Critical Factors of Offshore Master of Business Administration Education Programmes in Vietnam: Multiple Perspectives

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STATEMENT OF AUTHENTICATION

The work presented in this thesis is, to the best of my knowledge and belief, original except as acknowledged in the text. I hereby declare that I have not submitted this material in full, or in part, for a degree at this or any other institution.

Ly, Thi Minh Chau
ABSTRACT

The shift to a market-oriented economy in Vietnam has created a need in both the broader society and the business community for knowledge about market economics and business management. A key aspect of a rapidly emerging economy, such as that of Vietnam, is the need for high-qualified and knowledgeable human resources personnel, especially business administrators. However, there is a serious lack of qualified local human resources to meet the demands of both local and international business organisations in Vietnam. Understandably therefore, the situation has raised high demand for higher education (HE) business programmes in Vietnam.

Many universities, local and international, on becoming increasingly aware of the Vietnamese people’s demand for social change and the Government’s liberal education reforms, have sought to capitalise on the tremendous opportunities available to provide postgraduate business courses. The result is an unprecedented growth in transnational education programmes in Vietnam. A key programme option is that provided by a partnership between local institutions and overseas universities and/or corporations. These joint ventures launch a variety of offshore educational programmes including the Masters of Business Administration (MBA). The fact that local students can achieve international qualifications on the home soil is particularly attractive as there are huge cost savings to be gained.

However, the unprecedented growth in transnational higher education programmes in Vietnam has not gone unnoticed and there have been some real concerns. A number of articles attribute much of the growth in transnational education programmes to the corporatisation of the higher education sector in the developed countries around the world. Many of the affected universities look elsewhere and many are particularly drawn to developing countries and emerging economies for financially lucrative alternatives to supplement their income in the home countries and or to make huge profits. Since 1986, many foreign universities have descended on the Vietnamese education sector and have embarked on providing various education programmes mostly through joint venture collaborations and partnerships with local Vietnamese education providers.

While access to good quality higher education is essential for any emerging economy, the concern to the Vietnamese is the indiscriminate growth of transnational higher education programmes and the associated challenges that come with such growth. People from across the various Vietnamese stakeholder groups are concerned about issues such as, but not limited to, the quality of the programmes, the long-term viability of the programmes offered and the quality and capabilities of the graduates. In totality the overall concern is about programme sustainability i.e. will the partnership survive, will it be there for the long term and will it benefit the local stakeholders. This concern is the underlying crux of the present study and its focus is on the offshore MBA programme.

The study aims to understand and identify from key Vietnamese stakeholders’
perspectives what the critical factors are for the successful design, delivery and management of offshore MBA education programmes. The study will provide comprehensive insight and understanding of the identity, nature and criticality of factors crucial to the long-term viability and ultimately the sustainability of offshore MBA programmes in Vietnam. The findings of the study are valuable to current and future foreign educational providers and local partner institutions, students, sponsors, the community and other relevant stakeholders.

This thesis is in partial fulfilment of the professional doctorate qualification from the School of Business, University of Western Sydney. The research is based on a qualitative paradigm and uses the case study approach. Three case organisations, all current providers of offshore MBA education in Vietnam are used. Both primary and secondary data is collected. Primary data is collected via interviews and focus groups with representation of a number of key stakeholder groups from each of the case organisations while secondary data is collected from official documents from these three case organisations. It is envisaged that such a broad spectrum of views from different stakeholders will provide good insight into and add greater validity of the factors local Vietnamese deem are valuable and need to be factored in the design, delivery and management of offshore MBA programmes.

The study found that, in the main, stakeholders prefer the international MBA programmes because it allows the transfer of critical contemporary knowledge and the transfer, from the foreign partner, technical hardware (such as infrastructure, technology, and machinery) and managerial ‘software’ (skills such as leading, managing, problem-solving, negotiation etc) essential to effectively operate and compete in a global marketplace. The findings also show that stakeholders generally have had good experiences with their case organisations, and that their expectations have mostly been met. However, programme quality is a key concern across all stakeholder groups and covers a broad range including most importantly programme and curriculum design, programme delivery, namely the expertise and contribution of teaching staff, and programme management.

