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Active learning in an ICT-enhanced blended learning environment: A case study of Vietnamese students in Australian higher education

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**ACTIVE LEARNING IN AN ICT-ENHANCED
BLENDED LEARNING ENVIRONMENT: A CASE
STUDY OF VIETNAMESE STUDENTS IN
AUSTRALIAN HIGHER EDUCATION**

A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the award of the degree

Doctor of Philosophy

from

UNIVERSITY OF WOLLONGONG

by

Vu, Xuan Huong

B.Ed. in Psychology & Pedagogy, M.Ed.

School of Education

Faculty of Social Sciences

2015

Statement of Original Authorship

I, Vu, Xuan Huong declare that this thesis presents work conducted by myself during my PhD candidature and does not contain materials published elsewhere or extracted in whole or in part from a thesis or work by which I have qualified for or been awarded another degree or diploma.

To the best of my knowledge and belief, this thesis also does not contain any materials previously published or written by another person except where due acknowledgement is made in the text.

Abstract

This thesis was conducted in response to the ongoing issues in education reform with the increasing use of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) for the development of active learning in Vietnamese higher education. This study aims to explore the ways that active learning can be adopted by Vietnamese University students who are studying within an ICT-enhanced blended learning environment in Australia, a developed Western country with a long history of providing ICT-supported learning opportunities for students in higher education.

This study undertook a qualitative case study approach, drawing on the development of hybrid active learning practices among Vietnamese international students in an ICT-enhanced blended learning environment at an Australian University. Berry's models of acculturation processes (Berry, 2005) were employed as an organising theoretical framework for exploring Vietnamese students' cross-cultural learning experiences. The potential for active learning amongst Vietnamese international students in the Australian learning environment was analysed using theories on active learning and a constructivist approach. The data was collected through semi-structured interviews with nine Vietnamese international students and a review of their course documents. The results of this study show that there is a potential for active learning among Vietnamese students studying in an ICT-enhanced blended learning environment in Australia. This study has found, and subsequently argues, that active or passive learning is influenced by educational context, rather than being determined by students' personal characteristics or their cultural heritage. However, it did not claim that the students who were educated in Confucian cultural contexts can adopt the new culture and become active learners immediately. The study has demonstrated the difficulties that the participants experienced while becoming more active in their learning in the new ICT-based setting. It has also confirmed that in order to develop active learning characteristics, students need to be facilitated and supported by an educational environment in which knowledge content, learning environment, teaching approaches and assessments are carefully designed with a thoughtful integration of ICT to engage students in more effective study.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

Over the past decade, educational literature has indicated that University graduates in Vietnam have been ‘poorly prepared in terms of their range of skills and capacities beyond those required for narrowly academic pursuits’ (Q. K. Nguyen & Nguyen, 2008 p. 74). Ten years ago, a survey of 234 employers and 3,364 graduate students conducted by the University of Education, Ho Chi Minh City about tertiary education quality, showed that 50% of graduates have to be retrained to be able to meet recruiters’ requirements (Mo, 2003). Research conducted by Nuffic Neso Vietnam (2005) also confirms that with the contemporary training capability of Vietnam, only 40-60% of the demand for a skilled workforce can be met, while about 60% of graduate students from training institutions need at least 6-12 months for retraining after being employed. When looking to recruit hundreds of employees, the well-known semiconductor company (Intel) interviewed more than 2,000 Vietnamese graduates but found only forty of them to be appropriate for recruitment (Thomson, 2009). A number of studies have shown that limitations in teaching and learning in Vietnamese universities result in a lack of necessary skills that students need to develop for their study and future career.

Most recently, L. Le, Tran and Hunger (2013) conducted an analysis of teaching and learning in Vietnamese universities and concluded that the situation has remained unchanged. They provided an alarming set of statistics related to the capability of Vietnamese students to engage in active learning:

More than 50% of students are not really confident in their learning capability.
Over 40% of students say that they are incapable of self-study.
Nearly 70% of students claim that they are incapable of teaching themselves.
Nearly 55% of students said that they are not really involved in learning.

(L. Le, et al., 2013, p. 242)

In looking for a solution, some scholars suggest that overseas studies of Vietnamese students is “an important response to the crisis in Vietnamese higher education” (J. V. Thomas & Wilkinson, 2008, p. 5). Going abroad for studying, either with the support of a scholarship or being self-financed, has become progressively more popular in recent years (N. T. Le, 2011; Phuong-Mai, Terlouw, & Pilot, 2006). In order to support this educational trend to study overseas, the MOET (Ministry of Education and Training) has increasingly cooperated with a large number of developed countries, international organizations and institutions around the world. As a result, Vietnamese students have received various scholarships from these organizations and countries for their overseas study, especially from Australia (Australian Government, 2012; A. Walker & Dimmock, 2002). A number of scholarship programs also have been introduced by the MOET and Higher Education Institutions in Vietnam, such as the Mekong 1000 program, the East Central Vietnam program and the 322 project for Master’s and PhD candidates to study abroad (D. N. Pham, 2005). The Vietnamese government has also implemented a project with a goal of training 20,000 PhDs by 2020, of which over 10,000 PhDs were planned to be trained abroad (Phuong-Mai, et al., 2006). Therefore, in the coming years there will be a considerable increase in the number of Vietnamese students studying in foreign countries, and Australia is, according to the Australian Government (2005), a leading study destination for students from Vietnam, with over 23,000 Vietnamese students enrolled in Australian educational institutions and about 10,000 students following Australian training programs in Vietnam as at 2005. In January 2014, Vietnam was on the top three countries which have a high volume of students studying in Australia (Australian Government, 2014).

The purpose of this chapter is to provide the rationale for the current study. It begins with providing contextual information and an argument for conducting this project. It then presents the aims of the study, the research approach and this thesis plan.

1.1 Background to the Study

In order to meet the demands of social and economic development within **Vietnam**, significant efforts have been made to improve its higher education system. A reformation of the higher education system was implemented in 1993 based on Western teaching and learning models (L. H. Pham & Fry, 2004). Therefore, the strategies for the improvement of Vietnamese higher education towards 2020 have focused on: (a) modernizing the training curriculum in colleges and universities by adding more applied technology and scientific content to meet economic requirements, and also (b) transforming from teacher-centered to student-centered methods, together with applying modern technological equipment and advanced teaching approaches, so as to foster student's activeness and creativity (MOET, 1998; National Assembly, 2000).

According to constructivist teaching and learning theories, students learn best when they are actively involved in a process of inquiry, interpretation, investigation and discovery (Alt, 2015; Drew & Mackie, 2011; Duong, 2009; Keengwe & Onchwari, 2011; T. C. Le, 1991; Ugwuegbulam & Nwebo, 2014). This view is traced to the work of John Dewey who emphasises the importance of training individuals “not as passive recipients of educational content, but as active makers of meaning, capable of exercising independent judgment and of democratic collaboration” (Gregory, 2002, p. 399). Current constructivist views of teaching and learning require educators to guide learners to think and study beyond traditional boundaries, in order to grow to be functioning members of modern society (Keengwe & Onchwari, 2011; Mustafa & Fatma, 2013; T. H. T. Pham, 2008). In a modern technologically driven society, learners can no longer passively sit in the class waiting for knowledge to be distributed by their teacher which they then memorize mechanically, but instead are expected to become actively involved in and be responsible for their own learning (Ugwuegbulam & Nwebo, 2014; Zhenhui, 2001). Moreover, students need to be assisted in recognizing the limitations of existing knowledge or personal perspectives, and instilling an interest for lifelong learning (Drew & Mackie, 2011; Pratt, 1992). Therefore, the traditional teaching methods should be changed to encourage active learning in learners (Hofstede & Hofstede, 2005; Mustafa & Fatma, 2013).

Integrating ICT in teaching and learning plays an important role in the educational improvement agenda. The use of ICT has been considered as a crucial tool for participating in the new knowledge society (Keengwe & Onchwari, 2011; J. Peeraer & Petegem, 2010; Samra, 2013). The application of ICT is also seen as “an essential aspect of teaching’s cultural toolkit in the twenty-first century, affording new and transformative models of development that extend the nature and reach of teacher learning wherever it takes place” (Tucker, 1999, p. 324). ICT can help design and operate flexible learning courses, and the online education delivery techniques. Used effectively, ICT can support the transformation of a learning process from a teacher-centered and passive learning approach, to a student-centered and active learning approach (N. F. Liu & Littlewood, 1997). Research conducted by Thomas (2002), Spiceland & Hawkins (2005) and Keengwe & Onchwari (2011) demonstrate that a teaching method supporting interaction and collaboration works effectively within the online delivery of the courses. Specifically, it was found that in Asian cultures, learners who tend to be reserved and often worry about “losing face” or making mistakes in public, often prefer to involve themselves more in online courses where they can feel safe to participate in student discussions and interact with the lecturer (Duiker, 1995; MOET, 1998). The integration of ICT with the constructivist teaching approach is, therefore, supposed to be able to support active learning (Mustafa & Fatma, 2013; Neo & Kian, 2003; Paily, 2013), particularly in an Asian context (Dexter, Anderson, & Becker, 1999). It is therefore believed that, in order to improve active learning in **Vietnam**, changes in education such as reforming teaching and learning methods should combine with the application of ICT for flexible and blended learning.

In recognition of the important role of education and training, particularly active learning in higher education in contributing to the quality of the future workforce and the modernization of **Vietnam**, the Communist Party and the government have considered education and training, and science and technology as areas of national priority (Vallely & Wilkeninson, 2008). Teaching and learning methods have been reformed to encourage students’ active engagement or to make students become more active and involved in their learning process (Harman & Nguyen, 2010; MOET, 2001).

The MOET launched the “year of ICT” in education in the school year 2008-2009 to promote the use of ICT in innovative teaching and learning methods (J. Peeraer & Petegem, 2010).

Despite certain achievements, higher education in **Vietnam** still faces a range of limitations in relation to teaching and learning modernization, as well as in the application of ICT in education (Harman & Nguyen, 2010; Q. K. Nguyen & Nguyen, 2008). Similar to other developing countries, Vietnam is still in the process of implementing ICT in education; it has been observed that e-learning in Vietnam is mainly used to replicate traditional teaching practice (J. Peeraer & Petegem, 2010). Generally, Vietnamese students are described as being passive during the learning process, and lecturers still use traditional methods which focus on the transmission of information (Harman & Nguyen, 2010; T. N. Pham, 2010). The teaching and learning styles “have been deeply imbedded in the mentality of both Vietnamese teachers and students” (T. H. T. Pham, 2008, p. 5). It is argued that:

Vietnam’s higher education, much like China’s, was heavily influenced by Confucianism and the Soviet model. The former emphasized rote learning, repetition and memorization over innovation, and the latter stressed ideology and theory over practice. Most schools suffer from obsolete equipment, outdated curricula and retrograde teaching methods. (D. N. Pham, 2005, p. 4)

In recent years, there has been an increasing use of ICT in higher education in Vietnam. However, the effectiveness of integrating technology in teaching and learning is still appears as a concern to educators and experts (L. Le, et al., 2013). It has been noted that “Vietnamese teacher educators mostly used ICT in teaching practice in a way that mainly replaces traditional practice” (J. Peeraer & Petegem, 2012, p. 98).

In regard to Australian education, research highlights how students in Australian are encouraged to (a) study independently; (b) use time management practices; (c) be self-motivated; (d) be responsible for learning on their own; (e) express their personal opinions or ideas with peers and the lecturers; and (f) participate in group activities such as group discussions in order to ask questions and solve open questions raised within

the classrooms (Ballard & Clanchy, (1997); Cortazzi & Jin, (1997) and Wang, Singh, Bird & Ives, (2008). With this teaching practice in Australia, students are encouraged to draw on their own experiences, to generate new thought and to challenge the existing knowledge delivered by teachers or the text. The use of active learning approaches such as student debate and collaborative learning groups, in which knowledge can be constructed collaboratively with the presence of various perspectives, is essential here.

In addition, Oliver, O'Donoghue & Harper (2003) and Taylor & Newton (2012) indicate that Australia is a nation with a high degree of capacity and expertise in the integration of ICT in teaching and learning in higher education. The teaching approaches, with a focus placed on learners and their construction of knowledge, and the availability of ICT application in the Australian context, have the potential for the effective incorporation of ICT in education (Walshe, 1984). The universities of Australia currently have positioned themselves in response to “the digital learning environment” through applying new learning approaches such as e-learning, flexible learning and blended learning (Sappey & Relf, 2010). Blended learning is described as a combination of face-to-face and online learning (Stacey & Gerbic, 2009). It is also called the “tutorial mode” by Macdonald (2008), in which students studying on-campus and off-campus (distance education students) are provided with distance education materials such as online learning resources and team project sites, and have only tutorial contact in person with their lecturer or academic staff. Oliver and Tigwell (2005) have also stated that “blended pedagogies propose combining constructivism, behaviourism and cognitivism to optimise learning outcomes” (p. 18).

Efforts to improve the quality of higher education in Vietnam, by adopting Western educational philosophies and practices, failed to take advantage of developed countries' achievements (A. Walker & Dimmock, 2002). Particularly, changes which have been made within the Vietnamese higher education system in relation to active learning, and the application of ICT to modern teaching approaches, failed to achieve the expected outcomes (Q. K. Nguyen & Nguyen, 2008 ; T. N. Pham, 2010). Research demonstrates that the limitations of adopting the Western educational policies, methodologies and practices in developing countries largely result from a serious disregard of cultural

heritage (T. H. T. Pham, 2014; E. Thomas, 1997). These limitations are particularly noticeable in those countries, such as Vietnam, that are not characterised by Western self-expression or secular-rational values. The teaching and learning cultures in those countries, therefore, may hinder students from becoming active learners and being successful in this era of the speedy development of information technology (T. N. Pham, 2010). However, there is still limited research that has explored the implications of the teaching and learning cultures in relation to improving active learning. This study will, therefore, focus on how Vietnamese students can become active learners, or actively engaged in the learning process, when they are studying in the Australian higher education system, an educational environment with ICT-enhanced blended learning.

1.2 Purpose of the Study and Research Strategy

This study aimed to explore the ways that active learning can be experienced by Vietnamese students who are studying within an ICT-enhanced blended learning environment in Australian higher education. The purpose of this study was to investigate the ways that Vietnamese students perceive differences in teaching and learning between Vietnamese and Australian University and how they adapt to those changes. Specifically, the focus of the study was on the ways that Vietnamese students can become more active in their learning while studying in Australia and the role of ICT-based teaching and learning environment in enabling this change.

Research Questions

1. How do Vietnamese students perceive their experiences of teaching and learning practice in Vietnamese higher education?
2. What types of teaching and learning practice are encountered by Vietnamese students in the ICT-enhanced blended learning environment at an Australian University?

3. How do Vietnamese students become more engaged in active learning when studying in the ICT-based learning environment in Australia?

This study was informed by an interpretivist paradigm; it is a qualitative research that uses a case study approach. The participants were selected from Vietnamese international students who had studied in the Vietnamese higher education environment before they came to Australia for further study. All of the participants had experiences with studying in ICT enhanced blended learning environments at an Australian University. The students who were recruited come from different regions in Vietnam (the north, the central and the south) and were studying at different levels including bachelor, master and doctorate. The differences amongst the participants, in terms of their locations and levels of study allowed the researcher to cover a diversity of views about the research issues.

Overall, this study was guided by a number of theories. The acculturation theory of Berry (2005) adapted by Chen (2010) was employed as an organising framework to examine the cross-cultural learning experiences of Vietnamese international students in Australia. This theory guided the researcher to construct the object of this study through investigating characteristics of teaching and learning practices that the participants perceived in both Vietnam (“heritage culture”) and Australia (“host culture”), and then addressing the students’ learning experiences of the meeting of the two educational contexts. Theories on active learning and the constructivist approach were used to address the potential of active learning among Vietnamese international students in the Australian learning environment. Accordingly, the data was collected in three phases through semi-structured interviews with the students, and analysis of the documents related to the teaching and learning process at the Australian University. The first stage of data collection focused on the first research question to explore the perception and experiences of the students about teaching and learning practices in Vietnamese higher education. The next phase aimed to investigate the reality of the educational environment that the participants encountered in the ICT-enhanced blended learning environment at the Australian University to answer the second research question. To answer the third question the last phase addressed the changes in learning styles of the

participating students in the Australian context, and their perceptions of this process of engaging more actively in their learning as prompted by the ICT-based environment offered by the Australian University.

1.3 Outline of Chapters

This thesis has been presented in six chapters. Chapter 1 has provided a rationale for the current research and the focus of the investigation. It briefly describes the research approach and provides a plan of the structure of this project chapter by chapter. In Chapter 2, the researcher reviews relevant literature to establish a conceptual framework and empirical research background for the study. This chapter focuses on the issues related to active learning including the concept of active learning and its interrelated factors, the cultural differences in teaching and learning styles between East Asian and Western countries, the reality of teaching and learning styles in Vietnam, and the role of ICT-enhanced blended learning environments in fostering active learning. Chapter 3 presents the theoretical and methodological approaches adopted in the study. The chapter describes the theoretical basis guiding the research, the methodology, the research population, the data collection procedure and the data analysis strategy. It also presents the strategies employed to enrich the rigour and quality of the research.

The research findings are presented in two chapters, Chapter 4 and Chapter 5. Chapter 4 presents the study results related to the students' perceptions of learning and teaching practice in the higher education sector in Vietnam, in comparison with those they encounter in the ICT-enhanced blended learning environment in Australia. The presentation of the results aims to address the first and second research question. Chapter 5 presents the results of the data analysis in response to the third question. It reports the findings on the opportunities and the potential of the two learning environments for active learning with an emphasis on the ICT-enhanced learning environments at the Australian University. Finally, Chapter 6 discusses the implications of the research findings, indicating how the findings address the research questions and

how the results can expand existing knowledge in the field. It also acknowledges the limitations of this investigation and suggests areas and possibilities for future research.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to review the relevant literature in order to build up a theoretical and empirical research background for the current study, and locate the research gap that is addressed by this study. The identified literature areas reviewed in this chapter include, firstly, the issues related to active learning, active learning pedagogy and the constructivist approach. Secondly, the literature on cultural differences in teaching and learning styles between East Asian and Western countries is reviewed. Thirdly, the reality of teaching and learning styles in Vietnam is scrutinised. Finally, this chapter reviews literature on blended learning environments and constructivist pedagogies.

2.2 Active Learning

This section reviews literature in relation to the notion of active learning. The review aims for the formation of a theoretical understanding of active learning and defining the essential characteristics of an active learner. This review forms the basis for analysing the learning approaches of the participants in this study - Vietnamese students.

The notion of active learning can be contrasted with that of passive learning, in which the learners are considered simply as knowledge receivers who principally listen to the lecturer's exposition, then recite and drill the provided knowledge (Ahrari, Othman, Hassan, Samah, & D'Silva, 2014; Anthony, 1996; N. Michel, J.J. Cater, & O. Varela, 2009; Snyder, 2003; Spring, 2006). Passive learners are likely to attain "shallow"

learning outcomes and to lose attention rapidly (Halsall & Cockett, 1998; Nagy & Ilisoi, 2013; 2008; Wolfe, 2006). Petress (2008) indicates that when engaged in learning passively, students tend to “become disinterested, non-motivated and responsive, and ineffectual learners” (p. 556). The passive forms of learning are less attractive to students than active because in active learning students “can become more motivated and interested when they have a say in their own learning and when their mental activity is challenged” (Simons, 1997, p. 22). Active learning is defined in the Greenwood Dictionary of Education by Collins and O'Brien (2011) as students attaining knowledge by participating in learning activities such as gathering information, goal formation and problem solving. They also regularly evaluate their own achievements and adjust their actions accordingly.

Historically, the idea of active learning is not new. It can be traced back to the beginning of the 20th century, specifically to the philosophy of John Dewey (1915). In his “Schools of To-morrow”, Dewey emphasised the important role of personal experience of students in learning, as he said:

The teacher and the book are no longer the only instructors; the hands, the eyes, the ears, in fact the whole body, become sources of information, while teacher and textbook become respectively the starter and the tester. No book or map is a substitute for personal experience; they cannot take the place of the actual journey. (Dewey, 1915, p. 74)

The idea of the importance of personal experience in learning was developed further in Dewey’s “Experience and Education” (1938). In this book, Dewey compared and contrasted the traditional methods of education to the current era with his ideas of progressive education. He described traditional education as relying “upon subjects or the cultural heritage for its content”, while progressive education was defined as exalting “the learner’s impulse and interest and the current problems of a changing society” (Dewey, 1938, pp. 9-10). In criticising traditional education, Dewey asserted that students had limited active engagement in the development of subject matter. This was because, he explained, the traditional education system put much emphasis on delivering pre-ordained knowledge, and was not concerned with the actual learning experiences, the capacities or interests of the students (Dewey, 1938). He concluded that

with traditional systems “the attitude of pupils must, upon the whole, be one of docility, receptivity, and obedience” (Dewey, 1938, p. 18). The progressive education that Dewey proposed included principles which were different to the traditional system, as shown in Table 1:

Table 1

Traditional and progressive education

Traditional education	Progressive education
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Students are imposed with teachers’ standards, subject matter and methods</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Expression and cultivation of individuality are encouraged</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>External discipline</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Free activity</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Learning from texts and teachers</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Learning through experiences</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Acquisition of isolated skills and techniques by drill</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Acquisition of skills and techniques as means of attaining ends, which are important and appealing to students</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Preparation for a more or less remote future</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Making the most of the opportunities of present life or practical application</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Static aims and materials</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Acquaintance with a changing world</i>

(Adapted from Dewey, 1938, pp. 19-20)

The principles of progressive education, as shown above, promote active involvement of students in their own learning through “educative experiences”. In order to acquire the knowledge of a product or object, students need to experience “the ways in which it was originally built up or to changes that will surely occur in the future” (Dewey, 1938, p. 19). In essence, then, students need to actively engage in the learning process through hands-on and intellectual activities to build up their own knowledge (Dewey, 1916).

Since the work of Dewey, the concept of active learning has been interpreted in literature in various ways. For example, Gibbs (1988) emphasised the combination of the intellectual and physical actions in active learning: “it is not enough just to do, and neither is it enough just to think. Nor is it enough simply to do and think. Learning from

experience must involve linking the doing and the thinking” (Gibbs, 1988, p. 9). Bonwell and Eison (1991) suggest that active engagement in various learning activities needs to occur at the level of higher order thinking:

They [students] must read, write, discuss, or be engaged in solving problems. Most important, to be actively involved, students must engage in higher-order thinking tasks such as analysis, synthesis and evaluation. (p. 3)

According to Meyers & Jones (1993), active learning can be assured by three interrelated factors including teaching resources, basic elements and learning strategies. With regard to teaching resource, students need to actively interact and participate in using available teaching resources such as subject outlines, readings, lecture notes or various online materials in order to support their study. The basic elements that students need to engage in are reading, listening, talking, writing and reflecting. Involvement in these actions enables students to “clarify, question, consolidate and appropriate new knowledge” (Meyers & Jones, 1993, p. 21). The learning strategies include small group work, discussions, cooperative work, case study, problem solving and journal writing. Students engage in and contribute to the learning activities with the knowledge they acquire from the teaching resources and basic elements. In addition, students also learn from the learning activities, and they are motivated by these activities to increasingly use teaching resources and engage more in the basic elements. These three interrelated factors were essential to take into account when addressing the characteristics of active learners in this study.

Simons (1997) proposed a useful set of categories through which active learning can be recognised and operationalised. These categories cover students’ independent learning and their intellectual reflective activities. Independent learning refers to students’ involvement in making decisions about the learning process such as planning and choosing learning activities. Students, as active learners, also reflect on their involvement by thinking about what they are learning individually or in cooperation with others. These categories which are summarised in Table 2 below helped the researcher to clarify the necessary factors that characterise an active learner:

Table 2

Examples of decisions that can be initiated by learners

Category	Learner activity
• <i>Orientation of goals and actions</i>	• <i>Thinks of possible goals and activities</i>
• <i>Choice of goals</i>	• <i>Chooses personal learning goals</i>
• <i>Relevance of goals</i>	• <i>Realises why goals are relevant</i>
• <i>Self confidence</i>	• <i>Is self-confident; promotes own self confidence</i>
• <i>Planning of learning activities</i>	• <i>Plans and chooses learning activities</i>
• <i>Motivating students to learn</i>	• <i>Is motivated to learn; promotes own motivation</i>
• <i>Getting started</i>	• <i>Has an adequate starting strategy; getting attention and recalls prior learning</i>
• <i>Comprehension</i>	• <i>Reads, listens, analyses</i>
• <i>Integration</i>	• <i>Relates, makes a schema</i>
• <i>Application</i>	• <i>Applies to a new situation, thinks of possible applications</i>
• <i>Monitoring</i>	• <i>Monitors own learning process</i>
• <i>Testing</i>	• <i>Paraphrases in order to test comprehension</i>
• <i>Revision</i>	• <i>Tries a new strategy</i>
• <i>Reflection</i>	• <i>Thinks of possible reasons for succeeding this time</i>
• <i>Evaluations</i>	• <i>Evaluates the process of learning</i>
• <i>Feedback</i>	• <i>Uses external feedback possibilities</i>
• <i>Judgment</i>	• <i>Judges own performance</i>
• <i>Motivation</i>	• <i>Thinks of future rewards</i>
• <i>Concentration</i>	• <i>Takes a break</i>

(Adapted from Simons, 1997, p. 20)

Simons (1997) points out that the level of activeness is based on how much the students monitor learning issues on their own or without supervision; how they work in cooperation with peers and teachers; and how they use their mental activities such as

analysing, synthesising and evaluating while learning. Within the activities, he emphasises the importance of mental activities in contributing to students' activeness: "the amount of (mental) activity of learners is an important criterion" in determining how active the learners are in their learning (Simons, 1997, p. 22).

In a similar vein, Anthony (1996) presents two common interpretations of active learning. Firstly, he defines that active learning refers to learning activities in which learners are "given considerable autonomy and control of the direction of the learning activities" (Anthony, 1996, p. 350). For example, students become autonomous in and can take control of their actions in investigational work, small group work, collaborative learning, problem solving and experiential learning. Secondly, he argues that active learning means active intellectual engagement of students, encompassing meaningful learning and metacognition. This form of active learning is "contrasted with 'passive' intellectual involvement in the learning experience which is characterized by an emphasis on assimilating new knowledge through memorization and practice" (Anthony, 1996, p. 350).

The factors of autonomy and decision making in active learning are similarly identified in the work of Halsall and Cockett (1998) who focused on students' decision making on "what goals to set", the "sequencing of learning activities" (p.304), and their needs for learning resources and how to access these resources. By the same token, Petress (2008) proclaims that in active learning students take a dynamic and energetic role in their own education; they are no longer overly dependent on their teachers as in passive learning. Students consider "their teachers as resource people, as guides to the learning process and as motivators for further endeavours" (Petress, 2008, p. 556). Particularly, Petress (2008) identifies a number of behavioural indicators of students' engagement in active learning, which help to recognise an active learner:

1. Asking questions of clarification, example, category, nomenclature, status, reason, rationale, and kind.
2. Challenging ideas, procedures, content relationships, priorities without attacking people or their character.

3. Following up learning sessions with personal extensions such as: added reading, group discussions about what was learned, experimentation, and applications of learning.
4. Connecting what was most recently learned with what was previously learned.
5. Attaching what is learned with skill development.
6. Discussing what they know with others in order to validate their ability to clearly, thoroughly articulate what they think they know.
7. Keeping an enthusiastic attitude about learning.
8. Active learners are more often sought out by instructors, classmates, and persons outside school for opinions, assistance, and insight than are their passive counterparts.
9. Active learners typically exchange views, share research findings, and debate topics among themselves.
10. Active learners usually have an open mind, make fewer snap judgements, and possess better reasoning skills.

(Petress, 2008, pp. 566-567)

Bringing together various views, Drew and Mackie (2011) talk about an overarching learning theory of active learning in which co-learners are active constructors of knowledge and understanding, and where meaning making is central to learning. Active learning approaches provide learning experiences based on meaningful hands-on activities (Bolliger & Armier, 2013; Bonwell & Eison, 1991; Chickering & Gamson, 1987; Hovelynck, 2003; Mahmood, Tariq, & Javed, 2011). Examples of such learning activities include investigational work, small group work, problem solving, collaborative learning, debates and experiential learning (Anthony, 1996; Braxton, Milem, & Sullivan, 2000; Meyers & Jones, 1993; Petress, 2008).

Active learning is also characterised by active intellectual inquiry, reflection and metacognition (Bereiter & Scardamalia, 1989; Waidelich, 2012; Wojcikiewicz, 2010). In this respect, students engage in a higher-order variety of forms or levels of thinking (Bonwell & Eison, 1991; M. Ginsburg, 2009), such as analysis, synthesis and evaluation (Simons, 1997; R. G. Thomas, 1987).

Active learners do not purely rely on the lecturer's instructions, but demonstrate autonomy and self-regulation in their learning activities (Jayawardana, Hewagamage, &

Hirakawa, 2001; Kelly, 2004; Prince, 2004; Zion & Slezak, 2005). These include involvement in the decision making and taking responsibility for own learning; setting the learning goals or plans; monitoring the learning process and evaluating own performance (Dam, 1995; Halsall & Cockett, 1998; Little, 1996; N. Michel, J. J. Cater, & O. Varela, 2009; Simons, 1997; Waidelich, 2012). This autonomous aspect of active learning will be incorporated in this study of Vietnamese students learning experiences and also further discussed in the next section in relation to teaching instruction and cultural aspects of learning.

In drawing conclusions from the reviewed literature, the nature of active learning can be described as active involvement of students in their learning process such as engagement in hands-on activities, meaningful intellectual inquiry, and learner autonomy and responsibility for own learning. This understanding of active learning will be used as an analytical framework for this study to assist in identifying the elements of active learning in Vietnamese students.

This section has defined active learning in terms of major characteristics and behavioral indicators of an active learner. The following section focuses on literature regarding the pedagogies, which support students' active engagement in their learning. The significant concepts reviewed in this section include teaching approaches which contribute to active learning with a focus on the constructivist approach and theories of learner autonomy.

2.3 Active Learning Pedagogies and the Constructivist Approach

Active learning within student-centred pedagogies represents a model of teaching that “involves students in doing things and in reflective thinking about the things they are doing” and encourages learners to “become active, motivated, and independent learners through open communication and collaboration” (Matveev & Milter, 2010, p. 201).

There is general agreement on the many elements of active learning pedagogies such as minimal direct transmission of factual knowledge; the inclusion of group learning activities to engage learners in problem-solving or discovery learning; frequent student discussions and questions; the ability to communicate autonomously; the use of conceptual learning which goes beyond memorisation; employing cooperative learning to help learners construct knowledge together; and using the original work of students to demonstrate their learning outcomes (Leu & Price-Rom, 2006). The differences between these pedagogies and a teacher-centred approach are summarised by Cuban (1993, p. 7) as shown in Table 3.

Table 3

Observable measures of Teacher-centred and Student-centred approaches

<i>Teacher-centred observable measures</i>	<i>Student-centred observable measures</i>
<i>A model in which a teacher or lecturer controls what is taught, the time, and under what conditions within the classroom</i>	<i>An approach in which learners exercise a substantial degree of direction and responsibility for what is taught, how it is learnt, and for any movement within the classroom</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • During instruction lecturer talk dominates student talk • Most instruction occurs with the whole class, rarely with individual or small group. • The lecturer determines use of class time. • Students often sit in rows facing a blackboard with a lecturer's desk nearby in the classroom. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Student talk is at least equal to lecturer talk on learning tasks • Instruction takes place frequently either individually, or in small or moderately sized groups rather than the whole class. • Students participate in choosing and organizing the learning content. • Classroom is typically arranged into movable chairs, desks and tables so that students can study together or independently in small groups or in individual workspace. • Students are allowed to determine, wholly or partially, rules of behaviour and penalties in the classroom and the way they are enforced. • Various instructional materials are provided in classroom so that learners can make use of them independently or with other classmates in small groups.

(Adopted from Cuban, 1993, p. 7)

While there exists a variety of literature on active learning pedagogies, this review will focus on the philosophical and theoretical foundations of these pedagogies and constructivist approaches to active learning. This focus will assist in defining active learning pedagogies and establishing a theoretical framework for this study.

2.3.1 Philosophical and theoretical foundations of active learning pedagogies

“Active-learning or student-centred approaches to instruction have increasingly been promoted worldwide by national governments as well as international organizations” (M. B. Ginsburg, 2010, p. 62). This is partly because active learning pedagogies can directly lead to improved educational outcomes, whilst indirectly contributing to economic development (Freeman et al., 2007; M. B. Ginsburg, 2010). It is also perceived that these pedagogies better prepare students to participate effectively in democratic polity at different levels such as local, national and global (Torney-Purta, 1999 cited in Ginsburg, 2010). These approaches, it is argued, are to be contrasted with direct or formal teaching which focuses on direct transmission of factual knowledge from lecturer to students (Armbruster, Patel, Johnson, & Weiss, 2009; Spring, 2006). Active-learning pedagogies differ from direct transmission approaches in regards to both cognitive and behavioural dimensions (Barrow et al., 2007; R. Mayer, 2004).

Active learning pedagogies can be traced to a number of classic authors such as Socrates, a classical Greek Athenian philosopher and one of the founders of Western philosophy, who called attention to engaging individual learners in philosophic conversations (Navia, 1985). Johann Heinrich Pestalozzi (1746-1827), a Swiss educator and famous educational reformer, argued for “firsthand experience” and individual autonomy in the learning process (Soetard, 1994). Friedrich Wilhelm August Froebel (1782-1852), the German educationalist, encouraged learning through “free self-activity” and the creation of educational environments involving the direct use of materials and practical work. He was an early supporter of active creativity and social

participation in the learning process (MacVannel, 1905). In addition, as mentioned earlier, Dewey popularised “experiential”/“progressive” education in which learning by practice and experimentation or learning by doing is promoted (Dewey, 1938). More recently, Rogers (1969) argued that greatly important learning is obtained by way of doing, and learning is facilitated when the learner responsibly participates in the learning process.

A theoretical approach linked to active learning pedagogy is that of constructivism, which is described as “a broad church, encompassing all educators who reject the “transmission” model of teaching or anything that sounds non-cognitive” (Duffy & Cunningham, 1996, p. 171). This approach relates to the work of John Dewey, Jean Piaget, Lev Vygotsky, Jerome Bruner and Seymour Papert (Coopertein & Kocevar-Weidinger, 2003; M. D. Roblyer & Edwards, 2000). Constructivism, or a dynamic, cognitive model of learning, was proposed by Piaget (1929) to react to behaviorist learning theories which have a long and commanding legacy. Behaviorism defines learning as a change in observable behaviors resulting from external stimuli in the milieu (Skinner, 1953). Thus the learner is viewed as a passive recipient, and the teacher as the active distributor of knowledge and feedback (R. E. Mayer, 1998). In contrast, the constructivist approach views learning as a “bottom-up”, holistic process, which is enacted by an active learner (Dimitriadis & Kamberelis, 2006). This constructivist paradigm is often termed as cognitive constructivism, which primarily associates learning with changes in cognitive structures of the learner his/herself, thus interaction engages individual “sensory-motor and conceptual activity” (Cobb, 1994, p. 14).

The constructivist perspective was further developed within the socio-cultural theory of Vygotsky (1978) and is known as a pedagogy of social constructivism. It considers learning as situated in the individual’s social environment, and emphasizes the importance of social interaction in learning (Vialle, Lysaght, & Verenikina, 2005). While the students play active roles in the learning process, they are required to discover meaning with the knowledge they are provided with (M. B. Ginsburg, 2010) and do so in interaction with teachers or more knowledgeable peers. The techniques of

pedagogical interaction, such as dialogue and discussion, powerfully stimulate cognitive engagement and understanding (Alexander, 2008).

While the perspectives of the cognitive and the sociocultural constructivism are different, they can be viewed as complementary (Cobb, 1994). This view of constructivism provides an account of the learning process encompassing not only individual cognitive activity, but also participation in cultural practices of the society. This allows for the formation of an integrated perspective on learning (Ringberg & Reihlen, 2006). Both the perspectives concede that learning encompasses the components of individual cognitive activity and interaction enacted by an active learner, but they differ in focus on the primary role of each element in the contribution to the learning process (Ling, 2006).

Examples of relatively recent research which combines cognitive and social constructivism include the work of Jonassen (1994), Anthony (1996), Good & Brophy (2000), Ally (2004), Paily (2013) and Ugwuegbulam & Nwebo (2014). They incorporate significant aspects of constructivism where learning is seen as an active process in which students construct their own meanings, based on prior experiences, by making connections between the new information and the concepts or beliefs that they would have held before. At the same time, the researchers see learning as enhanced by social interaction where knowledge is constructed in social interaction with others and the world around them. These combined constructivist perspectives will be adopted as one of the main theoretical frameworks in this study.

In summary, cognitive constructivism places emphasis on students as the main agents in the learning process, viewing them as being active in their learning. Learning is considered as a knowledge construction process in which students actively construct their own meaning. In other words, the students' learning process is not shaped mechanically by practice and reinforcements (R. E. Mayer, 1998). In order to make learners' knowledge become more functional in a new situation, in the constructivist perspective, students are expected to make a deliberate effort in processing the information that is presented to them so as to discover and construct knowledge of their

own (Good & Brophy, 2000). Students construct interpretations of the world based on their prior knowledge as well as on their experiences (Duffy & Cunningham, 1996; Jonassen, 1994; Mustafa & Fatma, 2013). This learning approach puts emphasis on the learner and the impacts of their attitudes, beliefs and contexts on constructing new learning. In order to progress, students are expected to compare and question, investigate and challenge, acknowledge or discard what they have learned or experienced (Good & Brophy, 2000; Paily, 2013; Ugwuegbulam & Nwebo, 2014).

In the theory of social constructivism, learning is seen as enhanced by social interaction. In this learning perspective, the individual learner is supposed to actively engage in the learning process by raising questions and discussing, developing or finding answers through collaboration with his/her teacher and peers or other students (Drew & Mackie, 2011; Keengwe & Onchwari, 2011). Being actively involved in the learning through social interactions can help students discuss complex topics, converse with others about disagreements, and help them take part in negotiated understandings of the world (Palincsar, 2005). It is argued that social interaction happens not only in direct face-to-face communications when students meet and discuss with others, but it also happens even in individual problem-solving, when the student uses the “voice of another” to guide his/her own learning through educational outcomes. Knowledge can be shared with others without their presence in the same geographical location. It can be shared through various means or tools by which information, thoughts, attitudes and beliefs can be distributed across time and space (Mustafa & Fatma, 2013; Salomon, 1997). In this respect, the notion of the social construction of knowledge can be applied to the analysis of blended learning or online learning.

In social constructivism, it is also advocated that students should be encouraged to seek information and construct their own knowledge and to determine how to achieve the expected learning outcomes by themselves (Drew & Mackie, 2011; Duffy & Cunningham, 1996). This means that students need to be autonomous in their learning. The following section will review literature on learner autonomy in order to clarify the concept as an important aspect of active learning.

2.3.2 Nurturing learner autonomy

The relationship between learner autonomy and active learning is plainly described in Dam's (1994) definition of learner autonomy. He proposed that in order to become autonomous in learning, students not only have to actively participate in the social learning activities but also have to actively interpret what they learn based on their own experiences. As he pointed out:

An autonomous learner is an active participant in the social process of classroom learning, but also an active interpreter of new information in terms of what she/he already and uniquely knows. (Dam, 1994, p. 505)

Historically, Holec (1981) defined learner autonomy as the ability of a learner to take charge of his or her own learning. In this definition of learner autonomy, Holec treated autonomy as capacity that a learner can develop in the learning process. The characteristics of learner autonomy could be recognized from one's degree of capability to take responsibility for the following actions:

- determining the objectives;
- defining the content and the progressions;
- selecting methods and techniques to be used;
- monitoring the procedure of acquisition (rhythm, time, place, etc.);
- evaluating what has been acquired.

(Holec, 1981, p. 3)

As indicated in Holec's points above, in order to become autonomous in learning students need to take responsibility for or control of their own learning. They have to find out possible goals and choose their own learning goals. They have to plan, choose possible learning activities, select learning materials or resources and consult their own feeling of the learning process. Moreover, they need to assess the process of acquiring knowledge or learning outcomes. On this issue, Benson (2007, p. 23) comments that Holec characterizes "WHAT autonomous learners are able to do", but he "did not

explain HOW they are able to do it”. That is, Holec supposes that autonomous learners need to have the responsibility for all of the decisions concerning their learning and the implementation of decisions. However, he does not point out how students should take this responsibility. For example, he does not clarify whether the learners make the decisions by themselves as a self-instruction, or how much control they should have in the decision making process.

