pierre Bourdieu's (1977, 1990) theory of practice can help explain how technological and cultural citizenship manifest through the use of overseas-acquired knowledge and skills as cultural artefacts, and in turn, constitute transformations or reproduction of the institutional culture that the academics find themselves in. Bourdieu's (1977, 1990) concepts of capital, habitus and field underscore his theory of practice. These are outlined briefly to explain how they are applied to understand citizenship in this chapter.

Bourdieu uses capital in the general economic sense of money. It is a principle for all various forms of economic capital like shares, finance, property, or non-economic capital like education, linguistic, political, familial because of their convertibility to economic capital. It is this in-principle convertibility that surmises from the place of capital in "capitalist" society that makes Bourdieu's capital applicable to an analysis about higher education reform for market-based economies (Blunden 2004). We can shed light on the impact of owning various forms of capital as a result of studying overseas for **academics' teaching and career practices** and what it means to them. For Bourdieu, a neat definition of capital is not required, although he conceptualises cultural capital, social capital and symbolic capital.

Capitals are deployed in the social world, which Bourdieu sees through the lens of *field* and *habitus*, complementary concepts representing the social and psychological processes which moderate the actions and attitudes of individuals so that stable systems of interpersonal and class relationships spontaneously reproduce themselves (Bourdieu, 2006). **A field is broadly an institution, with a normative and evolving set of rules, roles, and relationships. In adhering to the norms, rules, roles and relationships, people may gain certain status, authority, income, or autonomy, which Bourdieu refers to as the rewards specific to the field.** The *field* motivates people to carry out the functions of the *field* as if it were their own and ensure the maintenance of the *field* (Bourdieu, 1977). Examples of *fields* include the political system, academia, and the legal system.

*Habitus* is the "internalised form of the class condition and of the conditionings" by which a member of the class knows, without thinking about it. It predisposes people to react to different cultural stimuli (Bourdieu, 1977, p. 78). *Habitus* is sensibility acquired through a lifetime of upbringing in those conditions and the possibilities they include or exclude (Bourdieu, 1977). The extent to which the person uses their owned capitals depends on the *field* in which they operate and their *habitus*. In other words, having capitals is not enough; rather their ability to deploy capitals determines the extent of their agency, which is conditioned by the *field* in which they operate and the *habitus* which they have internalised over time.

In the following analysis, the chapter uncovers how ownership of capital can be the resource that enable the academics to express citizenship. Capitals are broadly categorised as: 1) technological capital which can be understood as the overseas-acquired knowledge, skills, and attributes that they can mobilise to enable technological citizenship; 2) cultural capital can be institutionalised by way of the academic's place of education or specific university, or objectified through their achieved qualifications for example, overseas qualifications; 3) social capital is understood to be the social relations or connections needed to make use of one's technological and cultural capital. Someone who aspires to participate in HERA may have the necessary knowledge and skills and cultural norms and attributes (technological capital), or perceived with distinction for example a Harvard degree (cultural capital); but they still need relevant social connections that can appreciate and value their qualifications (social capital) in order for them to deploy their technological and cultural capital.

Deployment of capitals in ways that academics consider worthwhile is the expression of citizenship. It is contingent on their individual norms, values and prior experiences (*habitus*), which can accord with or diverge from the university culture and the university sector (*field*). The analysis that follow will discuss firstly Vietnamese overseas-educated academics' technological, cultural, and social capital and how do they denote technological citizenship. Secondly, the paper analyses academics' individual norms and values about knowledge production and transfer in relation to the university's norms and values and how do they hinder or generate cultural citizenship in the context of HERA.

## Methods

This chapter draws on unstructured in-depth interviews with seventeen Vietnamese overseas-educated academics and university leaders working in Vietnamese universities (n=17). The participants were recruited through the author's personal networks, social media, and human resources departments of six large public universities in four major cities in Vietnam (Hanoi, Ho Chi Minh City, Hue and Danang). The author conducted all interviews in two stages over 18 months from late 2013 to 2014. In the first stage, the interviews were conducted with the academics that lasted about 90-120 minutes. Subsequent to these interviews, the academics nominated some leaders from their university. The author then liaised with these leaders and invited them to participate in the interviews. Interviews with these leaders lasted about 60-90 minutes. All interviews were conducted in Vietnamese.

