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Teaching and Learning Reforms in Vietnamese Higher Education: Students' Experiences

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Abstract

Student experiences are important resources to inform the improvement of the quality of higher education teaching, learning and management activities. In the case of Vietnam, a series of teaching-learning reforms have been conducted since the 2000s, amidst many other reforms in the higher education system, following the Higher Education Reform Agenda (2005). All changes as a result of such reforms may affect students' experiences with their university education. Unfortunately, there have not been any studies about teaching-learning reforms in Vietnamese higher education, taking into students' experiences to enhance educational quality or to inform the reform directions. In this paper, we report a synthesis of 10 empirical studies that explored the

experiences of approximately 4,300 students across Vietnam with different teaching-learning reforms occurring in their universities. In particular, we focus on the following aspects:

- building a learning environment support provided to first-year students
 - the operation of the credit-based training system
 - the implementation of a student-centered teaching approach
 - the use of ICT in teaching and learning
 - the effectiveness of imported programs
 - the use of student-centered assessment practices
 - the implementation of internship programs
 - the execution of extra-curricular activities to develop students' employability skills
- the added values of Vietnamese higher education

The results suggested overall positive student experiences with the teaching-learning reforms. The studies also revealed several obstacles to the reforms related to students' learning attitudes, teacher beliefs and expertise, and leadership and management capacity. Some socio-cultural and systemic factors were identified as inhibitors to the reforms. Based on the results, we discuss and develop a framework for teaching and learning reforms that place students' learning experience in the heart of on-campus and off-campus activities, setting "ecologies" conducive to students' learning.

Keywords: Student learning experiences, Teaching and learning, Higher education reforms, Vietnamese higher education, Vietnam

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Introduction

Vietnam's higher education has been regarded as a major vehicle for building human capacity, socio-economic development and international engagement for the nation. There were 237 universities, 236 colleges, and 76 research institutes in the academic year 2019-2020 (Ministry of Education and Training [MOET], 2021). In 2019-2020, the number of university students reached 1,672,881, of whom female students accounted for 54.6%. 78.2% of a total of 447,483 students who commenced higher education in 2019-20 were enrolled at a public university, and 21.8% did so at a private university (ibid). Vietnam has witnessed a dramatic increase in the demand for higher education in line with the rise of the knowledge economy and the country's socio-economic development, growth of the middle-class and urbanisation over the past two decades (Tran, Phan, & Marginson, 2018). In response to these significant developments, the Vietnamese government has designed and implemented a range of reforms over the last two decades to uplift the quality, efficiency and sustainability of the higher education sector. Despite growing research on students' needs, characteristics and learning in Vietnamese higher education, their voices and experiences related to these experiences have not been explicitly captured in existing scholarly work.

In Vietnam, the Higher Education (HE) Reform Agenda (HERA) manifest by the Resolution 14/2005/ND-CP emphasises "a comprehensive reform of the HE system with the aims to improve the quality of teaching and learning, enhance the efficiency and broaden the scope of the system in response to the demands of modernisation and industrialisation, international integration and people's needs" (Prime Minister, 2005, p.1). One of the main aspirations of this Reform Agenda is that by 2020, Vietnamese HE should be able to keep pace with the regional and international standards to enhance its competitiveness and meet the demands of the socialist oriented market economy. The HERA focuses on the following key dimensions: reforming curricula, renovating training and education, developing a credit-based training system, renovating university admission and refining program management.

Following the HERA, the Vietnamese HE system has witnessed ongoing reforms over the last two decades, facilitated by a range of policies outlined below:

- Education Law 2005 (38/2005/QH11)
- Higher Education Law 2012 (08/2012/QH13)
- Strategy for Education Development for Vietnam 2011–2020 (Decision 711/QĐ-TTg, 13/6/2012)
- Decree 73/2012/ND-CP on foreign cooperation and investment in education
- Decree 86/2018/ND-CP on foreign cooperation and investment in education (replacing Decree 73/2012/ND-CP)
- Decree 73/2015/NĐ-CP on the stratification and ranking of HEIs
- Amended Higher Education Law 2018 (34/2018/QH14)
- Updated Education Law issued in June 2019 (43/2019/QH14)