A key emergent finding is the need to factor the Vietnamese context in teaching and learning. Given that Vietnam is an emerging economy, stakeholders felt that the programme needs to be flexible enough to embrace the specific needs of the local business and industry. The findings highlight the need for increased networking between programme providers and the business sector. Another key finding relates to more rigorous student selection and admission criteria as these are deemed to be vital for the overall control of programme quality and sustainability.

All stakeholder groups perceive that offshore MBA programmes have a potentially large and positive impact on the local Vietnamese economy; well qualified graduates can make great leaders and managers and contribute directly and indirectly to the national budgets. Therefore, the government needs to ensure that offshore education programmes are given a priority in policy implementation.
A major limitation of the research is that the investigation is restricted to three case organisations i.e. providers of offshore MBA education programmes in Vietnam. Therefore, the findings are not representative of the wider population and cannot be generalised to all offshore MBA programmes. However, the findings can assist providers understand better the needs of the local/host communities and help raise awareness of the importance of understanding the local market in strategic planning and management education.

Keywords: offshore MBA, critical factors, qualitative, programme sustainability, emerging economies
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

AKNOWLEDGEMENTS ......................................................................................................................... i
STATEMENT OF AUTHENTICATION ............................................................................................. iii
ABSTRACT ........................................................................................................................................ iv
LIST OF TABLES ............................................................................................................................... x
LIST OF FIGURES .......................................................................................................................... xi

## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION ...................................................................................................... 1
1.1 Foreword ...................................................................................................................................... 1
1.2 Research justification .................................................................................................................. 3
1.3 Research objectives and research questions .......................................................................... 7
1.4 Significance of the findings ...................................................................................................... 8
1.5 Limitations of the study ............................................................................................................ 8
1.6 Definition of key concepts and terms ...................................................................................... 8
1.7 Overview of the thesis .............................................................................................................. 9
1.8 Limitations of the study ............................................................................................................ 10
1.9 Future research ....................................................................................................................... 10
1.10 Conclusions of the study ........................................................................................................ 10

## CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW ......................................................................................... 11
2.1 Introduction ............................................................................................................................... 11
2.2 Internationalisation of higher education (HE) ....................................................................... 11
  2.2.1 Corporatisation of higher education (HE) ......................................................................... 12
  2.2.2 Transnational education ................................................................................................... 13
  2.2.3 Offshore education .......................................................................................................... 15
2.3 Business education ................................................................................................................. 16
  2.3.1 The MBA programme ..................................................................................................... 17
2.4 Higher education (HE) in Vietnam ........................................................................................ 19
  2.4.1 Internationalisation – the Vietnamese context ............................................................... 22
  2.4.2 Offshore MBA programmes ............................................................................................ 26
2.5 Quality assurance .................................................................................................................... 27
  2.5.1 Quality assurance – multiple stakeholder perspective ..................................................... 28
  2.5.2 Offshore MBA – quality issues in Vietnam ...................................................................... 30
2.6 Theoretical framework - offshore programme quality ......................................................... 33
2.7 Chapter summary ................................................................................................................... 34

## CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY ............................................................................... 35
3.1 Introduction ............................................................................................................................... 35
3.2 Research strategy .................................................................................................................... 35
  3.2.1 Research design ................................................................................................................ 35

