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English proficiency of Vietnamese business graduates: Requirements of government, private universities, and foreign employers

Tien Tung Le
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**English proficiency of Vietnamese business
graduates: Requirements of government, private
universities, and foreign employers**

This thesis is presented for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

Tien Tung Le

Edith Cowan University
School of Education

2020

Abstract

English is the global language of business, trade, tourism, technology, science and politics. It is also the official language in many foreign companies (Kam, 2002) and proficiency in English is therefore an advantage for acquiring employment in foreign companies where the working environment is multilingual, professional and highly competitive.

As a dynamic developing country in Southeast Asia, Vietnam has attracted substantial foreign investment since the introduction of *Doi Moi* or the Renovation policy in 1986. Over the last three decades, a number of foreign companies have established themselves in the country, creating numerous employment opportunities for young Vietnamese people, especially university graduates. These foreign companies originate from a range of countries and English has become the common language for employees who are required to have good communication skills within these workplaces (Roshid & Chowdhury, 2013). While previous studies have investigated employers' perceptions of graduates' English proficiency in the fields of manufacturing and engineering in Malaysia and India as well as the employment competencies that business graduates require in Vietnam, little research has investigated the influence of English proficiency on the employability of business graduates from private universities in Vietnam. The aim of this study, therefore, was to explore the influence of English proficiency on the employability of business graduates from private universities in Vietnam who seek employment in foreign companies. To best understand the nature of this phenomenon, qualitative methods were employed to collect data via interviews, focus group discussions and document analysis. Participants included policy makers, private university business undergraduates, business graduates who had sought employment in foreign companies, as well as managers and human resources staff in these companies.

This study found that English proficiency strongly influences the success of business students who graduate from private universities in Vietnam and seek employment in foreign companies. Inconsistent internal triadic relationships between the university course materials, pedagogy and assessment procedures was also found to be an important influence on student success. Finally, the research highlights the

external misalignment between student outcomes of English courses at private universities and the requirements of the foreign employers are. Based on the main findings, a number of recommendations have been suggested in relation to policies, universities, language teachers, and future research.

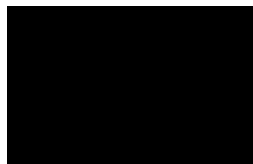
The findings from this study will contribute to understanding the role of English proficiency and its influence on the employability of business graduates from private universities in Vietnam. This information could be used to assist lecturers and other university stakeholders to assess whether English programs in private universities meet the needs of foreign employers and amend them where necessary. Understanding the level of English proficiency required by foreign employers and the methods used to assess graduates' English proficiency will support private universities and their undergraduate business students to better prepare for future employability in foreign companies. This knowledge will also be valuable for all universities in Vietnam and other Asian countries with a similar culture and English education characteristics. In addition, the findings may inform policies on teaching and learning foreign languages in the Vietnamese national education system.

Declaration

I certify that this thesis does not, to the best of my knowledge and belief

- i. Incorporate without acknowledgement any material previously submitted for a degree of diploma in any institution of higher education;
- ii. Contain any material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made in the text of this thesis; or
- iii. Contain any defamatory material.

Signature



Date: 19/05/2020

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List of Acronyms and Codes

ASEAN	Association of Southeast Asian Nations
APEC	Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation
ASEM	Asia-Europe Meeting
BE	Business English
CEFR	Common European Framework of Reference for Languages
CLT	Communicative Language Teaching
CPH	Critical Period Hypothesis
CPTTP	Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership
EFL	English as Foreign Language
EFTA	European Free Trade Association
EGP	English for General Purposes
ELP	English Language Proficiency
ESL	English as Second Language
ESP	English for Specific Purposes
EU	European Union
EVFTA	EU-Vietnam Free Trade Agreement
FDI	Foreign Direct Investment
FTA	Free Trade Agreement
GATS	General Agreement on Trade in Services
GD	General Director
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GSO	General Statistics Office
HEI	Higher Education Institution
HR	Human Resource
HRM	Human Resource Management
ICT	Information and Communication Technology
IELTS	International English Language Testing System
LA D	Language Acquisition Device
MOET	Ministry of Education and Training
PHEI	Private Higher Education Institution
RCEP	Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership

SLA	Second Language Acquisition
TESOL	Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages
TOEFL	Test of English as a Foreign Language
TOEIC	Test of English for International Communication
TPP	Trans-Pacific Partnership
USA	United States of America
USSR	Union of Soviet Socialist Republics
VND	Vietnam Dong
WTO	World Trade Organisation

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

The rapid spread of globalisation has resulted in integration of trade, cultures and businesses across the nations of the world and has had a marked effect on international affairs associated with business, academia, politics and sciences (Allen, 2016; Crystal, 2003; Kam, 2002), particularly in developing countries such as Vietnam. Over the past three decades, capital and technology have moved freely from developed countries to developing countries where they are needed to support socio-economic development.

In 1986, motivated by globalisation and a desire to develop the national economy that had been devastated by decades of war, the Vietnamese government shifted from a centralised economic development model to a market-oriented economy with the introduction of *Doi Moi*, known as the Renovation Policy, and opened the door to the world. Since then, Vietnam has attracted significant foreign direct investment (FDI) and a number of foreign companies have established themselves in Vietnam, creating countless employment opportunities for Vietnamese workers, especially university graduates entering the workforce.

These foreign companies originate from a range of countries and hire employees of different nationalities for their business operations, thereby creating multilingual working environments. As a result, English has been chosen as the common language of communication, so employees need to have effective English skills to communicate in these workplaces (Bui, 2013; Roshid & Chowdhury, 2013). This is especially the case for employers, who, in addition to workplace efficiency, consider English proficiency necessary for their employees to appropriately and effectively represent the image of their companies to business partners, customers and at international events (Ranasinghe & Herath, 2011; Sing, 2017). It therefore follows that English proficiency is a key requirement for Vietnamese business graduates seeking employment in foreign companies (Bui, 2013).

Although globalisation afforded significant opportunities for business and economic development, it also placed substantial pressure on the national education system in Vietnam, responsible for training and supplying skilled labour to meet market demands. Initially it was difficult for the national education system to respond to the high demand for skilled local employees with English proficiency due to limited government funding,

inadequate infrastructure and the limited number of quality students exiting Vietnamese public universities (Mamun, 2011).

To address this issue, private higher education was legally approved in 1993 in Vietnam, with the aim of providing courses in relevant disciplines, guided by market demand, to prepare graduates for employment and reduce the burden on public higher education institutions (Le, T. T., 2014; Mamun, 2011). Since then, several private universities have been established, operating as business entities and focused on providing training programs to meet market demands in the fields of business, economics, administration, finance, accounting, sales and marketing, tourism and foreign languages (Hayden & Dao, 2010). Many university graduates from both public and private universities were trained to meet the requirements of the labour market, particularly in the business sector, and sought employment in foreign companies because they were perceived as dynamic, professional workplaces offering equality, attractive remuneration and transparent working environments. Additionally, they provide opportunities to work with colleagues from different cultures and backgrounds and offer a greater likelihood of promotion and enhancement of professional knowledge and skills (Bui, 2013). As a result, competition for employment in foreign companies is fierce.

In a highly competitive employment market, employees are required to have good English communication skills in addition to their professional knowledge and work experience. Like other countries in Asia, learners in Vietnam have chosen to improve their English proficiency by studying English in national education classes, private language centres, foreign-funded language centres and at all levels of schooling from elementary to tertiary education (Le, T. S., 2011). To meet the demand for English proficiency, hundreds of English language centres were established within major cities and provincial areas, offering English classes at various levels for both adult and young learners during the day and in the evenings. While English language centres helped meet the growing demand for improved English proficiency, a detailed legal framework and government investment (Le, T. S., 2011) were needed to ensure the quality of English education.

In 2008, the Vietnamese Government implemented an ambitious project called *Teaching and Learning Foreign Languages in the National Education System, period 2008-2020* (commonly referred to as the National Project). The National Project acknowledged the need for extending teacher training in the English language, promoting innovation in English

teaching and learning, especially in higher education, to enable graduates to use English independently (Le, T. S., 2011). As a result of this project, English became a compulsory subject from Year 3 to the end of tertiary studies. Moreover, to ensure quality outcomes in foreign language teaching and learning, a national framework for English proficiency assessment, *the Six-Level Foreign Languages Proficiency Framework* (hereinafter referred to as the Framework), was introduced in 2014. This framework was derived from the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) and provides comparative references to other well-known English proficiency tests. To graduate from university, tertiary students in non-English major disciplines are required to attain level 3 English proficiency on the framework scale, equivalent to a B1 level on the CEFR scale, because at this level, university graduates are expected to communicate confidently and independently in English.

These interventions have led to improvements in the English proficiency of Vietnamese learners (Education First, 2016; Nguyen, M. T., 2011) in recent years, yet for a number of reasons, the English proficiency of graduates remains an area of concern (Ha, 2018; Hong, Fehring, & Warren, 2014; Le, T. S., 2011; Le, 2007; Le, V. C., 2011). It has been suggested that the curricula from primary to tertiary levels are not sufficiently comprehensive or comprehensible, and that the low levels of English proficiency of many English language teachers exacerbates the problem (Ha, 2018; Le, V. H., 2017). Teaching methods have also been blamed, given the persistent use of grammar-based, exam-oriented teaching and learning methods that focus more on improving reading, writing, grammar and spelling than developing listening and speaking skills (Ha, 2018; Hoang, 2010). Some cite the influence of Confucian ideology in education that has led to teacher-centred approaches, where learners depend on and follow teachers' instructions instead of studying English creatively and autonomously (Dang, 2010; Ha, 2018; Le, T. S., 2011; Le, 1999b; Le, V. C., 2011; Nguyen & Ho, 2012). Whatever the cause, claims from employers, especially foreign employers in Vietnam, have highlighted the low levels of English proficiency and communicative incompetence of graduates in general, and business graduates in particular, for not meeting employment requirements (Ha, 2018; Ngoc, 2014; Nguyen, D., 2011; Nguyen & Pham, 2016; Nguyen, T. T. T., 2017; Pham, T., 2011).

In recognition of the English incompetence of Vietnamese learners, the limitations of foreign language teaching and learning and the ineffectiveness of the foreign language proficiency assessment system, the Vietnamese government issued a Decision on Approval

of Adjustment and Supplement of the Teaching and Learning Foreign Languages in the National Education System, period 2017-2025 (hereinafter referred to as the Revised National Project) on 22 December 2017. The Revised National Project was aimed at breakthroughs in the quality of foreign language teaching and learning at all levels of the national education system by 2025. To achieve this goal, a number of solutions were prescribed, such as applying modern technologies in foreign language teaching and learning, focused on developing communicative competence; creating a favourable environment for all stakeholders to learn and practise foreign language anywhere, anytime; ensuring foreign language proficiency of language teachers and content teachers who teach content subjects in a foreign language; and intensifying quality assessment and assurance in teaching and learning a foreign language. Despite the many changes, the English proficiency level for non-English major students to graduate from tertiary education remained unchanged at level 3 of the Framework.

Statement of the Problem

The National Project and Revised National Project stressed the importance of foreign languages in the national education system, especially the teaching of English, and the necessity for graduates to develop English proficiency with a focus on communicative competence for future employment. Higher education institutions in Vietnam responded to the policy by making English a mandatory subject in higher education curricula and assessment to ensure attainment of the required level 3 at the completion of tertiary education. However, many graduates who have been certified as attaining English proficiency are still not able to communicate fluently in English despite a long period of learning English (Ha, 2018; Mai & Iwashita, 2012) and many foreign employers have expressed concerns about the situation, questioning the effectiveness of current English programs in the higher education system (Nguyen, T. T. T., 2017).

This study had a fourfold purpose. The first was to investigate existing English courses and assessment systems used for developing and measuring English proficiency at two selected private universities in Vietnam. Secondly, to determine the desired levels of English proficiency by foreign employers in Vietnam. The third was to ascertain how foreign employers in Vietnam gauge the English proficiency of business graduates; and finally, to establish whether Vietnam's current policies on foreign languages education and training are aligned with the practical requirements of the labour market.

Significance of the Study

Given the large number of Vietnamese private university business graduates seeking employment in foreign companies, the findings from this study can assist all stakeholders to better understand the relevance of English programs preparing students for employment. The results also identify the levels of English proficiency required by foreign companies in Vietnam representative of the manufacturing and service industries. In addition, the study describes the methods employed by foreign companies to assess the English proficiency of business graduates in their recruitment and selection processes.

This research is significant for a number of reasons. Although previous studies have investigated several aspects of English, such as the role of English language proficiency in employment; English education in higher education in Vietnam; and English as Foreign Language (EFL) speaking assessment in Vietnamese tertiary education, little research has investigated the influence of English proficiency on the employability of business students from private universities who seek employment in foreign companies in Vietnam. This study provides in-depth information about the English courses designed for business students at two selected private universities in Vietnam. In particular, it describes the English course curricula and how each university assesses student proficiency, including placements in English classes throughout the courses, and graduation. It also examines the approaches of teachers and exam preparation procedures at each university and reveals the business graduates' perceptions of the English courses and the recruitment and selection processes in foreign companies.

Secondly, this research provides in-depth information about the required levels of English proficiency sought by the foreign companies involved in the study for each particular skill (listening, speaking, reading, and writing). This information could assist private universities to assess whether their English courses are effective in preparing business students adequately for employment in foreign companies.

Thirdly, the study provides detailed information about the recruitment and selection processes in a sample of foreign companies across different industries and describes how they assess the English proficiency of business graduates. The information gained can assist understanding the relevance of universities' curricula and assessment methods and their alignment with the methods used by foreign employers for more effective preparation of business graduates.

Fourthly, the results may be a value to other private and public universities in Vietnam for reviewing the currency and relevance of their English courses to better support the requirements of foreign companies and prepare their business graduates for employment, particularly those who wish to work in an English-speaking environment.

Further, the findings can be used to inform policymakers within the Ministry of Education and Training (MOET) about the required English proficiency levels for non-English major graduates in order to meet the needs of the labour market. The results can also assist MOET with decision-making related to improving English language teaching and learning in higher education.

Finally, the results of the study may be of value to private and public universities and non-English major students in other Asian countries with similar characteristics as Vietnam, to improve the English proficiency levels of business graduates for employment in foreign companies.

Research Questions

This study investigates the influence of English proficiency on the employability of business graduates from private universities who seek employment in foreign companies in Vietnam. The high rate of unemployment amongst business graduates in recent years (Ha, 2018; Mai & Iwashita, 2012) and complaints from employers related to inadequate levels of English proficiency (Nguyen, T. T. T., 2017) signals a mismatch between the requirements of foreign employers and existing levels of proficiency as determined by MOET and universities in Vietnam. The situation highlights a need for MOET, private universities and foreign employers to clarify appropriate levels of English proficiency in order to more effectively meet the needs of the labour market.

The research was guided by the following main question: How does English language proficiency influence the success of business graduates from private universities seeking employment in foreign companies in Vietnam? This was supplemented by three sub-questions:

1. How have English courses at private universities been implemented in response to the requirements of the National Project to prepare business graduates for employment in foreign companies in Vietnam?

2. What requirements do foreign employers have for English proficiency of business graduates from private universities in Vietnam?
3. How do foreign employers assess the English proficiency of business graduates from private universities in Vietnam in the recruitment and selection processes?

Organisation of the Thesis

This thesis consists of nine chapters. Chapter one, the Introduction, provides a brief description of the problems identified, the purpose and significance of the study, the contribution of the research to addressing the identified issues and the research questions driving the research.

Chapter two, the Context of the Study, describes the research context and the impact of globalisation on the socio-economic development and educational changes in Vietnam, the establishment of foreign companies in Vietnam over the last three decades, and the influence this has had on English education in Vietnam's national education system. This is followed by an explanation of the emergence of private higher education and English education in Vietnam and Asia, and finally, a description of the contextual framework of the study.

Chapter three, the Literature Review, provides a review of the relevant literature, including the theories of second language acquisition, English for Specific Purpose (ESP) education and the Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) approach. Following this is a review of English proficiency assessment in higher education, common recruitment and selection processes at foreign companies and the assessment methods used by them to evaluate the English proficiency of graduates. Finally, the chapter examines the use of English and other languages in foreign companies and the relationship between English accent and employment.

Chapter four, the Research Methodology, outlines the methodology employed in the research. This chapter explains the interpretive paradigm, qualitative methods and why they were selected. It also describes the recruitment of participants, data collection processes and the instruments used to analyse the data.

Chapter five, Private Universities in Vietnam, presents the findings on the English programs at two private universities in Vietnam, including the English curricula, English teaching approaches, the methods used to assess business students' English proficiency, graduates' perceptions of the English programs and the findings related to their employment in foreign companies.

Chapters six and seven describe the findings of the recruitment and selection processes used by the foreign companies involved in the study. Chapter six reports on the findings of the recruitment and selection processes of service companies, while chapter seven describes the same processes in manufacturing companies. The results identify language practices, English proficiency levels required by employers, the systems used to assess candidates, the impact of English accent on employment and foreign employers' perceptions of business graduates' English proficiency.

Chapter eight discusses the relationships between the findings and links with the literature, as well as the main issues that emerged from the findings.

Chapter nine provides a summary of the research, summarises the contribution and limitations of the study and makes recommendations for solutions and for further research. Figure 1.1 is a diagrammatic depiction of the organisation of the thesis.

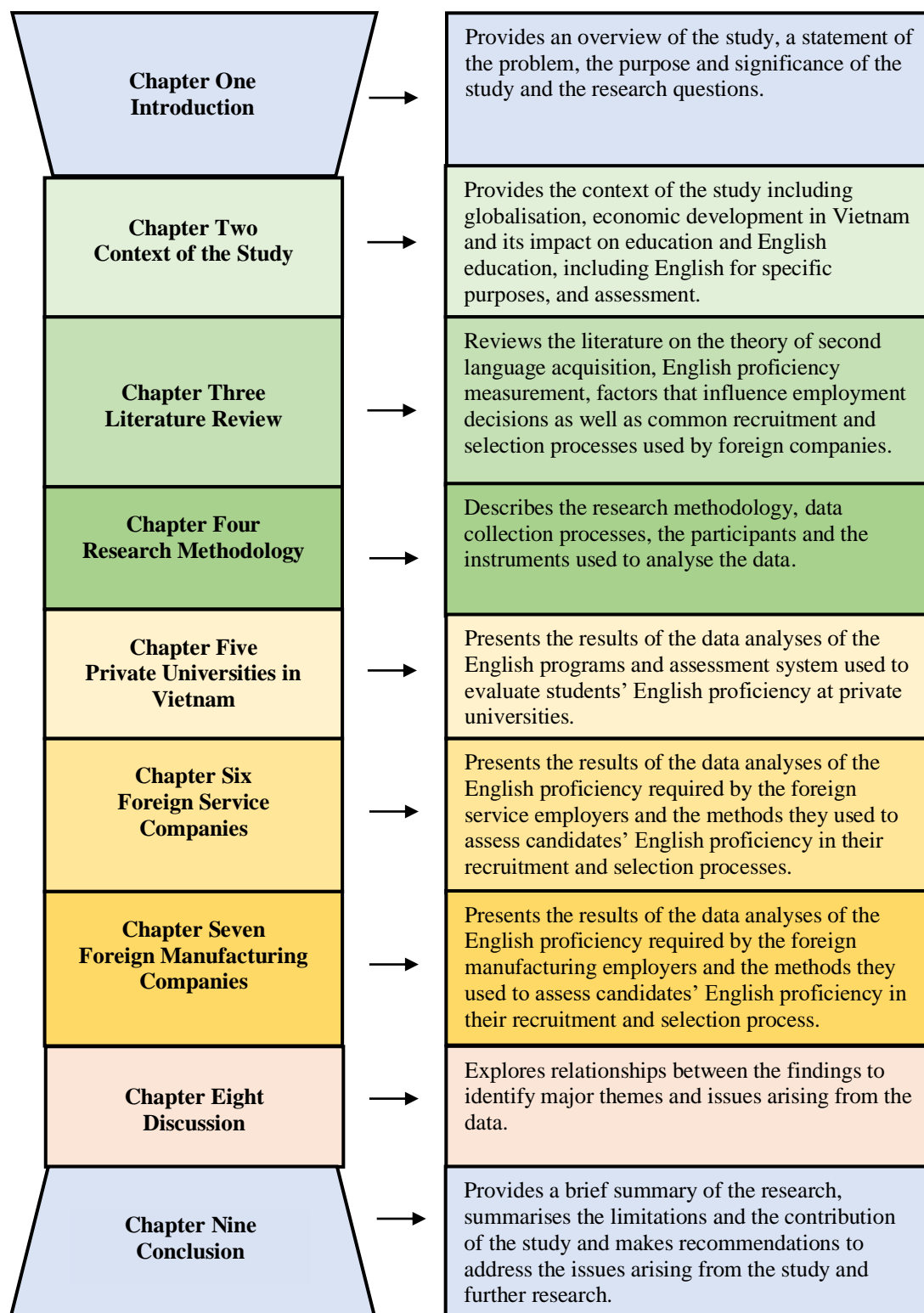


Figure 1.1 Organisation of the Thesis

CHAPTER TWO: CONTEXT OF THE STUDY

This chapter provides an overview of globalisation, its influence on increased foreign direct investment and the establishment of foreign companies in Vietnam leading to economic growth. It also examines the emergence of private higher education and English as a dominant foreign language in the Vietnamese national education system.

Globalisation and its Influence on Vietnam

Towards the end of the 1970s, globalisation manifested as a result of innovation in information technology, telecommunication and digitalisation (Edoun, Mabiza, & Ezeanyika, 2016; Utkin, 2002). Globalisation refers to the phenomenon of technological, economic, political and cultural exchanges between nations (Allen, 2016; Baffour Awuah & Amal, 2011) and reflects an ongoing process that facilitates greater interdependence among countries (Fischer, 2003). Negative and positive consequences of globalisation are extolled by anti-globalists and pro-globalists respectively. Anti-globalists make up the minority, viewing globalisation as a controlling and influencing force used by foreign companies to dominate international trade (Konyeaso, 2016). Pro-globalists comprise the majority, perceiving globalisation as a beneficial process that supports greater trade in goods and services between nations, increasing the transfer of capital through the expansion of foreign direct investment (FDI) by multinational companies (Konyeaso, 2016). Supporters also consider globalisation a process of integration, aided by the removal and reduction of tariff and non-tariff barriers, thereby changing the international flow of capital and the nature of the labour force between countries (Chang & Lee, 2010). FDI expansion caused by globalisation is widely viewed as having a positive impact on the welfare of the receiving country (Edwards & Rees, 2006).

Globalisation has also had a positive influence on the socio-economic development and education in ASEAN (Association of Southeast Asian Nations) countries (Suci, Asmara, & Mulatsih, 2016), where it has increased technological, economic and political exchanges between member nations, resulting in enormous economic growth (Suci et al., 2016; Ying, Chang, & Lee, 2014). In Vietnam, globalisation has not only benefited the economy with short- and long-term growth (Tran & Nguyen, 2018), but has also been a major contributor to increased FDI, leading to the establishment of numerous foreign companies that have created employment opportunities for young Vietnamese (Jenkins, 2006). Globalisation has also positively influenced higher education in Vietnam with the

emergence of private higher education institutions and greater diversity in education provision, the revision of curricula to meet market needs, and enhanced efficiencies and effectiveness of educational services (Nguyen & Fraser, 2007). The next section reviews the influence that globalisation has on the policy amendments and economic development in Vietnam.

Globalisation Influence and Economic Development in Vietnam: A Historical View

Since unification in 1975, globalisation has significantly impacted Vietnam's economic development. Historically, Vietnam's economy has been affected by other countries through colonisation, war and policy decisions. It was not until the end of 1945 that Ho Chi Minh proclaimed Vietnam an independent, democratic republic, ending 80 years of French control and economic exploitation perpetrated by Japan after World War II. However, Vietnam was not unified until 1975, following a war between North Vietnam (supported by the USSR) and South Vietnam (supported by the USA and its allies). When the USA withdrew its forces in 1973, Communist armed forces seized power from South Vietnam and the country was unified as the Socialist Republic of Vietnam in 1975. After unification, Vietnam was embroiled in two border wars with Khmer Rouge in the southwest from 1975 to 1978 and with China in the north from 1979 to 1990. Due to these conflicts, Vietnam was classified as one of the poorest countries in Southeast Asia between 1945 and 1986.

Eleven years after unification Vietnam adopted a nationwide, centralised, agricultural-collectivist model based on the Soviet Union (Pham & Fry, 2004). Dominated by the state, this model discouraged private or FDI investment and external trade was mainly with the Soviet Union. During this period, Vietnam's economy was heavily dependent on agriculture, with 80% of the population employed in this sector. The USSR economic model caused several difficulties for the Vietnamese economy – in 1986 the gross domestic product (GDP) grew by 3% while annual inflation figures reached three digits. In 1988, approximately 75% of the population was living in poverty, mainly caused by low agricultural production and overstaffing in ineffective state-owned enterprises (Pham & Fry, 2004) and collectives controlled by the government that generated very little international trade. The government recognised that the existing economic structure, with its heavy dependence on agriculture and state ownership was unfavourable for sustainable economic development, and that intensive reform was

urgently needed to develop the weak economy. In addition, the conflict between Vietnam and Cambodia (1975-1978) and the border war between Vietnam and China 1979-1990) were particularly harmful to the Vietnamese economy as the country was closed to foreign investors (Jenkins, 2006) during those years.

In the 1980s, the collapse of the Soviet Union, a cut in financial aid and a domestic economic crisis in Vietnam led the country's leaders to reconsider their political and economic strategies and future (Pham & Fry, 2004). At the Sixth National Communist Party Congress in 1986, the Vietnamese leaders conceded that the centralised economic model had failed and needed to be reformed. The term *Doi Moi* – meaning reform or renovation – was used to name the new policy to guide the economic transition to a market-oriented model that encouraged all sectors, private and foreign, to become involved in economic development and attract FDI (Nguyen & Fraser, 2007). The government established an open policy, promoting external economic cooperation with all countries of the world to support Vietnam's reformation into a market-oriented economy. The policy also encouraged private-sector development, foreign trade and FDI in Vietnam in order to transform the country from a single, state-owned economy into a multiple-sector economy.

Following the introduction of the *Doi Moi* policy, reforms took place in several sectors (Than & Tan, 1993; Wolff, 1999). In the agricultural sector, farming collectives were replaced by individual farming families, which meant that families were granted the rights to use agricultural land for long-term farming. In the industrial sector, state-owned companies were given more autonomy for planning and implementing production activities based on a self-financing mechanism that resulted in the abolition of government subsidies for state-owned companies. Additionally, the government prioritised investment in export-oriented industries rather than heavy industry. In the financial sector, the government released its control on commodity prices, allowing market prices to be regulated by the laws of supply and demand. In the trade sector, the Vietnamese government no longer had control of trade activities, instead utilising market devices such as tariffs, taxes and quotas (Than & Tan, 1993). Furthermore, the Vietnamese government passed two new laws that came into effect in 1987 – the *Law on Foreign Investment* and the *Law on Enterprise* – with the purpose of encouraging more foreign investment and technological innovation to promote socio-economic development. Due to these reforms, Vietnam initially achieved encouraging results with an annual GDP around 8% and high levels of import and export growth. Agricultural production grew exponentially, and rather than being a rice importer

as was the case before *Doi Moi* in 1986, Vietnam became the third largest rice exporter in the world in the early 1990s (Milanovic, 1999). The inflation rate decreased making Vietnamese exports more competitive, and has remained in single digits since 1996. The percentage of people living in poverty also declined from 75% in 1993 to 37% in 1998 (Milanovic, 1999) and continued to fall to 9.8% in 2016 (Nguyen, 2018). To sustain economic development and adapt to rapid international and regional changes, Vietnam proactively integrated and participated in various international and regional economic organisations since the introduction of *Doi Moi*.

Vietnam's Economic Development and Integration in the Global Economy

Since the advent of globalisation and the *Doi Moi* policy, Vietnam has made considerable efforts to participate in the global economy in order to diversify foreign investment for its industrialisation and modernisation. Since 1995, Vietnam has become a member of important organisations, such as the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and the World Trade Organisation (WTO). As a member of ASEAN, Vietnam has signed several free trade agreements (FTA) with some of the largest economies in the world, including China, India, Japan, South Korea, Australia and New Zealand. Vietnam has also solely negotiated alliances and signed FTAs with Japan, South Korea and some European countries. Such deep integration with international countries and trade organisations has enabled Vietnam to expand its exports to new markets and attract substantial foreign investment into the economy to stimulate socio-economic development (Tran & Nguyen, 2018). Table 2.1 shows Vietnam's participation in the global economy between 1995 and 2019.

Table 2.1

Vietnam's Participation in the Global Economy between 1995 and 2019

	Year	Economic Organisations
Economic organisations joined by Vietnam following <i>Doi Moi</i>	1995	The Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN)
	1998	The Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC)
	2001	Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM)
	2007	The World Trade Organisation (WTO)
ASEAN Free Trade Agreements	2002	ASEAN-China Free Trade Area
	2003	ASEAN-India Free Trade Area
	2003	ASEAN-Japan Comprehensive Economic Cooperation
	2006	ASEAN- South Korea Free Trade Area
	2009	ASEAN-Australia and New Zealand Free Trade Area
Non-ASEAN Free Trade Agreements	2008	Economic Partnership Agreement with Japan
	2011	FTA with Chile
	2015	FTA with South Korea
	2015	Vietnam-Eurasian Economic Union
	2016	Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) or Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP).
	2019	EU-Vietnam Free Trade Agreement (EVFTA)

Vietnam's participation in regional and international organisations and FTAs with various economic partners have attracted substantial FDI into the country's economy. These investments have enabled Vietnam to achieve significant economic development during the last three decades.

Vietnam's Integration and Foreign Direct Investment (FDI)

Vietnam's membership of international and regional organisations stimulated FDI into becoming the major contributor to economic growth in Vietnam since 1986. The government recognised and promoted the role of such investment in the country's socio-economic development, and after unification in 1975, introduced the first *Foreign Investment Rules* policy in 1977, as a means of developing the economy after decades of war. However, this proved difficult for three reasons. Firstly, Vietnam's centralised economy still focused on domestic economic development. Secondly, the trade embargo imposed by the USA in 1975 was not lifted until 1994; and thirdly, the *Foreign Investment Rules* policy proved to be an unfavourable legal framework for attracting foreign

investment (Than & Tan, 1993; Wolff, 1999). To address this, following intensive socio-economic reform in 1986, a new legal framework to attract FDI was announced, and in late 1987, the Vietnamese government promulgated the *Law on Foreign Investment*. The purpose of this law was to strengthen national interest in the economy and attract foreign investors (Anwar & Nguyen, 2010; Pham, 2003) by offering more advantageous conditions in the form of generous tax incentives and import privileges. Since then, the *Law on Foreign Investment* has been amended twice, in 1990 and 1992, and renewed twice, in 1996 and 2000, to adapt to rapid changes in FDI and international trade. The amendments provided a more beneficial environment for foreign investors and expanded the rights of both domestic and foreign investors. The subsequent success in attracting FDI was not only attributed to these changes, but also to the USA lifting its trade embargo in 1994 and improvements in diplomatic relations with America. Vietnam has since become one of the highest FDI-attracting countries in ASEAN (The ASEAN Secretariat, 2018). Figure 2.1 shows the exponential increase in foreign projects and FDI in Vietnam over the last three decades (General Statistics Office of Vietnam (GSO), 2019).

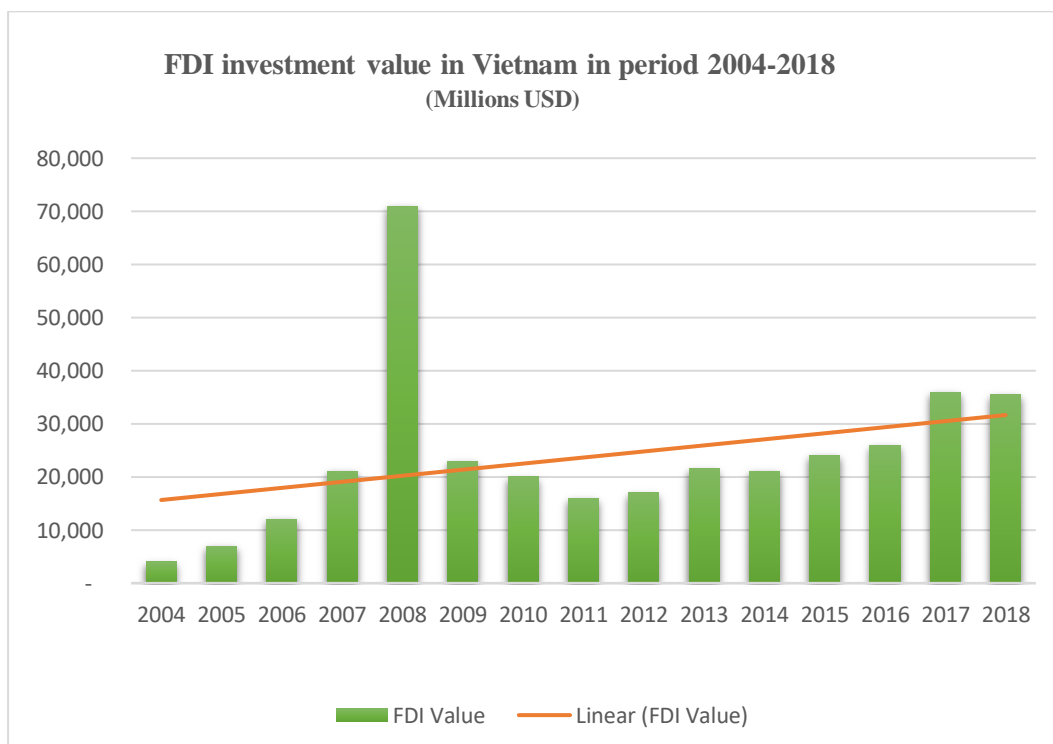


Figure 2.1 FDI Value in Vietnam during the Period 2004 to 2018

The FDI value in Vietnam fluctuated between 2004 and 2018, increasing sharply between 2004 and 2008, particularly in 2008, coinciding with the 2005 *Investment Law* that

supplemented the *Law on Foreign Investment* and Vietnam's 2007 WTO membership. From 2011 to 2018 the FDI value increased steadily; the trajectory shows consistently high levels between 2004 and 2018 (Tran & Nguyen, 2018).

As a member of some of the largest trade and economic organisations such as ASEAN, WTO and CPTPP, and FTAs with several major world economies such as China, Japan and South Korea, Vietnam's FDI was characterised by significant diversity. By the end of 2017 approximately 115 countries and territories had invested in Vietnam (Tran & Nguyen, 2018). The statistical data in Figure 2.2 shows a large proportion of FDI originated from four Asian countries, namely Japan, South Korea, Singapore and Taiwan accounting for 72% of the total FDI value in Vietnam in 2017, with Japan the highest investor. One of the main reasons for the high levels of investment by these countries is that Vietnam had signed FTAs with them.

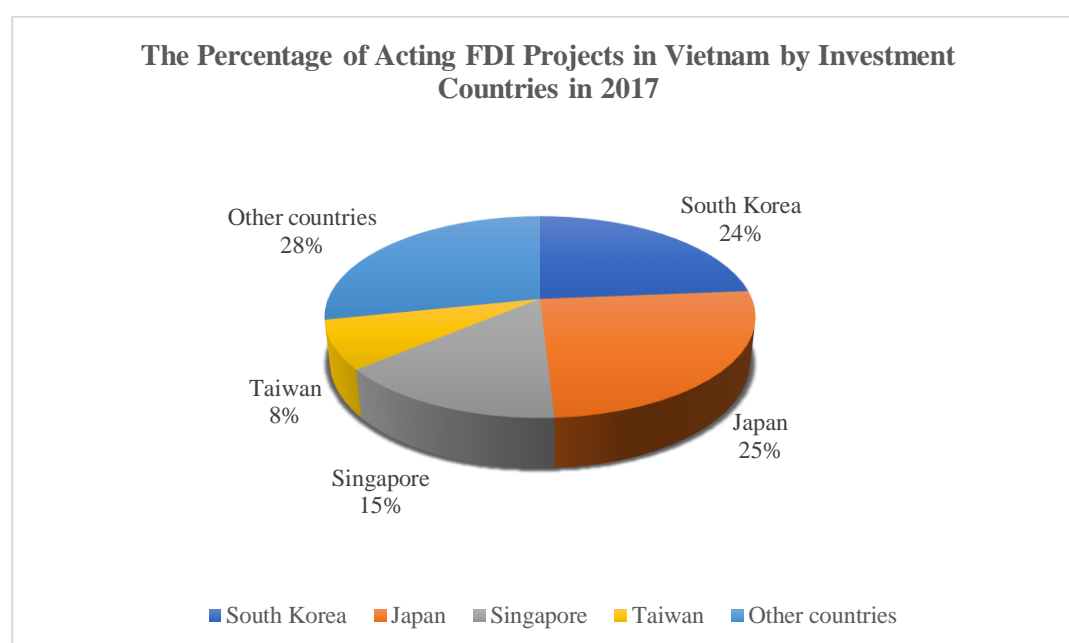


Figure 2.2 Percentage of Active FDI Projects in Vietnam by Investment Countries in 2017 (GSO, 2018)

Figure 2.3 shows FDI enterprises focused predominantly on labour-intensive industries such as manufacturing, processing, services and construction. As can be seen, the two most prominent industries were manufacturing/processing (52.1%) and services (39.0%). Interestingly, primary industries such as agriculture, forestry and seafood which had been so prominent in the past, accounted for only 2.3% of FDI projects in 2016.

Although a relatively minor contributor at 6.2%, construction in all likelihood reflects an upturn in FDI project facilities, while mining ventures at 2.3% attracted the least interest.

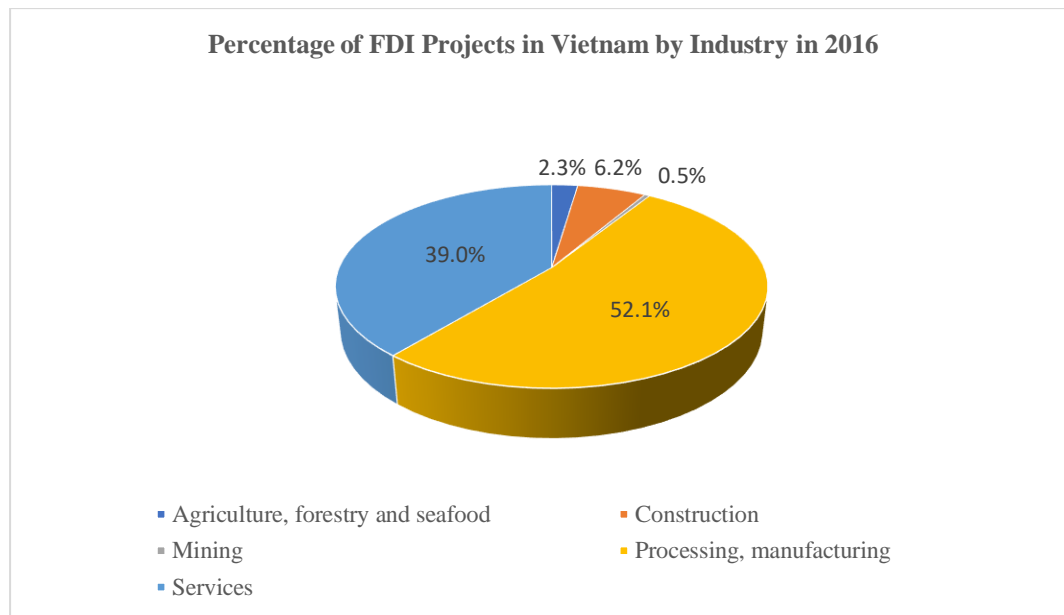


Figure 2.3 Percentage of FDI Projects in Vietnam by Industry in 2016 (GSO, 2017)

Since the changes in regulations and the establishment of numerous multinational organisations, affiliations and foreign companies, these FDI capital inflows had a major impact on Vietnam's economic development. The presence of increased numbers of foreign companies in Vietnam created numerous employment opportunities for young Vietnamese people, especially business graduates. According to the General Statistics Office (2017), FDI in Vietnam created two million extra workplace positions up until 2015, consistent with the World Bank's (2010) observation that for every direct employee in the FDI sector, two or three indirect employee positions are created. Based on this theory, calculations suggest that the FDI sector provided employment for four to six million indirect employees in the service sector and ancillary industries in Vietnam, and six to eight million workplace positions overall.

To maintain competitiveness and expand their businesses in Vietnam, foreign companies also recruited talented local employees, thus creating multinational and multilingual working environments. In these multilingual working environments, English has been the chosen common language (Bui, 2013; Kankaanranta, Karhunen, & Louhiala-Salminen, 2015, 2018) for communication by all employees (Bui, 2013; Roshid & Chowdhury, 2013).

Vietnam's growing labour market demand for highly skilled employees, proficient in English, placed enormous pressure on the national education system that was struggling to respond due to limited government funding and poor infrastructure (Mamun, 2011). To boost socio-economic development and meet the demands of the labour market, the Vietnamese government reformed the national education system in the 1990s, with a particular focus on higher education.

Globalisation and Higher Education in Vietnam: A Historical View

In its long history, Vietnam's educational system has experienced many changes; its role and structure greatly impacted by the political regime of the day. Historically, Vietnamese education has been strongly influenced by Confucianism because of Chinese domination in the country for almost a thousand years (from 111 BC - 938 AD). After gaining independence from China, Vietnam became the first country in Southeast Asia to build a higher education institution in 1046 – *Quoc Tu Giam* – to teach Confucianism. At that time the main purpose of higher education was to educate the sons of emperors and enhance the expertise of people who worked for the state in the Mandarin language (Nguyen, T. K. Q., 2011). The official language of education was Chinese, and Confucianism formed the basis of education in Vietnam (Le, Q. A., 2016).

In more recent times, the role and structure of Vietnamese higher education has been influenced by Western countries. Three major political changes in the country altered Vietnam's higher education system. The first occurred in the middle of the 19th century, following French colonisation of Vietnam in 1858, when the French education system replaced Confucianism. However, it was not until 1918 that the last Confucian examination was undertaken in Vietnam (Bowen, Nguyen, & Weigl, 1998). The first French university, the University of Indochina, was established in 1906. A French curriculum was adopted and the official language of education transferred from Chinese to French (Pham & Fry, 2004). Without access to technological and scientific knowledge, the main purpose of higher education was teaching basic skills so that graduating students would be capable of serving the colonial government (Woodside, 1983).

When Vietnam gained independence from the French in 1945, it was divided into two countries by the Geneva Agreement: The Democratic Republic of Vietnam (North Vietnam) and the Republic of Vietnam (South Vietnam). This marked the end of French education in Vietnam and led to a second change in higher education. Higher education in

South Vietnam followed the American model, whereas higher education in North Vietnam adopted the Soviet system (Pham & Fry, 2002). With the use of Latin characters, Vietnamese language replaced French to become the national language of North Vietnam in 1954 and South Vietnam in 1966 (Le, Q. A., 2016). In North Vietnam, curricula and teaching methods were identical to those used in Soviet Union countries. All universities were run by the state and specialisation was confined to courses such as engineering, science, agriculture and technology. To qualify for university, students were required to have a successful high school background and pass an entrance exam, and upon graduation students were assigned to work in government offices. By contrast, higher education in South Vietnam followed the American model and emphasised science, law, economics and administration. Graduates were free to decide whether they wanted to work in government offices or companies upon graduation.

In 1975 the country unified and the higher education system in North Vietnam was adopted by the whole country. Russian became the required foreign language in the national education system and only state-run universities existed across the country. However, coupled with an economic crisis in Vietnam in the early 1980s, the collapse of Communism in Eastern Europe led the Vietnamese government to introduce the *Doi Moi* policy in 1986. This policy led to intensive reform in every sector of governance in Vietnam and marked the third major change in higher education that was no longer confined to following the state plan. State-owned universities were granted more autonomy and flexibility, and provided courses that met the increased needs of learners, satisfied the diverse demands of the market and provided competent human resources to serve the nation's industrialisation and modernisation (Tran, N. C., 2006). For the first time they were permitted to exact a levy for tuition fees. Perhaps the greatest change was the government's support for investment in private higher education, and as a result, private higher education institutions in Vietnam burgeoned in response to labour market demands.