One of the most prominent factors underpinning the reforms has been the growing realization of the importance of autonomy in improving the quality and efficiency of the HE system. These reforms have resulted in greater autonomy granted to public universities, that allows for more flexibility and efficiency in decision making about the curriculum, teaching, learning, assessment and internationalization. However, while these reforms have brought about positive changes to teaching and learning, they are largely organic and fragmented. Governance in many universities is still highly centralised and under heavy state controls, especially in terms of directions for university operations, especially in curriculum, teaching and learning and finances (e.g., Ngo, 2019; Pham & Goyette, 2019; Tran et al., 2020). The reforms have not enabled the full allocation of both real substantive (freedom to make choices) and procedural autonomy (freedom to take action) to Vietnamese universities (Ngo, 2019). Scholars point out the critical need for reforms to “prepare learners for more adaptive workforce and more engaged and flexible citizenship within the community and the nation” given the changing context and emerging needs of Vietnam (Tran et al, 2014, p.24; Tran et al, 2022). Therefore, it is vital to investigate how teaching and learning reforms in Vietnamese HE have progressed within such affordances and challenges.

The Research Project

Despite numerous reforms to Vietnamese HE since the launch of HERA, in our research reported in this paper, we focused on investigating reforms related to teaching and learning through student experiences. Students are the key actors and the beneficiary of such reforms. Teaching-learning is one of the three missions of the university, together with research and community engagement. Efforts and investment for HE will be ineffective if they do not yield positive impact on improving students' learning experiences. Therefore, investigating students' experiences with the reforms will provide invaluable insights into the effectiveness of those reforms and areas for improvement (Benckendorff, Ruhanen & Scott, 2009; Harvey, Burrows, & Green, 1992).

This project included a series of empirical studies conducted from 2015 to 2020, each of which explored students' experiences with a specific aspect of teaching-learning reforms. Key information about these studies is presented in Table 1. All the studies had quantitative data whereas some of them also included a qualitative component to complement the results of quantitative results. Most studies collected data randomly from HE institutions across Vietnam and three were designed as case studies. Data were collected by both online and paper-based survey and digital interviews. Recruitment of students, who were studying at a Vietnamese HE institution at the time of study, was supported by our Vietnamese colleagues in multiple universities across Vietnam. Paper-based survey was distributed by three volunteers for three regions: North, Centre and South of Vietnam.

In total, we had approximately 4300 responses to surveys and interviews with students. Quantitative data were analysed using principal component analysis, descriptive data analysis (mean, standard deviation, frequency and percentages), and inferential statistical analysis (Mann Whitney U test). Qualitative data were analysed thematically to complement and/or highlight the quantitative results.

Table 1. Studies included in this project

Studied aspects of teaching and learning reforms	Research design and participants
1. First-year students' transition	A mixed method case study 24 interviews and 438 responses to a survey
2. Building a favorable learning environment	A quantitative study 828 students from 58 HE institutions
3. The operation of the credit-based training system	A mixed method case study 204 students
4. The implementation of student-centered teaching approaches	A quantitative study 831 students from 39 HE institutions
5. The use of ICT in teaching and learning	A mixed method study 16 interviews and 410 survey responses from students of 38 HE institutions
6. The impact of imported programs on students' learning outcomes	A mixed method study 30 interviews, two 10 years' implementation institutional reports and a national report.
7. The use of student-centered assessment practices	A quantitative study 416 survey responses from students
8. The implementation of internship programs	Case study 270 responses to an online survey
9. Learning via extra-curricular activities	A quantitative study 797 students from 9 universities
10. The benefits of pursuing Vietnamese HE	A quantitative study 809 responses of students from 38 HE institutions

Key findings

Varied but mostly positive student experiences

Students enrolled in university programs due to different motivations: employment prospects, interests in a specific field of study, following the advice of influential others, and the match between their personal circumstance with the program entry requirements. Their goals for university education varied, but in general, they focused more on tangible outcomes such as achieving high scores, obtaining certificates in foreign languages and information technologies to work for their advantage in securing jobs upon graduation (see Table 2). First-year students experienced an array of difficulties, ranging from self-management and adaptation to the new learning environment and culture to wellbeing issues. Unfortunately, approximately half of the students reported a

lack of support for their first-year transition and learning experience (see Table 3).