Advocates of autonomy assert that students taking responsibility for their own learning is a major principle of learner autonomy (Dam, 1995; Littlewood, 1997; Scharle & Szabó, 2000; Voller, 1997; Waidelich, 2012). There are strong conceptual overlaps between the terms autonomy and responsibility in the literature on learner autonomy, but few explicitly elucidate the overlaps (Oshana, 2002). In attempting to explore the term autonomy in relation to the concept of responsibility, Scharle and Szabó (2000) argue that:

In theory, we may define autonomy as the freedom and ability to manage one’s own affairs, which entails the right to make decisions as well. Responsibility may also be understood as being in charge of something, but with the implication that one has to deal with the consequences of one’s own actions. Autonomy and responsibility both require active involvement, and they are apparently very much interrelated. In practice, the two concepts are more difficult to distinguish. (p. 4)

Explaining the meaning of responsibility in terms of learner autonomy, Chanock (2004) asserts that taking responsibility within autonomous learning does not mean students have to determine and solve all the learning issues by themselves because “there are countless things that students cannot readily discover for themselves” (p. 4). According to Chanock, being responsible means students “do not hesitate to ask someone who knows” such as teachers or peers, and in new situations students can depend upon the assistance of others, so that they “can learn how to operate in the new context” (Chanock, 2004, p. 4). This point is consistent with Little’s (1991) arguments for responsibility in learner autonomy. Particularly, Little (1991) elucidates how students can take responsibility for their own learning, which was not clarified in the Holec’s

(1981) the definition of autonomous learner (Benson, 2007, p. 23). Little (1991, p. 3) explains:

1. Autonomy is not a synonym for self-instruction; in other words, not restricted to learning without a teacher.
2. In the classroom context, autonomy does not require the teacher to relinquish all initiative and control.
3. Autonomy is not something teachers do to learners; in other words, not a new methodology.
4. Autonomy is not a single easily described behavior.
5. Autonomy is not a steady state achieved by different ways.

The above quote indicates that students taking responsibility for their own learning does not mean that they study in isolation or on their own. Instead as Benson (2011) states, autonomous learning is about taking responsibility, which is supported by the social constructivist paradigm of active learning. Students take responsibility for their own learning by socially constructing their own knowledge through actively engaging in the learning process. Similarly, Little (2007) asserts that while students are encouraged to take control of learning for themselves, it is not necessarily that they have to take charge on their own. Learner autonomy is, therefore, considered as “the product of interdependence rather than independence” (Little, 1994, p. 435). Hence, learner autonomy could be defined as the capability of students to actively engage in the learning process such as in taking initiative, monitoring their own progress and evaluating their own learning outcomes.

In summary, nurturing learner’s autonomy is an important aspect of active learning pedagogies. This section has explored the ways that students can be assisted in becoming autonomous in their learning from the point of view of active learning pedagogies. However, “the influence of socio-cultural contexts” is paramount when dealing with applying these principles of active learning pedagogies to specific cultural contexts (Aliponga, Johnston, Koshiyama, Ries, & Rush, 2013, p. 83). In relation to this study, it is essential that the cultural differences between East Asian and Western educational traditions are considered; these differences are discussed below.

2.4 Approaches to Teaching and Learning: Cultural Differences in East Asian and Western Countries

The purpose of this study is, as aforementioned, to investigate the learning characteristics of Vietnamese students in an Australian context. This section therefore concerns literature that depicts cultural differences in learning styles between East Asian and Western countries. This review aims to argue the importance of taking into account the cultural values and learning styles of Vietnamese students when investigating their study in a Western context.

In research related to cultural differences in educational traditions, Vietnam falls under the category defined by the term “Confucian Heritage Culture countries” which culturally refers to nations belonging to the East Asian or Chinese cultural sphere. Apart from Vietnam, these countries include China, Japan, Korea, Taiwan, Malaysia and Singapore (Hofstede & Hofstede, 2005; Jian, 2009; Joy & Kolb, 2009; Sulkowski & Deakin, 2009; T. T. Tran, 2013b).

According to the sociocultural theory of Vygotsky (1978; 1986), which inspires this study, there is no human activity that can stand alone, independent of, or unrelated to, its socio-historical and cultural circumstances, and this includes educational activities. For example, Holtbrügge and Mohr (2010, p. 622) assert that “understanding the learning style preferences of individuals from different cultural backgrounds is of growing importance in higher education”. In order to understand how certain factors influence the active learning process, this part of the literature review looks at the differences in learning styles between East Asian and Western cultures.

Perceptually, learning style means “the variations among learners in using one or more senses to understand, organise and retain experience” (Reid, 1987 p. 89). It is a “person’s natural, habitual and preferred ways of learning” (Hyland, 1993 p. 69), which

is often defined as “...characteristic cognitive, affective, and physiological behaviours that serve as relatively stable indicators of how learners perceive, interact with, and respond to the learning environment” (Ladd & Ruby, 1999, p. 363). The characteristic learning approaches or learning styles are believed to be created by the learner’s own psychological make-up and socio-cultural experiences or background, as pointed out by Oxford, Hollaway and Horton-Murillo (1992), who stated that:

Although culture is not the single determinant, and although many other influences intervene, culture often does play a significant role in the learning styles unconsciously adopted by many participants in the culture. (p. 441)

Dimensions of cultural dissimilarity that are often claimed to have an important influence on learners’ behaviours and attitudes or learning styles in East Asia, include a “collectivist” orientation and attitudes to power and authority or power distance dimensions (Hofstede & Hofstede, 2005; Joy & Kolb, 2009; Nguyen-Phuong-Mai, Terlouw, & Pilot, 2012; Phuong-Mai, et al., 2006). These dimensions will be discussed in order to identify the differences in learning styles between East Asian and Western countries, which are believed to be influential in building active learning processes.

2.4.1 Individualism and collectivism

Hofstede (1991) describes the cultural dissimilarity according to how it is orientated on a continuum which extends from individualism to collectivism. Individualism and collectivism are present in all cultures; however one of them tends to be dominant in any one particular social context. Hofstede and Hofstede (2005), who surveyed the employees of a large multi-national firm in 74 countries and regions, found that East Asian countries such as China, Singapore, Malaysia, Korea (south) Taiwan and Vietnam have very low scores in the individualism index in comparison with Western countries like the United State, the United Kingdom and Australia as shown in Table 4.

Table 4

Individualism index

<i>East Asian countries</i>	<i>Score</i>	<i>Western countries</i>	<i>Score</i>
China	20	USA	91
Singapore	20	Great Britain	89
Malaysia	26	Hungary	80
Korea (south)	18	Canada	80
Taiwan	17	Netherlands	80
Vietnam	20	Australia	90

(Hofstede & Hofstede, 2005, pp. 78-79)

These results are consistent with the research of The Chinese Culture Connection (1987), Gudykunst and Ting-Toomey (1988) and Triandis, McCusker and Hui (1990), which show that individualism appears to dominate in Western cultures, while collectivism is considered as a specific trait of East Asian culture.

The differences between individualist and collectivist dimensions of culture have been proved to play an important part in shaping learning styles. According to research on learning styles conducted in different countries by Hofstede and Hofstede (2005), Jian (2009), Sulkowski & Deakin (2009) and Joy & Kolb (2009), the dissimilarities in individualist and collectivist learning styles can be described in the following ways (Table 5).

Table 5

Individualist and collectivist learning styles

Collectivist Learning Styles	Individualist Learning Styles
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “We” learning culture: students learn 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “I” learning culture: students learn to

to think in terms of ‘we’ (Hofstede & Hofstede, 2005)	think in terms of “I” (Hofstede & Hofstede, 2005)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Learning how to do</i>: Learners look for demonstrations and want to observe first and then attempt the task - “watch, then do” (Hofstede & Hofstede, 2005) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Learning how to learn</i>: Learners prefer to learn by engaging themselves in a task and learning to do it by “trial and error” (Hofstede & Hofstede, 2005)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Reflectivity</i>: Learners respond during the learning process when they feel really confident with their opinions or answers to avoid “loss of face”(Joy & Kolb, 2009) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Impulsivity</i>: Learners are inclined to quickly respond to other’s opinions or questions raised while learning (Joy & Kolb, 2009).
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Extrinsic motivation</i>: Students are often encouraged to study hard by their desires for satisfying social relationships like making their parents happy, impressing their relatives or friends (Sulkowski & Deakin, 2009). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Intrinsic motivation</i>: Students study hard mainly because of their inner drive to acquire more knowledge and improve themselves (Sulkowski & Deakin, 2009).
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Listening and receiving</i>: Students normally rely on their teachers and peers to tell them what to think, what information they should have and how to respond (Jian, 2009). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Engaging</i>: Students often actively participate in the learning process by giving their own opinions, asking questions or engaging in discussions (Jian, 2009).

The orientation of collectivism or individualism might influence students’ “social cognitions and behaviours that support academic achievement” (Cibangu, 2010, p. 1). The characteristics of learning styles in collectivist cultures, as shown in Table 5, seem to support passive learning styles or to transform knowledge through reflective observation. Whereas, learning styles in individualist cultures appear to be associated with active involvement in the learning process. Supporting this idea is the article by

Aktaş (2012), which reviews a number of studies on factors influencing learning styles. Aktaş (2012) explains the connection between the learning style and the degree of active involvement in learning as follows:

By basing on the theoretical foundations of individualism and collectivism and cultural values, it is proposed that individuals who are high on individualist values grasp experience through the learning mode of abstract conceptualization and transform experience through the learning mode of active experimentation. For the collectivist values in contrast, we proposed that the higher the collectivist values in individuals the more they prefer grasping experience through the learning mode of concrete experience and the more they prefer transforming experience through the learning mode of reflective observation. (p. 357)

Here, Aktaş (2012) argues that the students' preference for learning might be strongly influenced by cultural values. However, he suggests that to support this argument, more empirical research on the relationship between "cultural values and learning styles" needs to be conducted (p. 358). This point validates the dimension of cross-cultural investigation in this current study. In attempting to explore the impact of cultural values on learning styles, it is important to investigate the influence of the values on social relationships in general and the relationship between students and teachers in particular. The significant values in this instance should be related to the attitudes to power and authority which are discussed below.

2.4.2 Attitudes to power and authority

It is argued that the "power distance" dimension plays a vital role in contributing to variations in social relationships. This term is defined as "the extent to which the less powerful members of institutions and organizations within a country expect and accept that power is distributed unequally" (Hofstede & Hofstede, 2005, p. 46). This dimension, or attitude to power and authority, also varies from country to country, especially between East Asian and Western countries. Most countries with high scores in individualism get low scores in power distance and vice versa. Hofstede and Hofstede (2005) explain that the power distance score reflects the dependence

relationship in a country. The countries with low scores in power distance, have little hierarchical dependence of subordinates on leaders, and have a preference for consultation. The leaders often treat their subordinates equally and are open for negotiations. There is little emotional distance between subordinates and leaders, and it is easy for subordinates to approach and contradict their leaders. These features are opposite to those in the countries with high scores in power distance. The scores can be seen from the data of Hofstede and Hofstede (2005) adapted in Table 6.

Table 6

Power distance index

<i>East Asian countries</i>	<i>Score</i>	<i>Western countries</i>	<i>Score</i>
China	80	USA	40
Singapore	74	Great Britain	35
Malaysia	104	Hungary	46
Korea (south)	60	Canada	39
Taiwan	58	Netherlands	38
Vietnam	70	Australia	36

(Hofstede & Hofstede, 2005, pp. 43-44)

Littlewood (1999) explains that people who are low in the power distance expect minimal differences in power and authority between members in society, while those who have high scores in the dimension accept that these differences exist. However, he argues that “accept” does not automatically mean believing that such differences are desirable, just that it seems to be an unavoidable fact of life. This cultural dimension is also considered as a crucial factor relating to the classroom roles that students might desire or feel able to adopt in relation to their teacher as shown in Table 7. Attitudes to

power and authority, therefore, should be recognised in order to understand the relationships between teachers and students, in addition to the learning styles amongst different cultures.

Table 7

Key differences between low- and high-power-distance in terms of education

Low Power Distance	High Power Distance
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inequalities among people should be minimized. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inequalities among people are expected and desired.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students treat teachers as equals. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students give teachers respect, even outside of class.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teachers expect initiative from students in class. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teachers should take all initiative in class.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teachers are experts who transfer impersonal truths. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teachers are gurus who transfer personal wisdom.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Quality of learning depends on two-way communication and excellence of students. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Quality of learning depends on the excellence of the teacher.

(Hofstede & Hofstede, 2005, p. 57)

The relationship between students and the teacher varies from culture to culture depending on attitudes to power and authority. This has led to significant dissimilarities in learning styles. In countries with high power distance like Vietnam and other countries strongly influenced by Confucianism, people are encouraged to respect a hierarchical relationship between individuals, especially in relationships between teachers and students (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). As Chan (1999, p. 301) asserts “teachers must therefore be seen with the authority and power to decide which knowledge is to be taught, with students accepting the information readily and rarely questioning or challenging teachers in the classroom”. The classroom culture thus discourages active and critical enquiry (C. T. Nguyen, 2011). Students asking questions to express their ideas, to solve learning tasks by themselves, or to challenge teachers are often considered to disrupt teaching or to be disrespectful to their teachers (Mackenzie & Knipe, 2006). This cultural factor, therefore, is seen as one of considerable obstacles to fostering active learning.

It must be acknowledged that the above statements are generalisations; it does not mean that all people in East Asian countries or Western countries think, feel or behave in the ways described. However, every individual to an extent carries within him/herself patterns of feeling, thinking and potential acting learned from their cultures (Hofstede & Hofstede, 2005). The learning attitudes of East Asian students such as Vietnamese students have been changing over the past few decades. However, because of strong traditions engraved in various East Asian cultures, the educational systems in Eastern Asia appear to be constrained in their development of educational environments, which encourage active learning (Creswell, 2014; Guba & Lincoln, 1994; Mackenzie & Knipe, 2006; C. T. Nguyen, 2012). The East Asian educational system, therefore, might face a number of issues in relation to their educational approaches which include: Non-active learning styles and approaches to learning, passive attitudes towards dealing with knowledge, and poor teacher/student relationships.

2.5 Teaching and Learning Styles in Vietnam

The teaching style in Vietnam is, as indicated in a study by Kramsch and Sullivan (1996), authoritarian and based on Confucian moral lessons. The role of teachers in classrooms is like fathers in traditional families or the leaders of the institutions, and the students are considered as their children or subordinate members. Hence, the teacher is treated with deference and expected to transmit all the authority knowledge to students in order to help them pass their course (Mackenzie & Knipe, 2006; Tucker, 1999). The teacher tends to be dominant and hold superior power over the students in classroom activities and academic matters (N. F. Liu & Littlewood, 1997; C. T. Nguyen, 2011). This can be illustrated by a number of famous sayings or proverbs in Vietnamese about the important role of a teacher such as:

Không thầy đố mày làm nên

(No teacher, no realization)

Nhất tự vi sư, bán tự vi sư	<i>(The one who teaches you one word or even half of a word should be your respectful teacher)</i>
Muốn sang thì bắc Cầu Kiều Muốn con hay chữ phải yêu lấy thầy	<i>(To get across a river, you need a bridge To have your child well educated, you need a beloved relationship with his teacher)</i>
Quân - sư - phụ	<i>(The king, the teacher, and then the father)</i>
Thầy hay trò giỏi	<i>(Like good teachers like good students)</i>

The above sayings demonstrate that the role of teachers or lecturers is considered to be a determining factor in learning outcomes; students have to rely on the relationship with and the power of their lecturers for their educational growth. It is evident that the relationship between lecturers and students is unequal; lecturers are used to being ranked just after the king as the proverb above indicates, so students should respect and follow what the lecturers say. In this context, teachers' duties are believed to include delivering their lectures and helping students to take notes, accept and memorise knowledge, rather than interpreting or questioning it. In addition, the practice of students asking questions during the class can be regarded as showing a lack of understanding or respect for their teacher (J. Liu, 2002; Nguyen-Phuong-Mai, et al., 2012). The teaching style is, therefore, still based on what would be considered a traditional or teacher-centred approach (Harman & Nguyen, 2010; T. T. Tran, 2013b).

Correspondingly, the learning style of Vietnamese students is largely considered as passive (Harman & Nguyen, 2010; T. N. Pham, 2010). It is argued that this is a manifestation of Confucian values which place more emphasis on the importance of harmony over conflict, and of collective rather than personal self-expression (Hofstede & Hofstede, 2005). The students are less likely to voluntarily express personal opinions, beliefs and feelings openly or directly. Many would not consider questioning or challenging their teachers' knowledge and ideas or those of their classmates, in fear of either being seen as unknowledgeable or humiliating others. This is often related to being frightened of losing face, which inflicts extremely serious personal damage and is

thus best avoided (McCornac & Chi, 2005). Additionally, limitations in curricula, programs and teaching approaches such as excessively academic curricula, heavy teaching loads and the teacher-directed approach have been argued to disrupt active learning (Harman & Nguyen, 2010). As a result, students seem to be quiet, passive and lacking in contributions and responsibilities for their learning (L. Le, et al., 2013; T. T. Tran, 2013b). They rarely initiate or engage in learning activities. Instead, they mainly listen and memorise provided information in order to reproduce the knowledge (Chan, 1999; Creswell, 2014; Guba & Lincoln, 1994).

However, a question that can be raised here is whether East Asian or Vietnamese students' learning style is culturally bound and whether it can be altered by exposure to the Western educational system. There are a number of studies, for example Volet (1999), Biggs (2001), C. T. Nguyen (2012), and T.T Tran (2013a; 2013b) which demonstrate that Asian students can engage in learning activities and excel in their academic achievement in a foreign country. Additionally, it was demonstrated that Asian students can engage in active constructivist learning in their own country if either taught by foreign teachers (C. T. Nguyen, 2012) or if their teachers are willing to "change their teaching conceptions and classroom practices in order to adopt a student-centred approach" (T. H. T. Pham & Renshaw, 2013, p. 79). Initial learning culture, therefore, should not be considered as a decisive factor influencing students' learning styles and outcomes as suggested by T.T. Tran (2013a):

Culture could be one factor affecting student behaviour and reaction in class. Students from the CHC [Confucian heritage culture] may hold a different perspective on the appropriateness of behaviours and reactions in the classroom environment. However, such differences should not be confused with passiveness, as the decisive factors affecting students' activeness or passiveness come from the specific educational system, its requirements, the workload placed on students and also related issues of curricula, exams, teaching methodology and other specific problems related to student study context and environment. (p. 64)

The quote above indicates that together with the impacts of heritage culture, the educational contexts are crucial factors influencing students' learning styles. This is supported by other studies showing that students' learning approaches are not decided

by either their heritage culture, or the new culture in which they undertake their study. The process is more complex which includes the interrelation of both cultures. The learning practices are strongly influenced by the local contextual, institutional and political circumstances which manifest themselves in particular requirements of the courses or learning environments (e.g., Kubota, 2001; T. H. T. Pham & Renshaw, 2013; S. Volet, Renshaw, & Tietzel, 1994). Therefore, by considering possible factors leading to the passiveness or activeness of students in their learning, an appreciation of the characteristics of the learning environment is essential for understanding and adjusting students' learning styles. This highlights the vital role of heritage culture and educational context in learning, which needs to be taken into account when investigating students' learning styles.

There are a number of recent studies, which have investigated Vietnamese students' learning styles in the contexts of globalisation and internationalisation of education. For example, H. V. Dang (2006), and T. K. A. Dang, Nguyen & Le (2013) studied how Vietnamese students can become active learners in the context of their training as English language teachers by English speaking teachers in Vietnam. T. K. A. Dang et al. (2013) demonstrated that being taught by English-speaking teachers prompted the pre-service teacher students to adopt some characteristics of their teacher's style.

C. T. Nguyen (2012) investigated autonomous learning of Vietnamese students in Australia. This study focused on how Vietnamese international students can become more autonomous in their learning in Australia. C. T. Nguyen's (2012) study looked at one particular characteristic of active learning: Autonomous learning. The study was based on interviews of eight Vietnamese international students about the ways that they gradually became independent learners. It demonstrated that with relevant support, Vietnamese students moved towards being more independent and autonomous learners than they were at the beginning of their study in Australia. The study took into account the students' learning experiences in a new educational context in Australia, yet did not consider the learning experiences in the context of their cultural learning heritage.

More recently, T. T. Tran (2013a) investigated the learning approaches of Asian students who studied in Australian Universities. This was a qualitative case study with ten Asian international students from China, Korea, Singapore, Thailand and Vietnam. This investigation indicated the complexity of the issue and addressed the “confusion between passive learning style and Confucian cultural heritage, between memorising and understanding and between quietness and passiveness” (p. 57). T.T. Tran’s (2013a) study demonstrated how Confucian heritage culture can have a strong influence on students’ learning such as their behaviours and reactions in class, but the cultural factor did not determine students’ learning style. Although, the study of T. T. Tran’s (2013a) does focus on the learning experiences of Vietnamese international students, its emphasis is not on exploring a particular learning style at a particular learning environment in Australia from a cross-cultural perspective. Specifically, it does not focus on Vietnamese international students’ active learning experiences and a consideration of both their heritage and host learning culture.

Even though numerous studies exist which have investigated how Vietnamese students become more active and autonomous learners when exposed to Western learning contexts, the review of the related literature demonstrates that there is a paucity of research investigating this issue from the perspective of a learner being at the intersection of the two cultures. Specifically, to date, there is no research into Vietnamese learners’ perspectives on the comparison of two different approaches to education - those in Vietnam and Australia. This research gap has motivated this current study. Furthermore, the use of ICT in education has been considered in those two systems of education as a contributing factor to active learning. Students no longer merely study face-to-face because they can have opportunities to study from a distance or in virtual learning environments to enable further engagement in the learning process. This thesis, hence, takes into account the ICT-enhanced blended learning environment in relation to the activeness of the participants’ learning style in Australia. The concept of blended learning environment is reviewed in the following section to provide the frame of reference for this study.

2.6 Blended Learning Environments and Constructivist Pedagogies

This section reviews the literature related to the Information and Communication Technology (ICT) - enhanced blended learning environment upon which this research focuses. The review will contextualise the learning environment and highlight the potential of such a learning environment in encouraging active learning.

2.6.1 Defining ICT

There has not been a universally accepted definition of ICT. It is argued that ICT involves various concepts, methods, as well as applications, which are continually evolving. Sanyal (2001) draws a broad definition of ICT, which has been accepted and used by the International Institute for Education Planning-UNESCO. This definition includes radio, TV, fixed and mobile phone, fax, satellite, computer, and the internet. He further states that ICT can be divided into two levels or generations: the old or traditional ICTs such as radio, TV and fixed phone, and the modern ICTs which are mentioned in this research such as satellite, telecommunications and internet.

2.6.2 Increased role of ICT in education

The escalating societal requirements for quality higher education have challenged instructors to prepare their students to become active participants and contributors in the so-called knowledge society where they live and work (Keengwe & Onchwari, 2011; J. Peeraer & Petegem, 2012; Spague & Dede, 1999; Watson, 2002; Wood & Smith, 2005). Technology has created a large number of opportunities for students to construct and work with new knowledge (Bereiter, 2002; Mohra, Holtbrügge, & Bergc, 2012; Paily, 2013; Swail, 2002). The role of instructors as sole providers of information has been changed to one of learning facilitator who “assists students to access information, to

synthesize and interpret it and to place it in a context-in short to transform information into knowledge” (Kershaw & Safford, 1998, p. 294). ICT is, therefore, believed to be an essential tool in education, and if used effectively, can encourage active learning.

There is an ever-increasing use of technology to enhance active learning to enable the learner to filter, and make sense of, large volumes of information easily available through various electronic media (Keengwe & Onchwari, 2011). Traditional teaching and learning methods such as lectures, which are simply used to provide information, have been questioned and seen as passive approaches (J. Peeraer & Petegem, 2012). If a lecture is employed simply to disseminate information it is not engaging students “in critically filtering and making sense of the glut of information that we now face” (Garrison & Vaughan, 2008, p. 4). Pedagogical literature has widely recognized the use of technology in instruction (Fu, 2013; B. Green, 1993). Jones and Relf (2004) argued that pedagogy has never been unaffected by a technology, however it has been formed based on the affordances or application level of the technologies.

Recent studies show that the adoption of new technologies in the classrooms play an important role in providing necessary opportunities for students’ active engagement in their learning (Bolliger & Armier, 2013; Keengwe & Onchwari, 2011; Mohra, et al., 2012). It is argued by Yelland (2001) that traditional educational environments do not seem to be suitable for preparing students to be able to adapt, function or become productive in current workplaces. She also claimed that educational institutions which have not incorporated the use of ICT in teaching and learning cannot seriously claim to empower their students to be active knowledge builders or prepare them for life and work in the 21st century (Yelland, 2001). This argument is supported by Nykvist (2008), pointing out that “there is a need for deep knowledge building to occur in these environments for our students to be active participants in a society where new technologies are constantly emerging” (p. i).

ICT can play a variety of roles in teaching and learning processes (Kouninef, Djelti, & Kourbali, 2013), which has a powerful contribution to enhance teacher learning and

student achievement (Bransford, Brown, & Cocking, 2000; Samra, 2013). ICT is also described as having “the potential to extend student learning capacities, engaging them in understanding concepts and processes in areas of learning and facilitating change in learning, thinking and teaching” (Curriculum Corporation, 2006, p. 2). A study conducted by Jowallah (2008) on using technology supported learning to develop active learning in higher education shows that “technology based learning can be an effective means of increasing students’ participation within a course, developing students into active learners, enhancing students’ dependence, enhancing students’ self-esteem and increasing social interaction amongst students” (p. 46). Technology is believed to be able to play an important part in supporting face-to-face teaching and learning processes (Wong et al., 2006). This is consistent with the views of Iding, Crosby & Speitel (2002), Shamatha, Peressini & Meymaris (2004) and Romeo (2006) that the use of technology can reduce the amount of instruction directly given to students, give instructors an opportunity to support those learners with particular needs, and facilitate students with the power to obtain knowledge.

With the increasing adoption of ICT, the educational systems of past decades have been superseded by a more dynamic and inclusive system (Karami, Karami, & Attaran, 2013). A face-to-face learning approach within a classroom is no longer a must because “the capacity of ICTs to reach students in any place and at any time has the potential to promote revolutionary changes to the traditional education model” (Chitanana, 2010, p. 153). Various opportunities available for higher education organisations have been enlarged by ICT, which is challenging the traditional modes of production, approaches of communicating with learners and quality assurance procedures (Boer, Boezerooy, & Fisser, 2003). On one hand, new practices in teaching and learning have been supported by emerging technologies, while on the other hand, the adoption of new pedagogies has also demanded the support of new technologies and the extension of the use of existing media (Karami, et al., 2013; Nykvist, 2008).

2.6.3 The integration of ICT and blended learning

The various ways ICT integrated in teaching and learning indicate different pedagogies. Research conducted by Becker (1994), Hadley & Sheingold (1993) and Keengwe & Onchwari (2011) illustrate that teachers' use of ICT ranges along a continuum of teaching modes, from a didactic approach of instruction to constructivist approaches. The instructional style implies traditional pedagogy or a teacher-centred approach, where teachers impart knowledge and learners recite their understanding (M. Roblyer, 2004). This pedagogy is described by Bigum (2002) as "domesticating" the technology, where ICT is used to conform to the classroom's requirements rather than to transform teaching practice. This means ICT is adopted as an add-on or a complement to this style (Keengwe & Onchwari, 2011; Prestridge, 2005). The teachers assimilate ICT into their repertoire as a medium or tool through which traditional teaching practices prevail. Conversely, constructivist-oriented teaching styles tend to build student-centred classrooms in which ICT is integrated to encourage learners to study in active ways. This pedagogy of ICT integration based on a constructivist teaching approach is believed to be able to support active learning (Dexter, et al., 1999; Keengwe & Onchwari, 2011; Paily, 2013; Ugwuegbulam & Nwebo, 2014), and, therefore, provides empirical references for discussions in this current study.

ICT is increasingly being adopted in University teaching and learning worldwide (N. Jones & O'Shea, 2004; Laurillard, 2002; Orlando, 2013; Samra, 2013), predominantly because it is believed to offer teachers, students and administrators greater flexibility in terms of pace, time, place, entry and exit (Inglis, Ling, & Joosten, 1999; Mustafa & Fatma, 2013). The increasing use of the internet as a tool to facilitate data transmission and exchange has changed the way that learning materials are presented by tertiary educators (Chard, 2006). In some circumstances, technology has merely been employed to make online access available to basic lecture content and module information such as timetables, course objectives and suggested reading. At the other extreme end of adoption, it has been embraced to build an entirely integrated learning and teaching system where no direct instruction or even face-to-face contact exists between students and their lecturers (Turney, Robinson, Lee, & Soutar, 2009).

However, “many students who want the advantage of being able to study online with convenient access to learning materials, also want the social interaction of the face-to-face experience” (Abraham, 2007, p. 2). Arbaugh (2002) and McLoughlin & Luca (2006) also assert that a lack of direct contact between students and lecturers can lead to learners’ experience of online communication and learning being unsatisfactory. In extreme circumstances, student attrition can increase as a result (Clark, 2012; Mintu-Wimsatt, 2001). A blended approach combining the use of ICT and direct contact is considered a compromise, in which students can repeatedly return to learning resources when in need, whilst receiving guidance and support from their lecturers (Sharpe, Benfield, Robers, & Francis, 2006; Utts, Sommer, Acredolo, Maher, & Matthews, 2003). Wold (2013, p. 221) cites a number of research projects proving that “blended learning has been touted as a high-quality instructional method for over 40 years, and it has been often found more effective than strictly face-to-face or strictly online instruction”. However, there is a paucity of research available to demonstrate the effectiveness of adopting blended learning in higher education (Graham, 2013; M. Oliver & Trigwell, 2005)

It is productive for researchers and practitioners to consider various examples and aspects of blended learning. The knowledge gained can allow them to “engage with different perspectives that exist within their professional community and to negotiate common understanding of emergent concepts and terminology” (Gunn & Blake, 2009, p. 266). While discussing complex aspects of blended learning, Gunn and Blake also proposed that a simple definition for blended learning is valuable because “it offers flexibility for meaningful interpretation within a particular context” (p. 266). Therefore, the definition that aptly describes blended learning as “the thoughtful integration of classroom face-to-face learning experiences with online learning experiences” (Garrison & Kanuka, 2004, p. 96) or “the combination of traditional face-to-face and technology-mediated instruction” (Graham, Woodfield, & Harrison, 2013, p. 4) will be adopted for the purpose of this research.

Blended learning should not merely imply “bolting” ICT onto traditional face-to-face classrooms by using technology as a complement or an add-on in order to add

supplemental information or teach a difficult concept. It should be, instead, considered as an opportunity for transforming the way that training courses are improved, scheduled and delivered in higher education based on thoughtful integration between physical virtual instructions. Bleed (2001) refers to this as “brick and clicks”, which is known as a hybrid model in higher education, where courses are offered in which a considerable proportion of the learning activities are delivered online, and the time of face-to-face meeting is diminished but not eliminated. The purpose of hybrid courses is to combine the benefits of both traditional instruction and online learning in order to enhance “active independent learning and reduce class seat time” through providing increased flexibility (Garnham & Kaleta, 2002, p. 1). Having reviewed various research papers, Abraham (2007) indicates that in order to improve student outcomes, the online components of blended courses must be used to adopt a learner-centred approach, instead of merely converting traditional face-to-face courses into an online delivery design. In this study the blended environments, which the participants encounter, will be analysed in relation to their positioning on the continuum from teacher centred to student centred.

2.7 Conclusion

The literature reviewed in this chapter has explored the concept of active learning in relation to its characteristics including engagement in hands-on activities, meaningful intellectual inquiry, and learner autonomy and responsibility for own learning. This chapter then reviewed literature on pedagogical factors which allow students to become active in their learning, and explored the relationship between active learning and constructivist pedagogies. The review has demonstrated that active learning can be positively influenced by a constructivist teaching approach which encompasses not only individual cognitive activity, but also participation in cultural practices of the society. The constructivist approach is informed by both cognitive and sociocultural perspectives, in which learning incorporates the components of individual cognitive activity and interaction enacted by an active learner. The understanding of the active learning concept and the teaching approach encouraging active learning, have built up a conceptual framework for this study.

The differences in learning styles between East Asian and Western countries have also been examined. The dimensions of cultural dissimilarity, including collectivist and individualist orientation and attitudes to power and authority, were critically reviewed. It showed that the cultural dissimilarities have important impacts on learning styles or learners' learning behaviours and attitudes. It also indicated the necessity to consider the relationship between cultural values and learning styles in an investigation of students' learning experiences in general, and their active learning in particular. In addition, this literature review addressed the reality of teaching and learning styles in Vietnam in relation to active learning. The review identified certain factors influencing students' activeness in their learning, typically cultural heritage and educational context. This chapter also demonstrated that the application of ICT in education, in which there is a thoughtful integration of traditional face-to-face and technology-mediated constructivist instruction, or a blended learning environment, is believed to be a contributing factor to active learning.

Moreover, the literature review indicates that teaching practices in Vietnam still reflect a traditional Confucian teacher-centred pedagogy, which creates obstacles in applying Western teaching approaches and technology to encourage active learning. These teaching practices are connected to cultural features of the education system, features which are often believed to be major issues which challenge attempts to change learning styles. However, there has been limited research that explores the active learning experiences of Vietnamese students in an ICT-enhanced blended learning environment in Australia from the learner's perspective, as the learner in both his/her heritage and host learning culture. The lack of current targeted research, therefore, justifies the need for this study's focus. The next chapter describes the research design and methods adopted to conduct this study.

Chapter 3

Research Design and Methods

3.1 Introduction

Chapter 2 reviewed the key literature on active learning; it identified major characteristics of active learners, the importance of active learning and the factors contributing to active learning in relation to cultural heritage and educational contexts within an ICT-enhanced blended learning environment. The chapter provided fundamental understandings of active learning, which established a theoretical and empirical research background for the recognition and discussion of active learning in this study. The review of literature also validated the current study of active learning of Vietnamese students in an ICT-enhanced blended learning environment in Australia. This chapter introduces the research design and methods adopted to conduct the study. The first section details the theoretical basis guiding the research and the methodology which includes the research paradigm and research approach. The following sections describe the research population, the data collection procedure and explain how the data was analysed. The final part of this chapter presents the strategies employed to enrich the rigour and quality of the research.

3.2 Theoretical Framework

This section presents theories that provide the conceptual basis for this research design and data analysis. In particular, it discusses Berry's acculturation theory adopted to conceptualise this research problem, and theories on active learning and constructivist approaches used for analysing and interpreting the collected data.

3.2.1 Berry's acculturation theory

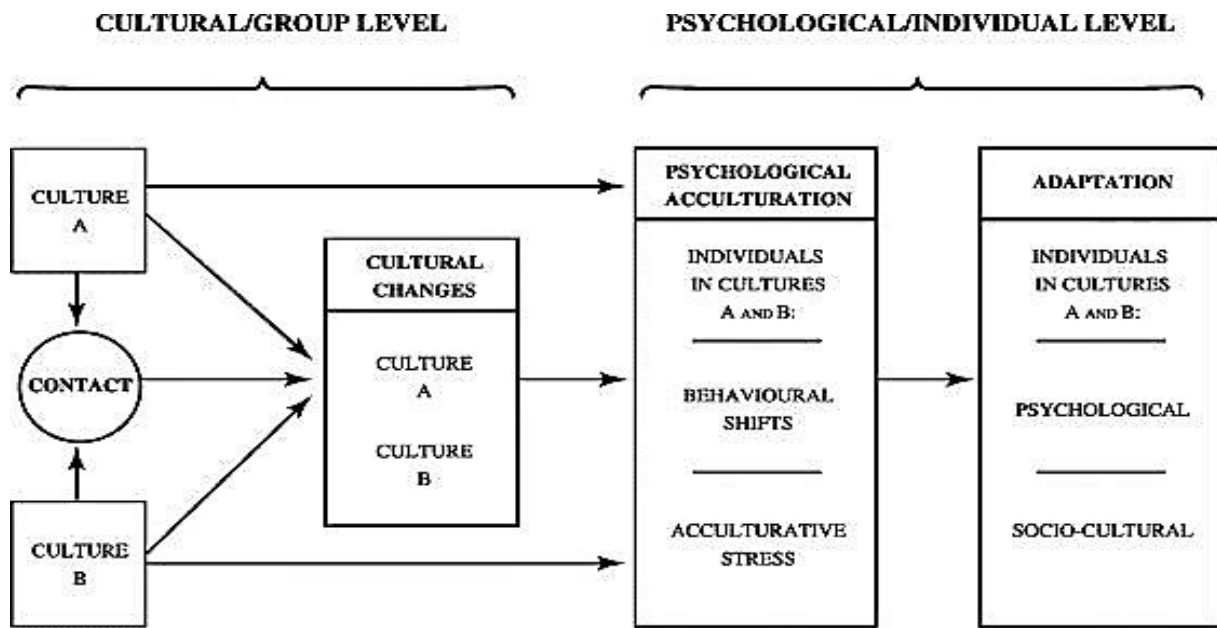
This sub-section presents the justification for the adoption of Berry's acculturation theory as a conceptual basis for this research design and how the theory assisted the researcher to organise this study.

The focus of this research is on the learning experiences of a group of Vietnamese international students studying in an Australian higher education environment. The study, therefore, will need to take into account the intercultural shift influencing the learning experiences of the students, who are relocated "from one culture to another", even if it is for a limited period of time. In this case it is the duration of students' study in Australia. Therefore, Berry's (2005) acculturation framework will be employed as an organising framework for this study to address the impacts of the two cultures on the participants' learning experiences.

Acculturation can be defined at different levels. It has been characterized as an anthropological concept at group level by Redfield, Linton and Herskovits (1936, p. 149) such that "acculturation comprehends those phenomena which result when groups of individuals having different cultures come into continuous first-hand contact, with subsequent changes in the original cultural patterns of either or both groups". The key factors in acculturation, as indicated here, and later elaborated on by Berry (1990), include a process, a state, contact and changes. At an individual level, acculturation has been known as "psychological acculturation" (Graves, 1967). At this level, acculturation refers to the changes in individual members of an acculturating group (see the Figure 1).

Figure 1

A general framework for understanding acculturation (Berry, 2005, p. 703)



In this general framework for understanding acculturation, as shown in Figure 1, acculturation is conceptualized at both group/cultural and individual/psychological level. In order to understand acculturation at a group/cultural level (on the left), according to Berry, it is necessary to investigate key features in the “heritage” culture (culture A) and those in the “host” culture (culture B), to examine the nature of their contact relationships together with the changes resulting from the contact to both cultures (left and centre). These aspects of cultural contexts help define the nature of the acculturation process at the group/cultural level, and they also establish the starting point for the acculturation process at the individual/psychological level (on the right). At the individual/psychological level, the process of acculturation can be defined by examining psychological changes, including behavioural shifts (the behavioural adjustments individuals make to deal with the new environment) and acculturative stress (a consequence of psychological conflicts between the desires to preserve one’s original culture and the desires to join the host culture) that individuals in all groups undergo, and their eventual adaptation to the new environment. The eventual adaptation, which is known as “longer-term outcomes” results from the strategies that individuals adopt to cope with acculturative stress. It includes psychological and socio-cultural adaptations. Ward (2001, p. 414) describes psychological adaptation as a “feeling of well-being or satisfaction during cross-cultural transitions” and socio-cultural

adaptation as the ability to “fit in” or “execute effective interactions in a new cultural milieu”.

Berry’s models of acculturation processes (Berry, 1997, 2005, 2009) have been recognized as one of the most influential frameworks in the field of acculturation research. Berry identifies a variety of acculturating groups based on categories such as the degree of voluntariness, permanence and movement of contact. These include immigrants, refugees, sojourners, native peoples, and ethnic groups (Berry, Kim, Minde, & Mok, 1987). The relevance of Berry’s models to this research is in its applicability to sojourners, who are described as people who voluntarily go overseas for a specific purpose or contract for a relatively short period of time (six months to five years) with the objective of returning home after completing the sojourn (Berry, 1990; C. A. Ward, Furnham, & Bochner, 2001). The intention of sojourners is to travel and to fulfil their desired commission of the sojourn, whether it be academic, voluntary or business-oriented work (Furnham, 1988). International students are seen as academic sojourners who travel with purposes of improving their qualifications in a foreign country, and are categorised as temporary residents in the country in order to join in international educational exchanges as students (Paige, 1990). The participants in this research, the Vietnamese students who are studying in Australia for a short period of time (from one to four years), therefore, can be considered as academic sojourners.

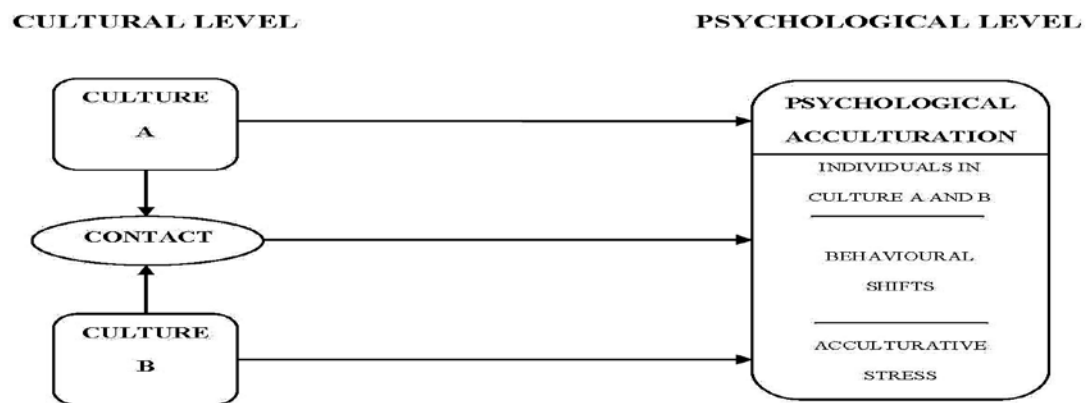
The idea of cross-cultural education is defined by Smith (1956) as “the reciprocal process of learning and adjustment that occurs when individuals sojourn for educational purposes in a society that is culturally foreign to them, normally returning to their own society after a limited period” (p. 3). To characterise this process at the societal level, Smith further suggests exploring “cultural diffusion and change, involving temporary ‘exchange of persons’ for training and experience” (p. 3). Eshel and Rosenthal-Sokolov (2000) argue that contrary to the patterns of pertinent adjustment to refugees or immigrants who have to adapt to their new society, the temporary status of sojourners makes it not necessary for them to identify with, or to be assimilated by, the host culture. Hence, this study will focus on the short-term outcomes of acculturation, rather

than the long-term outcomes or components of psychological and socio-cultural adaptation, of the Vietnamese sojourner students.