Privatisation of Higher Education in Vietnam

Following the introduction of *Doi Moi* in 1986 (Boothroyd & Pham, 2000), the Vietnamese economy grew quickly and the demand for well-educated graduates with high levels of technical, communication and management skills increased. Since then, higher education in Vietnam has faced many challenges in providing the number of quality workers required to support economic integration and development (Pham & Fry, 2002).

Government funding for education and training at state-owned universities were limited and failed to meet the demand for socio-economic development. As a result, the government implemented a flexible education policy to mobilise diverse investment for education from different sources. One of these was in the private sector. The first private university, Thang Long University, majoring in mathematics and information, was established in Hanoi in 1988 to test the new method of education. However, Thang Long Private University was not as successful as expected, due to limited investment in teaching and learning facilities. More importantly, the Vietnamese people were not familiar with this new model of education and preferred public universities, because as business entities, private universities were expected to generate revenue, mainly from tuition fees, to cover their overheads. As a result, private institutions tried to recruit as many students as possible, even those with poor academic results who failed to qualify for entry into public universities, and due to limited investment, they hired retired lecturers and visiting teachers to teach their students. This led to private universities being negatively perceived because of their low entry requirements, poor infrastructure and the perception of low teaching quality (Le, T. T., 2014), and cast doubt on the qualifications of their graduates.

To establish a legal framework for the development of private higher education in Vietnam, the government issued *Regulations on Private Higher Education*, attached to Decision No. 240/TTg on 24 May 1993. The regulations provided private higher education institutions in Vietnam with official approval to design and deliver courses in relevant disciplines, as guided by market demand, and prepare graduate students for employment (Mamun, 2011). Several legal documents, as shown in Table 2.2, were issued by the Vietnamese government to consolidate the legal framework for further development and expansion. According to these legal regulations, Vietnamese citizens had the right to establish a private university and operate as a business entity and legal component of higher education. Although private universities could be established by individual(s) with approval from the Prime Minister, they had to operate under the management of MOET.

Table 2.2

Legal Documents on Education Reform Issued by the Vietnamese Government

Document	Date	Focus
Decision No. 240/TTg	May 24, 1993	Regulations on Private Higher Education.
Resolution No. 90-CP	August 21, 1997	Direction and Guideline on Socialisation of Education, Health and Culture Activities.
Law on Education	1998	
Decision No.14/2005/QĐ-TTg on Issuance of Regulations for Private Higher Education Institutions	January 17, 2005	Replacing the previous Regulations on Private Higher Education Institutions issued in 1993.
Law on Education	2005	
Resolution No. 14/2005/NQ-CP on Basic and Intensive Reform of Vietnam's Higher Education in the period 2006-2020.	November 2, 2005	Aimed to increase enrolment in private universities to approximately 40% of total national higher education enrolments by 2020.
Amended Law on Education	2009	
Law on Higher Education	2012	
Amended Law on Higher Education	2018	
Law on Education	2019	

Operating costs are paid for by investor contributions, private funding or loans, as well as tuition fees, income from research and other educational products sold to the public, interest from bank accounts, gifts and grants from individuals and/or organisations. Outflows for private universities include expenses for administration, academic activities, staff benefits, rental fees, interest on investments loans and other legal expenditure. As a business entity, any surplus after paying all expenses is taxed, re-invested or paid to investors as a dividend.

Like public universities, private universities operate in the same legal environment and under the management of MOET (Villano & Tran, 2018). Unlike public universities that receive financial support and land use privileges from the government and follow strict government regulations, private universities do not receive financial or other forms of support from the government and are able to provide education and training in registered disciplines provided they meet all MOET conditions, such as approved teachers, curricula, teaching and learning materials and facilities. As business entities, private universities can recruit their choice of academic professionals and administrative staff on condition that they

adhere to Labour Code regulations (Villano & Tran, 2018). All Vietnamese citizens and foreigners living in Vietnam are eligible to enrol in private universities if they meet the institutions' enrolment requirements, and students studying at private universities have all the same rights as those at public universities (Villano & Tran, 2018). Due to limited financial sources and the need to make a profit, private universities deliver programs that require a low initial investment and have high financial returns; for example, business administration, foreign languages, accounting, finance, banking and tourism (Hayden & Dao, 2010; Pham & Fry, 2002). Private universities also have an obligation to ensure the quality of their teaching staff in order to maintain student outcomes and uphold their reputation, so they tend to contract visiting and retired professors from public universities. As a result, teaching methods in these institutions are typically traditional and teacher centred.

Despite the abovementioned challenges, private higher education in Vietnam has developed quickly over the last three decades. The experimental introduction of Thang Long University in 1988, the creation of an adequate legal framework, the growing needs of learners and the strong influence of globalisation led to a proliferation of private universities since the early 1990s (Le, T. T., 2014). Figure 2.4 shows the growth in the number of private higher education institutions in Vietnam between 1994 and 2018.

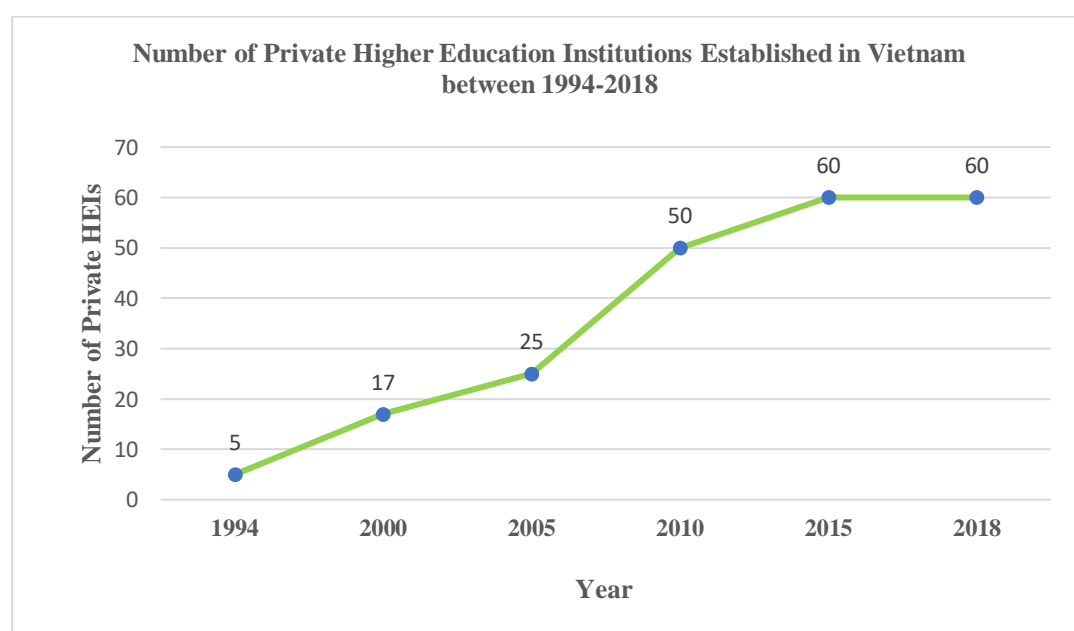


Figure 2.4 Number of Private HEIs Established in Vietnam between 1994 and 2018 (GSO, 2019).

During this period, socio-economic growth was considerable, but the legal framework for private higher education had not yet been established and Vietnamese students still preferred to attend public universities. The period from 2005 to 2015 witnessed a sharp increase in the number of private universities, coinciding with Vietnam's membership of the WTO in 2007. As a member nation, Vietnam was required to comply with the General Agreement on Trade in Services (GATS) that encouraged flexibility and deregulation in the education sector (Le, Q. A, 2016).

Another reason for the proliferation of private universities was globalisation. The Vietnamese economy was booming because of foreign investment, creating an exponential demand for highly skilled human resources with appropriate education and training. The reputation of private universities improved as they became more established and provided good education facilities and teaching quality, along with a diversity of courses designed to meet the requirements of prospective foreign employers. Between 2015 and 2018, the number of private universities stabilised at 60, when the Vietnamese government concentrated on improving education quality rather than expansion. Despite slight fluctuations, improvements in teaching and learning quality at private universities in recent years has maintained high numbers of enrolments as shown in Figure 2.5.

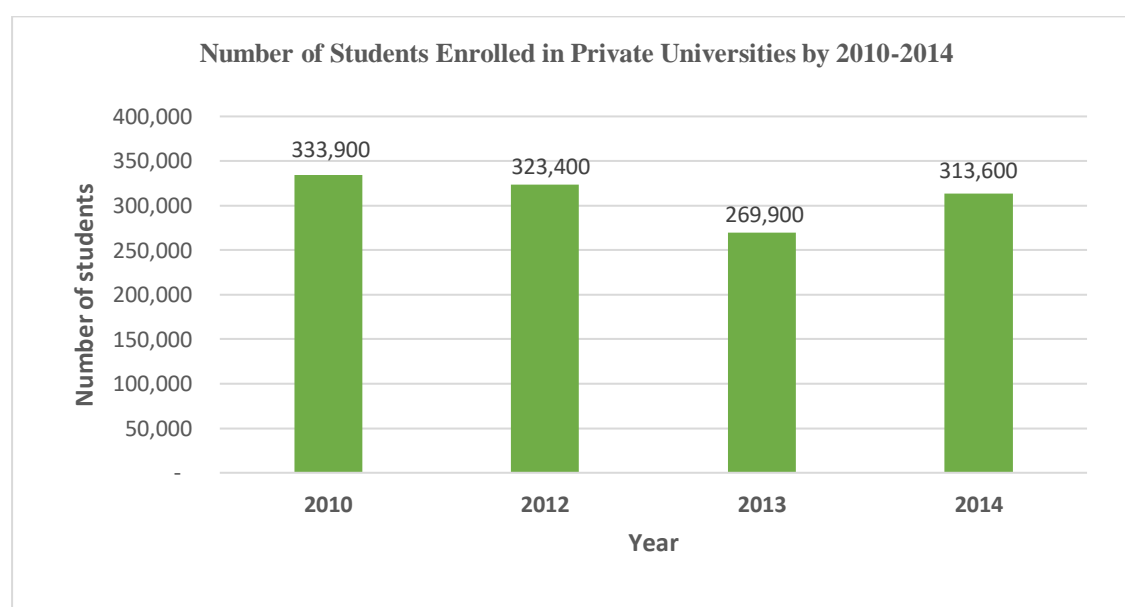


Figure 2.5 Number of Students Enrolled in Private Universities between 2010 and 2014. Source: GSO 2016.

As perceptions of private universities gradually became more positive, the data in Figure 2.5 shows they provided education and training to hundreds of thousands of students

from 2010 to 2014. This eased the burden on public universities and contributed substantially to the national education system. With the assistance of private higher institutions, significantly more graduates were prepared for employment during this time (Le, T. T., 2014). Figure 2.6 shows the number of students graduating from the private sector between 2010 and 2014 accounted for approximately 20% of the overall number of university graduates annually.

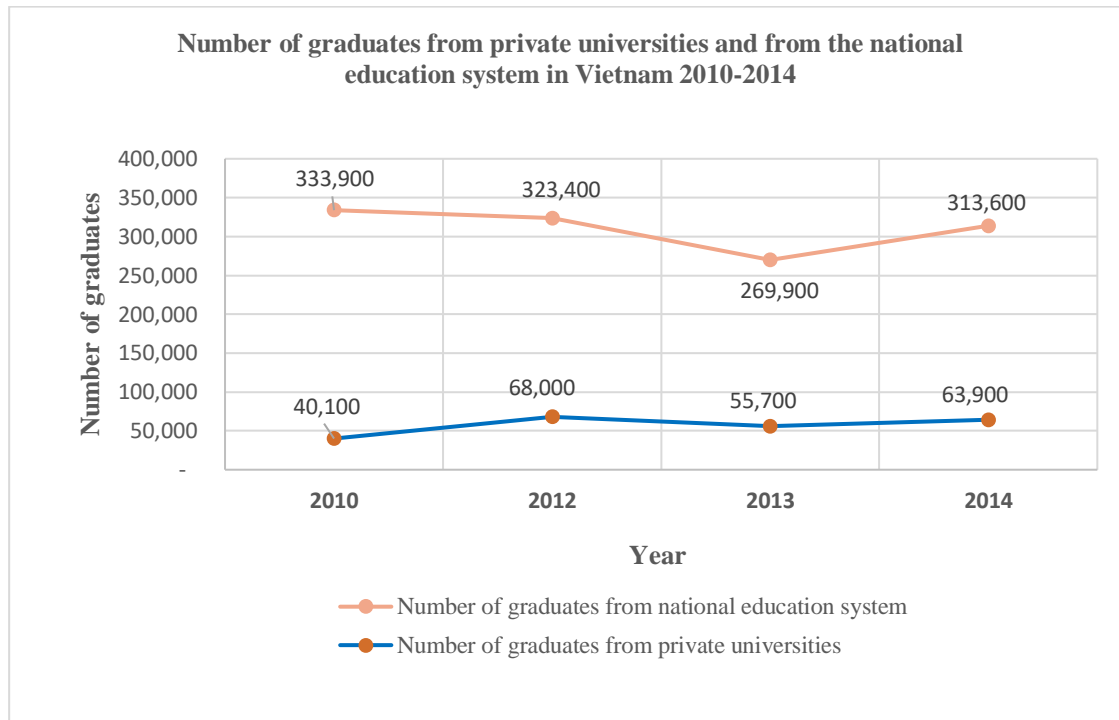


Figure 2.6 Comparison of Graduate Numbers: Private Universities and the National Education System in Vietnam 2010-2014 (GSO, 2016).

Most graduates from both public and private universities in Vietnam have a preference for working in foreign companies because they are perceived as dynamic workplaces that offer attractive remuneration and professional development (Bui, 2013). To be able to work in foreign companies, employees are required to have particular skills, competencies and English proficiency. Accordingly, the Vietnamese government and higher education institutions not only strive to provide students with professional knowledge, but also improve their English proficiency to qualify them for employment in foreign companies (Hoang, 2008, 2010; Le, T. H. D., 2014; Le, T. S., 2011; Le, V. C., 2011; Nguyen, T. B. H., 2013).

Globalisation and English Education in Asia

In the globalised world English has become an international language (Clyne & Sharifian, 2008); (Mair, 2003). However, the role of English is variously regarded in different countries. For example, Kachru (1985) identified and depicted the differences in global English as three concentric circles: an Inner Circle, an Outer Circle and an Expanding Circle. The Inner Circle represents countries such as the United States, United Kingdom, Canada, Australia and New Zealand where English is the native language. The Outer Circle represents previous colonies of the British Empire, such as Bangladesh, Ghana, India, Malaysia, Nigeria, Pakistan, Philippines, Singapore, Sri Lanka, Tanzania, Kenya, Zambia and South Africa. In these countries, English is a second language (ESL) and frequently the language of education and business, where native speakers often retain their first language. The third Expanding Circle comprises countries such as Vietnam, China, Egypt, Indonesia, Japan, Korea, Nepal, Saudi Arabia, Israel, Taiwan, Zimbabwe and others in Europe, where English is considered a useful foreign language (EFL) rather than a second language and taught in an EFL context. (Crystal, 2012) endorsed Kachru's model and added that English is viewed as a traditional language in the Inner Circle, as a second language in the Outer Circle and as a foreign language in the Expanding Circle, as shown in Figure 2.7.

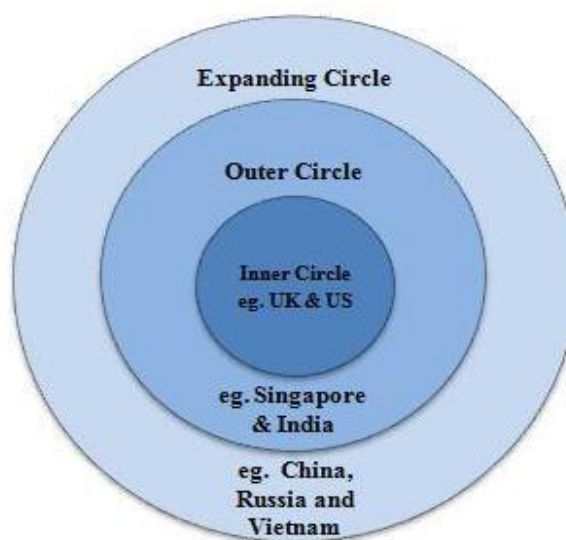


Figure 2.7 Three Circles of English. Model adapted from *English as a Global Language* by Crystal 2012 (p. 61).

The model proposed by Kachru (1985) reflects how English is regarded by the countries in each circle and the way the language is taught in those countries. Some Asian countries belong to the Outer Circle, while others belong to the Expanding Circle. Outer Circle countries, such as Singapore and Philippines, teach English as a second language using ESL methods, and children begin learning English at an early age in pre-school or primary school (Kam, 2002). English is used as a medium of instruction in subjects at school and is the common language of communication outside the classroom. In these countries, English is considered the language of business, politics and education, even though it may not be students' first language (Bolton, 2008).

In contrast, children in Expanding Circle countries, such as Vietnam, Thailand and China, typically begin learning English later in school as an academic subject. In many of these countries, students are taught English grammar, reading and writing within a restricted classroom environment with little opportunity to practise their speaking skills (Kam, 2002). As a result, they often regard the main purpose of learning English as passing exams and receiving a certificate. Given that the opportunity to practise English outside the classroom is very limited, it follows that learners in Expanding Circle countries usually have low levels of English-speaking fluency.

In 2008, the Vietnamese government nominated English as a compulsory subject from primary to tertiary education (Bolton, 2008). This change led to innovations in English teaching and learning, including use of the communicative language teaching (CLT) approach and textbooks with an emphasis on communication development. However, English education in Vietnam is still strongly influenced by Confucian ideology, evident in the examination-oriented, book-based, teacher-centred education system, with its emphasis on rote learning, memorisation, following directions and passivity (Le, V. C., 2011). This is reflected in the quiet, attentive way students listen to their teachers, repeat their teachers' words (Kennett & Knight, 1999; Le, 1999b) and seldom ask questions or challenge ideas. Therefore, very little oral communication takes place between teachers, students or their classmates (Le, V. C., 2007). EFL lessons mainly focus on grammar, reading and writing; and as a consequence, the English communication skills of graduates in Vietnam have remained an area of concern (Hoang, 2008; Le, T. H. D., 2014; Le, T. S., 2011; Le, V. C., 2011; Nguyen, T. B. H., 2013).

Globalisation and English Education in Vietnam

Earlier in this chapter, political and economic factors were cited as major determinants of the predominant foreign language in Vietnam. Over different periods of time, Mandarin, French, Russian and English were the dominant foreign languages. Dire economic circumstances and globalisation were responsible for Vietnam's transition from a subsidised agricultural economy to a market economy, and the private and foreign investment that followed impacted on all aspects of Vietnamese society, including education (Abuza, 1996). Several factors led to English becoming the preferred foreign language in Vietnam, including the normalisation of diplomatic relations with America, the need for foreign countries to identify a common language for business, the spread of the internet and mass media which were mainly in English, and the economic advantages of employment in foreign companies that had adopted English as the common language. All these factors conspired to make English an indispensable qualification for Vietnamese workers (Ha, 2018; Shapiro, 1995).

The growing demand for learning English led to major changes in both policy and English teaching in the national education system in Vietnam. In 1994, the Vietnamese Prime Minister signed the Instructions 422-TTg, emphasising the importance of foreign language competence, especially for government officers. This policy mandated that government officers and employees learn English, and English proficiency became a benchmark for assessing the qualifications of government officers for promotion and salary increases. As a result, the demand for learning English in Vietnam increased rapidly and public universities began offering a range of English programs from beginner to advanced levels, both during working hours and after hours. The private sector also started to actively participate in English education and hundreds of English centres were established. These centres were not only a drawcard for government officers who wanted to secure their positions and ensure future promotion, but also for those wanting to gain better paid employment in the multiplying international organisations, including university students (Do, 2006). English seemed to have infiltrated every aspect of Vietnamese society, with English words fashionably used concurrently with Vietnamese in most young people's conversations. Many company names, instruction signs at tourist spots, hotels and entertainment venues were written in English (Vuong, 2010). English proficiency became a required competence for candidates applying for employment in foreign and local

companies, and employers used English to assess applicants during their recruitment and selection processes. English proficiency also became a condition for promotion to managerial positions, and academics realised that since most research was written in English, they would have to master the language to attain current knowledge (Phan, 2017).

The introduction of *Doi Moi* in 1986 was a response to this socio-economic development and political change. To cater for the growing need for English proficiency, the Vietnamese government announced several policies to promote English education in the national education system. These policies resulted in three major changes. Firstly, from 1986 to 2002, English was introduced in the National Education System as an elective subject in lower secondary school (from Year 6 to Year 9) where it was mainly taught in junior high schools in major cities. In upper secondary education, from Years 10 to 12, it became a compulsory subject (Hoang, V. V., 2010). Secondly, from 2002 to 2008, English became an elective subject in primary and tertiary education and a compulsory subject in secondary schools. The increased importance of English proficiency for international integration, socio-economic development and meeting the requirements of the labour market led to a third major change in 2008, with the introduction of an ambitious project titled *Teaching and Learning Foreign Languages Plan in the National Education System, period 2008-2020*. The purposes of the National Project reflect the requirements of the Vietnamese government regarding English proficiency of graduates and aim for: (1) improving English proficiency of Vietnamese people, especially of the graduates to meet English requirements of the labour market, foreign employers in particular; (2) supporting Vietnamese youth who aspired to study at tertiary level and internationally; (3) making young Vietnamese more competitive in the regional and global labour market; (4) sustaining Vietnam's integration in regional and international economies; and (5) meeting the requirements of globalisation and serve the industrialisation and modernisation process in Vietnam.

The National Project was composed of three main phases. In the first phase, from 2008 to 2010, priority was given to developing a ten-year foreign language curriculum. During this period, textbooks were written and new approaches piloted. The second phase began in 2011 and continued for four years, focused mainly on introducing the ten-year foreign language program in the National Education System. Unlike the first two phases, the third phase (2016 – 2020) is aimed at refining the school-based program by developing

intensive foreign language programs for vocational schools, colleges and universities (National Project, 2008).

As a result of these developments, English has become a compulsory subject in education. It is now offered in Vietnamese schools from Years 3-12, and high school students must complete an English exam before entering universities. At tertiary level, English is mandatory and delivered nationwide as a discipline and an EFL subject. Students who wish to major in English enrol in courses such as Bachelor of Arts, Master of English or Doctoral studies that focus on English to be eligible for positions as teachers, translators/interpreters and researchers. Students, including business students who study English for the purpose of gaining employment need to attain level 3 English proficiency to graduate from university (Hoang, V. V., 2010).

Language proficiency testing and assessment play an important part in foreign language education. Testing not only assists in identifying strengths and weaknesses in students' abilities, but also informs teachers about the effectiveness of teaching programs (Henning, 1987). Therefore, it is important for MOET to provide clear and unified guidelines on how to assess foreign language proficiency, so that the national education system has a consistent benchmark followed by all Vietnamese education institutions. In 2008, to set the standard for English assessment, MOET devised a foreign language proficiency assessment system by adopting the Common European Framework for Reference of Languages (CEFR). This assessment system comprises six levels, identified as A1, A2, B1, B2, C1 and C2, with A1 representing the lowest level of attainment and C2 the highest. All non-English major graduates are required to attain B1 English proficiency and are expected to:

...understand the main points of clear standard input on familiar matters regularly encountered in work, school, leisure; deal with most situations likely to arise whilst travelling in an area where the language is spoken; produce simple connected text on topics, which are familiar or of personal interest; and describe experiences and events, dreams, hopes, and ambitions and briefly give reasons and explanations for opinions and plans (CEFR, p. 5).

According to the National Creation Board that developed the National Project, the ideal English proficiency level for non-English major university graduates to gain

employment in foreign companies is B2, because at this level they are able to communicate effectively in English in the various complex contexts required by foreign employers. The CEFR describes B2 as:

The learners can understand the main content of complicated document, the concrete and nonfigurative topics including technical communications in their professional fields; communicate fluently, naturally with native speakers; Write various documents clearly and in detail with different topics and explain their own points of view about a topic, discussing the advantages and disadvantages of various options (CEFR, p. 5).

However, after deliberating the factors that influence English teaching and learning in Vietnam, such as the low English proficiency of language teachers, the existing language teaching approaches with a focus on grammar translation, the unfavourable English teaching and learning environment, the passive learning style of Vietnamese learners and the technological facilities needed to support foreign language teaching and learning, the National Project Creation Board determined that level 3 was the most viable foreign language proficiency level for non-English major graduates. Despite not having a choice, foreign employers in Vietnam were willing to accept graduates with this level of English proficiency, since they could communicate effectively in the workplace and continue to improve their English. Consequently, level 3 was set as the compulsory English proficiency level for non-English major graduates at the completion of tertiary education. A general description of each level of the CEFR, as adopted by the National Project, is provided in Table 2.3.

Table 2.3
General Description of Each Level of the CEFR

	Level	General Description
Proficient Users	C2	Can understand with ease virtually everything heard or read. Can summarise information from different spoken and written sources, reconstructing arguments and accounts in a coherent presentation. Can express him/herself spontaneously, very fluently and precisely, differentiating finer shades of meaning even in more complex situations.
	C1	Can understand a wide range of demanding, longer texts, and recognise implicit meaning. Can express him/herself fluently and spontaneously without much obvious searching for expressions. Can use language flexibly and effectively for

	Level	General Description
		social, academic, and professional purposes. Can produce clear, well-structured, detailed text on complex subjects, showing controlled use of organisational patterns, connectors, and cohesive devices.
Independent Users	B2	Can understand the main ideas of complex text on both concrete and abstract topics, including technical discussions in his/her field of specialisation. Can interact with a degree of fluency and spontaneity that makes regular interaction with native speakers quite possible without strain for either party. Can produce clear, detailed text on a wide range of subjects and explain a viewpoint on a topical issue giving the advantages and disadvantages of various options.
	B1	Can understand the main points of clear standard input on familiar matters regularly encountered in work, school, leisure, etc. Can deal with most situations likely to arise whilst travelling in an area where the language is spoken. Can produce simple connected text on topics which are familiar or of personal interest. Can describe experiences and events, dreams, hopes, and ambitions and briefly give reasons and explanations for opinions and plans.
Basic Users	A2	Can understand sentences and frequently used expressions related to areas of most immediate relevance (e.g., very basic personal and family information, shopping, local geography, employment). Can communicate in simple and routine tasks requiring a simple and direct exchange of information on familiar and routine matters. Can describe in simple terms aspects of his/her background, immediate environment, and matters in areas of immediate need.
	A1	Can understand and use familiar everyday expressions and very basic phrases aimed at the satisfaction of the needs of a concrete type. Can introduce him/herself and others and can ask and answer questions about personal details such as where he/she lives; people he/she knows, and things he/she has. Can interact in a simple way provided the other person talks slowly and clearly and is prepared to help.

Source: *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, Teaching, Assessment* (p. 5).

In conforming to the foreign language teaching and learning environment in Vietnam, MOET developed a new foreign language assessment system in 2014 that replaced the CEFR version called the *Six Level Foreign Language Proficiency Assessment System* (hereafter referred to as the Six Level System). As the title suggests, it was made up of levels ranging from 1 to 6, with level 1 representing the lowest level and level 6 the highest. The Six Level System was adapted from the CEFR and made comparisons with other English proficiency assessment systems used by several countries around the world. Each level of the Six Level System specified proficiency requirements applicable to foreign language

teaching in Vietnam and were almost identical to CEFR requirements. The levels were then divided into three categories: primary, intermediate and upper-intermediate, each of which consisted of two levels. An overall description of each level is provided in Table 2.4.

Table 2.4
General Description of Each Level in the Six Level System

	Level	General Description
Primary	Level 1	Can understand and use familiar everyday expressions and very basic phrases aimed at concrete communication. Can introduce him/herself and others and can answer questions about personal details such as where he/she lives; people he/she knows, and things he/she has. Can interact in a simple way provided the other person talks slowly and clearly and is prepared to help.
	Level 2	Can understand sentences and frequently used expressions related to areas of most immediate relevance (e.g., very basic personal and family information, shopping, local geography, employment). Can communicate in simple and routine tasks requiring a simple and direct exchange of information on familiar and routine matters. Can describe in simple terms aspects of his/her background, immediate environment and matters in areas of immediate need.
Intermediate	Level 3	Learners are able to clearly understand the main ideas of a paragraph or standard speech, the familiar topics at workplace, school or entertainment. They can handle most of the communication cases using English language. The learners are expected to write simple paragraphs about familiar or interested topics. Able to describe their experiences, dreams, hopes, ambitions and able to briefly present the reasons and explain own ideas and plans.
	Level 4	Learners are able to understand the main content of complex text both on concrete and nonfigurative topics including technical communication in their professional fields; communicate fluently, naturally with native speakers; write various documents clearly and in detail with different topics and explain own point of view about a topic, discussing the advantages and disadvantages of various options.
Upper-Intermediate	Level 5	Can understand a wide range of demanding, longer texts and recognise implicit meaning. Can express him/herself fluently and spontaneously without much obvious searching for expressions. Can use language flexibly and effectively for social, academic and professional purposes. Can produce clear, well-structured, detailed text on complex subjects, showing controlled use of organisational patterns, connectors and cohesive devices.
	Level 6	Can understand with ease virtually everything heard or read. Can summarise information from different spoken and written sources, reconstructing arguments and accounts in a coherent presentation. Can express him/herself spontaneously, very fluently and precisely, differentiating finer shades of meaning even in more complex situations.

Note: The Six Level Foreign Language Proficiency Framework

The National Project provided general information for the time frame and the compulsory level of English proficiency which the students must achieve to be eligible for graduation. The higher education institutions have flexibility to decide the English curricula which best suit the needs of their students. The English proficiency assessment framework is for general English teaching and learning. To aid understanding of the English proficiency assessment system after the shift from the CEFR to the Six Level Framework, MOET provided a table reflecting the equivalences of each proficiency level in the two systems as shown in the Table 2.5

Table 2.5

Relevance of Each Level of the Six Level System and CEFR

	Six Level System	CEFR
Basic User	Level 1	A1
	Level 2	A2
Independent User	Level 3	B1
	Level 4	B2
Proficient User	Level 5	C1
	Level 6	C2

Note: The Six Level Foreign Language Proficiency Framework

The National Project does not restrict educational institutions from adopting other foreign language assessment systems than the Six Level Framework. Instead, it encourages educational institutions to apply a recognised system most suitable to their teaching and learning programs. To ensure equivalence, MOET provided a table comparing the proficiency levels of different assessment systems popular in Vietnam, as shown in Table 2.6.

Table 2.6

Proficiency Levels of Different Assessment Systems

Six Level System	CEFR	IELTS	TOEFL	TOEIC
Level 3	B1	4.5	450 PBT 133 CBT 45 iBT	450
Level 4	B2	5.5	500 PBT 173 CBT 61 iBT	600
Level 5	C1	7.0 – 8.0		
Level 6	C2	8.5 – 9.0		

Note: The Six Level Foreign Language Proficiency Framework

Following introduction of the National Project, the Vietnamese government made huge investments in the national education system, with the aim of improving the quality of foreign language teachers, changing the curricula and adopting new foreign language teaching and learning methods. These methods were heavily reliant on Information and Communication Technology (ICT) and changed the way universities delivered their English courses. English language teaching methods shifted from a focus on grammar to a communicative approach, and as a result, the English proficiency of graduates increased and Vietnamese learners improved on the regional English proficiency ranking list (Education First, 2016).

Despite these improvements, a number of factors still affect English teaching and learning in Vietnamese higher education institutions, strongly influenced as they are by Confucian ideas and ideology. According to Le, V. C. (2011), education in Vietnam is characterised by examination-oriented, book-based, teacher-centred methods that promote rote memorisation and passive learning, and English education is no exception. Teachers are highly respected knowledge disseminators whose absolute knowledge is unquestionable (Hofstede & Hofstede, 2005). Teacher-student relationships are hierarchical, meaning that classroom interactions are controlled by the teacher and students are passive learners. They keep quiet, remain attentive, listen to their teachers and repeat what teachers say (Kennett & Knight, 1999; Le, 1999a), try to understand what the teacher explains, memorise information and follow directions with very few questions (Le, V. V., 2007). This style of teaching limits students' proactive learning and discussion in language classes, and therefore their second language acquisition progresses slowly, especially listening and speaking skills (Nguyen, 2002).

In addition, English education in Vietnam is influenced by several inherent factors that impact on the quality of English education. These include placement tests; large, multi-level English classes; and a culturally irrelevant syllabus. Placement tests are intended to assess the levels of English proficiency of newly enrolled students, the results of which help universities to classify and place students with similar English competency levels in the same English classes to facilitate teaching and learning. Placement tests are therefore an essential part of English programs at universities, however, few Vietnamese universities successfully administer such tests as part of their English programs (Nguyen, Fehring, & Warren, 2014a; Pham, 2013). Consequently, English classes comprise students with various levels of English proficiency, the root cause of current multi-level English classes

in tertiary education in Vietnam (Hoang, 2008; Tran, 2013). In multi-level English classes, students with high English proficiency are frequently bored, while students with low English proficiency are overwhelmed. It is therefore not surprising that the language teachers in these classes face many challenges, particularly teaching communicative English.

Another typical characteristic of English classes in Vietnam is large class sizes. The average number of students in an English class varies, but ranges from at least 35 students (Hoang, 2008) to 55 students (Nguyen, Fehring, & Warren, 2014b), and in some cases as many as 70 students (Tran, T. T., 2013). Large, multi-level classes are the main factors affecting the quality of English teaching and learning in Vietnamese universities, because it is difficult for language teachers to implement communicative activities, such as working in pairs or groups (Hoang, 2008; Nguyen, Thi Hong et al., 2014b; Tran, 2013).

In addition, the syllabi used to teach English at higher education institutions in Vietnam are derived from English-speaking countries because they cover all essential skills and knowledge (Hoang, 2008; Nguyen, Thi Hong et al., 2014b). However, the use of imported English syllabi from English-speaking countries without modification has created cultural irrelevancies and unintelligible content that neither teachers nor students can relate to (Tran, T. T., 2013). In this context, most language teachers believe that reading is the best way for students to learn English (Le, V. V., 2007). In a typical language class teachers write down new words and after reading them aloud the students repeat the words. The teacher then explains the meaning of the new words and the meaning of the text, sentence by sentence, with a focus on grammar structures, while students listen attentively, take notes and try to memorise as much information as possible. The students then answer the teacher's questions based on the text.

In Vietnam, higher education is considered a pathway to good employment and a bright future. High scores in important examinations and certificates in recognition of good marks are viewed as evidence of a talented student. Therefore, the goal of language learning, as with other subjects, is to achieve good results in examinations and accumulate certificates, rather than promoting communicative competence (Le, V. V., 1999). From the teacher's perspective, attention is paid to the percentage of students who pass examinations with high scores rather than teaching quality, because large numbers of students who pass with high scores is viewed as evidence of well qualified teachers. This motivates teachers

to promote their students' success in examinations by carefully following the curriculum assigned by the examination authority instead of focusing on improving communication skills. In this context, students focus on reading, writing and grammar, with the aim of achieving good scores in examinations (Hoang, T., 1999), and as a result, graduates generally possess good English reading and writing skills but weak listening and speaking skills (Tran, 2018).

Contextual Framework

Figure 2.8 illustrates the major influence of globalisation on the socio-cultural and employment changes that impacted on the education system in Vietnam. These factors directly affected the relationship between English proficiency and employment in foreign companies for business graduates from private universities.

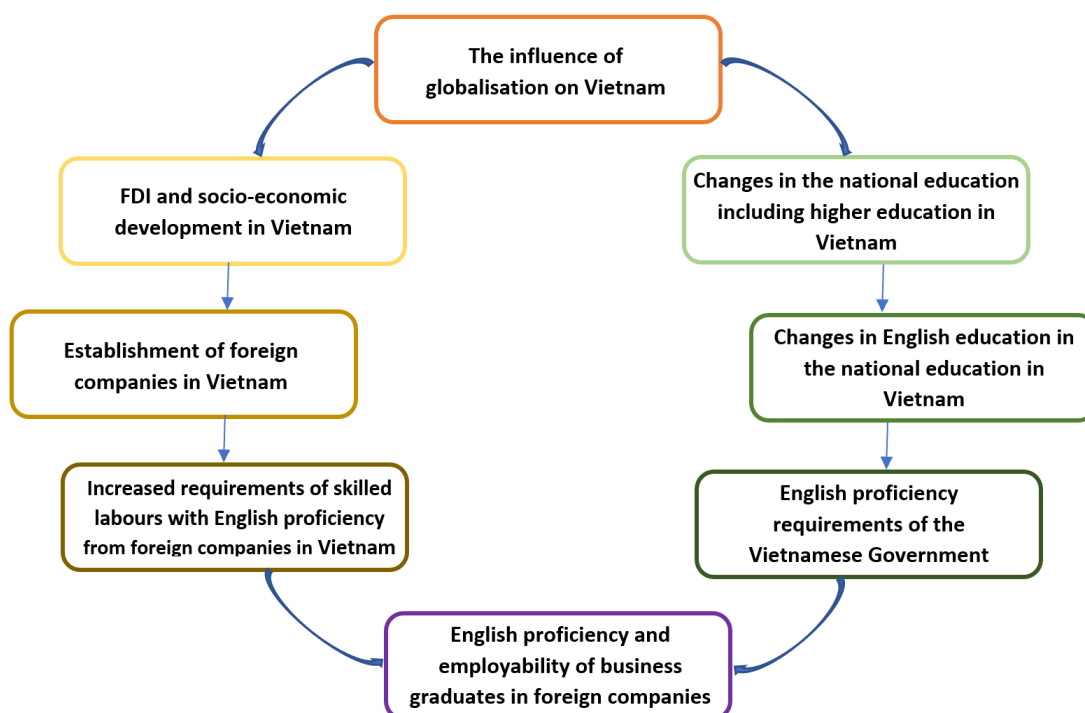


Figure 2.8 Contextual Framework of the Study

Chapter Summary

This chapter provided an overview of globalisation and its impact on economic development in Vietnam. It also reviewed the changes and improvements in the national education system, particularly the role of English in education and higher education. The next chapter, Chapter 3, reviews the relevant literature that underpins the research.

CHAPTER THREE: LITERATURE REVIEW

Chapter 2 situated the research by describing how the 2020 Project became the catalyst for educational change, responsible for the growth of private universities in Vietnam. This chapter reviews the literature on the underlying theories that inform second language acquisition, including teaching English for Specific Purposes (ESP) and application of the Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) approach in higher education, as well as English proficiency assessments used in higher education institutions in Vietnam. The recruitment and selection processes, and specifically the English assessments methods used by foreign companies are described, in addition to the use of English and other languages in foreign workplaces and the relationship between accent and employability. Research related to English proficiency and employment in a foreign company, and English proficiency assessment in the recruitment and selection process at foreign companies, especially in Vietnam context is scarce. Contextual information provided by a Recruitment Agent is therefore included.

Theories of Second Language Acquisition

Second Language Acquisition (SLA) refers to the factors that influence how people learn a second language, of particular importance in some regional areas of Vietnam where dialects are common. The development of English language proficiency in Vietnam and elsewhere needs to be understood in the context of theories of language acquisition that underpin the programs for learning English. The following section reviews the main theories of language acquisition and their links to English as a Foreign Language (EFL) education in Vietnam.

The five main theoretical schools of thought are: operant conditioning and behaviourism (Skinner, 1965; Thorndike, 1932), nativism (Chomsky, 1967), cognitivism (Piaget, 1967), interactionism (Vygotsky, 1978) and pragmatism (Bruner, 1974; Halliday, 1973). Operant conditioning is closely related to behaviourist theory, and was introduced by Watson (1924) whose main hypothesis was that humans respond to punishment and reward, assumed to be the factors that drive learning motivation. Thorndike (1932) added two hypotheses of learning to this theory: the law of effect and the law of exercise. Central to the law of effect is that actions followed by pleasing outcomes are more likely to recur, and conversely, that actions followed by unfavourable outcomes are less likely to recur.

The law of exercise refers to the learning process as a consequence of the duration and number of times that the target situation is practised by the learner.

Behaviourism was introduced in the 1940s and 1950s and is also known as environmentalism. The main tenet of behaviourism is that habit formation is the fundamental constituent of language learning (Skinner, 1957). These habits develop as learners respond to stimuli and are reinforced until a stimuli-response connection is made (Ellis, 2008). In this learning process, learners are passive and influenced by external factors, i.e., the learning environment (Ellis, 2008; Larsen-Freeman & Long, 1991).

Within this context, the teacher's role is seen as that of a highly knowledgeable transmitter of information who conveys important language items to students and repeats these items until they become automatic. On the other hand, the role of the language learner is to absorb the knowledge transmitted by the teacher and store it for later use. Following this, students' language proficiency is tested and those who can remember and repeat the language items are considered proficient. Operant conditioning and behaviourist methods are commonly believed to be a customary feature of countries that embrace Confucian ideology (Elias & Merriam, 2005). Wang (2014) endorsed this view and claimed that the characteristics of such teaching are predominantly those of rote learning, with a focus on competitive external examinations that have been shown to be extremely stressful for both teachers and students.

Two early, prominent EFL methods based on behavioural theory were the Audio-Lingual Method (Larsen-Freeman & Long, 1991) and the Grammar Translation Method (Richards & Rodgers, 2014). Both of these placed a strong emphasis on imitation, rote learning and memory. Today, these methods are reflected in the form of the Present-Practice-Produce (PPP) model, commonly used in Vietnamese classrooms. Wang (2014) cautioned against assuming that repetition is merely a form of mechanistic, superficial learning and claimed that it can also be used as a strategy for ensuring accurate recall of meaningful, comprehensible target items. Richards (2006) concurred and recommended the currently modified PPP strategy for contemporary EFL classrooms if the target language structures are natural, meaningful and communicative. Recall is believed to be enhanced if the target language items are accompanied by visual illustrations and comprehensible to the learner so that learning is transferred to supplementary situations. In this way,

behaviourism underpins teacher-centred instruction through imitation, rote learning and memorisation.

Also known as innatism or rationalism, nativist theory was introduced in the 1960s and 1970s and was strongly influenced by Chomsky (1965, 1967, 1975, 2010), who claimed that language acquisition is not simply the result of stimuli-response connections, but rather an innate process for human beings that makes learning possible. As the leading proponent of this theory, Chomsky (1965, 1975) argued that language acquisition cannot simply be the result of stimuli-response connections, because stimuli-response cannot account for the rapid growth of language learning characteristics of young children. Neither can it account for the creative overgeneralisation of grammar rules made by children and adult EFL learners. Therefore, he concluded that language learning must be an innate process and humans possess an innate hypothetical tool, which he referred to as a Language Acquisition Device (LAD). According to Chomsky, LAD is the main determinant of language acquisition and only a small amount of input is needed to activate it.

Chomsky (1967, 1975) also hypothesised the universality of language development; that is, speech development follows a universally defined pathway independent of the language being learnt. In the early stages of EFL this universality applies when it is common for learners to use two-word utterances, telegraphic speech forms and incorrect grammar (Allen, 2016). Chomsky maintained that LAD is the main determining factor of language acquisition accompanied by an underlying knowledge of grammar, which he named the theory of Universal Grammar (UG), sometimes labelled generative linguistics or generative grammar (Christiansen & Chater, 2008; Larsen-Freeman & Long, 1991). Chomsky and others used three main arguments in support of UG. The first is that all human languages share similar properties (universality). Secondly, despite exposure to different input, the output of language learners is almost the same (convergence). The third argument is that young learners of any language are able to produce structures they have never heard before (over-generalisation), even with a lack of appropriate stimulus. Together, LAD and UG provide the innate language-specific knowledge that allows children to acquire most language constructs within the first five years of life, and may explain why young children seem to find it easier than adults to learn a foreign language. UG may also account for the similar grammatical overgeneralisation errors made by adult EFL learners. It is interesting to note that while Chomsky (1965) proposed there is a

critical period that favours young learners, Krashen (1982) claimed that adults, like children, can acquire a second language using the same process, but this does not guarantee they will achieve the same native competence as young learners.