Table 2: Vietnamese first-year students' goals for the academic years

Goals for university years	M	SD
Trying my best to achieve as many high scores as possible	3.54	1.22
Graduating within the timeline of the program	3.42	1.21
Participating in extra-curricular activities to improve soft skills	3.45	1.07
Studying to get a certificate in a foreign language	3.71	1.15
Studying to get a certificate in computer skills	3.75	1.14
Working part-time to support my study	2.89	1.06
Expanding my social network in and outside the university	3.68	0.96

Table 3: First year students' experiences with the transition

Difficulties	Student experience		Institutional support		Gap
	M	SD	M	SD	MD
Homesickness	2.77	1.24	2.76	1.21	-0.01
Failing to adapt to the academic environment	2.67	1.25	3.02	1.10	0.35
Feeling disconnected from people around	2.78	1.22	2.98	1.12	0.20
Loss in defining learning goals	2.95	1.22	3.04	1.07	0.08
Difficulties in taking care of myself	2.79	1.22	2.89	1.14	0.10
Local culture different from that in my hometown	2.92	1.15	3.12	1.09	0.20
Falling to find an effective learning method	3.16	1.20	3.24	1.21	0.09
Complexity of technologies used on campus	3.05	1.16	3.23	1.13	0.18
Challenges related to self-management	3.20	1.14	3.03	1.10	-0.18
Financial problems	3.04	1.15	3.22	1.16	0.18
Difficulties related to accommodation	2.85	1.20	3.23	1.18	0.38

Our study also showed that Vietnamese universities have invested a great deal in building a favourable learning environment. We explored the learning environment in three dimensions: physical (i.e. infrastructure and facilities, learning resources), service (i.e. all services for students), and academic (i.e. academics and administrative staff). The results showed that students had a general positive experience with the infrastructure, facilities, learning resources, and student support services in their institutions. However, students suggested that more attention should be paid to maintenance of facilities and operation of student-related services. Likewise, professionalism of administrative staff needs to be improved to make the academic environment more conducive to their learning (see Table 4).

Table 4: Students' experience with the learning environment in their institutions

Physical learning environment	Contentment			M	SD
	Discontent (%)	Neutral (%)	Content (%)		
Physical learning environment					
Campus and facilities	11.8	15.1	73.1	3.86	1.09
Information technologies	24.4	20.4	55.3	3.44	1.24
Space and learning resources	16.1	16.9	67.0	3.75	1.18
Servicing learning environment					
Learning and career development support	16.15	26.17	57.68	3.54	1.07
Student loan and extracurricular activities	15.98	21.73	62.28	3.61	1.11
Catering services	20.27	29.30	50.43	3.39	1.17
Academic learning environment					
Academic staff's qualities	9.74	19.02	71.23	3.89	1.03
Professional staff's qualities	16.88	23.36	59.76	3.56	1.10

The implementation of a credit-based training system was initiated in the 2000s. In students' experiences, the use of this system helped them to positively change their learning habits and afforded them flexibility in their learning process. The implementation was effective in setting operational regulations and providing support and management, but it was not so in terms of conducting teaching-learning activities. Students reported that they needed further support regarding the development of a suitable study plan, selection of relevant subjects, and self-directed learning ability (see Table 5).

Table 5: Students' experiences with the implementation of the credit-based training system

Components	M	SD
Support and management	3.84	0.72
I was guided to develop learning plans for my academic years.	3.86	0.88
I received advice from my academic advisor about which subjects to select.	3.69	1.02
I received a report on my learning progress annually.	3.69	1.03
I was adequately informed of information about the credit-based training program.	4.11	0.76
I was taught how to register for a subject.	3.89	0.87
I could register for subjects conveniently using an online platform.	3.96	0.94
I could register for subjects quickly.	3.65	1.03