Thematic analysis (Huberman et al., 2013) was employed using NVivo software. The coding process aimed to identify various categories of capitals defined in the last section (technological, cultural and social), and relationships between these capitals and academics' attitudes towards HERA and their reform practices. These codes were compared across types of university or field (private, public and foreign), staff vs leaders, age groups, types of funding, and cities. No clear patterns across groups or group differences were identified. The following discussion of findings will focus on the key themes that emerged from the interviewees, although variations will be noted when relevant to the issue discussed. Table 1 summarises the background information of the participants. No personal data was collected for the leaders that participated in the second stage interview.

Table 1: Background information of participants

Participants	Sex	Age	University	City	Position	Overseas study qualifications	Number of years return	Overseas study country	Overseas study program
OG1	F	>50	Public	Hanoi	Professor	PhD, Economics	8-10	Singapore	BS
OG2	F	31-40	Public	Hanoi	Associate Professor	PhD, Law	1-3	Japan	BS
OG3	F	21-30	Foreign	HCM	Professional staff	Master, Human resources	1-4	UK	SF
OG4	M	21-30	Public	Hanoi	Lecturer	Master, Development studies	1-5	Netherlands	OS
OG5	M	31-40	Public	HCM	Researcher	PhD, Nanotechnology	1-6	France	BS
OG6	F	31-40	Private	HCM	Lecturer	Master, Finance	1-7	USA	GS
OG7	M	41-50	Public	HCM	Senior lecturer	PhD, Finance	1-8	Australia	GS
OG8	M	31-40	Public	Hue	Head of Department	Master, Finance	4-7	Australia	BS
OG9	F	21-30	Public	Hue	Lecturer	Master, Accounting	1-3	Australia	BS
OG10	F	21-30	Public	Danang	Lecturer	Master, Finance	1-4	Other OECD	BS

UL1	M	>50	Public	Hanoi	Vice Director				
UL2	F	>50	Private	HCM	Rector Board				
UL3	M	>50	Public	Danang	Head of Department				
UL4	M	31-40	Private	HCM	Lecturer				
UL5	F	31-40	Foreign	HCM	Lecturer				
UL6	F	41-50	Public	Hanoi	Lecturer				

OG=Overseas graduate

UL=University leader

OS=Overseas university scholarship

GS=Government scholarship

BS=Bilateral scholarship

SF=Self finance

## Technological Capital and the Value of “Western” Education

The interviewees’ response to HERA is generally positive in that there is a consensus about the role of universities in equipping students with necessary skills to participate in the market-based economies. Both academics and leaders shared the value of HERA and the intention of the Ministry of Education and Training (MOET) for reforming Vietnamese universities:

The state wants to have human resources that meet the demand of the current level of development. I believe in their intention. I see it with a positive view. OG1

The idea of internationalisation of higher education as a strategy for reform was also appreciated by all interviewees. However, different practices of internationalisation in different *fields* were noted:

There is the trend of internationalisation, but we need to talk about how we should select what’s suitable for Vietnam. We all engage in internationalisation across different schools, but it is done differently everywhere. If you come through the gate, you can see the slogan: “Innovate – Integrate – Develop.” The idea of “innovate” is actually integration or internationalisation. It becomes a slogan and the mission of the school, and we have to follow the trend of global integration and decide the direction for our research. OG1

This comment reaffirms the idea of higher education reform as internationalisation. This senior academic felt that she had to respond to the MOET and her school’s mission of internationalisation, although what that actually involves were diverse. As Darriulat (2011) argued, the problem with Vietnamese higher education reform is not the lack of commitment or shared value, rather the processes of reform are problematic because they tend to be top down and do not allow the new generation to focus on research to boost intellectual capacity of the universities.

Internationalisation was also thought to be about sending academics abroad on government scholarships to equip themselves with “Western” education and return home to apply their knowledge and skills to educate and train Vietnamese students. For many interviewees, this mode of student mobility was a more effective form of internationalisation. Their perceptions align with Darriulat’s (2011) emphasis on the importance of supporting returning international students to build a body of knowledge around them in order to effectively use their knowledge and skills that they acquired from overseas.

University XX pay a lot of attention to developing talented individuals by sending them abroad. This is a way of real internationalisation. OG1

This sentiment of grassroots reform suggests the idea that knowledge resides within the people, which universities can take advantage of its reform. It was a popular view among the academics rather than the leaders.