Not all language researchers subscribe to Chomsky's theory of UG. Several (Comrie, 1983; Dabrowska, 2009; Evans & Levinson, 2009; Fodor, 2003; Guasti, 2002; Roberts & Holmberg, 2011) suggested that UG is a doubtful concept due to weak empirical evidence. They claimed that languages across the world are diverse in many ways and there are very few real universals. Dimensions of difference not only include syntactic structure, but also how various languages are articulated because of variations in contrastive sounds. For instance, some languages are devoid of plural and past tense markers, verb tenses, pronouns, numbers, definite and indefinite articles. Morphological variations have also been cited. This includes how words are formed and structured; that is, the use of root words, prefixes and suffixes in English is not common in all languages. Unlike Asian languages, intonation and stress patterns of words in English can change meanings according to the context in which words are used (Allen, 2016).

In their comprehensive review of SLA theories, Larsen-Freeman and Long (1991) acknowledged that grammar also featured in Krashen's Input Theory for EFL learning, comprised of three hypotheses: the natural order hypothesis; the monitor hypothesis and the affective filter hypothesis (Krashen, 1976, 1981, 1985). According to Krashen, two separate knowledge systems underpin second language performance: an acquired system and a learned system. The acquired system enables learners to achieve language fluency in the target language by subconsciously using their innate language learning ability, communication and interaction. The learned system entails a conscious process in which grammatical rules and structures are learnt through repetition and understanding the rules governing the target language, leading to accuracy in the second language.

The premise of Krashen's Natural Order hypothesis is that English language patterns and grammar are not random but predictable and occur in a natural order, implying that some are learned earlier than others. However, it is commonly acknowledged by first- and second-language teachers that not every learner follows the same pathway. Many EFL students echo the five-stage pattern of language development common to young L1 learners. The first stage is holophrastic speech; that is, one-word utterances that represent a sentence through a change of voice inflection. This is followed by two-word sentences;

usually a noun plus a verb. Telegraphic speech then emerges, consisting of meaningful content words that omit function words. In the penultimate stage, the learner produces more complex grammatical structures in which some rules, such as irregular verbs, are over-generalised. Finally, they produce correct structures and are able to self-correct using Krashen's second hypothesis, the Monitor Theory.

Although Krashen's Monitor Theory indicated that language acquisition is more important than learning, the author stated that learning and understanding grammatical rules can help students to plan, edit and correct their spoken and written performance in the target language. He added that three conditions are necessary for self-correcting and monitoring language output. Firstly, learners must be able to identify and understand the rule. Secondly, they must focus on the form rather than the meaning, and finally, they must have sufficient time to correct any errors detected. Although Larsen-Freeman and Long (1991) classified universal grammar and the monitor model as important components of nativist theory, they stressed that it is the message (language), not the medium (grammar) that should indicate progress in language proficiency.

The third Krashen hypothesis, the Affective Filter hypothesis shown in Figure 3.1, proposes that an affective filter may hinder language learning. The affective filter reflects the influence of three emotional variables on a learner's ability to comprehend input: motivation, self-confidence and anxiety. According to this theory, when learners are demotivated and stressed, the affective filter is up and a mental block can form to prevent learning.

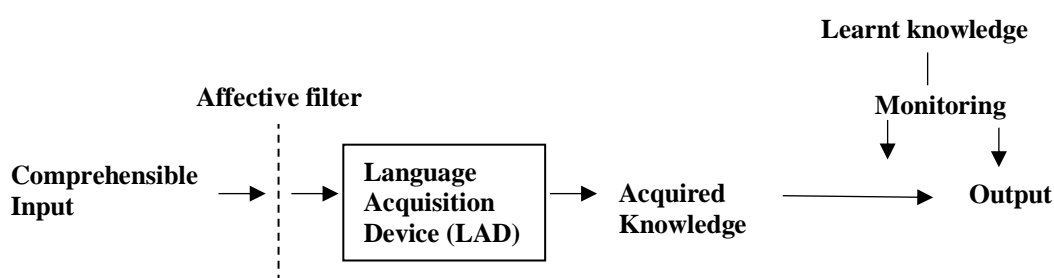


Figure 3.1 The Affective Filter Hypothesis in L2 Learning and Production. Adapted from Krashen, 1982, p. 16.

On the other hand, when learners are not stressed and the affective filter is down, they are motivated and confident in language learning. A supportive learning environment

in which learners are encouraged and the errors they make are seen as “signposts of learning” lowers the affective filter and facilitates language acquisition and learning.

The leading proponent of cognitivist thinking was Piaget (1967), a child psychologist whose research with children in the late 1960s is credited as being the driving force behind the cognitivist movement (Bromley, 1998). According to cognitivist theory, learning is essentially a cognitive process rather than mechanical repetition of input or an innate ability. Central to this cognitive process is interaction with others and the environment. Combined with reasoning and intellectual development, environmental perceptions and sensory input form cognitive schemes that aid the development of language proficiency. According to cognitivists, interested learners use natural curiosity to explore, experiment and absorb new information by organising their ideas, assimilating and accommodating new knowledge gained from external events; that is, learning is embedded in context. Piaget noted that over-generalisation is part of learning as language learners experiment and refine their ideas.

In contrast to behaviourism that posits learners are passive recipients filled with knowledge by teachers, cognitivism asserts that learners are active participants in knowledge acquisition and integration (Good & Brophy, 1990; Merriam, Caffarella, & Baumgartner, 2007; Simon, 2001). This theory describes knowledge acquisition as a mental activity involving internal coding and structuring by the learner (Coulson, Jacobson, Feltovich, & Spiro, 2012; Derry, 1996) and suggests that learning happens best under conditions aligned with human cognitive architecture (Sobel & Li, 2013). Cognitivism underpins learner-centred instruction and classroom practice.

Like Krashen, Cummins (1981) distinguished between language acquisition and language learning. He maintained that learners acquire an additional language in the same way they acquire their first language, providing that the input is meaningful and additional contextual support is offered. To assist teachers, he proposed the Threshold Theory and two models, namely, the Iceberg Model and the Context Embeddedness Matrix.

Cummins’ Threshold Theory situates biliteracy as an important goal that teachers of EFL hope their students will eventually attain. The theory recognises two levels of threshold before a person can be identified as bilingual; that is, both languages need to develop equally if students are to reach their full potential. This is especially important in countries like Vietnam, where several dialects are spoken and the national language may be

an individual's second or even third language. The first threshold contends that learners who are not proficient in their mother tongue will be disadvantaged in learning and becoming proficient in a second language. This is because the cognitive perceptions they possess in their first language will be less likely to transfer to the second language. Thus, the first threshold represents the minimum learners must reach in order to avoid any negative effects of bilingualism, and the more competent the person is in the language of education, the easier it will be to become bilingual (Baker, 2011). The second threshold identifies children who have age-appropriate competence in the language of education, but not the targeted foreign language. Children can be competent in one language but have difficulty transferring cognitive ideas between two languages. According to Cummins, although this is neither an advantage nor a disadvantage, a balanced bilingual who is equally competent in both languages will have cognitive advantages and meta-linguistic awareness. Cummins' main premise was that strength in the first language provides support for the development of a second language. Learners who cross the second threshold will benefit from positive cognitive effects that correspond with age-appropriate levels of competency in both languages.

The first of Cummins' model, the Iceberg Model, is used to describe the goal of language proficiency. The author proposed two dimensions of efficiency; the first is communicative language, which he labelled Basic Interpersonal Communicative Skills (BICS). The second dimension of efficiency refers to academic language skills, which he named Cognitive Academic Linguistic Proficiency (CALP). He reasoned that BICS is highly contextualised because it mostly involves face-to-face communication based on need, simple grammar and prosaic vocabulary; whereas CALP demands a more cognitive effort, specialised vocabulary and complex grammatical structures (although CALP can be assisted using concrete objectives and actions). Given his description of BICS and CALP, Cummins estimated CALP proficiency would take much longer (between five to seven years) than BICS proficiency (at least three years). Teachers need to be aware that a student who appears highly proficient in BICS may find it difficult to use and understand academic language that takes longer to master. However, if students have developed an academic concept in their first language, it can transfer more easily to another language when learning the vocabulary and grammar of a second language, provided they are proficient in the first language.

Like the nativists, cognitivists and language specialists such as Krashen, Cummins distinguished between language acquisition and language learning. He illustrated this in his Context Embeddedness Model, showing that meaningful input embedded with contextual support allows learners to acquire an additional language in the same way they acquired a first language. Cummins' model illustrates how context can positively or negatively impact EFL activities and that language activities can be made easier if the language is embedded in context. The classification of activity types is shown in Figure 3.2.

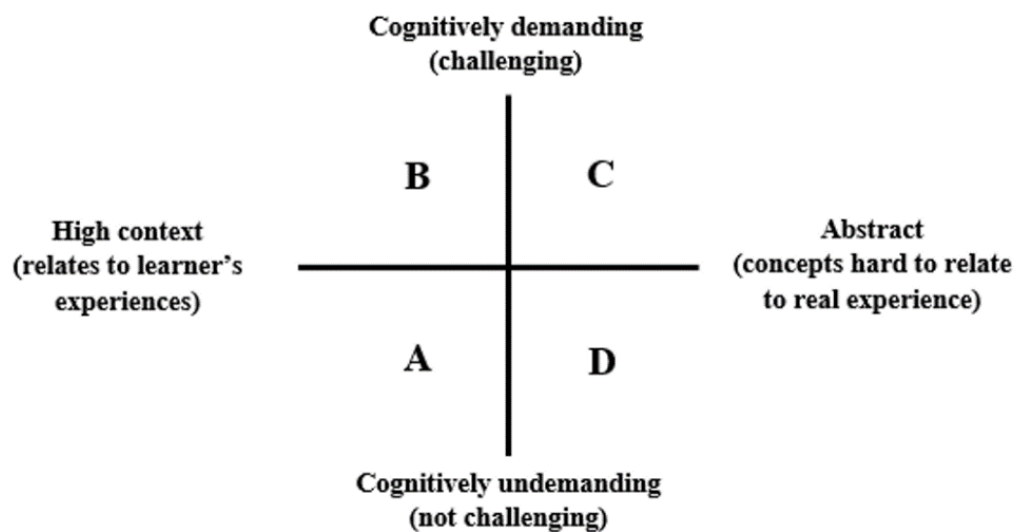


Figure 3.2 Cummins' Context Embeddedness Model

The horizontal axis in Figure 3.2 indicates context embeddedness, while the vertical axis indicates degree of cognitive challenge. Quadrant A represents context-embedded activities that are cognitively undemanding and easiest for students in acquiring EAL. Quadrant B represents cognitively undemanding activities with less context. Quadrants C and D represent cognitively demanding activities, with more context-embedded activities in Quadrant C, indicating tasks are easier than in Quadrant D.

Also known as constructivism, interactionist theory focuses on the language performance of learners and proposes that language learning involves a connection between learners' cognitive ability and how the linguistic environment promotes and extends language development (Brown, 2000; Ellis, 2008; Long, 1981, 1983a, 1983b, 1985; Vygotsky, 1978). The seminal work of Vygotsky (1978) broadened Piaget's hypothesis (1967) on the role of social context in language acquisition by placing more significance on modelling, extension and correction methods principally provided by

family members, teachers and significant others. In other words, socio-cultural variables and interactive discourse (Brown, 2000; Long, 1981, 1996a) are key tenets of the interactionist movement. It is therefore not surprising that collaborative learning, inherent in Vygotsky's interactionist theory, views learning as a social process. An important attribute of Vygotsky's theory is that the higher mental functions of humans, such as rational thought and learning, are initiated by social activity (Johnson, 2003). To quote Vygotsky (1981):

Any function in the child's cultural development appears twice, or on two planes. First it appears on the social plane and then on the psychological plane. First it appears between people as an inter-psychological category and then within the child as an intra-psychological category (p. 163).

Hence, higher mental functions originate from social interactions; through interpersonal activities, concepts and language patterns stimulated by activities and internalised by individuals. The process from interpersonal to intrapersonal is described as a gradual movement from the initial, object-regulated stage to the other-regulated stage, and finally, to the self-regulated stage (Johnson, 2003).

While it was the nativist, Chomsky (1965, 1975), who first suggested that speech development follows a universally defined pathway, cognitivists such as Piaget and interactionists such as Vygotsky extended this theory to show how environmental input can move learners more quickly through the various stages. In the early stage of EFL, learners commonly use short speech forms with grammatical errors where a typical technique for teachers is to correct structure. This form of modelling creates a scaffold and is used as a correction technique by teachers of both first- and second- language learners.

To explain scaffolding and the relationship between the interpersonal and intrapersonal planes, Vygotsky introduced the concept of a Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD). According to Vygotsky, the ZPD is the distance between the current developmental level (actual level) of a student and his or her potential level. The actual level refers to the stage where individuals can work independently. The potential level is the stage where they cannot work independently and need the assistance of others. The ZPD is graphically illustrated in Figure 3.3.

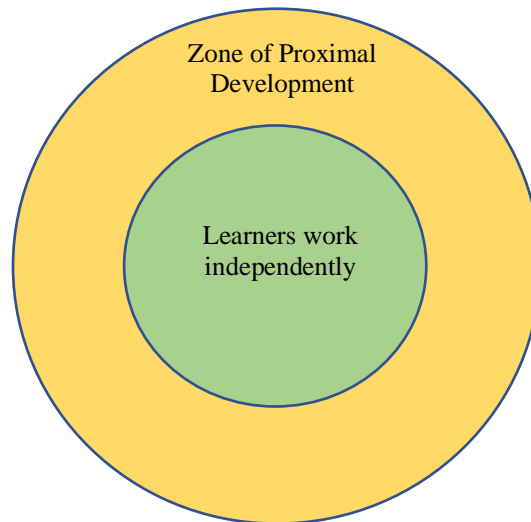


Figure 3.3 Zone of Proximal Development (Adapted from Vygotsky, 1978)

Scaffolding introduces new concepts and language items and challenges children to extend their current understanding of language and the world. As Vygotsky (1978) explained:

ZPD is the distance between the actual development levels as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers (p. 38).

According to this definition there are two levels of development: the actual level and the potential level. The actual level refers to the stage where individuals can work independently, while the potential level is the stage where they cannot work independently and need the assistance of others. Lin (2015) stated that by interacting with more capable peers, students have the potential to achieve a greater level of development. According to Lin (2015), "... peer scaffolding also serves as a mediating tool to promote learners' ZPD and it has a valuable role to play in language learning situations" (p. 13). In the Vygotsky tradition, social interaction, either among students or between teachers and students, assists in the learning process. Wood, Bruner, and Ross (1976) used the term *scaffolding* to refer to assistance given to individuals so that they can move from their actual level of development to reaching their full potential. To summarise, interactionist theory supports the view that students have more opportunities to develop their cognitive ability through social interactions with more competent peers.

Despite the differences between nativist and interactionist theories, there is agreement that the input needs to be comprehensible. Gass and Mackey (2007) noted that the Interaction Hypothesis includes features of comprehensible input (Krashen, 1985), modified input, interaction (Long, 1981, 1996a) and comprehensible output (Swain, 1995). According to Krashen (1985), language learning occurs when learners are exposed to sufficient comprehensible input to promote language acquisition. He claimed that learners need a sufficient period of time to process input without any pressure to produce output. However, if the input is insufficient or of poor quality, it will cause fossilisation (Krashen, 1985). Therefore, to promote language acquisition, learners must receive input one level above (i+1) his or her current level. Similar to Vygotsky's ZPD, this theoretical perspective proposes that language is not directly taught, but will emerge as the learner independently acquires grammatical rules.

Long (1981, 1996a) added that comprehensible input is necessary but not sufficient in SLA. He claimed that after receiving comprehensible input, language learners need to be exposed to an interactive environment where they can discuss ideas, negotiate meaning and receive feedback from competent speakers. Long's hypothesis described the language acquisition process as learners first receiving input, then analysing it before moving to the next stage, which he called intake. At that stage they begin to form and test hypotheses about the second language. Long viewed the intake stage as the core phase for analysing input and grammar, acting as a bridge to the integration stage where the rules of the target language become strengthened and stored. This process leads to learner output that, in turn, leads to modified input in the form of negotiation and native speaker modification, i.e., interaction (Gass, 1997).

The act of negotiating meaning when interacting with more proficient speakers facilitates language acquisition because it connects input, internal learner capacity and output in productive ways (Gass & Mackey, 2007; Long, 1981, 1983b, 1996b; Pica, 1987). Gass and Mackey (2007) noted that through interaction learners can attend to the problematic features of knowledge production because it helps them recognise differences in the way they express ideas and how more competent communicators express their thoughts. Therefore, they may notice and try to correct errors by looking for more appropriate words or different grammar structures to state their ideas, thereby promoting development of the second language. Interactionists, such as Long, argued that learners can modify the comprehensible input they receive from interactions with more proficient

speakers, triggering adjustments that facilitate learning (Long, 1981, 1983a, 1983b, 1985, 1996b; Pica, 1987, 1988, 1994).

In her Output Hypothesis, Swain (1995) added a further dimension to the elements of comprehensible input, interaction and negotiation. While recognising their importance, she argued they were insufficient and introduced the notion of comprehensible output, based on the findings of her language immersion program in Canada (Swain, 1984, 1985). In that study with English-speaking Canadian students learning French as a second language she found participants displayed much lower levels of spoken proficiency compared to native speakers of the same age (Swain, 1984, 1985) despite having received significant comprehensible input during their schooling. These findings led Swain to conclude that comprehensible input is not sufficient for second language acquisition and that learners also need to produce comprehensible output. Figure 3.4 illustrates the recursive process of second language acquisition, demonstrating that in addition to the theoretical approach in language classes,

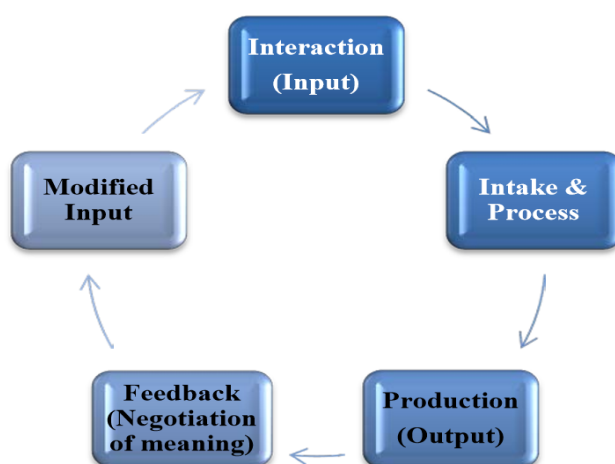


Figure 3.4 The Recursive Process of Second Language Acquisition (Adapted from Seo, D., 2015, p. 12).

Individual factors also have an impact on learning, such as the age of learners, their beliefs, abilities, desires, motivation, self-confidence and levels of anxiety. To summarise, interactionist theory supports the view that interaction creates opportunities for students to develop their cognitive ability through social intercourse with more competent peers.

The pragmatists, Bruner (1974), Halliday (1973), and (Bruner, 1974; Halliday, 1973); Wilkins (1976) added another dimension to language learning with a focus on the

purpose (the functions and notions) that motivates learners. In linguistics, the word “notions” refers to practical language items and the role they play in a specific context as opposed to their literal meaning. Pragmatist theory claims that six functions address and solve a wide range of human needs. A *heuristic* function, for example, is used to seek information, to learn and discover. *Instrumental* and *regulatory* language is used to influence and/or command others; whereas *representational* functions are used to request information from others or pass on what has been learned. The *imaginative* function relates to creativity, lateral thinking, imagination and the narration of events to others; while the *interactional* function encourages the development of relationships. According to pragmatists, language learning is prompted by need, linked to functions such as expressing opinions, suggesting, socialising, learning, criticising, refusing, agreeing and disagreeing, enquiring, talking about the past, giving advice and directing the behaviour of others.

The development of a functional-notional approach is attributed to Malinowski (1923) who introduced a theory he called *Context of Situation*. This theory was further developed by Firth (1957) into a functional syllabus design. Both Malinowski and Firth identified language as context dependent and sociological in character, rather than a self-contained grammatical system with a psychological orientation. In a functional notional approach to EFL, major emphasis is placed on the communicative purposes and skills needed for appropriate, sensitive and clear transmission of information. As most EFL textbooks attest, in both English for General Purpose and English for Specific Purpose, functional approaches have contributed substantially to language teaching methodology. Most course books reflect a functional type of syllabus that focuses on grammar and vocabulary, thus providing learners with useful expressions for specific real-life situations. The intrinsic value of this is that even beginners can be presented with models of highly communicative language from the start, in contrast to a grammar lesson, focused on structure and with little concern for actual communication in the target language (Ahmed, 2013; Joseph, 2009; Martin, 2011; Siewierska, 1991; White, 2003; Wilkins, 1976; Yalden, 1987).

According to Finocchiaro and Brumfit (1983), the merits of a functional-notional syllabus can be viewed from four perspectives: sociolinguistic, psycholinguistic, linguistic and educational perspectives. From a socio-cultural viewpoint, learners are exposed to realistic, real-word language in a variety of socio-cultural situations, where they are introduced to both the grammatical knowledge and cultural knowledge necessary to

understand the target language and its culture. From a psycholinguistic point of view, a functional-notional syllabus is intrinsically motivating because it addresses the real needs of students and targets different levels of ability; is flexible and allows for sufficient comprehensible input before asking students to respond; teaches grammar and vocabulary items in a communicative context; and the pace of learning can be adapted. From a linguistic aspect, functional-notional syllabi can be developed to cater for students at various levels of proficiency. Suitably aligned, EFL students are assisted in acquiring knowledge of the appropriate phonological, grammatical and lexical subsystem of the English language, as well as acquiring an ability to use these in real-life communication. Educationally, the approach can be adapted and integrated into existing pedagogy, enabling educators to exploit comprehensive psycholinguistic, sociolinguistic, linguistic and educational principles. This form of syllabus modification can add to the success of students across all levels of school and university faculties (Allen, 2016).

Theories of second language acquisition assist universities and language teachers to improve the design and delivery of English programs. In Vietnam, all higher education institutions, public and private, are required to design and implement English programs, consisting of three subprograms: English for General Purpose or General English (GE), English for Specific Purpose (ESP) and Academic English (AE). These programs are aimed at enhancing the English proficiency, especially the oral competence of students for future employment and further study. The GE and AE are designed to improve general English, while ESP is focused on enhancing English competence in specific fields of study and directly impacts students' employability upon completion of higher education.

Communicative Competencies

For those who wish to engage in a multinational working environment, the ability to communicate effectively in English is essential given that English has become a global language and commonly used within foreign companies (Arifeen & Yunus, 2013). In Vietnam, most foreign companies use English within their recruitment and selection processes, job allocations and promotional activities. Therefore, the applicants with a high level of English proficiency are more likely to be successful. Thus, the Vietnamese government and universities in Vietnam continuously address ways to improve the English communicative competence of their students.

The notion of communicative competence has proved contentious since the 1960s with debate centred mainly on terminology. The term linguistic competence is historically associated with Chomsky (1957, 1965) who differentiated between two aspects of language. In Chomsky's opinion, competency represents what a person knows implicitly about language, including knowledge of vocabulary and grammar, while performance is how a person uses the language. However, the term communicative competence is attributable to Hymes (1972) who, in reaction to Chomsky's concept of linguistic competence, asserted that communicative competence also involves providing an appropriate response that considers the context in which the speech act is performed.

Since Hymes' introduction to the socio-linguistic aspect of communicative competence, others have added communicative flexibility as a further element required for language users to be considered competent. For example, Savignon (1983) further analysed the notion of sociolinguistic competence by highlighting that discourse changes according to three elements: the role each participant plays; the information they wish to share, and the purpose of the communication. The first version of a model proposed by Canale and Swain (1980) considered that language ability encompassed knowledge of three main components: grammatical, sociolinguistic and strategic competencies. In a later version, Canale (1983) modified the original model by stressing appropriacy in how speakers and writers use sociocultural rules—rather than just knowledge of the rules—that is, how effectively a person interprets and uses language according to the norms of the sociocultural context. Canale (1983) asserted that communicative competence consists of grammatical or linguistic competence, strategic competence, sociolinguistic competence, and discourse competence.

Grammatical Competence

Grammatical competence included knowledge of the lexical items and of the rules of morphology, syntax, sentence-grammar semantics, and phonology. This competence enabled the learners to use knowledge and skills needed for understanding and expressing the literal meaning of the utterances. Grammatical competence was largely based on Chomsky's notion of linguistic competence. Therefore, some theoreticians use the term "linguistic competence" for "grammatical competence" when using this model.

Strategic Competence

Strategic competence is the knowledge of verbal and non-verbal communication strategies. These strategies included paraphrasing, circumlocution, repetition, reluctance, avoidance of words, structures or themes, guessing, changes of register and style and modifications of messages (Bagarić & Djigunović, 2007). Canale (1983) pointed out that this competence can be used to enhance the effectiveness of communication such as by changing the speed or pitch of delivery for rhetorical effects.

Sociolinguistic Competence

Sociolinguistic competence referred only to the socio-cultural rules which govern the use of the language. It attended to the appropriateness of meaning such as whether functions, attitudes and ideas were appropriate to context and form or how appropriate the realisations of function, attitudes and ideas were in specific context. Thus, this aspect included pragmatic knowledge.

Discourse Competence

Discourse competence determined the ways in which the forms and meanings of the language were combined to achieve a meaningful unity in spoken and written contexts. The unity of a text relied on cohesion in form and coherence in meaning. Cohesion was achieved by the use of cohesion devices such as reference, text conjunctions, lexical chains, parallel structures and the like which help to link individual sentences and utterances into a structural whole. Coherence was achieved by the use of devices such as repetition, progression, consistency and relevance of ideas which help organise the meaning (Bagarić & Djigunović, 2007).

The current research study investigates the influence of English proficiency on the employment of the business graduates from private universities in Vietnam. Therefore, it takes a focus on oral English competence which is necessary in the recruitment and selection process and in the workplace and strongly influences the employment opportunity of the business graduates in foreign companies.

ESP Teaching Forms

Tarnopolsky (2013) categorised two ESP teaching forms: (a) traditional ESP teaching and (b) integrated language (ESP) learning. As shown in Table 3.1, integrated ESP shows up in several forms and models.

Table 3.1
ESP Teaching Forms

ESP Major Forms	Secondary Forms	Models	Description
Traditional ESP	Assumes that students already have the necessary content knowledge in L1 but need equivalent structures and vocabulary in English. Subject content indicates the English language items to be learnt, in accordance with Cummins' (1981) Threshold Theory that the cognitive perceptions possessed by students in L1 will transfer more easily to a second language. No secondary forms or models are used in traditional ESP.		
Integrated ESP	Context-based Instruction (CBI) is an integrated method that allows students to learn L2 together with subject knowledge. Context provides important scaffolding to link subject knowledge and English.	Theme-based Language Instruction (TBLI).	Professional themes and topics are central to this model.
		Sheltered Content Instruction (SCI).	Mainly designed for ESL students who are studying abroad, rather than EFL students.
		Adjunct Language Instruction (ALI).	Learners are enrolled in two linked courses: a language course and a content course that complement each other.
	Content and Language Integrated Learning Instruction (CLIL).	In this model, the teaching of content is conducted in English rather than the learners' L1. This is common in primary and secondary schools and requires significant scaffolding.	
	Immersion learning	Sheltered or Structural Immersion	L1 is used extensively in lectures but the information is summarised and reviewed in English. Practical classes, seminars and assessment are mainly in English.
		Sheltered Content Immersion	Subject content is taught in a modified form of English suited to students' abilities.

ESP Major Forms	Secondary Forms	Models	Description
		Partial Immersion	L1 is used at the beginning of the course to deliver lectures, but gradually more English is used until total immersion is reached.
		Total Immersion	Students need high levels of general and professional English proficiency as lectures are delivered only in English.

Traditional ESP teaching focuses on learning English for professional communication (Robinson, 1991), with the subject determining the English language forms and associated vocabulary to be learnt. In this language-focused ESP method students do not acquire any new professional knowledge because the professional content is the medium rather than the learning focus.

By contrast, ESP integrated language learning focuses on both language and content for professional communication. Language and content learning are integrated so that they complement each other (Snow, Met, & Genesee, 1989) and students acquire both language skills and new professional knowledge. This integration is reflected in Context-Based Instruction (CBI), Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL), and Immersion forms of instruction, discussed below in more detail.

Context-based instruction.

Context-Based Instruction (CBI) is an effective integrated English teaching method for ESL because it helps students develop their communication skills in the target language while also acquiring new knowledge through meaningful content (Heo, 2006; Stoller, 2008). Heo (2006) argued that CBI provides the scaffolding links between subject knowledge and its English-language equivalents in EFL contexts. Therefore, to a certain extent, CBI fits in with teaching EFL environment in Vietnam.

According to Brinton, Snow, and Wesche (2003), CBI is a teaching approach that enables learners to acquire knowledge of both language and academic content. In this

method, teachers deliver subject lessons in the target language, so that students not only acquire content knowledge in the target language, but also learn communication skills naturally in the target language. Tarnopolsky (2013) proposed achieving language and content acquisition at the same time by modelling EFL content-based instruction on academic classes, where students model, imitate and solve professional tasks in English by taking part in group work, discussions, searching for and processing authentic professional sources of information in English (Tarnopolsky, 2013). The major difference between studying academic subjects in a content-based ESP classroom and an ordinary academic subject classroom is the language of instruction – the former in the target language and the latter in students' first language.

Models of CBI.

Three CBI models are used in higher education: (a) theme-based language instruction (TBLI); (b) sheltered content instruction (SCI); and (c) adjunct language instruction (ALI) (Brinton et al., 2003). In the theme-based language instruction (TBLI) model, the language curriculum is based on academic curricula to promote learning of the required academic content in the target language. In this method, professional themes and topics are important considerations, selected by the language teacher from the course books. The core teaching materials are derived from related professional sources such as magazines, newspapers and others, and adapted for language-teaching purposes (Brinton et al., 2003). Furthermore, the teaching and learning process in theme-based language instruction covers all four language skills: listening, reading, speaking, and writing for professional purposes.

The second form of CBI, sheltered content instruction (SCI), is designed to support ESL students who study in English-speaking countries but do not have sufficient English proficiency to learn academic subjects in the same class as local students. Such courses are instructed in English and adjusted and scaffolded to suit the learners' levels of language proficiency. In the SCI model, understanding the content of the academic subject is essential for language acquisition, and accordingly, the language curriculum is based on subject materials.

The third model of CBI is adjunct language instruction (ALI). In this model, learners undertake two parallel courses that are linked together: a language course and an academic course (Brinton et al., 2003). The syllabus of the language course is based on the

academic curriculum. While only ESL students attend the sheltered language course, both ESL and local students attend the adjunct classes.

These three models of CBI foster learning a language and subject content related to the academic and occupational interests of students (Brinton et al., 2003). They have several features in common with the communicative language teaching (CLT) approach, such as content forming the centre of the course, promoting collaboration between language teachers and content teachers in preparing the curriculum, and using materials and tasks that reflect real-life situations. However, these models also differ in some ways: while TBI focuses on language and SCI emphasises content, ALI incorporates both content and language.

Due to their differences, language teachers should carefully consider and select the most suitable approach for their particular teaching situations and students' language proficiency. According to Brinton et al. (2003), TBI is appropriate for all levels of language proficiency, while SCI and ALI are suitable for classes with higher levels of language proficiency because of the conceptual complexity of academic subject matter. SCI is deemed suitable for intermediate to high intermediate levels, and ALI is considered appropriate for higher proficiency levels, from intermediate to advanced. This is important for placement tests in universities that are designed to determine the English proficiency levels of newly enrolled students, and where the results are not only intended to facilitate effective class placement commensurate with students' abilities, but also for language teachers to consider appropriate teaching methods.

Content and language integrated learning.

Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) is defined as a dual-focused educational approach (Coyle, Hood, & Marsh, 2010) whereby content subjects are taught in the target language. Language and academic content are taught in combination and are of complementary value. When learners acquire new academic knowledge and skills in the target language, they progress in both language and academic content (Banegas, 2012; Dalton-Puffer & Smit, 2013).

Immersion form of instruction.

Language immersion is an approach that integrates foreign language learning with teaching professional academic subjects to enable students to acquire a target language for

professional communication (Walker & Tedick, 2000). Such programs are designed not only for ESP classes, but also for academic discipline classes.

There are three forms of immersion: (a) sheltered immersion; (b) partial immersion; and (c) total immersion. Sheltered or structural immersion requires limited instruction in the target language. In the sheltered immersion classroom, students' first language is mainly used and the use of English is limited. For example, the lectures in academic classes are delivered in students' first language, but the lesson summary and review are in English. Another version, sheltered content instruction, requires higher levels of English proficiency, since academic subjects are taught in English at a level appropriate to students' English proficiency.

Similarly, partial immersion requires a higher level of target language proficiency. Students' first language is initially used in the course to deliver lectures in the academic subject and then gradually replaced by more English, until finally, lectures are delivered in English only. In total English immersion classes, only English is used to deliver lessons, so students are expected to attain high levels of English proficiency, at least B2 of the CEFR, to acquire new professional knowledge. Moreover, such high levels of English proficiency should apply to both General English and English for professional communication (Tarnopolsky, 2013).

Integrated language and content teaching was proved to be successful by measuring learning outcomes (Edwards & Rehorick, 1992; Johnson & Swain, 1997) and led to calls for the use of CLIL instead of traditional ESP teaching that focuses only on language. However, the choice of teaching ESP using CBI, CLIL, Immersion or a combination of these methods depends on several factors, such as the needs and English proficiency levels of learners, the willingness and qualifications of the language teachers and the ESP teaching and learning environment. Tarnopolsky (2013) suggested that both traditional and integrated ESP teaching should be used for tertiary students with low English entry levels in the following sequence: traditional language-focused ESP training (a language course only) in the first year → theme-based instruction (a language course only) in the second year → sheltered immersion (an academic discipline course) in the third year → immersion (an academic discipline course) in the final year. Tarnopolsky (2013) recommended this sequence for students with unclear future professions and low English proficiency at commencement of tertiary education, whereby learning language is gradually integrated into academic subjects as an appropriate

form of teaching. This entails a traditional language-focused ESP course first, followed by a simple integrated learning approach like Content-Based Instruction (CBI) in order to gradually shift from a focus on language only to a focus on both language and content with progressive intensification until total immersion is reached.

Alignment and Misalignment

When planning an English course, particularly an ESP course, it is important for an internal triadic relationship to exist between the course content, the mandated pedagogy and the assessment procedures that test students and provide learning outcomes. That is, the three elements should align and support one another (Nguyen, T. C. N., 2017). The terms “internal alignment” and “misalignment” are used in education to describe the relationship between curriculum, pedagogy and assessment (Watermeyer, 2012; Webb, 1997). The term “alignment” indicates an agreement or match between two or more components of a course, while the term “misalignment” refers to a mismatch or disagreement between two or more components (La Marca, Redfield, & Winter, 2000).

Although an ESP business course needs internal triadic consistency, it also needs to reflect and respond to the workplace needs of employers. In ESP business education, the term “external alignment” is understood to be a match between curriculum and the needs of a specific workplace (So-mui & Mead, 2000) or consistency between the ESP course and the communicative practices of a particular industry (Chostelidou, 2010). This term is also used to indicate that the ESP course meets industry requirements (Kassim & Ali, 2010) and is aligned with the needs of foreign employers (Bouzidi, 2009). By contrast, the term “external misalignment” is used to describe a mismatch between the content of an ESP course and the language demands of the workplace (Bouzidi, 2009), or a failure of language course aims, pedagogy and assessment procedures to develop students for the needs of the workplace (Liton, 2015).

This study uses the terms “internal alignment or misalignment” to indicate a match or mismatch between curriculum, pedagogy and assessment of the English courses at the two private universities; and the terms “external alignment or misalignment” to describe a match or mismatch between one or more components of English courses and the language requirements of the workplaces in foreign companies.

English for Specific Purposes Education in Vietnam

English for Specific Purposes (ESP) emerged in the late 1960s in the oil-rich countries, where the demand for learning English was growing as a result of massive trading in commodities (Hutchinson & Water, 1987). ESP is simply described as the teaching of English for any specific purposes, such as business, accounting, pharmacy and technology (Anthony, 1997). Given the rapid growth of English learners around the world, ESP has become popular for vocational and professional purposes (Lin, 2007). It was introduced in response to the English communication needs of students within a specific discipline where General English (GE) courses (Andriani, 2014) and English for Academic Purposes (EAP) courses proved inadequate for their requirements (Dudley-Evans & St John, 1998). University graduates particularly found ESP helpful, because it improved their English vocabulary, use of professional terminologies and the communication skills they needed for future employment. For this reason, numerous Asian countries, including Vietnam, adopted ESP as the preferred approach for teaching EFL in higher education (Chen, 2011), where tertiary students are expected to memorise, understand the meaning of specialised vocabulary and terminologies and communicate in English using these specialised vocabularies. This means they are able to read and understand English documents in their field to enrich their professional knowledge (Andriani, 2014) and can use professional English to converse in the workplace (Rasekh & Simin, 2011) and for further study.

In Vietnam, ESP has been incorporated into English programs in higher education institutions (Nguyen, 2015). However, like other Asian countries, there has been ongoing debate about ESP teaching in higher education, specifically whether ESP is a subject or a discipline and should be taught by language teachers or content teachers (Chen, 2011). In Vietnam, debate also swirls around whether it is best to teach General English (GE) only or General English and English for Specific Purposes (GE and ESP) or English for Specific Purposes (ESP) only in higher education (Hoang, 2010).

Some researchers have reported difficulties defining the differences between GE and ESP. According to Hutchinson and Water (1987) there are no theoretical differences between the two approaches; they only differ in practice and content. However, it is commonly believed that GE refers to English used for everyday purposes in a variety of general situations, and ESP is specialised language used in various fields of knowledge

(Bowker & Pearson, 2002). In ESP courses, the content is specific and based on an analysis of the needs of course participants; while GE is mainly concerned with improving the overall competency of English skills in reading, writing, listening and speaking. Additionally, ESP utilises the specific underlying strategies and activities common to the discipline for which the course is devised. The target skills are therefore also specific in terms of English skills, such as using appropriate lexis, discourse and genre forms, register and syntax.

GE supporters believe that GE and ESP are similar, the only difference being that ESP provides learners with more professional vocabularies and terminologies. Therefore, they claim students should learn GE until they are proficient in English and know how to use correct pronunciation, can construct a sentence, use correct grammar and apply this knowledge appropriately in different contexts. Once students become competent in GE, they can then learn ESP themselves with purposeful professional terminologies. Like GE supporters, GE and ESP followers claim that students should learn GE first until they are proficient in English. However, when students are proficient in GE, they should be taught ESP, because communication in GE is much easier than communicating in a professional context that entails highly specialised content and uses professional terminologies. On the other hand, supporters of the ESP-only approach claim that GE and ESP are only different in terms of the demand for professional terminology in the latter. Since ESP is much more difficult than GE and needs more time to achieve proficiency, learning ESP is necessary to deepen students' academic knowledge in the discipline. Therefore, they argue, teaching GE becomes unnecessary, because students who are proficient in ESP will already be competent in GE (Hoang, 2010).

These different views on English teaching approaches and divergent practices present some of the most challenging issues in higher education in Vietnam (Hoang, 2010). Unlike English language teaching and learning in primary and secondary education where the Vietnamese government designs the curricula and defines the teaching and learning approaches, higher education institutions can choose their own approach in tertiary education, provided it aligns with the general timeframe and required proficiency levels. While this scenario creates diversity, it also creates chaos for English teaching and learning in higher education in Vietnam.

In recent years, teaching GE followed by ESP has been widely adopted in higher education in Vietnam. ESP teaching and learning is a young and developing branch of EFL education and still in its infancy (Le, T. H. D., 2014; Nguyen & Nguyen, 2017). Since ESP courses have been incorporated into English programs in higher education, teaching them pursuant to GE courses (Nguyen, 2015) has posed several challenges for both teachers and students (Nguyen, 2015; Pham & Malvetti, 2012). For teachers, a lack of training and specialised knowledge has presented difficulties (Pham & Malvetti, 2012) because they are not equipped with the necessary theoretical and practical knowledge (Nguyen, 2015). As a result, they've struggled to apply ESP pedagogy in their practice and resorted to teaching from experience, usually in the form of a teaching approach that focuses on grammar, memorising specialist terminologies and exercises on basic grammar rules, while neglecting the communicative aspects of the language (Hayati, 2008; Nguyen, T. C. N., 2011; Wu & Badger, 2009). This traditional teacher-centred, exam-driven approach to teaching and learning English has demotivated students who've become primarily focused on examinations and failed to develop an ability to communicate since most classroom time is spent on terminologies and translation (Nguyen, T. C. N., 2011; Utsumi & Doan, 2010).

The nature and objectives of ESP pedagogy have been proven to be more suited to delivery by language teachers than content teachers (Tabatabaei, 2007). However, insufficient specialist knowledge is a major issue faced by ESP teachers, the majority of whom are unfamiliar with the specialised materials and content of this approach. As a consequence, ESP teachers are constantly challenged by a lack of specialist knowledge, expertise and strategies (Wu & Badger, 2009). They are also frequently responsible for the design and development of materials for courses, but their lack of understanding can lead to incomprehensible and inconsistent teaching materials (Wu & Badger, 2009). It is therefore not surprising that ESP teachers lack confidence to teach ESP and regularly seek support from the internet, colleagues and even from their students.

Students also encounter challenges in ESP courses, including the exam-oriented, passive approach to learning (Hayati, 2008; Jianchang, 2011; Nguyen, T. C. N., 2011) that leads to poor outcomes. Despite the fact that English is a compulsory subject in secondary school, Vietnamese students typically enter university with poor English proficiency due to their tendency for passive learning (Nguyen, T. C. N., 2011). Failure to achieve high levels of English proficiency has also been attributed to inequitable access to language education

in rural and urban areas; a prevalence of the traditional teacher-centred approach in secondary schools; and an emphasis on grammar, reading and writing in secondary and high schools to the detriment of listening and speaking skills (Nguyen, T. C. N., 2011). Another cause has been the inability of placement tests in Vietnamese universities to accurately measure the English abilities of newly enrolled students and place those with similar aptitudes in the same classes.

Other issues include a lack of standards related to ESP textbooks, limited time for ESP courses, and a scarcity of teaching materials and library resources. Although MOET oversees higher education in Vietnam, there are no prescribed standards for ESP textbooks and universities are free to decide what materials they use (Utsumi & Doan, 2010). Several institutions use imported textbooks, but others assign teachers to developing teaching materials, mainly focused on grammar, reading and basic communication (Nguyen & Pham, 2016). These different approaches to course materials have caused confusion about the objectives of ESP courses for teaching language skills or specialist knowledge (Ho, 2011), and as a result, some universities view ESP as a subject to which they assign language teachers, while others view ESP as a discipline and assign content teachers. Language and content teachers are also responsible for teaching other subjects, such as GE and Academic English in the case of EFL teachers, and content courses in the case of content teachers (Nguyen, 2015; Pham & Malvetti, 2012). Although language teachers have expertise and experience in teaching language, they struggle with their own lack of specialist ESP knowledge, particularly when they are tasked with preparing their own course materials. On the other hand, content teachers are knowledgeable in the field of teaching ESP, but many are deficient in English proficiency to deliver ESP lessons or explain the meaning of terminologies. As a consequence of their lack of training and pedagogical methodology in ESP, content teachers have resorted to teaching from experience, using traditional teaching methods that focus on grammar translation, reading and writing (Utsumi & Doan, 2010).

Limited time for the amount of work associated with ESP courses has also been cited as an issue (Tabatabaei, 2007), given the onerous workload including design and development of the curriculum, learner assessments and tests. Coupled with large class sizes, the pressure of exams has made it impossible to teach ESP effectively. The time allocated for ESP lessons is barely enough for teachers to explain new terminologies, so they commonly use Vietnamese instead of English in classes (Kieu, 2012) to speed up

delivery. In addition, ESP textbooks are mainly imported or compiled from a variety of sources, resulting in inconsistent and inappropriate content for the Vietnamese context. Limited teaching materials and library resources, as well as insufficient professional development opportunities for ESP teachers also present challenges for ESP education in Vietnam (Utsumi & Doan, 2010).