vii
CHAPTER 4: RESULTS AND DISCUSSION ............................................. 47

4.1 Introduction .............................................................................. 47
4.2 Analysis and results of the interview sessions .............................. 47
  4.2.1 Graduate interviews .............................................................. 47
    4.2.1.1 Graduate interview: Reasons for choosing offshore MBA .......... 48
    4.2.1.2 Graduate interview: Personal expectations and needs ................. 52
    4.2.1.3 Graduate interview: Were expectations and needs met? .............. 53
    4.2.1.4 Graduate interview: Perception of programme strengths ............ 56
    4.2.1.5 Graduate interview: Perception of programme success .............. 58
  4.2.2 Provider interviews .............................................................. 60
    4.2.2.1 Provider interview: Expectations of programme quality .............. 61
    4.2.2.2 Provider interview: Perception of programme strength .............. 64
    4.2.2.3 Provider interview: Perception of programme success .............. 68
  4.2.3 Employer interviews ............................................................. 71
    4.2.3.1 Employer interview: Expectations of the programme ................ 71
    4.2.3.2 Employer interview: Perception of programme strengths .......... 73
    4.2.3.3 Employer interview: Preference for type of MBA programme ....... 74
4.3 Analysis and results of the focus group session ............................... 75
  4.3.1 Background of the focus group .............................................. 75
  4.3.2 Focus group: Why do students prefer offshore MBA programmes? .... 76
    4.3.2.1 Attractiveness of the programme ........................................... 76
    4.3.2.2 Quality of the programme ................................................... 77
    4.3.2.3 Language, knowledge and skills transfer ................................. 77
  4.3.3 Focus group: Expectations and needs ....................................... 78
  4.3.4 Were expectations and needs met? ......................................... 80
  4.3.5 Perceptions of strengths of offshore MBA programmes ............... 82
  4.3.6 Perceptions of the success of the programme ............................ 85
  4.3.7 Focus group: Preference for type of MBA programme ................ 86
4.4 Factors affecting offshore MBA programmes in Vietnam ................ 87
  4.4.1 Recent graduates .................................................................. 87
  4.4.2 Programme providers ............................................................ 87
LIST OF TABLES

Table 1: Vietnamese higher education sector 1987-2010 ......................................... 20
Table 2: Vietnamese higher education – Institutional ownership .................................. 20
Table 3: Vietnamese higher education – Postgraduate enrolments ............................. 21
Table 4: Participant coding .......................................................................................... 41
Table 5: Interview demographics - Graduate student ................................................. 48
Table 6: Interview demographics - Provider ................................................................. 60
Table 7: Interview demographics - Employers ............................................................. 71
Table 8: Focus group demographics .......................................................................... 76
LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1: The Theoretical Framework ........................................................................... 33
Figure 2: The Research Process ....................................................................................... 45
CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

“All progress is born of inquiry. Doubt is often better than overconfidence, for it leads to inquiry, and inquiry leads to invention” (Hudson Maxim)

1.1 Foreword

How do I get started in research? Where do great research ideas come from? How do I decide what to research? I went back to my childhood days to help me with this dilemma. When I was a little girl, I often asked my parents - and occasionally myself - a number of ‘why’ questions as I pondered over life as I saw it:

Why couldn’t the hard-working people in my village have new thatched roofs for their cottages?

Why couldn’t I earn a living even though I was a little girl?

The ‘why’ questions continued to haunt me even as I was growing up:

Why were the farmers still poor despite owning fertile lands?

Why did young people give up their studies to earn their livelihood in dangerous areas or areas far from their hometowns?

Why did these young people choose to leave their hometowns even though they owned land and were hard-working and could cultivate them? Why?

Studying at university far away from my hometown, I still had a barrage of questions running through my mind. Even as I embarked on my journey, to further develop my career and assist my community, I continually sought to understand more by delving in the ‘why’ questions.

How can my family, my village and my country overcome poverty? What are some the workable solutions?

Are there still secrets out there, yet to be discovered, which can help me find some workable solutions?

Returning home to Vietnam, after graduating with a Master of Business Administration degree from the Asian Institute of Technology, Thailand I took up position as a lecturer at the University of Economics Ho Chi Minh City. I was responsible for a number of management training courses including the MBA programme for middle managers and Chief Executive Officers. There were (and still are) many MBA programmes, local and offshore, offered in Ho Chi Minh City (HCMC) and I was privy to student experiences, good and bad, concerns and dissatisfaction with the quality of the MBA programmes that were being offered.

The students’ experiences, their concerns and their satisfaction raised my awareness and consciousness about the MBA programmes being offered and the ability of these
programmes to satisfy the needs of Vietnamese students and other key stakeholder groups. Yet again I found myself reflecting on the situation and confronted myself with more questions:

Why is there a gap between the MBA programme outcomes and the needs of postgraduate students from business organisations?

What are business organisations and managers expectations when they sponsor their employees to undertake MBA courses?