There was a consensus among interviewees that overseas-acquired knowledge and skills provide fertile opportunity for higher education reform in Vietnam because of its application toward work readiness. These types of knowledge and skills were the technological capital that they own and wish to deploy in their universities. It includes for example technical, technological, communication, leadership, problem solving, presentation, as well as personal attributes like confidence, independence, self-awareness, and proactiveness. There was a tacit knowledge of the modern university as a connector to the modern economy, which these academics saw themselves as capable and responsible to effect. There were two emerging ideas about how they could go about achieving this in relation to their overseas acquired knowledge and skills.

First, transferable knowledge and skills were considered relevant for professional life. Many interviewees spoke about the instrumental value of learning to develop human capital, that is to acquire relevant skills and knowledge that they can use in employment. These types of knowledge and skills are seen to be “transferable” from the “West” to the Vietnamese context, and “transferable” from the university to the workplace:

It is more necessary to teach soft skills because technical skills are accumulated through work - learning by doing. Also, technical knowledge about the law constantly changes because the law constantly changes. I think the most important thing is to teach students how to deal with a problem than how to solve that problem with technical knowledge and skills. OG3

The above comment distinguishes between soft skills and technical skills and their application in Vietnam. The distinction is made from the perspective of teaching. While both are important as technological capital, she is emphasising her role in transferring transferable skills, because the Vietnamese context does not permit a transfer of overseas technical knowledge and skills. This emphasis on skills application rather than skills as an object of ownership is also implied in the below comment of a university leader. This leader connects higher education with employment outcomes wherein the students’ development of skills is assessed in terms of direct application and contribution to the company. The leader felt the change in internship practices and assessments as a result of following overseas universities internship practices. Her view clearly aligned with HERA’s intention for internationalisation. For this person, the ability of overseas-educated academics to transfer pedagogical practices is a marker of internationalisation and effective reform:

Internationalisation is pretty much in our teaching programs. For example, in marketing, all textbooks come from the United States, so we have to read and extract content from those textbooks. We also want to teach the ways we were taught in the US, for example, group work, e-learning, student-centred teaching, even assessment. I think my faculty takes on reform in relation to practical aspects of teaching and learning. Practicum now includes internship and writing reports about their practical experience. The mentoring and assessment by the company that the student interns are also part of student assessment in their university coursework. Before, students only went and gathered some data in internship. There was no real contribution to the internship companies and these companies felt that taking up students was a burden. Most universities in Vietnam have changed but my faculty and my university has changed the most in the last 4 years. UL2

In the same sentiment, the academic in the below comment, felt that producing graduates equipped for modern workforce to catch up with Western modernity is the idea of international education:

University X has many instructors who study abroad and hence have quite good qualifications. So, quite a number of their students, once graduated, can work for a foreign environment. This university with its overseas educated academics is the future of higher education in Vietnam because they can narrow the gap between universities here and abroad. OG4

These views are consistent with Dang (2011) that found many Vietnamese universities adopting curricula of overseas universities program as part of the international partnership program (degree awarded by foreign universities) or joint degree programs (degree awarded by both foreign and Vietnamese universities).

The overseas educated academics in this study also felt that English skills are a form of technological capital. They cited ability to read and extract teaching materials from English texts books and journal articles, teach in English in programs purchased from overseas universities. Interestingly, their observations attribute the value of English skills to the scarcity of English proficiency in the universities' staff, and in the context of economic integration:

Most senior academics, staff and leaders do not have English or French language skills to read research documents. OG8

Language skills are important in Vietnam. If I study English in Vietnam, then my language skills are quite low. But if I lived overseas, or worked with foreigners, then my language skills are good. We need English skills to work with foreign firms, especially with so many foreign investors in Vietnam. UL6

The currency of English as a technological capital depends on whether the university is private or public. For those who work in private universities, they seem to be able to apply English more, which may relate to the extent to which the university engages in transnational education programs:

The dean and deputy I think they prefer overseas students because we can teach in English. They see teaching English as a progress of reform that they want to ascend. We have more English-instructed classes than before. It is a requirement of the university. UL4

These findings are consistent with Nguyen's (2018) claim that the growth in transnational education services in Vietnam led to the popularity of English as a language of instruction.