In summary, ESP is a new branch of EFL teaching in higher education in Vietnam. Encouragement from MOET and increased awareness of its benefits have encouraged steady growth, but ESP has not been as effective as anticipated for various teacher- and student-related reasons. Half of all Vietnamese graduates are estimated to fall short of the required English proficiency levels required by employers, and in recent years, the situation has contributed to the high unemployment rates of Vietnamese graduates (Nguyen & Pham, 2016; Nguyen, 2015; Sharif, 2005; Utsumi & Doan, 2010).

In English lessons, teaching approaches have a direct influence on the effectiveness of lesson delivery and the motivation of learners, and in turn, impact on the levels of proficiency acquired by students (Nouf, 2016). A communicative teaching approach is a proven method for promoting the communicative competencies of learners and therefore of great benefit to higher education students needing to acquire enhanced communication skills for future employment.

Communicative Language Teaching in Vietnam

Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) refers to a pedagogical approach aimed at meeting learners' needs to communicate in a target language (Richards & Rodgers, 2014; Trinh, 2005), whereby teachers use real-life situations to promote and develop learners' communicative competence (Krashen, 2008; Li, 1998). Therefore, in CLT classrooms, language teachers create activities that students encounter in real life to enhance interaction and communication practices.

To promote communication, a CLT syllabus employs communicative tasks that focus on developing all four subskills (listening, speaking, reading and writing) (Brandl, 2007). Teaching materials reflect authentic real-life situations, such as videos, photographs and audio recordings, to enrich comprehensible input. Unlike traditional classrooms where teachers play a central role as knowledge transmitters and students listen, take notes and try to memorise new knowledge with very limited discussion, teachers in CLT classrooms play

the role of facilitator, providing rich comprehensible input to their students by maximising use of the target language as a means of instruction. In CLT classrooms, students work in pairs or groups to complete assigned tasks through discussion, communication and presentations in the target language. In the CLT approach, feedback is necessary to support the learning process. Furthermore, CLT takes cognisance of the negative impact of anxiety on learners' performance, manifesting as stress, resistance to participation and nervousness (Krashen, 2003).

In Vietnam, CLT was primarily implemented in the early 1990s with encouragement and support from the government, universities and the favourable views of Vietnamese teachers (Mai & Iwashita, 2012). The introduction of CLT for teaching foreign languages marked a shift from the traditional teacher-centred methods with their focus on grammar translation and memorisation of dialogue, to a student-centred teaching approach, emphasising group and pair activities, role play and presentations in a friendly learning environment (Richards & Rodgers, 2014). In 2006, a new curriculum was approved and implemented nationwide in secondary school (from Year 6 to Year 12), highlighting communicative skills as a goal of English teaching. In higher education, Vietnamese universities not only tried to improve teachers' abilities to use CLT in language teaching by encouraging them to attend local seminars and workshops conducted by foreign education agencies, but also by sending their staff abroad to study methods of teaching English to speakers of other languages (TESOL) (Pham, 2005). However, in spite of the government's promotion of CLT and the efforts of universities, a number of factors hindered successful implementation in tertiary educations in Vietnam (Nguyen, 2016), including the Vietnamese educational system itself, the teachers and their teaching, and the students and their learning (Nguyen, 2016).

One of the main barriers to successful implementation of CLT in English programs was the educational system in Vietnam, characterised by an exam-oriented mentality and focused on grammar-based examinations, designed to assess linguistic knowledge and grammar rather than communication skills. Other impediments were time constraints; large, multi-level class sizes; teacher-student relationships; limited opportunities to practice English inside and outside the classroom; and inadequate classroom conditions (Nguyen, 2016). CLT classrooms were unable to accommodate effective pair and group discussions since they lacked ICT support, round tables and moveable desks, projectors, audio and video systems. The typical Vietnamese classrooms with long, heavy tables and chalkboards

and large, multiple class sizes of up to 70 students (Tran, 2013) hampered communication and CLT practice.

Difficulties encountered by teachers include their low English proficiency, lack of training, and an inability to implement CLT and assess their students' communicative competence in tests and exams (Mai & Iwashita, 2012; Nguyen, Q. T., 2013). Due to these inadequacies, language teachers who initially expressed an eagerness in the seminars to learn and apply CLT continued to use familiar, traditional methods of teaching when they returned to their classrooms. This meant the teacher-centred, Confucian model persisted, with teachers dominating lessons while students listened and took notes with little communication. In such a context, lesson content took precedence over opportunities for practicing English communication and students had little or no input.

Textbooks mostly originated from western educational sources and failed to connect with students' interests or existing knowledge. Pedagogical problems were also evident, such as limited encouragement by teachers and ineffective class management. Teachers appeared to provide little input or motivation, allowing students in small-group discussions to passively listen to group leaders or turn away to work independently (Bock, 2000; Mai & Iwashita, 2012; Tran, 2013). Students' motivation for communicative practice was overshadowed by concerns about passing exams (Mai & Iwashita, 2012). In group discussions, there were few, if any, opportunities to communicate in English, and students preferred to work on their own, frequently resorting to Vietnamese when the teacher was absent or distracted (Nguyen, 2016).

English Assessment in Higher Education Institutions in Vietnam

Assessment practices have a direct impact on language teaching and learning (Bachman, 1990; Cheng, 2005) as they allow teachers to identify the strengths and weaknesses of their students and provide relevant information about the programs' effectiveness. For these reasons, various English assessment systems have been designed to evaluate students' English proficiency.

In Vietnam, assessment of English Language Learning (ELL) is regulated by MOET and follows the regulations of tertiary education by means of a learning credit system (MOET, 2007). English language assessment comprises three parts: lesson attendance; an assessment of participation in learning activities designed by teachers; and

assessment of learning achievement during and at the end of semester. Each assessment result is represented by a mark on a ten-point scale. The marks, with different weightings, are used to calculate students' Grade Point Average (GPA), that in turn, determines a student's eligibility to move to the next level or re-sit the exam in the case of poor performance.

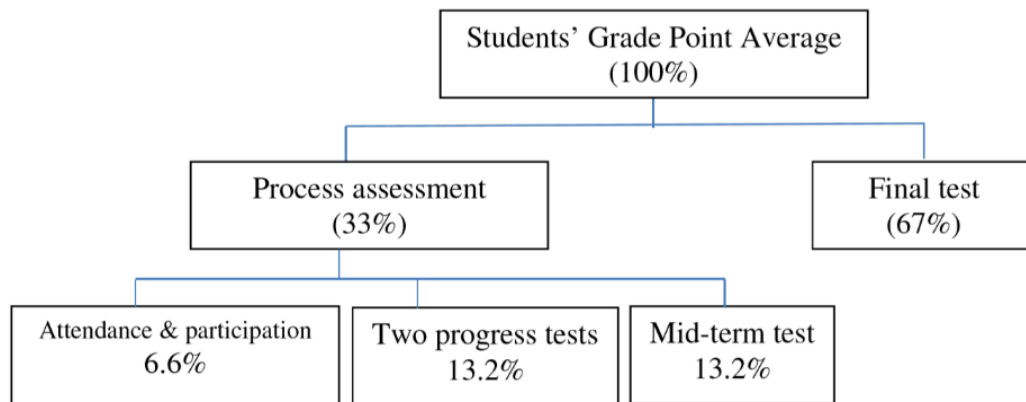


Figure 3.5 Types of Assessments and their Weightings (MOET, 2007)

English assessment results contribute to final grades in tertiary study and the type of degree awarded to students. Due to its importance, the primary goal of most students is to achieve high grades in English (Le, 1999a). English proficiency assessment results are made up of different aspects of students' ELL, and are primarily used for providing a summative judgement in administration, certification and student selection, rather than improving student learning.

In response to MOETs regulations related to accreditation of educational quality at the tertiary level, EFL education programs in higher education institutions have predominantly served as measures of quality and marketing tools in an increasingly competitive environment. Several institutions adopted internationally recognised tests, such as the Test of English for International Communication (TOEIC), the International English Language Testing System (IELTS) and the Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL); whereas others adapted these to develop their own testing systems. International standardised tests are widely recognised by universities and foreign employers for selecting, screening and shortlisting qualified students and employees, and as a result, language teachers have tended to replicate international standardised tests in preparing their

teaching materials and English tests. This has caused problems in that the assessments designed by local English language teachers are usually in the form of discrete points testing (Le, V. T., 2014b) and examinations are typically focused on the reading, writing and listening skills of large numbers of students in a multiple choice format. Contrary to the National Project's stated objectives for EFL programs to promote and improve students' abilities in English as a means of communication in academic and occupational environments, English tests are commonly designed for measuring students' lexical and grammatical knowledge (Hoang, 2010) and the results are mainly used for monitoring and grading students (Vu, 2008). EFL assessment practices are therefore inconsistent with the objectives of EFL education at the tertiary level and potentially threaten the validity of assessment results (Crooks, Kane, & Cohen, 1996; Hamp-Lyons, 2009; Le, V. T., 2014b).

English proficiency assessments in Vietnam usually follow a multiple-choice format for listening, grammar and reading, and include an essay component for writing (Todd & Shih, 2013). With the exception of speaking, these skills are usually tested on an ongoing basis throughout the year and in mid-level exams. Oral assessments are normally conducted at the end of semester and/or academic year, at which time students have completed a certain level of English. Based on the number of participants in each session, they comprise one of three common methods: individual interviews, paired speaking tests or group oral assessments (Lam, 2018).

In individual interviews, students' speaking skills are assessed in verbal conversations with an examiner. Normally, the student is required to randomly draw a topic and the examiner asks questions related to the topic. The student is expected to answer, speaking as much as possible while the examiner evaluates his or her speaking skills based on prescribed criteria such as fluency, vocabulary, accuracy and complexity of the sentences used in the interview. This testing format allows examiners to control the interaction and direct students to acquiring sufficient knowledge for evaluating their English-speaking ability. However, it increases students' anxiety because they are required to converse solely with an examiner, who is usually also their teacher.

Paired oral tests include two students and an examiner. Both students are required to choose a topic randomly and discuss it with one another, during which time the examiner asks them questions while observing and evaluating their speaking abilities based on fluency, accuracy, vocabulary, confidence and how they express their ideas. This type

of testing allows for a variety of interactional patterns between students and examiner, and helps to reduce anxiety because the students are mainly interacting with a partner rather than an examiner.

As a speaking assessment, group discussions are ideally suited to higher education institutions in Vietnam due to the large numbers of students at universities. Like paired tests, participants in group tests are required to randomly draw a topic for the whole group to discuss. An examiner asks questions during the discussion and observes the group to assess the speaking ability of each participant based on fluency, accuracy, vocabulary, confidence, the contribution of each and how they deliver their ideas. This format has received positive feedback from participants but raised concerns about the actual participation of all the members of the group and fairness of the marks awarded (Hilsdon, 1991).

Language assessments in Vietnamese higher education institutions are still viewed with scepticism in terms of trustworthiness, and English assessment benchmarks continue to be controversial for educators (Lam, 2018). Recent research on tertiary level EFL education in Vietnam consistently highlighted the negative effects of English tests that focus on linguistic rather than communicative competence (Hoang, 2010; Le, 2013; Le, V. T., 2014a; Mai & Iwashita, 2012). Language teachers have been labelled “exam-driven” in helping students attain high scores and spending significant amounts of teaching time on test-taking strategies (Le, V. T., 2014a). Similarly, students tend to prefer explicit teaching with an emphasis on grammatical accuracy over communicative activities in the classroom, in the belief that this is more relevant to the discrete points-testing methods they are commonly subjected to (Mai & Iwashita, 2012; Viet, 2008).

Common Recruitment and Selection Processes in Foreign Companies

A foreign company is defined as a business organisation whose activities are located in more than two countries and controls income-generating assets in these countries (Brinkman & Brinkman, 2002; Buckley & Casson, 2003; Cook, 2006; Loku & Loku, 2016). In globalised economies, the establishment of foreign companies has profoundly affected labour markets across nations and necessitated flexibility in response to rapidly changing demands. In order to develop foreign subsidiaries and maintain a competitive edge, many foreign companies assigned expatriates to lead their business operations abroad in a transfer of technical expertise, management, coordination of foreign operations and

development of human resources (Barry Hocking, Brown, & Harzing, 2004; Engle, Dowling, & Festing, 2008). Expatriates also represent the interests of headquarters in improving communication with subsidiaries to better understand the local business environment (Nohria & Ghoshal, 1994) and encourage employees to create a competitive advantage in international business environments (Stroh & Caligiuri, 1998; Taylor, Beechler, & Napier, 1996). However, utilising expats to work abroad incurs much higher costs for foreign companies than employing local talent (Bennett, Aston, & Colquhoun, 2000; Fryxell, Butler, & Choi, 2004), so to mitigate this expense, they hire talented locals to fill various positions in foreign subsidiaries.

Foreign companies need well-developed recruitment and selection processes (Delgadová, Gullerová, & Ivanová, 2017; Kundu, Rattan, Sheera, & Gahlawat, 2015) to attract the quantity and quality of people needed to meet their human resource needs in the most economical manner. The recruitment process entails attracting a pool of potential candidates with the required knowledge, skills and experience by sparking their interest in the organisation and encouraging them to apply for employment (Gold & Bratton, 2003; Lok & Crawford, 2004). The purpose is to find the widest pool of potential applicants to provide the greatest opportunity for selecting the best people for the positions to be filled. Efforts are made to inform applicants fully about the selection criteria and required competencies that will lead to effective performance, as well as the career opportunities that the organisation can provide.

The selection process involves identifying and choosing the individual best suited for a particular position from a pool of candidates (Mondy, Noe, & Premeaux, 2005). Depending on the human resources (HR) policy of the company, vacant positions might be filled by suitable candidates from within or outside the company (Nankervis, Compton, & Baird, 2002). The purpose of the selection process is to ensure that the best individual is appointed to the position using effective, fair and equitable assessment methods. Traditionally, the recruitment process begins with identifying a vacancy or need for a position or positions, then preparing a job description and posting an advertisement. The process ends when at least the minimum number of applications are received by the deadline (Nguyen, 2019). The selection process commences at the time the recruitment process ends with screening applications and organising a shortlist of potential candidates. Short-listed candidates are notified and attend individual and/or panel interviews, and may also undertake an assignment and/or testing. This is followed by checking references and

making decisions about those who are qualified. Successful candidates are placed on probation for a period of time after accepting the job offer, and the selection process concludes when new employees complete probation and become an official staff member after a post-probation assessment has been conducted. Nguyen (2019) confirmed that, in Vietnam, the recruitment process begins with identifying recruitment needs, developing a job description for the position(s) and placing advertisements on the company's websites and/or using recruiting agents – see Figure 3.6.

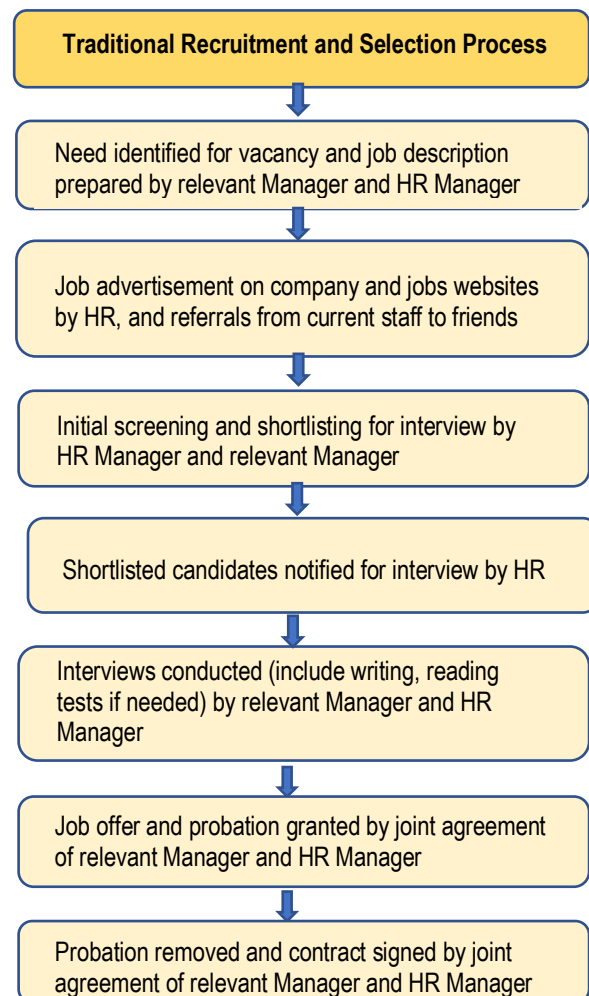


Figure 3.6 Traditional Recruitment and Selection Processes in Foreign Companies. As described by Nguyen (2019).

Depending on the company, the recruitment process concludes after applications have been received or after preliminary telephone screening by the HR manager. Timelines may be extended if the number of applications received is below expectation by the deadline. The selection process starts with screening applications and selecting potential

candidates, according to the selection criteria, for further assessment. Assessments may include group discussions, face-to-face interviews, IQ, EQ and academic tests. The selection process concludes when the most suitable candidate has been selected and offered ongoing employment after probation.

English Proficiency Assessments and Requirements of Employers from Foreign Companies

In Vietnam, English is the common working language in foreign companies where employees originate from different cultures and language backgrounds (Dhir & Gòkè-Paríolá, 2002; Nguyen, 2019). All four English subskills – writing, reading, listening and speaking – are assessed in these companies' recruitment processes. Several organisations assess English proficiency from the beginning of the recruitment process through to the end of the selection process (Nguyen, 2019). Employers all have their own strategies for testing English proficiency. Writing skills are typically assessed from written applications or together with reading skills in an assignment during the selection process. Listening and speaking skills are assessed in interviews, discussions and/or IQ, EQ and professional knowledge tests during the selection process. Writing skills are further assessed based on candidates' abilities to construct their ideas in a clear and logical way, and the use of appropriate words and structures with accurate grammar. Reading skills are further assessed based on candidates' understanding of documents and how accurately and comprehensively they answer related questions. Listening and speaking skills are mainly evaluated during the selection process, where presentations, group discussions, panel interviews or individual interviews are conducted. In group discussions, interviewers generally observe the involvement and quality of the applicants' interactions; while their levels of understanding and answers to questions are assessed in individual and group interviews for clear, sufficient and appropriate information. The criteria used for assessing speaking skills are pronunciation, fluency, confidence, speed, the use of suitable words and accurate sentences free of grammar errors.

In Vietnam, differences are evident between the English proficiency requirements of foreign companies that originate from English-speaking countries, such as America, Australia and England, and those from non-English speaking countries, such as Japan, Korea and the Republic of China (Nguyen, 2019). Foreign companies from native English-speaking countries usually require higher levels of English proficiency and only accept

candidates who are already fully competent. However, in non-native English-speaking companies, candidates who meet the recruitment and selection criteria but slightly miss the mark for English proficiency may be accepted with adjusted remuneration, depending on their skills in the parent language. For example, where two staff members with similar qualifications work in the same position in a foreign company, the individual with higher proficiency in English may be paid more than the other.

In spite of various origins of the foreign companies and the different requirements of English proficiency of graduates from foreign employers, all employees, including business graduates are expected to fluently communicate in English in the workplace at foreign companies to successfully perform assigned duties (Nguyen, 2019). At foreign companies, the listening and speaking skills are more important than reading and speaking skills because the employee need to prove their suitability to the recruiting position in the interview by answering interview questions, orally presenting on a specified topic or participating in a group discussions during the recruitment and selection process (Nguyen, 2019).

Despite the fact that English is a common language in foreign working environments, it is not used in isolation, but together with other languages (Nguyen, 2019). Foreign companies in Vietnam that originate from native-English speaking countries use English and Vietnamese in the workplace; while foreign companies that originate from non-native English-speaking countries use English, Vietnamese and a third, parent language in the workplace.

Use of English and Other Languages in Foreign Companies

To effectively respond to the rapidly changing demands of the labour market and develop their foreign subsidiaries, foreign companies assigned expatriates to lead their business operations abroad, and hired foreign managers living in the host country and talented nationals to fill various positions. These HR policies brought together people from different cultures, languages and traditions (Dhir & Gökè-Paríolá, 2002), resulting in multilingual working environments where language differences affect inter-unit and intra-unit communication (Rogerson-Revell, 2007, 2008). To promote and ensure effective communication between subsidiaries and work units, foreign companies formulated policies about the languages to be used for company communication and documentation (Marschan-Piekkari, Welch, & Welch, 1999).

In multilingual workplaces, employees constantly interact and interpret information according to their cultural and linguistic contexts (Glinow, Shapiro, & Brett, 2004). According to Luo and Shenkar (2006), language policies within subsidiaries adhere to three scenarios. First, ethnocentricity promotes the language of the headquarters, such as the Japanese-based Toyota subsidiary in Vietnam that uses Japanese as the official working language. Second, polycentricity promotes the host country's language as the working language, such as the Korean-based Samsung in Vietnam that uses Vietnamese in the workplace. The third, geocentricity, promotes the third language, such as German-based Mercedes in Vietnam that uses English as the working language. In certain situations, foreign companies may use two or more languages in their internal communication (Fredriksson, Barner-Rasmussen, & Piekkari, 2006). Although the parent language is often used at corporate and subsidiary levels, poor proficiency in the parent language in foreign subsidiaries hinders communication (Fredriksson et al., 2006). For this reason, the local or host language is important for business communication in foreign subsidiaries and for recruiting competent employees.

In foreign companies where employers and employees originate from different countries, English, as the lingua franca of international business, is the official working language (Clyne & Sharifian, 2008; Mair, 2003; Nguyen, 2019). Parent and host languages may be used to facilitate communication between small groups of staff who speak the same language (Nguyen (2019). For example, in Vietnam, Vietnamese is also used to communicate with local customers and business partners, despite English being the official language in the workplace for official meetings, discussions, presentations and official written documents such as emails, contracts, minutes of meetings and reports.

Since the staff in foreign companies originate from different cultures and linguistic backgrounds, their mother tongue accents carry over into their spoken English. This is especially pronounced in Vietnamese employees, whose language is very different from English in terms of pronunciation, emphasis and consonants. The spoken English of Vietnamese employees is likely to be unclear and unintelligible to foreign language employers and may hamper their chances of success when applying for employment. Foreign employers' perceptions of English accents and its impact on employment are examined in the following section.

English Accents and Employment

In today's globalised world, international business, trade and investment are everyday activities among nations and English is used as a common language to link people with different first languages (Lazaro & Medalla, 2004). Globalisation and English language are mutually interactive; both have a significant impact on employment (Roshid & Chowdhury, 2013). English competency is a mandatory requirement for most people who wish to engage in an English-speaking working environment (Arifeen & Yunus, 2013) and has become an indispensable qualification for securing managerial positions and promotion in the workplace (Casale & Posel, 2011). In contrast, people with poor English proficiency face difficulties finding jobs, especially well paid positions in English-speaking foreign companies (Leslie & Lindley, 2001). To secure a job in these companies, candidates have to provide evidence of their professional knowledge, work experience and skills throughout the recruitment and selection processes that are usually conducted in English. In other words, candidates must harness their communication skills to persuade employers to hire them (Ranasinghe & Herath, 2011).

Several factors have been shown to influence candidates' English proficiency, amongst them, English accent. Research suggests that speakers with a non-native English accent may be evaluated as less proficient compared with a native English accent, undoubtedly impacting on their employment. Lippi-Green (1997) defined accent as the term used to refer to a distinctive way of speaking by a specific group of people, typically based on differences in intonation or phonology. Similarly, Edwards (1997) described accent as a unique mode of sound production, impacted by a speaker's native language or dialect.

Accented language originates from phonological differences caused by a learner's native language, native origin or social status. Phonological variation is a key component of accents (Hwa-Froelich, Hodson, & Edwards, 2002) such as prosody, which includes rhythmic stress and emphasis (Cheng, 1998; Lippi-Green, 1997). The speech characteristics of a person's native language may overlap or carry over into their use of English when it is spoken as a foreign language, resulting in accented English (Carlson & McHenry, 2006; Lippi-Green, 1997; Owens, 1996), for example, Chinese-accented English, Japanese-accented English, Thai-accented English and Vietnamese-accented English (Owens, 1996). Accent is linked to the age of learners when they start learning a

second language. According to Nejadansari and Nasrollazadeh (2011), only child learners are capable of acquiring a native accent and grammatical competence in informal learning contexts.

Workplaces have become more multinational as foreign companies increasingly employed people from different countries, creating multilingual working environments where individuals' accents or dialects may cause positive or negative reactions (Carlson & McHenry, 2006; Lippi-Green, 1997). Nguyen (2010) conducted a study to examine the influence of accent on employment decisions related to a Standard American English and Spanish-accented English applicant respectively, as well as characteristics of competence and likeability. The results revealed that the Spanish-accented applicant was perceived as having less chance of being hired compared to the Standard American English-accented applicant. He was also rated less competent, even though the applicants were equally likeable. Similarly, in a study on the influence of accents on employment in an interview for a HR manager position, Deprez-Sims and Morris (2010) found that a Midwestern US-accented applicant was evaluated more positively than a French-accented applicant. These findings indicate that accent can negatively impact on employment, and consequently, foreign-accented applicants may be disadvantaged in terms of their competitiveness. However, this is not always the situation. Shatoria (2013) analysed the relationship between a candidate's accent and its impact on employment in an interview and found no significant relationship between the two.

Due to significant differences between the two languages, Vietnamese people encounter great difficulties with English acquisition and speaking (Ha, 2005). The first difference is that Vietnamese language has additional diacritics to indicate tones and meaning of words, whereas English does not. The second difference is that most words in Vietnamese are one syllable long and change minimally for tense or grammatical agreement. In Vietnamese, six tones form part of the lexical identity of a word and Vietnamese learners are inclined to carry these tones over into spoken English, thus obscuring clarity. The third difference is that Vietnamese is a syllable-timed language in which all syllables take the same amount of time to pronounce, whereas English is a stress-timed language, where syllables lengthen or reduce depending on the emphasis of the word. Tien (2013) observed the difficulties for speakers of syllable-timed languages to adapt to stress timing. Similarly, Ha (2005), in her study of common pronunciation problems of Vietnamese learners of English, concluded that in some cases, Vietnamese

learners of English produce redundant sounds, and in other cases omit sounds and mispronounce words.

Chapter Summary

This chapter provided a review of the literature related to second language acquisition and English for Specific Purpose education, as well as an analysis of Communicative Language Teaching and English assessment procedures in higher education. The recruitment and selection processes in foreign companies, their assessment methods of English proficiency, and the use of English and other languages in foreign companies were also covered. The next chapter outlines the research methodology employed in this study.

CHAPTER FOUR: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This chapter describes the research methodology used to investigate the influence of English Language Proficiency (ELP) on the success of business graduates from private universities seeking employment in foreign companies in Vietnam. The investigation sought to identify the level of ELP required by foreign employers, their assessment methods and the response of private universities to government policies aimed at preparing business graduates for employment in foreign companies in Vietnam.

The chapter commences with the theoretical foundations guiding the research, followed by the recruitment of participants, the instruments used for data collection and the data collection procedures. Finally, the methods used to analyse the qualitative data are discussed.

Research Paradigm

According to Morgan (1983) and Myers (2000), paradigms provide theoretical, philosophical, instrumental and methodological foundations for conducting research and a platform for interpreting events and human behaviour. Neuman (2000, 2013) proposed three research paradigms for social science research: positivism, interpretivism and critical social science approach.

Interpretive social science is related to explication and how people interact with each other. It is the systematic analysis of socially meaningful action through direct detailed observation of people's actions and how they maintain their daily lives. The purpose of interpretive social science research is to form an understanding of social life and discover new explanations about people's behaviours in natural settings. It assumes that all of human behaviour includes a purpose, and this purpose is related to society.

The interpretive approach was adopted for this study because it was aimed at investigating foreign company directors and Human Resource managers involved in recruitment and selection processes, as well as Vietnamese business graduates from private universities who sought employment in foreign companies. The interpretive approach was best suited because it enabled exploration of the business undergraduates' experiences through focus group discussions and reviews of relevant documents at two private universities and four foreign companies.

Qualitative Approach

By nature, the interpretive paradigm typically employs qualitative methodology and promotes the value of qualitative data (Creswell, 2012; Kaplan & Maxwell, 2005). Researchers operating within an interpretive framework focus on contextualising and investigating the complexity and authenticity of the data gathered (Elliott & Timulak, 2005; Fryer, 1991; Jackson, 2014). This involves accurately describing, decoding and interpreting the meanings of phenomena occurring in their regular social contexts. According to Husserl (1965) and Kelliher (2011), interpretivists assert that reality is socially constructed, not objectively determined, and reality is discovered through the views, knowledge and experiences of the participants. The underlying assumption is that there will be greater opportunity to understand the perceptions people have of their own activities if they are placed in their social contexts, (Hussey & Hussey, 1997) and therefore, researchers need to examine the views of relevant people who share the same socio-cultural, educational and ethical understandings.

This study was designed to deeply examine the influence of English proficiency on the employment in foreign companies of business graduates from private Vietnamese universities. As part of the investigation, the policies and practices that determine the English proficiency levels of employees in foreign companies were investigated. So too were the policies and practices of private universities related to the development and assessment of business graduates' English proficiency. A qualitative research design was selected for this study because it was an appropriate approach for identifying the contextual features that impacted on employment (Baxter & Jack, 2008; Smith, 1987; Yin, 2009).

Qualitative research assists in uncovering and understanding the factors that are little known (Strauss & Corbin, 2014). Another advantage is that qualitative methods can explore the sophisticated details of phenomena that are difficult to identify by means of quantitative methods. This includes perceptions, in this case the perceptions of business students in the English program, as well as unwritten processes, such as details about the recruitment and selection processes used by foreign companies in Vietnam (Strauss & Corbin, 2014).

Data Collection

The qualitative data in this study were collected via focus group discussions, interviews and document reviews. Primary sources of data included directors and HR managers from foreign companies that recruited business graduates, and business graduates and undergraduates from two private universities.

Secondary sources of data comprised regulations on the implementation of English programs at two private universities, and policies and practice regulations on recruitment and selection at four foreign companies. University documents, such as policy decisions and regulations on English education, teaching and learning guidelines, textbooks and materials, as well as assessment-related documents were scrutinised to determine curriculum content and assessment criteria for judging the ELP of business students prior to graduation. However, neither of the two private universities had any written documents regarding policy decisions or regulations guiding the implementation of their English programs and ELP assessments. Both universities provided their English teaching plans and textbooks that included detailed information on the topics taught and the levels of English to be attained in each year of study.

Although it was deemed necessary to access documents on the recruitment and selection policies and practices of foreign companies in Vietnam as a means of determining their requirements, privacy issues prevented access, but company representatives willingly discussed all aspects of the recruitment process.

Recruitment of Participants

Unlike quantitative research that requires large sample sizes for statistical validity, the sample size in qualitative research is determined by factors other than size alone. Qualitative research is usually aimed at acquiring useful information to understand the complexity, depth and context surrounding a phenomenon. Therefore, the richness of the data collected in qualitative research is more important than the number of participants (Whitehead D & Whitehead L, 2016). Morse (1995) and Creswell and Creswell (2017) recommended a sample size of between 6 and 10 for a phenomenological study. In their systematic methods review of sampling in qualitative research, Gentles, Charles, Ploeg, and McKibbin (2015) suggested that around 12 participants are enough. Whitehead D and Whitehead L (2016) asserted that a good qualitative research sample size is between 8 and 15 participants. Thirty-three participants took part in this study, recruited by means of

purposive and convenient sampling methods. Purposive sampling was used to select two private universities and four foreign companies in Vietnam. After being introduced by colleagues, two private universities, one situated in a large city in the north and the other located in a small city in the south of Vietnam, were selected to investigate English education and English proficiency assessments and identify the possible similarities and differences. Several business graduates from these universities had sought employment with foreign companies in their respective areas.

With assistance from the Student Management Department and Enterprise Cooperation Department of the two private universities, four foreign companies (two service companies and two manufacturing companies) were selected to participate in the study. The purpose of selecting these companies was to investigate the recruitment and selection processes, English proficiency requirements and assessment methods of each foreign company, then note the similarities and differences between these foreign companies. They had also recruited business graduates from the private universities that participated in the study. Purposive sampling was used to recruit business graduates from the selected universities who had sought employment with foreign companies in Vietnam, as well as the foreign companies that participated in the research. The same method was used to recruit a member of the National Project Creation Board and an HR recruiting agent. Convenience sampling was used to recruit senior HR managers and directors of the four participating foreign companies, who in turn, identified other appropriate personnel in their companies and business undergraduates for the focus group discussions.

To better understand the English proficiency assessment systems and perceptions of the students, business undergraduates who had undertaken the English courses were invited to participate in the data collection. They were convenience-sampled according to availability and willingness to take part in the focus group discussions. Twenty-one business undergraduates from two private universities volunteered (see Table 4.1) and participated in two focus groups of five and six final-year students at each institution respectively.

Table 4.1

Business Undergraduate Participants

Location		Private University	Business Disciplines	n
In the north of Vietnam	Big city	Private university 1	Sales & Marketing; Business Administration; Finance	11
In the south of Vietnam	Small city	Private university 2	Finance & Banking; Accounting; Business Administration	10

The purpose of these focus group discussions was to investigate the business undergraduates' perceptions of the English courses and the influence of English proficiency on their employment. Individual interviews with business graduates who had sought employment at foreign companies provided further information about the English courses at private universities, and details about the recruitment and selection processes in foreign companies and the impact of English proficiency on their success in gaining employment. The interview data assisted understanding why certain graduates were successful in obtaining employment in foreign companies and others were not. Six business graduates were interviewed individually. Of these, three had successfully obtained positions in foreign companies and three had been unsuccessful (see Table 4.2).

Table 4.2

Business Graduate Participants

Success or Failure	Private university 1	Private university 2	n
Gained employment in foreign companies	2	1	3
Failed to gain employment in foreign companies	3	0	3

The National Project Creation Board mandated level 3 English proficiency for graduating non-English major students. The feedback provided by the National Project Creation Board member helped to clarify why level 3 was determined as the required level of English proficiency to satisfy the requirements of foreign employers and how universities in Vietnam responded to the policy.

The four foreign companies who participated in the study were coded Company A, B, C and D to protect their anonymity. Companies A and B were service companies located

in a large city in the north of Vietnam, while Companies C and D were manufacturing companies situated in the industrial zone of a province in the south of Vietnam, a common location for manufacturing industries (see Table 4.3).. The company employees who participated in the semi-structured interviews were either senior managers, directors or HR managers involved in the recruitment and selection of Vietnamese candidates seeking employment within their organisations. All of them originated from different countries, such as America, Singapore, the Chinese Republic of Taiwan and Japan, and all were literate in English.

Table 4.3
Foreign Company Participants

Location		Type of foreign company	Name of foreign company	Original	Number of participants
In the North of Vietnam	Big city	Foreign service companies	Company A	America	2
			Company B	Singapore	1
In the South of Vietnam	Small city	Foreign manufacturing companies	Company C	Taiwan	1
			Company D	Japan	1

Research Instruments

To enhance the credibility of the findings, multiple data sources were used in this study. They included interviews, focus group discussions and document analysis, all considered valuable data collection strategies in qualitative research (Bryman, 1988; Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2007). The data collection instruments comprised individual semi-structured interviews, focus group discussions and checklists for document reviews, and were accompanied by information about the process so that participants could understand what they were expected to do. The same semi-structured interview and group discussion questionnaires were used with participants of the same status, e.g., business undergraduates, business graduates and foreign employers, and were designed to explore their views on the influence of English proficiency on the employment of business graduates in foreign companies.

The questions in the semi-structured interviews with business graduates who had sought employment in foreign companies mainly centred around the English programs at private universities, the recruitment and selection processes in foreign companies, their

English proficiency requirements and assessment processes. Individual interviews with foreign employers elicited details about their recruitment and selection processes, English proficiency requirements, assessment methods and views on the influence of English accent on graduate employment.

Questions in the focus group discussions with business undergraduates were directed at gaining information about the English programs at private universities, and their perceptions of the English programs and the recruitment and selection processes in foreign companies. Checklists for document reviews focused on information about the English programs, English teaching plans, and the teaching and learning materials at each private university.

Semi-structured interviews.

Given that the purpose of this study was to explore interviewees' thoughts and experiences, semi-structured interviews were chosen to allow them to express their thoughts, make comments and provide feedback in an unlimited way. At the same time, the interviewer was able to maintain the overall direction of the interview and focus on predefined areas of discussion. Semi-structured interviews enabled the researcher to understand people's perceptions, meanings and situations (Punch, 2013) by means of a flexible tool that allowed multisensory channels to be used (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2000; Cohen et al., 2007). In addition to making field notes, all semi-structured interviews were audio recorded.

A semi-structured interview was conducted with the member of the National Project Creation Board to establish the purpose of the National Project, examine policy regulations on English programs in higher education, investigate the reasons why level 3 was determined the appropriate level for non-English-major graduates, and explore alignment between the English proficiency levels required by the National Project and foreign employers (see Appendix 3). The semi-structured interview with the Recruitment Agent Representative was also conducted to collect information about recruitment and selection processes at foreign companies, the foreign employers' requirements of graduates' English proficiency, and the systems the foreign employers used to assess employees' English proficiency in the recruitment and selection processes.

The semi-structured interviews with five foreign company employers provided in-depth information about their companies' HR policies, the level of ELP they required and how business graduates were assessed in the interviews. Employer interviews comprised twelve questions and garnered information about their recruitment and selection processes; the criteria they used to assess the ELP of candidates; the English skills they regarded as most important in their workplaces; and their perceptions of business graduates' ELP (see Appendix 4).

Other semi-structured interviews, conducted with three business graduates who had successfully sought employment in foreign companies, obtained their feedback, comments and perceptions of the English programs at private universities to supplement and enrich the data obtained from the business undergraduates. The semi-structured interviews with business graduates also allowed for triangulation of the responses provided by foreign company executives. Questions explored the role of English in the recruitment and selection processes; the assessment systems used to evaluate English proficiency; the use of English in foreign companies, and the effectiveness of the English programs in preparing graduates for employment. Interviews conducted with three business graduates who failed to gain employment in foreign companies were identical to those for successful graduates, but included an additional question exploring possible reasons why they failed to gain employment (see Appendices 6 and 7).

Focus group discussions.

According to Krueger and Casey (1994, 2014), focus group discussions are suitable for attaining participants' experiences and perceptions of an identified area of interest in a permissive, non-threatening environment. Interaction in a group discussion forms the source of the data and the researcher takes an active role in directing the group discussion for data-generating purposes (Morgan, 1997). In this study, four focus group discussions were conducted with five or six business undergraduates in each group to explore their perceptions, opinions and experiences of the English programs at their universities, the impact of these programs on their job readiness, the assessment methods used by the university, and the role of ELP in employment. The information collected was combined with the document analysis and the business graduates' comments in the individual interviews to obtain a multi-dimensional picture of the English programs (see Appendix 5

for details of the semi-structured focus group questionnaire). Details about the participants and data-collection methods are summarised in Table 4.4.

Table 4.4
Summary of Participants

Methods of Data collection	North of Vietnam Big city	South of Vietnam Small city	n
Individual interviews with foreign employers	3	2	5
Individual interviews with business graduates who gained employment in foreign companies in Vietnam	2	1	3
Individual interviews with business graduates who failed to gain employment in foreign companies in Vietnam	3	0	3
Focus group discussions with business undergraduates from two private universities in Vietnam	11	10	21
Document review in four foreign companies	0	0	0
Document review in two private universities	1	1	2

Data Collection Protocol

Data collection was carried out in May and June 2016 at places and times convenient to the participants. Before meeting with them, the relevant authorities were contacted by telephone and email for permission to conduct the research and requesting their support. At the beginning of each interview/focus group, sufficient time was allowed for developing rapport with and amongst participants. Full voluntary support was obtained from all participants before schedules were drawn up for data collection.

Protocol for document reviews at private universities.

Prior to visiting each private university, the rector and designated contact people were emailed and telephoned, and were sent an information letter explaining the purpose of the interview and providing an assurance of confidentiality. They were also advised of the

number of business undergraduates participating in the focus groups, the criteria used for selecting the business undergraduates and the schedule for the focus group discussions.

Each university was visited three times in two days. On the morning of the first day, the researcher met with the rector of the university and the designated contact person who assisted with arrangements and administration procedures to inform them of the proposed schedule and reinforce the purpose of the research. The document reviews took place at each university directly following this meeting on the morning of the first day. An English language teacher who was knowledgeable about the English programs at each university was assigned to work with the researcher. The document reviews took between 45 and 60 minutes, depending on the number of documents and the questions they raised. The review focused on exploring the internal regulations, decisions or other relevant documents on English education at each university. However, only English teaching plans with detailed information such as detail of textbooks, teaching hours, assignment for each teacher were included. The participating universities did not have documents providing detail of design, implementation, assessment regulations. To build rapport and a friendly working environment, time was spent chatting with the English language teachers before the work sessions commenced.

Protocol for focus group discussions.

Two focus group discussions were held with business students in a classroom at each university respectively. One was conducted in the afternoon on the first day of data collection, and the other, on the morning of the second day. The business students who participated in the focus group discussions were in the final year of a business discipline and had been recommended by the contact person at each university. Before discussions began, a cover letter and consent form were issued to each participant. They were written in English, since the participants were final-year students and proficient in English, and all of them had agreed to use the English version without translation into Vietnamese. A summary of the research and the intended subjects of discussion were provided in Vietnamese. All consent forms were signed before the focus groups commenced.

To build a positive rapport and create a friendly and relaxed environment, a short period of time was spent interacting with the participants prior to the focus groups. All of them appeared relaxed and freely discussed all aspects of the English programs. The focus group discussions were audio recorded.

Protocol for interviews with business graduates.

The six business graduates who took part in the interviews had been recommended by the designated contact people at each university. The researcher contacted each business graduate by telephone to arrange a suitable time and place for the interview. Meeting places were carefully considered to ensure they were private, comfortable and quiet for audio recordings. Like the focus group discussions, each business graduate was provided with a summary of the research and an assurance of confidentiality, and provided with an information letter and consent form for their signature. Interviews were conducted after establishing a positive rapport, lasting approximately 40 to 50 minutes depending on the amount of information shared by the interviewee and the questions they asked. All interviews were audio recorded.

Protocol for document reviews at foreign companies.

Research planning included review of the foreign companies' HR policies relating to recruitment and selection process, English proficiency and other qualifications assessment. However, due to privacy regulations of these foreign companies, none of these documents were made available for review, however information related to HR policies was shared by the foreign employers in the interviews.

Protocol for interviews with foreign employers.

Eight senior management executives of four foreign companies were referred and contacted by the Enterprise Cooperation Department of the university. Five were able to participate in the interviews. After agreeing to be interviewed, the researcher contacted them by telephone and sent them the information letter and an interview schedule. Depending on the number of staff that agreed to participate each foreign company was visited once or twice, at times convenient to their work schedule. Face-to-face interviews with company executives involved in recruitment and selection were conducted at the company offices. Before commencing the interviews, five to ten minutes were taken to inform the interviewees of the purpose of the research, assure them of confidentiality and build a positive rapport. Participants were provided with an interview package that comprised an information letter explaining the study; details about the roles of the researcher and the interviewees; the requirements of the interview; and a consent form for their signature. They were encouraged to ask questions before, during and after the interviews, all of which were audio recorded with their permission.

Protocol for interview with the national project creation board member.

Prior to the interview, the member of the National Project Creation Board was contacted by email and telephone, and received an information letter outlining the purpose of the interview and providing an assurance of confidentiality. Approximately five minutes was spent greeting, building rapport and supplying a copy of the original information letter and a consent form for his signature. The interview lasted 40 minutes and was audio recorded with the agreement of the interviewee.

Protocol for interview with the representative of a Recruiting Agent.

The representative of a Recruiting Agent was contacted by email and telephone, and received an information letter outlining the purpose of the interview and confidentiality before the interview. Approximately five minutes was spent building rapport and supplying a copy of the original information letter and a consent form for her signature. The interview lasted 40 minutes and was audio recorded with the agreement of the interviewee.

Data Analysis

This section discusses the methods and procedures for analysing the qualitative data derived from the interview transcripts, focus group discussions and document reviews. Data analysis required coding, transcribing, translating data and identifying themes.

To preserve confidentiality, the universities, foreign companies and individual participants were de-identified using codes. For example, the university in the big city in the north of Vietnam was coded University 1, and the first focus group at University 1 was coded FG1.1, differentiating between the second focus group at the same university that was coded FG1.2. The coding list is shown in Appendix 9.