Do Vietnamese employers prefer graduates who hold MBA awards with offshore affiliation than those who are awarded by local standalone universities? If so, what are some of the reasons for this preference?

What factors, if any, influence Vietnamese students’ choice and decision of which offshore MBA programme to pursue?

I have embarked on a journey to find answers to these questions.

As a researcher, it is necessary to understand why I am involved in research. I often question myself as to how the research I undertake will assist me as an educator to further knowledge, understanding and experiences of Vietnamese students. In the long term I hope that my DBA study will help improve the lives of all Vietnamese people through the successes of more informed and sound management practices of the offshore MBA graduates.

The first step in designing any research is deciding what exactly to study and why. ‘Critical factors of offshore MBA education programmes in Vietnam: Multiple perspectives’ is my research topic. I have a genuine interest in this topic area; over the course of my teaching career, I have been interested in developing MBA programmes that are successful and sustainable. By sustainable I mean MBA programmes that continually strive to provide good education to Vietnamese students – one that focuses on the need to manage globally as well as locally.

Arguably, a key aspect of offshore programme sustainability is the fit between what the programme offers and what the local students, business organisations and community want. Ultimately, it is mostly the local business organisations and community that are the potential recruiters and ‘users’ of these graduates. They are less likely to recruit these graduates if there is a perception that their learning has been restricted, in terms of how the programme has prepared them for managerial roles, in both the global and Vietnamese context. Over time the viability of the programme is likely to be affected.

The long-term demand in Vietnam for business education offering high quality MBA programmes is expected to grow. Such a demand makes it crucial that business schools have quality frameworks to assist them become the dominant providers of business education in the future. As a professional educator, I am concerned about ensuring quality of the offshore postgraduate programmes being offered. To me it is important to include quality control checks and balances in the programme offering from curriculum
design to programme delivery and programme management. Such checks and balances ensure successful and sustainable programmes and it is in this context that I see a need for research into offshore MBA programmes in Vietnam.

In this present study I investigate the offshore MBA market in Vietnam and propose a quality control framework for business schools to use.

1.2 Research justification

In a rapidly globalising world, the intellectual and professional skills, competencies and knowledge within business organisations are more important than ever before. Internationalisation for any university is fundamentally about broadening the educational experience of students and this generally translates to the provision of internationally focused education. With the advent of globalisation offshore programmes have become core aspects of the internationalisation agenda of most of the larger and more established universities. Guevarra (2007, p. 233) asserts that internationalisation is a top priority because it allows “mobility and exchanges for students and teachers, teaching and research collaboration, academic standards and quality, research prospects, cooperation and development assistance and curriculum development”. Through transnational education students from the host countries have opportunities to gain qualification of international standards of education (Hussain 2007; Pimpa 2008).

There is growing realisation by educational providers in many developed countries that there is a ready-market of students in foreign or host nations who need education and development of intellectual and professional skills. These competencies and knowledge will enable them to effectively participate in an international labour market. This realisation has created a money-making spin for transnational education (Goodman cited in Armitage 2007) and in tandem with the corporatisation of HE the export of education has taken off (Armitage 2007; Goh 2008; Lee cited in Sugimoto 2006; Mok 2006; Sanderson & Watters 2006; UNESCO 2012, Yang 2006).

However, as Armitage (2007) reports there have been dire consequences for many Australian universities who embarked on such ventures. Many universities have been downsizing their presence by cutting programme offerings and or completely withdrawing from some markets. The report quotes Dean Forbes, the international deputy vice-chancellor of Flinders University stating “Where they look unsustainable, we phase them out,” which, as this study asserts, is not what any host community wants. The poor performance has been attributed to a number of factors including fierce completion from local providers in the host community. Offshore programmes need to be heavily subsidised and challenges with maintaining quality control. Jennie Lang international pro-vice chancellor of the University of New South Wales laments that while the university wanted and intended to provide high quality educational programmes and student experiences, the reality was that they couldn’t provide it consistently as they “…don’t have full control of facilities and learning environment of the students”.
The ability to understand values and beliefs different from one’s own culture and to work within different social, political and religious frameworks (Ingleson 2009) are crucial to successful and effective functioning in a global environment. A firm believer of such an ideology is Australian born and raised scholar Phan Le Ha, who completed her undergraduate studies and taught in Vietnam, before moving to Australia to live and undertake her postgraduate studies. Phan (2004) alerts western English educators to the importance of factoring the influence of culture in the teaching and learning of English to Vietnamese students, if they want to be valued as ‘good’ teachers. Developing successful global mindset in the host student population requires offshore educational programmes that adapt to the teaching and learning methods within the local culture. The net effect is a qualified foreign faculty with international expertise and connections, with the capacity and ability to incorporate new global case materials, ideas and delivery mechanisms (Carnall 1991) to the teaching and learning experiences of local students. Such a strategic and proactive approach will undoubtedly help enhance the long-term viability and sustainability of offshore programmes in the host nation.