The instrumental value of technological capital is also expressed directly in relation to economic capital. As Bourdieu (1984) argued, those that lack economic capital may seek to convert other forms of capital to economic capital. Many interviewees spoke about the necessity of teaching to acquire economic capital that they lack:

Teaching in Vietnam can be very poor compared to people who work in industry. OG7  
Salary follows the government salary system, which is very low. So, you must find other work yourself to increase your living standards, like additional teaching at private universities. OG3  
Compared to emerging services like banking, finance or marketing, my salary is low. OG9  
To have higher income, you have to teach more classes. Whether you get classes depends on your boss who does the allocation for everyone. If you are favoured, then you will get more classes. People in general will try to compete with each other to get more classes. OG6

They therefore tried to promote the "sensibilities" (Bourdieu 1977) of professional skills and knowledge to the university, particularly through their ability to teach overseas-acquired transferable skills. This may also explain their emphasis on transferable skills rather than technical knowledge discussed earlier. In other words, academics constructed value of technological capital based on their

ownership and value of economic capital, as much as their individual value of these capitals. These observations suggest why technological capital is seen as resource that can be converted to economic capital, but that the necessity of such convertibility is because of a lack of economic capital. The structural issue of the university environment is the uneven playing field for academics, who seek to deploy knowledge and skills through “favours” with leaders. As Darriulat (2011, p. 2025) argued, this materialistic environment, with conditions for despotism negatively impact the ability of academics to contribute to reform, because academics could only spend a certain amount of their time to realise their responsibility in teaching. This kind of negative impact is also evident in this study where many academics chose to undertake additional teaching load outside their universities.

## **Cultural Capital and the “Value” Ambivalence of Western Education**

The second view about the value of overseas-acquired knowledge and skills emphasises the intrinsic value of the person and their wisdom beyond application in employment. Some academics viewed learning as developing humans as *ends* in development of a society. For them intellectual knowledge is valuable insofar as it is the formation of the person – how they can improve their self and create wisdom of society, which they see as beyond the knowledge economy. Trinh (2011) referred to this wisdom-based tradition of the Vietnamese knowledge system as about the humanistic actor rather than the economic actor. There was a sense of ambivalence about the historically embedded Vietnamese wisdom-based education and the skills-based functional approach of Western education. Some academics felt that the “Western university” encompassed an intellectual distinction – a cultural capital:

The role of the university is to train a student or a lecturer to have an independent mind. The problem with Vietnamese universities is that they are run by bureaucrats instead of intellectuals. In France, universities are run by intellectuals. UL2

Although this comment points to university management, it also implies an “universalising” distinction of Western university because of its representation of freedom and autonomy. Such a “distinction” (Bourdieu, 1984) of Western intellectuals has origins from Vietnam’s historical colonial context, which this leader interestingly juxtaposed against the problem of state membership in university governance in contemporary universities. This colonial mindset *habitus* was expressed in many other instances, and presented as an advantage for some academics:

In any government agency, which the university is one, you can be at an advantage if you have a foreign degree. OG2

People often think those who have studied abroad have much potential. So, they automatically think they are credible. There is more faith in them. They are often seen as capable of coaching their team. OG4

However, many academics also recognised that the extent to which such distinction can be a “real” advantage depends on their social field. This academic spoke about the “intellectual” gap between them and their co-workers and leaders:

The knowledge and worldview of my tutors are limited. OG4

The problem is also because there is a knowledge gap between us and our leaders, which creates bias. I see this bias through their attitudes or resistance to my suggestions. OG1

The differentiated values of overseas-acquired knowledge and skills that these academics perceived expose both themselves and their co-workers and leaders to certain positional status within the



university. The spontaneous distinction or prejudice directed at these academics, as exemplified by the academic above is a reflection of their attempt to make themselves citizens or agents of reform, where upon they can find themselves on the periphery or the centre of the knowledge production. Western education is their system of reference, an object from which they can learn, a point of measurement, and a goal to catch up to (Chen, 2010):

Generation after generation of academics with international education, our students will be exposed to international standards. Universities in Vietnam will catch up with others internationally and our students will be more independent. UL1

While Western education can be an advantage or alibi for transformative action, it can also present anxiety. Despite the shared agreement that Western knowledge should be emulated in the pursuit of international integration, some academics spoke about exclusion because of their overseas education:

If there is a small number of people who have studied abroad, then they are the minority. This means that the majority does not have the same appreciation or understanding of their knowledge and skills. It is then very difficult to utilize what they have studied. They would feel isolated and excluded. So, differences in knowledge and skills are not always good. It depends on those around you, what they possess and appreciate. UL4