With the exception of one interview with an American director of Company A who preferred to speak English, all interviews and focus group discussions were conducted in Vietnamese. The reason for this was that all the executives from the foreign companies, except the American director, were Vietnamese. While they were proficient in English, they preferred to communicate in Vietnamese to comfortably express their ideas in detail. The interviews and focus group discussions were audio-recorded and then transcribed (in Vietnamese) to ensure the original meaning was preserved. Each transcription was listened to several times to ensure complete understanding and checked for accuracy to avoid

missing any relevant information. If the meaning was unclear or ambiguous, notes were taken and the participants contacted for clarification. The Vietnamese transcriptions were then edited to delete any irrelevant and unnecessary information, such as greetings, casual conversation to establish rapport and conversations unrelated to the interviews and discussions. To ensure the transcriptions were identical to the participants' discussions, the edited transcriptions were returned to the participants for their confirmation of accuracy and meaning.

Some excerpts from the transcripts were translated into English so they could be used as quotations in the findings chapter. To ensure their accuracy, the translations were checked several times by the researcher before inviting comments and opinions on their accuracy from other Vietnamese PhD candidates in the School of Education.

Thematic analysis in this study was based on the premise that, while data analysis is initially shaped by the research objectives, it is further shaped by the contextual framework underpinning the data generation, multiple readings and interpretation of the raw data. Therefore, the findings are derived from both deductive and inductive approaches. There is a wide range of underlying assumptions and procedures in the literature associated with analysing qualitative data, many of which relate to specific approaches (Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach, & Zilber, 1998; Potter, 1994; Strauss & Corbin, 2014). However, thematic analysis was considered best suited to this study, because it is an appropriate method for identifying, analysing and reporting themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Data analysis for this study was based on a procedural model adapted from Braun and Clarke (2006), as shown in Figure 4.1.

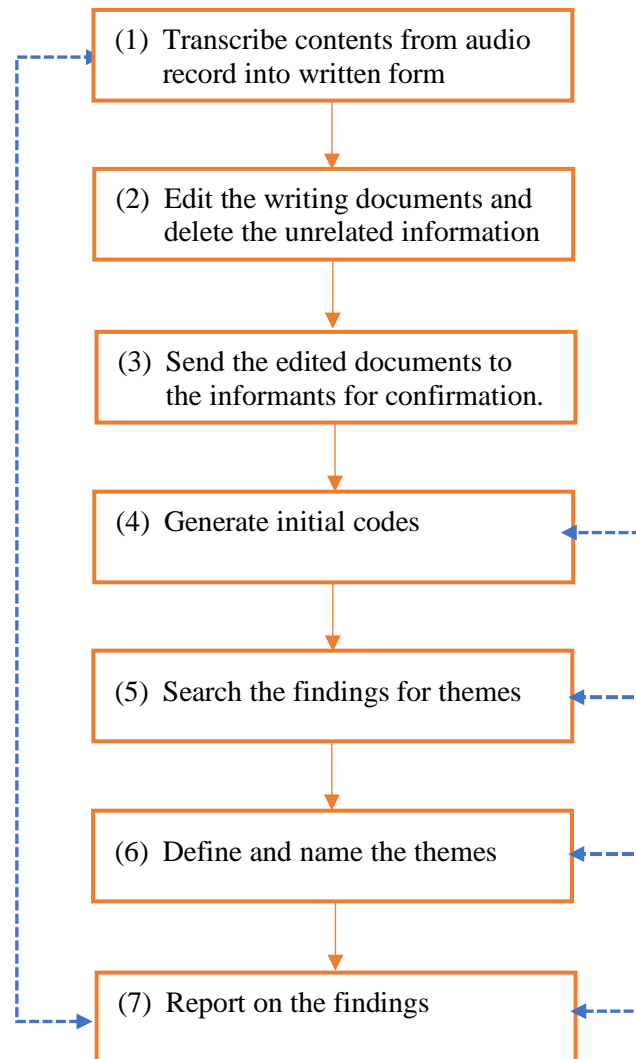


Figure 4.1 Flowchart Showing the Data Analysis Strategy. Adapted from Clarke, V. and Braun, V. (2013) Teaching thematic analysis: Overcoming challenges and developing strategies for effective learning. *The Psychologist*, 26 (2). pp. 120-123. ISSN 0952-822.

Figure 4.1 depicts seven steps in the process that appear to be linear and sequentially ordered. Although these steps were used to direct the thematic analysis, the process itself proved to be recursive, because in defining and naming the themes, it was necessary to revisit the previous stages several times to ensure they were relevant to the research questions. Additional themes emerged, which meant earlier decisions had to be reconsidered, expanded and refined. Furthermore, some of the emergent themes provided information beyond the scope of the research questions, but served to enrich the discussion.

Chapter Summary

This chapter provided an overview of the research approaches used to investigate the English programs at two private universities, and the recruitment and selection processes in four foreign companies in Vietnam. It also described the processes used to recruit the research participants, generate and analyse the data.

The next chapter presents the findings of the English programs at the two universities, including curricula, teaching approaches, assessment systems used to test business students' English proficiency, exam organisation, and the business undergraduates' perceptions of the effectiveness of the English programs, English proficiency and employment.

CHAPTER FIVE: ENGLISH PROFICIENCY: REQUIREMENTS OF THE PRIVATE UNIVERSITIES IN VIETNAM

This chapter reports on the findings of the English programs implemented at two private universities in Vietnam; one situated in a large city in the north (University 1), and the other, in a provincial city in the south (University 2). The findings include the design of their English programs, English curricula, teaching approaches, assessments, and students' perceptions of the English programs.

The National Project (2008) stipulated a mandatory English proficiency level for both English and non-English majors, but did not specify or regulate how these benchmarks should be achieved in tertiary institutions in relation to curricula, teaching materials, teaching methods and assessment procedures or how facilities should be configured. Consequently, higher education institutions have developed English courses and education policy independently according to their specific needs to provide non-English major students with level 3 English proficiency on the Six Level Framework, equivalent to B1 level on the CEFR scale. The result has been a proliferation of diverse English programs across Vietnamese public and private universities. While several universities have used a traditional teaching approach and internationally recognised English proficiency assessment systems, such as TOEIC and IELTS without any ICT support to measure graduates' English proficiency, others have adapted the Communicative Language Teaching approach with the support of ICT to develop their own assessment systems for evaluating English proficiency.

The Universities

University 1 was a private, corporate-sponsored technology university, established in Hanoi in September 2006, with a mission of educating a qualified labour force to meet the needs of potential employers. The long-term objective of University 1 was to provide learners with multi-dimensional skills to enable them to compete globally. The university's unique training programs were devised in conjunction with corporations to prepare students for future employment. The main campus was situated in Hanoi, and there were three other campuses located in Ho Chi Minh City, Da Nang and Can Tho respectively. The number of faculties on each campus differed based on student intake and the needs of learners, but averaged between three and five. This study was conducted on the Hanoi campus, comprised of five faculties including: Information and Technology; Business and Management; Architecture and Graphic

Design; Foreign Languages and General Programs. The university's organisational structure is shown in Figure 5.1 below.

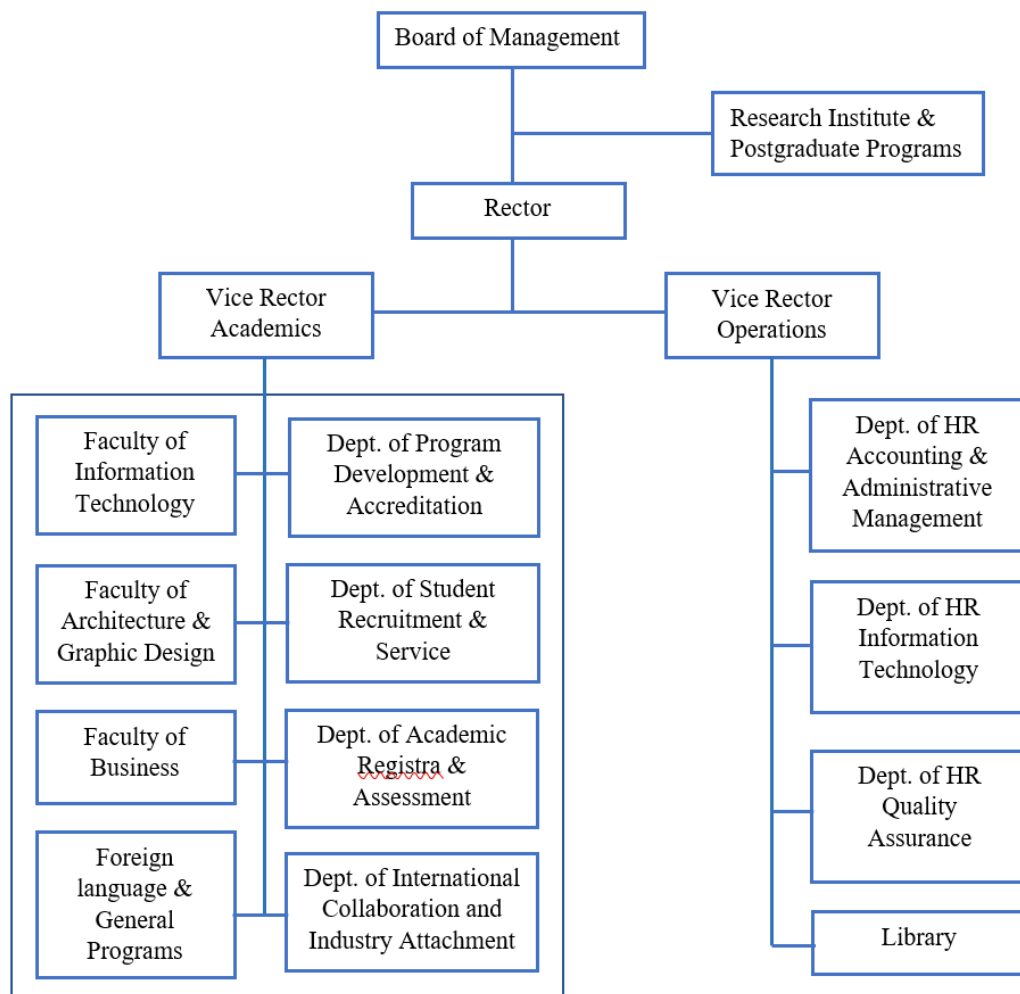


Figure 5.1 Organisational Structure of University 1. Diagram provided by University 1 on March 20, 2017.

University 2 was a private, individually sponsored technology university established in Dong Nai province in 2011, with a mission to educate a qualified labour force to meet the demands of the Vietnamese labour market. The long-term objective of University 2 was to provide training courses aligned with the requirements of relevant industries to help students gain professional knowledge and multi-dimensional skills for future employment. This study was conducted on the sole Dong Nai campus, comprised of four faculties: Foreign Languages; Information and Technology; Applied Science and Health; Economics and Business Administration. The organisational structure of University 2 is illustrated in Figure 5.2.

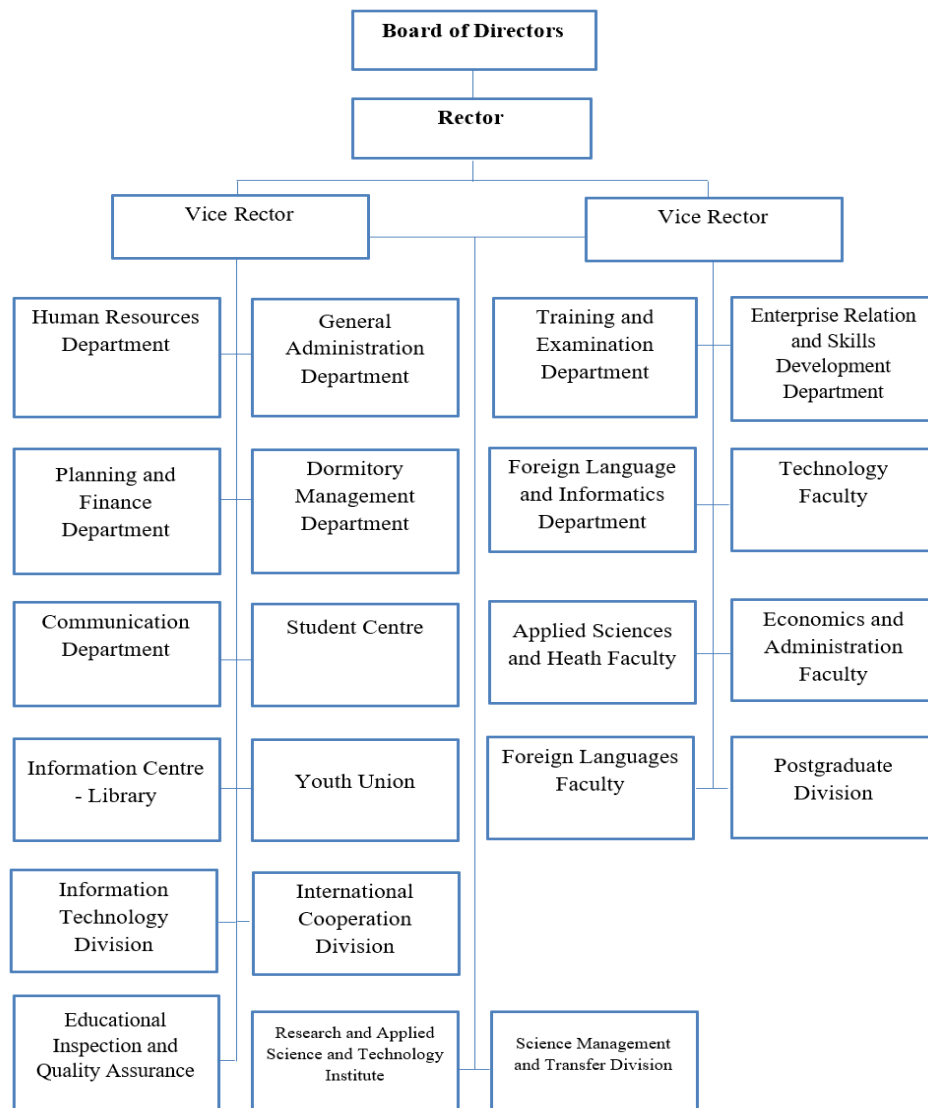


Figure 5.2 Organisational Structure of University 2. Diagram provided by University 2 on April 10, 2017.

Figures 5.1 and 5.2 show similarities and differences between the organisational structures of University 1 and University 2. One similarity is that both universities offered courses in high demand in the Vietnamese labour market, such as business, foreign languages and technology. An apparent difference is the structure of the two universities, with University 1 like that of a company, with a Board of Management also the owners of the university at the top of the structure, and the rector and vice rectors situated below the Board. In contrast, the structure of University 2 reflects that of a traditional higher education institution, where the rector is also the owner of the university.

English Courses Designed for Business Students

In response to the National Project and to prepare students for employment, both universities in this study designed and implemented English courses for non-English major students, including business students. The absence of specific regulations from MOET in regard to the design and implementation of these courses resulted in two quite diverse offerings. At University 1 the English program consisted of three English courses: a General English course, an Academic English course and a Business English course; while at University 2 the English program comprised four English courses: a General English course, a Communicative English course, a Business English course and a TOEIC course. These structures were established with consideration for the different levels of newly enrolled students' English proficiency levels, teaching priorities and unique English education circumstances at each university. The primary objective of the English courses was to ensure that students achieved the level 3 English proficiency necessary for graduating. The secondary aim was to increase students' academic and business English proficiency for further study and enhanced employment opportunities. At both universities the English language classes for business students extended over the first three academic years.

The English programs at the two universities differed in terms of number of programs and time for implementation. In this chapter, the findings are presented in a way that highlights their similarities and differences. The courses at each private university are outlined in Table 5.1. As can be seen, the learning hours designated for the English programs at University 1 far exceeded the hours at University 2. In Year 1, the time allowed for the General English course at University 1 was triple the time designated for the same course at University 2. However, this proportion was only around 1.2 times greater after taking into account the learning time for the Communicative English course at University 2 in Year 2. The Academic English course at University 1 assigned double the learning time of University 2, and the learning hours for the Business English course at University 1 was half that for the same course at University 2 in Year 3.

Table 5.1
English Courses for Business Students at Two Private Universities

University	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3
University 1	General English. 525 hours over ten months.	Academic English. 90 hours over the first six months.	Business English. 180 hours over twelve months.

	English was learnt along with auxiliary subjects such as music and martial arts.	In the last three months of Year 2 students join the Business English class.	The order of Academic English and Business English learning is interchangeable depending on the organisation of each business discipline.
University 2	General English. 157.5 hours over ten months. English was learnt in conjunction with other discipline subjects.	Communicative English. 247.5 hours over ten months. English was learnt together with other discipline subjects.	Business English. 112.5 hours over seven months. TOEIC. 45 hours over the last three months of Year 3. English learning is flexible for business students.

Year 1 English course for business students at two private universities.

The document review, focus group discussions and individual interviews revealed the existence of English placement exams for new, non-English major students at both universities to assess their English proficiency and facilitate class placement. The placement exams were necessary to distinguish between significant differences in the English proficiency levels of new students coming from different senior high schools, and tested language skills in listening, reading and writing. However, the requirements for new students to sit the placement exam were different at the two private universities. While it was compulsory for all newly enrolling students at University 1 to sit the exam, new students at University 2 had the option of deciding whether to take the exam or not. Those who decided not to take the exam, automatically commence English at the beginner level; whereas, the scores obtained by those who sat the exam determined their English class placement. The different processes were described by students in the focus group as follows:

My English level was lower than my friends who were from other senior high schools because I did not focus on learning English at senior high school. (FG1.1)

We were required to sit an English placement exam. Based on the exam results, we were placed in different English classes. (FG1.1; FG1.2; GS1.1; GS1.2; GF1.1; GF1.2; GF1.3)

We were flexible to take an English placement exam. Students who did not attend the placement tests would automatically start learning English at beginning level. (FG2.1; FG2.2; GS2.1)

Each private university implemented different General English courses based on their own English education regulations to ensure that students commenced at the most appropriate level. At University 1, the General English course in Year 1 focused on improving the proficiency of students so they could go on to learning Business English, Academic English and several discipline subjects in English in subsequent years. By the end of the first year in the General English course, students were expected to attain IELTS 6.0 English proficiency. The course comprised five levels, named after the textbook series, and ranged from lowest to highest as follows: Top Notch 1, Top Notch 2, Top Notch 3, Summit 1 and Summit 2. New students were grouped in appropriate levels based on their scores. English placement classes were described by University 1 students as follows:

My scores in the placement exam were low, therefore, I started learning at Top Notch 1. (FG1.1; GF1.2; GF1.3)

I got high scores in the placement exam and I commenced learning English at Summit 1. (FG1.2)

I got IELTS 7.0 at the end of Year 12 and got high scores in the placement exam. I was placed in Summit 2 class. (GS1.1)

Unlike University 1, where the General English course comprised five levels, University 2 offered only two levels for new students, also named after the book series chosen for the course: World Link 1A and World Link 1B. Students who opted not to sit the placement exam and those who achieved fewer than 5 points on a 10-point scale commenced in World Link 1A, while those who achieved 5 points and above started in World Link 1B. As a consequence of the limited levels in the General English course at University 2, several students with higher English proficiency levels than World Link 1B were inappropriately placed, causing them to become demotivated, as described by one focus group participant:

I got 8 points in the placement exam and started learning at World Link 1B level. However, I found the English lessons at World Link 1B level were uninteresting because they were too easy. (FG2.1)

Since the English courses were different at the two universities, so too were their time allocations. At University 1, new students only learned English in conjunction with auxiliary subjects such as martial arts and music. There were no other academic subjects in the first year. The General English course consisted of 10 units for each level, with each unit assigned 10.5 hours over two months, meaning that business students completed one level in 105 hours over two months or all five levels in 525 hours over ten months in Year 1. In contrast to University 1 where students only learned English in Year 1, students at University 2 learned English together with other academic subjects in their first year, hence the time allocation for General English was less than at University 1. At University 2 there were 6 units in each level of the General English course, with different timeframes allocated to each level. World Link 1A required students to complete 90 hours in the first six months, and World Link 1B was completed in 67.5 hours in the last four months. That meant business students at University 2 studied General English for 157.5 hours in Year 1, so the time allocated to business students for General English in Year 1 at University 2 was approximately 60% less than University 1. Business undergraduates at the two private universities stated:

In the first year we only learnt English and some auxiliary subjects. No academic subject in this year. (FG1.1; FG1.2; GS1.1; GS1.2; GF1.1; GF1.2; GF1.3)

We learnt each level in two months and we had ten months to complete five levels from Top Notch 1 to Summit 2. The total time for learning general English was 525 hours. (FG1.1; FG1.2; GS1.1; GF1.1; GF1.2)

In Year 1, we learnt English together with other academic subjects. (FG2.1; FG2.2; GS2.1)

There were 4 credits for World Link 1A and 3 credits for World Link 1B. Each credit was completed in 22.5 hours. That meant we learnt General English program in 157.5 hours. (FG2.1; FG2.2; GS2.1)

To monitor the progress of business students, English language teachers at both universities conducted various tests and exams. At University 1, ongoing tests were administered after every two units on each level. Students were required to pass each level before moving to the next one. In addition, there were two major mid-level and end-level exams for each level. Given that there were ten units in each level, this meant that testing occurred at the end of units 2, 4, 6, 8 and 10, plus there was a mid-level exam after completion of unit 5 and an end-level exam after completion of unit 10. Students were eligible to move to the next level if they scored at least 4 marks in the end-level exam with no band under 1 and a cumulative score of 5 for the entire level. At the conclusion of each level, the final English proficiency result was made up of a combination of ongoing test results (30%), mid-level test results (30%) and end-level test results (40%). Business students in the two focus group discussions at University 1 commented on the tests and exams as follows:

There were five ongoing tests, a mid-level and an end-level exam for each level. The ongoing tests and the mid-level exam assessed listening, reading and writing skills. The speaking skill was added in the end-level exam. (FG1.1; FG1.2; GS1.1; GS1.2; GF1.1; GF1.2; GF1.3)

Students who failed to meet the assessment requirements had to re-sit the exam until they passed. Once a student passed the Summit 2 exam, they were eligible to enter the Academic English or Business English courses that included academic subjects.

At University 2, the language teachers also administered ongoing tests, mid-level exams and end-level exams to monitor students' progress. One mid-level exam took place after completion of unit 3 and an end-level exam after completion of unit 6. The number of ongoing tests varied depending on the language teacher. There was no mark required for ongoing tests, but students had to pass the mid-level and end-level exams in order to progress to the next level. Business undergraduates at University 2 commented on the English assessments during the focus group discussions as follows:

There were mid-level and end-of-level exams for each level. There might be ongoing test depended on each language teacher. The ongoing tests and mid-level exam assessed writing skill. The speaking skills was added in the end-of-level exams. (FG2.2; GS2.1)

In summary, the General English courses at the two universities differed in terms of curricula, time allocations and assessments. At University 1, the General English course consisted of five levels, using Top Notch 1, 2, 3 and Summit 1 and 2 textbooks, and was delivered in 525 hours over ten months in Year 1; while at University 2, the same course comprised two levels, using World Link 1A and World Link 1B textbooks, and was delivered in 157.5 hours over ten months in Year 1. At University 1 assessments focused on skills associated with listening, speaking, reading and writing; whereas at University 2, assessments emphasised writing and speaking skills.

Year 2 English course for business students at two private universities.

The second year of the English courses in the two universities also differed; University 1 taught Academic English to their business students, while University 2 taught Communicative English. At University 1, the academic year comprised 3 three-month semesters and the Academic English course covered the first two semesters of Year 2. The final semester was devoted to Business English. The course focused on IELTS training and consisted of two parts: the first part, Academic English 1, was undertaken in semester 1 and concentrated on IELTS listening and speaking skills. The textbooks used were from the *Improve Your IELTS* series. The second part, Academic English 2, was taught in semester 2, concentrated on IELTS writing skills and used the same textbook series, *Improve Your IELTS*. Reading skills were not included in the program. Each part consisted of 10 units undertaken in 45 hours over ten weeks and included ongoing tests and an end- level exam, meaning that students learned Academic English in 90 hours over the course of 20 weeks in the first two terms of Year 2. There was no mid-level exam in the Academic English course. Ongoing tests and end-level exams followed an IELTS format. University 1 conducted a test every two weeks to assess students' progress, making up a total of 10 cumulative tests for listening and speaking skills that accounted for 60%, and one end- level exam that accounted for 40% of the marks. One business student commented:

We focused on IELTS listening and speaking skills in the first term, whereas concentrated on writing skills in the second term of Year 2. The tests and exams were designed in the format of IELTS. (FG1.1)

In Year 2, we learnt IELTS in the first two terms and Business English in the last term (GS1.1; GS1.2; GF1.1; GF1.2; GF1.3).

At University 2, the English course in Year 2 was aimed at improving English communication skills for business students, because this was identified as the most important competency for future employment and most of the business students had poor speaking skills. The course consisted of three levels, named after the textbook series selected for the course, namely, World Link 2A, World Link 2B and World Link 3A. Each level comprised six units. The time allocation for World Link 2A (67.5 hours over two months) differed from the time assigned for World Link 2B and World Link 3A (90 hours over four months for each level). Business undergraduates in the focus group discussions at University 2 commented:

The business students studied Communicative English in 247.5 hours over ten months in Year 2. (FG2.1; FG2.2; GS2.1)

English proficiency was assessed in a mid-level exam at completion of unit 3 and an end-level exam at completion of unit 6 for each level in the Communicative English course. The course was aimed at developing students' communication skills and focused on listening and speaking. However, due to the absence of an assessment system at University 2, evaluating students' skills in these exams varied depending on the language teacher. The mid-level exam in World Link 2A tested speaking skills; whereas the end-level exam only assessed grammar. In World Link 2B, both the mid-level and end-level exams focused on either speaking skills or group discussion. The mid-level exam in World Link 3A assessed speaking skills and the end-level exam concentrated on reading and writing skills. Business students at University 2 commented as follows:

The language skills chosen for assessment in the mid-level and the end-of-level exam were varied and depended on each teacher. They were not consistent. (FG2.2)

In summary, the design and time allocations for Year 2 English courses were different at each of the two private universities. University 1 taught Academic English in 90 hours over the first two semesters and Business English in 45 hours in the last semester; while University 2 taught business undergraduates Communicative English in 247.5 hours throughout Year 2.

Year 3 English course for business students at two private universities.

Year 3 of the Business English course at Universities 1 and 2 was designed to not only improve the English proficiency of business students, but also to enhance the use of professional terminology in their fields of business and prepare them for employment in foreign companies. At University 1, Business English was undertaken over four semesters, extending from the third semester of Year 2 to the final semester of Year 3. Each semester incorporated 45 learning hours or 180 hours in total. Just like the General English course, two exams were conducted for each level, a mid-level and end-level exam, in addition to ongoing tests. Both exams focused on listening, reading and writing skills, while the end-level exam also added speaking skills.

The textbooks used in the Business English course were derived from the four levels of the *Market Leader* series: elementary, intermediate, upper intermediate and advanced. They were readily available and purchased directly from the publishing company. University 1 chose this series because it suited the design and purposes of their Business English course. It also included various important skills applicable to most business disciplines and the lessons in the series complied with CLT principles and practices. However, these textbooks were chosen without analysing the needs of the business students and were used for all business-related disciplines.

At University 1, Business English was classified as a subject and taught by English language teachers from the Foreign Language Department. Assigning language teachers to teach Business English had its advantages and disadvantages. The main advantage was that language teachers had expertise in teaching language and an ability to use English as a medium of instruction in lessons, so business students had opportunities to practise English in class. The disadvantage was that language teachers lacked discipline knowledge and therefore had difficulty understanding professional terminologies and explaining them to students. Most students gave positive feedback about the Business English course and indicated that it suited their needs and met their expectations. However, some focus group participants made negative comments about the language teachers' business knowledge and English proficiency. Students' perceptions of the Business English course and language teachers are reflected in the following comments:

The Business English course was useful and meets my expectation.

(FG1.1; GS1.1; GS1.2)

The Market Leader series were used for all business disciplines.
Therefore, we did not find them closely relevant to our discipline. (FG1.2)

The language teachers should have knowledge in the business field to
better teach Business English. (GS1.2)

The language teachers were proficient in English but lacked professional
knowledge. Therefore, they spoke a vague English in the lessons that
students were unclear and unsure to understand. (FG1.1; GS1.2)

Like the English courses in Years 1 and 2, the language teachers who taught Business
English also conducted ongoing tests, mid-level and end-level exams to monitor their
students' progress. Ongoing tests and mid-level exams focused on assessing reading, writing
and reading skills; while speaking skills were added to the end-level exams.

At University 2, the Business English course consisted of two levels: Business
English 1 and Business English 2, designed for completion in five credits over the first
seven months of Year 3. Business English 1 covered the first three credits, and Business
English 2, the final two credits. Each credit entailed 22.5 learning hours, with the entire
course making up a total of 112.5 learning hours. A business undergraduate in the focus
group discussion at University 2 commented as follows:

The Business English course, which comprised Business English 1 and
Business English 2 was implemented over seven months in Year 3.
(FG2.2; GS2.1)

In contrast to University 1 where Business English was viewed as a subject, and
language teachers from the Foreign Language Faculty were responsible for its teaching, at
University 2 it was viewed as a discipline and taught by content teachers in the Economics
and Administration Faculty. These content teachers had total responsibility for the
Business English course, including curricula design, teaching and student assessments.
They prepared the textbooks without analysing the needs of the learners and language
teachers were not involved in the course development. A focus group participant at
University 2 commented:

The content teachers from the Business Faculty taught us Business English. (FG2.2; GS21.)

The content teachers prepared the textbooks for Business English courses. We did not know how the textbooks were prepared. (FG2.1)

Business students cited both advantages and disadvantages in having content teachers teach Business English. A major advantage was that content teachers understood both the professional terminologies and subject content so they were able to explain the meanings to their students. A significant drawback was that content teachers were not trained to teach language, and because their English proficiency was limited, they concentrated on teaching grammar, reading and writing. These limitations hampered content teachers' pronunciation, and as a result, they frequently resorted to using Vietnamese, rather than English, in their lessons. Students confirmed these observations in the following statements:

The content teachers were able to explain most business terminologies. Therefore, we understood the lessons. (FG2.1)

The content teachers made a number of errors in English pronunciation. Therefore, they mainly used Vietnamese in the Business English classes. (FG2.1)

The content teachers focused on teaching reading and writing skills. That might help improve our vocabulary, reading and writing skills but would not help us enhance our communicative competence in business field. (FG2.2; GS2.1)

Most business students had positive things to say about the Business English course because it increased their vocabulary and broadened their range of business terminologies, and it was evident that the content teachers emphasised vocabulary, reading and writing skills. Business students also found the exams beneficial, as they covered the same familiar content they learned in class, allowing them to pass more easily. One student made the following comment:

The exams were designed to assess reading and writing skills only. The assessment questions were relevant with what we had learnt. (FG2.2)

After completing the Business English course in Year 3, a further English course, TOEIC, was undertaken at University 2, with the objective of preparing business students for a final, English graduation exam. In alignment with the National Project requirements, the scores attained in the final exams were used to determine students' eligibility to graduate. The TOEIC course was taught by English language teachers over 45 hours during the final three months of Year 3. Teaching materials were derived from the TOEIC program and its assessment format that focused on listening and reading skills. There were no ongoing tests or mid-level exams. To help students prepare, language teachers provided them with papers and questions to review prior to the exam, so most of them passed and graduated. A student confirmed this practice in the following comment:

The TOEIC exam assessed listening and reading skills. We were provided with relevant documents for reviewing prior to the exam. (FG2.1; FG2.2)

At University 2, students had to score at least 450 points, equivalent to level 3 on the Six Level System, in order to graduate from university or resit the exam:

Business students were required to sit the final exam. The scores gained in this exam were used to determine graduation eligibility of each business student. (FG2.1)

English Teaching Approach at Private Universities

The teaching approaches of language teachers play an important role in English education because they are a strong influencer of teaching effectiveness and the motivation of students, in turn, impacting on their English proficiency. A review of the documents at the two universities revealed there were no specific regulations on teaching approaches to English, so teachers had the flexibility to choose the approach that best suited them, based on their expertise and experience. This resulted in diverse English teaching methods and different perceptions of teaching approaches.

In the focus group discussions at University 1, business undergraduates reported that the language teachers created a friendly and non-threatening learning environment, where students were encouraged to join different activities to improve all their language skills; listening, speaking, reading and writing. Teachers delivered lessons mostly in English and switched to Vietnamese when students did not understand the concepts being taught. English

lessons were based on imported textbooks, and online materials were used to supplement the lessons and make them more interesting and relevant. To further enhance English lessons for students, teachers utilised technology to add a visual component by means of tailored presentations and video clips. A business undergraduate at University 1 commented on teachers' attempts to make lessons enjoyable:

Computer, projector, internet and speakers were used to support English lessons. Teachers provided biscuits and candies to encourage students. All students had much chances to practice English in classrooms. (FG1.1; GS1.1; GS1.2; GF1.1; GF1.3)

To promote communicative practice in the classroom and improve students' communication skills, teachers regularly organised group and pair work to discuss designated topics. Students were encouraged to raise ideas, comment, discuss and provide feedback. Role play and games in the classroom, supported and supervised by the teachers, made English communication more interesting. The following comments indicate students' recognition of their teachers' efforts to promote meaningful practice:

Teachers provided the topics, then students were divided into small groups for discussion, presentation and role play. Games were also applied during the lessons for more fun. (FG1.1; GS1.1)

The current teaching approaches enhanced interaction between students and teacher and between students themselves. (FG1.1; GS1.2)

Students needed as much practise as possible, both inside and outside the classroom, to improve their English communication skills. At University 1, Vietnamese and international students from non-English speaking countries were encouraged to not only practise English, but also explore the cultures of different countries inside and outside the classroom. Business students said:

The English Club and the English Contest were organised at university and we were encouraged to participate to practise and improve our English communication skills as well as learn other cultures. (FG1.2; GS1.1)

The teaching approach of English language teachers at University 1 was perceived positively by business students, who felt comfortable in class and found the lessons interesting. One student expressed it thus:

I did not feel stressed in the English lessons. I believed that the teachers were excellent and very enthusiastic. (FG1.1; GS1.2)

Like University 1, there were no specific instructions for the teaching approach to be used in English lessons at University 2. Business undergraduates at University 2 described the teaching as uninteresting, boring, wordy and stressful. Teachers relied wholly on textbooks and focused on grammar, reading and writing. English lessons were delivered in both English and Vietnamese, and teachers constantly made pronunciation errors. Students were not encouraged to practise their English communication skills, nor did group discussions and pair work feature in their classrooms. Business undergraduates at University 2 made the following comments during the focus group discussions:

The English lessons were not interesting and stressful. Communication practice was almost ignored. (FG2.1)

Most English language teachers used the teaching method as same as at senior high school. It was unpleasant and focused on grammar translation with extremely limited conversation practice. (FG2.2)

At University 2, practising English was not promoted outside the classroom in the form of language clubs, events or contests, and as a result, business students were not confident about their English competency and needing to extend their learning skills at language centres.

In summary, the teachers at the two universities used very different teaching approaches. Teachers at University 1 used a method similar to Communicative Language Teaching, while teachers at University 2 adopted a more traditional Vietnamese approach. Comments from the business undergraduates in the two universities indicated that the approach at University 1 was positively perceived; whereas the approach at University 2 was rather negatively perceived.

English Proficiency Assessment at Private Universities

University 1 developed a set of criteria for assessing each English language skill. To evaluate listening and reading skills, students answered computer-generated questions in multiple-choice and matching-answer-to-question formats. Writing assessments addressed genre structure, grammar, choice of vocabulary and cohesion, as well as the relevance of content and ideas to the set task. A combination of panel and group discussions and individual interviews were used to evaluate speaking skills. In the speaking session, a group of four or five students selected a card on which was written a topic for discussion. The group had three minutes to prepare before discussing the topic for around five minutes, while the teacher observed each student's contribution. Following the group discussion, students individually selected a different topic on which they were required to speak to the teacher-examiner for around five minutes. Speaking assessments comprised a combination of the two tests, both marked according to fluency, coherence, cohesion, accuracy and vocabulary, during which the teacher-examiner made notes based on his or her perceptions of how well the students met these criteria. In group tests, students were additionally assessed on their contribution to the discussion, their interaction with other group members and how well they observed the rules of courtesy and turn taking. In the individual tests, they were assessed on content and the logical expression of ideas.

University 1 used a scale from 1-10 to mark students. To pass an assessment and move to the next level, students needed to score at least five in cumulative tests and four in the end-of-term exam. At University 2 there was no unified assessment system or specific criteria for assessing students' English proficiency, and language teachers had the flexibility to decide what assessment methods they used. In the General English course, writing skills were evaluated in ongoing tests and mid-level exams, with speaking skills added to the end-level exam. In the Communicative English course, there were no ongoing tests and the skills assessed in the mid-level and end-level exams varied depending on the language teacher, creating significant disparities. In the Business English course, there were no ongoing tests and reading and writing skills were assessed in mid-level and end-level exams. The TOEIC course only employed an end-level exam to test listening and reading skills in the TOEIC format, with the results determining business students' eligibility to graduate in accordance with National Project guidelines.

The reading exam required business students to read and record a passage that was then submitted to the teacher for evaluating pronunciation. The writing assessment addressed several criteria, such as genre structure, grammar, vocabulary, cohesion and relevance of the contents to the task. A combination of panel and individual interviews was used to assess listening and speaking skills: panel interviews evaluated listening and speaking in the final exam, while individual interviews assessed listening and speaking skills in the mid-level and end-level exams. In the panel sessions, a group of interviewers comprised of language teachers took turns to interview each student; and in the individual interviews, the language teacher conducted a face-to-face interview with each student. Both listening and speaking skills were marked according to comprehensive and sufficient understanding of the interview questions; accuracy of answers, fluency, vocabulary, coherence and cohesion.

Business students who went through the English courses at the two universities provided feedback for teachers and institutions to better understand the needs of their customers and end users, as well as the effectiveness of the English courses in meeting labour market demands.

Business Students' Perceptions of the English Courses

While the ongoing tests and exams informed the university and language teachers about the strengths and weaknesses of the English programs, the perceptions of the business students who undertook these courses provided useful feedback about the language teachers, their teaching approach and other factors that influenced the teaching and learning of English, including ICT support, facilities and the environment.