Vietnam has entered the new millennium with the emergence of a new era: the era of globalisation which has dramatically transformed world trade, communications and economic relations. Vietnam’s comparatively late entry into the globalised world in the late twentieth century has been parallel with an unprecedented growth and demand for knowledge and education (World Bank 2008). However, while globalisation has provided great opportunities for local education providers in catering to this demand it also poses new challenges.

A key challenge is the success and survival of institutions in a thriving higher education (HE) sector. To survive and succeed in the new era, educational providers need to understand and isolate their institutional strengths and weaknesses, identify vital changes in the new environment and perhaps most importantly, manage these changes strategically and effectively. These opportunities and challenges invariably mean changes and restructures to educational systems.

Many developing countries are in the process of restructuring their HE system to meet their nation’s socio-economic development, and Vietnam is no different. Prior to Vietnam’s admission into the World Trade Organisation (WTO) Mai and Nguyen (2007) highlighted the potential for international investments into the country including in the HE sector. Vietnam was admitted into the WTO in January 2007 (WTO 2007) and since then international investments in the local HE sector is a growing reality. While he Vietnamese government sets the broad policy framework and regulatory environment, more autonomy is assigned at institutional level, especially in HE. However, such freedom also translates to more accountability at the local university level (National Academies of the United States [NAUS], 2006).

The influx of foreign interest and newer players in the education sector has raised the Vietnamese Government’s concerns about education quality and standards and its advice to providers is to adopt international benchmarking (Mai & Nguyen 2007). To the
National Academies of the United States (2006) this call is an opportune time for local universities to take account of the emerging trends in HE and take a holistic approach to their programme offerings.

The demand for highly qualified personnel to assist in Vietnam’s social and economic development is the impetus for HE providers to ensure quality education. However, quality education is not simply about content delivery, it also involves the methods and systems used to gauge student performance (Nguyen TLH 2008). Better attention and rigour to assessing student performance could lead to prospective employers’ confidence in the calibre of the graduates and their ability to help firms make key workplace decisions in the globalised marketplace.

Mai and Nguyen (2007) examined the key impacts of internationalisation in the HE sector in developing countries and summarised these to be:

i. shifts in government policies favouring internationalisation;
ii. concerns of ‘brain drain’ from the country;
iii. significant HE institution ‘reforms’ in response to the market demands;
iv. shifts in curricula aimed at the global marketplace;
v. greater emphasis in the techno-science disciplines;
vi. growing use of English as the language of instruction, and
vii. exponential growth in transnational degree programmes.

Vietnam’s economic growth rate, productivity and prosperity are being jeopardised by the shortage of adequately qualified high level human resources (World Bank 2008). The adoption of a market-oriented economy by the Vietnamese government has created, in both the broader society and the business community, a need for knowledge about market economics and business management (Nguyen DT 2009; Vuong, Tran & Nguyen 2009). A rapidly changing and challenging economy requires high-qualified human resources, especially business administrators. However, it is widely acknowledged that there is a serious lack of suitably qualified local human resources to meet the demands of local and international business organisations in Vietnam (Luu 2006; Nguyen 2007). This situation has raised a great demand for MBA programmes in Vietnam.