Operational regulations	3.98	0.68
Prerequisite subjects must be completed before students can enrol in some important subjects.	3.98	0.96
There is a limit of number of credits that students can register per semester.	4.09	0.97
Teachers provide students with basic knowledge in class; students must learn further by themselves.	3.88	0.90
There are many electives for my programs.	3.99	0.71
Conduct of teaching-learning activities	3.62	0.69
The number of assessments and reports to complete per semester is bearable for me.	3.62	0.89
The amount of knowledge to acquire per semester is endurable for me.	3.73	0.86
Students in the same class enthusiastically study together.	3.46	0.92
There is more than one teacher delivering the same subject for students to choose whom to study with.	3.67	1.01

The implementation of the student-centered teaching approach, which has been promoted to remedy the theory-based teaching and students' dependent learning behaviours, has achieved some great results in students' experiences. Students rated their teacher attributes and clarity in communication a very high level and teachers' involvement of students in designing the course and activities at a high level. However, it seemed that the implementation at the classroom level should be further enhanced. This includes policy communication and provision of learning support, managing students' learning experiences and provision of flexibility for students' learning (see Table 6).

Table 6: Students' experiences with the implementation of student-centred teaching approach

Student-centred teaching implementation	M	SD
At the institutional level		
Policy communication and learning support	3.88	0.68
Managing students' learning experiences	3.73	0.89
Providing flexibility for students' learning	3.62	1.00
At the classroom level		
Involving students in course design and improvement	3.84	0.71
Conducting teaching and learning activities	3.81	0.70
Teacher attributes	4.12	0.65
Clarity in communication	4.28	0.61

In a developing country like Vietnam, ICT applications in HE have faced several difficulties in terms of financial constraints, lack of ICT experts, and teachers' and students' insufficient skills in using such technologies. In students'

experiences, there have been ICT facilities and applications available in Vietnamese universities. Teachers and students have mainly been engaging with using ICT for their teaching and learning in the classroom, rather than for ICT-enhanced learning activities outside the class. It is reported that there was a lack of ICT support staff and services, which caused some challenges for the adoption of ICT for teaching and learning purposes (see Table 7).

Table 7: Students' experiences of the use of ICT for teaching and learning purposes

Categories of experience	Percentage of agreement		
	No	Neutral	Yes
Availability of ICT facilities			
My university has been equipped with student computer labs	4.1	5.1	90.8
My university has a webpage that well informs about the operational activities	7.1	23.2	69.7
My university offers free Wi-Fi for students to use	9.0	16.8	74.2
My university has provided some software for students to use free of charge	6.6	8.8	84.6
My university has built a central library equipped with modern ICT facilities	8.0	9.5	82.5
My university provides online learning resources to meet students' learning needs	4.9	6.3	88.8
ICT applications			
My university has used an online platform for subject registration	3.7	5.6	90.7
My university communicates with students via media such as email and Facebook page	4.9	10.0	85.1
My university created a student accounts for students to manage their learning progress	8.3	14.6	77.1
My university collects students' feedback on their learning using an online platform	4.1	9.8	86.1
My university uses electronic system for the libraries to manage book loans	9.8	16.8	73.4
ICT support staff			
IT technicians are available in study buildings to support any ICT-related issues	9.3	18.0	72.7
My university has a IT service to assist students and staff of any ICT-related issues	12.2	21.2	66.6
My university organizes courses that train students in using ICT for their learning	13.7	19.8	66.5

Lecturers' use of ICT			
Lecturers often use ICT in their teaching	3.7	6.3	90.0
Lecturers contact students using applications such as emails, WhatsApp's, Messenger	5.6	17.3	77.1
Lecturers often share online learning resources for students to learn	4.6	9.0	86.4
Lecturers join in students' learning groups in social media such as Facebook groups	6.3	9.5	84.2
Lecturers encourages students to use ICT for their learning	3.4	10.0	86.6
Students' use of ICT			
I follow my university's media page to update teaching-learning news and policies	7.8	6.3	85.9
I often use computers or laptop for my studies	5.4	13.7	80.9
I follow my teachers' social media page to update information about the subjects	8.8	14.9	76.3
I often use ICT for my presentation of assignments	5.6	7.1	87.3
I often participate in an online learning group	3.4	4.9	91.7

Importing advanced programs from well-known foreign institutions has been among the initiatives to internationalize the curriculum and improve Vietnamese HE. Our study found that such programs provided students with positive learning experiences: develop human capital, expand their social networks, enrich cultural understandings, enhance their career adaptability, and develop professional identity. However, despite these achievements, approximately one-third of graduates did not successfully secure employment relevant to their study within a year post-graduation (see Table 8).