The focus group discussions with business students from the two universities revealed different perceptions of the English courses at each institution. At University 1, approximately 80% of business students perceived the English programs positively; they found them useful, suitable for their needs and helped to improve their English proficiency. The high proficiency levels of the language teachers, friendly learning environment, engaging teaching approach and relaxed lessons with games and candy also contributed to students' positive perceptions. The following comments reflect the perceptions of students at University 1:

The English courses were effective because they improved our English proficiency and professional knowledge. (FG1.1)

The English courses at the university were well designed and suited my needs. I was confident with my English proficiency at the end of tertiary education and passed the employment interview. (GS1.1)

The English courses were good and helped us improve our academic and business English proficiency. (GS1.2)

However, approximately 20% of business students had negative perceptions of the English courses. Several indicated that the English courses did not satisfy their learning needs and required modification. Reasons for negative perceptions were insufficient learning hours in Year 1; low English proficiency attained at the end of Year 1; unmodified imported curricula; the gap between different levels of the General English course; and incompatibility between lessons and exams with regard to reading and listening skills. A business student at University 1 stated:

The English courses were not as effective as expected. They did not satisfy nor meet our needs. (FG1.1; FG1.2; GF1.1)

Some students commented that the number of learning hours in Year 1 was insufficient and should be increased. English was the only subject they were required to learn in Year 1 for three hours a day, either in the morning or afternoon, so new students had plenty of free time to spend socially interacting with friends in their dormitories. In the words of the students:

We learnt English three hours a day in Year 1. We had too much free time. (FG1.1; GS1.2)

It was much better if the time for learning English increased from 3 hours to 4 or 5 hours and English classes were arranged in both morning and afternoon. (FG1.2)

It was necessary to increase learning time in Year 1 because the learners had more chances to practise English inside and outside the classroom. (FG1.2)

Business students were disappointed with their English proficiency after completing Summit 2 at the end of Year 1. They were led to believe they would attain IELTS 6.0 proficiency at this level, and would be able to learn discipline subjects in English and go on to

learning Business English and Academic English in subsequent years. However, several business students believed their English proficiency was below the prescribed level, somewhere between IELTS 4.0 and 5.5, as reflected in the following comments:

We were told that our English proficiency level was at IELTS 6.0 when we completed the Summit 2 level. However, our proficiency level was around 4.0 to 5.0 IELTS. (FG1.1; GS1.2; GF1.2; GF1.3)

I took an IELTS exam after passing Summit 2 level exam and my score was 5.5. I believed that we were unable to attain IELTS 6.0 when we completed Summit 2 as stated by the university. (FG1.2)

I sat an IELTS exam in the third year and my score was 4.5. (FG1.2; GF1.3)

This disparity between the university's English assessment and the IELTS assessment system created negative perceptions of the English courses. Students reported that some of the language teachers had lower expectations than the university requirements and awarded higher scores to help business students pass the exams. Consequently, many students who passed the Summit 2 exam did not achieve the expected 6.0 score in the IELTS exam, as acknowledged in these comments during the focus group discussions:

Marking at university was obviously different from IELTS. We got very high scores at university exams but obtained low scores at IELTS exam. The proficiency requirements of the two systems were dissimilar. (FG1.2)

I believed the English courses at university were easier than IELTS programs. It meant the English certificate of university was less qualified than IELTS certificate. (FG1.2)

In the writing tests, we only needed to write about the topics correctly, then we got high scores. I thought teachers were easy in marking. (FG1.2)

Several business students were required to re-sit the Summit 2 exam many times. Therefore, the teachers finally let them pass the exam by giving them more scores. (FG1.1)

Several students who re-sat the exams finally passed even they did not complete the exam well (GS1.1; GF1.2; GF1.3)

There were several complaints about the imported curricula used to teach English at University 1. Some business students claimed the material needed modification; others felt that using one curriculum for all business-related disciplines was inappropriate. They believed that using imported curricula and irrelevant textbooks for the Business English program hindered their motivation and progress. The following comments illustrate these views:

The imported curricula should be modified to suit the needs of students and Vietnamese culture. (FG1.2; GS1.1; GS1.2; GF1.1)

There was only one Business English curriculum for all business-related disciplines. Therefore, the curriculum did not really match the business subjects. (FG1.2; GF1.3)

Business students also complained about the gap in difficulty between the different levels of the General English course. The majority of the focus group participants agreed that the first level, Top Notch 1, was easy and that the gradual increase in difficulty from Top Notch 1 to Top Notch 3 was reasonable. However, between Top Notch 3 and Summit 1 there was a significant increase in difficulty, and students who passed Top Notch 3 found Summit 1 too difficult. Such an enormous gap discouraged them from learning English, as reported:

The level of difficulty between Top Notch 3 and Summit 1 was significantly different. It was too hard to learn English at Summit 1 level. (FG1.1, FG1.2; GF1.2; GF1.3)

The reading and listening of the Summit 1 were much more difficult than those of Top Notch 3. We were scared of listening and reading at Summit 1 level. (FG1.2)

The listening at Summit 1 was much more difficult than at Top Notch 3. It was too fast to listen. (FG1.2; GF1.1)

A further factor that generated negative perceptions was the misalignment between what they learned in class and the material assessed in the tests and exams. Students agreed that the writing and speaking assessments were compatible, but complained that the reading and listening assessments were significantly different from what they learned in English lessons, citing this as the reason for their low scores in these skills. According to them:

The topics in the reading tests and exams were not familiar with what we learnt in the English lessons. That was the reason why we got low scores in the tests and exams for this skill. (FG1.1)

Similar to the reading skill, the listening skill assessment was significantly different from topics we learnt. They were too difficult to complete the tests and exams for this skill. (FG1.1; GF1.2; GF1.3)

In the English lessons from Top Notch 3 to Summit 2 levels, the reading and listening were at basic level. However, those skills in the exams were at advanced level. (FG1.2)

Likewise, students' perceptions of the English courses at University 2 differed. Approximately 30% of business students had positive perceptions of the English courses and believed they were effective in achieving their objectives. The following responses reflect this view:

The English courses fulfilled our objectives. They helped improve our English proficiency. (FG2.1; GS2.1)

I believed the English courses were fine. Just depend on each student perception. (FG2.1)

In contrast to University 1, where the number of business students who negatively perceived the English courses accounted for 20% of the cohort, the proportion of business students who negatively perceived the English courses at University 2 was much higher at around 70%. Several students claimed that the English courses did not meet their needs. Other reasons for their negative perceptions included: English courses were simple, boring and lengthy; English lessons at different levels were similar; the traditional teaching approach with focus on grammar, reading and writing skills; low English proficiency levels of the language teachers; crowded English classes with little chance to practise English; the exam-oriented learning style; unaligned English lessons and assessments; and generous marks for assessments. The following comment illustrates:

The English courses were not appropriate and did not meet our needs. (FG2.2)

Students reported that the English courses were asynchronous, lengthy and boring, possibly because the General English course at University 2 was similar to the English program in senior high school. They indicated that English lessons in World Link 1A and World Link 1B were similar in terms of content, assessments and a focus on grammar, reading and writing skills, leading students to perceive the English programs as disjointed, lengthy and boring. The following comments illustrate:

We spent the first two years to learn again what we had learnt at senior high school. (FG2.2)

We expected the English lessons of the World Link 1B were higher and more difficult than the lessons of the World Link 1A. However, the lessons of two courses were almost similar. (FG2.2; GS2.1)

The English programs were not appropriate and lengthy. The general English course was boring, but we had to learn to move to the next levels. (FG2.1; FG2.2)

According to the business students, not only were the English lessons at different levels of the General English course similar, but so too were many of the lessons in Years 1 and 2 Communicative English. This caused them to lose interest as the significant amount of repetitive material failed to engage them:

The English lessons in second year was almost similar to those in the first year. Around 80% to 90% similarity. (FG2.2)

The Communicative English course in Year 2 was designed to enhance business students' communication skills, but rather than concentrating on listening and speaking skills, the lessons focused on reading and writing since they comprised the majority of exam assessments. This disparity between the purpose and practice of the Communicative English course at University 2 led students to believe that the main purpose of the program was to pass the examination rather than improving their English. These perceptions are evident in the following comments:

The purpose of the English courses was to help students pass the exams. (FG2.1)

Basically, English courses at university aimed to help students pass the exams. Our English proficiency was not improved because what we studied here already had learnt at senior high school. (FG2.2)

Another factor that hindered practice and caused negative perceptions was that English classes were overcrowded, with between 30 and 35 students in each class. One student stated:

There were 30 to 35 students in each English class. We did not have much opportunity to practise English in the classroom. (FG2.2; GS2.1)

At University 2, Business English was viewed as a discipline and taught by content teachers from the Economics and Administration Faculty. On the one hand, these teachers were professionals in their business fields and therefore understood the content of their lessons and were able to explain the terminologies, but on the other, they lacked expertise and experience in teaching language and had limited English proficiency. As a result, they tended to focus on grammar, reading and writing skills and frequently used Vietnamese rather than English in class, so practicing English communication was practically non-existent. Business students expressed their views as follows:

The business content teachers taught Business English. They mostly focused on grammar, reading and writing rather than communication. (FG2.1; GS2.1)

I expected to improve my communicative competence. However, communication in the Business English lessons was almost ignored. (FG2.2)

The content teachers used more Vietnamese than English in the Business English class to deliver the lessons. (FG2.2)

The teaching approaches in English lessons appeared to strongly influence the perceptions of the business students. At University 2, no specific regulations existed and teachers had the flexibility to use whatever teaching approach they believed was best. Comments from the students indicated that the language teachers who taught General English, Communicative English and TOEIC courses mainly focused on grammar translation, reading and writing skills, and used traditional methods of teaching. This

approach ignored listening and speaking skills and was a causal factor for business students' poor English communication skills. Students made the following comments:

The teaching approach was uninteresting, stressful, boring and wordy. Teachers relied on the textbooks to read and translate the lessons. The communication practice was ignored. (FG2.1)

Most teachers, including the language and content teachers, used traditional and unpleasant teaching approach. Teaching method predominantly concentrated on grammar translation with extremely limited conversation practice. (FG2.2; GS2.1)

Business students reported that communication practice was ignored in lessons because the teachers had limited English proficiency. Several teachers were unable to deliver lessons in fluent English and used Vietnamese predominantly in their classrooms. Consequently, there were limited opportunities for business students to practise and improve their English. One student commented:

The English language teachers who teach General English were not able to pronounce English correctly in the English lessons. (FG2.1)

For many students, English was merely a compulsory subject that enabled them to pass the exam and there was no other motivation for them to learn the language. This comment from a focus group participant at University 2 illustrates:

My purpose of learning English was to pass exams. I believed most of my classmates had the same purpose. (FG2.1)

Students appeared not to recognise the role of English and its impact on their employability until their final year of tertiary education when they took up internships in foreign companies. They were insufficiently prepared at university and some planned to improve their English after graduation at language centres. They stated:

We did not recognise the influence of English on the employability until the final year when we prepared to apply for employment in foreign company. (FG2.1)

I did not have time to improve English competence because it was too late to do at the end of tertiary education. I would continue to learn at a language centre. (FG2.2)

Another factor that impacted the perceptions of business students was the lack of a consistent English assessment system. Due to the absence of a unified assessment system in University 2, the language teachers used an array of different methods to assess their students' English proficiency, casting doubt on the reliability of the process, as indicated in the following comment:

The contents of the tests in World Link 1A and World Link 1B were similar. We expected the tests for World Link 1B were more difficult than the tests for World Link 1A. (FG2.1)

In the Communicative English course, lessons covered different skills to those assessed in tests and exams, further discouraging students from learning English. One commented:

In the second year, the Communicative English course focused on developing communication skills; however, the reading and writing skills were selected for assessment in the ongoing tests and the exams. (FG2.2)

The only end-level exam in the TOEIC English program was also the final exam. The percentage of students who passed the final exam and graduated from university impacted the ranking of teacher quality, as well as the reputation and position of the university on an annual ranking list. Therefore, to enhance their final results, language teachers provided their students with practice papers prior to the final exam, raising questions about whether their results were an accurate reflection of students' English proficiency. One student explained:

Before the TOEIC exam, students were provided with the documents for preparation. We just needed to read them entirely and follow the instructions, then we were able to pass the exam. (FG2.2)

As a result of such practices, several business graduates who passed the final exam and graduated were not sufficiently confident in their English proficiency to seek

employment in foreign companies. In some cases, students who achieved high scores in the TOEIC exam were unable to communicate fluently in English. One student commented:

Business graduates passed the final exam but failed to meet the foreign employer's expectations. That was the reason why several students who achieved 700-800 score in the TOECI exam failed in the job interview.

(FG2.1)

In the focus group discussions, business students reported seeking employment in foreign companies because they offered professional working environments, attractive remuneration and a greater likelihood of training and promotion. It was therefore important to investigate the recruitment processes of foreign companies to determine whether they were in harmony with the aspirations of students and to inform the design and delivery of congruent English programs.

Business Students' Perceptions of Employment in Foreign Companies

The National Project introduced by the Vietnamese government stemmed from a desire for economic prosperity and stressed the importance of learning English to ensure that graduating students were prepared for employment in foreign companies. The policy assumed that students would achieve English language proficiency if they learned English in a conducive, modern environment, supported by enthusiastic, proficient language teachers who understood how to apply effective teaching strategies, coupled with well-designed programs supported by ICT, specifically targeted at preparing students for future study and employment.

The focus group discussions explored these assumptions. Business students were asked about their work preferences and why they chose to work in either foreign or local companies. They were also asked whether they believed English was important for achieving success in their chosen field of work and whether their English language proficiency was adequate for that work. If they judged their English proficiency to be inadequate, they were asked why they thought this was the case.

At University 1, eight out of 11 business student participants wished to obtain employment in a foreign company upon graduation. Of the remaining three, one student wanted to first work in a private company to acquire more work experience before working in a foreign company. The mother of a second student had secured work for her in a government office, and a third student chose to work in the family business. The main reasons for wanting

to work in foreign companies were their reputation for dynamism, professionalism, attractive remuneration and opportunities to work with foreign colleagues; a greater likelihood of promotion; and enhancement of professional knowledge. The following comments illustrate:

I wished to work in foreign companies because they offered competitive remuneration, professional and good working environment, and opportunity to travel as well. (FG1.1; FG1.2; GS1.1)

I preferred working at foreign companies because I would have more chances to practice English, to work with foreign colleagues, and had more training that help enrich my professional knowledge. (FG1.1; FG1.2)

I would start working at private companies to enrich my working expertise and experience before applying for employment at foreign companies. (FG1.2; GF1.2)

Similarly, the majority of business students at University 2 (seven out of 11) wished to work in foreign companies upon graduation. Of the remaining four, two students wanted to first work in a local finance company or bank to gain more work experience, and another chose to start working in a local private company to improve her skills and experience before working in a foreign company. The fourth student wanted to work in the import-export sector where her sister was also employed. The main reasons for choosing to work in foreign companies were their reputation for being dynamic, professional working environments that provided good training opportunities, high salaries and opportunities to work with colleagues from different cultural backgrounds. The students commented:

I wished to work for foreign company because I would have chances to learn and improve my qualification. (FG2.1; FG2.2; GS2.1)

I preferred working in a foreign company. However, I would start working at a local private company to acquire more working experience before applying for job in a foreign company. (FG2.2)

I would start working in an import-export company where my sister was working. This company required high level of English proficiency. (FG2.1)

In response to questions about the importance of English, most participants acknowledged a role for those who chose to work in foreign companies where English was the common working language. They said:

I thought English proficiency was the minimum mandatory requirement to apply for employment in foreign companies. (FG1.2, FG2.2; GS1.1; GS1.2; GF1.1; GF2.1)

I believed to have more chances for promotion, further study and higher salary if I acquired high level of English proficiency. (FG1.1; FG1.2; GS1.2; GS2.1)

In judging the adequacy of their English proficiency, several students claimed they were motivated to learn English as a means of improving their chances of gaining employment, while others were unclear about whether English proficiency was necessary. As evidenced by the following comments, the more motivated students made use of additional, creative methods to improve their English, and others admitted they only learned English as a means of passing the exam:

I practised English by listening to the music, watching films in English without subtitle. (FG1.1)

I got a part-time job where English was used to communicate. Therefore, I had more chances to practise my English. (FG1.1)

I improved my native English accent and pronunciation by watching and practising English on YouTube. (FG1.1)

I participated in the language clubs regularly where I met and chatted with my friends in English. (FG1.2)

The English certificate provided by the university was not widely accepted by other institutions or employers. Therefore, I learnt English just to pass the exams. (FG1.2)

Although some business students thought they would need to continue improving their English, most believed their level of proficiency was sufficient for employment in foreign companies:

I thought my English proficiency met the employment requirements.
(FG1.1; GS1.1)

I thought it depended on the requirement of the company where we would apply for employment. However, I believed that we were proficient in English communication. (FG1.2)

My discipline was marketing and I was proficient in English to work in this field at foreign companies. (FG1.2; GS1.2)

However, the following statements show that some business students were doubtful about the adequacy of their English proficiency levels for employment in a foreign company at completion of their tertiary education:

It depended on each student, however, I thought I was not proficient enough to work in an English-speaking company. (FG1.1;)

I was not confident with my current English proficiency (FG1.1).

In their final academic year at university, all business students undertook an internship to improve their practical knowledge and acquire work experience. This exposed them to the recruitment and selection processes used by foreign companies and the relevant knowledge and skills required to submit an appropriate application. The following comments illustrate the understanding they acquired:

I thought each company had its own recruitment and selection process. For example, the banks in Vietnam normally designed multiple-round interviews. After each round, more tests and interviews would be added.
(FG1.1)

I thought after the application was shortlisted, the interviews were followed to complete several tests. (FG1.1)

The foreign companies had very high requirements. Firstly, they marked the Curriculum Vitae (CV). Then they tested all relevant skills. Finally, an interview conducted to overall evaluate the candidates. (FG1.2)

The interviewers would require interviewees to self-introduce, asked about working point of view, then tested relevant competences and logical thinking. (FG1.1)

The understanding of the business undergraduates about the recruitment and selection processes at foreign companies helps them proactively prepare for the future interviews and tasks in the recruitment and selection process at foreign companies. The following comments from business graduates who sought employment at foreign companies and the recruiting agent consolidated the above understanding of business undergraduates about the recruitment and selection processes:

The recruitment and selection process at foreign companies consisted of employment application, shortlisting, interview(s), group work and presentation (depend on the position and company), and probation. (GS1.1, GS2.1; GF1.2)

The recruitment and selection process comprised employment application, shortlisting, interview(s), field work and presentation (depend on the position and company), and probation. (GS1.1, GF1.1; GF1.3)

At foreign companies, the recruitment and selection process normally started with employment application, application shortlisting, interviews, completing reading and writing tasks and other tasks as required. (RA)

Further comments on the internship reflected the importance of English proficiency as an indispensable skill for all applicants to succeed in interviews, as indicated by the following comments:

I thought all test and interview rounds would be conducted in English. (FG1.2)

I thought it depended on each position and each company requirement. Some positions in foreign company did not require English, but other positions required high English level. (FG1.2)

I thought the foreign companies required employees to have good English proficiency level first, then other necessary skills. (FG1.1)

Foreign companies tested applicants' employment competencies and English proficiency was the most important one. (FG1.1)

The role of English in the recruitment and selection processes at foreign companies was affirmed by the business graduates who sought employment at foreign companies by the following comments:

English was the only language used in the recruitment and selection process, including CV, interviews, topic writing, reading comprehension, and during the probation. (GS1.1; GS1.2; GF1.3)

English was the main language used for application, interviews, reading and writing tasks. Vietnamese was used in case the candidates were not able to communicate technical terminologies in English (GS2.1).

Finding summary

The findings from this chapter answered the first research question on how the English courses at private universities had been implemented in response to the requirements of the National Project to prepare business graduates for employment in foreign companies in Vietnam. The research results indicated that both private universities in the study had implemented the English programs to prepare business students for employment as mandated by the National Project. However, due to a lack of specific guidance from MOET on English education programs at higher education, each private university had implemented their English program using its own strategy and differently from each other.

The English programs at two private universities consisted of different courses aimed at improving from basic communication in English, to academic English, to English for specific purpose. These English courses were taught in the first three years at university following a placement test. While the general English courses took place in the first year, the academic and communication English courses were conducted in the second year. The English for Business courses were placed in the third year to ensure business students were able to understand the English lessons with specialised terminologies and communications.

In the first year, the students at University 1 spent most of the time learning English only whereas the students at University 2 learnt English together with other subjects. Therefore, the learning time on English at University 1 was longer than at University 2. Consequently, the students from University 1 were more competent in English than their peers at University 2 at the end of the first year at university. The findings also showed that the time for English study during the first three years at University 1 was nearly half as much again at University 2. Consequently, business students in the final year at University 1 had greater opportunity for learning English than business students at University 2.

The English curricula at the two participating private universities were typically prepared by and imported from a native English-speaking country. These imported textbooks were used to teach students without any modification, therefore, several students claimed that the irrelevant content and culture in the English lessons hindered them from learning English effectively. Moreover, in the English for Business courses at both private universities, one English for Business textbook was used to teach all business-related disciplines such as business administration, finance, accounting which did not serve the students' learning purposes well.

The English teaching approach used at each private university was different. The findings showed that the English language teachers at University 1 were responsible for teaching English including English for Business course; whereas, at University 2, English language teachers were in charge of teaching general, communication, and TOIEC English courses, and the business teachers taught English for Business course. The finding also indicated that the English language teachers at University 1 employed a CLT-like approach by using authentic materials from different sources, in addition to the textbooks, to enrich the English lessons. English communication was promoted in the English lessons with ICT aid in pair work, group discussion, and role play. In contrast, the English language teachers at University 2 used the traditional teaching approach in the English lessons which focused on improving vocabulary and grammar rather than communication. The absence of authentic materials, the aid of ICT, and the communication practice in the class prevented students from improving their communication skills.

Finally, the English proficiency assessment systems at the two private universities were different. University 1 developed its own assessment system with a set of criteria for assessing each English language skill; whereas, University 2 had no unified assessment system or

specific criteria for assessing students' English proficiency, and language teachers were able to decide what assessment methods they used. As a result, English proficiency assessments from beginning of Year 1 to the end of Year 3 were consistent and the assessment results were reliable at University 1. In contrast, different assessment methods conducted by the language teachers and business teachers who taught Business English at University 2 resulted in a lower standard of outcomes which led to student complaints.

Chapter Summary

Chapter 5 examined the English programs designed and implemented by two private universities in response to government policy on foreign language teaching and learning to prepare business students for employment in a globalised economy.

A description of the English programs, their design and delivery, as well as the assessment of students' progress in ongoing tests, mid-level and end-level exams were provided. The perceptions of business students who undertook these programs, the recruitment and selection processes used in foreign companies and the importance of English in these processes, and the answer to the first research question were also described.

The next chapter investigates the recruitment and selection processes in two foreign service companies in Vietnam, as well as the role of English, the level of English proficiency required by these employers and the assessment methods they used. Other factors that influenced the employment of students, such as English accent and the employers' perceptions of business graduates' English proficiency are also elaborated.

CHAPTER SIX: ENGLISH PROFICIENCY: REQUIREMENTS OF THE FOREIGN SERVICE COMPANIES IN VIETNAM

This chapter reports on the findings related to service companies in Vietnam offering intangible skills and services to clients in the form of financial, transportation and auditing services. Since service businesses rely on the quality of the interactions between their employees and customers, and ultimately the satisfaction of their clients, it is essential that recruitment strategies are designed in a way that ensures the people they employ have the appropriate skills and personal qualities to deliver the standards of excellence upon which the success of the company depends. Two service companies from foreign countries participated in this research: the first was a transportation company (hereafter referred to as Company A) and the second, a financial services company (hereafter referred to as Company B).

Management Structure of Foreign Service Company A

Company A originated in the US and had been providing transportation services in Vietnam since July 2014. At the time of the interviews, its head office, located in Ho Chi Minh City, employed 35 staff, and another representative office in Hanoi employed an additional 30 staff. Interviews with the employers were conducted at the representative office in Hanoi.

The executive team included the general manager, the director of operations and the director of marketing. These three executives were responsible for oversight of all operations in Ho Chi Minh City and Hanoi. Figure 6.1 shows the organisational structure of the company and the staff responsible for recruitment and selection of new employees. As illustrated, each office had a layer of middle managers who specialised in areas such as marketing for acquisition and growth, community operations and logistics. Each manager supervised a team responsible for their designated business activities. Junior positions, such as business development associates, marketing associates and operations associates were tasked with daily business activities. According to the company's HR manager, junior positions were suited to new graduates and required professional knowledge, work experience acquired through internships, English competency and computer skills.

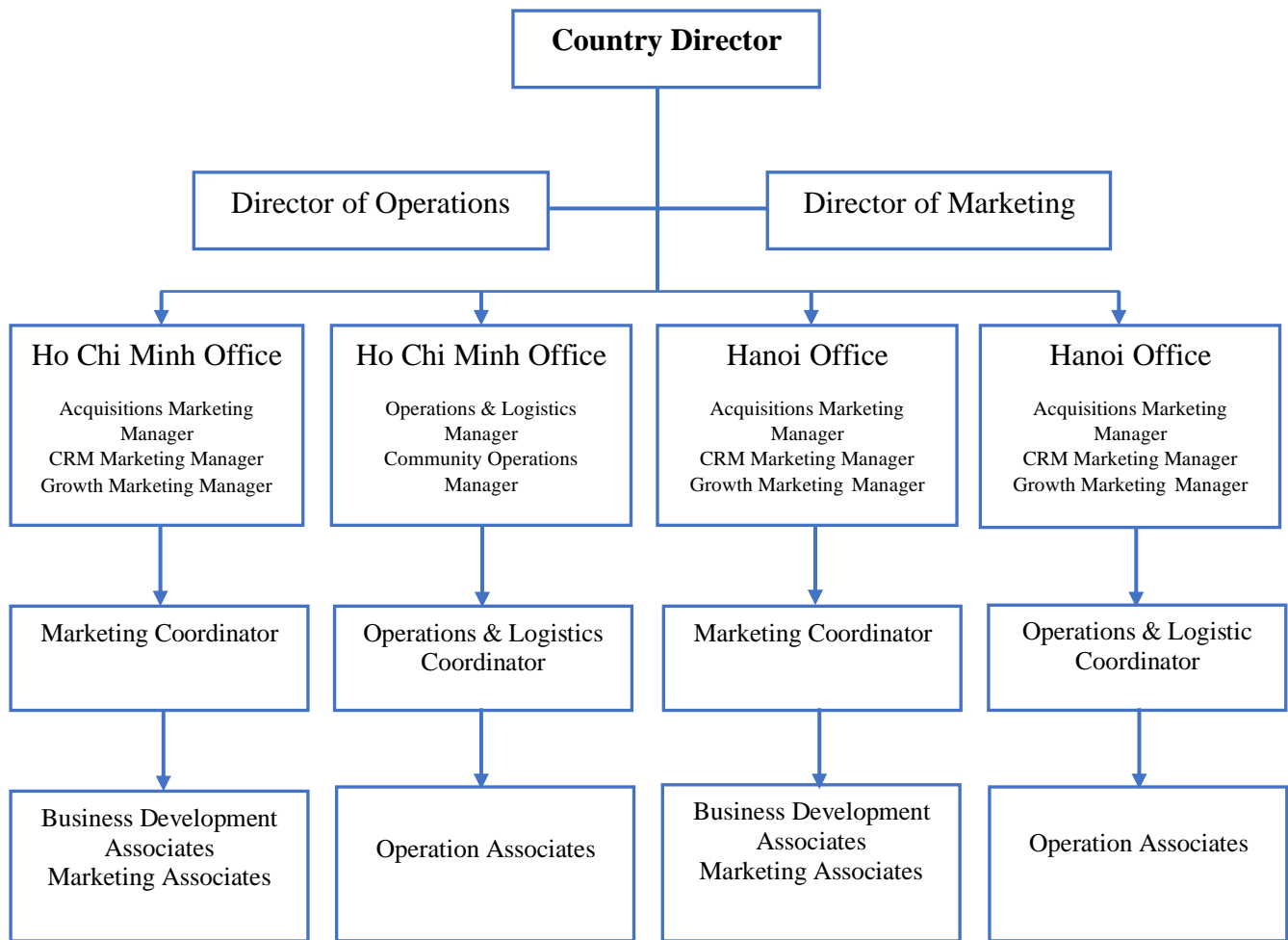


Figure 6.1 Organisational Chart of Company A. Structural diagram provided by the company on June 2, 2016

Management Structure of Foreign Service Company B

Company B provided financial services and had its headquarters in Singapore. Its head office in Hanoi was still in the process of being set up at the time of the interview. A total of 15 staff were employed by the company, offering creative and sustainable financial solutions for managing financial flows securely and effectively.

The organisational structure of Company B is shown in Figure 6.2. The executive team comprised a general director and deputy general director who were Singaporean and Vietnamese respectively, each responsible for operations and staff management of a designated section. Junior staff in the company carried out daily operations, including administration, financial analyses, insurance and human resources.

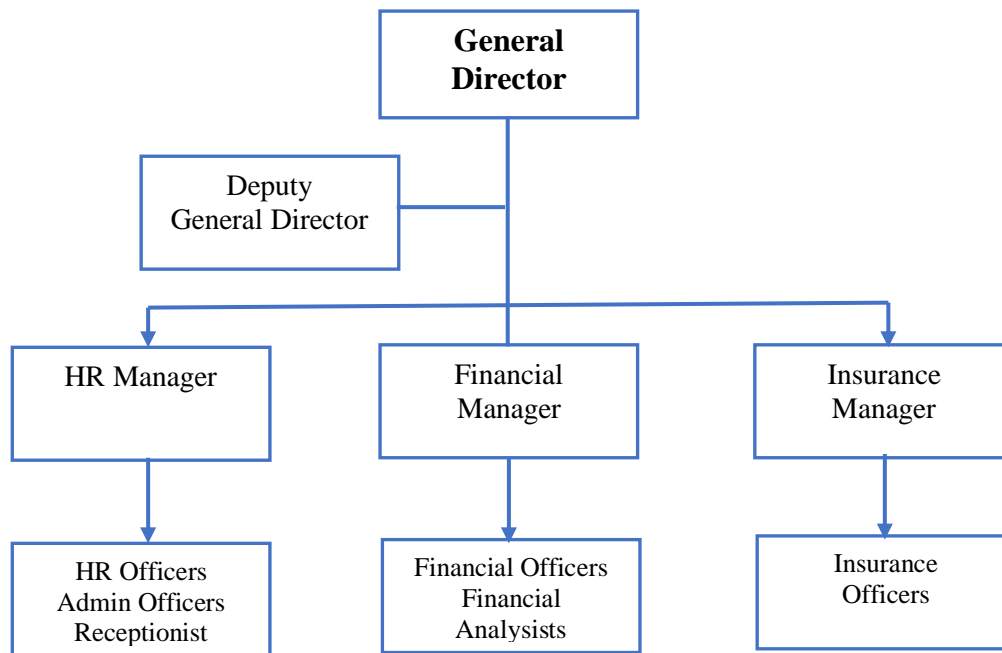


Figure 6.2 Organisational Chart of Company B

The recruitment and selection processes of the two service companies involved in the study were investigated to identify the levels of English proficiency they required and the assessment methods they used to judge the English proficiency of prospective employees.

Recruitment and Selection Processes in the Foreign Service Companies

Recruitment and selection processes are important influencers of success for service companies, so they were methodically investigated in the service companies that participated in this study. Senior managers advised that the manager and coordinator of the relevant business unit typically conferred about vacant job descriptions and jointly prepared advertisements. Various channels were used to advertise the position to the widest possible audience to obtain the highest number of applications. This differed from the traditional method that usually involved the HR manager. The acquisition marketing manager explained:

The line manager and coordinator were responsible for job description preparation and publishing. (AE2)

To capture the largest audience, Company A used both online and offline channels for advertising employment positions. The acquisition marketing manager stated:

Online channels consisted of company websites, Facebook, Instagram, Facebook Groups, internships, professional recruitment websites and

recruitment newspapers. (AE2)

Offline channels comprised Career Fairs at universities, events sponsored by the company and referrals from current staff in the company to their relatives and friends. (AE2)

Company A accepted both online and offline job applications. An online application template was available on the company's website, while candidates who attended university and company events were provided with hard copy application forms. In the words of the acquisition marketing manager:

To increase convenience for employment application submission, the online and offline forms were designed and made available for interested candidates to provide required information such as background, skills, work experience and working purpose. (AE2, RA)

The online and offline applications were screened and reviewed by the manager responsible against the selection criteria. The same manager drew up a shortlist of applicants and divided them into two groups: qualified and nearly qualified. Qualified candidates met all the requirements and were summarily invited for interviews. If the number of qualified candidates was deemed insufficient, the group of nearly qualified candidates, who met most but not all the requirements, were contacted to complete an assignment. Those who passed the assignment were also invited for an interview. The manager and graduates reported:

Screened candidates were classed as "qualified" and "nearly qualified".

The "qualified" candidates were invited for the interview, whereas the "nearly qualified" candidates were required to complete an assignment prior to the interview. (AE2, GS2)

Different strategies were used to assess the suitability of candidates depending on the requirements of the position such as professional knowledge, working experience, logical thinking, emotional quotient (EQ), and soft skills. For example, a brand ambassador position required candidates to participate in a field marketing exercise prior to the interviews, where success was measured by demonstration of sale and marketing skills, effective communication strategy, knowledge of service product and the number of customers who registered to use the company's service. This was described by the manager and graduates:

The ambassador candidates were required to complete a field marketing exercise on the street. They needed to find and persuade potential customers to register and use the company's services. (AE2, GS1, GS2, GS3)

Candidates who passed the field exercise were invited to attend an interview. For junior positions there were normally two rounds of interviews, with the addition of a third if there was uncertainty about a candidate's suitability. To verify their capabilities candidates were interviewed by the team leader in the first round and by the line manager in the second. If the team leader and line manager were unable to reach a consensus about the applicant's suitability, a third interview was organised for team members to interview the candidate. After the third round of interviews, a team meeting chaired by the line manager concluded the decision-making process, described as follows by the acquisition marketing manager:

There were two or three interview rounds for junior staff based on the confidence rating of each round. If the decision was not made after the first two rounds, the third round was added to finalise. (AE2)

The probation period for junior positions at Company A was normally three months followed by an assessment. Candidates who successfully completed probation transitioned to permanent employment in the company.

Unlike Company A that was already fully established in Vietnam, Company B had not yet completed setting up its business operations at the time of the interview. This meant that not all positions in the company had been filled. At Company B, the HR manager typically conferred with line managers and general directors to prepare an annual personnel plan based on the company's expansion and business developments. The HR manager stated:

Based on the annually approved personnel plan, the HR manager and the line managers prepared job descriptions for each vacant position for approval by the general director. (BE)

To obtain the widest pool of applicants, online and offline channels were used for job advertisements. Online channels included the company's website, websites of head-hunting companies and other mass media. Offline channels comprised referrals by existing staff to their friends and families. Applications were usually screened and shortlisted after a month of

advertising. At Company B, applicants were categorised as qualified or unqualified and only qualified candidates were invited for an interview. For junior positions there were three rounds of interviews; the first was conducted by the HR manager to assess relevant knowledge, skills, character, long-term goals and the applicants' fit with the organisational culture. The HR manager set up face-to-face or distance interviews via telephone or Skype at the candidates' convenience. Unlike Company A, professional knowledge and work experience were not considered in the first interview, as verified by the HR manager at Company B:

Shortlisted candidates were invited for the first interview with the HR manager either face-to-face or by telephone. During the first interview, general knowledge, skills, character and long-term goals of interviewees were assessed. (BE)

Candidates who passed the first interview were invited to a second interview with the line manager, who assessed professional expertise, work experience and other associated skills. The HR manager elaborated:

In the second interview with the line manager, the professional expertise, work experience and other relevant skills were examined. (BE)

Candidates who passed the second interview attended a final interview with the general director to assess their suitability against the selection criteria for the final selection. The successful applicant attended an orientation session and served a probation period before transitioning to permanent employment. A writing test did not form part of the selection process for all junior positions; only administrative and secretarial positions. Figure 6.3 illustrates the recruitment and selection processes in Companies A and B.

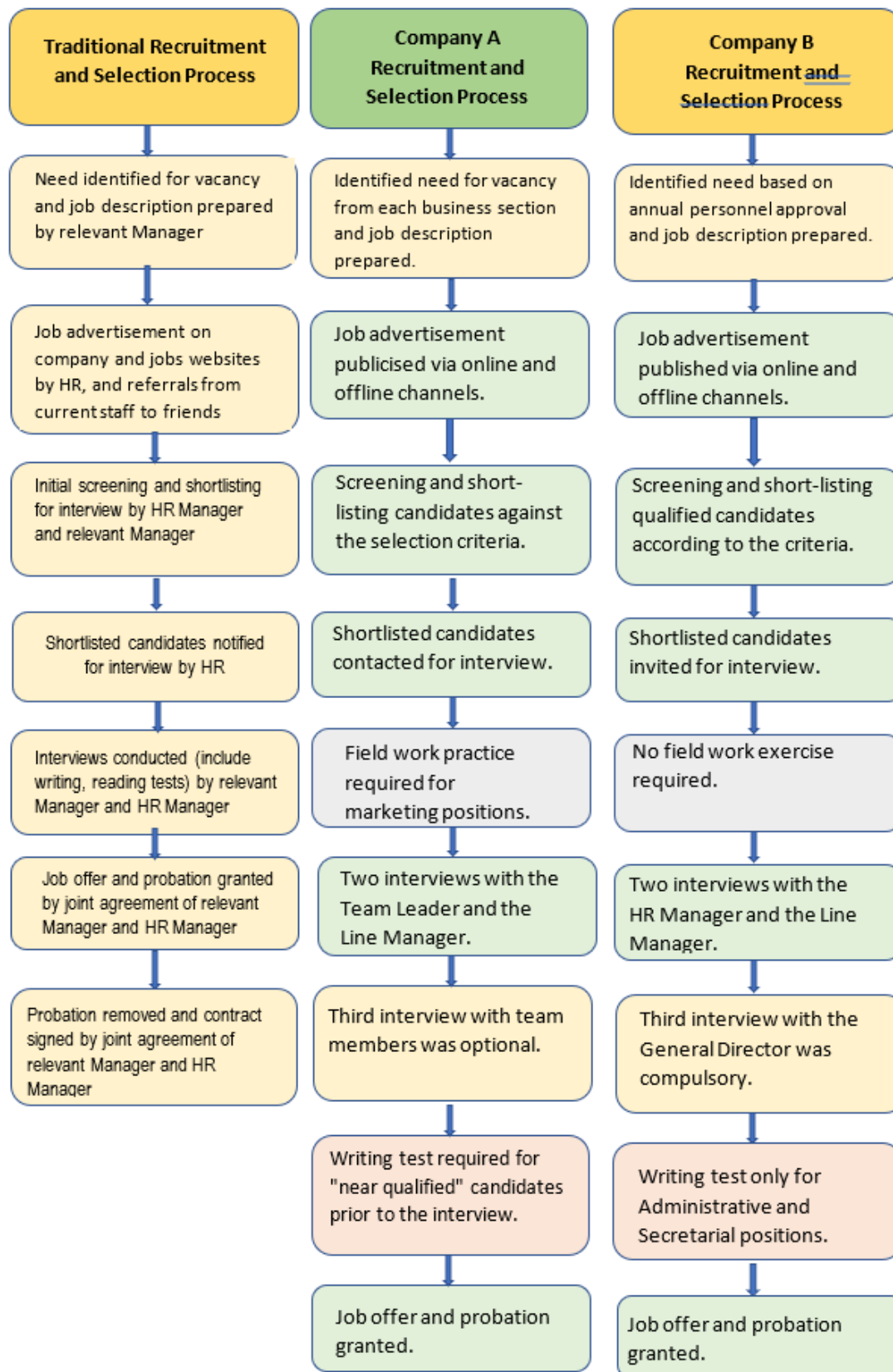


Figure 6.3 Recruitment and Selection Processes of Company A and Company B

English was the working language in both Companies A and B, but different HR procedures resulted in different uses of English and other languages. This necessitated further exploration for the results to be sufficiently comprehensive to benefit the relevant stakeholders.

Use of English in Foreign Service Foreign Companies in Vietnam

Although English was the primary language in Companies A and B, employees were expected to speak both English and Vietnamese in the workplace. The amount of spoken English differed according to the role of individual staff members.

During the recruitment and selection processes, English was mainly used in the interview rounds for junior positions in Company A. Employment applications and writing tests were also completed in English. However, Vietnamese was used by candidates to communicate with Vietnamese customers during field exercises, as explained by company personnel:

English used in the recruitment and selection processes included writing tests, exercises and interview rounds. However, Vietnamese was also used in contact with Vietnamese customers. (AE2, GS1, GS2, GS3, RA)

While both Vietnamese and English were used in the workplace at Company A, Vietnamese was only used for informal verbal communication with small groups of junior staff and Vietnamese business partners and customers. English was the official language for formal communication amongst staff and with regional offices and headquarters. The use of English and Vietnamese was described as follows:

In the workplace, English was used for all types of communication within the senior management team and with foreign partners and customers. (AE1; GS1.1; GS1.2)

English was mainly used for most communication in the company, including meetings, group discussions, presentations, negotiations with non-Vietnamese business partners and in all writing forms. Vietnamese was used among Vietnamese junior staff. (AE2; GS1.1)

In summary, English was used as the main means of communication by senior staff and with regional offices, headquarters and foreign business partners. Vietnamese was mainly spoken by junior employees; that is, positions predominantly filled by new graduates who did much of their work with local Vietnamese partners and clients.

Like Company A, English was used in the recruitment and selection processes, such as employment applications, interviews and writing tests for administrative and secretarial positions at Company B. The following quote illustrates:

Only English was used in the recruitment and selection process at our company. (BE)

Both English and Vietnamese were used in the workplace at Company B, but as in Company A, Vietnamese was used in Company B for informal verbal communication amongst small groups of local staff and with Vietnamese customers and business partners, whereas English was the official language for formal communication between staff, regional offices and headquarters. The HR manager confirmed:

In the workplace, both English and Vietnamese were used. However, English was the main language for formal communication; whereas, Vietnamese was used within junior local staff. (BE)

English was not only the dominant language in foreign companies where employees originated from different nationalities, but also the medium of communication in foreign companies where all staff were Vietnamese nationals. One business graduate who obtained employment in a well-known foreign company in Hanoi specialising in accounting and auditing services, reported that only English was used in their recruitment and selection processes despite all the employers and prospective employees being Vietnamese. He stated:

English was the only language used in the recruitment and selection process including application, writing tests, interviews, group discussions and presentations even though all interviewers and interviewees were Vietnamese only. (GS2)

The use of English and Vietnamese in foreign service companies differed depending on the language policies and requirements of the respective workplaces. Table 6.1 summarises the use of English and Vietnamese in the two service companies that participated in the study.

Table 6.1
Use of English and Vietnamese in the Two Service Companies

Company A	Company B
English was the means of communication within the company and with regional offices and headquarters. All written documents were in English. Vietnamese was used for informal verbal communication amongst Vietnamese junior staff and with Vietnamese business partners and customers.	Communication with other departments, branches and headquarters was in English. English was the language for all forms of written documents. Vietnamese was used for internal verbal communication within small group, and with Vietnamese business partners and customers.

English was the primary language for recruitment and selection in Companies A and B, but the extent of its use and proficiency requirements differed. The investigation and findings described below provide potentially valuable insights for universities, language teachers and graduates.

English Proficiency Levels Required by Foreign Service Companies

In this study, English proficiency was considered an important attribute for candidates who wished to work in multinational or foreign companies in Vietnam. Although foreign employers required candidates to meet their companies' mandatory English proficiency levels, to some extent this depended on the nature of the business and the duties integral to the position.

The senior manager in Company A, an American, affirmed that employees, particularly senior employees, needed high levels of English proficiency and professional communication to perform their duties. The company demanded extremely high English proficiency and fluency for senior positions, equivalent to expert capabilities on the IELTS scale, as reflected in the following quote:

The senior managers needed to have a high degree of fluency because they managed resources and communicated with other staff within the

company, other regional teams and headquarters. The required level of English proficiency was equivalent to 9.0 IELTS. (AE1)

Junior staff needed sufficient English fluency to communicate with the senior management team and foreign customers, to effectively deliver presentations at company meetings, engage in discussions and work with documents written in English. The senior manager commented:

The junior positions who worked with customers and other staff within the company were required to have sufficient English fluency. (AE1, RA)

In discussion about English proficiency for junior positions, the acquisition marketing manager, a Vietnamese national who completed a Master's degree in sales and marketing in the US and responsible for interviewing, making decisions and managing staff, concurred that junior staff needed to possess good English communication skills to perform their duties. She stated:

We did not require a specific level of English proficiency. However, I believed only candidates who were fluent and confident with their English proficiency applied for the employment at our company. (AE2)

According to her, high levels of English proficiency were not required for junior positions, but was a distinct advantage. English proficiency levels for junior staff at Company A was equivalent to 6.5 IELTS, equal to level 4 of the Framework and higher than the level 3 required by the National Project for non-English major graduates in tertiary education.

The junior staff must communicate fluently in English. The required level of English proficiency was equivalent to 6.5 IELTS. (AE2)

We were required to communicate fluently in English in the recruitment and selection process. (GS1.1, GS1.2)

Unlike Company A that assumed candidates were competent in English prior to applying for employment, Company B required candidates to provide evidence of their English proficiency, such as IELTS, TOEIC or TOEFL certificates together with their applications, despite not relying on these to verify English competency:

I did not rely on the English certificates provided by the candidates because several candidates who got high score in IELTS exam, namely 7.0 IELTS, were not able to fluently communicate in English. (BE)

The English proficiency required by Company B differed for each position. Those that required professional communication in English, such as customer service officers, receptionists and sales staff, needed higher levels of fluency; whereas positions that required less communication but more professional knowledge, such as accountants, had to be moderately fluent in English. The HR manager explained:

Depending on the position, the required level of English proficiency was different. For example, while receptionists, customer service officers required professional communication in English, the accountant position required moderate level of English proficiency. (BE)

The nature of the organisation and the fact that Company Bs business partners were mainly Vietnamese allowed greater flexibility with employees' English proficiency than Company A, somewhere between 5.5 to 6.5 IELTS, equivalent to level 4 of the Framework. The HR manager claimed that, at this level, employees were able to communicate effectively with a variety of business partners and customers in English. Employees also had opportunities to improve their English at work, as illustrated in the following quote:

The employees were required to communicate fluently in English to perform their assigned duties. I think English proficiency level equivalent from 5.5 to 6.5 IELTS was satisfied. (BE)

The HR manager in Company B cited the example of a candidate who had achieved high IELTS scores and successfully demonstrated English competence in reading, writing and listening in the interviews. However, while he was able to fully understand spoken English, he was unable to speak English fluently. As a result, he was unsuccessful in his application for the desired position and was offered an assistant position instead.

Table 6.2
English Proficiency Required by Company A and Company B

Company A	Company B
The successful candidate must be fluent in English.	Candidates were expected to be fluent in English.
Employees were required to attain English proficiency at 9.0 IELTS for senior positions and 6.5 IELTS minimum for junior positions, equivalent to level 6 and level 4 of the Framework.	Employees were required to have English proficiency levels between 5.5 and 6.5 IELTS, equal to level 4 of the Framework. Successful employees had opportunities to improve their English in the workplace.

As shown in Table 6.2, both Companies A and B expected their employees to communicate fluently in English, but Company A required higher levels of English proficiency than Company B.

English Proficiency Assessment Methods Used by Foreign Service Companies in Vietnam

Interviews with employers in Companies A and B indicated that the assessment methods they used to measure prospective employees' English proficiency were different from those used by the two universities that participated in this study. While the universities relied on assessment systems adapted from standardised tests, such as the Six Level Framework, IELTS and TOEIC, the service companies preferred to incorporate personal judgement. Neither of the two service companies had a formal, structured system for measuring candidates' English proficiency and relied on their perceptions for judging accuracy and candidates' understanding of complexities. The managers stated:

We did not have any standardised system to assess candidates' English proficiency. We based on our own perception of English proficiency of each interviewee. (AE1)

There was not any specific system to assess candidates' English proficiency at our company. We judged interviewees' English proficiency based on our personal perception. (AE2)

We did not prepare any specific system to assess candidates' English proficiency. We evaluated English proficiency of each employee based on how fluently and accurately they communicated in English during the recruitment and selection process. (BE)

Companies A and B attempted to quantify their personal judgements by converting their perceptions of applicants' abilities into an IELTS score, the most commonly used English proficiency assessment system in Vietnam. As indicated below, standards for each position varied:

My requirement of English proficiency of the senior positions was equivalent to 9.0 IELTS. (AE1)

English proficiency required for junior positions was equal to 6.5 IELTS. (AE2)

The level of English proficiency for junior positions in my company was from 5.5 IELTS. (BE)

Despite the absence of a standardised system to measure English proficiency, employers in both companies used various strategies to judge candidates during their recruitment and selection processes. For example, Company A based their judgement on candidates' comprehension of the questions, and whether they could sustain a conversation and pose insightful and relevant questions. This was described as follows:

During the interview, when I asked a question, did that person understand and answer my questions correctly and sufficiently? Did they use the content to connect to the topic? Could they ask relevant or insightful questions of me? (AE1)

The marketing manager of Company A reported that she based her judgement of candidates' English proficiency on her own, personal criteria during recruitment and selection. She evaluated listening and speaking skills from the effectiveness of their communication and fluency in the interviews, as well as the correct use of words and error-free grammatical expression of ideas. Reading and writing were assessed from candidates' written applications and an assignment task. In some cases, candidates were accepted even though they made some grammatical errors or used incorrect words, provided they communicated their ideas effectively. The marketing manager described this as follows:

I justified candidates' listening and speaking fluency based on how candidates understood the questions and correctly answered the questions

and how sufficiently and fluently the candidates delivered their ideas in an easy-to-understand way. (AE2)

Writing and reading skills were assessed based on the coherence and cohesion, the use of professional words and clear and simple sentences. I did not base on the use of difficult words nor complex sentences. (AE2)

Like Company A, there was no standardised system for assessing candidates' English proficiency at Company B. Candidates were judged on their conversations throughout the recruitment and selection processes. In assessing listening and speaking skills, Company B considered fluency, the speed at which interviewees responded to questions, the accuracy and depth of their answers, and the use of simple and coherent sentences to express their ideas. The HR manager described this as follows:

I assessed listening and speaking skills based on how candidate understood the questions and how correctly and sufficiently answered these questions. (BE)

As stated earlier, Company B was still establishing itself at the time of the interviews, so not all positions in the company had been filled. Applicants' writing skills were assessed from their employment applications, written in English, and further observed together with reading skills during the probation period. The HR manager confirmed in the interview:

We assessed writing skills based on the employment application in English. Writing skills were further assessed together with reading skills based on work performance in the probation time. (BE)

During the probation period, reading and writing skills were assessed according to employees' actual work performance that involved reading and preparing business contracts, project proposals, emails and taking minutes at meeting. The criteria used by Company B included comprehension of all written documents with technical terminologies and the use of appropriate words and sentences in ways that were easy to understand. The HR manager stated:

The criteria used to assess reading and writing skills included reading comprehension, how employees expressed their thoughts coherently in

English by using well-constructed and simple sentences with error-free grammar. (BE)

The criteria used by Companies A and B to assess English proficiency are summarised in Table 6.3.