This comment suggests that, for Western education to be cultural capital, they must be valued by people around them, not just those overseas-educated academics who own them. The strategy of vesting value in the technological capital that academics already monopolise or can leverage (discussed in the last section) has the same logic. If no one values what they have or can do, they will not be able to mobilise and convert to economic capital. As Takeuchi Yoshimi (1961) suggests, the alleged “universalist” value of the West can only be realised through the appropriation of Western values in the knowledge produced by the non-West. As expressed by these Vietnamese academics, technological capital and cultural capital that has their assumed value in a Western education is dependent on the local Vietnamese conditions in which they may be exchanged. For many, this lack of appropriation of Western knowledge and skills translate to lack of technological citizenship:

Sometimes we know that this way maybe better, but we cannot apply appropriately it to the current system that we have. For some people who go overseas and are exposed to things that are too advanced and modern. When they come back to Vietnam, they see our universities as non-idealistic and they want to change but those ideals that they see from overseas are not appropriate. So, the effectiveness of their actions can be contradictory. UL3

These academics’ experiences suggest that accumulating technological or cultural capital is not enough. They need to be able to mobilise them, which means getting those around them to appreciate their value in the same way they do. Without shared values, the symbolic value of Western education may only create differences and exclusion, which would only lead to ambivalent practices of applying overseas education, which may not result in changed practices. So, academics must recognise the *field* in which their knowledge and skills, and qualifications have currency. Technological citizenship thus depends on the social *field* in which academics operate, because specific culture of the field enables mobilisation of technological and cultural capital. The workings of culture will be discussed next.

## **Social Capital and the Vietnamese Social Relations**

Studying overseas may offer a way for these academics to acquire “distinction” of knowledge and skills and a certificate to prove it, but such technological and cultural capital acquired overseas never

quite duplicated the ease and depth of the cultural resources that are normalised within the Vietnamese universities contexts:

Culture is also a disadvantage. It is ironical that studying and living overseas allows us to be exposed to a different culture. It also creates bias when you return to your home country and start to criticise some traditional aspect of the local culture, and you might create a gap between yourself and your own culture. OG4

The opportunities and practices of these academics were bound within their social relations with students, leaders and colleagues since these relations provided the necessary social capital to enable them to take actions. As the academic commented above, he could bring his acquired overseas knowledge and skills back home, but the extent to which he can make use of them depend on whether his colleagues and leaders recognise and appreciate their value. The contradictions and exclusions that these academics encountered reflect the social hierarchy in the Vietnamese university and broader society. Accessing this hierarchy became necessary to acquire social capital:

Bonding with colleagues and leaders is very important because if you cannot share things with the people you work with, then you will become isolated and once isolated, it will be difficult to do your work. UL6

The academic, in the comment above, connects her sense of belonging to her capacity to work in a citizenry way, which she refers to as making changes in her individual teaching practices rather than structural, process or curriculum changes. Her idea resonated with other academics, particularly those who recently returned or those in more junior roles. The idea of collaborating with colleagues and establishing connections with their leaders who share their ideals of teaching and learning is an expression of cultural citizenship because it enables their contribution to reform practices. In this way, technological citizenship is deliberated in conjunction with cultural citizenship at the teaching practices level.

Cultural citizenship could also be seen as an acknowledgement of their “subjectification” to power (Bourdieu, 1977) within the hierarchical relationships with senior leaders, who set the agenda in their universities, which in turn forces them to aim for empowerment and changes at the grassroots level:

If you don't agree with the organisational culture, leadership culture, you either have to quit or adapt to it by continuing with the norms of practices and not having too much expectations to make changes according with what you saw overseas. You must understand that such organizational culture has existed for hundreds of years in Vietnam and cannot change in a day or two. So, I try to be good at the small tasks to prove myself. UL5

This comment suggests that the academic sees the university culture and leadership structure as power structures in the *field*, which limit her ability to mobilise her overseas acquired knowledge and skills. At the same time, she considers adaptation to cultural norms to be an alternative way to gain autonomy through individual teaching practices (Bourdieu, 1977).