Berry's models have been expansively applied to cross-cultural research on international students or student sojourners such as Eshela & Rosenthal-Sokolova (2000), Ying (2005), Wang & Mallinckrodt (2006), Chen (2010) and V. T. H. Tran (2011). Chen (2010) has utilised Berry's general framework for the study of understanding acculturation of Chinese student sojourners in Australian higher education. The version of Berry's (2005) model adapted by Chen (2010) below (Figure 2) was used in this study.

Figure 2

The model of acculturation (Berry, 2005, adapted by Chen, 2010, p.43)



This model has been adopted as an organising framework for exploring the cross-cultural learning experiences of Vietnamese international students in Australia. It helped the researcher construct the object of this study by investigating key features in both heritage and host cultures, as well as examining the meeting of the two cultures and the possible changes resulting from the connection.

The culture A or “heritage culture” refers to teaching practices in Vietnamese higher education that the students have experienced; Culture B (“host culture”) refers to the educational contexts the students encounter in the ICT-enhanced blended learning environment at the Australian University; and the outcomes or psychological acculturation including behavioural shifts and acculturative stress, are the students’ learning styles and experiences in the new learning environment in relation to how the Vietnamese students became more active in their learning in Australia.

3.2.2 Active learning and constructivist approach theories

Theories on active learning drawn upon existing literature, and constructivist approaches based on the cognitive and socio-cultural constructivist perspectives of Piaget (1929) and Vygotsky (1978) (as discussed in the literature review, see sections 2.2 and 2.3) were utilised to examine the potential for active learning amongst Vietnamese students studying in an ICT-enhanced blended learning environment.

As previously outlined in Chapter 2, the nature of active learning can be described as active involvement of students in their learning process including:

- Engagement in hands-on activities
- Meaningful intellectual inquiry
- Learner autonomy and responsibility for own learning

Constructivist approaches used in this study have been primarily incorporated by Jonassen (1994), Anthony (1996), Good & Brophy (2000), Ally (2004), Paily (2013) and Ugwuegbulam & Nwebo (2014); they can be described as follows.

- Learning is an active process in which students construct their own meanings. Students are encouraged to make a deliberate effort to process the information that is presented to them so as to discover and construct knowledge of their own.

- New learning is based on prior experiences. Students actively construct their new knowledge as a result of making connections between the new information and the knowledge conceptions or beliefs that they have achieved. Students are expected to compare and question, investigate and challenge, acknowledge or discard what they have learned or experienced.
- Learning is enhanced by social interaction. New knowledge is constructed when students engage in social interaction with others and the world around them. Students are encouraged to actively engage in the learning process by discussing, raising questions and developing or finding answers through collaboration with their lecturers and peers or other students.

These active learning and constructivist approach theories were adopted to guide this researcher in the process of analysing and interpreting the data in order to address the potential of active learning.

3.3 The Research Paradigm

Research paradigms play an important role in guiding a study, thus determining a suitable research paradigm is essential for a researcher. As suggested by Mackenzie and Knipe (2006), “without nominating a paradigm as the first step, there is no basis for subsequent choices regarding methodology, method, literature or research design” (p. 194). The term of paradigm can be defined as the “basic belief systems based on ontological, epistemological, and methodological assumptions” (Guba & Lincoln, 1994, p. 107). MacNaughton, Siraj-Blatchford and Rolfe (2001) also assert that a paradigm can provide researchers with “a belief about the nature of knowledge, a methodology and criteria for validity” (p. 32). Similarly, Willis (2007) views paradigm as “a comprehensive belief system, world view or framework that guides research and practice in a field” (p. 8). There are a number of paradigms described in literature, such as post-positivist, interpretivist, constructivist, deconstructivist, critical, emancipatory, transformative and pragmatic (Mackenzie & Knipe, 2006). However, positivism and

interpretivism are two major paradigms characterizing research design (Roth & Mehta, 2002; Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2009). The current study employed an interpretivist paradigm instead of a positivist paradigm for the following reasons.

Positivism, according to Lather (2006), originated with Auguste Comte in the 19th century. Positivism reflects a deterministic philosophy, where effects or outcomes can be determined by causes (Cresswell, 2003). The positivist approach aims to test a theory or describe relationships between variables through direct observations, quantitative measurement and objective prediction (Mackenzie & Knipe, 2006). In addition, promoters of positivism confess that this paradigm is “irrespective of context and related concepts such as feelings, opinions, values, or cultures” (Cibangu, 2010, p. 177). Moreover, they assert that the natural world and the social world can be investigated in the same way (Roth & Mehta, 2002).

However, there is no doubt that there is an obvious difference between natural and social phenomena. For example, human beings are different to inanimate objects such as plants, trees or mountains because human beings can interpret themselves as well as the environment around them. Recent research has shown that studying facts cannot be separated from their inherent context and values, because it is inevitable that understanding is prejudiced due to influence of the individual, the context or environment (Goldkuhl, 2012; Lather, 2006). These findings have supported the use of an interpretivist paradigm as a meaningful approach in social science.

An interpretivist paradigm aims to investigate “the world of human experience” (Heidgerken, 1953, p. 36) with interpretivist researchers asserting that the reality of human experience is socially constructed (Fallon, 2008; Hirose, Itao, & Umeda, 2012; Roth & Mehta, 2002). Therefore, they pay attention to the participants’ opinions and feelings of context, values or cultures (Cibangu, 2010; Cresswell, 2003; Whiting, 2008). The interpretivist approach allows researchers to “seek an in-depth and context-specific understanding of lived or inner experience or meaning” (Cibangu, 2010, p. 177). This current study focuses on investigating the active learning of Vietnamese students

studying in an Australian higher education environment. The investigation relies upon students' perceptions and experiences of the learning process. Hence, the interpretivist paradigm was adopted as a research orientation for this present study.

As mentioned above, the research methodology and method are determined based on the paradigm chosen to guide the study. Considering the current research focus and interpretivist paradigm, a qualitative case study approach has been adopted in this study. The following section presents the research approach and the justification for applying it in this study.

3.4 Research Approach

3.4.1 Qualitative research

Qualitative and quantitative researches are two major approaches to data collection and interpretation in research (Harvey-Jordan & Long, 2001; Pathak, Jena, & Kalra, 2013; Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2009). Qualitative research aims to understand a research query as an idealistic or humanistic approach. This approach helps researchers explore people's beliefs, attitudes, behaviors, experiences and interactions (Harvey-Jordan & Long, 2001; Joubish, Khurram, Ahmed, Fatima, & Haider, 2011; Shmerling, Schattner, & Piterman, 1993). In addition, Joubish, et al. (2011) assert that qualitative research focuses on developing an understanding of social phenomena. Particularly, it helps to explore the world in which people live and "why the things are the way they are" (p. 2082) in relation to social aspects of the world. The research questions which are appropriate to qualitative research in this manner are as follow:

- Why people behave the way they do
- How opinion and attitudes are formed.
- How people are affected by the events that go on around them.
- How and why cultures have developed.
- The differences between social groups.

(Joubish, et al., 2011, p. 2082)

A qualitative approach is, therefore, suitable for the current study because it provides the basis for an investigation of how Vietnamese students can become more active in their learning while studying in the ICT-based learning environment in Australia. This approach helps in understanding the students' active learning experiences and different aspects or factors contributing to their experiences. In addition, this study focuses on analyzing themes or concepts and related processes within the data (Creswell, 2015) in order "...to provide in-depth understanding of the phenomenon" (Cibangu, 2010, p. 177). In particular, this study aims to acquire a deep understanding of the active learning phenomenon based on the perceptions of nine participants.

Moreover, the choice of a qualitative approach fits in with the interpretivist paradigm that the researcher has adopted to guide this study. A number of studies such as those of Glesne & Peshkin (1992), Thomas (2003), Silverman (2005), Willis (2007) and Nind & Todd (2011) demonstrate that the qualitative approach is predominantly paired with an interpretivist paradigm. Particularly, Willis (2007) asserts that interpretivist researchers value subjectivity in investigating social aspects of the world, and "eschew the idea that objective research on human behavior is possible" (p. 110). He explains that perceptions of the world are variable depending on different people and groups. In the same vein, the findings of Smith (1993) prove that there does not exist a "particular right or correct path to knowledge, no special method that automatically leads to intellectual progress" (p. 120). Therefore, the use of an interpretivist paradigm with a qualitative approach allows researchers to achieve a comprehensive understanding of particular issues or events (Cibangu, 2010; D. Macdonald et al., 2002; Morehouse, 2012). Accordingly, a qualitative approach was employed for this current study. The following section presents justification for adopting a qualitative case study.

3.4.2 Case study approach

Case study is a qualitative method with a small number of cases (Yin, 2009). It is one of the four major approaches of qualitative research including ethnography,

phenomenology and grounded theory (Cohen, Manion, & Mossison, 2011; Lodico, Spaulding, & Voegtle, 2010; Merriam, 2009).

Qualitative case study has been acknowledged as a research approach since the early 1980s (Stake, 1988; Yin, 2009). This type of approach is increasingly used in educational studies which aim to deeply understand educational issues in particular contexts and draw conclusions based on the findings (Kyburz-Graber, 2004). Case study is defined by Gerring (2004) “as an intensive study of a single unit for the purpose of understanding a larger class of (similar) units” (p. 342). A unit, he explains, means a spatially bounded phenomenon such as a nation-state, a University or a person, - investigated at a certain time or over some delimited period of time. A unit or “case” is described by Stake (2005) as a “functioning body” or an “integrated system”. Hence he asserts that a case study aims to investigate the wholeness of the unit or entity, which differentiates the case study from other qualitative approaches, such as ethnography and phenomenology. The case study is an appropriate method within the interpretivist paradigm as the research aims to investigate “individual and shared social meanings” (Crowe et al., 2011, p. 4).

A case study is suitable for the current research because it enables the researcher to investigate an integrated system of Vietnamese students’ active learning experiences including perceptions, attitudes and behaviours within a bounded context. In particular, the contemporary phenomenon examined in this study is the active learning experiences of Vietnamese student sojourners studying in an ICT-enhanced blended learning environment at an Australian University.

3.4.3 Methods of data collection

The case study data was generated through in-depth interviews with the participants and an analysis of the documents related to the teaching and learning process at an Australian University. These documents included subject outlines, various teaching materials and University policy documents.

The interview is regarded as the most widely-adopted technique in qualitative research (Ary, Jacobs, & Razavieh, 2002; Punch, 2009), particularly in social sciences (Freebody, 2006). Interviews allow access to participants' understanding, perceptions of situations and the construction of multiple realities (Punch, 2009). Researchers classify different kinds of interviews such as structured, semi-structured and unstructured interviews (Patton, 2002; Willis, 2007). Semi-structured interviews are extensively employed in qualitative study to "understand the reasons why people act in particular ways, by exploring participants' perceptions, experiences and attitudes" (Harvey-Jordan & Long, 2001, p. 219).

Semi-structured interviews embody the subject's voice and allow researchers to revise and extend existing theory through exploring participants' views (Burawoy, 1991; Galletta, 2012). This technique can also give both an element of structure to the interview process and flexibility to the researcher to examine perspectives that might not have been foreseen before the interview. Semi-structured interviews, therefore, are used in this study to help the researcher organize interviews based on a framework of themes, and also to allow certain perspectives to be brought up during the interview.

3.5 Research Participants

This section describes the ways in which the researcher accessed and selected the participants for this study. In other words, it describes methods and techniques used to determine and recruit the participants. Demographic information about the participants is also presented to provide an overview of the samples recruited for this research.

3.5.1 Sampling

In research terms, sampling is defined as a process of selecting certain items, objects or people from a larger population for investigation so that the findings can be properly generalized back to the population as a whole. Therefore, sampling plays an important role in conducting research (Baker, 2002; Check & Schutt, 2012; Levy & Lemeshow, 2008). There are various principles for sample selection in qualitative research mentioned in the literature. Some major features for selecting samples in qualitative research have been distilled from a number of studies as the following:

- the method of drawing samples is not based on theories of the statistical probability of selection, but on other, purposive or theoretical sampling criteria;
- samples are small, are studied intensively, and each one typically generates a large amount of information;
- samples are not usually wholly pre-specified, and instead selection is sequential (by a rolling process, inter-leafed with coding and analysis);
- sample selection is conceptually driven, either by the theoretical framework which underpins the research question from the outset, or by an evolving theory which is derived inductively from the data as the research proceeds.

(Curtisa, Geslerb, Smitha, & Washburnb, 2000, p. 1002)

The purposive sampling, as indicated above, is suitable for qualitative research. Furthermore, Bowers, House and Owens (2011) assert that “most qualitative sampling methods are purposive in nature because we usually approach the sampling problem with a specific plan or purpose in mind” (p. 56). The common feature of the purposive sampling method, they added, is that units or cases are deliberately or purposely chosen by the researcher to represent types of population based on certain criteria. Similarly, Tongco (2007) explains that the purposive sampling method refers to the judgment sampling technique, in which the deliberate selection of a case is based on the qualities the case possesses. Purposive sampling, he proposes, is not a random technique that underlies a set number of units or theories. Instead the researcher makes decisions about “what needs to be known and sets out to find people who can and are willing to provide the information by virtue of knowledge or experience” (p. 147).

The researcher, therefore, has adopted a purposive sampling technique in choosing participants for the current study. To answer the research questions, the researcher chose participants who are native to Vietnam, with knowledge and experiences of studying in both Vietnamese and Australian higher education environments. The participants all studied in Vietnamese universities before they came to Australia, and they were all enrolled in at least three subjects with ICT enhanced blended learning environments while participating in the project. The participants were selected from students coming from different areas in Vietnam and with different levels of study to increase the variety of the samples.

3.5.2 Accessing the participants

Based on the criteria created to select participants for the current study, the researcher collected related information about students studying in the Australian University through friends and the Vietnamese student association at the University. The researcher participated in social activities with Vietnamese students, especially the activities organised by the Vietnamese association to build up relationships with potential participants. After locating potential participants, the researcher organised individual meetings with each of the participants. In these meetings, the researcher began with an open talk to learn more about the participants and obtain more information about them to confirm that they have the right amount of knowledge and experiences needed for the study. The participants then were informed about the study and the procedure for data collection. The researcher explained the purpose of the project, the role of the participants, their possible contribution to the study, as well as their rights and the benefits of their participation. The individuals who were willing to participate in the study were given a copy of a consent form to read and then sign.

The sampling technique that the researcher used to recruit the participants in this study is known as “snowball sampling”. This technique can also be called referral sampling because it starts with the initial participant identified as having the necessary knowledge and experiences or important characteristics that are required by the research design.

The researcher then asks the subject for assistance to nominate other people with similar characteristics, and the same technique is used with the nominated cases to obtain sufficient numbers of participants for the study (Goodman, 1961; Trotter II, 2012). With the help of two initial students whom the researcher located through social activities with Vietnamese friends and the students' association, he was introduced to other Vietnamese friends or students who had characteristics required by the study. Accordingly, the researcher approached, recruited more participants and then asked the new participants for more information about other Vietnamese students having similar characteristics. The snowball effect, therefore, increased the number of potential cases for this study.

The snowball sampling technique is described as a non-probability form which has become "a widely employed method in qualitative research on hard-to-reach populations" (Heckathorn, 2011, p. 356). This technique was suitable for this project because the number of participants that could meet the criteria required by this research design was limited in the University. Moreover, based on the researcher's understanding of the potential participants' cultural background, a mutual contact should be better able to gain the participants' trust and secure their participation. This aspect is believed to be supportive for achieving in-depth information from the participants.

Undeniably, snowball sampling could have some disadvantages because the cases chosen mainly rely on the initial cases. The representativeness of the cases is limited since the previous participants often nominate people sharing similar characteristics. However, as mentioned in the first paragraph of this section, the researcher paid close attention to understanding the potential cases or nominated students, to make sure that they could provide enough information for the study and were willing to participate in the project. In other words, the researcher made selections of samples from the potential cases based on the practical concerns and requirements of the research design.

3.5.3 Participant profile

The participants selected for this study, as stated earlier, were Vietnamese international students who had studied in Vietnamese higher education institutions before they came to Australia for further study. All of them had experiences with studying in an ICT enhanced blended learning environment in an Australian University. The researcher selected ten participants from the potential cases to start collecting data; however two students withdrew from the study. One participant did not continue because he had to move to another University, so he could not contribute to the data collection process, and he no longer met the research criteria required. The other refused to be recorded or to sign to confirm the information he provided although he had agreed at the beginning. The researcher had explained again about participants' rights and confidentiality in the study, however this participant said that he did not want to discuss his experiences when studying in Vietnam, and as a Vietnamese lecturer he did not want any "sensitive issues" to be recorded. Therefore, an additional participant was recruited leading to a total of nine participants.

The participants included four females and five males aged from 20 to 35. They all graduated from Vietnamese universities and six of them had work experience in Vietnam. They were selected from three different regions in Vietnam (the north, the central and the south); the researcher recruited three students in each region. This is because there is a considerable difference among the regions with regard to both cultural and educational aspects. These differences are also acknowledged in a study by T.T. Pham and Renshaw (2013):

Vietnam is characterised by cultural differences in different parts of the country - the South, Central and North. In reality, these three parts own many different cultural characteristics including daily practices, beliefs, languages and ways of working. (p. 81)

Recruiting the participants from the different regions was, therefore, believed to increase a variety of samples. The level of study varied among the participants; their enrolments range from bachelors, masters to doctorates; and the researcher chose three students at each level of study. The following table presents the demographic information for each participant.

Table 8

Demographic information for the participants

Pseudonyms	Gender	Age	Region	Year of Graduation in Vietnam (Undergraduate)	Working Experience in Vietnam (years)	Level of Study in Australia
Ha	F	20-25	Central	2008	Nil	Undergraduate Degree
Huyen	M	25-30	North	2006	1	Research Doctoral Degree
Khanh	M	25-30	South	2008	1	Research Doctoral Degree
Lan	F	25-30	Central	2007	3	Masters Degree
Phung	F	25-30	South	2008	1	Undergraduate Degree
Thu	F	25-30	South	2006	3	Masters Degree
Toan	M	20-25	North	2010	Nil	Undergraduate Degree
Tri	M	20-25	North	2010	Nil	Masters Degree
Truong	M	30-35	Central	2001	5	Research Doctoral Degree

It is important to note that students having the specific characteristics or features required by the research design seem to be small in number at this Australian University. This once again validates the use of the snowball sampling technique to

recruit the participants. It was also required that the students' current specialisations and personal details should not be visibly mentioned in this project due to ethical reasons. In order to ensure the participants' confidentiality, the researcher used pseudonyms for all the participants.

3.6 Data Collection

3.6.1 Data collection process

The data collection was aligned with the research questions and Berry's framework (see Table 9). Semi-structured interviews were conducted on three occasions. The first interviews concerned the first research question, aiming to explore the "heritage culture" or the teaching and learning practices in Vietnamese higher education that the participants had experienced. The second set of interviews aimed to investigate the "host culture" or the characteristics of the educational environment that the participants encountered in the ICT-enhanced blended learning environment at the Australian University to address the second research question. The third interviews explored possible changes in learning styles of the students studying in the new educational environment, and the students' learning experiences in relation to how Vietnamese students can become more active in their learning while studying in the ICT-based learning environment in Australia. Although each of the interviews had a particular focus, the participants were encouraged to compare and contrast what they had experienced in both the heritage and host cultures to increase the clarity and depth of the information provided. The reviews of the participants' course documents such as subject outlines, policies and guidelines were also conducted to reduce the biases and enhance the validity of this study

Table 9

Data required and data gathering techniques

Research Questions	Rationale (how does this question help to achieve the main aim)	Data Required	Source (instrument)
1. How do the Vietnamese students perceive their experiences of teaching and learning practice in Vietnamese higher education?	Helps to examine teaching and learning practice in Vietnamese higher education that the students have experienced.	Students' perceptions of teaching and learning practice in Vietnamese higher education	Student interviews
2. What types of teaching and learning practice are encountered by the students in the ICT-enhanced blended learning environment at the Australian University?	Helps to identify the characteristics of teaching and learning practice in the ICT-enhanced blended learning environment in which the students are engaged.	Students' perceptions of teaching and learning practice in the ICT-enhanced blended learning environment Features of the learning environment	Student interviews Document reviews
3. What are the perceptions and practices of Vietnamese students using ICT-enhanced learning environments that seek to foster active learning?	Examines outcomes of the meeting of the two cultures and the potential harmonies and conflicts encountered by students in the new learning environment Investigates the ways that learning in the new learning environment can encourage active learning among the students	Evidence of changes Students' learning strategies in relation to active learning	Student interviews Document reviews

(Adopted from LeCompte & Goetz, 1993)

The period of time scheduled to carry out all the interviews was six months, starting in December 2011 and concluding in May 2012. All the interviews were face-to-face, and the particular time and location for each interview was set for the participants' convenience. The choice of locations included the participants' home, the interviewer's office, the University's library and the library of the city where they studied. All the interviews were recorded with the shortest interview taking only 30 minutes (30 mins) and the longest was one and a half hours. The following table presents the details of the interviews with participants.

Table 10

Interviews' audit trail

Participants	1st Interview	Length	Place	2nd Interview	Length	Place	3rd Interview	Length	Place
Ha	30/12/11	41 mins	Interviewer's Home	11/02/12	31 mins	City's Library	17/05/12	32 mins	City's Library
Huyen	08/12/11	45 mins	University's Library	25/02/12	45 mins	University's Library	18/05/12	47 mins	University's Library
Khanh	14/12/11	55 mins	University's Library	22/02/12	1.08 mins	City's Library	26/05/12	44 mins	City's Library
Lan	18/12/11	41 mins	University's Library	10/03/12	35 mins	University's Library	16/05/12	40 mins	City's Library
Phung	13/12/11	30 mins	Participant's Home	10/03/12	36 mins	Participant's Home	19/05/12	31 mins	Participant's Home
Thu	20/02/12	53 mins	City's Library	05/03/12	45 mins	City's Library	09/05/12	36 mins	City's Library
Toan	15/12/11	37 mins	University's Library	12/02/12	38 mins	Participant's Home	20/05/12	38 mins	Participant's Home

Tri	08/01/12	1.29 mins	Interviewer's Home	21/02/12	48 mins	Participant's Home	19/05/12	38 mins	Participant's Home
Truong	01/12/11	35 mins	Participant's Home	26/02/12	41 mins	Participant's Home	16/05/12	30 mins	University's Library

The leading questions for interviews (see Appendix 1) were prepared based on the research questions and the analytical framework in order to obtain in-depth information from the participants. The questions were prepared in both English and Vietnamese versions and sent to participants by email some days prior to the interview time. After the first interview of each session, the researcher systematically reviewed the interview to identify limitations and emerging topics from that interview in order to have timely adjustments for the next (Rubin & Rubin, 2005).

The language used in the interviews was mainly Vietnamese but participants were encouraged to use whatever language allowing them to best describe their particular experiences. The combination of the two languages in the interviews seemed to be productive because participants felt more comfortable when having various ways to communicate to the interviewer and express exactly what they thought. For example, some participants admitted that they were not sure how to say this information or that idea in Vietnamese. As a Vietnamese international student himself, the researcher shared similar experiences of communicating in another language and the difficulties this can cause. Therefore, the combination of using English and Vietnamese in the interviews was believed to bring rich and deep information to the study.

All the interviews were transcribed and translated into English for data analysis and discussion of the results. Initially, the researcher sent some transcripts to a professional translation company in Vietnam for translation in order to ensure objectivity. However, when the researcher reviewed the translation in consultation with the participants, there were many points of confusion, especially in relation to participants' learning

experiences in Australia. This issue might have resulted from a lack of understanding of the context and conceptual equivalence across the two cultures.

The translations were then conducted by the researcher, with a focus on meaning-based, rather than word by word translation (Hebbrecht, 2013; Larson, 1997). Each transcript was sent back to the participants for member checking (Cohen, et al., 2011) to confirm the accuracy of the information and the translation. Thus, the preparation of the transcripts for analysis took a long time, but it ensured the validity of the interview data and also assisted the researcher's engagement with the data (C. Marshall & Rossman, 2011).

3.6.2 Role of the researcher

In qualitative study, the researcher is considered to be a vital ingredient in data collection, data analysis and in the interpretation of findings (Locke, Spirduso, & Silverman, 2000). The role of a researcher as an “outsider” or “insider” in relation to the participants, or how a researcher engages with the participants, has a strong impact on the quality of the study (Lodico, et al., 2010). The notion of “outsider” or “insider” status is clarified by Gair (2012) as the extent to which an investigator is located either outside or within the group of units being investigated, due to “her or his common lived experience or status as a member of that group” (p. 137). The researcher in this study has had experiences in learning during a four year undergraduate and one year postgraduate course at Hanoi National University of Education in the north of Vietnam, and extensive experience working at a Vietnamese University in a remote province in the south as a lecturer of psychology and pedagogy. Additionally, the researcher has completed a two year Masters of Education in an Australian University, and has audited three “blended learning” subjects as a PhD candidate at the University where he conducted this study.

This researcher, therefore, shares a cultural background and educational experiences with the participants, which enhances his understanding of the participants' meanings

and assists in building trust and rapport with them (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011; Papadopoulos & Lees, 2002). As both researcher and the participants are Vietnamese, and the native language was used to clarify and specify questions and answers during the interviews, it was easy for the participants and interviewer to understand the questions and responses. In this instance, the role of this researcher is considered as a “fellow student”, which is widely regarded as being useful in achieving valuable and credible data (Crabtree & Miller, 1999). The aforementioned technique facilitated the researcher to get “insider” and in-depth knowledge from the informants.

The position of the researcher as an “insider”, however, might also result in the researcher imposing his ways of thinking on the participants (Flick, 2009; Gair, 2012). In addition, when the participants see the researcher as an “insider”, they are likely to assume that he or she has a sense or understanding of their experiences, so they might not elaborate on research matters (Wray & Bartholomew, 2010). Being aware of these possible weaknesses, the researcher endeavoured to develop close relationships with the participants to make them feel comfortable and content to share their knowledge and experiences, and also kept maintaining a necessary boundary between the social relationships and research issues with the participants. Particularly, the researcher played the formal role of an investigator in the interviews and showed his curiosity and interest in listening to the participants’ expressions of their own feelings and experiences. He kept an open mind during the conversations and asked prompting questions, rather than just accepting what the participants said even though he knew what they meant. He encouraged the participants to elaborate on what they shared by asking them to provide specific evidences or examples to make sure that the obtained data made sense to an ‘outsider’ audience.

3.6.3 Ethical considerations

A classical understanding of ethics pertains to the ideal of doing good things and avoiding harm. In a research context, the term generally means following ethical principles and guidelines in undertaking studies or investigations, in which principles

and guidelines are set with the purpose of protecting participants and investigators, assuring trust, ensuring research integrity, minimizing possible harm, increasing the amount of good outcomes, and satisfying professional and organizational demands (Aluwihare-Samaranayake, 2012). Ethical issues can be present in both qualitative and quantitative research. However, in qualitative research the nature of the issues is more subtle than those in quantitative research, such as in surveys or in experimental studies. This is because in qualitative studies, the researchers' focus is on investigating and describing people and their natural environments, which embeds "the concepts of relationships and power between researchers and participants", and the desire to take part in the studies "depends upon a participant's willingness to share his or her experience" (Orb, Eisenhauer, & Wynaden, 2001, p. 93). Therefore, qualitative studies might involve probable ethical conflicts resulting from the way a researcher acquires access to participants and the possible influence of the researcher on the participants. In order to ensure ethical research, the researcher needs to assure the following principles are adhered to:

1. Projects should identify anticipated risks to subjects and be designed to minimise such risks. Risks are reasonable relative to expected benefits.
2. Participation of subjects is voluntary and equitable.
3. Informed consent will be obtained from each prospective subject and properly documented.
4. Additional safeguards must be taken for the inclusion of potentially vulnerable subjects such as children.
5. Adequate provisions are made as appropriate for ensuring the safety of subjects, monitoring data collection, and maintaining privacy and confidentiality of subjects and data.

(Wiersma & Jurs, 2009, p. 436)

Accordingly, ethical considerations for this research were addressed in a number of ways. Ethics approval, one of the compulsory and important steps before collecting the

data was obtained from the Human Research and Ethics Committee at the University of Wollongong (see Appendix 2). Considering that the participants are of non-English speaking background, Information Sheets for individual interviews and a Consent Form are presented in plain English (see Appendixes 3&4) and were sent to the participants before the interviews. By doing that, the researcher ensured that he provided “a larger issue of respect to the participants so that they are not coerced into participation and have access to relevant information prior to the consent” (Halai, 2006, p. 5). The researcher obtained informed consent and reassured total confidentiality of participation and unconditional withdrawal, should participants wish to do so at any stage of the research. The participants’ confidentiality was assured by using pseudonyms and keeping the data securely in password protected storage.

3.7 Data Analysis

The data collected in the study included 27 interviews transcribed and translated into English for analysis, and nine subject outlines that were analysed by the researcher. NVivo 10 (QSR International Pty Ltd, 2010), a qualitative data analysis computer software program, was used to assist with the data analysis procedures: To store, organise, code and revise collected data from the study including interview data and document reviews (Leech & Onwuegbuzie, 2011). The use of data analysis software enabled larger amounts of data to be handled. Particularly, this software can enhance comprehensiveness and flexibility of data handling, permit rigour and increase a visible audit of data analysis (Beck, 2003). Seers (2012) asserts that qualitative data analysis requires the researcher to keep his “brain very much in gear” and be organised because the researcher has a strong influence on both data collection and analysis. Thus the use of qualitative software like NVivo is really essential (p. 2). The details of how this computer-assisted data analysis was applied in this study will be shown in the data analysis steps.

In qualitative study, one of the most common methods used in the data analysis process is a thematic analysis (Bryman, 2012). It has been argued by Braun and Clarke (2006)

that most of the data analysis in research, especially qualitative research is thematic in nature. In particular, thematic analysis is considered as a foundational approach for qualitative analysis because it can help the researcher identify, analyse and report patterns or themes within the collected data; this technique can also organise and comprehensively describe the data with a minimum of organisational effort (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Similarly, Thorne (2000) asserts that “what makes a study qualitative is that it usually relies on inductive reasoning processes to interpret and structure the meanings that can be derived from data” (p. 68).

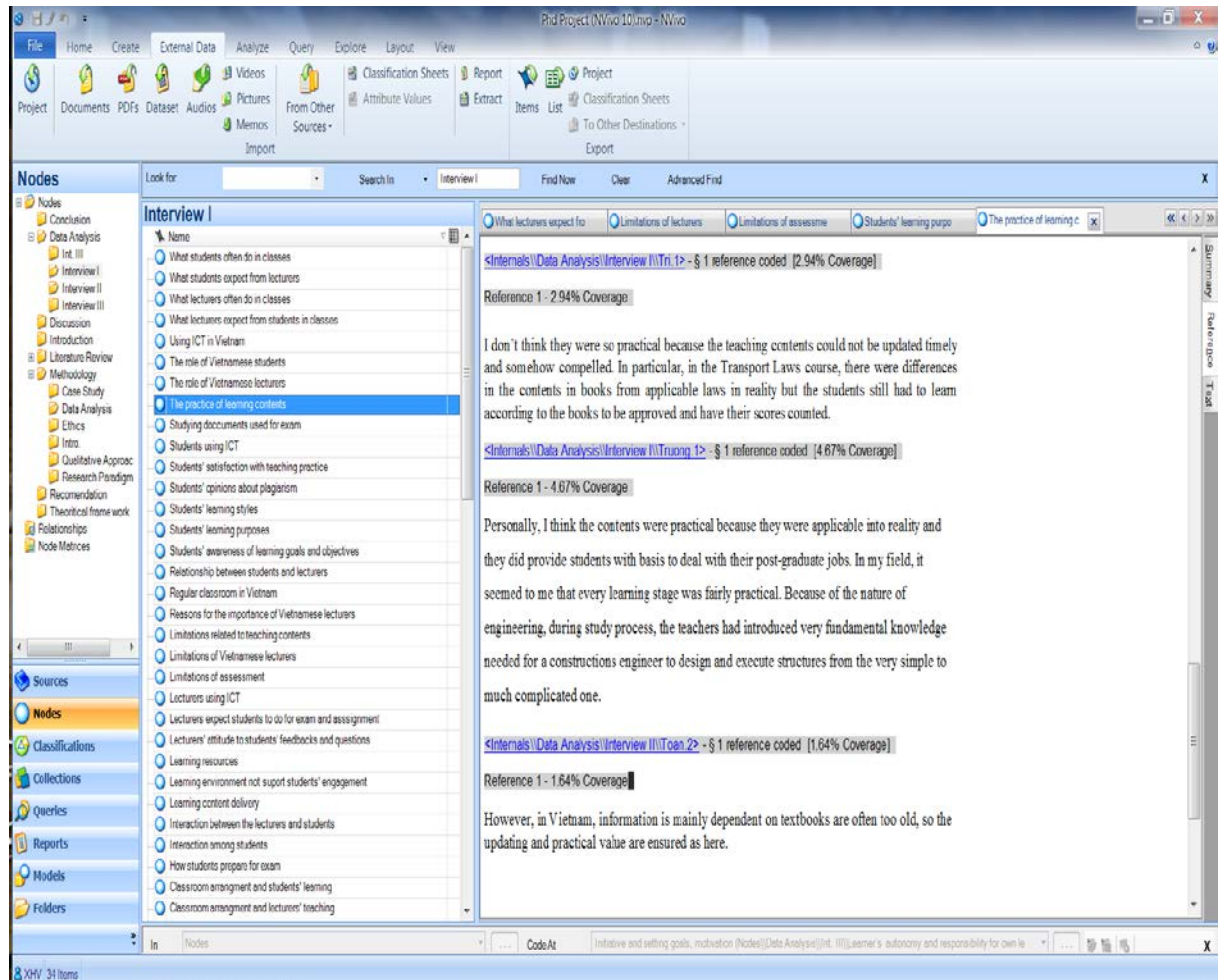
Thematic analysis therefore was applied in this research, drawing upon a combination of inductive thematic analysis and theoretical thematic analysis. In this manner, an inductive or “bottom up” technique (Frith & Gleeson, 2004) means that the themes formed are strongly derived from the data themselves (Patton, 1990). A theoretical or “top down” analysis (Hayes, 1997) refers to theories-oriented analysis, where the themes identified are strongly linked to the researcher’s theoretical or analytical interest in the area (Boyatzis, 1998; Braun & Clarke, 2006). Consequently, the theoretical thematic analysis is believed to be “more explicitly analysis driven” (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 84). This combination of the inductive and deductive approaches in data analysis can allow the researcher “to better comprehend the information domain and to design more targeted analysis processes” (Greco, Masciari, & Pontieri, 2001, p. 69). The theories used to orient the analysis in this study included Berry’s framework, theories on active learning and constructivist approaches. The procedure of data analysis in this research therefore was conducted as follows:

All the collected data, including interview transcriptions and related documents, were imported in folders and sub-folders created in the NVivo 10 Sources feature. The researcher carefully read and re-read the data and coding features of the data in a systematic fashion across the whole data set (J. Green et al., 2007), then collated relevant data to each code. In this step, the researcher used free line by line coding (Chenail, 2012); he did not try to fit the data into a pre-existing coding frame or the researcher’s analytic preconceptions. After that, the researcher searched for themes emerging from the codes, collated codes into potential themes and gathered all data

relevant to each potential theme. The first step of free line by line coding using NVivo 10 is presented in the Figure 3:

Figure 3

NVivo's free line by line coding



After all the data was imported in the Nvivo Sources, the researcher immersed himself in the data by carefully reading and re-reading every single data unit. A number of substantive or coding categories were created which incorporated each of the participants' accounts in different interviews and supporting documents. For example, as shown in the above figure (Figure 3), the category "the practice of learning content", coded to describe how Tri spoke about the practical relevance of the learning content in interview 1, was shared by Truong (interview 1) and Toan (interview 2). This helped

the researcher compare and contrast the participants' ideas from different interviews to deeply understand participants' accounts of the research issues.

Upon completing the first pass at the data, the researcher reviewed all the generated codes then modified and compared the findings to locate emerging themes and gather all the codes relevant to each emerging theme. In the next step, the deductive approach or theoretical thematic analysis was applied. All the emerging themes were organised based on Berry's framework for the initial data analysis. The emerging themes were gathered into three categories guided by the framework: The "heritage culture" represents the teaching and learning practices in Vietnamese higher education that the students had experienced; the "host culture" refers to the educational contexts the students encountered in the ICT-enhanced blended learning environment at the Australian University; and the "outcome" stands for the students' learning styles and experiences in the Australian ICT-based context with regard to how the Vietnamese students could become more active in their learning. The themes were then refined, named and analysed based on the relevant literature and constructivist theories of active learning to answer the first and second research questions (outlined in Table 9). Table 11 below summarises emerging themes mapped against the theoretically based categories developed for this study.

Table 11

Combination of inductive and theoretical thematic analysis used to describe both Vietnamese and Australian educational contexts

Criteria	Emerging themes	Indicators
Primary resource of data are used in order to ensure authenticity and real-world complexity	<i>Learning resources and materials</i>	<i>Indicating the learning resources students were provided by their University or lecturer</i>
	<i>Practical relevance of the</i>	<i>Indicating the relation of learning resources provided to daily life or real-</i>

(Murphy, 1997, p. 4)	<i>learning content</i>	<i>world complexity</i>
Activities, opportunities, tools and environments are provided to encourage meta-cognition, self-analysis, -regulation, -reflection & -awareness (Murphy, 1997, p. 4)	<i>Classroom arrangement</i>	<i>Indicating how the regular classrooms were arranged to support study</i>
	<i>Classroom atmosphere</i>	<i>Indicating learning environment among students</i>
	<i>Learning activities</i>	<i>Describing what types of learning activities were often organised to support students' learning</i>
	<i>Learning tools</i>	<i>Describing assisted tools provided to support study</i>
	<i>Learning opportunities</i>	<i>Indicating opportunities available to support learning</i>
Lecturers play the role of guides, monitors, coaches, tutors and facilitators (Jonassen, 1991)	<i>The role of lecturer</i>	<i>Describing the importance of a lecturer in contributing students' knowledge</i>
	<i>Relationship between lecturer and students</i>	<i>Indicating how the lecturers relate to students and vice versa</i>
Provide real-world, case-based learning environments, rather than pre-determined instructional sequences (Jonassen, 1994, p. 35).	<i>Authentic versus text based content</i>	<i>Describing what the lecturers actually does or the approach that the lecturers take during their teaching time</i>
Multiple perspectives	<i>Lecturer's self-efficacy in their</i>	<i>Describing the lecturers' belief in their subject knowledge</i>

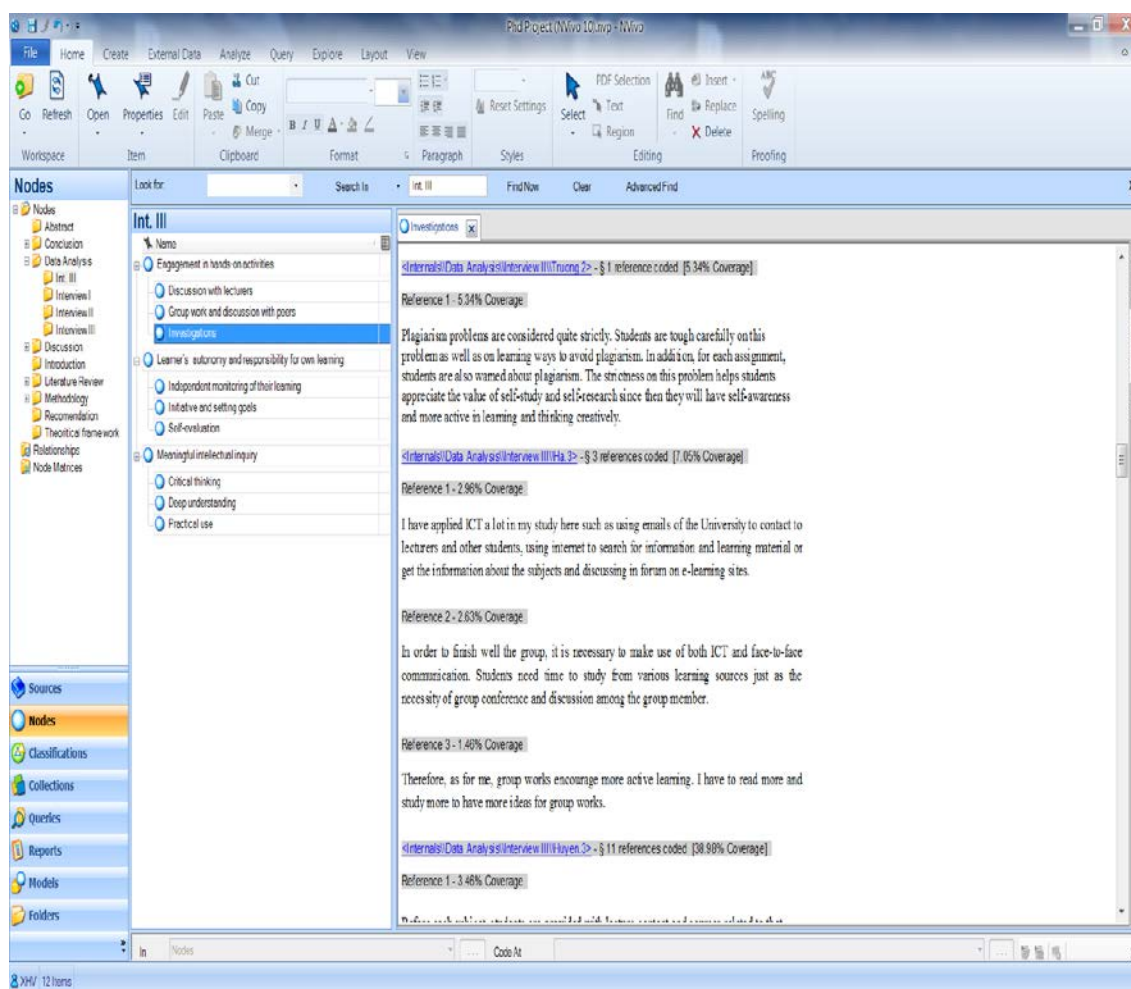
and representations of concepts and content are presented and encouraged (Murphy, 1997, p. 4).	<i>own knowledge</i>	
	<i>Lecturers' attitudes to students' feedback and questions</i>	<i>Describing how the lecturers consider students' learning concerns</i>
Focus on knowledge construction and support for collaborative construction of knowledge through social negotiation (Jonassen, 1994, p. 35)	<i>Expectations for achieving knowledge</i>	<i>Indicating how a lecturer expects students to do to acquire knowledge</i>
	<i>Social learning activities</i>	<i>Describing how learning activities are organised in relation to social interaction</i>
	<i>Students' learning activities</i>	<i>Describing what students often do to acquire their knowledge</i>
Evaluation should serve as a self-analysis tool (Jonassen, 1991, p. 11)	<i>Assessment criteria</i>	<i>Indicating the requirements that students should be provided with to enable self-evaluation and to prepare for assessment and self-assessment</i>
Assessment is authentic and interwoven with teaching (Murphy, 1997, p. 4)	<i>Plagiarism</i>	<i>Describing how plagiarism is perceived and applied in evaluation</i>
	<i>Types of assessment</i>	<i>Indicating the types of assessment applied during the course</i>
Problem-solving, higher-order thinking	<i>Expectations for completing the</i>	<i>Describing requirements for students' learning outcomes</i>

skills and deep understanding are emphasized (Murphy, 1997, p. 4).	assessment	
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In a similar way, the free coding categories regarding the Vietnamese students' learning experiences in the new learning environment were reviewed, organised into potential themes and linked to the research categories derived from the theories and empirical research on active learning. Figure 4 indicates how Nvivo 10 was used to create hierarchical structures in order to present the emerging themes linked with theories on active learning.