Table 8: The impact of advanced programs on students' learning and employment outcomes

Learning outcomes		Phase 1	Phase 2	Phase 3	Sum
Publications					
	International publications	94	40	5	139
	Local publications	107	67	18	192
	Conference attendance and/or presentations	38	89	29	156
Scale of research					
	Cross-border research projects	6	3	4	13
	National level research projects	0	2	0	2
	Provincial level research projects	19	1	1	21
	Institutional level research projects	40	60	75	175
	Student research projects	194	84	131	409
Awards					
	Awards for creativity and innovation	31	21	6	58

Employment outcomes						
Phases of implementation	Work sectors					
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Phase 1 (10 programs)	54	52	172	227	107	722
Phase 2 (13 programs)	43	34	52	286	312	220
Phase 3 (12 programs)	29	18	48	152	159	101
Sum	126	104	272	665	578	1043

(1) Lecturers in a tertiary education institution

(2) Researchers in a research organization

(3) Staff in a public organization

(4) Staff in an international organization

(5) Staff in other types of organization

(6) Unknown

Note: two military programs are excluded; unit: students

In terms of learning conducive assessment and evaluation practices, the results suggested a transition in assessment practices in Vietnamese universities. Teachers started to engage with new practices while still holding on their power in conducting assessment activities, without giving students much flexibility in assessment. Students were mostly positive about the way their teachers conducted assessment activities, the development of assessment tasks, and appropriateness of giving assessment. Unfortunately, there was a lack of authenticity in assessment tasks, which may contribute to widening the existing skill gap of students/graduates. Students also reported lenient monitoring of assessment activities, resulted in high percentage of cheating behaviours among the participants (see Table 9).

Table 9: Students' experiences with assessment practices and their cheating behaviours

Students' experiences with assessment practices	M		SD		
Development of assessment tasks	3.52		0.57		
Conduct of the assessment activity	3.69		0.51		
Appropriateness of assessment activities	3.52		0.64		
Students' cheating behaviours (%)	never	rarely	seldom	often	always
Using references inappropriately	19.5	46.9	14.3	13.4	5.9
Taking some authors' ideas as my own ideas	18.2	43.0	15.0	17.4	6.4
Taking materials that are not allowed into the exam room	46.2	14.3	13.4	20.4	5.7
Looking for information about the content of the test by all means	33.6	14.3	19.1	25.2	7.8
Asking other test candidates for help	11.3	23.2	20.0	39.0	6.5

Helping other candidates to do the test	10.6	18.7	23.2	38.2	9.3
Copying the answers of other test candidates	18.7	16.5	18.0	38.6	8.2
Allowing other candidates to copy my test papers	13.7	16.1	17.4	42.3	10.5
Asking someone to do the test for me	30.2	8.9	13.2	39.0	8.7
Resubmitting a paper for another test without approval	35.8	5.2	16.7	32.3	10.0

Students generally had positive experiences with the internship. Students believed that they performed well during the internship, and their internship performance was influenced by their engagement; the support of the host organisation, including the mentor; the academic supervisor's guidance; and institutional support. However, our study found that the role and the engagement of the industry mentor was not prominent during the internship, including their contribution to the interns' scores. Likewise, students found the university did not prepare them well for their internships: there is a mismatch between what is taught at the university and what is needed at the workplace (see Table 10).

Table 10: Students' experiences with the influencers of their internship

Components	M	SD
The industry mentor and the host organization's support	3.67	0.79
Interns' engagement	4.02	0.68
The academic supervisors' support	3.71	0.93
Institutional support	3.58	0.90

In Vietnam, extra-curricular activities are among the main channels through which student employability skills are developed (Tran, 2017). It was found that the Youth Union and its associates (YUA) frequently organised a wide range of extra-curricular activities to support students' employability. The research suggested a decrease in the effectiveness of YUA activities as the main channel for students' employability development. Between the two points of time 2015 and 2019, there was a decrease in the frequency of organising political education, soft skills classes and talent nurturing activities, resulting in reduced student engagement with these types of activities (see Tables 11A and 11B).