Culture is associated with the specificity of the *field*. If culture works to enhance the symbolic value of Western education then it enhances technological and cultural citizenship because it gives academics sense of identification, and currency to mobilise technological and cultural capital. If not, academics must seek social capital of relations with colleagues and leaders in order to promote their technological and cultural capital to work in their favour. Culture acts a medium of exchange between the relations between academics and their colleagues and leaders. Citizenship is inferred here by way of getting a sense of the “others” having claims on oneself, and through which one can gain from seriously engaging with rather than rejecting the “others”. Academics’ practices of cultural citizenship results in a maintenance of the Vietnamese culture as well as attempts to change culture. Although

these conforming practices might result in some changed teaching and learning practices, they also enhance institutional rigidity and patriarchal leadership of Vietnamese public universities that might not sustain the momentum required for long-term social change, as noted in the below comment:

In principle, there might be a priority for reform, but in reality, there is still a lot of bias and difficulties because of culture and the need to conform with leaders who resist to change. There are still many difficulties in what we can do to shift that culture. OG8

The challenge with culture, that these academics recount, is also noted by Huynh (2011) who argued that the quality of training and raising human resources and talents in universities depends on consistent value of the humanistic aspect of higher education reform among students, lecturers and school administrators. Other studies also pointed out challenges in Vietnamese universities regarding learning culture and management culture (Pham, 2019; Nguyen, 2011). The analysis in this chapter explains how culture, through activation and manipulation of social capital, is needed to ensure technological capital can be legitimised. Academics cultivated distinction for their Western education and tried to make use of whatever technological capital they had to leverage their distinction. In doing so, they had to acquire social capital to permit that distinction in the university. The university, for many, is a site of ambivalent conception and explication of citizenship, wherein the outcomes for reform could never be guaranteed. Their experiences are mediated articulation of technological and cultural citizenship that is dependent on the university's social hierarchy and carried from the broader society. As Delanty (2011) argued, the university structure social relations must change in order to fulfil citizenship of its academics. Reform needs a transformation of cultural model of university, which for these academics, is rather stagnant because of the strong contests of knowledge and culture in Vietnamese universities:

I think it will take 50 or 100 years for change in our universities. It is not a revolution, perhaps a very slow evolution. OG4

Reform has been slow since it requires change from the top, while they are still not changing from the top, because they haven't really understood and won't easily accept this change. It's a long process. OG1

## **Implications and Conclusions**

The issue of education in serving the needs of the people must ask the question about the being and doing of university academics: to what extent can or should university academics understand themselves as a university, or a citizen of the university, of their community, of Vietnam and what are the associated citizenry responsibilities? This chapter attempts to explore some of these questions from the perspectives of those inside the universities rather than from the outside looking in. It put forward two propositions. First, there are contested values about citizenship in Vietnamese overseas-educated academics' contribution to Vietnam's higher education reform. On the one hand, they align with the policy mission of education for economic participation, which emphasise contributions of graduates to vocational needs of a transitional economy – a form of technological citizenship. On the other, they struggle with the cultural practice of education as cultivation and endorsement of past traditions of Vietnamese university culture, which predispose academics to reproduce that culture – a type of cultural citizenship. Second, the Vietnamese university is a site of formation of competing forms of citizenship, where academics mediate modes of knowledge in accordance with cultural norms to enable changes in individual teaching practices. In aligning with the norms, they also enhance the norms and values of hierarchical leadership of Vietnamese public universities that often counter the momentum of reform.

The implications are that for reform to effectively take place, academics' participation in the reform at the grassroots level is critical. Vietnamese universities must create conditions for their

participation. As the landscape of higher education shifts, and there is an interplay of international and local knowledge and norms, the universities must be places of connectivity rather than fractures of knowledge production and transfer. The universities could be more democratic in valuing and using different modes of knowledge and skills whether local or international. This calls for new cultural models within the university that allow academics to have shared identities and responsibilities in knowledge production and transfer. Without this cultural revision, the universities will miss the opportunity of reform, and continue to be self-referential bureaucratic organisations.

Although bounded by the case study and inherent limitations of the methods of participants recruitment, interview methods, and small sample size, the chapter raises prospects for thinking about the role of university and citizenship in contemporary age as a way forward. Citizenship is a matter of being a citizen – defined as living and participating in a particular community, in a particular way, that society deems appropriate and valuable (Delanty, 2011). Technological citizenship works in tandem with cultural citizenship, in that technological capital of skills and knowledge aligns with the meaning, purpose and direction of their application. Applying Bourdieu's (1977, 1990) theory of practice to understand formation and enablement of citizenship, the chapter offers ways to see how modes of knowledge and skills as technological capital are intertwined with cultural capital of Western education, and social capital that manifest in culture which the academics must accord or change. Academics find themselves along different positions of power in the university as they accumulate different stocks and balances of technological, cultural and social capital to convert to economic capital.