Figure 4

NVivo's hierarchical structures in relation to active learners



Further details of the coding are described in the Table 12 below. The themes were refined and formulated in relation to the categories and sub-categories about active learning experiences that the researcher had integrated based on existing literature reviewed in section 2.2 and the categorisation of active learning during the process of data analysis. This procedure guided the researcher in analysing the students' learning experiences in relation to answering the third research question, regarding how Vietnamese students can engage more in active learning when studying in an ICT-enhanced blended learning environment.

Table 12

Coding summary for the students' active learning experiences

Categories	Sub-categories	Indicators
Engagement in hands-on activities	<i>Investigations</i>	<i>Searching, reading, exploring</i>
	<i>Group work and discussion with peers</i>	<i>Students participating in small group learning activities and discussions</i>
	<i>Discussion with lecturers</i>	<i>Students debate learning issues with lecturers and ask questions</i>
Meaningful intellectual inquiry	<i>Deep understanding</i>	<i>They think about the learning content by analyzing, summarizing, rewording... in order to deeply understand the knowledge.</i>
	<i>Critical thinking</i>	<i>Determining the quality of a learning content by formulating a judgment; challenging ideas or knowledge they have learned</i>
	<i>Practical use</i>	<i>Making connections from theoretical knowledge and previous discipline knowledge to practical implications</i>
Learner's autonomy and	<i>Initiative and setting goals</i>	<i>Students' awareness of learning goals and objectives, and acting upon those goals</i>

responsibility for own learning		<i>independently</i>
	<i>Independent monitoring of their learning</i>	<i>They take control of and responsibility for their own learning</i>
	<i>Self-evaluation</i>	<i>Reflection on their own learning</i>

The results of the data analysis process were refined and organised, and are presented in two separate finding chapters (Chapter 4 and Chapter 5). In Chapter 4, the findings on students' perceptions and leaning experiences of the two learning environments, regarding the potential of each environment to enable active learning, are presented to answer the first and second research questions. The findings presented in Chapter 5 relate to how the Vietnamese international students in this study became more engaged in active learning when studying in an ICT-enhanced blended learning environment in Australia, which focuses on answering the third research question.

3.8 Credibility and Trustworthiness of Research

The most common criticism of qualitative research is that it lacks scientific rigour. It is supposed that the qualitative studies often face issues of credibility or authenticity; credibility relies upon validity and reliability, and authenticity is determined by the trustworthiness of the study (Sumathipala, Siribaddana, & De Silva, 2003). The rigour issues often arise from the potential problems of qualitative research, such as participant and researcher biases and limitations in the generalizability of the study (Maxwell, 2005). Being aware of the potential problems which may have unexpected impacts on the quality of the current study, the researcher has applied different strategies in order to enhance the research's rigour.

In order to minimize the possible biases and strengthen the credibility of this study, the researcher has maintained scrupulous records of all the interviews and documented the

study processes in detail, so that the process can be verified or checked by other researchers (Harvey-Jordan & Long, 2001; Sumathipala, et al., 2003). To reduce respondent biases, the researcher has organised three different interviews over six months, and in the second and last interviews the participants were reminded again about their learning experiences in Vietnam when comparing and contrasting their learning experiences between the two environments. The researcher also detailed his cultural background and the educational experiences he shared with the participants. He acknowledged the potential risks which might arise due to the researcher's dual role as an observer and "insider", and detailed the necessary techniques he applied, such as keeping an open mind and a critical attitude during conversations with the participants, so as to reduce researcher biases (see section 3.7).

Triangulation was also used to reduce the biases and enhance the validity of this study. This technique is defined as "an approach to data collection in which evidence is deliberately sought from a wide range of different, independent sources and often by different means" (Mays & Pope, 1995, p. 110). The researcher applied this approach through collecting data from both interviews and related document reviews. The data was collected from participants who had different levels of study and who came from different areas in Vietnam. All the data collected from the different respondents was compared and cross-checked with the assistance of NVivo 10.

Member checking (Cohen, et al., 2011) was another technique applied to assist with the trustworthiness of the study. The researcher obtained the participants' consent about member checking before starting the interviews. This approach was deemed necessary for this study because the interviews were conducted in Vietnamese then transcribed and translated into English for analysis. The researcher therefore sent the transcripts and their English versions to the participants for comments and possible modifications to make sure the transcriptions accurately presented what they said (Stake, 2006) and the translation reflected precisely their meanings in the interviews. Furthermore, the researcher asked for English assistance from his native speaker friends and supervisors to double check complicated expressions in English to ensure the translation could make sense to readers.

Qualitative research tends “to generate large amounts of detailed information about a small number of settings” (Mays & Pope, 1995, p. 109). Therefore, the emphasis of qualitative research is not put on breadth and generalizability, but on depth and transferability. The findings of qualitative research are almost always contextually oriented. Therefore, describing the original context of the study adequately and precisely can develop transferability (Koch, 1994). To solve the issues of generalizability, or to enhance the transferability of the findings in this study, the researcher applied the technique known as “thick description”. The researcher has detailed the study context, such as the time and place of the study, cultural factors related to the research issues and the characteristics of the participants. The detailed descriptions can then enable readers or other researchers to make informed decisions about the possible transferability of the study results to their particular milieu (Bryman, 2012; McKee, 2004; Neuman, 2014).

3.9 Conclusion

This chapter has described the research design and research approaches adopted to facilitate the current study. After considering the research purpose and questions, Berry’s (2005) model of acculturation processes adapted by Chen (2010) was employed as an organising framework for exploring Vietnamese students’ cross-cultural learning experiences. Theories on active learning and constructivist approaches were used as an analytical framework. The study adopted an Interpretivist paradigm and applied a qualitative case study method as the research approach. The data collected was derived from semi-structured interviews of nine Vietnamese international students in the ICT enhanced blended learning environment at an Australian University, and also from reviews of their course documents. A detailed description of the participants, the role of the researcher and the ethical considerations has been discussed to specify the study context.

Thematic analysis was adopted for data analysis, in which the researcher combined inductive thematic analysis and theoretical thematic analysis. The data analysis process was assisted by NVivo 10 which was used for storing, organising and coding collected data from the study. A number of strategies were employed to enhance the rigour and trustworthiness of the research, such as scrupulous records of the study process, triangulation and thick description. The next chapter presents the research findings about the learning and teaching practices in both heritage and host cultures.

Chapter 4

Teaching and Learning Practices in Vietnamese and Australian Higher Education

4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents research findings in regard to the participants' perceptions of learning and teaching practices in the higher education sector in **Vietnam**¹ in comparison with those in the ICT-enhanced blended learning environment in **Australia**. The majority of the findings come from the analysis of two rounds of interviews with the nine participants [with a small number of excerpts from the third interview (Int.3)] and learning documents collected from the participants' courses. The first interview (Int.1) was about the participants' perceptions of the learning and teaching practices in the higher education sector in **Vietnam** covering the period of time from 2001 to 2010 as per the participants' profile. In the second interview (Int.2), the participants were asked about their perceptions of learning and teaching practice in the ICT-enhanced blended learning environment at an **Australian** University during their study in **Australia** which falls into the period from 2006 to 2012. The comparison of the two learning environments was made in relation to the opportunities for active engagement of the participants in learning which each environment has provided. Identified themes from the findings were grouped into four categories: knowledge content, learning environment, pedagogy and assessment. The discussion of each category is concluded with a summary of how the data relates to the first and second research questions.

4.2 Knowledge Content

¹ The words **Vietnam** and **Vietnamese** as well as **Australia** and **Australian** are bolded in the rest of this thesis for clarification purposes in the comparison between these two contexts.

This section focuses on the knowledge content that the participants experienced in **Vietnam** and **Australia** as represented in the learning resources and materials available to them (such as books, text books, lecture notes and other related learning resources). It describes the kinds and characteristics of those materials in relation to their applicability to real life situations and tasks at hand in the students' future professional activities.

4.2.1 Learning resources and materials

When discussing the variety of learning materials provided to students by their universities or lecturers in **Vietnam**, all the participants consistently reported that the main learning materials were derived from prescribed textbooks and lecture notes. For example, one of the participants stated:

...provided materials were mainly books issued by the Ministry of Education and Training for almost all subjects, internal course books edited according to the books of the Ministry and content of lectures. (Khanh, Int.1)

In Lan's words, at her **Vietnamese** University: "most of the lecturers didn't require students to read or find out more information from many different sources other than the course books and lecture notes" (Lan, Int.1). This response is characteristic of the majority of these participants (seven out of nine) and highlights both the limited number of learning resources that students were required to access and indicates how lecturers followed predetermined course books in their teaching practice. This theme will be further explored in the section on instructional sequences (4.4.2).

Only two participants mentioned supplemental materials such as additional books, mass media and websites. As one of the participants explained, "lecturers sometimes recommended some extra books to buy or to borrow from the library" (Truong, Int.1). In some specialized economics subjects that Tri studied in a **Vietnamese** University, such as International Payment, Delivery Transportation and Marketing 1, "the material was more copious, and students were asked to make use of information from newspapers, magazines or websites" (Tri, Int.1). However, all the participants agreed

that actual access to extra learning resources was quite limited, with some characteristic responses presented below:

The library of my University did not have enough materials for all subjects... and online materials were not easy to access. (Ha, Int.1)

The library.... where I studied was so limited, most of the books were old, and the University websites had very poor information...., most of the time we studied based on text books and lecture notes. (Huyen, Int.2)

The limited availability of resources was perceived by many participants (five out of nine) as an obstacle for students' learning of the subject content, which mainly came from course books and lecture notes. On the other hand, four of the participants considered the small number of learning resources as advantageous for students' learning. According to Toan, this limited amount of material meant that "students did not have to spend a lot of time searching for required information for a subject" (Toan, Int.2). A similar idea was expressed by Ha:

When I was in **Vietnam**, the sources of information and learning materials were limited. The main source of information was from text book and knowledge of the lecturers.... It was easy for us to know what to learn. We never had to worry about being misled in locating the core information for a subject. (Ha, Int.3)

While Lan and Huyen agreed with Toan and Ha that students could benefit from using limited resources (the ease of locating the core learning materials for a subject, saving time and providing a clear focus), they also perceived some disadvantages to this situation, particularly that students were not encouraged to think critically (Lan & Huyen, Int.3). For example, Lan said: "with the assigned learning materials which mainly came from a textbook, we didn't need to compare the knowledge with the one from another source or judge if it was right...we just accepted and remembered" (Lan, Int.3).

When asked what types of learning materials were available for students studying in the **Australian** University, all the participants agreed that they had a chance to access a

wide range of learning resources from the very beginning of the study. For example, Huyen described that before starting every subject, students were provided with “a variety of learning resources such as lecture notes and a list of books, journals and websites” (Huyen, Int.2). Moreover, the learning materials were available online for students to access, which was convenient and flexible as exemplified below:

The learning resources here are mainly provided online via e-learning and other websites of the University. Students can easily access and search the documents relating to subjects such as lecture notes, books, magazines, etc. The availability of these documents makes students’ learning easier and more flexible. (Phung, Int.2)

The participants all stated that they received subject outlines and lecture slides regularly delivered through e-learning sites. In the documents, students could see the list of primary learning resources like text books and journals and an additional list of recommended learning materials from various sources. The description provided by Ha was typical:

At the beginning of each semester, lecturers post learning materials in the E-learning site of the school. The documents include subject outlines and lecture slides that also contain many references and resources such as books, magazines and websites related to subjects. (Ha, Int.2)

The participants explained that when studying in **Australia** they could easily access various learning resources because they were supported by online access. “Each student is provided with a private account by the University... to access the University’s websites for searching learning materials in the E-learning system and library” (Thu, Int.3). Eight participants indicated an appreciation of the availability of a large amount of learning resources from the University. For example, Khanh described learning resources in **Australia** as being “very abundant” and commented that “the students are able to use different resources including the library itself or from electronic data of the University’s sites” (Khanh, Int.2). Toan indicated that the library had a “resource-sharing initiative” which helped students borrow selected books from many participating University libraries (Toan, Int.3). In addition, Ha and four others commented that in **Australia** students could “easily access open information resources”,

such as newspapers and websites related to the economy and politics, that they were restricted from accessing when studying in **Vietnam** (Ha, Tri and Lan, Int.2). Explaining further, Ha pointed out that in **Vietnam**, financial companies did not post much information about their annual financial activities on websites, so “we couldn’t tell how they were operating” (Ha, Int.2). In the same vein, Khanh explained, “some websites I could not access from **Vietnam** but here I can, simply like Facebook” (Khanh, Int.3).

A typical comment by the participants about the advantage of the **Australian** learning resources was that it brought students more opportunities to deeply understand the subject matter. Truong and Huyen expressed their satisfaction with the learning resources by commenting that they had never experienced such an enormous amount of learning material, which helped them understand learning issues in a detailed way (Truong and Huyen, Int.2). For Khanh, the variety of learning resources was really interesting as he commented:

You can see many different points of view talking about the same issues....in this book it was said this, in that book or journal it was said that....it gives you a clearer and more comprehensive view. (Khanh, Int.2)

Sharing a similar opinion, Toan added:

Many different learning resources require students to study harder and think more.... Students have to learn to understand the issues, not just to remember the learning content because there are too many things for them to remember. (Toan, Int.3)

While most of the participants perceived the rich and easily accessible learning resources in the **Australian** University as an advantage, three of them stated that this also had some drawbacks. For example, Ha explained that the large amount of learning materials could make students confused and sometimes worried about a lack of guidance in identifying the primary knowledge which they needed to acquire (Ha, Int.3). In addition, Tri and Khanh thought that the availability of numerous learning

materials could make students feel that they already had enough necessary materials, so they did not need to go to class or communicate more with their lectures and other students (Tri & Khanh, Int.3).

4.2.2 Practical relevance of the learning content

When participants discussed the real-world applicability of the learning content they encountered within the **Vietnamese** educational context, a diversity of opinions emerged. Two participants expressed positive ideas about the practical nature of the learning content provided in **Vietnam**. Specifically, Lan found that in her discipline, Accounting, the learning content was rather useful for her future work. It “was updated quite frequently, namely the lecturer notified students about changes to the accounting law subject” (Lan, Int.1). In her course, she also said that “there was the time for practice in workplaces, thereby, the knowledge in the University was quite close to the actual work” (Lan, Int.1). Similarly, Truong indicated that the learning content in his engineering field was quite practical. He explained:

Personally, I think the content was practical because it would be applied to real life situations and it did provide students with basic knowledge to deal with their future jobs. In my field, it seemed to me that every learning stage in the course was fairly practical. Because of the nature of engineering, during study process, the teachers had introduced very fundamental knowledge needed for a construction engineer to design and execute structures from the very simple to more complicated ones. (Truong, Int.1)

Whilst Lan and Truong were able to see that the learning content had practical application, this point of view was not common to most of the participants. Lan commented:

I often heard that the learning content provided in **Vietnamese** universities was divorced from reality, which made it difficult for the students to apply learnt knowledge into practice. (Lan, Int.1)

The above remark was consistent with the opinions of the majority of participants in this study. Seven of the participants explained that the content they were taught in the **Vietnamese** educational context was not applicable to real-life professional activities. They asserted that there was little relation between what they learnt in their universities and the complexities of real life contexts in their future profession. This was primarily due to the prescribed course text-books which were mainly out of date and provided generic information which did not include specific details or relate to local contexts. For example, Thu (Int.1) explained that text books issued by the MOET (Ministry of Education and Training) were prescribed for all universities nationwide, and therefore their content was quite general and lacked specific details relevant to particular regional contexts. In addition, information in the books was often old and not applicable:

I don't think the learning content was so practical because most of the content came from a course book which was not updated regularly For example, in the Transport Laws course, there were differences in the books' content compared with applicable laws in reality. (Tri, Int.1)

In some technical subjects, students had to use books released 20 years ago whereas the technical development had come a long way. Consequently, the books brought no benefit to the study. (Khanh, Int.1)

Khanh and Thu specifically talked about the domination of generic content over practical skills. Khanh elucidated: "We didn't see the value of the learning content because we do not know how to use it in daily life" (Khanh, Int.1). Sharing a similar opinion, Thu pointed out: "I had to study so many subjects but didn't get the necessary practical skills as the subject content was often out-dated" (Thu, Int.1).

The lack of relevance to real life situations within **Vietnam** appeared to have a strong impact on students' interest in their learning. For instance, Huyen described:

Some practical subjects required greater exposure to real situations such as going to a factory to observe production lines or teaching at schools, etc... This made me feel that the learning was meaningful and interesting. I loved studying

such subjects, so I often spent more time to read and learn, not like many other ones I just studied in order to pass. (Huyen, Int.1)

The above quote indicates that Huyen was not interested in learning subjects which did not have an obvious practical relevance. Similarly, six other participants shared their concern about this issue. For example, Ha commented that the lack of practical relevance of the subject content that she experienced in **Vietnam** was “one of the reasons making students become passive and not interested in digging deeply into knowledge of the subject”. She then explained that she did not try to learn, to understand or expand her knowledge because she did not think it was necessary to do that (Ha, Int.1). In addition, Khanh pointed out that:

I studied mainly because of duty. Many subjects, you know, especially the general ones, even now I still can't understand what I studied them for or how I can use the knowledge for my work. (Khanh, Int.1)

The real-world applicability of the learning content that students were provided in **Australia** was reported consistently by all the participants. They acknowledged that the learning content in the **Australian** University was more practical compared to that in **Vietnam**. Seven of the participants explained that the learning content had close relationship to contemporary professional practice. For example, Tri proved this point by comparing the learning content with that he had experienced in **Vietnam**.

One time, when I was learning an accounting subject, the lecturer provided each student with a workbook. The lecturer asked us to write our answers on that book and hand it over for marking. I asked why she didn't make copies or allow students to write answers on a paper and keep the original for students in the next courses. She said if it was retained for the next courses, students couldn't use it because its content would have been out-dated and not really applicable in a real life situation. However, this kind of workbook would be re-used for many years in **Vietnam**. (Tri, Int.2)

The above quote reveals that the content Tri learnt in **Australia** was not only updated frequently with new information, but also closely followed the current professional practice in the field. Studying in the medical area, Phung expressed her satisfaction

with the provided content:

I find the learning content in my study being closely relevant to the practice of the field because it often contains much new content which have just occurred in practice, such as the announcement of a certain new medicine to treat a disease or subject knowledge applied successfully, bringing many benefits to improving human health. The learning content will help students clearly see the value of the subject as well as the meaning of their own learning. (Phung, Int.2)

According to Thu, the practicality of the learning content was characteristic of financial subjects such as investment or financial analysis subjects (Thu, Int.2). She explained that the content in those subjects contained real situations which required students to find financial statements and actual data reports of current companies to analyze. Moreover, in a foreign currency trading subject that she studied, “students were not only taught words or numbers theoretically... but they had chances to practice on a virtual environment to be able to apply the subject knowledge” (Thu, Int.2). Similarly, Toan described his experiences of economics subjects’ content in comparison with its content in **Vietnam**.

Learning content in **Australia** is updated quite often; it is associated with events going on in daily life. For example, when studying economics subjects, students are required to find out the prominent economic problems at present, namely how the current economic crisis is taking place through many different mediums such as books and journals. However, in **Vietnam**, the learning content that I studied was mainly dependent on textbooks which were not updated frequently. (Toan, Int.2)

In the technical fields, such as engineering which Khanh studied, the learning content was not updated very often but it was linked to practical issues, which made a difference between the learning content that Khanh experienced when he was studying in **Vietnam** and **Australia**.

Theoretically, learning content in the engineering sector is not much different to that in **Vietnam**. Students were also required to study academic knowledge of the subjects, which was not updated very often. However, the difference is that students were often required to relate the learning content to problems. (Khanh, Int. 2)

Overall, the practicality of the learning content in **Australia** received positive comments from the majority of the participants. For example, Truong said that the learning content had “high practical value and is designed based on practical knowledge, requirements and requests from real life” (Truong, Int.2). Learning associated with relevant and realistic contexts helped “students see the meanings of subject content, so they can understand and remember easily” (Thu, Int.2). The learning content did “help students clearly see the value of the subject as well as the meaning of their own learning” (Phung Int.2). In addition, Truong also recognized that the learning content “made students feel more passionate and interested in learning” (Truong, Int.2). Tri shared the same opinion, however, he thought continuously updated content “could cause certain difficulties for students”. For example, students could not “stop learning and have to keep them up to date all the time”. It is also difficult for “students to look for help from friends who studied the course before because new things for them may be new for the friends too” (Tri, Int.2).

4.2.3 Summary

In summary, the knowledge content or learning materials that were provided to the participants while studying at **Vietnamese** universities was largely derived from text books or curriculum issued by the MOET for the use of all colleges or universities nationwide. This centralised distribution may have been the reason that students perceived that the content did not include a variety of perspectives. The participants in this study largely regarded the content as lacking real-world complexity and relevance to modern professional practices. Most of them indicated that the texts lacked a connection between theory and practice. Often, students were not expected to look for more information from additional resources and while this was identified by three out of the nine participants as assisting in the location of core knowledge for a subject, this practice did not always encourage students to pursue additional information or engage their critical thinking skills. In contrast, within the **Australian** learning environment, the participants described how various types of learning resources were provided and how they were generally required to access different types of sources. Such additional demands were not always regarded in the positive sense of supporting students’

engagement in learning, because to some extent this diversity of learning material was found as challenging for students to locate the core knowledge they needed to follow. The diversity of the sources of study made available to the students in **Australia**, as commented upon by some of the participants, could sometimes make the students feel that they had enough information and did not need to go to the class. However, the majority of the participants recognised that this approach enabled them to see the subject matter from a range of perspectives, as they were required to compare, contrast and judge what they had learnt.

4.3 Learning Environment

This section concerns two main points that emerged from the data, namely classroom arrangement and learning tools. Specifically, it presents the data related to the classroom's physical environment that the participants experienced, and the Information Communication Technology (ICT) tools that were available for students to take advantage of while they were studying in **Vietnamese** universities, in comparison with those they encountered in their **Australian** University.

4.3.1 Classroom arrangement

This section outlines how the participants described their **Vietnamese** and **Australian** classrooms and the way they were arranged to support students' learning. It presents the descriptions of typical classrooms in which students studied, how such kinds of classrooms were physically organised with regard to designs and equipment like desks, chairs and boards, and how this arrangement related to teaching and learning.

The **Vietnamese** classrooms experienced by all of the participants were lecture halls and "traditional" classrooms. The term "traditional" refers to those classrooms that accommodate about 50-150 students, with rows of desks in a fixed line and with the teacher sitting at the front on a platform 30-40 cm higher than the class floor. Such

classrooms were also quite difficult to physically reorganise because of heavy and closely positioned furniture. Only one participant who graduated relatively recently (in 2010) pointed out that “there were a few fast-track or modern classrooms” in his University where “tables and chairs were arranged in a U shape and lecturer’s position was in the centre with a small number of students” (Tri, Int.1). Although the participants mentioned the existence of different classroom types, all of them reported that most of the time they studied in classrooms which were physically arranged in this traditional way. Typical descriptions are presented below:

Most of the time students studied in classrooms arranged in a traditional way like those in high schools, namely the desks and chairs were arranged in rows. (Lan, Int.1)

Each class contained about 50 students, with lecturers’ desk placed in front of students’ tables and on a platform 30-40 cm higher than the class floor... the tables and chairs were very heavy, arranged next to one another and difficult to move. (Khanh, Int.1)

Classrooms were often large ones for about 150 students. Tables and chairs were arranged like in high schools, lecturers often presented without microphones so it was difficult to hear; especially for students sitting at the back of class.... I studied some subjects in a small classroom for about 50 students but the arrangement was also similar to other large classrooms. (Thu, Int.1)

Seven of the participants agreed that this traditional classroom arrangement was consistent with a particular style of students’ learning. For instance, Khanh indicated that the arrangements supported a hierarchical relationship between lecturers and students, and provided little possibility for students’ interactions with their lecturers:

When looking at that lay-out, we can see students on one side and lecturers on the other side, which reveals a clear separation. Besides, the position of the lecturers is significantly higher than students, making us feel that lecturers are placed higher than students. That arrangement creates obstacles for the interactions between teachers and students. (Khanh, Int.1)

As commented by Tri, this classroom arrangement emphasised distance between lecturers and students. It reinforced the students’ feeling that there was a lack of

attention paid by lecturers to students, especially those who sat at the back of the class. Consequently, “students were easily distracted and did not pay much attention to the lectures” (Tri, Int.1). In addition, the students who studied in such large classes with a traditional high school classroom setup recognized the limited opportunity for interactive learning activities (Ha, Thu, Lan & Truong, Int. 1). Characteristic comments are presented below:

The arrangement hindered students’ view of other students. It also made sharing and exchanging among students in class pretty difficult. (Ha, Int.1)

In my opinion, the arrangement of a traditional classroom does not provide multi-dimensional interaction in learning activities. (Thu, Int.1)

All of the participants felt the way that the regular classrooms were arranged reinforced the teaching style of “one-way information transmission from lecturers to students” (Khanh & Phung, Int.1). While it helped lecturers “provide knowledge to a number of students at the same time” (Huyen, Int.1), such an arrangement made it hard for lecturers to observe the whole class or to organise group learning activities to encourage students’ involvement in study by exchanging their views (Lan & Truong, Int. 1).

The **Australian** University learning environment used lecture halls and tutorial classrooms. The arrangement of the lecture halls was described as similar to those in **Vietnam**. The variation of classroom arrangement that the participants all acknowledged belonged to tutorial classrooms which they attended after lectures. This type of classroom was different to the rooms they regularly attended in **Vietnam** where there were no tutorial classrooms; students either studied in lecture halls or regular classrooms. The tutorial classrooms were regarded as not being as crowded as the rooms in **Vietnam**. These classrooms were usually organised for about 10-20 students (Thu & Truong, Int.2). The tables and chairs were also different. All the classrooms were equipped with portable chairs and tables (Toan & Ha, Int.2).

All the participants agreed that the tutorial classroom arrangement was convenient for study. This was because the portable chairs and tables could be “arranged flexibly

depending on different learning activities to make students feel comfortable with their study” (Thu, Int.2). Normally, the chairs and tables were arranged in a “U shape”. For example, Ha (Int. 2) said in these classes, “students sit in U form, and tutors stand in the middle to organize and encourage students to participate in learning activities”.

This kind of arrangement was believed to bring a number of advantages to students’ learning. For example, Tri commented that in the U-shaped class, the lecturer’s table was located in the middle, so “the distance among students to the lecturer was similar and quite close....students did not feel hidden in the class” (Tri, Int.2). The arrangement, therefore, “could help students easily observe the lecturer’s and other students’ activities” (Toan, Int.2). It also “helped students understand the learning content and exchange ideas with the lecturer and other students” (Thu, Int.2).

The classroom arrangement and the small number of students in the class were seen by the participants as advantageous for lecturers in organising learning activities and managing their students. For example, it was observed that the class environment could easily be adapted so that lecturers could organise different learning activities to attract students in exchanging and sharing experiences (Khanh, Lan, Phung & Toan, Int.2). In this class, lecturers could also observe students’ activities and control them better than in a large class with chairs and tables arranged in rows as in **Vietnam** (Toan & Tri, Int.2).

4.3.2 Availability and the use of ICT

When discussing the ICT tools that were available in **Vietnamese** universities to support students’ learning, the participants all mentioned that during the time they studied, there were some ICT tools provided to support their study. For example, Ha, who graduated from a **Vietnamese** University in 2008 explained:

At that time we were taught how to use computers and the internet, and in some “high technology” rooms, there were computers and internet access, but we

could only attend when we learnt and practiced computer skills or had a “special” lesson. Most of the classes or lecture halls in my University were not equipped with technology like the internet or a sound system, so we were restricted in how we approached information. (Ha, Int.1)

According to all the participants, the lack of ICT application when they were studying in **Vietnam** was the main reason that students did not have many chances to access this for their study. Additionally, six participants explained that using ICT in learning was not necessary because it was not required by lecturers as explained by Lan “... lecturers did not require us to search more information from the internet or websites.... so I hardly used technology in the learning process” (Lan, Int.1). Similarly, Tri described “I didn’t apply much ICT to my learning because I thought it was not very necessary; students could have high scores without using ICT” (Tri, Int.1).

Another reason given for not using ICT was the lack of knowledge about ICT and how to apply it to support study. For example, Ha (Int.1) said when she was studying an English literature course in 2008, students in her class were “lucky to be supported by the British Council to grant internet-accessible cards”, but they “did not take much advantage due to not knowing how to use the internet to search for information”. Hence, even though there was some internet access, students still faced difficulty in using this technology.

Overall these participants did not have many opportunities to use ICT in **Vietnamese** universities to support their study for a variety of reasons. The learning environments that these participants encountered were not sufficiently equipped with technology tools; the students did not have the necessary knowledge for using them, and the use of ICT was not encouraged by lecturers.

In contrast, all the participants experienced the application of technology tools to support students’ learning whilst in **Australia**. The integration of ICT in education to assist students’ learning was applied in different forms. All the classes that the participants studied were fully equipped with the necessary technical tools. For

example, Tri and Truong described that all the rooms had built-in technical equipment such as projectors, mica whiteboards and internet access (Tri & Truong, Int.2). Students were provided with different online services such as online learning material delivery, as mentioned above, and online communication.

All students had their own [email] accounts and could log in to online services of the University to find and receive information from the University. Specifically, they could use the accounts to access e-learning sites where they could receive necessary information ...for their subjects. E-learning was also featured with an SMS service in case urgent communication was needed. Forum on e-learning sites was also an effective means of communication. In addition, students were also provided with email accounts of the University to contact and communicate with lecturers and other students. (Ha, Int.3)

Besides the use of ICT tools for information delivery and communication, six participants also shared their experiences about the tools used in the course evaluation and assessment. For example, in many subjects that Phung studied, “students were requested to do exercises and tests through the E-learning site” (Phung, Int.3).

The integration of ICT in education in **Australia**, as described by the participants, resulted in the increasing use of the learning tools amongst students. All the participants commented that using ICT in learning in **Australia** was considered a compulsory requirement for every student because “all learning activities are related to the use of technology” (Khanh, Int.2). For instance, Lan explained:

Here [in **Australia**], the application of information technology in the learning process is compulsory for every student, because all subjects require them to seek related learning sources from the internet or e-learning sites, such as subject outlines and lecture notes provided through the e-learning system. Doing exercises or assignments also requires students to search for online documents and make an online submission. (Lan, Int.2)

Similarly, Tri (Int.2) noted all students studying in **Australia** had to apply ICT because most issues related to subjects were presented online. When doing group exercises, he added, students often had to exchange and discuss through emails and/or forums because sometimes “they didn’t have conditions to meet their classmates and lecturers

directly”. Students often applied ICT to search documents from different sources and websites for the purpose of learning and they also had to use information technology to present subject content in class (Tri, Int.2). Further, most of the participants agreed that they were interested in the use of technology because it was convenient and time saving. For example, Phung explained: “in the class presentations, technology could help students design posters, illustrations and they could present them on PowerPoint more easily compared to that of manual methods” (Phung, Int.2). Students could also access learning documents from different places and at different times at their convenience, hence “it helped students keep pace with the learning progress even... when they could not go to class due to sickness or a certain reason” (Ha, Int.3).

4.3.3 Summary

The findings regarding classroom arrangement demonstrated that **Vietnamese** classrooms were largely arranged in a **Vietnamese** “traditional” way. The classrooms often accommodated about 50-60 students, with rows of desks in a fixed line and with the lecturer sitting at the front on a platform higher than the class floor. This type of classroom arrangement was regarded by the participants as suitable for a one-way information transmission from lecturers to students. This classroom arrangement also helped the lecturer provide knowledge to a large number of students at the same time, but it was believed by participants to create a distance between lecturers and students. It was agreed that there were ICT tools available to support students’ learning in **Vietnam** during the time they studied. However, the availability and the use of ICT tools were limited because not many classrooms were equipped with ICT infrastructure and/or students were not always required to use such tools. Nevertheless, it should be recognised that these students had studied in **Vietnam** from 2001 to 2010, and this situation may have changed since then.

In the **Australian** learning environment, the participants indicated that there were often more opportunities to participate in learning activities due to their exposure to small classrooms often equipped with movable chairs, desks and technical tools such as

projectors and computers. Some of the participants also found that studying in these small classrooms gave them a sense of proximity to lecturers and other students. In the small classrooms, various learning activities were also thought by the majority as being organised easily to engage students in learning activities such as group work and discussions.

4.4 Pedagogy

This section includes methods and teaching practices that the participants encountered in **Vietnam** and **Australia**. The themes presented in this section are as follows:

- The role of lecturers and their relationships with students
- Instructional sequences
- Delivery styles
- The integration of ICT in teaching

Detailed descriptions of the participants' perspectives in relation to each of these provide insights into how the teaching is perceived in both **Vietnamese** and **Australian** University environments. The perceived impact of the lecturers' pedagogical approaches on the students' learning is also discussed.

4.4.1 The role of lecturers and their relationships with students

When describing the role of **Vietnamese** lecturers in contributing to students' knowledge and achievement, there was an agreement that the lectures were extremely important for their study. However, the reasons why lecturers held such an important role were perceived differently amongst the participants. Two participants commented that the important role of lecturers resulted from the values of **Vietnamese** traditional culture rather than from the lecturers' own capability. For example, Huyen explained

“in **Vietnam**, lecturers are more respected because of the traditional concept” (Huyen, Int.1). This idea of the “traditional concept” is explained in more detail by Khanh:

The traditional culture placed lecturers in the highest position, so right from their early age students had to respect their teachers and got used to absolute obedience in front of them. We showed our respects to lecturers even sometimes.... we didn't really admire them. (Khanh, Int.1)

Lecturers' knowledge was mentioned by the participants as a main factor contributing to the important role of lecturers in students' learning. Three participants mentioned that their lecturers were very knowledgeable about the subject matter, which made students feel confident about the information provided by the lecturers. “I thought many **Vietnamese** lecturers of mine were quite knowledgeable...they knew everything... and I felt secure to follow them” (Huyen, Int.3). However, regardless of the lecturer's expertise, the students often had to rely on the lecturer as the only source of information and guidance available for them in their learning. For example, Phung explained that the lecturers “were the main and even sometimes, the only knowledge source; without them, students could not know what to do and what to study” (Phung, Int.1). The lack of learning resources required students to rely more on lecturers' knowledge and consider their lecturers as “the only source of information” for the subject content (Ha, Int.1).

Students had to rely on their lecturers because they felt that “they could not direct their learning activities without the lecturers' instructions” (Toan, Int.1). A similar comment was made by Tri who stated “without lecturers, students would be confused and wouldn't know what to do or would lack motivation to fulfil their tasks” (Tri, Int.1).

The lecturer's role was perceived as being vital in relation to assessment. For example, Thu indicated that students had to attend almost all the lectures otherwise “the students would face difficulty in taking exams” (Thu, Int.1). This was because lecturers often provided certain learning content for reviews and exams during the lecture (Thu, Int.1).

According to the participants, the view of the lecturer as a highly important figure in the **Vietnamese** University context impacted the relationship between lecturers and students. For example, Tri explained how in **Vietnam** studying was mainly face-to-face, so students had more opportunities to meet their lecturers, however “there was a significant gap that made students hesitate when they had to meet or express their personal needs to the lecturers” (Tri, Int.1). This relationship created a distance between lecturers and their students which seemed to prevent interaction between the students and the lecturers, as explained by Phung, “detering the students to communicate or discuss with their lecturers” (Phung, Int.1). Lan and Khanh also agreed with that point:

A distance between the students and lecturers was quite significant, so it was difficult for students to meet their lecturers or exchange ideas with them about their learning. (Lan, Int.2)

Normally, we just asked our classmates. Some students asked their lecturers at the break time or outside the class. Some others didn’t dare to meet or ask their lecturers; sometimes they even avoided meeting their lecturers outside the classroom. (Khanh, Int.1)

The students’ view of the **Vietnamese** lecturer as a highly important figure in their learning was associated, by some participants, with a dependant relationship between students and their lecturers. It was allied to the lack of guidance from the lecturers to support self-directed learning skills among their students as compared to the **Australian** lecturers.

The role of **Australian** lecturers was also believed to be to provide important contributions to students’ knowledge and achievement. However, it was described very differently to the role of the **Vietnamese** lecturers. In **Australia**, it was explained that students no longer had to rely heavily on their lecturers, as they used to do in **Vietnam**. Six participants said that they were oriented from the beginning by being given the necessary information about subjects such as guidelines for study and learning materials, so they were able to take more control of their study. For example, Toan commented:

Students here no longer depend on lecturers like that in **Vietnam** where students frequently had to go to class. If not, they didn't know what they should study and how they could study. Here, students are oriented from the beginning through documents provided by lecturers such as subject outlines, references and materials. (Toan, Int.2)

Subject outlines (see Appendix 5, for an example) provided students with information about the subject including a subject description, student learning outcomes and graduate qualities. This, according to Tri and Phung, gave them a clear pathway as to what they were supposed to learn, what targets they were expected to achieve and how they should study to meet the graduate qualities (Tri & Phung, Int.2). Moreover, a large amount of learning resources was also suggested in the subject outline including readings, references and materials. Thus, the lecturers in **Australia** were no longer the sole learning resource for the students. This is evident in the words of Toan:

Lecturers in **Australia** are considered as an information source among many other information resources that students can access and use, so they no longer hold the unique position as often seen in **Vietnam**. (Toan, Int.2)

In addition, Lan explained that with technological support, students could easily access various learning resources and do self-study based on the clear guidance provided. So, "students' learning results were not influenced as much by a lecturer as seen in **Vietnam**" (Lan, Int.1). She later added that within **Australia** "students played a decisive role in their learning activities and outcomes" (Lan Int.2). However, this did not mean that the role of the **Australian** lecturers was not important for students' achievements, or that the students could be successful without their lecturers' support. The following quotation provides evidence for this:

Due to the popular application of information and communication technology, students no longer solely depend on lecturers for knowledge. Specifically, students can access E-learning to download guidelines and learning materials for self-study. However, lecturers' roles are also important [in **Australia**], because students cannot solve every problem by themselves. (Truong Int.2)

Five participants commented that the role of lecturers in **Australia** was not as a "guru" who knew everything and imparted "transcendental knowledge" to students. Rather, the

lecturers acted as a facilitator who guided and supported students' learning. For example, Thu observed: "The lecturers aren't the ones who know all or act as the ones who know everything in front of students. Instead, they often admit their limited knowledge, give suggestions and encourage students to study by themselves" (Thu, Int.1). Similarly, Khanh said the main task of lecturers was to orient and stimulate the students' learning activities. They were no longer knowledge providers or the one who told students what to do (Khanh, Int.2). More details of this role will be presented in the section on delivery styles (4.4.3).