Understanding the need behind the social demand for reform of its economy and the Government’s encouraging education policies, many universities and educational institutions in Vietnam have cooperated with overseas universities to launch various MBA programmes. In recent years, the MBA has become one of the most popular and fastest growing postgraduate degrees in Vietnam (Nguyen DT 2009). The interest and demand for suitably high qualified human resources especially business administrators have resulted in the proliferation of offshore MBA programmes. Such a growth demonstrates the vital role that business schools play in supplying high level human resources (Neelankavil 1994; Nguyen 2009; Vuong, Tran & Nguyen DT 2009) needed to operate and manage in the new market-orientated Vietnamese economy exposed to all the usual challenges of a globalised world. However, the proliferation of MBA programmes has raised real concerns regarding quality and long-term viability of many of the
programmes offered (Vinen & Selvarajah 2007).

Collaborative partnerships between local public and/or private educational institutions and foreign MBA providers can be hugely beneficial. First, such partnerships provide both parties opportunities to increase their student enrolments. Second, it offers local students greater opportunities and choice of internationally recognised qualifications that are more easily accessible and affordable. Finally partnerships provide both parties opportunities to create alternate revenue streams (Vinen & Selvarajah 2007). However, a major problem faced with such partnerships is how to ensure the quality and sustainability of programmes offered.

Globalisation has firmly cemented internationalisation of education in Vietnam. The initial trend has been for international universities and business schools to establish fully-invested enterprises or extended programmes in coordination with local universities. The focus was on undergraduate course but there has been increasing trend for delivering postgraduate course; there is aggressive competition between educational institutions in the delivery of master programmes, including the MBA programmes (Nguyen DT 2009). Students’ interest in and applications to enrol in MBA programmes are on the increase, and both students and corporations are seeing faster returns on their investments in these programmes. In the 2011-2012 academic years there were more than 18,000 Master graduates and 34,440 enrolments, bringing the total number of Masters students to more than 79,200. A negative element to this spectacular growth is that the teaching staff is not adequately qualified to teach in these programmes, suggesting implications for programme quality. This finding has led the Vietnamese authorities to suspend more than 160 master programmes for the current academic year (Vietnam International Education Development (VIED) 2012). The critical shortage of qualified teaching has also been raised by Professor Martin Hayden from the Southern Cross University, Australia. In his paper titled, Developing a Globally Integrated Higher Education System in Vietnam: A Nine-Point Plan, he notes that “only 14.4% of all higher education lecturers in Vietnam have doctorates” (Hayden 2012).

As mentioned previously many offshore MBA programmes have been launched in Vietnam. However, some have been poorly planned and or lack adequate quality control. Such shortcomings, by a few, have had negative effects on the overall quality of off-shore MBA programmes (Vinen & Selvarajah 2007). Moreover, given changes in the fast-paced business environment, the question arises whether MBA programmes meet the needs of local business practice (Nguyen DT 2009). Additionally such allegations about poor quality, if true, also reflect a more serious problem of ineffectiveness of offshore MBA programmes and its providers. Challenges concerning programme quality, which can involve a new or existing program, can and do affect its long-term viability.

To be a high performing business administrator in contemporary Vietnam, the MBA degree is regarded as an essential training programme capable of delivering right qualities, skills, competencies and associated knowledge. My question is how can an educational institution ensure quality in its programme delivery without adequate
knowledge and awareness of the expectations and motivations of its multiple stakeholders?

The literature shows that the key issues on successful delivery of offshore MBA programmes centres on quality assurance, quality management and programme sustainability (Vinen & Selvarajah 2007). Therefore to ensure programme survival and growth, graduate schools need to incorporate systems and processes to monitor, assess and improve where relevant programme quality. For best results, programme quality needs to be assessed and addressed from multiple stakeholder perspectives. Additionally, policies need to be assessed and developed to help fulfil stakeholder expectations about programme quality, long-term viability of the provider, and calibre of graduates to meet the needs of employers, business, government and the wider community.

Thus, it is the aim of this study to investigate the offshore MBA programmes offered in Vietnam and to learn the needs of its various stakeholders. Through this approach the study aims to identify the key factors for the successful design, delivery and ultimately the long-term viability and sustainability of offshore MBA programmes.