Table 6.3

Criteria used by Company A and Company B for Assessing English Proficiency

Company A	Company B
No specific assessment system was used by the company. English proficiency assessment was based on the employer's perceptions.	No specific assessment system was used by the company. English proficiency was judged on the personal perceptions of the interviewer.
Listening and speaking skills were assessed in the interview based on comprehension, listening, accuracy and sufficiency of information in answering questions.	Listening and speaking skills were assessed in the interview. Criteria included comprehension, listening, accuracy and sufficiency of information in answering interview questions.
Reading skills were assessed on comprehension. Writing skills were assessed based on sentence construction, cohesion and coherence in delivering ideas in a simple way.	Reading and writing skills were assessed in the probation period based on the actual work performance of the employee.

Impact of English Accents on Employability in Foreign Service Companies in Vietnam

Previous studies showed that the English pronunciation of non-native English speakers can have a negative effect on their employability. However, it does not always preclude employability in foreign companies. This section reports on the findings related to the impact of English accents on the employability of Vietnamese graduates in foreign service companies. In the interviews, employers in Companies A and B indicated that accent affected fluency and accuracy in communication, but conceded that the extent of its impact on employability depended on the requirements for communicating in English. The higher the priority for communicating in English, the more impact accent had on employability.

During recruitment and selection, the Company A employer observed a marked difference between the accents and pronunciation of graduates who had studied abroad and those who had studied in Vietnam. Graduates who had studied overseas were usually able to speak English fluently and with natural accents, whereas graduates who studied in Vietnam

had strongly accented English, attributed to limited practice and the focus of universities on reading and writing rather than speaking and listening. The employer stated:

There was an obvious difference in accent between graduates who studied abroad and in Vietnam. The graduates who studied overseas had a more natural accent than those who studied in Vietnam. (AE2)

The Company A employer believed that graduates who learned English in Vietnam lacked conversational practice and spoke English with a strong Vietnamese accent. The employer explained how accent influenced communication during the interviews:

The graduates who were not proficient in English normally negotiated the meaning in Vietnamese then tried to translate into English. By doing this they made a lot of pauses and hesitations and spoke in a less natural accent. (AE2)

Slow responses to questions by applicants and strongly accented English with frequent pauses and hesitations during interviews created negative perceptions in the minds of employers.

The Company B employer explained that the extent to which accent impacted on employability depended on the requirements of the industry and the specific position. In the service industry, professional English skills were an assumed expectation because it reflected on the quality of staff and the image of the company. For this reason, candidates who spoke fluently and with a native English accent were prioritised and candidates with accented English were less desirable. The HR manager explained it thus:

In the service industry, good communication skills in English were required. Accent obviously played an important role in communication and therefore impacted on the employability of the speakers. (BE)

In summary, the employers in Companies A and B indicated that accent played an important role in English communication and influenced the employability of candidates. Table 6.4 illustrates their perceptions of English accent and employability.

Table 6.4

Perceptions of Accent and Employability of Companies A and B Employers

Company A	Company B
There was a connection between English proficiency and accent. If speaker was proficient in English, then s/he could speak English fluently with natural accent. Accent influenced fluency and therefore impacted on success in gaining employment.	English accent played an important role in communication in the service industry and therefore influenced employability.

Foreign Service Employers' Perceptions of Business Graduates' English Proficiency

During the recruitment and selection processes, employers in Companies A and B had several opportunities to converse with candidates and gain a good understanding of their English proficiency. Their experience enabled valuable insights into the English capabilities of graduates from the two private universities in this study.

Company A employers claimed the reputation of the organisation imposed an automatic “filter” on potential candidates and believed that only those who were confident with their English proficiency and ability to work in an English-speaking organisation applied for positions in their company. The following comment illustrates:

Our company was reputable in the labour market in Vietnam for its professional working environment and services. Therefore, I believe only graduates who were already competent in English applied for employment in our company. (AE2)

Due to this phenomenon, most graduates who sought employment at Company A were highly proficient in English and the company therefore received applications from a majority of candidates with good English skills. Consequently, their perceptions of graduates' English abilities were mainly positive, as reported by the senior managers in the interviews:

I thought the English proficiency of graduates was good. They were able to communicate fluently in English in the recruitment and selection process and in the workplace at our company. (AE1)

We had interviewed several graduates from private universities in Hanoi and thought that they were proficient in English. That meant they were able to communicate fluently in English. (AE2)

Unlike Company A, Company B was still establishing itself and therefore could not rely on its reputation in the Vietnamese labour market to automatically “filter” applicants. Graduates from both public and private universities had sought employment at Company B, many of whom were not proficient in English, and as a result Company B encountered varying levels of English proficiency in the applications they received for employment. This led to both positive and negative perceptions of graduates’ English proficiency.

The Company B employer reported that graduate applicants with low English proficiency outnumbered those with high proficiency. In many instances, graduates who achieved high IELTS test scores were unable to communicate fluently in English, creating negative perceptions of their English abilities. She explained:

Several graduates studied English for certificate. Therefore, many of them got high score in IELTS test (6.5 and 7.0 score) but still were unable to speak English fluently. (BE)

However, she also had positive perceptions of some graduates, as indicated in this statement:

However, many graduates who learnt English for working purpose or studied abroad were fluent in English and met the work demands. (BE)

In summary, Company A and B employers had different perceptions of graduates’ English proficiency associated with their experiences of communicating with candidates during the recruitment and selection processes. Company A employers had mainly positive perceptions, whereas Company B employers had both positive and negative perceptions. Table 6.5 summarises their respective perceptions.

Table 6.5

Service Company Employers' Perceptions of Business Graduates' English Proficiency

Company A	Company B
<p>Graduates from private and public universities were good at English.</p> <p>Candidates were fluent in English because they were aware of the English requirements of the company. Therefore, only those who were fluent in English applied for positions in the company.</p>	<p>Several business graduates were proficient in English, whereas many others were weak at English communication because they studied English for certificate only.</p>

Finding summary

The findings from this chapter contributed to answering the second research question which investigated the requirements the foreign employers have for English proficiency of business graduates from private universities in Vietnam. The findings also contribute to responding to research question three which examined the method used by the foreign employers to assess the English proficiency of business graduates from private universities in Vietnam in the recruitment and selection processes.

Regarding the second research question, the findings indicated that the foreign service employers required candidates to meet their companies' mandatory English proficiency levels. However, to some extent, depending on the nature of the business and the duties integral to the position, English proficiency requirements were varied. At Company A, English was the primary language used in the recruitment and selection process including employment application, interviews, group discussions, and written tasks. Vietnamese was used only during the field exercise when the candidates interacted with the Vietnamese customers.

The interviews with the employers from Company A revealed that the senior positions in their offices in Vietnam were mostly occupied by foreign staff and many customers were foreigners from different countries. Therefore, the junior staff were required to have sufficient English fluency to effectively communicate with the senior management team and foreign customers, and engage in company meetings, group discussions and working with documents written in English. Company A employers assumed that the candidates who wished to work in their company were proficient in English prior to commencing the application process. Therefore, there was not any specific level of English proficiency was set for the potential candidates, and their English

proficiency would be assessed through the interviews and other tasks in the selection process. The employers from Company A confirmed the English proficiency level required for the senior positions to IELTS 9.0 and 6.5 for junior positions. These IELTS levels are equivalent to level 6 and level 4 in the Framework respectively.

Similar to Company A, the foreign service company B which originated from Singapore also required candidates to meet their companies' compulsory English proficiency levels. However, the English proficiency required by the employers from Company B differed for each position. Those positions that required professional communication in English, such as customer service officers, sales and marketing staff, and receptionists needed higher levels of fluency; whereas positions that required less communication but more professional knowledge, such as accountants, only needed moderate English proficiency. In contrast to the Company A where the employers did not require candidate to prove their English proficiency in the recruitment process, the employer from Company B requested the candidates to show evidence of their English proficiency by attaching English Certificate to the employment application. In the recruitment and selection process at Company B, English was the primary language used for oral and written tasks.

While Company A was established and had been operating, the foreign service company B was still in the setting up process with one established office in Hanoi. There were three senior positions in the company which were filled with Vietnamese nationals. Therefore, the junior staff were flexible to communicate daily with senior staff in Vietnamese, English was used if the Director and Deputy Director presented in the communication or meetings. The interview with employer from Company B indicated that the company's business partners were mainly Vietnamese which allowed greater flexibility with employees' English proficiency than Company A. Company B required an IELTS between 5.5 to 6.5, equivalent to level 4 of the Framework. The employer believed that, at this level, employees were able to communicate effectively with a variety of business partners and customers in English.

The third research question sought data regarding the methods used by the foreign employers to assess the English proficiency of business graduates from private universities in Vietnam in the recruitment and selection processes. The findings showed that neither of the two service companies had a formal, structured system for measuring candidates'

English proficiency. The employers relied on their perceptions for judging accuracy and candidates' understanding of complexities during the recruitment and selection process.

At Company A, to assess listening and speaking skills, the employers based their judgement on candidates' comprehension of the questions, and how they could sustain a conversation and pose insightful and relevant questions in the interviews. Another strategy was based on the effectiveness of candidates' communication and fluency in the interviews, and the correct use of words and error-free grammatical expression of ideas. To assess reading and writing skills, the employers used candidates' written applications and an assignment task. In some cases, some grammatical errors or used incorrect words were accepted, provided that the ideas were effectively communicated.

Similar to employers from Company A, the employer from Company B assessed candidates' listening and speaking skills based on the fluency and the speed at which interviewees responded to questions, the accuracy and depth of their answers, and the use of simple and coherent sentences to express their ideas. Writing skills were assessed based on candidates' employment applications written in English. The reading skill was not assessed in the selection process but was observed and assessed during the probation period. In the probation period, reading and writing skills were assessed according to employees' actual work performance that involved reading and preparing business contracts, project proposals, emails and taking minutes at meeting. The criteria used by the employer comprised comprehension of all written documents with technical terminologies and the use of appropriate words and sentences in ways that were easy to understand.

Chapter Summary

This chapter commenced with a description of the specific contexts of two service companies from foreign countries situated in Hanoi. An examination of their structure and recruitment and selection processes clarified understanding of the impact of English proficiency on the employability of business graduates seeking employment within these organisations.

The investigation also uncovered the amount of English used and the proficiency levels required for various positions in foreign organisations. A description of the methods used to evaluate candidates' English proficiency, employers' views on the importance of

English fluency, listening and pronunciation as factors of employability, and data relevant to the second and the third research questions were provided.

Chapter 7 reports on the recruitment and selection processes at two foreign manufacturing companies in Vietnam. The role of English, required levels of English proficiency and assessment methods are examined. Other associated factors that impacted on employability, such as English accent and employers' perceptions of graduates' English proficiency, are also discussed.

CHAPTER SEVEN: ENGLISH PROFICIENCY: REQUIREMENTS OF THE FOREIGN MANUFACTURING COMPANIES IN VIETNAM

Unlike service organisations that provide intangible skills and services, manufacturing companies produce tangible goods that are marketed, stocked and inventoried according to customer demand. The success of manufacturing businesses depends mainly on the quality of the merchandise they produce, so it is essential for their employees to possess the necessary training and expertise to generate, maintain and market their products. Carefully designed and executed recruitment and selection strategies are crucial for ensuring that the people employed have appropriate technical knowledge and skills.

This chapter reports on the findings of the recruitment and selection processes in two foreign manufacturing companies situated in an industrial zone in the south of Vietnam; one, a foreign manufacturing and export company, hereafter referred to as Company C, and the other, a foreign mechanical engineering company, hereafter referred to as Company D. The investigation covered their recruitment and selection processes, the required English proficiency, assessment methods, and the employers' perceptions of applicants' accents, employability and English proficiency.

Management Structure of Foreign Manufacturing Company C

Company C had its headquarters in the Chinese Republic of Taiwan and had been manufacturing motorbike products and spare parts for the Vietnamese and export markets in Asia since March 1992. Its head office was located in an industrial zone in Dong Nai province, with two other sales and marketing offices situated in Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City respectively. At the time of the interview, the company employed 1,300 staff. The interview with the HR manager was conducted at the head office in Dong Nai province.

The executive team of Company C included a general director, a deputy general director and line managers, such as a production manager, quality control manager, sales and marketing manager and administration manager. Figure 7.1 illustrates the company's hierarchy and shows the staff responsible for recruitment and selection of new employees. As shown in Figure 7.1, the staff responsible for daily operations included mechanics, production staff, quality assurance and control staff, material outsourcing staff, sales and marketing staff, HR, financial and accounting staff. According to the company's HR policy, these junior positions were filled by employees who possessed professional expertise, work experience, English proficiency and other multi-dimensional skills.

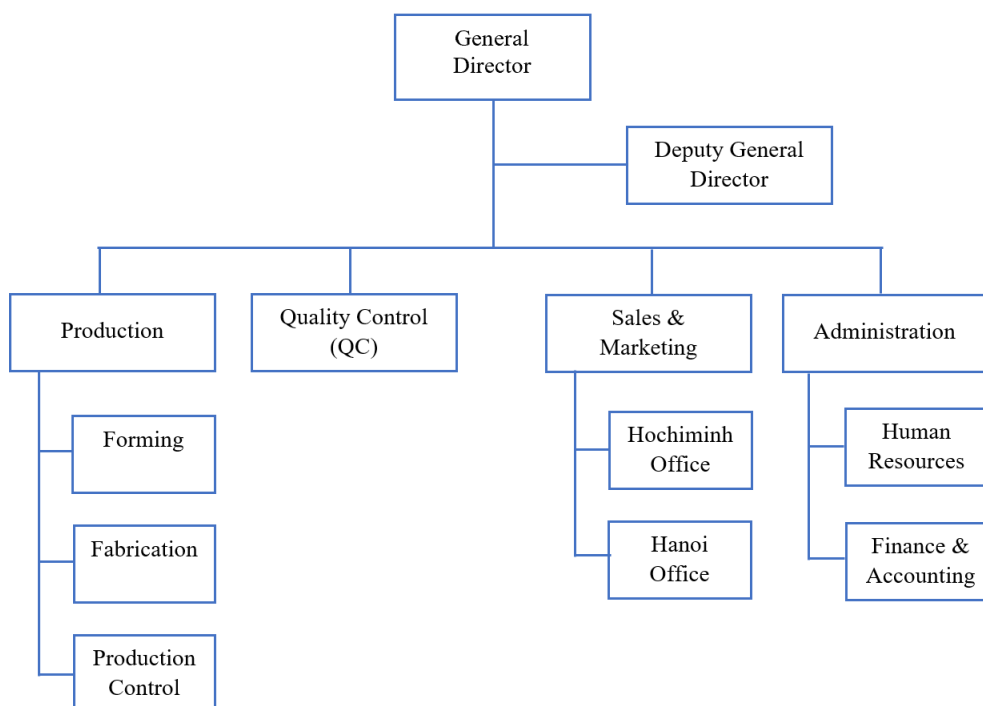


Figure 7.1 Organisational Chart of Company C. Diagram provided by Company C on April 12, 2017.

Management Structure of Foreign Manufacturing Company D

Company D had its headquarters in Japan. It manufactured spare parts for motorcycles and motorcycle engines and supplied these products to the domestic market and other countries in Asia. Company D had been operating in Vietnam since 2006. The organisation employed 130 staff and had its head office in an industrial zone in Dong Nai province, where the interview took place.

The structure of Company D is illustrated in Figure 7.2. The executive team included a Japanese general director and three line managers who were either Japanese or Vietnamese. Each line manager supervised the designated business activities of his/her department, namely, production, sales and marketing, and administration.

Junior staff were involved in production, quality control, sales and marketing, human resources and accounting. In the interviews, graduates were required to demonstrate their expertise, work experience and multi-dimensional skills in these respective areas.

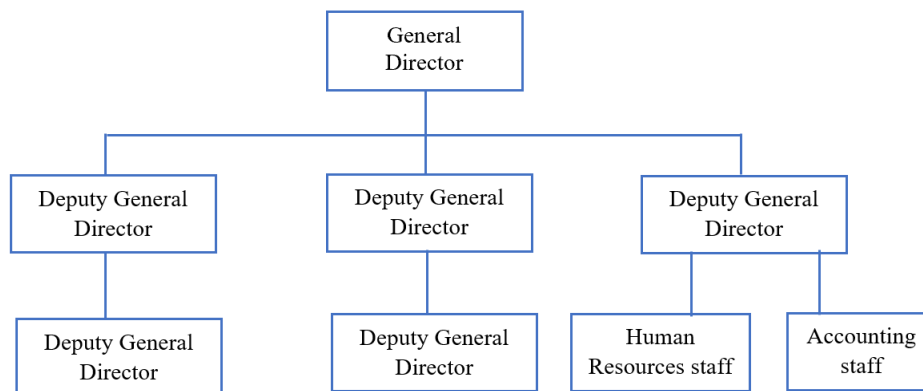


Figure 7.2 Organisation Chart of Company D

To determine the standard of English proficiency required by foreign employers, the company's recruitment and selection processes were investigated. The examination focused on how English proficiency was evaluated and uncovered differences and similarities between the expectations of foreign service and manufacturing companies.

Recruitment and Selection Processes in Foreign Manufacturing Companies

Like the service companies in Vietnam, the foreign manufacturing companies had customised recruitment and selection processes in place to ensure the people they employed had appropriate technical skills and qualifications to carry out their responsibilities. However, recruitment and selection processes differed due to the HR policies within each company.

In the interview, the responses of the HR manager indicated that Company Cs recruitment and selection processes included several traditional steps. However, the organisation had also modified certain steps to align with the nature of manufacturing. In Company C, the need to recruit staff typically originated from a specific department in the organisation. It was initiated by the manager who completed a Request Form providing all relevant information about the requirements of the position, such as professional and technical knowledge, work experience, foreign language proficiency, communication skills, gender and age range. This was submitted to the general director for approval, after which it went to the HR manager who prepared an employment advertisement and publicised the position via various online and offline channels, with the aim of attracting the widest pool of potential candidates. Online channels included the company's website, Job Seek websites and newspapers; while offline channels consisted of employment leaflets, referrals by existing staff to families and friends, employment centres and partner

universities. The deadline for expressions of interest was usually one month from release of the employment advertisement, but could be extended if the number of applications were lower than expected. As explained by the HR manager:

The employment advertisement was advertised through different online and offline channels such as company's website, Job Seek websites, employment centres and partnering universities. (CE, GS2.1)

Applications were reviewed by the HR manager and a preliminary shortlist forwarded to the line manager for final shortlisting. The final shortlist of candidates was returned to the HR manager who then contacted the applicants for interviews.

Customarily, Company C had one round of interviews for junior staff and two rounds for senior staff. For junior positions, the HR manager, line manager and team leader who would work directly with the successful applicant participated in the interview process. For senior positions, applicants attended a second interview with the general director or deputy general director. At the conclusion of each interview, the HR manager, line manager and team leader discussed the suitability of all applicants such as professional knowledge, working experience, working attitude and plan, communication skills, and other soft skills and agreed on a score for each; the one with the highest score being offered the position by the HR manager. Once accepted, the applicant attended an orientation session before commencing a probation period, usually for two months. At the conclusion of the probation period, an evaluation was conducted by the HR manager, the line manager and the team leader, and those who passed the evaluation transitioned to permanent employment.

As in Company C, recruitment and selection of staff in Company D followed a traditional pathway with some modifications to meet specific requirements. In Company D, the recruitment process began with a request for new staff from a line manager. Once approved by the general director, the job description was jointly prepared by the line manager and HR manager and publicised via online and offline channels. Online channels included the company website, recruitment companies' websites and newspapers; and offline channels comprised job posters within the company, referrals by family and friends of existing staff members, and employment notices at partner universities. The selection process commenced with screening applications and shortlisting potential candidates by the HR manager according to the selection criteria. Unlike the procedure at Company C, the

HR manager at Company D shortlisted the final candidates and contacted them for interviews. Three interviews were conducted for junior positions at Company D; the first of these by the HR manager to verify the general suitability of candidates against the selection criteria such as qualification, communication skills, English proficiency. Those who passed the verification interview were invited to attend a second interview, jointly conducted by the line manager and HR manager, to assess specific professional and technical knowledge, work experience and other associated skills required for the position. Highly rated applicants in the second interview attended a third interview with the general director, who assessed anything he considered relevant to ensure the most suited applicant was offered the position. After approval by the general director, applicants were placed on a two-month probation period, which, if successfully assessed, secured permanent employment. The HR manager described the recruitment and selection in the interview as follows:

Our technical company specialised in manufacturing mechanical parts, therefore the recruitment and selection process was uniquely designed to meet the requirements of the company. (DE)

Junior staff were required to pass three rounds of interviews and a probation assessment to become member staff of our company. (DE)

Figure 7.3 illustrates the similarities and differences between the recruitment and selection processes of Company C and D as compared with the traditional model. The flowchart shows that the two manufacturing companies closely followed traditional recruitment and selection processes with some modifications. Company C adapted the shortlisting step so that the line manager screened and shortlisted candidates with appropriate technical knowledge, while Company D adapted the interview process to ensure candidates met the selection criteria.

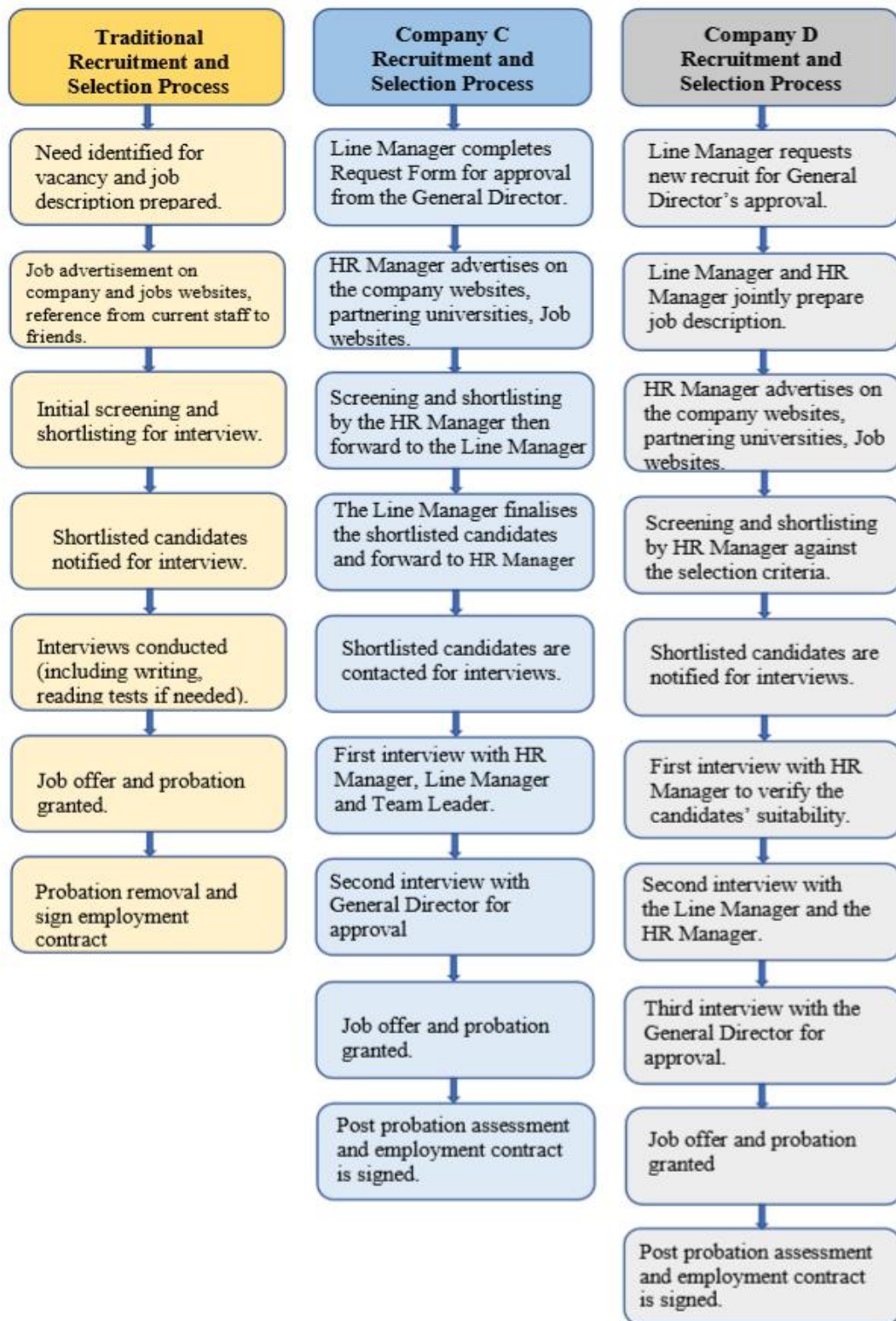


Figure 7.3 Recruitment and Selection Processes in Company C and Company D

Use of English in Foreign Manufacturing Companies in Vietnam

Like other Asian countries that have embraced globalisation, Vietnam chose English as the official language for conducting international business, and accordingly,

Companies C and D used English as the primary language of communication in their recruitment and selection processes. Graduates who wished to work in foreign manufacturing companies were therefore expected to have good English communication skills. Depending on the HR policies and unique requirements of each position, the amount of English used in each organisation differed. The HR manager of Company C asserted that English was the main language used in their recruitment and selection processes and in the workplace. English was used for employment applications, reading and writing tests, as well as interviews. A small amount of Vietnamese was used in interviews, but only in reference to technical terminologies that candidates were unable to understand in English. The HR manager claimed:

English was the primary language used in the recruitment and selection processes at our company. Limited amount of Vietnamese could be used for difficult terminologies. (CE, GS2.1, RA)

Both English and Vietnamese were used in the workplace. English was the official means of communication within the senior management team and amongst junior and senior staff. It was also predominantly used for communicating with foreign business partners, foreign customers and with headquarters. Vietnamese was only used in limited communication between small groups of junior staff and with Vietnamese business partners and customers. All written documents, such as technical drawings, business contracts, work emails and minutes of meetings were in English. The HR manager said in the interview:

English was the official working language for most communications in the workplace of the company. Vietnamese was also used but limited within small group of Vietnamese junior staff. (CE)

English was the only language used in all written documents. (CE, GS2.1)

As in Company C, English was the primary medium of communication in recruitment and selection processes and in the workplace generally at Company D. It was the main mode of communication between company staff, business partners and customers and was used for all written documents. A small amount of Vietnamese was used during recruitment and selection of new staff, once again limited to technical terminologies, and

between small groups of Vietnamese employees and customers. The HR manager commented in the interview:

English was the primary language in the recruitment and selection process and in the workplace at Company D. Vietnamese was used for communication between Vietnamese junior staff and customers. (DE, RA)

Unlike Company C, where English and Vietnamese were used in the workplace, staff at Company D used Japanese to communicate with the general director if they were competent in Japanese. The use of English and Vietnamese in Companies C and D is summarised in Table 7.1.

Table 7.1
Use of English and Vietnamese in Company C and Company D

Company C	Company D
English was the main language in the recruitment and selection processes. Limited amount of Vietnamese was used for difficult technical terminologies.	English was the medium of communication in the recruitment and selection processes. Limited amount of Vietnamese was used for difficult technical terminologies.
In the workplace, English was the common language for all types of communication within the company and with foreign business partners, customers and headquarters. Vietnamese was used for communication within small groups of Vietnamese junior staff and with Vietnamese customers and business partners.	English was the means of communication between company staff and foreign business partners, customers and headquarters; and Vietnamese was only used for internal communication by small groups of Vietnamese junior staff and with Vietnamese customers and business partners.
All written documents were in English.	Japanese could be used for communication with the general director.
	All written documents were in English.

English was the chosen means of communication in Companies C and D and employees were therefore required to have appropriate English proficiency for effective communication. Requirements varied depending on the position in each company, so it was necessary to investigate the expectations of foreign manufacturing companies in relation to English proficiency.

English Proficiency Required by Foreign Manufacturing Companies in Vietnam

Employers in Companies C and D indicated that English proficiency was an essential skill for graduates who wished to work in their organisations, so graduates' levels

of proficiency had a strong influence on their success in obtaining employment. Although foreign employers required graduates to meet the company's English proficiency requirements, their expectations varied depending on the duties and responsibilities of the position. For example, Companies C and D both indicated that flexibility was a necessary attribute. They recognised the importance of understanding production processes and possessing appropriate technical skills, so interviewees who were unfamiliar with technical English terminologies were permitted to use the Vietnamese equivalents to demonstrate understanding.

As explained by the Company C employer, business graduates were hired for junior positions that did not necessarily require high levels of professional expertise or extensive work experience. They needed a tertiary qualification, work experience gained from internships, good computer skills and good English communication skills to be able to perform their duties. Although employment advertisements specified applicants must provide certification of their English proficiency, such as Certificate C or TOEIC 450, these were only used for screening and shortlisting applicants, as their English proficiency was further assessed during recruitment and selection. The HR manager in Company C confirmed:

Applicants were required to provide English certificate for application screening and shortlisting. English proficiency was assessed in the recruitment and selection process. (CE, GS2.1, RA)

The required aptitude for each language skill differed depending on its importance and how frequently it was used in the workplace. At Company C, communication skills were more important than reading and writing skills, as illustrated in the following quote:

The listening and speaking were the most important skills, then the reading and writing skills. (CE)

Company C did not use a widely recognised assessment system such as Framework, IELTS or TOEIC to measure candidates' English proficiency. Instead, the employer described the various skill requirements as follows:

The employees were required to understand comprehensively, correctly and sufficiently all the interview questions which contained professional

and technical information and respond to these questions sufficiently and correctly in a good manner. (CE)

This description indicates that employees were not only expected to communicate fluently in general English, but also in professional and technical English. The company's expectations of graduates' listening and speaking skills were reflective of level 4 of the Framework that stated:

... Can understand the main ideas of complex text on both concrete and abstract topics, including technical discussions in his/her field of specialisation... (National Project 2008 MOET: Learning, teaching, assessment)

As indicated by Company Cs employer, reading and writing skills were less important than listening and speaking skills, requiring moderate English proficiency. Therefore, employees who were able to read and understand technical drawings, use short technical sentences and write emails in English made the cut. The reading and writing skills of employees in Company C aligned with level 3 of the Framework that stated:

...Can do reading comprehension of texts with concrete information of the topics which related to his/her field of specialisation... (National Project 2008 MOET: Learning, teaching, assessment)

...Can write simple texts about familiar topics or of personal interest by connecting simple sentences to complete a structural text... (National Project 2008 MOET: Learning, teaching, assessment)

In summary, Company C required employees with level 4 English proficiency in listening and speaking skills and level 3 proficiency in reading and writing skills. Naturally, applicants with high levels of English proficiency across the board were highly regarded and favoured. In the words of the HR manager in Company C:

The applicants who were competent in all skills in both general English and technical English were highly appreciated and were usually successful in the interviews. (CE)

Like Company C, the Company D employer reported that the English certificates provided by applicants were not reliable, because in his experience, many applicants who had attained high scores in IELTS and TOEIC tests were unable to communicate fluently in English. For this reason, English proficiency was assessed throughout the recruitment and selection processes.

As in Company C, listening and speaking were considered the most important skills for the workplace in Company D and employees were required to be able to communicate effectively in English. Communicative proficiency was essential in both general and professional English. Listening and speaking skills required by Company D matched the description of level 4 of the Framework:

... Can understand the main ideas of complex text on both concrete and abstract topics, including technical discussions in his/her field of specialisation... (National Project 2008 MOET: Learning, teaching, assessment)

In alignment with the level of technical English sought by manufacturing companies, Company D required employees to possess moderate reading and writing skills. The company's expectations signified alignment with level 3 of the Framework:

...Can do reading comprehension of texts with concrete information of the topics which related to his/her field of specialisation... (National Project 2008 MOET: Learning, teaching, assessment)

...Can write simple texts about familiar topics or of personal interest by connecting simple sentences to complete a structural text... (National Project 2008 MOET: Learning, teaching, assessment)

In summary, Company D expected employees to have English listening and speaking skills at level 4, and reading and writing skills equivalent to level 3 of the Framework. Applicants who possessed higher levels of proficiency in the full range of skills naturally had a competitive advantage for successfully gaining employment. The HR manager of Company D stated:

We prioritised the applicants who were proficient in both general and technical English. (DE)

The English proficiency levels required by Companies C and D are illustrated below.

Table 7.2
English Proficiency Levels Required by Company C and Company D

Company C	Company D
Employees were required to have English proficiency levels for listening and speaking skills at level 4 of the Framework.	Employer expected their employees to have English proficiency levels for listening and speaking skills at level 4 of the Framework.
Employees' English proficiency levels for reading and writing skills required were at level 3 of the Framework.	The level of English proficiency required for reading and writing skills was at level 3 of the Framework.
Employees with high levels of English proficiency in all four skills were favoured by employers.	The employees with competency in all skills had advantages for gaining employment in Company D.

As shown in Table 7.2, both foreign manufacturing companies demanded similar levels of proficiency from their employees. They expected high levels of mastery and prioritised listening and speaking skills over reading and writing abilities.

English Proficiency Assessment Methods Used by Foreign Manufacturing Companies in Vietnam

Personnel in Companies C and D reported that the methods used to assess the English proficiency of employees differed from those used by the private universities that participated in this study. As described in Chapter 5, the two universities relied on standardised tests such as IELTS and TOEIC. However, the foreign manufacturing companies developed a customised point scale to quantify their assessment of employees' English. The Company C employer described it thus:

We developed our own point scale to mark each candidate's English proficiency. The scale ranged from 2, 4, 6, 8 and 10, in which 2 was the lowest level and 10 the highest. (CE)

We used this point scale to give scores to each candidate based on our perception of English proficiency level demonstrated by the candidates in the recruitment and selection process. (CE)

Similarly, the Company D employer affirmed the use of a point scale to evaluate the English competence of each candidate during recruitment and selection. The scale ranged from 1 to 5, with 1 the lowest level and 5 the highest. The Company D employer described the point scale as follows:

We developed a point scale to give a score for English proficiency of each candidate. This scale ranged from 1 to 5 in which 1 was the lowest and 5 was the highest level. (DE)

The point scales developed by Companies C and D for assessing employees' English proficiency are shown in Table 7.3.

Table 7.3
Grading Scale Used by Companies C and D to Quantify Candidates' English Proficiency

Company	Grade	Level of English Proficiency
Company C	2	Poor: Can only say simple words and sentences in English
	4	Average: Can introduce themselves and have limited communication in English
	6	Good: Able to communicate in English in acceptable manner
	8	Very Good: Able to communicate well in English
	10	Excellent: Fluent in English. For those who studied in English overseas
Company D	1	Poor: Poor communication in English
	2	Average: Limited communication in English
	3	Good: Competent in English communication
	4	Very Good: Good competence in English
	5	Excellent: High level of proficiency in English

The two manufacturing companies employed different strategies to assess English proficiency. At Company C, listening and speaking skills were assessed during the interview and communication competence was evaluated based on interviewees' comprehension of the questions, the relevance and accuracy of their answers and fluency. A score was allocated to quantify the competency of each interviewee, as described by the HR manager:

I used our point scale to mark communication competence of each employee in the interview based on my perception. (CE)

Reading and writing skills were assessed by means of a translation test, where applicants were required to translate a passage from English into Vietnamese and another from Vietnamese into English. Once again, the employer used a point scale to grade the translation. The points awarded for English proficiency were consolidated with scores for other competencies, such as work experience, professional knowledge, expertise and soft skills, with a minimum requirement of 60 points.

I was required to read and translate a short passage from English into Vietnamese and another from Vietnamese into English. (GS2.1)

As in Company C, listening and speaking skills were of primary importance in Company D. They were assessed in the interview based on applicants' comprehension of the questions, accuracy and fluency of their answers, and then quantified on a point scale. Reading and writing skills were assessed differently. Writing was evaluated at the start of the recruitment process from the candidates' written applications and responses to the selection criteria, and entailed completeness of sentences, clarity of ideas, cohesion, sentence structure and grammar. The HR manager described the process:

The writing skill was marked based on the employment application. The criteria for marking comprised sentence structure, cohesion, ideas delivery and the grammar errors. (DE)

Reading skills were not assessed until the probation period and took into account employees' comprehension of emails, business contracts and other formal documents. The employer stated in the interview:

The reading comprehension was complicated, therefore, we only assessed it in the probation time. (DE)

Unlike Company C that amalgamated interviewees' points to include a range of other competencies, English proficiency points were evaluated separately at Company D. Candidates who achieved at least 3 points were considered to meet the requirements.

Impact of English Accent on Employability in Foreign Manufacturing Companies in Vietnam

Research shows that poor English pronunciation can affect fluency and effective delivery of ideas, with negative impacts on interviews with non-native speakers. Company C's employer reported:

There was a difference in pronunciation between graduates who studied abroad and in Vietnam. Those graduates who studied overseas have more natural pronunciation than those who learnt English in Vietnam. (CE)

However, since Company C employees and senior staff were non-native speakers and learned English as a foreign language, allowances were made for poor pronunciation during the selection process, as stated during the interview:

We accepted strong accent and some pronunciation errors. We only required candidates to understand the questions and respond correctly and sufficiently. They still had chances to learn while working in our company. (CE)

The above comment signals that Company C was sympathetic towards applicants who had difficulties with English pronunciation. Employees were encouraged to continue practising and develop an awareness of the foreign English accents of business partners and customers, as reflected in the following quote:

In our company, staff were encouraged to practise and communicate in English with different accents because our customers were from different countries and speak English with different accents. (CE)

Company D also demonstrated sympathy and acknowledged the difficulties of English pronunciation for Vietnamese, as indicated by the following statement:

It was hard to assess the candidates' English accent and pronunciation because each language had its own accent. We only assessed English proficiency based on fluency, grammar and clear ideas delivery. (DE)

Hence, unlike the service companies who considered English pronunciation an important factor for employability, the manufacturing companies discounted pronunciation as a major influencer of success.

Foreign Manufacturing Employers' Perceptions of Business Graduates' English Proficiency

Since the foreign manufacturing employers in this study were exposed to prospective employees' English capabilities, their perceptions provided useful insights into graduates' levels of English language proficiency. In the interviews they revealed that the English proficiency of business graduates was substandard, particularly in relation to communication skills. The Company C employer stated:

Most graduates have learned English for at least seven years in high school. However, they were weak at communication in English. (CE)

This view was echoed by the Company D employer who reported:

In the interview, approximately 90% of new graduates were unable to meet the requirements of English proficiency (DE).

Most new graduates were not good at English. They only achieved 1 point on the five-point scale. (DE)

Several reasons were cited by Company C for these poor outcomes. Employers believed that university English courses lacked alignment with business English in the workplace and that students' motivations to learn the language centered on passing exams. Furthermore, students had few opportunities to practise English with native speakers, lacked autonomy and relied too much on teachers, instead of proactively preparing themselves for interviews by improving their technical vocabulary. The employer from Company C stated:

Most students learn English for exams rather than for employment. Some of them recognised the role of English in employability, however, they did not attempt to improve their English proficiency. (CE)

The Company D employer added:

Several graduates used Google Translate app to translate their application from Vietnamese into English. Therefore, they made a number of writing errors. (DE)

According to the Company D employer, widely recognised English certificates, such as IELTS and TOEIC, were unreliable predictors of success in business, as confirmed by the following statement:

We did not rely on the English certificates provided by the applicants because many of them got very high scores but were not able to communicate fluently in English. (DE)

Company Ds employer also raised concerns about the effectiveness of the English programs at universities, because they provided few opportunities for students to practise inside or outside the classroom. He stated:

The business students would be proficient if they practised English regularly. However, they did not have chances to practise English at university. (DE)

Table 7.4 summarises the perceptions of foreign employers regarding the English proficiency of the business graduates they had interviewed.

Table 7.4

Perceptions of Foreign Manufacturing Employers of Business Graduates' English Proficiency

Company C	Company D
Graduates are weak at communicative English despite having learned English for at least seven years.	Several graduates used Google Translate app to translate their CV from Vietnamese into English and made a number of errors.
Graduates studied English mainly to pass exams, therefore their English proficiency was low.	Most graduates (90%) were not able to communicate fluently in English.
Graduates lacked technical vocabularies in English.	Most graduates achieved a score of 1 on the company's five-point scale.

Finding summary

The findings reported in this chapter contributed to answering the second and the third research questions which investigated the English proficiency of business graduates

from private universities in Vietnam required by the foreign employers and the methods they used to assess English proficiency of business graduates in the recruitment and selection processes in their companies.

Regarding the second research question about the requirements of English proficiency the foreign employers have for English proficiency of business graduates from private universities in Vietnam, the findings from this chapter indicated that English proficiency was an essential skill for graduates who wished to work in the foreign manufacturing companies. Therefore, graduates' levels of proficiency had a strong influence on their success in obtaining employment. Although the foreign manufacturing employers required graduates to meet the company's English proficiency requirements, their expectations varied depending on the duties and responsibilities of the position.

At Company C, English was the main language used in the recruitment and selection process and in the workplace. It was used for employment applications, reading and writing tests, and interviews in the selection process. Vietnamese was also used in the interview but only for the difficult technical terminologies. In the workplace at Company C, English was the official means of communication within the senior management team, amongst junior and senior staff, with foreign business partners, foreign customers and with headquarters. All written documents, such as technical drawings, business contracts, work emails and minutes of meetings were in English. Vietnamese was only used within small group of Vietnamese junior staff.

Due to the characteristics of the manufacturing industry which involved technical knowledge, the employees were expected to not only fluently communicate in general English but also in professional and technical English. At Company C, listening and speaking were the most important skills, then the reading and writing skills. Therefore, the employees were required to have competent English proficiency for communication within the companies and with the business partners and customers and have moderate competence for reading technical documents and writing short technical sentences and emails in English. Consequently, the employees at Company C were required to attain English communication skills at level 4 and reading and writing skills at level 3 of the Framework.

Similar to Company C, Company D was also a foreign technical manufacturing company choosing English as a common language in the recruitment and selection process

and in the workplace. In the recruitment and selection process, the candidates were required to prepare employment application, complete interviews and other tasks in English. In the workplace, English was the medium of communication between senior staff, among senior staff and junior staff, and with business partners and customers, as well as in all written documents. Vietnamese was limitedly used within small group of Vietnamese junior staff.

Like Company C, the findings showed that the employer from Company D expected his staff to have competent English proficiency in both general and technical professional English. At Company D, listening and speaking were considered the most important skills, then reading and writing skills. Therefore, the employees were required to attain competent English proficiency for communication skills at level 4 in the Framework to effectively communicate with senior staff and customers and moderate English competence for reading and writing skills at level 3 of the Framework to perform reading and writing tasks in the workplace.

Regarding the third research question about the methods used by the foreign employers to assess the English proficiency of business graduates from private universities in Vietnam in their recruitment and selection processes, the findings reported in this chapter indicated that the foreign manufacturing employers employed different methods to assess each language skill of the candidates in the recruitment and selection processes.