The difference between the perceived importance of a lecturers' role in the two countries was associated with the differences in the nature of the relationship between lecturers and students. When reflecting on their experiences of studying in **Australia**, the participants explained that they felt much more comfortable contacting their lecturers due to the "close" and "friendly" relationships they had with those lecturers. Whereas in **Vietnam** there was an over dependence on the lecturer, as Lan explained:

In **Vietnam**, students must mainly depend on lecturers in terms of learning and learning results, which made the distance between the students and lecturers quite large, so it was difficult or uncomfortable for students to meet or exchange with their lecturers about learning issues. Lecturers here are closer and friendlier; hence students could easily contact or interact with them. (Lan, Int.2)

The friendly relationship with **Australian** lecturers made all the participants feel closer and more comfortable to express their concerns while studying with them. "Students can feel free to ask or even question their lecturers anytime during the lecture", said Tri (Int.2). Moreover, "the lecturers' knowledge is open to negotiation", which encouraged students to engage in learning activities (Huyen, Int.3). The friendly relationship and the lecturers' attitude to knowledge, however, made four of the participants feel it was not easy to trust or rely on the lecturers' knowledge. For example, Ha said that in **Vietnam** lecturers mostly made sure what they were saying was right and students could follow without any worry, while **Australian** lecturers just presented their opinions as one of various ideas on a topic, so students had to judge whether they could follow the information or not (Ha, Int.2).

4.4.2 Instructional sequences

This theme emerged as the participants explained how **Vietnamese** lecturers' instructional approaches were influenced by compulsory course books (see 4.2.1). The responses from all the participants revealed that lecturers in **Vietnam** often followed instructional sequences predetermined by a course book or curriculum prescribed by the MOET. For instance, Toan (Int.1) explained that "the teaching content was also specified by that book in term of content, time and assessment".

Complying with an assigned textbook or curriculum in **Vietnamese** universities was recognised by the participants as a compulsory government requirement for all lecturers. However, not all the lecturers continuously complied with this requirement. Six of the participants explained how younger or more flexible lecturers did not seem to follow all the predetermined teaching content from the course books. Some of the lecturers, especially those who had studied overseas, really wanted to make some changes to meet students' needs, but overall they still had to comply with the Ministry's requirements and follow the predetermined instructional sequences. Khanh talked about some lecturers who "wanted to refine the curriculum to adjust to their and students' needs but they seemed to have no chance to do so" as "their teaching was imposed by the curriculum" (Khanh, Int.1). He further commented that even if "some young lecturers... didn't follow the curriculum they still had to note in the class' teaching schedule record book that they did" (Khanh, Int.1).

According to Khanh, not following the text was "not a bad thing to do; in fact, it was a good adjustment and we liked such lecturers" (Khanh, Int.1). Nevertheless, there were few lecturers doing that because all the participants agreed that most of their lecturers closely followed the subjects' textbooks. The participants' responses revealed that the requirements to comply with the textbooks, along with lecturers' personal preferred teaching style, were the two main factors that motivated lecturers to strictly follow the textbooks. Tri offered the following explanation:

...the lecturers, who wanted to follow the text books, did so because they wanted to be secure... They got used to curriculum which had been taught for years. The same lectures often taught the same content in different classes to save time... They didn't want to explore new things. (Tri, Int.1)

There were significant differences when comparing instructional sequences that the participants experienced in **Vietnam** and **Australia**. The instructional sequences in **Vietnam**, as presented above, were formally structured or predetermined by a course book prescribed by the MOET, while those in **Australia** were described as “less predetermined and less formally structured” (Tri, Int.2). These instructional sequences can be seen in Appendix 6; the lecture program in **Australia** did not follow a certain textbook chapter by chapter and was not limited to the textbook's content. Instead, it was organised based on various topics related to the subject, and the content could come from many different resources such as a textbook, books or journals. Therefore, the content was believed to be flexible, and could be built upon by the lecturer and was open to negotiation, as described by Toan:

Unlike teaching in **Vietnam** where the lecturers often stuck quite closely to a textbook's content, the teaching content here is more flexible; it could be compiled by the lecturers and more open, so students could also build up the content by adding more readings for a topic. (Toan, Int.2)

Similarly, Khanh commented that the teaching content was adjustable and lecturers should be the content builders, because they could modify the content flexibly in accordance with instructional practice. This means the lecturers could control the teaching content to be able to support students' learning or meet students' needs, which made Khanh perceive this differently from the lecturing he used to experience in **Vietnam**.

Here [in **Australia**], the lecturers should be the teaching content builders because they are able to modify or reorganise it. For example, my lecturers could jump from this part to another part when requested by students, or they could spend much more time on the topics that students felt were difficult and needed more explanations....Sometimes, students raised an issue related to the subject but not in the teaching content. The lecturers also spent time listening to and discussing with them. This was different to **Vietnamese** lecturers who

seemed to focus on the teaching schedule rather than students' needs. (Khanh, Int.2)

Khanh's opinion was supported by five other participants who all agreed that the teaching content in **Australia** was flexible and open, and lecturers could focus more on students' needs, and thus students felt more interested in learning. However, some others like Huyen commented that though the teaching content could bring certain benefits for students, she felt:

It was not very well structured, it could be changed easily making students confused with locating what the important point was, and students sometimes weren't prepared for the background knowledge step by step to catch up with the issue, so it was.... hard for them. (Huyen, Int.2)

She then compared this situation with her learning experiences in **Vietnam**: She stated that **Vietnamese** lecturers often followed the teaching content which was well organised and structured systematically; "normally, it was organised step by step to provide students with knowledge from the easy to the difficult" (Huyen, Int.2). In addition, she added, students were also expected to focus on the content only, so they were not distracted by other information (Huyen, Int.2). Truong and Ha added that because of the structure, **Vietnamese** students could develop very strong background knowledge (Truong & Ha, Int.2).

4.4.3 Delivery styles

This theme refers to how the students' learning was facilitated by lecturers, or the ways that lecturers helped their students to acquire knowledge. Alongside the predetermined instructional sequences, a favoured style of teaching in **Vietnam**, that all participants mentioned, was a lecturer-centred teaching approach where one-way communication of knowledge transmission was mostly employed. Eight of the participants agreed that their lecturers placed much emphasis on knowledge transmission or knowledge reproduction. They tried to present predetermined knowledge from a course book to students for note taking and recitation. They did not pay much attention to students'

needs or the practical value of knowledge. For example, Lan and Huyen provided this explanation:

In my opinion, the lecturer-centred teaching method is the method used primarily by the lecturers to provide the knowledge for students. It is based on one-dimensional communication from a lecturer to students. Lecturers regularly gave lectures and then read or wrote learning content on the blackboard for the students to listen and write down. (Lan, Int.1)

Vietnamese lecturers were somehow rigid. They did not have necessary changes in teaching techniques and teaching content. They did not update new knowledge or try to make the lectures more informative. They often kept lesson plans prepared in the early years and used these repeatedly ... lecturers often gave similar lectures to different kinds of students. (Huyen, Int.1)

The one-way knowledge transmission style of teaching, as commented upon by four participants, seemed to be most popular in the general subjects which were compulsory for all students. In these subjects, lecturers normally just presented knowledge to students who had to note down the provided information to cope with assessments. For example, Toan indicated that “the lecturers mainly gave lectures for general subjects that every student had to study, and they often dictated for the students to take notes to prepare for mid-term and end-term tests” (Toan, Int.1).

This type of predetermined knowledge benefited some students because “it could systematically provide fundamental knowledge, help students build up a very firm theoretical basis, and be suitable to the learning styles of some students” (Truong, Int.1). However, seven participants showed their dissatisfaction with this teaching style. For example, Phung said that she was not satisfied with the reality of teaching in **Vietnam**. In particular, she suggested that lecturers should not just focus on “transferring knowledge to students”. They should “pay more attention to students’ desires or create necessary conditions for students to motivate their ability and activeness in study” (Phung, Int.1). That is because “in reality”, she explained “the lecturers just cared about their presentations and paid very little attention to students’ understanding and interests” (Phung, Int.1).

Some participants were satisfied with such teaching practice because they felt the study was easy to cope with and not stressful.

At that time, I felt satisfied because it was easy, I didn't have to think too much or spend much time on learning ... I just needed to learn by heart and express all what I had learned when required. (Thu, Int.1)

...students didn't need to do much research or have creative thinking. They only needed to learn by heart and follow what their lecturers taught. (Phung, Int.3)

...following lecturers' instructions or knowledge seemed to be compulsory, so even lazy students were forced to come to class, and as a result they could learn something. (Lan, Int.3)

While talking about the benefits of "the easy" style of learning at the time of the study, the participants recognised its limitations after they graduated. For example, Thu described:

....after I had finished my study I realised that such a studying method didn't support my knowledge because it was too easy to forget and it really wasted my time... (Thu, Int.1)

The lecturers' expectations in relation to their students' behaviours in classes also revealed a preference for knowledge reproduction. All participants agreed that most of their lecturers expected students to be quiet in class, to be obedient and conform to what they were taught. The lecturers did not encourage students to enlarge and develop their knowledge in order to deeply understand what they had learnt. Therefore, students sometimes just followed their lecturers' instructions and tried to remember what they were provided without understanding the meaning of the knowledge. For example, Thu explained:

Lecturers often expected students to listen and take notes carefully. They didn't desire students' contribution to lectures. Students often depended on the lecturers' reproduction of knowledge. Sometimes, students didn't understand

what they were studying for, but they had to obey instructions of lecturers to be able to cope with the study. (Thu, Int.1)

There were a small number of **Vietnamese** lecturers who required students to actively engage in learning activities. According to Huyen, “some lecturers who taught specialized subjects often required more; they presented less content and often designed questions for students. But such lecturers were just a minority” (Huyen, Int.1). Tri also had similar experience in some of his courses, but he thought some lecturers did not really appreciate students’ feedback:

...although some lecturers said they welcomed students’ own opinions about learning issues during the lecture, students could be marked down or criticized if their ideas or opinions were in conflict with lecturer’s knowledge or different from the curriculum. (Tri, Int.1)

Tri’s view was consistent with that of five other participants. For example, Phung commented that “students were not welcomed or did not feel secure to participate or engage in learning activities; especially they did not dare to challenge lectures’ knowledge” (Phung, Int.2). Thus, students learning activities were “to listen to lectures and rely on lecture notes and course books”.... few activities were available in class because “group work or discussion was not organised or required by the lecturers” (Truong, Int.1). None of the participants described any extra learning activities such as forums or consultations organised to support students’ learning during the study time, therefore “students did not really have a chance to express their opinions about the learning content” (Truong, Int.1).

The delivery styles or the teaching approaches that **Australian** lecturers used to help students acquire knowledge were described by the participants as quite different. Three participants thought the difference in teaching styles resulted from their lecturers’ cultural background. They all believed that lecturers who came from Western countries seemed to have flexible teaching styles. The lecturers did not rely much on teaching content; instead they paid more attention to their students. Whereas, the participants perceived that the lecturers having an Asian background focused more on transmitting

knowledge to students. This approach was supposed not to encourage students' engagement in learning. Lan exemplified the styles by her description of the lecturers' teaching approaches:

The teaching approaches in **Australia** are quite diverse. Regularly, the lecturers from Western countries like Britain, America, **Australia**, etc have a quite flexible teaching style. In the process of teaching, they are so independent of the teaching content; they pay more attention to students' needs. Meanwhile, lecturers from Asian countries like India, Philippines, China, etc. rely on the teaching content and communication of knowledge. They often prefer writing on the board and lecturing. I had two Chinese lecturers and a Philippine one who usually presented the provided teaching content, making students feel pretty depressed because students had the content in advance. (Lan, Int.2)

According to Toan and Truong, **Australian** lecturers generally did not focus as much on the transmission of knowledge as **Vietnamese** lecturers but rather on explaining, raising issues and requesting students to build up their knowledge by themselves (Toan & Truong, Int.2). "Lecturers' designs and requirements for a subject always expect students to research and find out their own answers. The answers will not be readily available as it is in **Vietnam**" (Truong, Int.2). Similarly, Huyen commented that building background knowledge was mainly considered as being the students' job rather than the lecturer's, in contrast to the Vietnamese system:

Yes, here [in **Australia**] they also provide both background and advanced knowledge in each subject. But I've got a feeling that they require students to have background knowledge by themselves most of the time, and they focus on assisting students with the ways to acquire the knowledge and to use it, while in **Vietnam** the lecturers spent more time on providing us with background knowledge. (Huyen, Int.2)

In explaining this strength of **Australian** lecturers in helping students to build up their own knowledge and apply this knowledge in practice, Truong stated that most of the lecturers were researchers. They often spent considerable time doing research, so they were experienced in acquiring new knowledge (Truong, Int.2). In Tri's experiences, **Australian** lecturers also had practical experience, so when teaching they could easily relate the content to practice (Tri, Int.2). However, as Khanh commented, lecturers in **Australia** seemed not to be trained about pedagogy professionally. "They are mostly

researchers, so the ways they communicate as well as express knowledge and viewpoints, are limited compared with **Vietnamese** ones” (Khanh, Int.2). This might be because the majority of **Vietnamese** lecturers have been trained as teachers.

Generally, all the participants agreed that most of the teaching styles of their lecturers in **Australia** were student-oriented. That is, the lecturers cared about students’ needs and concerns rather than just following their prepared subject content.

It can be said that lecturers here [in **Australia**] are complying with a teaching method in which students are the center of the lecture. During the teaching process, in addition to the compliance with subject outlines and lecture notes, lecturers always encourage students to give their responses and lecturers will give timely adjustment in accordance with students’ needs and capabilities. (Truong, Int.2)

In accordance with the opinion that lecturers cared more about students’ need and concerns, Tri thought the quality of student learning was important in the **Australian** context. Therefore, students’ concerns or responses were taken into account. Lecturers not only paid attention to what they intended or planned to teach but also to their students’ demands and feelings:

Lecturers pay more attention to the learners and teaching quality here [in **Australia**]. Suppose that there is a case when a student suddenly stands up and says: “I feel tired and I need a recess”. In **Vietnam**, that student will be regarded as a lazy and badly-behaved student, distracting the lecture schedule and other students, and he or she will be questioned like: “why can’t you keep studying when the others can?” or “you do not seem to respect me, my lecture?”.... This story will be normal here because the lecturers would think that it’s an inevitable, personal demand, or useful feedback from students which may help them to adjust their teaching for more effectiveness, such as the reasons causing tiredness. If the reason comes from that individual, lecturers may let her/him relax. If it is because of the content or teaching methods, lecturers may stop the lecture or call for more opinions, etc. (Tri, Int.1)

The welcome attitude of **Australian** lecturers to students’ feedback and opinions was appreciated by all the participants because it could make students feel closer to their lecturers and more confident in learning. For example, Thu commented that most of the **Australian** lecturers did not regard themselves as experts. “They are experienced

researchers and they thought that it's normal if they can't answer student's questions or they don't know about that matter" (Thu, Int.1). This attitude, she further added, could help students improve their self-confidence in interacting with their lecturers, in researching and creating learning activities (Thu, Int.1). The following quote from Tri clearly demonstrates the lecturers' attitude.

Here, lecturers are open so students can express their opinions at any time and lecturers are willing to answer all relevant questions. They always respect personal thinking of each student. If lecturers don't know about a new issue, they will admit that they don't know and are willing to accept new and good opinions from students. (Tri, Int.2)

For Khanh, this type of openness suggested that students were free to express their ideas or challenge their lecturers' views even during lectures. He admitted that this type of behaviour would not be tolerated in **Vietnam** (Khanh, Int.2). In addition, lecturers often organized discussions and group work to encourage students to participate in learning activities and share opinions (Toan, Tri & Ha, Int.2). Therefore, the teaching and learning processes, as commented by Khanh, were similar to the knowledge exchange process because students could learn from each other and lecturers also learnt from their students. This was not just a one-way process of teaching and learning, which made "students feel more interested in learning and researching, because they understand the true value of research and creative thinking through their contributions to learning processes" (Khanh, Int.2).

4.4.4 The integration of ICT in teaching

Section 4.3.2 provided a description of availability of ICT tools and how students used these tools to support their study. This section focuses on the ways that lecturers integrate ICT into their teaching.

When discussing how **Vietnamese** lecturers applied ICT in their teaching, all participants agreed that in their experience lecturers did not use much technology in

teaching. There were only some lecturers who used projectors or PowerPoint for their lectures. For example, Ha, who studied in **Vietnam** in 2008, remembered “at that time, few lecturers used projectors, PowerPoint in class presentation” (Ha, Int.1). In addition, Huyen said “lecturers mainly used chalk and blackboard to assist their teaching” during her time at University in 2006 (Huyen, Int.1).

Several reasons were identified to account for the limited number of lecturers using technology. For example, Truong recalled when he was studying in **Vietnam**, “the use of technology in teaching was not compulsory”, so lecturers did not have to use it (Int.1). Besides, the lack of availability of equipment caused difficulty for lecturers to integrate technology into their teaching. According to Toan, if a lecturer wanted to use a projector he or she “had to book in advance...we had only some rooms equipped with projectors and projection screens and no Wi-Fi internet available” (Toan, Int.1).

Therefore, the experiences of these participants indicated that very few **Vietnamese** lecturers integrated technology into their teaching, and the ways they applied technology in their teaching were limited. According to most of the participants’ experiences, lecturers mainly used PowerPoint to simply present learning content to students, which did not maintain students' attention or encourage their engagement and interest:

The lecturers had applied some technical equipment to their teaching such as a projector, and PowerPoint, but it was very limited and only for presentation and knowledge transfer to the students. (Phung, Int.1)

Some lecturers used PowerPoint in their teaching process, but it was mostly used to list all of the important content for students to see and take notes. (Thu, Int.1)

In the teaching process students often felt bored because the lecturers mainly read the slides. They didn’t pay much attention to the interpretation or the connection of content to practice. (Lan, Int.1)

The above observations have revealed that most of the **Vietnamese** lecturers encountered by these students simply used the technology to transfer knowledge, which was consistent with their overall teaching style. Besides, the barriers the lecturers faced, such as the lack of encouragement or requirement for applying technology in teaching and a lack of equipment also inevitably had an impact on how they used technology.

Regarding the integration of ICT in teaching activities in the **Australian** University, all the participants commented that their lecturers used the technology in various activities such as searching for resources, teaching and also communicating with students. The use of ICT to support teaching activities was regarded as being compulsory for lecturers because they had to “do research online and guide their students in ways to look for necessary information from different websites” (Toan, Int.2). The lecturers had to use technology to create teaching content such as PowerPoint slides, to teach, to manage their subjects in the e-learning sites and to communicate with their students via forums or emails, etc. (Truong, Int.2).

All the **Australian** lecturers could easily integrate ICT in their teaching activities because “all lecture rooms are well-equipped with teaching devices such as projectors” (Khanh, Int.3). In addition, high speed internet connections were available everywhere on the campus, which was a favourable condition for the lecturers to get access and search for the information to illustrate or give an explanation to the students during their lectures (Ha, Int.3).

The most popular integration of ICT in the **Australian** teaching activities was the use of projectors for subject content presentations or to give lectures. However, the ways the lecturers applied the technology were different and depended on each lecturer (Toan, Int.3). All the participants agreed that most of their lecturers used projectors to present teaching content and stimulate students’ learning with various applications derived from the internet.

In this University, lecturers all made use of projectors. Most of the lecturers employed the lively illustration and video clips on the well-known cases in their lectures to explain and encourage students to give opinions and solutions, which helped students remember and understand the learning content better. (Tri, Int.3)

The lecturers made use of quite a lot of illustrations via the internet, for example, using videos to explain and illustrate some complicated concepts such as the global economic crisis to help students have a more complete picture of that concept. (Ha, Int.3)

The methods of integrating ICT in teaching as indicated in the quotes above were believed to be effective for students' learning. This was because the lecturers that the participants had experienced mainly focused on key points, guided students to learn and engaged them in learning activities with stimulation from different sources. However, the participants also had some **Australian** lecturers who just used the projectors simply to repeat what they had provided to their students via lecture slides, which made "students feel depressed and not interested in learning" (Phung, Int.2).

Some lecturers [in **Australia**] often give lectures by presenting or reading slides without explanation or illustration to help students understand subjects easily. This often makes students feel disinterested because slides are available; students don't see any new information. Especially, for calculating subjects like accounting subjects, it is very difficult for students to understand the lecture when lecturers only give lectures by reading slides. (Tri, Int.2)

When ICT was used mainly to impart knowledge, Tri added, "students' learning was even less effective than learning with traditional teaching methods such as chalk and board, which required students to attend classes to listen and take notes, so that they could remember the learning content" (Tri, Int. 2). However, in the **Australian** learning context, he further explained, lecture slides were generally available online, so students did not have to listen carefully or take notes, which "made students become lazy in attending classes and taking notes, and as a result, they don't remember much of the learning content" (Tri, Int.2).

4.4.5 Summary

Overall, the practice of instruction in the **Vietnamese** higher education sector as described above was believed to assist students in achieving a solid theoretical basis. The role of **Vietnamese** lecturers and their teaching approaches had a strong influence on students' learning outcomes. Students could easily follow and rely on what was taught by their lecturers. However, according to the participants' experiences, students often considered their lecturers too important to get close to or be open with. Teaching styles mainly focused on following a pre-determined instructional sequence, which did not seem to encourage knowledge construction or support collaborative construction of knowledge through discussion. Lecturers seemed to pay more attention to transferring knowledge from course books to students than on students' knowledge construction, understandings and feedback. Most of the participants in this study reported that many **Vietnamese** lecturers did not facilitate group work or discussions.

With regard to the teaching techniques used in the **Australian** University, the participants reported a relaxed relationship with their lecturers. The lecturers were considered to be "facilitators" who cared for students' learning needs and the application of knowledge in practice. Students' feedback on teaching content and collaborative learning through group work and discussions were generally encouraged. However, according to some of the participants, this teaching style had certain weaknesses, such as a perceived lack of structure and certainty in teaching content.

4.5 Assessment

This section presents the data in regard to assessment activities which were used to gauge students' progress. The topics which are presented in this section include types and schedules of assessment tasks, assessment criteria, expectations for completing the assessments, and plagiarism.

4.5.1 Types and schedules of assessment tasks

According to all the participants, the assessments in **Vietnam** consisted largely of written tasks such as tests, papers or quizzes. Three of the participants mentioned oral assessment, such as oral presentation or quick oral tests. The assessment tasks were almost all individual, with only two participants mentioning group presentations which they encountered in one subject only (Phung and Toan, Int.1).

The types of assessments mentioned by the participants depended on the kind of subjects that students took or the majors they studied. For example, Phung who studied business administration stated: “The main form of assessment was written tests. There were also multiple choice tests and oral tests in some subjects but the kind of tests were quite limited” (Phung, Int.1). While Tri, who studied International Economics, also said he experienced some main forms of tests including multiple choice test, written tests and oral tests, but “most of the time we took multiple choice tests; it accounts for about 60% of the assessment” (Tri, Int.2).

Although there were a number of assessment types, all the participants reported that the main assessments were conducted at the end of the semester, and only some minor and light weighted tests were included at the beginning and the middle of the semester. For example, Toan recalled:

There were different forms of assessments, and they were often organized in three stages: The assessment at the beginning of the term accounts for 10% of a course grade, mid-term: 20% and end-term examination or test of 70%. (Int.1)

The limited number of tests carried out during the course and assessments mainly focusing on the final test might influence students’ learning habits in preparation for assessment. Eight out of nine participants said they mostly concentrated on study for a fixed time before the final exam.

The types of assessments conducted in the **Australian** learning environment were varied depending on the majors and subjects studied. For example, Huyen who studied biology said she often got lab work and reports, software based applications (modelling

reports) and mid-term and final exams (Huyen, Int.2). In other areas such as Commerce and Accounting, students often had financial reports, group assignments, oral presentations and exams (Thu & Lan, Int.2).

All participants concluded that they had encountered different types of assessments in **Australia** compared to those in **Vietnam**. Assessments in **Australia** required assessment of group work or group activities and practical skills. Some participants found the differences in the type of assessments challenging to cope with at the beginning, but they all thought these approaches were useful for them. For example, Ha described:

Major forms of examination and assessment in my commercial subjects are group work, oral presentations and assignments. It was hard for me at the beginning because many of the tasks required me to work with other students, like I had to do group presentation and group reports..., which I have never experienced before. But I think those kinds of assessment were quite meaningful for me because it focuses on key skills such as presentation skills, writing skills and teamwork skills, which are essential skills for students' work in the future. (Ha, Int.2)

Similarly, Truong commented that the assessments in **Australia** were implemented in different forms, and most of them were assignments and group presentation. In those forms, he appreciated doing written assignments at home and oral presentation in class. This, he explained, was because doing assignments required students to read a large number of documents and try to understand all relevant aspects as much as possible. "This self-understanding and self-studying helps students understand issues more than that of taking written tests". Oral presentations, according to Truong, were usually organized in groups, which helped students develop necessary skills such as interpersonal skills in front of a crowd, communication skills, expressive skills and team work skills (Truong, Int.2).

Another difference was that in **Australia**, examinations and assessments were conducted at many different stages of a course. The weighting on the final exam or assignments was not too heavy. Therefore, students had to study continuously

throughout the course, which built up good learning habits for students (Phung, Thu & Khanh, Int.2).

The wide range of assessment types in **Australia** assisted the students' learning because it placed additional demands on them to deal with a variety of tasks and assignments conducted during a course. Moreover, the assessments were implemented in various forms which placed more emphasis on practical skills. Therefore, students were not only judged on their knowledge but also on their ability to apply the knowledge, in daily life situations.

4.5.2 Assessment criteria

When asked about the assessment standards or requirements for evaluation in **Vietnam**, all the participants agreed that there was no clear assessment criteria provided to them by the lecturers in the **Vietnamese** universities where they studied. Students were only provided with some general information about the assessments, such as how many and what kinds of tests students were going to take to complete the subject, which parts of the subject the test would focus on and the weight of each test (Toan, Ha, Khanh & Truong, Int.1). Khanh described a process which was similar to that experienced by other participants:

At the beginning of the subject, students were just generally advised of assessments for each subject. Normally, there were three tests for each subject: Random tests or tests at the beginning of the term accounting for 10%, midterm tests accounting for 20% and end-term tests occupying 70%. The lecturers didn't specify the objectives of the subjects or specific criteria such as requirements to be conformed to or what ability students needed to present in such tests. (Khanh, Int.1)

The lack of assessment criteria provided at the beginning of a course did not appear to bother at least three of the participants in this study, as they had developed a familiarity with the manner of assessments they had experienced in previous courses. For example, Thu explained:

Some students like me often thought that assessment criteria were not really necessary because we were quite familiar with previous requirements that we had to remember or learn all provided knowledge by heart to pass the tests. (Thu, Int.1)

However, the other participants asserted that the lack of assessment criteria was confusing and caused difficulty in learning; “students could not know what to learn or what they should focus on to fulfil the course” (Phung, Int.1). Similarly, Ha said “we couldn’t build up learning orientation, and passively waited and followed what made the lecturers satisfied” (Ha, Int.1). Without clear criterion, students did not know what they should do, to deal with assessments. In particular, Tri elucidated:

Because the main purpose of examination and test was for us to get high scores, I had to follow what the lecturers had instructed us to do....Assessments were based on responding or reporting on what they had been provided by their lecturers. Thus, students had to follow closely to the content provided by the lecturers to be able to get good marks. (Tri, Int.1)

Without the assessment criteria, all the participants concurred that most of the time they could only focus on studying at the end of the term or just before the exams. This was because they could not regulate their study when requirements for evaluation were not provided at the beginning of each subject. For example, Toan said “I could not study or prepare for assessments and exams right from the beginning because I did not know what I should study..., therefore, I was just able to focus at the end of the semester” (Toan, Int.1). Similarly, Huyen described that **Vietnamese** students were not encouraged or required to study during the semester. Students normally just waited until the end of the semester to have lecturers’ guides for assessments or narrowed parts of the subjects that lecturers said the tests would focus on, and then they started to learn (Huyen, Int.1).

Seven participants revealed the difficulty of judging their learning achievements by themselves. They felt confused with their learning results, and could not judge their performance after the assessments. For example, Tri illustrated “we even were not able

to estimate whether we passed the exam or not and at what level” (Tri, Int.1). In addition, Toan said “students did not actually know why they obtained the score, so they did not know what level they had reached to orient their future study” (Toan, Int.2). The participants, therefore, had to rely on their lecturers’ judgment for their learning progress.

In the **Australian** University, all of the students had been provided with necessary information about what requirements they had to follow in assessments from the beginning of every subject. For example, Toan described:

Students [in **Australia**] are provided with quite clear information for examination and assessment. Specifically, through subject outlines, students can know the form of examination and assessment, requirements for assessments in detail as well as weights and specific time for the examination or assessment. Besides, lecturers often give further guidance to help students master the requirements for examination and assessment. (Toan, Int.2)

When compared with the assessment criteria in **Vietnam**, Lan thought the criteria she experienced in **Australia** were clearer and more objective, because they were based on tangible outcomes and not heavily influenced by the lecturers’ own judgement:

Most subjects have clear criteria for testing and assessing. It is different from those in **Vietnam**, where there was no clear assessment requirement provided formally, and the judgment of students’ performance depended profoundly on the lecturers’ experiences and feelings. It means that if lecturers thought it was right, it should be right and vice versa. The criteria in **Australia** as I can see are stipulated clearly for an assignment such as the percent of the overall assessment rating, the limitation on the number of words, of references, requirements on format and content... (Lan, Int.2)

The clear requirement for assessments provided students with a guide to help them direct their own study. Seven participants agreed that requirements for a subject or assessments were presented clearly and formally in the subject outline, providing them necessary information about the subject such as the purpose of studying that subject, what kind of knowledge and skills they were expected to achieve and how to meet the subject’s requirements. The evidence for this could be seen in Phung’s quotation:

Assessment here is quite clear. Students are provided with objectives and specific requirements for each subject in general and assessment in particular, helping students to orient their study. This is because they know what they are studying and how to study from the beginning of each subject. This is different to what I experienced in **Vietnam**, where students did not know what to learn at the beginning, so they often waited until the time the subjects were nearly finished to have some suggestions from their lecturers to prepare for tests or exams then they started to learn. (Phung, Int.1)

The clear assessment criteria also helped students to self-assess. When provided with clear requirements for assessments students could know what aspects needed to be judged, and based on the criteria they could tell how well they had met the requirements (Thu, Toan & Tri, Int. 2). Four participants commented that they did not feel confused with the results they had because they could tell the reasons why they achieved it. For example, Khanh commented that when studying in **Vietnam** he had a number of surprises relating to test or exam results, because sometime he thought he did very well, but the results were low, and vice versa. However, studying in **Australia**, he described, “we could guess quite well what our results would be right after the tests or exams because the criteria are clear, so students can easily accept their results instead of blaming their lecturers...” (Khanh, Int.1 & Int. 2).

4.5.3 Lecturers’ expectations for completing assessment

Eight of the nine participants asserted that most of their lecturers in **Vietnam** expected students just to reproduce knowledge in tests, especially the knowledge provided by the lecturer. For example, Toan described that “in exams, lecturers often expected students to present correctly and precisely what they had provided before”. Some of the lecturers did not require or appreciate any expansion or additions in students’ answers. “They did not accept other answers although those were accepted by reliable documents” (Khanh, Int.1). The students who did not follow the predetermined content could get negative feedback and or a reduced mark:

In tests, most teachers wanted students to follow and conform to what they taught. They did not want students to learn further from other sources or create

personal opinions. I knew some students who studied very hard, read many different textbooks and had broader knowledge compared to others, but often failed the exams or got low scores. While, I just learnt what my lecturers provided and wrote it down in the exams, and then I always got high marks. (Lan, Int.1)

According to Khanh, the lecturers explained that adhering to the content presented in the classrooms "demonstrated whether the students attended the class, listened to the lectures and followed lecturers' requirements" (Khanh, Int.1). However, there were a small number of **Vietnamese** lecturers who encouraged students to express their understanding and show an ability to connect what they had learnt to daily life. For example, Lan described "some lecturers also required students to demonstrate the capability of thinking and creativity in the test answers, but not much" (Lan, Int.1). Most of the participants agreed that there was only a small percentage of creativity required in each test; "in fact, creativity was the smallest part, only about 5 % of tests" (Ha, Int.1). In addition, Toan explained why he thought his lecturers often required their students to present what they had learnt, rather than showing their capability of thinking or creativity in tests.

I think they preferred learning by heart because open-end questions were hardly employed in the tests. Most of the questions asked for presenting or reflecting learnt knowledge from lectures or the course book content. (Toan, Int.1)

Even though the requirements for assessment could help students get good marks, seven participants showed their dissatisfaction with the assessments that they had experienced in **Vietnam**. For instance, Phung remarked that she did not feel satisfied with the assessment because of "its heavy concentration on memorizing knowledge, making us forget everything right after the tests, so though we had learnt, we didn't know what we had learnt" (Phung, Int.1). Similarly, Huyen thought the emphasis placed on memorizing and reproducing transferred knowledge "had formed students' learning routines of listening and following lecturers' directions without active thoughts, discovery or creation" (Huyen, Int.1). Further, Lan, Tri and Toan all asserted that the assessment had failed to reflect the learning ability or actual capability of students (Lan, Tri & Toan, Int.1).

In discussing **Australian** lecturers' expectations for completing assessments, no participant thought that the lecturers in **Australia** required students' reproduction of knowledge in assessments, or expected students to precisely follow what they had provided then reproduce the knowledge in assessments. Instead, seven participants commented that the lecturers often encouraged students to demonstrate their understandings of an issue from various perspectives including personal and research-based views. For example, Thu described:

Generally, lecturers often desire students to show their understanding and knowledge from different points of view. Also, they want students to represent personal opinions, specific ideas based on students' research and study from different material resources. (Thu, Int.2)

In comparison with previous experiences, Toan stated that assessments in **Vietnam** usually stuck to textbook content or teaching content provided by the lecturers. In **Australia**, he saw the difference that students did not necessarily follow any textbook, and they could present their own understandings which might be at odds with their lecturers' views:

...while doing the assignments, students are often encouraged to make their own opinions and defend their opinions based on reasonable evidence which they find out themselves from their experiences or research. Students didn't need to agree with or have to follow the opinions of the lecturers or a textbook like that in **Vietnam**. (Toan, Int.2)

In accordance with encouraging multiple perspectives while attempting assessments, five participants also recognized that most of the lecturers they encountered in **Australia** often expected students to demonstrate their ability to do research, to fully understand and to be creative, rather than only requiring students to present background or basic knowledge. This can be seen in the descriptions by Lan and Phung:

Lecturers expect that students shall express their understanding of basic knowledge. Especially, they really appreciate student's ability to research, create and improve the knowledge. Specifically, lecturers also highly value the further readings and learning of students through different information resources from various resources that students have researched. This encourages students to provide new methods, opinions and strong arguments. (Lan, Int.2)

Students are not only required to show their understandings of basic knowledge, but also the ability to research, to think critically and expand knowledge. This makes students feel more excited about research and creation. Unlike in **Vietnam**, where students just stuck to what the lecturer had offered but didn't need to expand or create more, so students only needed to learn the lesson by heart or copy it into their assessments. (Phung, Int.2)

Six participants commented that **Australian** lecturers generally appreciate the links between ideas or knowledge and practice. The lecturers often required students to relate what they had learnt to work practices, and in assessments the lecturers usually posed questions on real business and social issues requiring students to solve these with their subject knowledge and experiences (Ha, Huyen & Khanh, Int.2). In addition, the lecturers paid more attention to the ways students solved a problem rather than focussing solely on the result they reached. For example, Khanh described: "as I know, lecturers here don't pay much attention to the final result, but about the method to achieve such results or ways to solve problems" (Khanh, Int.2). He added, the lecturers seemed to appreciate independent research ability and the creative thinking of students, which encouraged students to engage more in study, but that this could be challenging for **Vietnamese** students, because many were not familiar with creative thinking (Khanh, Int.2).

The participants' experiences of the lecturers' expectations for completing assessments in the **Australian** environment has shown that students were required and encouraged to show their deep understanding, critical thinking and problem solving rather than just knowledge reproduction. These different expectations can also be seen in the attitude toward plagiarism.

4.5.4 Plagiarism

The term plagiarism is defined as an instance or act of imitating or using another author's language and thoughts as one's own without authorization or without crediting the original author (Cochran, 2011). The students' perceptions of plagiarism and how a plagiarism issue is taken into account in the academic environment, are believed to have

certain influences on students' learning styles and on the propensity to cheat in assignments and examinations (J. Walker, 1998; Zhang et al., 2014). The data analysis demonstrated that the differences between **Vietnamese** and **Australian** assessment practices are associated with differences in concerns about plagiarism. This was because the plagiarism issue had certain implications for what students were supposed to learn (regurgitate the information as compared to understanding and critical analysis).

When discussing plagiarism, all the participants indicated a lack of their understanding of the issues associated with it at the time of studying at the universities in **Vietnam**. For example, Huyen, who graduated from a University of education in 2006 described: "When I was studying in **Vietnam**, I had no clear idea about plagiarism because such notions did not appear anywhere in my University" (Huyen, Int.1). Similarly, a participant graduating from a University of economics in 2008 said: "I didn't understand what the meaning of plagiarism was at that time because there was no regulation in the University talking about that issue" (Phung, Int.1).

Similarly, the other participants either misunderstood or had very limited knowledge about plagiarism. For example, Khanh observed: "According to my thinking at that time, plagiarism was just cheating or copying material which was not allowed when taking a test or exam" (Khanh, Int.1). Truong said plagiarism was mainly understood as copying material when doing an assignment at home. When taking tests or exams, students could remember and use knowledge or ideas of others without citation (Truong, Int.1). In addition, Huyen shared some limited knowledge of plagiarism:

All the subjects we studied had final exams. Students could learn by heart and write the information from curriculum or lecture notes without citation. Only when making our graduate project, we were reminded that it was prohibited to copy other's work and citation was needed. However, this was also unclear because there weren't any specific policies and penalties in relation to plagiarism. (Huyen, Int.1)

Plagiarism seemed not to be important, as these participants had never heard of a formal policy or received any penalty regarding this issue. Moreover, some participants thought

that “plagiarism was considered normal and common in **Vietnam**” (Toan, Int.1). It was very easy to find a copy of books or theses at photocopy shops. It was also very difficult to recognize plagiarism because there were no plagiarism regulations or software to check for this (Toan, Int.1). Thu related: “I didn’t see any particular form of punishment for that issue, so plagiarism problems in assignments and these were quite common” (Thu, Int.1).

There was a considerable difference in participants’ conception of plagiarism when they were studying in **Vietnam** compared to studying in **Australia**. In **Vietnam** this issue was not addressed consistently. Whereas, studying in **Australia**, all the participants recognized the significance of understanding plagiarism and how to avoid it effectively. This was because, as Tri said, students were required to attend a class about plagiarism at the beginning of the course, to make sure that they had enough knowledge about the issue:

In **Vietnam**, I didn’t have a right view about plagiarism but here I had to attend lectures about plagiarism and how to avoid plagiarism right at the beginning of the course. Students are also tested to show that they really understand about plagiarism and how to avoid plagiarism. (Tri, Int.2)

All the participants thought that plagiarism in **Australia** was considered to be a serious issue. Students were not only “required to attend a class teaching about plagiarism, which includes rules and relevant regulations of plagiarism as well as methods to avoid plagiarism” (Ha, Int.2). This issue was also always reinforced by lecturers and in every subject outline (Phung, Int.2). An excerpt from the subject outline (Appendix 7) illustrates the validity of Phung’s statement. In addition, showing an understanding of plagiarism was seen as a compulsory condition to be able to graduate. For example, according to Thu:

Plagiarism is considered quite seriously here. Since the entry, students are educated carefully about plagiarism. At graduation, it is required to have evidence of plagiarism study, and then students will be accepted to graduate. (Thu, Int.2)

The participants all agreed that they were notified clearly about plagiarism regulations. For example, Tri said: “In the University website, students can see the details of plagiarism rules and specific punishments for violation” (Tri, Int.2). An example of one set of rules is provided in Appendix 7. The participants were also aware of tools to detect the levels of plagiarism, which they did not experience in **Vietnam**. For example, Khanh commented that in **Vietnam** it was hard to know if a student plagiarized or not because it only relied on the lecturer’s judgment, but here “the University used software to detect plagiarism, so it was quite accurate and not easy for students to cheat in study” (Khanh, Int.2).