1.3 Research objectives and research questions

This study aims to identify the critical factors essential to the successful design and delivery of an offshore MBA programme. Such a set of critical factors can help ensure the success and sustainability of offshore MBA programmes. Specifically, the study attempts to answer the following questions:

i. Why do students enrol in offshore MBA education programmes?
ii. Do employers prefer offshore to local MBA graduates? If so why?
iii. How well do the current programmes meet the expectations and needs of multiple stakeholders (such as, among others, students, prospective employers, and faculty members) regarding programme quality?
iv. What factors are crucial to ensuring sustainability of offshore MBA education programmes in Vietnam?

The fourth research question is framed for the benefit of the offshore MBA programme providers, to assist them understand how to provide strong and successful programs so that there is continuous demand for their offshore programs. The following two sub-questions arise:

1. How is programme strength perceived by different stakeholder groups?
2. How is programme success perceived by different stakeholder groups?

These research questions in totality drive the study. Answers to these questions will assist me to identify the critical factors essential for the successful design, quality and delivery of an offshore MBA programme. These findings will also assist the partnership members of offshore MBA programmes to ensure that the programmes they design and offer are of
the highest quality and effective and sustainable for the host communities and the international partner(s).

1.4 Significance of the findings

The research is significant as it addresses a need for comprehensive research into critical factors for quality design, delivery and management of offshore MBA programmes in Vietnam. The contributions of this study are expected to be three-fold. First, critical factors for quality design, delivery and management of offshore MBA programmes in Vietnam will be identified. Second, the findings can assist offshore providers in understanding the integral needs of the local/host communities in Vietnam. The final contribution will be to help raise awareness of the importance of understanding the local host market in strategic planning and delivery of any offshore education programme. The study as a whole can assist offshore education providers understand what it takes to ensure their programmes are successful and relevant in the context of the host country, and will therefore earn them long-term sustainability.

1.5 Limitations of the study

A major limitation of the research is that the investigation is restricted to three case organisations i.e. providers of offshore MBA education programmes. Therefore, the findings will not be representative of the wider population and cannot be generalised to all offshore MBA programme partnerships.

Another limitation is that the multiplicity of stakeholders is restricted to three key stakeholder groups i.e. graduate, business and programme provider. Some of the other stakeholders that are excluded in this study are current MBA students, other business personnel) (i.e. other than sponsors of MBA students) and government officials from the higher-education sector. Their exclusion could be a limitation as they may have some different perspectives on the offshore MBA programmes in Vietnam. There is not much influence on research objectives.

1.6 Definition of key concepts and terms

This section provides the definition of key concepts and terms central to understanding the thesis.

**Offshore programme:** This is a programme that is designed and/or delivered by the partnership between an educational institution from a foreign country and one from the local (or host) country.

**Programme effectiveness:** This concept refers to how successful a programme is in achieving its expressed outcomes (Kettner, Moroney, & Martin 2008).
**Quality**: This is described as the total effect of the features of a process, product or service on its performance, or on the customer’s or client’s perception of that performance. Quality relates to the effectiveness and efficiency of the educational institution in achieving its stated missions and objectives (Liston 1999). Quality systems are developed in the light of the needs of the clients. The processes and standards must reflect the clients’ requirements and current best practice (Davis, Olsen & Bohm 2000, p. 68).

**Quality management**: This refers to a process that ensures the quality process actually happens. In terms of transnational programmes there is a quality framework with standards and criteria for comparing and assessing the quality of the programmes design and delivery. In assessing the overall quality of a transnational programme a university should consider two aspects of the programme (Davis, Olsen & Bohm 2000, and p.72). The first is whether the programme is of at least an equivalent standard to the same or comparable programme at the home institution -inputs/process and outcomes. It must also include criteria about whether it meets any relevant national or international benchmarks. The second is whether the programme is effective in the local (host) students meeting and achieving the educational objectives of the programme.

**Stakeholder**: The classic definition of a stakeholder is “any group or individual who can affect or is affected by the achievement of the organisation’s objectives” (Freeman 1984, p.46). Friedman and Miles (2006) argue that the stakeholder groups are vital to the survival and success of a corporation.