The findings showed that the employers from Company C developed their own system with scale points of 2, 4, 6, 8 and 10, with 2 being the lowest and 10 the highest level to mark English proficiency of each candidate. At Company C, listening and speaking skills were assessed in the interview based on interviewees' comprehension of the questions, the relevance and accuracy of their answers and fluency. Reading and writing skills were assessed by means of a translation test, where applicants were required to translate a passage from English into Vietnamese and another from Vietnamese into English. Then, the employer used a point scale to grade the translation. The points awarded for English proficiency were consolidated with scores for other competencies, such as work experience, professional knowledge, expertise and soft skills to decide the success of each candidate.

Similar to Company C, employers from Company D also developed their own 1-5 scale with 1 as the lowest and 5 the highest level to mark English proficiency of each

candidate in the selection process. At Company D, listening and speaking skills were of primary importance and they were assessed in the interview based on applicants' comprehension of the questions, accuracy and fluency of their answers. Writing was assessed based on the candidates' written applications and responses to the selection criteria, and entailed completeness of sentences, clarity of ideas, cohesion, sentence structure and grammar. Reading skills were not assessed until the probation period based on employees' comprehension of emails, business contracts and other formal documents. Different from Company C where the points for English proficiency were consolidated with scores of other competences, the score for English competence of each candidate was calculated separately from other competences.

Chapter Summary

Chapter 7 reported on the findings of two foreign manufacturing industries located in an industrial zone in the south of Vietnam, including their organisational structures and recruitment and selection processes. The investigation contributed to the study in several ways. Firstly, it defined the English proficiency levels required by these companies and the amount of English used in their workplaces. Secondly, it described the methods employed by each organisation to assess the English competency of candidates and the importance they placed on accent, pronunciation, communication and fluency as determining factors for employability. Finally, it answered the second and the third research questions. The next chapter discusses the major findings in light of the relevant literature.

CHAPTER EIGHT: DISCUSSION

To situate the issues raised by the findings, the first section of this chapter provides a brief description of the context and educational changes that instigated the research. The main problem is stated, followed by the supplementary aims and a concise explanation of the research design. The results of this study, derived from multiple sources of data, led to the identification of four major issues: (a) misalignment of internal triadic consistency of English courses at university level; (b) external misalignment between the required levels of English proficiency by government and employers; (c) the question of who should be responsible for the development of ESP courses; and (d) administrative and English proficiency constraints affecting EFL teachers.

Context of the Study

The current study investigated the influence of English proficiency on the employability of private university business graduates seeking employment in foreign companies as a consequence of globalisation. Regarded by the Vietnamese government as a vehicle for addressing economic circumstances, globalisation led to substantial foreign investment and a proliferation of foreign offshore companies in Vietnam. This necessitated a common language, and English was chosen because it is the language of international business.

Employment in a foreign company is highly desired by graduates because it offers favourable remuneration and advantageous working conditions. It also provides opportunities to work with colleagues from different cultures and backgrounds, as well as a greater likelihood of promotion and enhancement of professional knowledge and skills (Bui, 2013). Accordingly, competition for employment in foreign companies is stiff. In a highly competitive employment market, potential employees need to have not only professional knowledge and experience, but also good communication skills, especially in English, a vital requirement in foreign-company workplaces (Roshid & Chowdhury, 2013). These circumstances prompted educational change in Vietnam, including policies and curricula at all levels of schooling and tertiary education. To address the influx of business students into universities and reduce the burden on public higher education institutions, several private universities were established in alignment with government aims (Mamun, 2011).

Educational Change

The National Project required a radical change in pedagogy; from a traditional model based on Confucian principles to one that focused on communicative language proficiency. Although a timeframe was set for the implementation of English language courses and the expected levels of proficiency for graduates were clarified, universities had the flexibility and independence to design courses suited to their intake of students based on broad guidelines published by the National Project. This led to diverse course content and organisation in higher education institutions, in turn, resulting in inconsistencies across the board of the various courses offered. Against this backdrop, the government set the level of English proficiency for non-English major university students at level 3 on the Six Level Framework, where it was assumed that business graduates would be able to successfully communicate in English in the workplaces of foreign companies.

Main Problem and Aims of the Study

Despite the educational changes, foreign employers have expressed concerns about the inadequacy of English proficiency levels of graduates from higher education institutions. Therefore, a major aim of this study was to identify whether the English language programs and the systems used to assess the English proficiency of students at two private higher education institutions in Vietnam influenced their success or failure in obtaining employment in foreign companies. To do so, it was necessary to identify the practical level of English proficiency required by foreign employers in Vietnam and to compare this with private universities' measure of English proficiency. A further purpose of the study was to establish whether Vietnam's current policies on foreign language education and training are relevant for labour market requirements.

Research Design

Both primary and secondary data were used in this qualitative study. Analysis of secondary data sources, such as English education policy documents and regulations, curricula and teaching and learning guidelines, textbooks and materials, and assessment-related documents at private universities were deemed necessary to determine the curriculum content and assessment criteria for determining how business students gained their English proficiency prior to graduation. Similarly, the reviews of HR policies at foreign companies were necessary to investigate the recruitment and

selection criteria, the assessment of employees' English proficiency and other qualifications. However, due to incomplete regulations on English education at both private universities, only English teaching plans were provided. Similarly, written HR policies at four foreign companies were not available for review due to privacy regulations, but the information related to HR policies were shared by the foreign employers during the interviews. Primary data sources comprised transcriptions from audio recordings of semi-structured interviews with employers to obtain information about the recruitment and interview processes in their companies. Similarly, recordings of student responses during focus group discussions provided information about their learning experiences at the respective universities, and interviews with business graduates clarified their experiences of learning at universities and working in foreign companies.

Issue 1: Misalignment of internal triadic consistency within English courses

Like most countries, Vietnamese universities, particularly private universities, whilst guided by government policy, are authorised to develop faculty courses independently. The result has been a plethora of diverse English courses in Vietnam, many of which are entirely reliant on ESL teaching materials derived from other countries. The current study found that, rather than developing their own courses, the two private universities in this study chose to adopt textbooks for ESL students designed and published in an English-speaking country. Although these textbooks focused on the development of business reading, writing, listening and speaking skills (from elementary to advanced level), document analysis and interview transcripts revealed insufficient consideration for consistency and alignment with government policies. It was therefore not surprising that the findings of this study uncovered an internal triadic course misalignment between curriculum, pedagogy and assessment procedures.

According to the extant literature, there needs to be a consistent triadic relationship between the curriculum (syllabus or course), the mandated pedagogy and the content and procedures used to assess whether the goals of the curriculum have been met (Nguyen, T. C. N., 2017; Watermeyer, 2012; Webb, 1997). Misalignment between any of these elements means that the program is unbalanced and unsound (Bouzidi, 2009; La Marca et al., 2000; So-mui & Mead, 2000; Watermeyer, 2012). In the current study this was evident in the following examples: the absence of a students' needs analysis in selecting the curriculum, disjunction between the two series chosen by

University 2, the random selection of supplementary activities by one university, the lack of real-life speaking activities in the course, traditional pedagogical approaches used by the teachers, discrepancies between what was taught and what was examined, in addition to many other examples noted in the findings chapters.

Possible reasons for this internal misalignment is the absence of an initial needs analysis for the pre-placement test, resulting in some students' negative judgement of their course as irrelevant because it was either too easy or too difficult or unmatched to their area of study. University 1 adopted a single set of textbooks for all business-related disciplines, while the Business English Course at University 2 was developed by business content teachers without conferring with language teachers about the English language needs of the business students. As a result, the Business English Course at University 2 focused on learning general business vocabulary, specialist terminologies and improving grammar, reading and writing skills, overlooking English oral proficiency. If Vietnamese universities are to comply with the requirements of an adjunct ESP course (Harris & Ashton, 2011), business teachers and EFL teachers must confer to create links between the two courses based on their joint needs. Additionally, consultation with business graduates about which needs were not met in their ESP courses will provide valuable feedback. These findings accord with Johns (1991), who stated that the first step in curriculum design is to conduct a needs analysis. (Dudley-Evans & St John, 1998) argued that this should precede the selection and production of materials and evaluations relevant to the adopted resources and pedagogy.

Another notable element of misalignment revealed in the document reviews of the two private universities was the absence of a teaching approach in English courses. The focus group discussions at University 2 showed that the language teachers could decide on their own teaching approach for their English lessons. In the General English and Business English courses, the teaching methods at University 2 were reported as being typically traditional, with a focus on grammar, reading and writing skills and a lack of opportunities for students to develop oral proficiency through interaction with others.

By contrast, focus group discussions confirmed that at University 1, although undocumented, the language teachers adapted a CLT approach in their English lessons by acting as facilitators to provide rich comprehensible input, promoting and

encouraging students to participate in pair work and group discussions. Additionally, authentic materials that simulated situations encountered in the workplace were sought and used in English lessons. Since this teaching approach aligned with government policy direction and with students' needs and the communication requirements of their chosen professions, it supported development of their oral English proficiency. Nevertheless, there was an internal triadic misalignment because the course materials and pedagogy were not reflected in the assessment procedures. The National Project objectives cited the use of CLT as the preferred pedagogical approach for improving the communicative ability of EFL students (MOET, 2012) and prior studies noted the importance of this approach, recommending the inclusion of authentic materials in the curriculum to reflect situations that students will encounter in real life (Brandl, 2007; Krashen, 2008; Li, 1998; Richards, 2006; Richards & Rodgers, 2014; Trinh, 2005). The use of authentic materials necessitates the use of similar materials and processes in assessments, however, the focus group discussions at University 1 revealed that speaking skills were not assessed in ongoing tests and mid-level exams, causing an internal misalignment between government policy, course materials and the CLT pedagogical approach adopted by the teachers. Moreover, the research data showed that assessments in advanced General English from the Summit 1 and Summit 2 textbooks tested items that had not been taught and were beyond the capability of students' English proficiency levels. Such internal misalignment resulted in low exam scores and demotivated students. Additionally, the CLT materials chosen for inclusion in the course did not form part of the assessment process.

Likewise, focus group discussions at University 2 indicated an internal misalignment between the curriculum, pedagogy and assessments. In Year 1 of the General English Courses, skills assessment was flexible and it was left to each language teacher to choose what and how to test language proficiency. While some assessed reading and writing skills, others tested writing and listening skills, and oral proficiency was overlooked.

Moreover, similar items were assessed in the World Link 1A and World Link 1B tests, thus they failed to demonstrate any substantive progression. In Year 2, students studied English communication; however, the end-level exam either assessed only grammar (World Link 2A) or only reading and writing skills (World Link 3A). This continued in Year 3, with a focus on business English communication skills

needed in the workplace, where only grammar, reading and writing skills were assessed in the mid-level and end-level exams. Similarly, the scores attained in the final exam of the TOEIC course in Year 3 were used to determine students' eligibility to graduate as a requirement of the National Project, yet this exam only assessed listening and reading skills.

English assessment practices assist language teachers to identify the strengths and weaknesses of learners and provide feedback about the effectiveness of English courses (Bachman, 1990; Cheng, 2005). Since the purpose of assessments is to test and measure what learners have been taught, the internal misalignment described above resulted in distorted assessment results that did not accurately reflect the business students' English proficiency.

Issue 2: External Misalignment of English Proficiency Requirements between Government and Employers

Internal triadic inconsistencies not only negatively affected student learning and motivation, but also contributed to an external misalignment between the English proficiency expectations of foreign employers and those documented in government policies. The results of this study revealed an external misalignment between the English courses at both universities and the workplace requirements of service- and manufacturing-industry employers.

A particularly relevant finding was the emphasis placed by employers on the need for employees to be confident English speakers. As mentioned previously, the Business English Course at University 2, developed by business content teachers, focused on professional English terminology and grammar accuracy, while practising oral communication was virtually ignored. Similarly, speaking skills were only assessed in end-of-year exams. At University 1, the Business English textbooks were sourced from an English speaking country and taught by language teachers. According to T.C.N., Nguyen, T. C. N. (2017), a focus on specialised vocabulary and content knowledge is necessary but insufficient, and compared with authentic spoken genres, demonstrates an uncertain degree of external alignment with the needs of employers. Additionally, Allen (2016) reported that, rather than teaching vocabulary in isolation, students need contextual support and exposure to relevant collocations. At University 2, the language teachers relied solely on textbooks to teach vocabulary and grammar in

isolation and by rote, and there appeared to be very little variation in the vocabulary list taught in the Year 1 and Year 2 courses. The absence of oral communication practice in the stated objectives of the course negatively affected both internal and external alignment. Although University 2 attempted to include genuine workplace resources and speaking practice in their Business English courses, the oral communicative practices of the target industries were not considered or tested by either of the universities. Neither was consideration given to including important themes, such as interviewing techniques and structuring questions and answers in interviews. Consequently, most final year business students stated they were not confident with their English proficiency.

The focus group discussions revealed that one curriculum had been adopted by University 1 to teach Business English for all business disciplines. Therefore, some of the content of the textbooks were not appropriate for certain business disciplines and did not meet the students' learning needs or the communication requirements of the workplace. This created a mismatch between the contents of the ESP course and the language demands of the workplace (Bouzidi, 2009), as well as inconsistencies between the ESP course and the communication needs of industry (Chostelidou, 2010; Kassim & Ali, 2010; Liton, 2015; So-mui & Mead, 2000).

A major external misalignment was also evident between the government's English proficiency target of level 3 (on the Six Level Framework), which was considerably lower than the requirements of employers according to the importance they placed on English in the workplace. The interviews indicated that foreign employers in the manufacturing industry prioritised employees with technical knowledge and required their staff to attain English communicative proficiency (listening and speaking) of at least level 4 and written competence (reading and writing) starting from level 3; whereas, the requirements of foreign service employers were higher, due to the demand for professional communication in the service industry, starting from level 4 for all skills.

In addition, the results revealed that the origins of foreign companies influenced employer expectations of English proficiency. For example, employers in Company A, an offshore company from an English-speaking country, required higher levels of English proficiency than Company B, a foreign service company from a non-English speaking country. Employers in Company A stated that they required English proficiency levels of

IELTS 6.5 for listening and speaking skills (equal to level 5 on the government's Six Level Framework) and IELTS 6.0 for reading and writing (equal to level 4 on the government's Six Level Framework). However, employers in Company B required employees with a combined English proficiency level of IELTS 5.5, equal to level 4 on the government's Six Level Framework scale.

It also appeared from the results that the assessment procedures at the two private universities were not aligned with those of the foreign companies. The interviews with foreign employers revealed that interviewers assessed all languages skills during the recruitment and selection processes; however, they valued speaking and listening skills more highly than reading and writing. Although the service industry personnel referred to IELTS levels of English proficiency, their recruitment and selection processes were based mainly on personal perceptions and experience rather than any standardised system. For example, Company A staff expressed the belief that a formal test of oral English proficiency was unnecessary because only applicants who were proficient in English would apply for advertised positions in their company. Therefore, interviews were conducted in the form of conversations and candidates were judged on how sufficiently and correctly they understood the questions and how accurately, fluently and comprehensively they responded. On the other hand, Company B added a writing assignment to test reading and writing skills.

Conversely, Companies C and D developed their own scales to quantify candidates' English proficiency, based on their personal perceptions after following a similar interview stage to the service industries. manufacturing. Company C assessed reading and writing skills based on candidates' translation of passages containing technical concepts and terminologies from English to Vietnamese and vice versa. These were then converted to a cumulative score, and candidates with a minimum of 60 points on a 100-point scale were deemed successful.

Company D assessed English skills individually using a 5-point scale. Writing proficiency was assessed from candidates' English applications. Reading was not tested during recruitment and selection, but assessed during the probation period. Each skill was judged proficient with a score of 3 on a 5-point scale.

Issue 3: The Need for More Effective ESP Syllabus Preparation

The findings of this study indicate a lack of coordination between English language teachers and business content teachers in the design, delivery of Business English lessons and assessment of students, resulting in ineffective ESP courses. At University 1, the language teachers who taught Business English indicated they experienced difficulties understanding and explaining professional content and English terminologies. This was supported by the students who commented negatively about the teachers' lack of professional knowledge. Conversely, the University 2 discipline teachers responsible for developing and teaching Business English courses understood the professional concepts, but had insufficient English language proficiency and meta-linguistic understanding to successfully deliver the lessons. Neither were they familiar with CLT strategies, so they reverted to traditional teaching approaches that were incompatible with developing communicative skills. The language teachers' lack of content knowledge and content teachers' inadequate language skills signal a need to integrate language and academic skills (LAS) into targeted discipline units. This proposition was supported by Harris and Ashton (2011), who successfully proved that specifically targeted core units can be developed successfully with cooperation between content specialists and language teachers. Such collaboration adds contextualised support, functionality and relevancy to language lessons, thus providing discipline-specific English language development for students and up-skilling for both content and language teachers. According to Cummins (1981), learning English is made easier if it is embedded in a context that relates to real experience. This accords with the early theories of cognitivists (Piaget, 1967), interactionists (Vygotsky, 1978) and pragmatists (Bruner, 1974 and Halliday, 1973).

Issue 4: Administrative and English Proficiency Constraints Affecting EFL Teachers

The three previous issues are somewhat exacerbated by constraints that hinder the successful integration of business concepts and English language development. These include insufficient language proficiency of teachers, the need for in-service training to improve professional development, the use of a CLT approach to promote interaction and communication skills in EFL classes, and appropriate facilities for EFL classes.

Evidence from the focus group discussions and interviews show that several language teachers and business discipline teachers who taught ESP in University 2 were not capable of delivering English lessons fluently. This prevented them from using CLT

and practising communication skills in English lessons, and raises the need for improving the English proficiency of primary and secondary language teachers by attending in-service training courses designed by the National Project. However, it takes time for language teachers to become fully proficient (Cummins, 1981) – at least three years for communicative language and five to seven years for academic language. Inadequate English proficiency negatively influenced the teaching approaches chosen by the language teachers. The study revealed that the CLT approach used by the language teachers at University 1 was more successful than the traditional method used at University 2. While the traditional approach can be successful for teaching content knowledge pertaining to business subjects in large classes where academic knowledge is transmitted one way from teacher to students, this method constrains successful teaching in EFL classes where interaction is vital to language learning.

Another administrative constraint for EFL teachers was the lack of facilities in English classes. The focus group discussions indicated the availability of supportive facilities in English classes at University 1, such as moveable tables, projectors, free Wi-Fi, laptops and posters had facilitated group and pair work to develop oral language proficiency; whereas the traditional English classes with inflexible, long tables and no ICT at University 2 had been unsuccessful.

Issue 5: The Influence of English Proficiency on the Employment of Business Graduates at Foreign Companies in Vietnam

Evidence from the interviews with foreign employers and business graduates revealed that English was the primary working language at foreign companies. It was used in the recruitment and selection processes and in the workplace of the foreign companies. Therefore, English proficiency communication was an indispensable skill that the business graduates needed to work in the English speaking environment.

The influence of English proficiency on the employment of business graduates at foreign companies differed depending on the position and integral duties of the position. In the service industry, businesses heavily relied on the quality of the interactions between employees and customers which were usually in English. Therefore, the employees were required to have the appropriate skills, personal qualities, competent English proficiency and excellent communication skills to deliver the standards of excellence required by the companies.

The different service businesses required dissimilar English proficiency level. The foreign service companies which produced and sold service products directly to foreign customers required higher level of professional communication skills and English proficiency than those foreign service companies whose majority of business partners and customers were Vietnamese. In a foreign service company, the positions which required regular and direct communication with the senior staff, the business partners, and the foreign customers such as sales and marketing staff, business promotion staff, and PR staff necessitated a higher level of English proficiency than positions which required less communication such as accounts and administration staff.

Different from foreign service companies, the foreign companies in the manufacturing industry produced and sold tangible goods that are marketed, stocked and inventoried according to customer demand. The success of the manufacturing businesses depended mainly on the quality of the products they manufactured, therefore, it was essential for their employees to possess the necessary training and expertise to generate and market their products. In foreign manufacturing companies, the requirements of English proficiency were also varied depend on the position and the duties assigned. Positions where staff, such as sale, customer relations, or marketing staff communicated with senior staff and foreign business partners and customers required a higher English proficiency level than those in positions with fewer communication requirements. Therefore, the higher level of English proficiency the positions required, the more influence English proficiency had on the employment success on these positions.

Although the requirements of English proficiency differed as to the type of foreign company and the positions in each foreign company, the employees were expected to have at least competent English proficiency to communicate in English in the recruitment and selection processes and in the workplace. Therefore, the higher level of English proficiency the business graduates have the more opportunity they have to gain employment in foreign companies.

In summary, this chapter provided information on the context of the study, the main problem and the research design. This was followed by a discussion of the four main issues that emerged from the findings, including: misalignment of internal triadic consistency within the English courses at the universities, external misalignment of English proficiency requirements between government and foreign employers, the need for more effective ESP

syllabus preparation, and the administrative and English proficiency constraints affecting EFL teachers.

CHAPTER NINE: CONCLUSION

Introduction

This study set out to investigate the influence of English proficiency on the employability of business students who attended private universities and sought employment in foreign companies in Vietnam after graduating. To answer the major question the research examined three areas, namely: the English courses designed to prepare business students at private universities for such employment; the levels of English proficiency expected by foreign employers of business graduates; and the assessment methods used by foreign companies to gauge the English proficiency of applicants during their recruitment and selection processes. Data were collected from secondary research of relevant documents and primary research methods such as focus group discussions and semi-structured interviews. The focus group discussions took place with undergraduates who had experienced the English courses at private universities, while individual semi-structured interviews were conducted with other stakeholders, including successful and unsuccessful graduates who had experienced the recruitment and selection processes at foreign companies and five staff members responsible for recruitment and selection in two service and two manufacturing companies. Discussions with a government representative and a recruitment agent provided additional baseline information; the government representative revealed important details and reasons for the National Project and the recruitment agent outlined commonly used recruitment and selection processes by Vietnamese and foreign employers.

The results of this investigation show that although the two universities had implemented various English courses in response to the requirements mandated by the National Project, inconsistent internal triadic relationships existed between the course materials, pedagogy and assessment procedures, and further, that additional government guidelines were necessary for course development. Student responses also highlighted the failure of courses to include relevant materials that met their needs and emphasised the importance of placement-testing before student enrolments into English classes. A perceived lack of teachers' English proficiency and the need for greater emphasis on oral English was also expressed. The data revealed that none of the English teacher cohort had been trained in the government's preferred CLT approach, so they lacked knowledge of CLT theory, pedagogy and how to develop relevant course materials and assess English

language proficiency; particularly oral proficiency. Students also complained about the size of classes, insufficient time allocated to English courses and the demotivating emphasis placed on exam results. Questions were raised about who should be teaching English to business students. While business experts had the industry knowledge, they lacked English language expertise, and conversely, English teachers possessed meta-linguistic knowledge, but failed to understand some of the more difficult business concepts and terminologies.

More concerning from an employment point of view, the government-assigned levels of English proficiency for university graduates were misaligned with the expectations of employers, who valued speaking and listening proficiency above reading and writing proficiency. This was more evident in the service companies where success is heavily dependent on the knowledge and professional communication skills of employees who sell their services. By contrast, the success of foreign manufacturing companies depends on the quality of the products they produce, so they placed more emphasis on understanding the technical specifications and characteristics of their products. While communication with customers was important, the ability to read and understand the technical documents was equally important. Foreign manufacturing employers demonstrated a willingness to lower their requirements for reading and writing proficiency in favour of high-level listening and speaking skills.

In summary, it is clear that private universities need to develop a more efficient approach to developing unified and relevant English courses based on CLT pedagogy and the needs of industry. English teachers require in-service training and development to improve their levels of English proficiency and understanding of how CLT strategies can be utilised to develop ESP language instruction. Additionally, the government-mandated level 3 English proficiency, deemed adequate for business graduates to seek employment in foreign companies, needs revision. Students also need to be more aware of the importance of English for successful attainment of employment in a foreign company.

Recommendations for Government

Although universities are free to develop their own courses, government directives and guidance are crucial in times of educational change to eliminate internal misalignment of university courses and external misalignment between mandated English proficiency levels and the agencies that universities serve. Such discrepancies are a feature of educational change that must be addressed.

The change process can be made easier at all levels of education by clarifying the roles of personnel involved and providing an avenue for those planning courses and lessons to develop appropriate knowledge. Thus, the in-service courses already provided for primary and secondary English teachers would prove invaluable for university-level English teachers. Not only would this result in improved courses, but it would also lift the English proficiency of university teachers, the corollary of which would be improvements in English assessment results to the levels required by industry. However, universities would need to approve adequately paid leave for their English teachers to attend in-service sessions.

Recommendations for Universities

At university level, difficulties caused by educational change must be identified, confronted and addressed. This study revealed that students whose ambitions were to work in foreign companies after graduating were unaware of the vital role played by oral communication in obtaining employment. This lack of knowledge could be addressed by an orientation session at the start of each university year and inviting former successful graduates to speak about their interview experiences and the importance of English in their current employment. Undergraduate course requirements, expectations, assessment procedures and ways to independently improve English speaking skills could all be outlined during this orientation.

Another way to emphasise the importance of English is to introduce a voluntary work experience component that encourages second- and/or third-year students to shadow an employee for two weeks (possibly during the holidays) and award them points for participating. Students could orally share their experiences in English with their peers during class time. This demonstration of work experience in the field would also add value to their Curriculum Vitae.

Allocated time for English teachers to attend in-service training has already been discussed; however, time is also needed for course development. It is recommended that business teachers and English teachers collaborate to jointly plan courses that unite business and English concepts and terminologies and address internal consistency. If textbooks are to be used they need to be jointly sourced, approved and supplemented with appropriate authentic materials. This form of planning provides a symbiotic relationship whereby specialist business information

can be acquired by English teachers and specialist English language information can be acquired by business teachers. Consulting with local foreign company employers and employed business graduates regarding industry needs could also prove valuable for course planning. Another form of joint cooperation is through networking, to allow successful practices to be shared and discussed with personnel from other universities.

Organisational matters also need to be addressed. Class placement, class sizes, room configuration and resources all affect English learning. It is essential for placement tests to be administered before classes are allocated so that students can cope with the English course content. Placement in a course that is too easy or too difficult results in demotivation. Similarly, demotivation and confusion often occur when course assessment procedures fail to align with course aims and pedagogical practices. It should be noted that the development of oral language proficiency requires targeted and functional opportunities to speak; however, this is hampered by large class sizes, inadequate spaces in which to organise group work, and a shortage of ICT resources to enrich English lessons.

Ensuring that English teachers and business teachers have responded to the requirements of educational change and maximised their full potential is a complex but necessary task for supervisors. However, performance management provides an effective, proactive and interactive solution for supervisors to monitor progress of the change process and the effectiveness of teacher performance. Undertaken annually or bi-annually, it should be designed to monitor the effectiveness and training needs of personnel in a non-threatening environment of mutual trust. In an educational setting, performance management involves both the appraiser and the teacher at all stages of the process, during which major tasks are delineated, examples of good performance are acknowledged, advice offered, training needs identified and possible solutions to constraints are discussed to provide a positive focus for future action.

Recommendations for Teachers

Like all other professionals, teachers have a responsibility to continue upgrading their knowledge and practical application of pedagogical approaches such as CLT. Understanding business ESP concepts and applying this knowledge is necessary for effective English courses to exhibit internal triadic alignment that meets the needs of

business teachers and the requirements of the labour market. Employing suitable ICT to enhance language lessons is essential for English teachers.

To provide a proficient role model for their students, English teachers must ensure that their pronunciation and communicative competence is satisfactory by taking advantage of training that is available to them. Teachers should also be mindful of strategies and interactive activities that students find motivating.

Recommendations for Business Students

In the dynamic economy such as Vietnam, the businesses need to innovate and improve to remain competitive in the industry. One of the key factors that help the established businesses to develop in the fast changing and severe competitive market is to have qualified staff. The findings indicated that the employees in the foreign companies are expected not only to have professional knowledge and working experience in the field and competent English, but also to have other skills that are essential in the workplace such as creativity, logical thinking, effective communication skills, groupwork, IT skills, and other soft skills.

To have greater opportunity to work in foreign companies, the business students should focus on improving English proficiency especially the communication skills, and other essential skills, in addition to the professional knowledge at universities. Early recognition of the role of English and its influence on employment at foreign companies will motivate business students to learn English. Understanding the requirements of the foreign employers will help students recognise and concentrate on improving essential skills that are needed for the future employment. Hence, the opportunity to gain employment in foreign companies is greater.

Limitations of the Study

Although this study identified some important issues arising from educational change, there are a number of important methodological limitations that need to be considered. Firstly, university culture is complex, making it difficult to compare cross-cultural variables and draw firm conclusions about internal triadic relationships. Also, the research is context bound as it represents only two private universities: one in the north of Vietnam and one in the south. Additionally, the

university participants were non-randomly chosen using convenience sampling methods. This included a relatively small group of 21 undergraduate business students who comprised the four discussion groups, and six business graduates (three who successfully gained employment in international companies and three who were unsuccessful). Therefore, the results cannot be generalised to other university disciplines or contexts such as Vietnamese public universities or universities in other countries. A single member of the National Project Creation Board was also interviewed, but the opinions expressed may not represent the views of all board members.

Likewise, purposive sampling, combined with assistance from the Student Management Departments and Enterprise Cooperation Departments of the two universities was used to recruit the four foreign companies – two service companies located in a big city in the north of Vietnam and two manufacturing companies situated in a small city in the south. Three company executives from the services companies and two from the manufacturing companies were interviewed. Therefore, differences between the two industry types can only be identified within the targeted companies and cannot be generalised across a wider group of industries and professions. Attributes of these particular companies may be responsible for the findings documented and there is therefore a definite need for further research in this important field.

Although the narrow scope of this study restricts the application of its findings, it has the potential to serve as a base for future studies by increasing the sample size and extending the scope to include language teachers, students from other disciplines and a wider range of study sites. Similarly, foreign companies from other industries across Vietnam could be included to highlight differences between their English language requirements, so that students are more aware of industry needs.

Value of the Study

Despite its limitations, the use of qualitative methods allowed the researcher to explore the opinions of stakeholders involved in significant educational change. In doing so, it provided insights into how English programs, created to prepare business graduates for employment in foreign companies, were implemented at two private universities in Vietnam, in response to the requirements of the National Project. This

uncovered a number of difficulties that led to suggestions for improving course planning and development as well as suitable pedagogical approaches. By providing information on how employers judge the English proficiency of graduates seeking work, the study highlighted discrepancies between the levels of English proficiency expected by foreign employers and those mandated by the government. It also highlighted differences between the ways in which universities and employers judge English proficiency.

The special needs of business students and tertiary English teachers and the constraints they faced in the changing environment were revealed through interviews and focus group discussions. The findings may contribute to policy revisions within the Ministry of Education and Training (MOET) and are of potential value to other private and public universities in other countries, especially Asian countries attempting to improve the English proficiency of their students.

Recommendations for Further Research

Limitations identified in this study demonstrate that English education in Vietnam requires further research at tertiary level in general, and at private universities in particular. Further studies may accentuate the findings of the current study and supplement it with other issues and complexities involved in preparing graduate students for employment in English-speaking environments. However, research such as this needs to be examined empirically using a larger sample to provide results that can be generalised more adequately and offer further insights into the development of ESP business courses and those in other disciplines. A wider research base is also necessary to provide the Ministry of Education and Training with information regarding the difficulties university English teachers have experienced in preparing students for employment in foreign companies in Vietnam. While the findings of this study are suggestive and tentative in nature, the research design offers a potential pilot and framework for future investigations into other EFL contexts similar to Vietnam.

The following quote by Benjamin Franklin (1706-1790) highlights the need for planning: “By failing to prepare, you are preparing to fail.” This research study offers a possible way forward for course planning by suggesting that teachers of business studies and English language teachers collaborate to design courses, select suitable textbooks and deliver targeted ESP lessons at private universities. However, new research is needed to ratify whether this is viable in a Vietnamese context.

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Appendix 1

Information Letter to Participants

Edith Cowan University



English Proficiency of Vietnamese Business Graduates: Expectations of Government, Private Universities and Businesses Employers

Dear Sir/Madam

My name is Tien Tung LE and I am writing to you as a student of the School of Education at Edith Cowan University, Western Australia. I would like to invite you and your colleagues to participate in a research project I am undertaking as part of a Doctor of Philosophy in Education degree. The purpose of my research is to find out how the English language proficiency of graduates from private universities influences their employability in English speaking working environments.

What does participation in the research project involve?

Participation in the research project will involve document review of recruitment process and a 45 minutes face-to-face interview with company's staffs who directly involve in recruitment process and decide personnel of the company. The interview will be organised at a time and place convenient for them.

To what extent is participation voluntary, and what are the implications of withdrawing that participation?

Participation in this research is entirely voluntary. If you change your mind, you are able to withdraw your participation at any time. All contributions you have made to the research will be removed and destroyed unless explicit permission is given for their use. This decision will not affect the relationship with the researcher or Edith Cowan University.

What will happen to the information collected, and is privacy and confidentiality assured?

The information collected from you will be de-identified. It will then be stored securely in either locked cabinets or password protected computers and can only be accessed by the researcher and the researcher's supervisors. The data will be stored for a minimum period of 5 years, after which it will be destroyed. This will be achieved by shredding any paper-based data and erasing electronic data including audio recordings.

The data is maintained in a way that enables the researcher to re-identify an individual's data and destroy it if participation is withdrawn. This is done by using identification codes known only to the researcher.

The identity of participants will not be disclosed at any time. Participant privacy, and the confidentiality of information disclosed by participants, is assured at all other times.

The data, including audio recordings, will be used only for this research, and will not be used in any extended or future research without first obtaining explicit written consent from participants.

It is intended that the findings of this study will be reported in the researcher's doctoral thesis. A summary of the research findings will also be made available upon completion of the research.

What are the potential benefits of this research?

It is expected that the findings from the study will contribute to understanding the role of English proficiency and its influence on employability of the business graduate students in foreign companies. This information could then assist private universities and undergraduate business students to better understand the nature of the English proficiency required by business employers and the role of English proficiency in the employment selection processes in foreign companies in Vietnam. In turn, this could assist private universities to design English programs which are more responsive to their undergraduate business students' needs, particularly those related to their future employability in foreign companies. The findings may also contribute to the refinement of recruitment and selection processes deployed by foreign companies in Vietnam.

Are there any risks associated with participation?

The risks to those involved in this study are considered very low because of care taken with the construction of the study.

Is this research approved?

The research has been approved by the Human Research Ethics Committee of Edith Cowan University.

Who do I contact if I wish to discuss the project further?

If you would like to discuss the opportunity provided by this research with the researcher, please contact me at ttle0@our.ecu.edu.au or +61 451016428 or +84 1683766868.

If you wish to speak with an independent person about the conduct of the research, please contact Ms Kim Gifkins the Research Ethics Officer on + 61 (8) 6304 2170 or by email k.gifkins@ecu.edu.au

How do I indicate my willingness for the school to be involved?

If you have had all questions about the research answered to your satisfaction, and are willing to participate, please complete the Consent Form on the following page.

Yours Faithfully,

Tien Tung Le

PhD candidate, School of Education

Edith Cowan University

2 Bradford St, Mount Lawley WA 6050.

Tel: [REDACTED]

Email: [REDACTED]

Appendix 2

Consent Form

Edith Cowan University



English Proficiency of Vietnamese Business Graduates: Expectations of Government, Private Universities and Businesses Employers

Consent Form

- I have read the information letter and understand the aims, procedures, and risks of this project, as described within it.
- I have asked any questions I have had, and I am satisfied with the answers I received.
- I am willing to be involved in the research project, as described.
- I understand that participation in the project is entirely voluntarily.
- I understand that I am free to withdraw from participation at any time, without affecting my relationship with the researcher or Edith Cowan University.
- I understand that any audio recordings are for research purposes only and will be erased after 5 years and not used for any other purpose without the explicit written consent obtained from the participant.
- I understand that this research may be published in a journal or doctoral thesis, provided that the participants are not identified in any way.
- I understand that I can obtain a copy of the findings from this research upon its completion.

On this basis, I agree to participate in the English Proficiency of Vietnamese Business Graduates: Expectations of Government, Private Universities and Businesses research project.

Name (printed):

Signature:

Date: _____

Appendix 3

Checklist for Document Review at Private Universities

Edith Cowan University



English Proficiency of Vietnamese Business Graduates: Expectations of Government, Private Universities and Businesses Employers

1. Have the private universities implemented English courses in response to the requirements of the National Project?
2. What are the internal decisions, regulations on English teaching and learning at the private universities?
3. What are the English courses for business students at private universities?
4. Have the private universities conducted placement test before commencement of the English courses for business students?
5. What are the curricula of the English courses for business students?
6. What are the teaching approaches used by the teachers in teaching English at private universities?
7. How do the teachers assess English proficiency of business students during the English courses?
8. How do the private universities determine the English proficiency level of the business students to be eligible for graduation as required by the National Project?
9. How the university prepare for the business undergraduates for the future employability in the foreign companies?

Appendix 4

Semi-Structured Focus Group Discussion Questions for Business Undergraduates

Edith Cowan University



English Proficiency of Vietnamese Business Graduates: Expectations of Government, Private Universities and Businesses Employers

Part 1: Explore the nature of the current English program in the university from the student's perspective.

1. Can you tell me about the English program in your course?
2. What do you understand the purpose of the English program to be in your university? What do you think it is aiming to do?
3. What do you think about the English program you have experienced at university?
4. Do you think the English program in your course suits your need? Do you have any recommendation?

Part 2: Explore how the university measures the student's English proficiency.

5. How is English proficiency measured in your university?
6. What is your perception of English proficiency measurement system in your university?

Part 3: Explore student's perception of role of English in employability.

7. What is your most important purpose of learning English?
8. What do you think is the role of English in graduate students' employability?
9. What kind of company would you like to work in after you graduate? Why would you like to work in that type of company?
10. Do you think your English proficiency will meet the company requirements? Why do you think that is the case?
11. Would you like to make any other comments?

Appendix 5

Semi-Structure Interview Questions for Business Graduates who have Gained Employment in a Foreign Company

Edith Cowan University



English Proficiency of Vietnamese Business Graduates: Expectations of Government, Private Universities and Businesses Employers

1. Can you please tell me about the recruitment process that you experienced in your company?
2. How did you prepare for the job interview?
3. What was the role of English in the recruitment process?
4. Did you have any problems understanding the English language of the person who interviewed you? [If so] Why do you think you had this problem?
5. How is English used in the company?
6. What English skill - speaking, listening, writing or reading- do you think was most important in getting your job? Which do you think is most important in your current role in the company?
7. How well do you think the English program in the university prepared you for gaining your position and doing your work in the company now?
8. What do you think undergraduate business students should do now so that they can gain employment in foreign companies when they graduate?
9. Are there any other comments you would like to make?

Appendix 6

Semi-Structure Interview Questions for Business Graduates who Failed to Gain Employment in a Foreign Company

Edith Cowan University



English Proficiency of Vietnamese Business Graduates: Expectations of Government, Private Universities and Businesses Employers

1. Can you please tell me about the recruitment process you experienced in the foreign company?
2. How did you prepare for the job interview?
3. What was the role of English in the recruitment process?
4. What is your perception of English proficiency level the company required?
5. What was your perception of the Interviewers' English proficiency level?
6. How well do you think the English program in the university prepare you to gain employment in a foreign company?
7. How well do you think the English program in the university matches with employers' English proficiency requirement? Why?
8. What English skill speaking, listening, writing or reading- do you think is the most important for you to get a job in a foreign company?
9. Why do you think that you did not get the job after your interview?
10. What advice would you give to undergraduate business students to help them prepare to get a job in a foreign company?
11. Are there any other comments you would like to make?

Appendix 7

Checklist for Document Review at Foreign Companies

Edith Cowan University



English Proficiency of Vietnamese Business Graduates: Expectations of Government, Private Universities and Businesses Employers

1. What are the decisions, regulations about the recruitment and selection process available at the foreign company?
2. What are the roles of different divisions of the company in the recruitment and selection process?
3. How is the job description developed and advertised to get a desired quantity of the potential candidates?
4. How are the potential candidates shortlisted and contacted for the selection process?
5. How is the selection process at foreign company? How are the interviews and other tasks conducted in the selection process?
6. Who will attend the recruitment and selection process to assess the potential candidates?
7. What are the functions and responsibilities of each member of the assessment board in the recruitment and selection process?
8. How is English used in the recruitment and selection process? How many languages are used in the recruitment and selection process?
9. How are English and other languages used in the workplace at foreign company?
10. How is the probation period applied for newly recruited position?

Appendix 8

Semi-Structured Interview Questions for Foreign Employers

Edith Cowan University



English Proficiency of Vietnamese Business Graduates: Expectations of Government, Private Universities and Businesses Employers

Part 1: Explore the perception of business employers of graduate business students.

1. Can you please describe the recruitment process in your company?
2. What is the role of English in the recruitment and selection process?
3. How many languages are being used in your company?
4. How is the English language used in your company?
5. What level of English proficiency does your company require of candidates?
6. What is your perception of business graduates from private universities English proficiency? What factors do you think affect the students' English proficiency?
7. What do you think about English accent of Vietnamese business graduates?
8. Do you think English accent influence on the English proficiency of Vietnamese business graduates?

Part 2: Explore the factors affecting the employer's perception of graduate business students' English proficiency.

9. What are the company's criteria for evaluating candidates' English proficiency?
10. What factors do you think affects candidates' success in meeting the English language requirements of your company?
11. What English skill do you think is the most important for employees in your company?
12. Is there any other aspect of graduate employment in your company which you would like to talk about?

Appendix 9

Semi-Structured Interview Questions for Member of National Project

Edith Cowan University



English Proficiency of Vietnamese Business Graduates: Expectations of Government, Private Universities and Businesses Employers

1. Can you please explain the purposes of the National Plan for Teaching and Learning Foreign Languages period 2008-2020?
2. Can you please explain the reason why level B1 is set as the compulsory foreign language proficiency level for non-foreign language undergraduates?
3. Does National Plan for Teaching and Learning Foreign Languages period 2008-2020 include regulations on how to implement foreign language exit exam for non-foreign language undergraduates at universities? Is it compulsory to assess all four sub-skills: reading, writing, listening and speaking?
4. Do you think non-foreign language graduates are able to proficiently communicate in foreign language at B1 level?
5. Do you think level B1 meets the employers' requirement of foreign language proficiency in foreign language speaking environment?
6. What are your comments on how non-foreign language undergraduates should do to proficiently communicate in foreign language?

Appendix 10

Semi-Structure Interview Questions for Recruiting Agent

Edith Cowan University



English Proficiency of Vietnamese Business Graduates: Expectations of Government, Private Universities and Businesses Employers

1. Can you please describe the recruitment process in your company?
2. What is the role of English in the recruitment and selection process?
3. How many languages are being used in your partner companies?
4. How is the English language used in your partner companies?
5. What level of English proficiency does your partner companies require of candidates?
6. Do you think English accent influence on the English proficiency of Vietnamese business graduates?
7. What are the company's criteria for assessing the candidates' English proficiency?
8. What English skill do you think is the most important for employees in your partner companies?

Appendix 11

List of Participant Coding

Code	Informants
University 1	Corporate-sponsored private university in the big city in the North.
University 2	Individual-sponsored private university in the small city in the South.
Company A	Foreign transportation service company in the big city in the North, originating from America.
Company B	Foreign finance service company in the big city in the North, originating from Singapore.
Company C	Foreign motorcycle manufacturing company in the small city in the South, originating from Taiwan.
Company D	Foreign mechanic manufacturing company in the small city in the South, originating from Japan.
FG1.1	Focus group discussion 1 at University 1
FG1.2	Focus group discussion 2 at University 1
FG2.1	Focus group discussion 1 at University 2
FG2.2	Focus group discussion 2 at University 2
GS1.1	Business graduate 1 from University 1 who gained employment in a foreign company.
GS1.2	Business graduate 2 from University 1 who successfully gained employment in a foreign company.
GS2.1	Business graduate 1 from University 2 who successfully gained employment in a foreign company.
GF1.1	Business graduate 1 from University 1 who was unsuccessful in gaining employment in a foreign company.
GF1.2	Business graduate 2 from University 1 who was unsuccessful in gaining employment in a foreign company.
GF1.3	Business graduate 3 from University 1 who was unsuccessful in gaining employment in a foreign company.

AE1	Employer 1 from Company A
AE2	Employer 2 from Company A
BE	Employer from Company B
CE	Employer from Company C
DE	Employer from Company D
BM	National Project Board Member
RA	Recruiting Agent