When studying in the **Australian** environment, these students felt confident with their understandings of plagiarism, which led to changes in their study. For example, Phung recognized that understanding about plagiarism required her to understand subject knowledge and improve critical thinking skills. She had to read more to understand and to seek her own views instead of copying other works (Phung, Int.2). For Toan, plagiarism knowledge made him aware of the importance of improving his self-discipline in learning, self-exploration and creativity (Toan, Int.2). Similarly, Ha said the knowledge helped her better understand plagiarism, which built up a more responsible attitude in her study and research, taught her how to respect other people's ideas as well as helped her understand the value of research and creative thinking (Ha, Int.2).

4.5.5 Summary

To sum up, the findings about the assessments that the participants experienced when they were studying in **Vietnam** revealed that there were a limited number of assessment types conducted at different stages of courses in **Vietnamese** universities. The assessments normally were comprised of three tests organised at the beginning, the middle and the end of a term with the weight accounting for 10%, 20% and 70% respectively. The assessments were perceived by the participants as having an emphasis on students’ reproduction of knowledge and on individual performance, rather than on

encouraging students to express their deep understanding of the learning content in its connection to professional practice and their creativity. Students were provided with general assessment criteria only and, as a result, the participants described how it was difficult for them to direct their learning and judge their achievements in order to prepare for assessments or orient their coming study. In addition, there were no formal policies or penalties dealing with the issue of plagiarism mentioned by the participants.

By contrast, the participants mentioned various individual and group assessments conducted at the **Australian** University. The assessments emphasised students' learning processes, group learning skills, problem-solving, critical thinking and deep understanding. The final grades were comprised of the marks from a number of tasks evenly spread across the semester. The assessment content was believed to have a close link with practical issues, and plagiarism was described by all the participants as a serious issue for academic performance in the **Australian** environment. Additionally, the lecturers in this University provided students with clear criteria which helped them self-evaluate their learning outcomes and therefore take more control of their own study. These assessments were challenging for the students in this study because, as they admitted, of their pre-existing learning habits. However, most of the participants indicated their appreciation that they were expected to show their understanding, make connections to daily life and engage in group work.

4.6 Conclusion

This chapter has presented research findings related to the **Vietnamese** participants' perceptions of educational practice in **Vietnamese** universities and one University in **Australia**. The comparison between the higher education practices experienced by these participants in **Vietnam** and **Australia** has been made in relation to the opportunities for active engagement in learning within each learning environment. In the participants' accounts, there was a significant difference between the two learning environments in all the areas concerned, especially with regard to active learning.

Specifically, the learning materials in the **Vietnamese** context were mainly comprised of predetermined content from course books or curricula which were assigned by MOET (Ministry of Education and Training). The predetermined nature of the materials did assist students to determine the core learning content easily, but it appeared to lack real-world complexity and practical relevance to daily life. Students therefore could easily locate what they needed to learn, but this did not encourage them to engage their critical thinking skills. The classroom arrangements in **Vietnam** were described as supporting traditional teaching approaches of knowledge transmission to large numbers of students but it did not seem to suit small group learning. In the **Vietnamese** setting there was an availability of ICT tools, but it was limited and the uses of the tools were not compulsory.

With regard to the pedagogy in **Vietnam**, it was believed that the lecturers had a strong impact on students' learning. The participants explained that they relied on their lecturers to indicate and explain what they needed to learn. They commented that their lecturers mainly taught by transferring predetermined teaching content, which could help the students to receive a solid and systematic theoretical knowledge. For some participants, this teaching approach was reported as being easy for students to follow. However, transferring predetermined teaching content implied the students were passively receiving, rather than actively building upon the knowledge.

There were various types of assessment used in **Vietnam**, conducted at different stages of the course. The major assessment (accounting for about 70%) occurred at the end of the course. The assessments largely had a strong emphasis on knowledge reproduction and individual performance. There were no clear assessment criteria reported by the participants to support students' self-assessment.

In **Australia**, the participants were supplied with a large amount of instructional materials, which encouraged students to learn from a variety of different sources. The participants in this study reported enjoying the opportunity to access learning content from a range of perspectives, to discuss and appraise it, rather than just accept and

remember. However, the diversity of recommended learning material was also considered to be challenging and confusing for students when they had to identify the core knowledge they needed to learn. For some students, the diversity and availability of learning sources suggested that it was not necessary to go to class or look for help from lecturers and other students. The physical learning environment, with its flexible equipment (movable chairs and desks) and technical tools in small classrooms, provided more opportunities to interact with their lecturers and peers.

In relation to the pedagogy of teaching practice in **Australia**, lecturers were described as facilitators who paid close attention to students' needs and case-based learning issues. Students' collaborative construction of knowledge through discussion was encouraged. However, some participants also felt that there was a lack of structure in the **Australian** teaching content, which led them to be concerned about the reliability of the lecturers' knowledge.

Regarding assessments, the participants believed that students were provided with clear assessment criteria at the beginning of the course, so they could take more control of their study. Moreover, in the **Australian** University plagiarism was considered to be a serious offence, and was strongly discouraged, especially as the assessments often focused on students' own personal experiences of engagement in problem-solving, critical thinking and group performance. While, the characteristics of these assessments seemed to be challenging to the **Vietnamese** participants' learning habits, such assessment structure was recognised as facilitating students' active engagement in learning. The next chapter presents the research findings in relation to how **Vietnamese** international students could become more engaged in active learning when studying in the ICT-enhanced learning environment in **Australia**.

Chapter 5

Potentials of ICT-enhanced Blended Learning Environment to Foster Active Learning Amongst Vietnamese International Students in Australia

5.1 Introduction

The previous chapter provided an overview of the learning and teaching practices in **Vietnamese** Universities compared to the practices carried out in one particular **Australian** University, with special attention given to the ICT-enhanced blended learning environment. From the nine participants' accounts and an applied course document reviews, a picture of the two learning environments has been created, which points to significant differences between them. The purpose of this chapter is to present the data regarding the participants' points of view on the opportunities and the potential of these two learning environments for active learning, with emphasis placed on the ICT-enhanced blended learning environment in the **Australian** University. The chapter aims to answer the third research question: *How do **Vietnamese** students become more engaged in active learning when studying in the ICT-based learning environment in Australia?* While the data presented in this chapter is drawn mainly from the third interview (Int. 3), supporting data from the other interviews (Int. 1 & Int. 2) and the participants' learning documents are also included to provide a comprehensive description of these environments.

The potential for active learning is presented through analyzing the participants' reflections on the learning environments that they encountered in relation to characteristics of active learning. The data analysis of the participants' perceptions was based on the analytical framework of active learning described in Chapter 3.

Accordingly, the categories presented in this chapter include engaging in hands-on activities, meaningful intellectual inquiry, and learner's autonomy and responsibility for own learning.

5.2 Engaging in Hands-on Activities

This section describes how students engaged in hands-on learning activities. The activities discussed include investigative work (e.g. searching for literature, reading, and further exploring the topic through additional sources), group work and discussion with peers (e.g. participating in small group learning activities and discussions in-class or online) and discussion with lecturers.

5.2.1 Engaging in investigative work

When discussing the degree of active engagement of **Vietnamese** students in study through investigative activities such as searching, reading and exploring the content from additional sources, all nine participants agreed that they engaged more in such activities when studying in the **Australian** learning environment. The main reason put forward for this difference was that in **Vietnam**, investigative activities were neither required nor supported by lecturers, whereas it was expected and encouraged at the **Australian** university.

When studying in **Vietnam**, the participants all admitted that they did not actively seek to expand their knowledge, because most of the lecturers wanted students to simply follow and comply with what they were taught. For example, two participants explained:

...in **Vietnam**, students just stick to what the lecturer offers but do not need to expand or create anything, so students only need to learn the lesson by heart or copy. (Phung, Int. 2)

When I studied in **Vietnam**, I was quite submissive. I simply waited for, and followed instructions of lecturers, but did not explore, or discover any additional information... because students could pass exams easily by just reciting what was provided by the lecturers. (Lan, Int. 2)

Following the prescribed curriculum and the compulsory texts provided by the lecturers at each course in **Vietnamese** Universities (as described in Chapter 4) was considered to be sufficient for students to fulfil their learning tasks.

Some students reinforced this view by adding that in a **Vietnamese** University, the students were often even discouraged from doing additional study. For example, Lan stated that “the lecturers did not want students to learn further from other resources, and students could get high marks by just reproducing what was provided by the lecturers” (Lan, Int. 1). Tri further explained that students did not undertake wider reading or expand their knowledge because if they used the information from different resources rather than only that which they were provided or taught, “the lecturers would question the students’ respect for them” (Tri, Int. 2). All the participants agreed that lecturers in **Vietnam** expected students to follow only the material provided by them, so students were discouraged from doing additional investigations.

Ha and Khanh thought that the lack of learning resources and searching skills was another reason preventing students in **Vietnamese** Universities from investigating the learning content further. Ha explained that she did not do further reading on learning content when studying in **Vietnam** because she did not know how to locate or search for information and “it was difficult” (Ha, Int. 1). Khanh also agreed that students could not do extra investigation because of the shortage of learning materials and ICT support: “Seeking information is complicated because there were not many books in the library and online resources were also limited” (Khanh, Int. 3).

On the contrary, Toan noted a positive aspect of strictly complying with the knowledge content requirement provided by **Vietnamese** lecturers without doing further

investigation. He explained that many students were accustomed to being “spoon fed” and felt very comfortable and safe with that:

.... Most students wanted lecturers to provide ready information because it was easy and safe. Students didn’t have to discover or explore, therefore they could avoid risks. (Toan, Int. 1)

Following the curriculum, in this manner, meant that students could easily and safely use one source of information only, without taking intellectual risks by doing further study. The participants in this study seemed to find little incentive to undertake additional investigations.

However, in the **Australian** ICT-based context, the participants unanimously agreed that they participated more in extra investigations of the learning content because they were constantly encouraged to do so. Six participants stated that **Vietnamese** students in **Australia** engaged in more investigative learning due to the nature of the tasks provided by the lecturers. For example, Phung (Int. 3) explained that the teaching approaches involved students in discovery and exploration. Lecturers used open-ended and practical questions in classes and in assignments so students were motivated to do further readings from different sources (Lan, Int. 3, Khanh, Int. 3 & Truong, Int. 3). According to Tri, he was more interested in investigative activities in the **Australian** environment because students were encouraged to contribute their own ideas in class. He explained:

The lecturers that I study with [in **Australia**] are open so students can express their opinions at different times during the lectures, and lecturers are willing to answer relevant questions. They respect the personal thinking of each student. If lecturers don’t know about a new issue, they often tell that they do not know and are willing to accept new and good opinions from students, so students were interested in exploring to contribute more new ideas. (Tri, Int.2)

Five participants commented that students had to read more and study more to have additional ideas for their group contributions because they were often required to participate in group work. For instance, Ha and Phung said they had to more readings to prepare their learning activities in classes such as group work or group discussion (Ha,

Int. 3; Phung, Int. 3). Other participants also noted that the requirements of assessment tasks motivated students to engage in extra investigation. For example, Truong and Thu said:

Requirements of tests and assessments [in **Australia**] were quite encouraging because there was no available answer. Hence, it involved each student in finding out his own answer from different knowledge and reference sources. (Truong, Int. 3)

... Requirements of study, tests and assessments in learning always demanded students to read and expand their knowledge... it was compulsory for students to read as much as possible to meet the requirements or to complete the assignments. (Thu, Int.3)

The majority of the participants (seven out of nine) explained that they became more engaged in learning activities because of the easy and convenient access to information, especially with ICT support. The participants acknowledged that they felt the use of ICT was quite challenging at the beginning, because they were not trained with the necessary skills for using the technology in learning and doing their own independent study to further investigate the topic in **Vietnamese** context. For example, Khanh described the difficulties that **Vietnamese** students often faced in the new context as follows:

Our skills of seeking and classifying materials in **Vietnam** were limited, so initially we met difficulties in self-studying and self-seeking when studying in this ICT-based environment. There were massively abundant sources; we did not know what to study and how to study. (Khanh, Int. 3)

However, these challenges occurred only at the initial stage of their learning in **Australia**. All the participants explained that the challenges were then reduced because they were instructed how to use ICT in their study in terms of using technologies themselves and also for searching information. Thu's description below was a characteristic response:

At the beginning, as with many other **Vietnamese** students studying in this ICT-based environment, I had some certain difficulties of using technology for study, such as searching and classifying learning material on the internet. However, the full guidance of the supported services from the University such as IT support, Library assistance and lecturers' guidance helped me overcome such difficulties easily. (Thu, Int. 3)

The use of ICT for learning in **Australia**, therefore, had gradually become more convenient and useful for the **Vietnamese** students. For example, after experiencing the initial challenging period when Truong just started his study in this new ICT-based context he felt that the use of technology became increasingly easy and even stimulating, and helped him to explore more additional resources:

From my own experience, the application of ICT here [in **Australia**] stimulated the scientific curiosity of students. Once students got used to accessing and searching materials, they felt interested in studying that subject and doing further investigation to expand the subject knowledge. That is because searching and using materials have become quite easy and convenient. (Truong Int.3)

Additionally, Phung pointed out that she was involved in more investigative work because the availability of numerous ICT resources made the investigation easy and convenient for students in learning and exploring:

The learning resources here [in **Australia**] are mainly provided online via e-learning and other websites of the University. Students can easily access and search the documents relating to subjects such as lecture notes, books, magazines, etc. The supply of these documents makes students' learning easier and more flexible. Students can learn from a distance and at their own convenient time. (Phung, Int. 2)

This convenient access to a wide range of learning resources also encouraged Khanh and Thu to do further investigation. Khanh felt really interested in discovering new knowledge: "I was really excited about finding out materials from a massively abundant library which I had never accessed before" (Khanh, Int. 3). Similarly, Thu explained that "thanks to the favourable conditions to approach many different online materials and the plentiful material resources of this University, students were stimulated to read

more” (Thu, Int.3). She also expressed her high level of satisfaction with the **Australian** learning environment:

Generally, when studying here [in **Australia**] I am able to learn better, try to read books as much as possible and find out new information...I am very satisfied with this learning environment because students are provided favourable conditions to research and study. (Thu, Int. 2)

Seven participants also found that they engaged more in these investigative activities because, when studying in the **Australian** ICT-based context, they had to attend fewer face-to-face classes than in **Vietnam**. For instance, Phung, Khanh, Truong and Tri recognised that in the blended learning environment, they could have extra online support, such as e-learning and online access to various learning resources, to increase their further investigations (Phung, Khanh, Tri & Truong, Int. 3). Therefore, there was a significant difference in the class time required by the two learning environments, with the blended environment requiring the students to do more investigative work. For example, Lan commented:

During my study in this University [in **Australia**], I realized that students did not have much class time. Back in **Vietnam**, each subject often took one to two days in class every week. Additionally, students had to attend a larger number of subjects. Therefore, they usually had to learn from the early morning to the late afternoon. It was much different here [in **Australia**] where there were only 3 to 4 subjects each semester. Each subject often took 3 hours a week, including 2 hours of lectures and 1 hour of tutorials. This engaged me in doing more self-study or investigative work. (Lan, Int. 3).

In the blended learning environment, as described in the above quotes, the **Vietnamese** participants took the opportunity of additional time facilitated by the reduced number of face-to-face classes, and did further investigations using various online learning resources. Thus, there appeared to be an increase in the participation of **Vietnamese** students in investigative activities whilst learning in the **Australian** ICT-based setting. The different degree of students’ involvement in learning activities between the two environments could also be seen through participation in group work and discussion with peers as presented below.

5.2.2 Group work and discussion with peers

In relation to study in **Vietnam**, none of the participants spoke considerably about the role of group work in their learning. The majority of the participants (six out of nine) did not speak about group work at all when talking about their learning in **Vietnam**, and only three participants mentioned this: Truong, Toan and Thu. According to these three participants, students did not have many opportunities to participate in group discussions and group learning activities in **Vietnam**. For example, Truong stated that “there was hardly any group work or teamwork. The assignments for all the subjects were done individually” (Truong, Int. 1). Toan and Thu mentioned that they studied together informally, but there was no encouragement to do so formally (Toan, Int. 1 & Thu, Int. 3).

On the contrary, all the participants mentioned group work and discussions with peers in which they were involved in the **Australian** blended learning environment. For example, Truong said “studying here [in **Australia**] I have the chance to participate in a lot of group work and discussions” (Truong, Int. 1). Students were involved in such learning activities as a part of learning tasks that they had to complete:

Lecturers often organized group work activities or group assignments. Students were assessed based on their active participation and group work performance. Groups were often required to record the working procedures, such as times allocated for meetings and discussions, as well as the contribution of each member. This encouraged students to participate actively in sharing and discussion to finish the assignments. (Lan, Int. 3)

I didn’t have a habit of participating in group activities or discussing in classes and I often felt very shy to speak out in front of others...but I was pushed to do that here because the activities were learning tasks here [in **Australia**], all students had to participate though at different levels, I did participate more but not much compared with other classmates. (Huyen, Int. 3)

Five participants noted how the changes they experienced during their study in **Australia** related to the learning culture they witnessed in this environment. The

participants pointed out that seeing local students being very active in participating in discussions and group work, increased their own confidence and enthusiasm to be involved in such activities. For example, Phung pointed out the changes that she felt in her attitudes to the study as influenced by this environment in **Australia**:

Participation in group work or discussion seemed to be part of the learning culture here. Particularly, it seemed to me that the local students were naturally very active in learning, which did make me feel like participating too, which is very different to how I used to be in **Vietnam**. (Phung, Int. 3)

ICT forums provided additional environments for group discussions, which the participants were willing to embrace. For each subject, students were required to join a forum to communicate or discuss learning issues on the e-learning sites. Lecturers often posted assignments on e-learning sites and divided students into different groups so that students had to work together or share with others their ideas via forums, which the participants appreciated (Truong, Int. 3; Tri, Int. 3; Huyen, Int. 3). For example, Tri described the advantages of this kind of forums as follows:

This kind of communication was very convenient and helpful so that it attracted many students. They could post a question whenever they wanted. Moreover, the questions were available for everyone to view and answer, which saved a lot of time when we entered the forum and found similar questions that had been answered. I did involve more in this communication because I felt it was easier to ask a question on the forum rather than via face-to-face communication. Besides, I also found a lot of interesting things to learn from the different questions of the other students. (Tri, Int. 3)

Thus, in the above quote, we can see that Tri had some difficulties asking lecturers questions in face to face situations, but ICT helped him to overcome these difficulties and allowed him to engage in discussion with classmates. This types of relationships were generally not provided nor readily available in formal learning environments in **Vietnam**. In a similar vein, Huyen explained that students received replies quickly from peers with various views and interesting ideas. She also explained that the forum helped her and other international students to ask questions from their peers and make

comments more easily and confidently because “there was enough time to think and carefully edit and construct their sentences” (Huyen, Int. 3).

5.2.3 Discussion with lecturers

All the participants recounted their vivid memories of sitting quietly listening to lecturers and taking notes in the **Vietnamese** context. Only occasionally could they ask questions during the class, and then only with certain lecturers. For example, Toan explained “I only asked questions from young, easy-going lecturers. Other lecturers didn’t like students to ask questions in their lectures, so I did not dare to do so” (Toan, Int. 1). The interactions between lecturers and students in the learning process were minimal, as described by Lan: “students mainly listened, took notes, but rarely asked any question” (Lan, Int. 1). There were various reasons put forward as an explanation for this. For example, students did not dare to ask questions as they thought they would be looked down upon, and they were expected to behave formally and follow what lecturers said obediently.

We didn’t want to ask questions because we were worried of bothering lecturers or making other students think that we were stupid. (Huyen, Int. 1)

When there was something I didn’t understand, I had to consider whether it was problematic enough to ask and if it was, I waited until the recess to ask. If I did ask when the lecturers were talking, I would be marked down in terms of behaviour in class. (Tri, Int. 1)

The limited interaction was also a result of the distance that the participants felt between lecturers and students which made the students feel reluctant to get close to or discuss learning issues with their lecturers. For example, Phung stated:

I think lecturers play a very important role because they are the main and even sometimes, the only knowledge resource. Without them, students could not know what to do and what to study. However, the importance of the lecturers

deterred the students from communicating or discussing things with them. (Phung, Int. 1)

The participants also linked the expectation of students being quiet during the lecture to the method of delivery:

In my opinion, the most important thing was that students had to be quiet and keep silent, to not interrupt the lecturers and other students. Secondly, they had to listen to the lecturers carefully... Lecturers did not ask students' opinions but just concentrated on knowledge transfer. (Khanh, Int. 1)

...the lecturers just cared about their presentation without caring about students' understanding and interest, so sometimes, students really wanted to ask but they dared not. (Phung, Int. 1)

...the teaching method mainly focused on communicating knowledge; the interaction between lecturers and students was limited. (Thu, Int. 1)

Khanh thought that the lack of interaction between lecturers and students, specifically lack of feedback from students to lecturers, was one of the remarkable weaknesses in teaching in **Vietnam** (Khanh, Int. 1).

However, in the **Australian** context, it was generally reported that the participants discussed learning issues with lecturers more often because they felt more confident and comfortable asking questions. All the participants were appreciative of this opportunity; they felt it was not something they were used to, but because they had support, they engaged more in communicating with lecturers in this new environment because of the close relationships with lecturers. Four participants expressed their experiences of having a close relationship between lecturers and students, which they did not have when they were studying in **Vietnam**. For example, Thu explained: "In this **Australian** University, the relationships between lecturers and students were fairly equal, in comparison to that in **Vietnam**" (Thu, Int. 3). In more detail, Tri described: "It is quite different here [In **Australia**] when I meet the lecturers; they tend to be more open and closer to students, just like a friend, an older brother or sister" (Tri, Int. 1). The close relationship made students feel comfortable and respected when communicating or

discussing learning issues with their lecturers. For example, Phung and Huyen explained:

Lecturers and students [In **Australia**] have a close relationship. Ideas or arguments of students were respected by lecturers, so students felt comfortable to ask their lecturers if necessary. ... Sometimes, I had foolish questions but the lecturers still answered happily, so I did not feel embarrassed. (Phung, Int. 3)

The lecturers here are so friendly, we can talk like friends; we can ask whatever questions we feel confused or do not understand during the lecture time and they never look down on us even with simple questions. (Huyen, Int.3)

Three participants also noted that, in addition to various opportunities for discussion with **Australian** lecturers and their approachability, the lecturers likewise always paid close attention to students' learning, and were always ready to provide support if needed and encouraged the students to ask for help (Tri, Int. 2; Ha, Int. 3 & Truong, Int. 3).

Seven (out of nine) participants described various opportunities to discuss learning issues with their lecturers when studying in the **Australian** blended context, which influenced their learning habits, for example:

In this environment students could ask their lecturers in the lecture hall, in tutorial class, on the forum, in consultation time with lecturers and via emails etc. (Lan, Int. 3).

This learning environment could help the students choose to discuss learning issues with their lecturers at their convenience, thus they increasingly engaged in such discussions. For example, Phung, Truong and Ha explained that because the tutorial classes were most suitable for talking to lecturers (small size, furniture arrangements, as described in Chapter 4) they felt comfortable and engaged in discussions (Ha, Int. 3; Phung & Truong Int. 3).

However, seven participants acknowledged that even though the environment was encouraging and friendly, they felt that the learning habits they had gained in **Vietnam** held them back when studying in **Australia**. Their engagement in discussions with lecturers was improved compared to their study in **Vietnam**; however, they were still much behind their **Australian** counterparts in this respect. For example, Toan and Huyen described:

In class, as a **Vietnamese** person, I didn't want to bother lecturers. So at the beginning I mostly listened to discussions of lecturers and other students. Then I did participate more later on but not much (Huyen, Int. 3)

Even though lecturers often encourage students to raise questions and give personal opinions in classes, I still rarely participate or don't contribute much compared with the local students. This may be because of my learning habit, but I really like the learning environment. (Toan, Int. 2)

Similarly, Truong confided that he was not used to communicating in public: "Due to my habit I often think that lecturers are always correct; hence, in case of not understanding, I spend more time searching for the answer" (Truong, Int. 3). He also admitted that "international students did not participate much in class discussion with lecturers... because they were not confident in communicating in English (Truong, Int. 3).

Interestingly, ICT-based environment in **Australia** helped the students to compensate for these learning habits obtained in **Vietnam**. The participants felt that the online environments were convenient and safe for communicating with their lecturers - similar to how they felt in participating in discussion with their peers (as described in previous section). Communication with lecturers via email or the on-line forum was considered by all the participants as the most frequently used means for their participation in discussions because of the safe and considered nature of this environment. For example, Huyen felt shy and hardly joined in discussions with her lecturers in class, but she often communicated with the lecturers via email or forum because she thought "it was quite easy, convenient and formal" (Huyen, Int. 3). Likewise, Toan said:

The learning environment helped me be more confident. I was not embarrassed to ask questions. Good facilities and application of ICT in teaching activities made learning more comfortable and easy. Communication via email or forum enabled me to discuss much more, because I had enough time to prepare for giving questions and was not embarrassed like in direct communication. (Toan, Int. 3)

The participants' experiences revealed in the above quotes show that, with ICT support, students were able to overcome the obstacles and difficulties of face-to-face communication. They therefore could, and did, discuss learning issues with their lecturers more frequently in the ICT-based learning environment.

5.2.4 Summary

This section has described the ways that the participants gradually started to more actively participate in their study by undertaking learning activities offered by the **Australian** ICT-based environments such as investigations, group work, and discussion with peers and lecturers. This is in contrast to learning in **Vietnam** where they did not really participate or engage actively in hands-on learning activities because of the environments they encountered there: They were not expected or encouraged to get involved in such activities but expected to follow and comply with what was provided and taught by their lecturers, and were discouraged from extra investigations. Additionally, they were not given a chance (or were not required) to participate in group work or in discussions with peers or lecturers. Therefore, in class they were silent, passive learners who mainly listened to and followed predetermined knowledge from the lecturers. Some participants felt restricted by this style of learning, but others admitted that they were used to being “spoon fed” and felt comfortable and safe with that style.

Studying in the **Australian** ICT-based context allowed the participants to undergo a significant change in their study habits. They participated and engaged more in hands-on activities. This was because in this blended learning environment the students had ICT support for convenient participation in learning activities. They were provided with opportunities to access various learning materials and to join face-to-face group activities as well as online forums. The students were informed and challenged by the lecturers, who were encouraging and friendly, making them feel more confident and comfortable in their study. The local learning culture experienced in classes was also encouraging for these international students. Nevertheless, the learning habits that the students developed from **Vietnam** were at times considered to be initial obstacles in increasing their participation in this new blended environment.

5.3 Meaningful Intellectual Inquiry in Learning with ICT

This section presents the data related to students' involvement in meaningful intellectual inquiry while learning in the ICT-based learning environment. The section is structured around the themes identified in relation to active learning and meaningful intellectual inquiry, including deep understanding, critical thinking and practical application of knowledge (presented in Table 12). The section discusses how students think about what they are learning by applying a number of techniques of active learning. It also explores how students determine the quality of learning content by formulating a judgement, challenging ideas or knowledge they have learnt, and discusses how they applied what they had studied to solve practical issues.

5.3.1 Deep understanding

When asked about understanding the learning content when they were studying in **Vietnam**, none of the participants indicated that they had tried to understand it. According to Ha's experiences, students mostly learnt by rote:

Mainly we learnt by heart all the provided knowledge in the learning process; we wrote them down in the exams and that was it; we forgot about it afterwards. (Ha, Int. 1)

Moreover, Ha explained that students were not required to understand the subject matters, and were not motivated to do so. Therefore, they just “mechanically memorized it” in order to pass the exams (Ha, Int. 1). Supporting this idea, Phung and Thu also said students used to only pay attention to the information which was going to be included in the examination (Phung, Int. 2 & Thu, Int. 3). Toan further explained that with the limited learning resource provided students could learn by heart easily, so it was not necessary to understand (Toan, Int. 3).

Nevertheless, seven of the participants saw such learning as beneficial for further study, especially studying in an ICT-based environment. For example, Tri explained that by writing down and remembering the most essential content, he easily obtained and kept in my mind the basic knowledge in the discipline, which is “indispensable for expending the knowledge and practical application in the future” (Tri, Int. 3). Thu commented that studying in the **Vietnamese** context, “even the lazy and poorly self-aware student still had to remember basic points and necessary theories despite their lack of understanding” (Thu, Int. 3). On reflection after graduating, she felt the knowledge that she learnt was not meaningful, because there was not much that she could remember and most of her knowledge was theoretical. However, when continuing her study, especially in **Australia**, she found that “the basic knowledge obtained in **Vietnam** became useful for further study” (Thu, Int. 3). The knowledge that Thu learnt in **Vietnam** seemed to be easier to recall and became more meaningful while in the **Australian** learning environment.

The participants in this study generally agreed that they understood the subject knowledge more in the **Australian** ICT-based setting because an understanding of the content was an important requirement. Four participants attributed this requirement to the learning environment in **Australia** where they were not provided with readily processed or predetermined knowledge, which they would have been able simply to copy or remember. Instead, they were provided with learning challenges and various

online learning resources, which required them to understand rather than learn by heart (Ha, Lan, Toan & Khanh, Int. 3).

Seven participants explained that the teaching approach adopted by the **Australian** lecturers they encountered required them to understand the content better. They explained that these lecturers did not provide readily available content in their classes because they uploaded this sort of information for students to access using ICT. For example, Toan described “in classes lecturers didn’t provide available knowledge to students because all the content was available on the websites. They tried to involve students in thinking and understanding to build up their own knowledge” (Toan, Int. 3). Additionally, students had more time to think and understand the content with the online delivery mode. This was because, according to Truong, he could access lecture notes and related learning materials in advance, so he often prepared before going to classes, and in the lectures he did not need to spend much time taking notes compared to his experiences in **Vietnam** (Truong, 2).

According to Thu, “the lecturers in this University often expected students to show their understanding and discuss knowledge from different points of view” (Thu, Int. 2). The encouragement from the **Australian** lecturers for students to make contributions to class discussions was important to students as it made them think about what they were studying and feel more confident engaging in such activities, even though they were not always involved in discussions themselves (Huong, Int. 2). Moreover, the encouragement of the lecturers enhanced students’ understanding of the learning content, as described by Ha:

In the classes, the lecturers always listen to and encourage contributions of the students because they think that each individual has different ideas and no one is absolutely right, not even the lecturers themselves. Therefore, contributions, personal ideas, debates and listening to others are encouraged, which strongly involves students in discovering and understanding the learning content. (Ha, Int. 3)

Lan, Thu and Truong, attributed their better understandings of the learning content to the design of the learning tasks and assessment requirements in this blended context. These participants reported that in this ICT-based context they were always expected to undertake more investigation using technologies in order to deeply understand what they learnt, otherwise they could not have met the assessments' requirements (Lan, Thu & Truong, Int. 2). In other words, **Australian** lecturers required the students to undertake ICT-based tasks that were designed to show how they understood the learning content from different perspectives. Lan and Ha noted that they were happy with this approach because the availability of online learning resources enabled them to more easily find information and expand their knowledge. This even made them feel more interested in understanding the subject content (Lan, Int. 3; Ha, Int.2).

In addition, being made aware of plagiarism caused the students to care more about understanding the subject matter and less likely to just repeat what they had read or been told. For example, Phung explained:

Here [in **Australia**], plagiarism is considered to be taboo. Students are taught quite carefully on this issue. In most subjects, lecturers remind the students of plagiarism and the assignments are checked by using a software; and if direct wordings of content were repeated, plagiarism is detected. This helps students get a proper understanding that plagiarism was unacceptable and they learn more seriously and harder. They must read more to understand and to find out points of view for themselves. (Phung, Int. 2)

The role of ICT is clear here because in **Australian** University lecturers used ICT to detect plagiarism, it was an additional motivation to students to engage in deep understanding rather than just reproduce the content in the same way as they accessed it.

5.3.2 Critical thinking

When asked about comparing and evaluating the learning resources or challenging the information they had to learn in the **Vietnamese** context, all the participants' responses revealed that the students did not engage in such critical activities because there was no

need to do so. For example, Lan explained “when studying with one main source of material which turned out to be the only one, I was not supposed to think but only accept and remember” (Lan, Int. 3). So critical thinking appeared to be irrelevant.

Khanh, Lan and Thu pointed out that the courses in **Vietnam** contained predetermined knowledge that students had to passively accept (Khanh, Lan & Thu, Int. 1). In addition, the lecturers provided students with ready knowledge, so they did not need to spend time thinking or judging the learning content. For example, Huyen and Thu commented:

In **Vietnam**, the learning content was available in a pre-processed form [as in a text book or lecturers’ notes]. Therefore, students only hear and remember instead of using critical thinking. (Huyen, Int. 3)

In **Vietnamese** Universities, almost all the learning materials are provided by the lecturers, which lead to the fact that students are not supposed to think and research by themselves and it is enough for them to receive the information and learn by heart. (Thu, Int. 3)

The above quotes indicate that students were not expected to challenge the learning content because it was already judged, chosen and approved by their lecturers. Students were expected to follow the provided knowledge because “if lecturers think it is right, it should be right and vice versa” (Lan, Int. 2). Interestingly, the lecturers rarely admitted that they were wrong or made a mistake in front of their students. Tri revealed: “Lecturers often think that they know everything and are always better than students” (Tri, Int. 2). In the same way, Lan explained:

Historically, I find that lecturers always lecture for students to listen and take notes. Additionally, lecturers are often self-important, they always think they know everything and are always right in front of students, so they never think they are wrong or they never admit being wrong in front of students. (Lan, Int. 1)

Class time, therefore, “was mainly spent on receiving information instead of analysing or evaluating the learning content” (Huyen, Int. 3). The assessment requirements “concentrated too much on memorizing and repeating the transferred knowledge, which

formed students' routines of listening and following teachers' knowledge without active thoughts or challenging the knowledge" (Huyen, Int. 1).

All of the participants indicated that the learning content in **Australian** University appeared to be uniquely designed which made them think critically and to make judgement of a range of materials available to them, especially the online resources. For example, Lan and Toan explained the reasons why they became more engaged in critical thinking when they got a chance to access a number of different learning resources online:

Studying in this University [in **Australia**], I had the chance to access many sources of material via the internet which was abundant and informative, even for one single problem. For example, if a student searched for an article on the internet, he or she could find a range of related articles written from different or various perspectives. Therefore, it required him or her to analyze, compare and evaluate to select suitable material or information. (Lan, Int. 3)

...when I learned in English [in **Australia**], information sources were abundant. There were a number of learning resources available online, so it involved students in critical thinking, analysis, and evaluation to select appropriate knowledge. (Toan, Int. 3)

All participants mentioned the important role of **Australian** lecturers in making them engage more in critical thinking. For example, Toan described that the lecturers normally raised questions or learning issues and required students to think, judge and build upon their own knowledge (Toan, Int. 3). Particularly, Truong explained, this learning environment stimulated critical thinking ability because "students were always involved in creating their own knowledge instead of reciting the provided knowledge" (Truong, Int. 3). In addition, the lecture notes were provided prior to the class, and in the class, lecturers had time to explain and discuss other points of view. Students had "more time to listen, analyze and compare the given information with their own knowledge about the subject matter" (Tri, Int. 3). To demonstrate how lecturers encouraged students in critical thinking while using learning resources, Ha recalled her experience in the subject Business Ethics and Corporate Social Responsibility:

At the beginning of the course, my lecturer confirmed that there was nothing always true and vice versa. Whether it was true or false depended on the ways we evaluated and perceived the information. This was a quite difficult course because it was based on various theories such as economic theories and theories of social relationships. The various theories required students to analyse, compare, reason and evaluate the available knowledge in order to find out their own answers. (Ha, Int. 3)

Regarding how the assessments in the ICT-based context supported critical thinking, Lan explained that each subject she had encountered had clear criteria for testing and assessing (see Appendix 9), so it enabled her to judge what she needed to learn and achieve or what was necessary for her to meet the subject requirements (Lan, Int. 2). Comparing how students used learning resources in exams between the **Vietnamese** and **Australian** environments Toan said that **Vietnamese** examinations were usually limited to textbook information and lecture notes and students were expected to recite the provided knowledge in the exams. In **Australia**, Toan added, students did not necessarily follow any textbook, and they had access to various online learning resources which they could analyze and assess to form personal views or opinions (Toan, Int. 2). The students in this new ICT-based environment, therefore, were encouraged to find and present information and arguments from a range of different learning resources which they had to actively choose based on their own judgments.

5.3.3 Practical application

Most of the participants (seven out of nine) revealed that in the **Vietnamese** learning environment, they rarely applied their knowledge to real life situations. However, two participants found that what they had learnt helped them in their practical work:

I find the knowledge in my accounting area is quite close to the actual work, so I can apply what I have learnt. (Lan, Int. 1)

Our lecturers had introduced very fundamental knowledge needed for a construction engineer to design and execute structures - from the very simple to the more complicated. (Truong, Int. 1)

Yet, the majority of the participants doubted the practical use of the learning content that they had in **Vietnam**. They insisted that the content was outdated and mainly theoretical, which caused a difficulty in applying the information to real work. For example, Khanh stated that he could not see the practical value of what he had learnt because the information had been outdated: “teaching content was often outdated; even if we may have understood the content, it was not helpful to use in an everyday situation” (Khanh, Int. 1). In addition, Phung thought that the reason students could not use the content was because it lacked practical application: “The teaching content is extremely theoretical and far from the reality, so students were not able to apply it to a real life situation (Phung, Int. 1).

As the previous sections have noted, students were not encouraged to apply the knowledge that they acquired in practical settings but instead, as Lan explained: “Most lecturers wanted students to remember and recite what they had offered; only some of them required students to demonstrate the capability of thinking and applying the learning content, but only for some given cases” (Lan, Int. 1).

In spite of complaints that the **Vietnamese** environment did not encourage them to apply their gained knowledge, seven of the participants admitted that they did not really care much about the practicality of the subjects content as all they wanted was to pass the exams and get their degree:

...the students at the time mainly aimed at getting the degree in order to have a job after graduation. They did not want to study and did not have a passion for learning. (Lan, Int. 1)

My target was the degree and passing the exams. I just learned without any ideas about what I learnt for. (Phung, Int. 1)

According to all the participants, in order to pass exams students only needed to learn by heart what they were provided by lecturers, and the application of subject content was not a concern.

On the contrary, in **Australian** blended learning environment, all the participants asserted that they were aware of the practical use of what they learnt. Six participants attributed this to the characteristics of the subject content. For example, Truong believed that “the learning content had high practical value and was designed based on practical knowledge and requirements from real life” (Truong, Int. 2). Tri explained that scenarios used by the lecturers were “hot issues in practical conditions”, and such examples were appreciated by students because they could use what they had learnt to deal with real issues (Tri, Int. 2). Ha asserted that the content helped students understand the close relationship between theory and practice, which encouraged them to engage more in their learning and to feel more confident with their practical knowledge (Ha, Int. 2). She added that the practical use of knowledge was at the heart of teaching approaches of **Australian** lecturers:

Teaching methods of lecturers focus on the practical application of lecture content. For example, lecturers often invite experienced people such as managers from many different careers related to subjects to talk and share experiences in their daily work with students. (Ha, Int. 2)

In a similar vein, Thu referred to her experiences of studying subjects in Finance with ICT support, which increased her practical application of the subject content:

In this ICT-based context, lecturers often used practical scenarios which required students to research through the internet or websites to find ongoing contemporary information, such as financial statements and actual data reports of current companies to analyse, compare and practice. For example, in a Foreign-Currency Trading subject, students had an opportunity to practice on a virtual environment rather than just learn words or numbers theoretically. This teaching practice helped students feel closer to practical activities, making the subject matter easier to remember and become more interesting. (Thu, Int. 2)

Tri also asserted that the lecturers in this **Australian** environment had practical work experience in their subject area, so “they could help students integrate the learning content into practice” (Tri, Int. 2). Supporting this idea, Huyen and Lan admitted that they often connected what they learnt to real life situations because that was encouraged and supported by their lecturers, e.g. lecturers encouraged them to use ICT facilities to connect the content studied to current real world situations (Huyen, Int. 2; Lan, Int. 3).

Six participants indicated that assessments or learning tasks were often based in real life scenario analysis which required them to be able to apply the subject matter to practical use. For example, Khanh explained that the scenarios given in assignments were designed to solve practical problems through applying subject knowledge (Khanh, Int. 3). For Ha, this type of assessment had assisted her in retrieving the knowledge she had “learnt without paying attention to the value of its practice in the **Vietnamese** context” (Ha, Int. 2). The theoretical knowledge that students had achieved in **Vietnam** became meaningful when they had a chance to apply it in the **Australian** environment. Similarly, the **Australian** learning environment was believed by Khanh and Tri to offer an opportunity for **Vietnamese** students to improve their ability to apply the basic knowledge gained in **Vietnam**, because they had more opportunities to practice what they already knew (e.g. Khanh, Int. 3 & Tri, Int. 2). In addition, Phung asserted that in **Australia**, students were equipped with the necessary skills of recognizing and solving practical problems (Phung, Int. 3). Students therefore were trained not only in theoretical knowledge but also for practical use of the learning content, which improved students’ confidence in facing professional real-life issues.