Tables 11A: A comparison of students' participation in ECA between 2015 and 2019

Students' participation in ...	Year 2015 (N = 423)		Year 2019 (N = 374)	
	M	SD	M	SD
Political education activities	3.76	1.13	3.13	1.16
activities that train specialised skills	3.31	1.18	3.34	1.11
activities that train work skills	3.64	1.18	3.53	1.15
activities that train social engagement skills	3.73	1.09	3.79	1.07
recreational activities	3.67	1.04	3.75	1.19
activities that nurture special talents	3.80	1.06	2.99	1.31

Table 11B. A comparison of students' skill development via ECA participation between 2015 and 2019

Components	Year 2015		Year 2019	
	M	SD	M	SD
Information handling skills	3.88	0.78	3.43	0.90
Personal management skills	3.78	0.68	3.74	0.87
Professional development skills	3.77	0.79	3.54	0.93
Interpersonal skills	3.95	0.70	3.69	0.93
Learning skills	3.56	0.86	3.64	0.93
Communication skills	3.79	0.83	3.79	0.88

Finally, in terms of the benefits of pursuing HE in Vietnam, students suggested that their institutions focused more on developing students for the future work life but less on personal growth and social engagement aspects. Also, they reported that their institutions had strongly contributed to the development of their scientific insights, professionalism, as well as personal and inter-personal growth, but moderately added to their social engagement capability. This study raised questions about the role of Vietnamese HE in building social engagement for their students, which could contribute to creating a democratic society (see Table 12).

Table 12. Students' perception of the values of attending higher education in Vietnam

Added values of Vietnamese higher education	M	SD
Personal and inter-personal growth	3.56	0.83
Social engagement	3.09	1.04
Professional development	3.62	0.85
Scientific insights	3.50	0.91

Major obstacles

Students: A proportion of students do not have appropriate attitudes for and engagement with their learning (see tables 1, 9 and 11A for details). They are mainly motivated to achieving the required scores to complete their degree, rather than optimising their personal growth and professional development through their university experiences. Many still hold on with the passive, dependent and exam-oriented learning habit as a fossilisation of their 12 years in the lower levels of education.

Teachers: In Vietnam, teaching is a noble job and the teachers powerfully shape the culture of a class. Most of the teaching and learning reforms currently in place adopt a student-centered approach, meaning that the teachers will let go some of their power. While many have welcomed such a radical change in HE, others appeared to resist it. This would require appropriate approaches to change their beliefs and convince them to take new roles in HE. Likewise, many teachers are eager to implement new teaching practices, but they lack the expertise to do so. Thus, adequate professional development is needed to enable teachers to effectively engage with and enact the reforms.

Institutional leaders and managers: Our study suggested ineffective leadership and management as a barrier to teaching-learning reforms in Vietnam. Inhibiting factors include invisibility and a lack of clarity in informing of policies and guidelines related to the reforms, insufficient staff development, inadequate provision of support to students or an absence of incentives for high performers in the implementation. Ineffective leadership and management practices could be tied to the invisible culture embedded in each institution and the whole HE system: long-standing centralized governance and management, social hierarchy, and distanced power between university leaders, teachers and students. Despite recent changes, such hierarchical and centralised leadership culture hinder the development of democracy with which people can express their critical opinions. For example, in implementing the credit-based training system, many institutional leaders appeared to be obedient to the MOET, so they might not fully utilise the curriculum autonomy granted to them since 2013 (Vietnamese Government, 2012), to add or remove subjects to make their programs more market-relevant. Such reliance attitudes resulted in a lack of

flexibility for students' learning, even though flexibility is as a prominent feature that the credit-based training system was designed for. However, this could also be attributed to the rhetoric institutional autonomy: in reality, Vietnamese universities do not really have institutional autonomy due to overlapping policies, regulations and reporting lines.