Citizenship requires *field* and *habitus* that enable shared value and appreciation of knowledge and skills to make those knowledge and skills relevant and deployable. In Vietnam's transitional economy and shifted values of higher education towards the market, knowledge is instrumentalised for economic reality. Yet, the intrinsic value of knowledge as the end goal of the person still matters. Overseas-educated academics hold ambivalent positions of citizenship. On the one hand, the image of "backward" Vietnamese university creates the aspiration for technological citizenship. On the other hand, the institutional culture delineates the application of overseas-acquired skills which they accord to enact cultural citizenship. They uphold the colonial *habitus* of Western knowledge as the ideal of modern education for knowledge economy. In that regard, their efforts in this shifting the educational landscape are attempts of social dynamics, struggles or changes.

The concept of citizenship is appealing as expression of knowledge learnt or skills acquired. The analysis points to the collective values of cultural citizenship, in that citizenship works both ways. Without culture that is social norms and values, people cannot exercise agency to make change, which limits their citizenship. However, when there are enough people with a sense of collective responsibility and citizenship to make change, they can build new cultural norms that can change the *habitus* and eventually the field. This collective agency can provide the impetus for academics to see themselves as subjects of educational reform not only objects of social production. This chapter has shown some moments of individual agency as academics reflected on their new teaching practices which are possibilities for collective agency. It also highlights the need for referencing both overseas and local sources of knowledge and culture in articulation of citizenship in higher education reform. More work is undoubtedly needed to further develop these ideas.

## References

Blunden, A. (2004). *Bourdieu on status, class and culture*. Retrieved from <https://www.ethicalpolitics.org/ablunden/pdfs/bourdieu-review.pdf>

- Bourdieu, P. (1977). *Outline of a theory of practice*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Bourdieu, P. (1984). *Distinction: A social critique of the judgement of taste*. Cambridge, Mass. Harvard University Press.
- Bourdieu, P. (1990). *The logic of practice*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- Bourdieu, P. (2006). The forms of capital. In H. Lauder, P. Brown, J-A. Dillabough & A.H. Halsey (Eds). *Education, globalisation & social change*. pp. 105-118. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Chen, K. (2010). *Asia as Method: Toward imperialization*. Durham, NC: Duke University.
- Dang, A. Q. (2011). *Internationalisation of higher education China and Vietnam: From importers of education to partners in cooperation* (Unpublished thesis). Copenhagen Business School, Copenhagen.
- Darriulat, P. (2011). Chiec búa lớn hơn. [The bigger hammer]. In Ngô Ba Châu, Pierre Darriulat, Cao Huy Thuân, Hoàng Tuy, Nguyễn Xuân Xanh & Phạm Xuân Yêm (Eds). *Dai Hoc Humboldt 200 Nam (1810-2010). Kinh Nghiệm The Gioi va Viet Nam [Humboldt University 200 Years (1810-2010). Experiences of the World and Viet Nam*. pp. 521-535. Hanoi: Nhà Xuất Bản Tri Thức.
- Delanty, G. (2001). *Challenging knowledge. The university in the knowledge society*. The Society for Research into Higher Education & Open University Press.
- Frankenfeld, P. J. (1992). Technological citizenship: A normative framework for risk studies. *Science, Technology, & Human Values*, 17(4), 459–484.
- Fry, G. W. (2009). Higher education in Vietnam. In Y. Hirosato & Y. Kitamura (Eds) *The political economy of educational reforms and capacity development in Southeast Asia*. pp. 237-261 Springer Science + Business Media BV.
- Hayden, M. & Lam, Q. T. (2010). Vietnam's higher education system. In Harman, G, Hayden, M. and Phạm, T. N. (Eds) *Reforming higher education challenges and priorities*. pp. 15-30 Springer: New York.
- Huỳnh, H. P. (2011). Văn hóa con người trong nhà trường đại học. [Humanity in the university]. In Ngô Ba Châu, Pierre Darriulat, Cao Huy Thuân, Hoàng Tuy, Nguyễn Xuân Xanh & Phạm Xuân Yêm (Eds). *Dai hoc Humboldt 200 Nam (1810-2010). Kinh nghiệm the gioi va Viet Nam [Humboldt university 200 Years (1810-2010). Experiences of the word and Viet Nam*. pp. 615-626. Hanoi: Nhà Xuất Bản Tri Thức.
- Mellors-Bournes, R., Jones, E. and Woodfield, S. (2015). *Transnational education and employability development*. CRAC. Higher Education Academy.  
[https://pdfs.semanticscholar.org/9441/9541cdd121d286284bbca6aed29c79f15c36.pdf?\\_ga=2.155091519.684614181.1582884637-1807176440.1582884637](https://pdfs.semanticscholar.org/9441/9541cdd121d286284bbca6aed29c79f15c36.pdf?_ga=2.155091519.684614181.1582884637-1807176440.1582884637)
- Miles, B., Huberman, M. & Saldaña, J. (2013). *Qualitative data analysis: A methods sourcebook*. London: Sage Publications.
- Ministry of Education and Training (MOET) Vietnam. *Education Statistics 2013*.  
<http://www.moet.gov.vn/?page=11.0>, Accessed November 2019.
- Nguyễn, A. T. (2011). *The internationalisation of higher education from the perspectives of institutional stakeholders*. [Doctoral dissertation, Waseda University, Tokyo]. ProQuest Dissertation Theses Global.