5.3.4 Summary

To sum up, the data analysis regarding active intellectual inquiry and meaningful learning with ICT revealed how the participants responded to the differences in the two learning environments - in **Vietnam** and **Australia**. The findings showed that in **Vietnam**, students rarely engaged in critical thinking and rarely considered deep understanding or practical uses for the subjects they studied. The participants revealed

that they mainly memorised and recited the learning content provided by their lecturers in order to pass exams. This was because students were expected to comply with provided content; in addition, critical thinking and practical skills were not required or encouraged by lecturers. The learning content contained predetermined knowledge and was limited in quantity, so it seemed to be easy and safe for students to just memorize and recite the knowledge. Subject content was primarily theoretical knowledge and a practical linkage was not part of the courses.

In relation to ICT-based blended learning environment in **Australia**, the participants' responses indicated that they gradually changed their approach and engaged more in explorative learning activities because they were required, encouraged and taught how to do so. Students were no longer provided with a limited quantity of predetermined and processed learning content to be able to memorise and replicate, as in **Vietnam**. They built upon knowledge by drawing on various learning resources with their lecturers' guidance to meet the lecturers' requirements. The teaching approaches and the convenience of the learning content delivery using ICT were considered by the participants as being supportive of involvement in deep understanding, critical thinking and practical application of knowledge. More chances to deepen their knowledge and connect it to daily life made them to adjust their learning styles to engage in deeper and more critical thinking. Therefore, it was believed by most of the participants that the combination of the **Vietnamese** and **Australian** practices with ICT support was complementary for students' success in their learning. This was because the theoretical foundations of knowledge that students obtained in **Vietnam** became meaningful in the **Australian** blended environment, which focused more on the meanings and practical use of the content learnt.

5.4 Learner's Autonomy and Responsibility for Own Learning with ICT

The data presented in this section provides descriptions about the extent to which the students were aware of their learning goals and their ability to act upon those goals independently. It shows how the students could take control of and responsibility for their own learning, and how they reflected upon their own learning in the ICT-based learning environment.

5.4.1 Initiative and setting goals

All the participants expressed that students were not really made aware of the overall learning goals and objectives in their studies in **Vietnam** to be able to direct their own learning. They were not provided with clear learning purposes to achieve or specific requirements to follow in a subject. For example, Huyen and Ha observed:

There was no requirement on level of understanding or what knowledge was needed in the subjects. Therefore, we did not know what and how to organise our study. (Huyen, Int. 1)

I myself looked forward to hearing clear objectives from lecturers because this would be helpful for students' learning orientation and revision for tests or exams. However, I was not satisfied, so like most other students I waited for available content from lecturers and learnt by heart for exams. (Ha, Int. 1)

In the above quotes, students seemed to want to plan their study but this was not possible. As Phung explained "I didn't know what I was studying for" which made her have no inspiration to study, so that during the learning time, she just waited and did things according to what was directed by the lecturers in order to pass the exams (Phung, Int. 1). Likewise, Khanh indicated that "many students wondered what this subject was for?" (Khanh, Int. 1). Tri also explained that students "didn't know what they were learning things for or how to learn effectively" (Tri, Int. 1). Thus, in a **Vietnamese** University students were not expected, and were not able, to identify their learning goals or to guide their own study.

In the **Australian** ICT-based context, the findings indicate that the **Vietnamese** students felt they could better understand the purpose of their learning and they were more likely

to plan their own study accordingly. The participants all agreed that they could understand subject learning objectives and requirements to prepare for their learning activities because they could access subject outlines and content via the university's websites at the beginning of each semester. For example, Toan and Truong described:

In this University [in **Australia**], I could access the subject information on the University's websites, where I could find out what the subjects were about, the purpose of learning them and the requirements for their study. Therefore, I could understand the meaning of the subjects and plan my study easier than in **Vietnam** (Toan, Int. 2).

At the beginning of each subject, through the subject website I received the subject outline which provided basic information about objectives, content of such subjects, forms of examinations and assessments.... This helped me to know what kinds of subjects I would study, what for and how to study from the beginning of each subject. (Truong, Int. 1)

According to Toan, in this ICT-based context, he was not only able to orient his learning from the beginning of each subject, but also to receive further guidance in class or when students requested assistance to meet the learning requirements (Toan, Int. 2). Huyen expressed the opinion that in spite of the habit of passively following what lecturers taught, **Vietnamese** students were able to direct their study in this environment:

At first, like many other **Vietnamese** students incurring this new learning environment, it was quite difficult for me because I was used to solely relying on what lecturers taught. Therefore, I did not know how I should study.... Then, I gradually found out that there were clear standards for learning activities, which helped plan my study.... Students could determine their learning objectives based on the standards and lecturers' assistance, so they could endeavour to achieve such standards by their own capability and effort. (Huyen, Int. 3)

Identifying learning goals and establishing a study plan were considered by most of the participants as vital requirements for being successful in the **Australian** ICT-based environment. For instance, Khanh explained, in the ICT-based context the lecturers only guided students to plan their own study: "They did not do everything for students as often seen in **Vietnam**" (Khanh, Int.2). The students, therefore, had to become more

active in determining the learning objectives and planning their study. This characteristic had certain implications for independent learning, which is presented next.

5.4.2 Independent monitoring of their own learning

The data analysis of the participants' interviews regarding how the students took control of and responsibility for their own learning was consistent with their responses to the matter of initiative and setting goals presented in the previous section. None of the participants indicated that they could manage their study independently from their lecturers when they were studying in **Vietnam**, even if they desired to be independent in their study. For example, Toan said:

I was fairly inactive when I was studying in **Vietnam**. I often waited for instructions of lecturers in almost all learning activities. Sometimes I wanted to learn before, but I didn't know what and how to learn. In the first semester, I just learnt right before the exams started. The results weren't good so I felt worried. In the next semester, I learnt the lessons and wanted to focus on study right from the beginning, but I also didn't know how to learn by myself, and then I still had to wait for the lecturers' instructions and only concentrated at the end of the semester. (Toan, Int. 1)

As shown in the above quote, Toan admitted that he could not be proactive in his study or take control of his own learning, even though he did want to be independent in order to improve his knowledge. All other participants also agreed that relying on lecturers' instructions and knowledge in order to pass the subjects was the most popular learning style of **Vietnamese** students. For example, Ha, Phung and Thu said that the students did not know what and how they should learn beyond what they were provided with by the lecturers (Ha, Phung & Thu, Int. 1). In addition, Thu had some other possible reasons for the students' learning style. She stated:

In **Vietnam**, without the lecturers' help, students would not know what they should learn because textbooks were difficult to understand and learning resources were limited. Moreover, students were not encouraged to study on their own and they did not have favourable conditions for self-study, so they had to rely on lecturers' assistance. (Thu, Int. 1)

The quote above plainly indicates that students could not take control of their learning because they were not supported and not expected to do that, so students had to passively follow what their lecturers taught. As a result, Truong asserted that “students could only achieve superficial knowledge because they did not have the necessary skills of self-studying and problem solving” (Truong, Int. 3). It is important to note here that the individuals, who took control of and responsibility for the study, in the **Vietnamese** context, were not the students themselves, but rather their lecturers. Lan explained that students had to rely heavily on their lecturers for subjects knowledge and content. It means, she explained: “If lecturers thought it was right, it should be right and vice versa” (Lan, Int. 2). Students could not construct their own knowledge; they had to rely on what knowledge their lecturers had and how the lecturers felt about the issues in a particular discipline.

While studying in the **Australian** context with ICT support, all of the participants perceived that they had become more independent in their learning. They could gradually take control of their study, because they were required and supported within this blended learning environment by the provisions such as subject outlines with clear learning criteria, various online learning resources as well as encouragement and assistance from lecturers. This setting is described in Tri’s statement:

In this **Australian** blended context, students are quite independent of their lecturers, because they have relatively clear orientation from the beginning of each course through subject outlines and lecture notes which help them know which topics they should learn and how to study. Also, students can have access to diversified material resources online so they can self-study easily. Especially, lecturers here always encourage the independence of students, so students no longer have to rely on their lecturers as in **Vietnam**. (Tri, Int. 2)

As emphasised in the above statement, the students in this ICT-based environment did not have to be passive learners, because they were made aware of the learning goals. They could plan their learning activities and study by themselves with support from the online availability of rich learning resources and lecturers’ encouragement. In expanding this point, Huyen said she was motivated to do more self-study because

“lecturers just gave out an outline and requirements for study; they teach less and involve students in self-exploring based on the lecturers’ guidance and various learning resources” (Huyen, Int. 1). In this **Australian** context, the students were no longer able to get by with just processed knowledge from their lecturers. They had to think for themselves and take responsibility for their own learning. As confirmed by Khanh:

I have learned how to self-study and take responsibility for my learning because teachers only provided necessary guidance or directions for student’s study; they didn’t do it all for students. (Khanh, Int. 2)

Most of the participants (seven of nine) in this study who were familiar with passively waiting for the transmission of knowledge from lecturers, faced some difficulties at the beginning of their studies because “the class time was much less than in **Vietnam**” (Lan, Int. 3) and “mostly lecturers focused on key points of a subject and instructed students to complete self-study, rather than provide students with ready-made subject content for their easy reproduction” (Toan, Int. 3). However, the participants asserted that they gradually overcame the initial difficulty when facing this new ICT-based environment to being more independent in their study. For example, Huyen explained:

In the **Australian** blended learning environment, students must determine their own orientation by themselves, based on suggestions of lecturers via e-learning sites and lectures.... That was also my initial difficulty; I had to spend much time searching and studying a wide content of learning because I did not know what to learn and how to learn. But after that I could grasp the key points of each subject and find out the nature of issues, instead of learning by heart all the knowledge. (Huyen, Int. 3)

Some of the participants attributed the development of their independent learning to being educated about plagiarism in this blended context. For example, Toan and Tri suggested that the plagiarism rules, which were formally introduced to students through the university’s websites or course requirements and strictly applied for their courses had improved their self-discipline in study, their awareness of the importance of self-study and their level of responsibility for their own learning (Toan & Tri, Int. 2). As a result, Phung expressed the opinion that although it took time to engage in self-directed

study, students could acquire necessary skills of recognizing and solving problems by themselves, and became more independent in their study (Phung, Int. 3).

5.4.3 Self-evaluation

In discussions about how students reflected on their own learning, none of the participants thought that they were able to judge their achievements or learning progress by themselves when they were studying in **Vietnam**. Explaining this, Tri said: “We weren’t provided with the assessment criteria so ...we could not know whether we passed the exam or not and at what level” (Tri, Int. 1). In a similar vein, Khanh stated that the lack of specific learning objectives or criteria in a **Vietnamese** University caused students to be unable to control their study or make judgements about their achievements (Khanh, Int. 1). Therefore, as Lan asserted “students had to rely on their lecturers’ judgements” (Lan, Int. 1).

Studying in the **Australian** blended environment, the participants generally believed that they were able to judge their achievements by themselves because of the provision of clear assessment criteria. As discussed earlier, students had online access to “objectives and specific requirements of each subject in general and assessment in particular”, which could help them evaluate and assess their own study (Phung, Int. 1). Moreover, most of the participants indicated that the lecturers in this setting focused more on guiding and orienting students, which assisted them in constructing their own knowledge. “Lecturers act primarily as instructors or guides, and students play a decisive role in their learning and results” (Lan, Int. 2). The lecturers were no longer the sole “knowledge providers” who primarily transferred “predetermined” or “undeniable” information upon which students could rely. Therefore, judging their own learning activities and achievements based on provided criteria was considered to be a compulsory learning requirement for students studying in the **Australian** ICT-based environment.

5.4.4 Summary

In summary, the findings presented in this section have revealed the low level of autonomy and responsibility for personal learning amongst the **Vietnamese** students when they were studying in **Vietnam**. It was hard for the students to become autonomous and take responsibility for their own learning because they were not aware of or involved in the overall learning goals and objectives. Students could not direct and take control of their study. Moreover, students were not expected to be active in taking control and responsibility for their own learning. The students, therefore, relied on their lecturers for knowledge and judgements about their learning outcomes.

In the **Australian** ICT-based learning environment, the findings show that the participants became more autonomous and responsible for their learning. This was because in this new environment they were notified of the learning objectives and provided with clear learning criteria from the beginning of each subject. These provisions helped students understand the aim or purpose of a subject and the criteria for success. Students were also expected to be more independent in, and responsible for, their study because they were required to develop their own knowledge and undertake self-assessment for their achievements. In addition, they were supported by their lecturers with guidance when needed; various online learning resources were available to give them some ease of access for self-study. Therefore, the students could reach a higher level of autonomy and responsibility for their own learning in the **Australian** blended context.

5.5 Conclusion

This chapter has presented the findings relating to how **Vietnamese** international students could become more engaged in active learning in the ICT-enhanced blended learning environment in **Australia**. The potential for developing active learning of the **Vietnamese** students has been addressed through comparison of the level of students'

engagement in learning activities while in the two contexts. The results presented in this chapter indicated that there was a significant difference in the students' engagement in learning in the two settings. It has been suggested that the level of students' engagement in learning activities increased considerably in the **Australian** ICT-based context. It also acknowledged that the students faced initial difficulties in the new learning environment because of their learning habits. However, the ICT-based context required and encouraged them to engage more in learning activities such as investigation, group work and discussions. They also improved their active intellectual inquiry and meaningful learning in that context. Particularly, there was an improvement in deep understanding, critical thinking and practical application of knowledge, which could bring into play the existing basic and theoretical knowledge strength of these **Vietnamese** students. Moreover, their level of autonomy and responsibility for personal learning in the **Australian** ICT-based environment was believed to be higher than in **Vietnam**. The reasons which lead to these significant changes were mainly attributed to the differences in the online availability of the learning content, teaching approaches and assessments. The next chapter brings together these findings with the current literature in the field, discusses the implications of the findings and suggests directions for future research.

Chapter 6

Discussion and Conclusion

6.1 Introduction

This study aimed to investigate active learning among **Vietnamese** international students in an ICT-enhanced blended learning environment in an **Australian** University. The research used a series of three semi-structured interviews with nine **Vietnamese** students in one **Australian** University, and reviews of their course documents. The data collection was guided by the following three research questions:

1. How do **Vietnamese** students perceive their experiences of teaching and learning practice in **Vietnamese** higher education?
2. What types of teaching and learning practice are encountered by **Vietnamese** students in the ICT-enhanced blended learning environment at an **Australian** University?
3. How do **Vietnamese** students become more engaged in active learning when studying in the ICT-based learning environment in **Australia**?

Chapters 4 and 5 presented the findings in relation to the research questions. This chapter aims to provide a discussion of the research questions in relation to the major components of an educational system, namely curriculum, pedagogy and assessment (Bernstein, 1990). Additionally, it aims to outline the educational implications of the study. The chapter starts with a discussion of the teaching and learning practices within the **Vietnamese** and **Australian** contexts, which relates to the first and second research questions. The discussion of the ICT-enhanced blended learning environments and the development of active learning among **Vietnamese** students is then presented in order to answer the third question. The chapter ends with conclusions and recommendations for practice based on this research.

6.2 Discussion

This section focuses on the discussion of the essential characteristics of the educational contexts in **Vietnamese** and **Australian** universities, and how those contexts influenced the learning of nine **Vietnamese** participants of this study who undertook their University study in both the contexts. The discussion is framed by the ‘three message system’ of teaching and learning (Bernstein, (1975, p. 85) - knowledge content (curriculum), teaching approach (pedagogy) and assessment, which are situated in particular learning environments in each of the countries. The potential for developing active learning amongst **Vietnamese** international students in an **Australian** ICT-based learning context is discussed in relation to each dimension.

6.2.1 Knowledge content

This section discusses the knowledge or learning content investigated in both the **Vietnamese** and **Australian** settings. Valid knowledge content for an educational setting, or knowledge content that is supposed to be taught, is referred to as curriculum which is discussed here in relation to active learning. The discussion focuses on the availability of the learning resources recorded in both the **Australian** and **Vietnamese** learning environments, the characteristics of the learning materials regarding their practical application, and how the learning content can promote active learning among **Vietnamese** students.

Knowledge content in Vietnam and constraints around active learning

This investigation revealed that the knowledge content available to the participants in **Vietnam** was likely to be limited to prescribed resources such as textbooks or specific curriculum. These learning resources were normally issued by the Ministry of

Education and Training (MOET) for use in all the colleges or universities in **Vietnam** (Hayden & Lam, 2010). The centralised distribution of the learning content is also described by Hayden and Lam (2010) as being the result of “a strong culture of centralism in decision-making about higher education” (p. 20). By and large **Vietnam** still remains a one-party communist nation with centralised control over the country (J. Peeraer & Petegem, 2012). MOET traditionally assumed system-wide responsibility for education and training in the government (Q. H. Tran, Vu, & Sloper, 1995). Recently, V. T. H. Tran (2011) talks about the Ministry still determining curriculum frameworks for all study programmes in the higher education system. Particularly, it prescribes frameworks for specialised areas of study or training programs including learning objectives, knowledge requirements, structural curriculum components and the allocation of time to these components (Hayden & Lam, 2010; Nguyen-Phuong-Mai, et al., 2012).

The findings demonstrated that prescribed learning resources, as described by most of the participants in this study, were regarded as assisting students to locate and then memorise the required content in order to acquire subject knowledge. Several participants commented that the memorisation of the provided knowledge was favoured by **Vietnamese** students because the content was prearranged and recommended by lecturers, so students could just follow it, which was straightforward and safe in terms of assessment. In this type of learning, understanding or discovering the content was not necessary, which indeed did not encourage active learning. As pointed out by Avenstrup (2007), when the required learning content is “based on the encyclopaedic view of knowledge, a neatly categorised and prescribed quantity of unchanging information, learnable and containable” (Avenstrup, 2007, p. 4), then only memorisation and repetition skills are developed. The impact of such learning on students is echoed by Chen’s (2010) study of Chinese students, one of whom explained her learning experiences in China as follows: “I feel that learning is a process of “accumulation”. After a while, you will realise you’ve understood something, but not when you’re learning it” (p. 94). In the Confucian heritage culture, according to Lee (1996) and Volet (1999), memorising is perceived as a crucial step towards acquiring a deeper understanding of knowledge in the future. Therefore, in **Vietnam**, the core learning

content is traditionally provided to students to memorise in order to be well prepared for their further study.

The lack of learning resources and ICT support in the **Vietnamese** context was revealed to deter the participants from actively engaging in their study. They all agreed that **Vietnamese** students, including themselves, hardly engaged in learning activities such as searching, reading additional material and critical thinking, which they partly attributed to the limited access they had to other learning resources, including the minimal application of ICT. The paucity of learning resources for students in **Vietnamese** higher education still appears to be the case, as has been noted in relatively recent studies by researchers such as Harman & Bich (2010) and T. L. P. Pham (2012). Even though some ICT based programs and resources have been introduced to many **Vietnamese** universities in the past few years, according to Le, Tran and Hunger (2013), **Vietnamese** students do not see the necessity of acquiring subject knowledge via the internet, so the number of students who use the additional resources for further study remains low. This implies that increasing the application of ICT itself does not necessarily result in transforming student learning. Therefore, while the provision of learning resources and online document delivery is an important achievement, it does not necessarily lead to students' active engagement in learning. The traditional **Vietnamese** view of what constitutes knowledge that should be taught to students also has a part to play. It is not essential for students to acquire knowledge through additional sources when they can succeed in their study without doing so. Thus students were intrinsically motivated to acquire knowledge simply for the sake of assessment, rather than perceiving it to be relevant to their practical needs.

As evident in the findings of this study, knowledge content in **Vietnam** was often theoretically focused, rather than being focus on providing practical applications. The participants explained that the learning content often lacked relevance to modern professional practices and also was often out of date. This problem has been continuously brought to educators' attention in the plan for the fundamental and comprehensive reform of higher education in **Vietnam** from 2006-2020, where MOET explicitly acknowledged that subject content is too theoretically focused and not linked

to practical needs (MOET, 2005). T. L. P. Pham (2012) quotes the chancellor of a **Vietnamese** University where the reform (credit-based training system) has been applied over the past decade, but the lack of practical relevance of the curriculum is still an issue:

We have to follow the national curriculum frameworks but these curricula have not been updated for many years. Several curriculum frameworks no longer fit the current situation; it sometimes happens that when we renew a curriculum the specialized knowledge is modern but the mandatory knowledge in the curriculum framework is out-of-date. (p. 302)

The knowledge content in **Vietnam**, as revealed in this study, was lacking in practical application and centrally circulated by the government in the form of government-approved texts, which did not encourage the participants to study the content in a meaningful way or apply what they learnt to authentic tasks. This situation was significantly different to that which was evident when they studied in the **Australian** context.

The authenticity and real-world complexity of knowledge content in Australia

The findings of this study showed that the participants, when studying in an ICT-enhanced blended learning environment, were exposed to a diversity of learning experiences, which encouraged critical thinking and understanding. The knowledge content was not based upon textbooks, as it was in **Vietnamese** context. Instead, the participants had to deal with a number of learning materials in ICT-based context such as lecture notes, books and journals, which assumed extensive reading and critical thinking to deeply understand the issues at hand. The habit of memorising subject content, or what Egege and Kutieleh (2004, p. 76) call the “passive, non-critical rote-learning” style of South-East Asian students, did not work for the **Vietnamese** student participants in the **Australian** ICT-based context because there was too much diverse information, and it was not possible to memorise all of it. The challenges the participants faced in this new learning environment included locating and integrating the core subject knowledge from the various learning resources. Instead of simply absorbing predetermined learning content, the students were expected to construct their

own understanding of this content. Students were expected to act within a non-structured learning context where they had to self-direct their learning to build up their own subject knowledge (Kearsley, 2000). The findings in the study of Chen (2010) also showed that **Australian** lecturers did not prescribe subject knowledge for students to learn but provided a suggested list of readings. Therefore, when studying in the **Australian** ICT-based environment, the **Vietnamese** students were not able to rely on a provided learning content. They had to read, analyse and understand the information and extend their knowledge by using additional resources (including consultations with the tutors and online activities) in order to build their subject knowledge.

The availability of ICT access and consultations with the librarians on developing learners' information literacy significantly assisted the participants of this study to overcome initial lack of ICT skills when studying in **Australia**. Kearsley (2000) asserts that the use of ICT provides online access to subject domain expertise and a plethora of learning resources which can assist students in the problem-solving process. The participants explained that they initially encountered some degree of difficulties in discovering the content through the ICT due to previous learning habits and limited searching skills. However, these initial difficulties were soon reduced by the provision of reading guidelines and available ICT assistance from by librarians and lecturers to support their online information searching and other ICT skills.

This type of information literacy is common for **Australian** universities (Hughes, 2013). Specifically, Hughes asserts that students are assisted by librarians in getting started with searching, finding more information and identifying what information is academic. In addition, he adds students also receive support from their lecturers within the courses (Hughes, 2013). Similarly, findings of Chen (2010) indicate that the **Australian** lecturers in her study did not only provide students with various learning resources, but also guided them on "how to search the internet and what databases to go to and digital repositories that they need to go to in order to access those readings that are relevant to their context" (p. 121). Therefore, in the **Australian** ICT-based environment it was evident that the **Vietnamese** students were trained in necessary searching skills and also had ICT support to help them engage more in exploring,

understanding and expanding upon their own knowledge. They all gradually got used to online access to various learning resources that made them able to use ICT in exploring and understanding learning issues. Many of the participants even commented that this new skill and new possibility made them feel at ease in their study.

The participants reflected that the practical aspects of subject content in **Australia** encouraged students to understand and apply what they had learnt to daily life. Many of the participants felt that students were generally encouraged to expand upon and obtain deep knowledge of the subjects because of the real-world applicability of the knowledge content in **Australia**. The participants saw the learning content as having close relevance to contemporary professional practice because it was updated regularly, and ICT support also provided more opportunities for students to keep their knowledge up to date. For example, in some subjects the participants had to interact in a virtual environment, which made them see the value of understanding subject content and building practical skills. In **Australia**, universities can make changes and update course content frequently, because each University has responsibility for academic standards and it has considerable autonomy over the course content (James, 2003). This is quite different to **Vietnamese** universities who have to rely on the MOET, so it is difficult to make regular adjustments to meet practical requirements. Moreover, the **Australian** higher education system has focused on work-integrated learning to prepare graduates for the workforce, because stakeholders such as the government, universities and employers consider the goal of graduate employment in the professional workforce as of paramount importance (McIlveen et al., 2011). This focus has increased the practicality of the learning content which encouraged this group of **Vietnamese** students to achieve deeper understanding of the practical use of the subject knowledge.

6.2.2 Constructivist learning environment

Active learning is promoted in a learning environment where students are provided with opportunities to study collaboratively, and use various tools as well as various learning sources in order to construct their own knowledge (Paily, 2013; Ugwuegbulam &

Nwebo, 2014; B. G. Wilson, 1996). This section focuses on physical aspects of the learning environments, including classroom arrangement and the application of ICT in both **Vietnamese** and **Australian** contexts. It discusses the potential of these environments for active learning in the two contexts.

The physical learning environment in the Vietnamese context

The findings of this study indicated that the classroom arrangement in **Vietnam** encouraged passive learning, rather than active involvement in group work or interactive activities. The participants asserted that students in **Vietnamese** universities often studied in “traditional” classes, which normally accommodated about 50-60 students with rows of desks in a fixed line and with the teacher sitting at the front on a platform higher than the class floor. Many of the participants agreed that the class seating arrangement reflected a hierarchical relationship between lecturers and students, and only supported a one-way information transmission from lecturers to students. This classroom arrangement, as alleged by the participants, did assist lecturers to deliver large amounts of knowledge to many learners at the same time. However, they commented that the arrangement created a distance between lecturers and students as well as among the students, so students were discouraged from interacting or working together with their lecturers and peers. According to Bandiera, Larcinese and Rasul (2010), a high student-to-lecturer ratio also reduces tutoring activities and diminishes students’ participation. The inflexible and fixed seating arrangements in **Vietnamese** classrooms are also recognised by Nguyen-Phuong-Mai, Terlouw and Pilot (2012) as obstructing diverse grouping strategies such as group work or cooperative learning.

The heavy, multiple hour load of daily face-to-face study and the scarcity of ICT support in **Vietnamese** universities were perceived by the participants as obstacles to students’ involvement in self-study and further individual investigation. The participants generally agreed that, as students in **Vietnam**, they had to spend most of their time in a face-to-face class. Each course, as described by the participants, required students to attend a number of subjects and they were often scheduled for many full

days of face-to-face classes. Attending face-to-face classes can bring students certain benefits. For example, the findings of McCarthy (2010) and Smyth, Houghton, Cooney & Casey (2012) show that interactive activities in a face-to-face environment can help the learners engage with peers and develop close connections, which possibly promotes an effective learning association outside the official class time. In the **Vietnamese** context, face-to-face classes were valued because, as mentioned earlier, there was a limited number of learning materials and inadequate access to online resources. Lectures were considered to be the sole and the most reliable learning resource, so coming to the classes was the most effective, and only way of learning. However, too many face-to-face classes and a lack of ICT support also led to students spending most of their time on listening and taking notes from lecturers presenting in the classes; there was very little time (as well as lack of online access) to do further study or independently investigate learning issues.

The learning environment in the Australian context

In the **Australian** environment, the classroom arrangement was described by the participants as being more supportive for group work and interactive activities. The participants generally agreed that students had more opportunities to interact with lecturers and other students. Students not only attended lectures in lecture halls but they also had tutorial activities in small classrooms equipped with portable chairs and tables for a small number of students. As some of the participants mentioned, there were only about 10-20 students in the class. None of the participants had ever experienced this type of classroom when they were studying in **Vietnam**.

The findings did not reveal much difference between the learning environment in the classrooms in **Vietnam** and the lecture halls in **Australia**, but there were a number of dissimilarities reported in relation to the tutorial classrooms. In the small and flexible rooms with few learners, most of the participants indicated that students felt closer to lecturers and peers; students found it easier to understand the learning content and they were better able to communicate or interact with their lecturers and peers. In the tutorial

classrooms, the participants also asserted that students were able to observe the lecturers and other students' activities, and it was also easier for lecturers to manage their students and organise different learning activities, such as group work and discussions, to engage students in exchanging and sharing experiences.

These findings are supported by C. T. Nguyen (2012) who found that **Vietnamese** international students in **Australia** engage more in discussions and sharing experiences with peers in tutorial activities, than they do in lectures. The current study result, therefore, confirms that a learning environment with flexible tutorial classrooms can facilitate rich environments where students can be involved more in interactions with lecturers and peers (Sharp, 2006).

This investigation also showed that ICT support in the **Australian** learning environment provided more opportunities for **Vietnamese** students to access a wider variety of information sources and engage more in learning activities. The findings of Oliver, O'Donoghue and Harper (2003) point out that **Australia**, a nation with a long history of supplying flexible learning opportunities for students in tertiary education, has a distance education record going back further than most other nations. In addition, they assert that **Australia** has a high degree of capacity and expertise in the application of ICT in its higher education system (R. Oliver, et al., 2003). The universities of **Australia** have positioned themselves in response to "the digital learning environment" through applying new learning approaches such as e-learning, flexible learning and blended learning (Sappey & Relf, 2010).

The findings in this study indicated that the application of ICT such as e-learning and blended learning in the **Australian** University enabled **Vietnamese** international students to have flexible access to learning content and participation in different learning activities. Many of the participants asserted that they felt more capable in searching and investigating because they were enabled to do so through the e-learning space. The participants explained that in the **Australian** ICT-based environment, they had accounts to access e-learning sites and a number of online learning resources during

their courses, so they did not have to rely on knowledge transmission from their lecturers in classes. In addition, they added that resources such as online forums also motivated them to feel more confident to discuss, ask questions or share ideas compared with face-to-face learning. The participants also indicated that they did not worry much about “losing face”, as they had enough time to think and proofread carefully before posting their messages on online forums. There were no reported instances of participants feeling unsafe in their online learning experiences in this blended environment. The findings of this study suggest that the combination of face-to-face and online instruction can offer a potential compromise which helps students become more active and independent in their learning.

The blended learning environment in **Australia** was perceived by all of the participants as a factor supporting their increasing engagement in learning activities such as discussions, self-study and the practical application of knowledge. In this ICT-based learning context, the participants indicated that the students did not need to attend face-to-face classes most of the time during week days as they did in **Vietnam**. They explained that students normally had about three or four subjects per semester and they only needed to attend a maximum of three face-to-face hours a week for each subject including lectures and tutorial classes, so the total face-to-face time was about nine to twelve hours per week. The participants commented that in this **Australian** ICT-based setting they did not see their lecturers and other students as much as they did in the **Vietnamese** context, but the interaction were regularly occurring via email and online media. Students could also make appointments for an individual consultation with their lecturers at a certain time during the study weeks to have further assistance and discussion if needed. In addition, the participants indicated that in the blended mode, students could access learning content from a distance and do self-study anytime at their convenience, which helped them prepare well and feel more confident in interactions in classes or online mediums, as well as in the application of subject knowledge into practice. A number of studies by researchers such as McCarthy (2010), Hsu (2011) and Smyth, et al. (2012) conclude that a blended learning environment can help students obtain knowledge and feedback from various resources, motivate self-study and develop confidence in applying what they learn into practice. This current study result confirmed

that the combination of face-to-face classes and online learning in the blended courses is useful in providing **Vietnamese** students with more opportunities to actively engage in their learning.

6.2.3 Constructivist teaching approaches

This section discusses the teaching approaches in the **Vietnamese** and **Australian** contexts and how the teaching approaches impacted on the extent to which the students engaged in learning activities such as discussions, critical thinking and autonomous learning to construct their own knowledge. The discussion focuses on the role of lecturers and their relationship with students, the instructional sequences that the lecturers follow, the delivery styles and how the lecturers integrate ICT into teaching processes.

Teaching approaches in the Vietnamese context

The findings of this study revealed that the role of **Vietnamese** lecturers was extremely important for the participant students. Traditionally, **Vietnamese** lecturers are profoundly respected and cared for by the whole society (C. T. Nguyen, 2012; Phuong-Mai, et al., 2006). This tradition supports the high “power distance” score in the findings of Hofstede and Hofstede (2005) asserting that the less powerful members in a country with high power distance such as **Vietnam** “expect and accept that power is distributed unequally” (p. 46). Moreover, the limited learning and constrained resources, as described previously, also indicate why the role of a lecturer is considered to be the ultimate source of learning content (Jin & Cortazzi, 1998). The realities of the **Vietnamese** tradition, as well as the evidence from previous research, explain why **Vietnamese** lecturers’ knowledge is highly respected, and students often regard their lecturers as “gurus” who can be relied upon and whose knowledge should be remembered and passed on. However, there existed a considerable distance in the relationship between students and their lecturers, which deterred students from

interacting with their lecturers and developing critical thinking skills. Therefore, the results of this study confirmed that while the **Vietnamese** lecturers helped students have a strong theoretical knowledge, their teaching style was perceived to discourage the active engagement of students in constructing their own knowledge and understanding.

There was a consistency in **Vietnamese** lecturers' teaching styles noted by the participants in this study. The lecturers often consistently followed predetermined teaching content for every single component, which prevented lecturers from paying the necessary attention to students' concerns, and discouraged students from engaging in constructing their own knowledge. Teacher-centred teaching approaches, focusing on one-way communication of knowledge transmission, were consistently employed. This teaching practice is also acknowledged by a number of studies by researchers such as Harman & Bich (2010), C. T. Nguyen (2011) and T. T. Tran (2013b) who confirm that teaching approaches in **Vietnamese** higher education still remain traditional in style and support passive learning. The reasons why these approaches to teaching are still retained in **Vietnamese** universities, and are reflected in the current study, are expounded by Hung (2014) who argues that the teaching styles of **Vietnamese** lecturers are strongly influenced by culture and a "mechanism wall". He explains:

There are content-based education curricula and programs, which are focusing on remembering concrete facts and figures only; there are expert-based teaching approaches that relied on educators only. (p. 76)

The investigations of the current study confirmed that the teaching style in **Vietnam** could systematically provide fundamental knowledge to help students establish a firm theoretical basis, and it could be suitable for the learning styles of students who were accustomed to being "spoon fed" to pass exams. However, it failed to involve students in learning activities because there was not enough time spent on fostering students' engagements in learning and their practical application of subject knowledge in order to build up their own knowledge.

According to the findings of this study, the application of ICT among **Vietnamese** lecturers mostly replicated traditional teaching practice. The lecturers mainly used ICT for presenting knowledge content to students. They often applied ICT resources, such as PowerPoint, to show the learning content while simultaneously reading it aloud for students and expecting them to take notes, instead of showing the content and commenting on it with extra opinion and information. This accords with the use of ICT in teaching practices reported by Peeraer and Petegem (2012) who studied 783 **Vietnamese** teacher educators in different teacher education institutions:

Vietnamese teacher educators mostly used ICT in teaching practice in a way it mainly replaces traditional practice. Teacher educators sometimes or regularly used word processing software for production of documents (73.7%), presentation software was used for lecturing (55.0%) or they used ICT to access information... 57.6% of the teacher educators never or rarely used subject-specific software for integration into lesson practice. (pp. 98-99)

The reasons for the limited use of ICT in teaching practice among **Vietnamese** lecturers might relate to the fact that the government has just recently started actively encouraging the use of ICT in education. The MOET only announced its initial plan for the application of ICT in education in 2000, and promoted the use of ICT in teaching and learning practice by launching the “year of ICT” as late as 2008 (J. Peeraer & Petegem, 2010). Therefore, more time to build up the infrastructure and literacy for ICT applications is required in order for ICT integration to take effect (Heeks, Gao, & Ospina, 2010). Moreover, predetermined teaching content, as discussed earlier, also creates a considerable constraint on the successful use of ICT in teaching to promote active learning. This result also implies that the increasing application of ICT in education is essential, but it does not necessarily mean that the availability of ICT can involve students in learning without a proper pedagogical approach.

Teaching approaches in the Australian context

This investigation indicated that the role of the **Australian** lecturers and their counterparts in **Vietnam** differed with regard to their relationship with students. The

participants in this study generally agreed that students were able to become more independent, while at the same time they felt equal and closer in the relationship with their lecturers in the **Australian** context. In particular, the participants explained that students did not rely much on their lecturers because they were oriented from the beginning of the course with the necessary information about subjects, guidelines for study and learning materials, so they were able to take more control of their study. The subject outlines helped students understand subject meaning, learning objectives and requirements in advance to prepare for their learning activities. In addition, the participants indicated that the available access to abundant learning resources meant that the lecturers' knowledge was no longer the sole learning source for the students. **Vietnamese** proverbs like “without teachers, one can do nothing”, “like good teachers, like good students” or “the king, the teacher, and then the father” were not necessarily relevant in the **Australian** context.

The role of the **Australian** lecturers is perceived as an important contributor to active learning. A number of participants in this study acknowledged that the **Australian** lecturers they encountered were not considered as gurus of knowledge who could do no wrong and deliver transcendental knowledge to students. Therefore, students could not rely on their lecturers for knowledge transmission as they could in **Vietnam**. This situation was, however, a challenge for **Vietnamese** students at the beginning of the course because of their previous learning habits. In this **Australian** context, they could not passively wait for a lecturer's knowledge to be imparted to memorize and regurgitate when required. Students were expected to build upon their own knowledge not only from their lecturers' instruction, but also from various learning resources. These findings are resonant with a study by Rao (2001) who argued that Asian students are used to studying in a “teacher-centred” environment, so they are less autonomous and have difficulties with uncertainty or “fuzziness”. However, the participants in this current study suggested that the **Australian** lecturer's role and their relationship with students encouraged autonomous learning. They also asserted that the independent and close relationships formed helped students engage more in interactions, critical thinking and understanding of the learning content.

The current study found that lecturers in the **Australian** blended setting did not have to follow a formally structured or predetermined teaching content prescribed in a course book. One example of how an **Australian** lecturer followed instructional sequences can be seen from the subject outline sample (see Appendix 6). The teaching content did not appear to be prescribed in a certain course book that the lecturers had to follow chapter by chapter. Instead, the content was organised based on different topics related to the subject, and the lecturers the participants encountered were able to construct the subject knowledge based on various resources such as books, journals and websites. The difference between the instructional sequences in the two learning contexts, as suggested by James (2003), is that individual universities in **Australia** have autonomy over the course content. Recently, the independence of **Australian** universities has been increasingly conditioned by regulation and extra-University laws, but its autonomy from the government is still comparatively high (Baird, 2014). For example, **Australian** universities are now required to follow the current **Australian** Qualifications Framework (AQF, 2013) to ensure consistency across graduates' learning outcomes. The qualifications of graduates regarding the application of knowledge and skills in the framework are presented below:

Knowledge: Graduates at this level will have advanced and integrated understanding of a complex body of knowledge in one or more disciplines or areas of practice.

Skills: Graduates at this level will have expert, specialised cognitive and technical skills in a body of knowledge or practice to independently:

- analyse critically, reflect on and synthesise complex information, problems, concepts and theories
- research and apply established theories to a body of knowledge or practice
- interpret and transmit knowledge, skills and ideas to specialist and non-specialist audience.

(AQF, 2013, p. 59)

The guidelines above confirm that **Australian** lecturers are not required to provide students with predetermined subject content. Instead, they can make necessary adjustments to the instructional sequence in order to make it more flexible and negotiable for students. However, these types of instructional sequences did confuse

Vietnamese students in this study, because they were used to following a predetermined teaching content which was well-structured and presented to them in a fixed order. Nevertheless, the flexibility of the instructional sequence in **Australia**, as reflected by the participants, provided practical benefits, because the delivery of the content was adjusted and updated to meet students' needs. Students could also make contributions to, and build up the subject knowledge through their presentations to the class or online posts.

The teaching styles of the **Australian** lecturers were described in this study to be more student oriented, which could assist in encouraging active learning. The teaching styles in the **Australian** context can vary depending on the lecturers' cultural background. Many lecturers come from different countries worldwide to teach in **Australia**, so they might have certain differences in teaching skills and practices (Vandermensbrugghe, 2004). However, the findings of this study showed that the **Australian** lecturers encountered by this group did not rely on prescribed teaching content. The lecturers were described by most of the participants as facilitators who involved students in learning activities and supported them to develop their own subject knowledge. Many of the participants indicated that the **Australian** lecturers not only provided their students with basic knowledge, but they also spent additional time on students' inquiries and concerns. The lecturers encouraged and respected students' opinions and feedback; they often responded to issues raised by students by engaging students in learning activities such as discussions, group work and critical thinking about those issues. In addition, the participants asserted that the lecturers did not regard themselves as experts who provided students with correct answers or ready-made knowledge, but rather they required students to obtain knowledge based on their own study. These teaching styles were reported by Volet (1999) as challenging to **Vietnamese** students, because Asian international learners seemed to be reserved and rarely get involved in cooperative learning activities in the **Australian** context. However, the current study demonstrated that it was only an initial challenge for the **Vietnamese** students. They were eventually able to become more confident and comfortable in engaging in new learning activities in the **Australian** ICT-based context, especially in critical thinking and interaction with peers and lecturers.

The teaching styles of the **Australian** lecturers were also characterised by the ICT integrated teaching practices, which were described by the participants as supportive of students' active engagement in learning. The use of ICT, as described by the participants, was to assist students in constructing their own subject knowledge rather than transfer ready-made information or knowledge content. Therefore, the integration of ICT in teaching by **Australian** lecturers was perceived as being considerably different from ICT integration by the **Vietnamese**. This result indicates that the manner of integrating ICT in teaching in **Australia** is consistent with a constructivist approach, which promotes active learning (Dexter, et al., 1999; Keengwe & Onchwari, 2011; Ugwuegbulam & Nwebo, 2014).