Toward a comprehensive model for improving teaching-learning reforms and student experience

Studies in this project have provided further evidence to support the argument that student learning experiences were not constituted solely by student engagement but also required other elements, which are directly related to the key aspects of higher education reforms summarised in the introduction of this paper (Ministry of Education and Training 2005; Vietnamese Government 2012; Vietnamese National Assembly 2019):

- Leadership and management
- Availability of student support services
- The quality and quantity of infrastructure, facilities and learning resources
- Teacher factors: qualifications, teaching approach, and relationship with students, etc.
- Student factors: gender, disciplines, learning ability, attitudes and personalities
- Curriculum design, structured or unstructured content, delivery mode and pedagogies
- External stakeholders and their support with HE institutions

All factors formed by internal and external stakeholders of an institution help shape the learning environments. In Bourdieu's perspective (Bourdieu, 1998), these factors form a social field with certain capitals and rules governing students' learning. Bound in the institutional environment or social field, students gradually form a habitus that guides their thinking and behaviours aligned with such rules (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992). The use of capitals may make changes to their habitus and the social field. Therefore, when institutional leaders, teachers and those supporting students' learning pay attention to

deliberately making positive changes to the learning environments, they help students to access and utilize the capitals with which they can change the social field and habitus together.

Based on the issues that should be tackled to improve the advancement of current teaching and learning reforms in Vietnamese HE and to enhance students' learning experience, we would like to present a **simplified** framework for comprehensive teaching and learning reforms in HE, which complements and extends key dimensions of reform mentioned in previous reform policies (Figure 1).

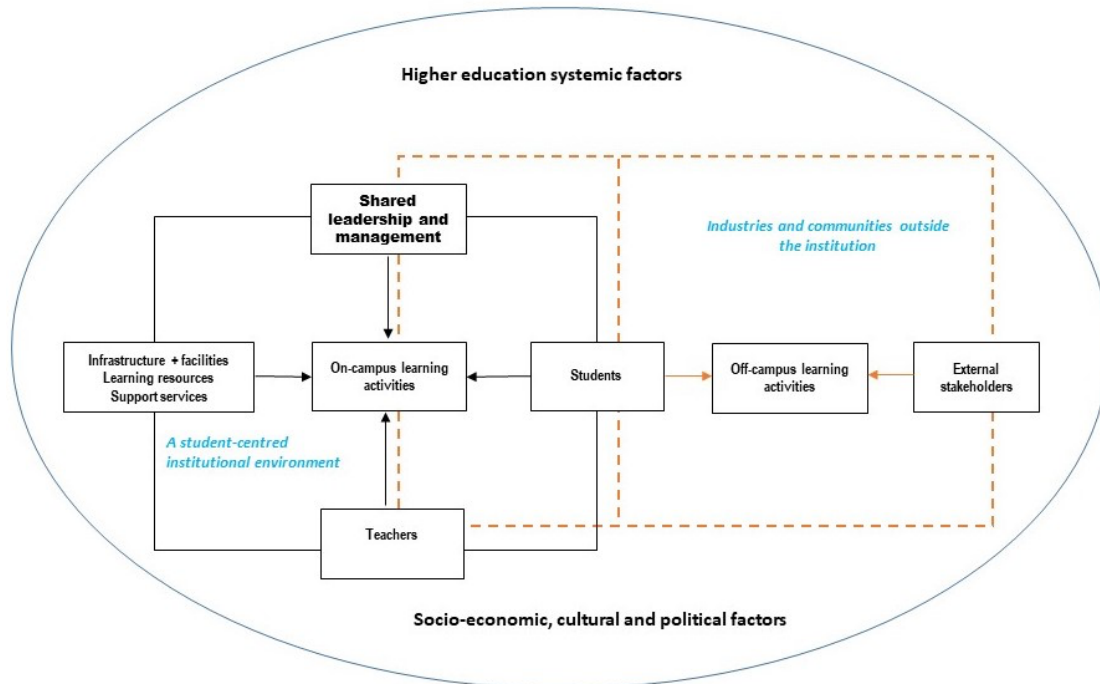
The relationship between policy reforms and student experiences showed in this research indicates that reforms can take place either within curriculum or out-of-the curriculum, on-campus or off-campus. The left half of Figure 1 presents curriculum-based and extra-curricular activities organized within an institutional environment, including virtual platforms, that can be considered in curriculum, teaching and learning reform policy. Within this sphere, curriculum activities are central in the teaching and learning process. Curriculum design and delivery methods as well as teaching, learning and assessment practices are underpinned by student-centeredness principles. Curriculum-based teaching and learning reforms are led by a shared leadership culture where information, resources and responsibilities are equally distributed to stakeholders so that they have the best conditions to engage with the reforms. Teachers are trained in expertise relevant to a reform, encouraged to execute it with incentives and/or monitored of their teaching behaviours with effective management tools. Students are informed of their central role in the teaching and learning process, how teaching, learning and assessment activities will take place, and what their rights and responsibilities are. Students should be equipped with essential learning skills. Infrastructure, facilities and support services are set up to ensure that the teaching-learning reforms are supported optimally so that they can yield the best results within the practical conditions. These factors together create an institutional environment/culture conducive to the execution of curriculum-based activities with a focus on student-centeredness. Likewise, within this institutional environment/culture, on-campus extra-curricular activities are organized complementarily to the curriculum-based activities. They might provide different learning experience,