- Nguyen, T. O. T. (2018). *The internationalisation of higher education in Vietnamese universities*. [Doctoral Dissertation, University of Portsmouth, the United Kingdom]. ProQuest Dissertation Theses Global.
- Nguyen, N. & Tran, L.T. (2018). Looking inward or outward? Vietnam higher education at the superhighway of globalization: culture, values and change. *Journal of Asian Public Policy*, 11(1), 28-45.
- Nguyen, D.P., Vickers, M., Ly, T.M.C. & Tran, M.D. (2016). Internationalizing higher education in Vietnam: Insights from higher education leaders – an exploratory study. *Education & Training*. 58 (2), 193-208.
- Pham, H. & Fry, G. (2004). Education in economic, political and social change in Vietnam. *Educational Research for Policy and Practice*, 3, 199-222.
- Pham, A. T. N. (2014). *The contribution of cross-border higher education to human resource development in Ho Chi Minh city*. [Doctoral dissertation, RMIT University, Melbourne, Australia].
- Pham, L. (2019). *International students returning to Vietnam: Experiences of the local economies, universities and communities*. Singapore: Springer.
- Takeuchi, Y. (1961). Bangbeobeuroseoeui Ashia [Asia as Method]. In Y. Yun (Trans and ed.), *Takeuchi Yoshimi Seonyip [Takeuchi Yoshimi Selection]* 2, 33-64. Seoul: Humanist.
- Tran, T. T. (2014). Internationalisation of higher education in Vietnam. Opportunities and challenges. *VNU Journal of Science: Foreign Studies*, 30(3), 61-69.
- Trinh, V. T. (2011). Dai hoc Viet Nam tu sup do den hoi sinh. Hoang Xuan Han. [Vietnamese Universities from collapse to restoration. Hoang Xuan Han]. In Ngo Ba Chau, Pierre Darriulat, Cao Huy Thuan, Hoang Tuy, Nguyen Xuan Xanh & Pham Xuan Yem (Eds). *Dai hoc Humboldt 200 nam (1810-2010). Kinh Nghiem the gioi va Viet Nam [Humboldt university 200 years (1810-2010). Experiences of the world and Viet Nam*, pp 553-571. Hanoi: Nha Xuat Ban Tri Thuc.
- Vietnamese International Education Development (2017). <http://vied.vn/en/about-vied/vietnamese-government-s-scholarship-schemes.html#>
- Vi, T.S. (2014). Supporting internationalisation of higher education – the way to develop a case study of Vietnam. In B.M Kehm & U. Teichler (Eds.) *Higher Education Studies in a Global Environment*, pp. 41-157. Kassel: International Centre for Higher Education Research Kassel INCHER.
- Volpp, L. (2007). The culture of citizenship. *Theoretical Inquiries in Law* 8(2), 571-602.
- Welch, A. (2010). Internationalisation of Vietnamese higher education: Retrospect and prospect. In G. Harman, M. Hayden & T.N. Pham (Eds.) *Reforming higher education challenges and priorities*. pp. 215-226, New York: Springer.