6.2.4 Authentic assessment

A number of researchers assert that assessment has a strong impact on students' learning. For example, McDonald, Boud, Francis and Gonczi (1995, p. 10) considered assessment as "the most significant prompt for learning. Every act of assessment gives a message to students about what they should be learning and how they should go about it"; and Fuentealba (2011) confirms that "assessment is a powerful learning tool that can enhance learning and education" (p. 157). Assessment also plays an important role in fostering active learning (Drew & Mackie, 2011). This section discusses the ways that both **Vietnamese** and **Australian** higher education used assessment to gauge students' achievements, and how the assessment practices can promote active learning among **Vietnamese** international students in the **Australian** ICT-based learning environment. Particularly, it focuses on the comparison between the two contexts in relation to the types and schedules of assessment tasks; the assessment criteria; the lecturers' expectations for completing assessments and plagiarism issues, and how these educational features contribute (or not) to students' active learning.

Assessment in the Vietnamese context

Regarding the types and schedules of assessment, the findings of this study showed that the evaluation of students' learning outcomes in **Vietnamese** higher education was mainly based upon written tests, individual performances and a final examination. The participants described different types of assessment used in **Vietnam** depending on the kind of subjects they studied. However, they generally agreed that there were very few oral and group tasks during the courses and their learning outcomes were assessed mainly through final exams. Most of the participants thought that the characteristics of the assessments influenced students' learning habits. They indicated that students did not really study during the semesters; instead they just concentrated on studying the subjects before the final exams.

These findings revealed that the assessment process in **Vietnam** put more emphasis on summative assessment procedures and did not encourage interaction or cooperation among students. Summative assessment is used to measure students' achievement and effectiveness of instruction and is generally undertaken at the end of a course or a period of instruction (Boston, 2002; Torrance & Pryor, 1998). Although summative assessment procedures can be used to judge students' overall learning, as well as the efficiency of the instruction process, they are criticized for providing feedback about students' learning outcomes very late in the process (B. Marshall & Ebrary, 2011; Popham, 1999) and for being disconnected from the reality of teaching and learning activities, and lacking information about learning processes (Carlson & Wiedl, 2013; Shepard, 2001). Therefore, the assessment procedures used in **Vietnamese** universities discouraged students' interactions and involvement in learning during their programs of study.

The lack of clear standards and criteria for assessment provided to students in **Vietnamese** universities was also perceived by the participants in this study as an obstacle to student autonomy in learning. The participants constantly indicated that students were not provided with specific learning objectives or assessment criteria for

the subjects to be able to self-regulate their learning progress. According to the participants, most students were not really aware of the reasons for studying a subject or the subject's requirements. The students were only given general information about the assessment tasks, such as how many and what kinds of tests or exams would be conducted in the subjects, or the particular parts of the learning content they needed to focus on for assessment purposes and the percentage weight of each assignment. The findings of this study imply that assessment practices in **Vietnam** do not support autonomous learning. This is because in order to become autonomous learners, Little (1991), Halsall & Cockett (1998) and Lennon (2012) assert that students should be able to understand the subject learning objectives, take initiatives in organizing and managing their learning activities, and they need to review and evaluate their learning processes. Students therefore need to have precise assessment criteria to be able to guide their study, judge their achievements and become more autonomous in the learning process.

Assessment processes in **Vietnamese** universities, according to the findings of this study, valued students' recall of facts and reproduction of knowledge, rather than their creativity and metacognition in activities such as critical thinking. Most of the participants in this study suggested that **Vietnamese** lecturers generally expected their students to replicate the provided knowledge in tests or exams. The participants explained that conforming to the knowledge delivered by the lecturers was considered as a compulsory requirement for success. Only a very small percentage of marks were allocated for critical thinking and practical application or creativeness. Some participants thought students benefited from this approach to assessments because it was simple and easy to get good marks by replicating provided knowledge. However, most of the participants indicated dissatisfaction with this kind of assessment, because they supposed that such assessments did not encourage students' understanding and application of what they had learnt. They also doubted the assessment processes could provide reliable results about the actual capability of students in learning by relying on the memorization of predetermined knowledge. In this respect, the current study is consistent with the findings of T. T. Tran (2013b) who showed that assessments in **Vietnamese** higher education are based on the exams designed for reiterating the

provided knowledge in class, hindering students' efforts to develop other skills. She argues that many of the students seem not to "see the link between being actively involved in class activities and the development of soft skills" to help them deal with practical issues (T. T. Tran, 2013b, p. 638). Therefore, the author also concludes that **Vietnamese** students focused more on listening to and memorizing the information provided by their lecturers for exams instead of actively engaging in the learning process.

The findings in this current study also indicated that a lack of awareness, information and policies about plagiarism in **Vietnamese** universities had a strong impact on assessment practice and students' learning. All the participants asserted that they were not educated about plagiarism, so they had very limited knowledge about this issue. Moreover, the participants also insisted that there was no formal policy in respect of plagiarism to warn students of possible penalties or to instruct them about how to avoid the issue. This implies that students can memorize someone's words and thoughts then replicate it in exams as their own without acknowledging or crediting the original author. A reason for the lack of awareness of plagiarism issues might be that the concept of intellectual property is still not really respected and protected in **Vietnam**. For example, Spoo and Dao (2010, p. 118) argue that "it is common for University students to photocopy their professors' textbooks rather than to purchase them". Recently, Kenfox (2014) quoted an academic Professor Nguyen Mau Binh who acknowledges that books used for University students have been plagiarized and copied on a large scale, and that "many books have been found as having the same content, though they have different covers and show different authors' names" (p. 1). Therefore, it is acceptable in the **Vietnamese** context for students to memorize and reproduce other people's knowledge as their own; and it is not necessary for students to use metacognition in learning or to construct their own knowledge.

Assessment in the Australian ICT-based context

In ICT-enhanced blended learning environment at the **Australian** University, the assessment was more focused on evaluating group work, practical applications of knowledge and the formative assessment process. The participants all perceived that a variety of tasks and assignments were conducted during the courses, which took into account not only the individual performances of students but also their performances in group work and practical application. In this ICT-based context, these participants encountered different types of assessments such as study reports, oral presentations, group assignments, online tasks, software based applications and mid-term and final exams. The assessments were conducted at many different stages of the courses and did not rely heavily on the final exams (see Appendix 9). The assessment procedures that the participants faced in the **Australian** ICT-based environment were found to be challenging at the beginning because of previous learning habits, but the participants generally agreed that the assessments had prompted them to engage more in study during the courses and pay more attention to practical skills. The assessment tasks in this environment, according to these findings, value formative assessment. This type of assessment, as defined by Torrance and Pryor (1998, p. 8) is the process that takes place “during a course with the express purpose of improving pupil learning”. Formative assessment can help students take responsibility for their own learning (T. H. T. Pham & Renshaw, 2015). This assessment can drive “self-regulated learning and the dynamic processes that involve the cognitive, metacognitive, and motivational strategies that the learner uses to develop and employ learning strategies” (Carlson & Wiedl, 2013, p. 12). This demonstrates that various aspects of active learning are promoted by using formative assessment (Drew & Mackie, 2011). This literature supports the results of the current study that the assessment procedures in the **Australian** ICT-based context enabled **Vietnamese** international students to become more engaged in their learning and taking control of their study.

The findings of this study demonstrated that in the **Australian** ICT-based setting, students were able to regulate their study and become more independent due to the online availability of the subject outline, assessment criteria and other resources, which all assisted in the completion of assignments. The participants explained that while studying in this context, they were provided with very specific assessment criteria from

the beginning of every subject. The criteria contained clear requirements for study, assignments and exams. The details of assessment criteria can be seen from the assessment procedures and guidelines presented in subject outlines that students could easily access via the university's websites (see Appendix 9). The assessment procedures in the **Australian** ICT-based setting reflected in this study allowed for active involvement of students in learning and assessment processes. The **Vietnamese** students studying in this ICT-based context, had opportunities to direct their study, monitor the learning processes and make judgments on their progress without relying heavily on their lecturers as they would in the **Vietnamese** context. This is consistent with constructivist principles for assessment design described in the literature. Specifically, the assessment in **Australia** was designed to "serve as a self-analysis tool" (Jonassen, 1991, p. 11) and provide students with control over their learning (Neeraja, 2011; B. Wilson & Cole, 1991).

This present study also revealed that in the ICT-based learning environment, where various resources were available online, the participants were expected to demonstrate understanding of learning content and engagement in problem solving and higher-order thinking. No reproduction of knowledge was acceptable as mentioned by the participants. The majority of the participants also indicated that students were required to apply what they had learnt to work practices through authentic tasks in this blended context. The assessment requirements of subjects that the participants described can be exemplified by the following example:

This assessment is designed to help you develop:

1. Various forms for engaging in responsible and ethical commerce
2. Innovative ways to apply logical analysis to solve business and social issues
3. Skills for independent thinking and life-long learning.

(Appendix 8)

This result is consistent with the work of Herrington and Herrington (2006) who argue that students can become more active in learning when they are involved in authentic

tasks to prompt the improvement of their practical skills, and when they are required to look at a learning issue from different perspectives.

All the participants commented that both staff and policy at the **Australian** University had a focus on educating students about plagiarism and avoiding it. The participants asserted that students were required to attend a class about plagiarism, in which they were equipped with necessary knowledge about plagiarism, relevant regulations and plagiarism avoidance. In addition, the participants insisted that students were continuously and widely reminded about this issue in the University websites, in class and learning documents. The University provided students with formal policies and guidelines for plagiarism on its website, which students could refer to when needed in order to understand what plagiarism is, why they should avoid plagiarism, how they can avoid it and what the penalties were for plagiarism at the University. The additional warnings about the issue are noted in every single subject outline. One of the typical cautions is presented below:

Students are responsible for submitting original work for assessment, without plagiarising or cheating, abiding by the University's policy on plagiarism as set out in the University Handbook under Universities Policy Directory and in Faculty Handbooks and subject guides.... Plagiarism has led to the expulsion of students from the University.

(Appendix 7)

Taking plagiarism issues in the **Australian** ICT-based context seriously was noted as an important contribution to active learning. Students were provided with ICT-based tool to detect plagiarism, such as Turnitin software, in order to check their work and ensure it was free from plagiarism. Before submitting their assignments, students had to declare that what they are going to submit is entirely their own work, except where they have given proper acknowledgement of the work of others, and that there is no material contained in the assignment that has previously been submitted for formal assessment or published elsewhere (see Appendix 10). This serious consideration of plagiarism was described by most of the participants as a big challenge to the **Vietnamese** international students in this study because of their learning culture. The learning culture that Biggs and Tang (2011) summarise for Asian students is characterised by rote learning, a lack

of critical thinking skills and not being aware of plagiarism. However, in the learning environment where plagiarism is forbidden, students are not expected to passively memorise others' knowledge and reproduce it as their own work. Instead, they are prompted to construct their own thoughts or ideas through developing their understanding and critical thinking skills, to respect the work of others and to be more responsible for their learning. It ends up with a concluding remark.

6.3 Conclusion

This section aims to tie together and synthesize the research presented in the body of this thesis, and provide significant comments upon the meaning of this investigation. In particular, it revisits the issues of this study to highlight the answers to the research questions and possible implications for the discipline. This section then indicates the limitations of the research and suggests areas and possibilities for future study.

6.3.1 Revisiting the key issues: Concluding results and implications

This case study was conducted in response to the ongoing issues in educational reforms for active learning in **Vietnamese** higher education. The aim of this study was to determine how **Vietnamese** students can become more active in their learning while studying in an **Australian** context with an ICT-enhanced blended learning environment. The cross-cultural learning experiences were explored based on Berry's models of acculturation processes (Berry, 2005) and theories on active learning and constructivist approaches. The participants recruited for this study were nine **Vietnamese** international students who came from different regions in **Vietnam**, were experienced at studying in **Vietnamese** higher education, and were enrolled in different levels of study within ICT-based settings at an **Australian** University. The data was collected through semi-structured interviews with the participants and the use of their course document reviews. A qualitative data analysis computer software program - NVivo 10, and a combination of inductive thematic and theoretical thematic analyses, were employed for

the data analysis. The potential for developing active learning amongst **Vietnamese** students studying in the new ICT-based context revealed by the results of this study, and related implications for improving active learning, are presented below.

There have been numerous efforts by the **Vietnamese** government to improve the higher education system, such as reforming teaching and learning approaches and fostering ICT applications in education, in order to encourage students to become more active and involved in their learning process. However, **Vietnamese** students are still criticized as passive learners (Harman & Nguyen, 2010; L. Le, et al., 2013). The passive learning style has been described by many previous studies as characteristic of **Vietnamese** students (T. T. Tran, 2013a). However, most of the studies seem to focus on “the temporary stereotypical characteristics of **Vietnamese** students” in the learning process, rather than their intrinsic motivation and the actual learning context (C. T. Nguyen, 2012, p. 147). The evidence presented in this thesis suggests that **Vietnamese** students have a potential for active learning when studying in an education context with ICT-enhanced blended learning support.

The current findings reveal that the **Vietnamese** participants engaged more in hands-on activities such as investigation, group work, and discussion with peers and lecturers when studying in the **Australian** context. However, the **Vietnamese** higher education context was perceived as discouraging students’ active participation in such activities. There were limited learning materials and also limited ICT application in document delivery, causing difficulties for students to search for and use additional learning materials. The learning content contained predetermined knowledge and lacked practical relevance. Moreover, students were expected to follow and comply with the content, or whatever was provided by their lecturers, rather than construct their subject knowledge based on different learning resources. Classroom arrangement supported passive learning, rather than students’ active involvement in group work or interactive activities. Students were also not required or encouraged to interact with peers or lecturers. The educational context in **Vietnam**, as described in this study, promoted passive learning by students. The initial conclusion to be drawn from this study is that reforms in **Vietnamese** higher education have not yet met students’ basic need to be

able to engage in hands-on activities. There still exists a strong pattern of central control in the knowledge content where students have no opportunity to add their personal voices.

Studying in the **Australian** ICT-based context the **Vietnamese** students became more engaged in hands-on activities because they were expected to do so and were provided with various learning materials. They had both the opportunities and the encouragement in this new setting to do further investigations of learning content from different sources, and to interact face-to-face or online with peers or their lecturers to construct their own knowledge. This **Australian** ICT-based context was initially challenging for **Vietnamese** students due to their learning habits developed in their heritage culture, however the hybrid practice that drew on both students' experiences in **Vietnam** and also the particular features of an ICT-based learning environment encouraged increased their involvement in learning activities. The push for educational reforms for enhancing active learning in **Vietnam**, therefore, needs to take into consideration the foundation of this learning style to enable students' involvement in their learning activities, and the cultural heritage which can constraint the adoption of innovative Western methodologies for active learning.

In the same vein, meaningful intellectual enquiry amongst the **Vietnamese** students was developed in the **Australian** blended context. When studying in **Vietnam**, the students memorised and recited the learning content provided by their lecturers, rather than engaging in critical thinking and considering deep understanding or practical uses for the subject content they studied. Although the learning style did not satisfy most of the students, it was recognised as easier because higher order thinking and practical skills were not required. In the educational setting, the students could also gain a large amount of theoretical knowledge, which was found useful for further study, especially when they were given opportunities to expand it and develop practical applications of that knowledge.

In the **Australian** ICT-based setting, the participants reflected that they were required and encouraged to engage in various learning activities. A provision of learning content limited in quantity, predetermined and readily processed was not available in this new blended context, so they were not able to keep learning solely by rote and reproducing the knowledge for successful assessment as in **Vietnam**. The convenience of online learning content delivery and learning environment, as well as the requirements for study and the assessments in the **Australian** context, made the participants to start engaging in deep understanding and critical thinking, and understanding of practical application to solve real life issues. This helped **Vietnamese** students bring their strength of theoretical knowledge developed in **Vietnam** into play in the new learning environment. A conclusion can be drawn here is that the educational practice in **Vietnam** has a potential for developing active learning when it takes into account students' involvement in meaningful learning and the practical application of knowledge content in an ICT - enhanced blended setting.

The findings of this study also indicated that the participants had low level of autonomy and responsibility for their own learning when they were studying in **Vietnam**. They could not direct and take control of their study because they were not aware of, or involved in, the overall learning goals and objectives. Also, it was found that taking control and responsibility for own learning was not being promoted in the **Vietnamese** context. The students, therefore, had to rely on their lecturers for knowledge transmission as well as judgements on their achievements.

In the **Australian** blended context, this investigation showed that the students were required and encouraged to direct their study, build up their own knowledge and do self-assessment on their learning outcomes. Students were made aware of the learning objectives and provided with clear learning requirements and various learning resources in advance, to encourage the thorough understanding of a subject's meaning, establish the criterion for success in learning, and to become more independent in their study. This approach made the **Vietnamese** students become more autonomous and responsible for their own study. With this result in mind, the passive or dependent learning styles of the **Vietnamese** students initially influenced by their heritage culture

was altered by the ICT-based educational setting in the **Australian** University, gradually making these learners become more autonomous in their learning.

6.3.2 Significance, limitations and future research

This study has produced insights into the concept of active learning in **Vietnamese** students by analysing this concept from both the learning and the teaching perspectives. It characterises active learning as students' engagement in hands-on activities, in meaningful intellectual enquiry and in taking control of and responsibility for their own learning. From a teaching perspective, this study indicates that active learning is underpinned by a constructivist methodology which combines cognitive and social constructivism. This implies that the teaching approach for active learning is an approach that considers students as individual and social constructors of knowledge. The approach facilitates students' learning by assisting them to construct their own knowledge based on their previous experiences and social interactions with peers, lecturers or others. This clarification of active learning should be meaningful for researchers, educators and policy makers who are interested in active learning and developing active learning for their students.

This investigation also adds to current understanding of the ICT-supported educational practices in the **Vietnamese** and **Australian** higher education contexts in relation to the development of active learning amongst **Vietnamese** international students from a cross-cultural perspective. It has identified the vital factors which characterise educational practices and influence students' learning. Particularly, this research examines the reality of the two educational settings through their knowledge content, their physical learning environments, teaching approaches and assessments. The conclusions drawn from the findings of this study confirm the development of active learning amongst **Vietnamese** international students in an **Australian** ICT-based context. However, it also raises significant concerns in relation to a number of issues. It is argued that the learning styles of **Vietnamese** students are not culturally bound or determined by heritage culture. The students' level of passivity or activity in their learning is largely influenced by the educational context they encounter. This study

shows how the initial culture can serve to support or deter the development of active learning, and it also indicates the educational opportunities provided by a hybrid practice that the host or Western culture can provide to enable active learning.

The results of this study suggest that in order to effectively develop active learning in **Vietnam**, its educational reforms need to pay more attention to major components of its educational practice, as well as cultural differences affecting students' learning. The educational practice needs to be changed to ensure that active learning is facilitated and supported. Particularly, it is recommended that in order to enhance active learning of **Vietnamese** students, the educational system of **Vietnam** needs to be more concerned about factors contributing to active learning as suggested below:

- It is important that the content presented to the students is not limited to the textbooks or lecture notes. It must provide students with multiple perspectives on the concepts in the subject knowledge to ensure authenticity and real-life complexity, and to support their use of alternative or various learning resources. The classroom design is essential in facilitation of interactions between students and peers or lecturers. Therefore tutorial or small classrooms equipped with movable chairs, desks and technical tools such as projectors, computers and internet access would be helpful in allowing for social construction of knowledge in **Vietnamese** universities. Such rooms can help to reduce the distance between lecturers and students, enable lecturers to organise and operate group work or cooperative activities, and therefore provide students with more opportunities to engage in interactive learning.
- The reforms of teaching approaches are important to consider in order to actively engage students in knowledge construction based on their previous experiences and social interactions with peers, lecturers and others. Traditional approaches such as direct instruction and lectures can be used for the benefit of providing students with a theoretical basis for systematically developing their deep understandings of a discipline, constructing their own knowledge and supporting their further study. However, students need to be aware of learning

goals and objectives, as well as the importance of knowledge construction, in order to be able to direct and manage their study. Lecturers need to play the roles of guides or facilitators, rather than instructors to engage students in learning activities. Instead of focusing on the sequence of instruction, lecturers need to place emphasis on the process of knowledge construction, scaffolding, multiple representations of concepts, relevant or realistic learning contexts, and encouragement of self-regulated learning, collaborative learning, ownership, multiple perspectives and social negotiations.

- Assessments need to be authentic, interwoven with teaching processes and provided as a self-analysis tool. Assessments are required to reflect students' actual abilities to acquire deep understandings of concepts, problem-solving skills and cooperative skills, rather than to simply recall provided knowledge or facts. It is crucial to have a combination of summative and formative assessment, in which the use of formative assessment is valued to engage students in learning during the course. It is also essential to take plagiarism into account seriously in all assessments to encourage critical thinking, taking ownership, and creativity in study. In addition, assessment criteria need to be comprehensive, understandable and be provided to students in advance to enable self-assessment.
- ICT applications in education are considered to be vital technological tools used to facilitate and improve teaching and learning practices. However, the applications need to be aligned with teaching approaches in order to support active learning. Even though the integration of ICT in education has been strongly endorsed and supported in **Vietnam**, a considerable effort is needed to integrate the tools for enhancing meaningful teaching and learning. ICT needs to be used as a means to enrich teaching and learning, rather than to replace those activities. A blended learning environment or a hybrid learning practice, therefore, is a recommended choice, especially for the **Vietnamese** context. Nevertheless, it is important to note that blended learning is not recommended to be conducted by merely supplementing ICT into traditional face-to-face classrooms through using technology as a complement or an add-on, in order to

provide auxiliary information, teach a difficult concept or to comply an educational policy. Instead, ICT needs to be applied to transform teaching practices toward constructivist approaches. Particularly, the application of ICT should involve students in building their own knowledge through various activities such as self-exploring or searching for additional resources on the internet to understand alternative points of view. ICT should be integrated to facilitate social interactions such as group work, group discussions and online forums to involve, encourage and make students feel more comfortable in participating in interactive activities. It is also essential to use the technology for online delivery of learning contents, assessment requirements and study guides which enable autonomous learning.

Beside the expected contributions, it is significant to acknowledge certain limitations of this study which need to be highlighted for future action or speculation. There are some substantial restrictions regarding scientific rigour in this study. One of the limitations is that this study has been conducted with a small number of participants and at only one **Australian** University. In addition, the **Vietnamese** context was primarily described based on a snapshot of the teaching and learning practice that the participants had encountered before they came to **Australia**. This study is also limited in terms of exploring the active learning issue based primarily on nine learners. Accordingly, future research could replicate this investigation with a larger number of cases across different **Australian** Universities to enable broader generalisations. Another opportunity for further investigation is to merge multiple approaches, such as employing a combination of quantitative and qualitative case-study, and taking both teachers' and learners' perceptions about the issue into account in order to include multiple perspectives. Moreover, future research on education reforms or implementations of Western or modern approaches in a **Vietnamese** setting designed to enhance active learning, need to pay attention to all the important factors of an education system, the interactions amongst the factors and their impacts on student learning. This can help to reduce unexpected cultural mismatches in attempting to improve teaching and learning practice in **Vietnam** by simply adopting Western educational philosophies and practices.

6.3.3 Concluding remarks

This study has provided an analysis of the development of the elements of active learning amongst **Vietnamese** international students in the context of **Australian** higher education study supported by ICT-enhanced blended learning environment. It has provided an insight into educational practices with ICT support in the higher education contexts of **Vietnam** and **Australia** in relation to the development of active learning amongst **Vietnamese** international students from a cross-cultural perspective. This investigation has demonstrated that **Vietnamese** international students were able to engage in active learning in an **Australian** learning context, specifically with the support of ICT. This study has also acknowledged the challenges that the students from a Confucian Heritage Culture might initially face because of their learning habits when encountering a new blended learning environment. It has demonstrated that while the learning styles of **Vietnamese** students are initially affected by their heritage culture, the extent to which they actively engage in their learning is largely influenced by the educational practices they encounter. Therefore, in order to encourage the development of active learning for **Vietnamese** students, this study has suggested that the educational reforms in **Vietnam** need to take into account the implementation of an ICT-enhanced blended environment, in which there is an essential concern paid to core factors of the educational practice and cultural differences in adopting Western or modern approaches, to ensure that students are required, supported and encouraged to actively engage in, and taking control of their study. However, it has been also acknowledged that this study is limited to a small number of participants and the results are bound by time. Therefore, further research into the development of active learning for **Vietnamese** students is requisite.

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Guiding Questions for the Interviews

These guiding questions are created based on the theoretical frameworks and the literature review, focusing on answering the three research questions.

1. How do Vietnamese students perceive their experiences of teaching and learning practice in Vietnamese higher education?

- Could you tell me about your experience of being a student in Vietnamese higher education?
- What teaching and learning content was provided by your University?
- How was the content delivered to you?
- What forms of assessment did you undertake?
- Could you describe some of learning practices in Vietnamese higher education?
- How did you communicate with lecturers and other students?
- Could you describe your own approach to learning or your personal learning styles?

2. What types of teaching and learning practice are encountered by Vietnamese students in the ICT-enhanced blended learning environment at an Australian University?

- What types of learning environments have you encountered in Australia?
- Could you describe some of the teaching practices you have encountered?
- What types of teaching and learning content has been delivered?
- How has the content been delivered to you?
- What forms of assessment have you undertaken in the Australian learning environment?
- How did you communicate with lecturers and other students?
- How have you approached learning in the learning environment?
- In what ways does this approach differ to your experiences of being a student in Vietnam?

3. What are the perceptions of Vietnamese students in relation to how the ICT-enhanced blended learning environment provided in Australia fosters their active learning?

- Could you explain how the ICT-enhanced blended learning environment impacts on your approach to learning?
- To what extent does this learning environment engage you in the learning process?
- How does this learning environment physically engage you in the learning activities?
- How does the learning environment mentally involve you in the learning process?
- How does this learning approach differ to the others?
- To what extent are you satisfied with this learning environment? Why?

Appendix 2: Ethics Approval

University of Wollongong



INITIAL APPLICATION APPROVAL

In reply please quote: HE11/419
Further Enquiries Phone: 4221 4457
KC:CJ

20 October 2011

Mr Huong Vu
49 New Dapto Road
WOLLONGONG NSW 2500

Dear Mr Vu

I am pleased to advise that the Human Research Ethics application referred to below has been **approved**.

Ethics Number: HE11/419
Project Title: Active Learning in ICT- Enhanced Blended Learning Environment: A Case Study of Vietnamese Students in Australian Higher Education
Researchers: Mr Huong Vu, Dr Irina Verenikina, Dr Sarah O'Shea
Approval Date: 20 October 2011
Expiry Date: 19 October 2012

The University of Wollongong/Illawarra Shoalhaven Local Health District Social Sciences HREC is constituted and functions in accordance with the NHMRC *National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research*. The HREC has reviewed the research proposal for compliance with the *National Statement* and approval of this project is conditional upon your continuing compliance with this document.

A condition of approval by the HREC is the submission of a progress report annually and a final report on completion of your project. The progress report template is available at <http://www.uow.edu.au/research/rso/ethics/UOW009385.html>. This report must be completed, signed by the appropriate Head of School, and returned to the Research Services Office prior to the expiry date.

As evidence of continuing compliance, the Human Research Ethics Committee also requires that researchers immediately report:

- proposed changes to the protocol including changes to investigators involved
- serious or unexpected adverse effects on participants
- unforeseen events that might affect continued ethical acceptability of the project.

Please note that approvals are granted for a twelve month period. Further extension will be considered on receipt of a progress report prior to expiry date.

If you have any queries regarding the HREC review process, please contact the Ethics Unit

Research Services Office University of Wollongong NSW 2522 Australia
Telephone: +61 2 4221 3386 Facsimile: +61 2 4221 4338
research-services@uow.edu.au www.uow.edu.au/research

on phone 4221 3386 or email rso-ethics@uow.edu.au.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Garry Hoban". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, looping initial 'G'.

A/Professor Garry Hoban
Chair, Social Sciences
Human Research Ethics Committee

Cc Dr Irina Verenikina, 67.307, Faculty of Education

Appendix 3: Information Sheet

University of Wollongong



Participation Information Sheet for Students

Dear student

This is an invitation for you to participate in a study conducted by researchers at the University of Wollongong. The research is called *Active Learning in ICT-Enhanced Blended Learning Environments²: A Case Study of Vietnamese Students in Australian Higher Education*. The purpose of this study is to explore the ways that active learning can be experienced by Vietnamese students who are studying within an ICT-enhanced blended learning environment in Australian higher education. The results of this study will provide increased understanding of the impacts of Confucian teaching and learning styles on fostering active learning amongst Vietnamese students studying within an ICT-enhanced blended learning environment in Australian higher education. The findings will provide empirical evidence to support the implementation of educational reform policies concerning teaching and learning approaches and the application of ICT to promote active learning at higher education level in Vietnam.

Investigators

Mr. Xuan Huong Vu (PhD candidate) Faculty of Education	Dr. Irina Verenikina (Principal Supervisor) Faculty of Education	Dr. Sarah O'Shea (Co-Supervisor) Faculty of Education
---------------------------------------------------------------------	-------------------------------------------------------------------------------	--------------------------------------------------------------------

² “the thoughtful integration of classroom face-to-face learning experiences with online learning experiences”
(Garrison & Kanuka, 2004, p. 96)

02_42213865 xhv415@uowmail.edu.au	02_42214285 <u>irina@uow.edu.au</u>	02_5838 <u>saraho@uow.edu.au</u>
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If you consent to participate you will be asked to complete a questionnaire (approximately 5 minutes) and will be interviewed for up to three times (approximately one hour for each interview).

The following measures will be adopted to protect the identities of participants in the study:

- Pseudonyms will be used during data recording process and in any published materials,
- Data collected will be securely stored in the Faculty of Education, and will only be accessed by the researchers.

Your participation in this research is voluntary. You are free to refuse to participate and may withdraw from the research at any time by advising Xuan Huong Vu. Your refusal to participate or withdrawal of consent will in no way affect your scholarly work, or your relationship with the Faculty of Education or University of Wollongong.

If you have any enquiries about the research, you can contact the researcher by phone on 02_42213865 or by email at xhv415@uowmail.edu.au. If you have any concerns or complaints regarding the way the research is or has been conducted, you can contact the Ethics Officer, Human Research Ethics Committee, Office of Research, University of Wollongong on 02_4221 4457.

Thank you for your interest in this study!

Appendix 4: Consent Form

University of Wollongong



Consent Form for University Students

Research title: *Active Learning in ICT-Enhanced Blended Learning Environments: A Case Study of Vietnamese Students in Australian Higher Education.*

Researcher: Xuan Huong Vu

I have been given information about the PhD research project: *Active Learning in ICT-Enhanced Blended Learning Environment: A Case Study of Vietnamese Students in Australian Higher Education* conducted by Xuan Huong Vu from the Faculty of Education at the University of Wollongong. I have had an opportunity to ask any questions I might have about the research and my participation.

I understand that if I consent to participate, I will be asked to complete a questionnaire (approximately 5 minutes) and will be interviewed for up to three times (approximately one hour for each interview).

I have been advised that the following measures will be adopted to protect the identities of my participation in this study:

- Pseudonyms will be used during data recording process and in any published materials,
- Data collected will be securely stored in the Faculty of Education, and will only be accessed by the researcher and his supervisors.

I understand that my participation in this research is voluntary, I am free to refuse to participate and I am free to withdraw from the research at any time by advising Xuan

Huong Vu. My refusal to participate or withdrawal of consent will not affect my treatment in any way.

If I have any enquiries about the research, I can contact the researcher by phone on 02_42213865 or by email at xhv415@uowmail.edu.au. If I have any concerns or complaints regarding the way the research is or has been conducted, I can contact the Ethics Officer, Human Research Ethics Committee, Office of Research, University of Wollongong on 02_4221 4457.

By signing below I am indicating my consent to participate in the research. I agree that the data collected from my participation will be used primarily for a PhD thesis, and will possibly be used in summary form for journal publications, and I consent for it to be used in that manner.

Signed

Date

...../...../.....

Name (please print)

Appendix 5: Subject Introduction

Example of how students were introduced about a subject in the subject outline (an excerpt from an Australian University Subject Outline, as provided by participant Phung)

Section A: General Information

Learning Outcomes and Graduate Qualities

Student Learning Outcomes

On successful completion of this subject, the student should be able to: 1. Explain the importance of individual rights and responsibilities in responsible and ethical commerce. 2. Demonstrate an appreciation of the historical context of today's commercial principles and practices. 3. Identify and explain ethical approaches to contemporary enterprise in commerce. 4. Identify and critically evaluate the key challenges posed by contemporary social, economic and legal systems to responsible and ethical decision making in commerce. 5. Communicate reasoned arguments and demonstrate critical thinking to apply responsible and ethical principles to organisational decision making. 6. Demonstrate an understanding of the use of specified information and communication technologies.

Subject Description

The subject provides students with a conceptual tool kit for understanding and practising responsible and ethical Commerce. The topics covered will include the origins of contemporary systems of commerce, ethical and social responsibility in commerce and developments in ethical and responsible commerce. Areas addressed include the environment, globalization, technology, anti-corruption, labour and human rights. Students will examine these issues from a variety of theoretical and practical perspectives and apply them to contemporary commercial contexts.

Commerce Purpose and Graduate Qualities

Our Faculty Purpose is to inspire socially innovative commerce through research and teaching. Based on our purpose, our Faculty has five Graduate Qualities which we aim to progressively develop in our students through learning and teaching.

Graduate Quality	Faculty of Commerce Graduates will:	Graduate Qualities Taught, Practiced or Assessed in this Subject
Informed	have gained appropriate conceptual and applied knowledge that is research-based	Yes
	have developed skills for independent thinking and life-long learning	Yes
	acknowledge the work and ideas of others	Yes
Innovative and Flexible	be innovative in their thinking and work practices	Yes
	be flexible in their approach	Yes
	be able to apply creativity and logical analysis to solving business and social issues	Yes
Socially Responsible	appreciate the social and ethical dimensions of business	Yes
	be able to make informed choices for the benefit of society	Yes
Connected	be able to work and network effectively with others	Yes
	appreciate the links between ideas and practice in domestic and international business, the public sector and community contexts	Yes
Communicators	demonstrate an effective level of interpersonal, written, and verbal communication skills	Yes
	show an understanding of intercultural communication practices	Yes

Appendix 6: Teaching Schedule

Examples of how instructional sequences were conducted (an excerpt from an Australian University Subject Outline, as provided by participant Ha)

Teaching Program Autumn Session 2011

Lectures commence in Week 1. Please make sure you attend.

Seminars commence in Week 2 – note: week 2 in the computer labs.

Week 1	Week beginning 28 February 2011 – LECTURE ONLY TOPIC 1 <i>Introducing the Business of Law</i> Introduction to the Australian Legal System
Week 2	Week beginning 7 March TOPIC 1 <i>Introducing the Business of Law</i> How law is made SEMINARS IN THE COMPUTER LABS
Week 3	Week beginning 14 March TOPIC 1 <i>Introducing the Business of Law</i> Legal systems
Week 4	Week beginning 21 March TOPIC 2 <i>Business Planning</i> Business Structures Pt 1
Week 5	Week beginning 28 March NOTE: No lecture this week. Seminars as normal. TOPIC 2 <i>Business Planning</i> Business Structures Pt 2
Week 6	Week beginning 4 April TOPIC 3 <i>Business Relationships</i> Making Contracts – Part 1

Appendix 7: Academic Integrity and Plagiarism Policy

Example

Example of how Academic Integrity and Plagiarism Policy is reflected in the subject outline (an excerpt from an Australian University Subject Outline, as provided by participant Toan)

2. Referencing and plagiarism

Written assessment tasks submitted for ~~XXXX~~ and ~~XXXX~~ subjects must be referenced in accordance with the *Australian Guide to Legal Citation* (Melbourne University Law Review Association Inc., 3rd ed, 2010) unless an alternate referencing system is specified in the assessment task requirements (this may apply to ~~XXXX~~ subjects only). The Guide may be borrowed from the University library, or purchased from the UniShop, or downloaded from this link:

<http://ezproxy.uow.edu.au/login?url=http://mulr.law.unimelb.edu.au/go/AGLC3>

For further information about referencing in your legal studies, see

<http://www.library.uow.edu.au/helptraining/tutorials/legal/citwrit/index.html>

The University's policy on Acknowledgement Practice /Plagiarism Policy is available at <http://www.uow.edu.au/about/policy/UOW058648.html>. Students are responsible for submitting original work for assessment, without plagiarising or cheating, abiding by the University's Academic Integrity and Plagiarism Policy as set out in the University Handbook, the University's online Policy Directory and in Faculty Handbooks and subject guides. Re-using any of your own work (either in part or in full) which you have submitted previously for assessment is not permitted without appropriate acknowledgement. Plagiarism has led to the expulsion of students from the University.

Appendix 8: Assessment Requirements

Example of how students were expected for their learning outcomes (an excerpt from an Australian University Subject Outline, as provided by participant Truong)

Graduate Qualities Assessed	Informed Innovative and Flexible Socially Responsible Connected Communicators
Marking Criteria	1. Addressing assigned tasks (15%) 2. Quality of analysis (20%) 3. Quality of critique (20%) 4. Clarity and conciseness of arguments (10%) 5. Use of theory, concepts or models to support arguments (25%) 6. Referencing, spelling, punctuation and report structure (10%)
Length	2500 words (plus or minus 200)
Weight	25%
Assessment Due	07 Oct 2010 (Thursday in Session Week 10)
Type of Collaboration	Group Work
Style and format	<p>This assessment is designed to help you develop (1) various forms for engaging in responsible and ethical commerce, (2) innovative ways to apply logical analysis to solve business and social issues, and (3) skills for independent thinking and life-long learning.</p> <p>In the first tutorial, you will be formed into groups of 4-5. As a team of consultants, your group will be working together to research and explore a</p>

Appendix 9: Assessment Structure Example

Example of assessment structure (an excerpt from an Australian University Subject Outline, as provided by participant Huyen)

Assessment Guidelines

Final examination	45% of total assessment
Quiz (Week 6)	10% of total assessment
eLearning Assignments	15% of total assessment
Practical Work (Wet and Dry Labs)	30% of total assessment

Students are expected to perform satisfactorily in all sections of the subject. Specifically, a "pass grade" cannot be obtained without satisfactory completion of at least 85% of the wet/dry lab experiments. Failure to comply will result in a technical failure (TF). If you are unable to attend any prac class due to illness a medical certificate must be submitted to Administration and academic consideration (AC) applied for through SMP. Note that the 85% minimum requirement still applies for those who apply for AC.

In order to be awarded a pass grade in ~~subject~~ the following criteria must be satisfied:

- i) a total mark (*i.e.* lab + assignments + quiz + exam) \geq 50%
- AND ii) final exam mark of \geq 45%
- AND iii) a minimum of 85% of the wet/dry labs satisfactorily completed.

Supplementary Assessments

Supplementary assessment **may** be offered to students who receive an overall mark of 48% or 49%, and are otherwise identified as meriting an offer of a supplementary assessment. The form of supplementary assessment will be determined at the time the offer of a supplementary is made. For more information refer to the Supplementary Assessment Guidelines:

<http://www.uow.edu.au/content/groups/public/@web/@gov/documents/doc/uow112335.pdf>.

Performance Grades

HD	High Distinction	85–100%
D	Distinction	75–84%
C	Credit	65–74%
P	Pass	50–64%
F	Fail	0–44%
TF	Technical Fail (unsatisfactory completion)	No mark

Medical Certificates

If medical issues impede your progress it is in your interest to submit a medical certificate. These should be submitted to student administration. If you are going to absent for longer than a week discuss this with the course coordinator ASAP.

Appendix 10: Assignment Coversheet

UOW **EDUCATION** **ASSIGNMENT COVERSHEET**

This form is to be completed by students submitting an essay or assignment for an Education subject. Assignments are to be submitted to the relevant Tutor, unless otherwise advised.

Plagiarism

Deliberate plagiarism may lead to failure in the subject. Plagiarism is cheating by using the written ideas or submitted work of someone else. The University of Wollongong has a strong policy against plagiarism. See Acknowledgement Practice/Plagiarism Prevention Policy at <http://www.uow.edu.au/about/policy/UOW058648.html>

Please note: Students must retain a copy of the Assignment Receipt any work submitted.

Student Name: _____ Student Number: _____

Subject Code: _____ Subject Name: _____

Assignment Title: _____

Tutorial Group: _____

Day and Time

Tutor's Name: _____

Due Date: _____ Date Submitted: _____

DECLARATION

I certify that this is entirely my own work, except where I have given fully documented references to the work of others, and that the material contained in this assignment has not previously been submitted for assessment in any formal course of study. I understand the definition and consequences of plagiarism.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The marker of this assessment item may, for the purpose of assessing this assignment, reproduce this assignment and provide a copy to another member of academic staff. If required to do so, I will provide an electronic copy of this assessment item to the marker.

Signature of Student: _____

Assignment Receipt *To be filled in and retained by student*

Subject Code: _____ Assignment Title: _____

Student Name: _____ Student Number: _____

Signature of Tutor: _____ Date Submitted: _____

(Version 3 – 23 October 2012)