but what students gain from their participation should be aligned with what is delivered through the curriculum-based activities.

Of significance for teaching and learning reform policy is the finding that teaching and learning reforms may also take place outside the curriculum and out of the environment set by the institution, which is presented by the right half of Figure 1. Students still take the leading role in their learning while working with external stakeholders. Off-campus curriculum-based activities can be internships or work placement, field trips, or industry project, which are categorized under the common term work-integrated learning. Such learning activities require a close collaboration between students and the mentor who is based in a relevant industry to further develop professional knowledge, skills and attributes. Off-campus non-curricular activities can be in the forms of service learning, voluntary community development projects, or any kinds of activities of students' interests. It is hard to monitor students' participation in non-curricular activities outside the institution, some of which may distract students' formal learning. Therefore, it is crucial for institutional leaders to work closely to forge relationships with industry stakeholders so that they can provide internship opportunities to students, mentor student interns, or organize extra-curricular activities. Academics also need to work with these industry stakeholders to ensure that these stakeholders can effectively guide t students' acquisition of knowledge and skills out of participating in these off-campus activities.

Inevitably, teaching and learning reforms, regardless of them occurring within or outside an institutional environment, are bound within characteristics of the HE and the socio-economic, cultural and political of a country. Therefore, these contextual and systemic factors need to be considered when implementing teaching and learning reforms. If all of these activities can take place harmoniously in accordance with student-centeredness principles, the majority of teaching-learning reforms can take place concurrently and progress well to enhance students' learning experience and outcomes.

Figure 1. A framework for teaching and learning reforms (Tran & Tran, 2021)



Note: Learning activities encompass both curriculum-based and extra-curricular activities

Conclusion

Socio-economic, cultural and political changes have required Vietnamese HE to reform their teaching and learning to better fit in with the new landscape and more effectively prepare students for their future prospects. Contextual, socio-cultural, economic and political changes appear to be on-going and increase in intensity. Therefore, it is crucial to comprehensively implemented teaching and learning reforms to yield positive results. Providing students with positive teaching and learning experiences is the target of such reforms. To do so, it demands a careful plan and feasible strategies with the engagement of all HE stakeholders involved. Leaving teachers and/or students alone to implement such teaching-learning reforms will never yield the expected outcomes. Therefore, investment, incentives and management need to be put forward to enhance the progress of the reforms. This research shows the importance to explicitly acknowledge the relationship between policy reforms and student experiences. It should also note that student learning experiences can serve as valuable data that government and universities can use to inform and guide the reforms. Student experiences are therefore the beginning and the ultimate goals of the teaching and learning reforming cycles in HE. We discussed these

experiences in more detail in our 2021 book '[Students' Experiences of Teaching and Learning Reforms in Vietnamese Higher Education](#)'.

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