**Sustainability**: Since the 1990s the Development Evaluation Committee of the organisation of Economic Cooperation and Development - Development Assistance Committee (OECD-DAC) has included sustainability is one of its five evaluation criteria. The others are relevance, effectiveness, efficiency and impact. Sustainability means maintaining and continuing programme services after the funding period is over.

**1.7 Overview of the thesis**

There are five chapters to this thesis. CHAPTER 1: introduces the reader to offshore MBA education programmes and provides the background of the study, research objectives and questions, significant of the findings and limitations, definitions and overview of the thesis.

CHAPTER 2: reviews and provides discussions of the extant the literature on issues and challenges of postgraduate management education and the offshore MBA in particular. It also examines the gap between offshore programme design and delivery and the local business needs. It provides rationale for the design and development of a conceptual framework that will ultimately guide this study.

CHAPTER 3: is concerned with the overall research methodology. The research methodology is based on a qualitative paradigm and consistent with such a paradigm a
case study research method. Three case organisations feature in this study and interviews, focus group sessions and published documents from the case organisations are used as research tools. The chapter provides rationale and justification for the research methodology.

CHAPTER 4: presents and discusses the qualitative results of the research. There are two sub-sections – results and analysis of individual interviews and focus groups and where appropriate relevant documents from the case organisations.

Finally in CHAPTER 5: the thesis presents the findings of the results in light of the extant literature and answers the research questions and the research objective. The recommendations, limitations and suggestions for further research are also discussed and then the overall conclusions to the thesis are summed up.

1.8 Limitations of the study

A major limitation of the study is that the investigation is restricted to three case organisations i.e. providers of offshore MBA education programmes. Therefore, the findings will not be representative of the wider population and cannot therefore be generalised to all offshore MBA programme partnerships.

1.9 Future research

There is potential for comparative research and investigation into the perceptions of Human Resource (HR) managers in foreign-owned and local companies in Vietnam about the work attributes of the offshore MBAs graduates.

1.10 Conclusions of the study

The identification of critical factors in offshore MBA education programmes in Vietnam can function as a checklist and can help programme providers do what it takes to enhance programme viability, performance, success and sustainability. The contributory factors can assist universities initiate a more systematic and strategic planning process to ensure programme quality. The findings from this study can assist in providing the basis from which an appropriate quality model can be adopted to develop quality indicators with regard to the MBA market in Vietnam.

In conclusion the long-term demand for business education offering the quality of offshore MBA education programmes is expected to continue to grow, it is evident that business schools should develop quality framework to become the dominant providers of business education in the future.
CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

While Chapter 1 introduced the research problem and objectives, scope and overview of the study, here in Chapter 2 the extant literature essential to understanding the study is presented.

This chapter has a number of objectives. First, to review the literature on the internationalisation of HE; and in doing delve into the discussion of the corporatisation of higher education. Second, the chapter reviews the growth and development of management education particularly at postgraduate level. Why is there tremendous growth in this sector? Third, the chapter delves into the extant literature of the offshore management education market specifically with regard to the offshore MBA programme. Finally, the chapter reviews from a global perspective the quality issues and challenges related to the design and delivery of offshore MBA education programmes. The tracking of the literature covering these areas has the overall objective to assist the researcher to better understand the offshore market sector and to contextualise and comprehend the challenges facing the offshore MBA sector in Vietnam.

2.2 Internationalisation of higher education (HE)

Globalisation has meant that while countries still bear varying degrees of distinctiveness in economic, social and cultural systems overall they are increasingly becoming more interrelated. The global HE market fits in with this trend. Collaboration between countries is expanding and national policies are focused on facilitating and also regulating where necessary cross-border activities in this sector. The term "internationalisation of higher education" is used to describe all policies and activities of governments and HE institutions designed at making HE (more) available and responsive to the challenges of internationalisation, Europeanization and globalisation (Vossensteyn et al. 2007).

Transnational education is regarded as the service of education on a global scale highlighting that some degree of cross-border mobility of students, academicians, programmes of study and/or institutions is involved (Huang 2006a; Hussain 2007; Sugimoto 2006, p. vi). In the past decade or so, many universities have extended their education and research activities across national boundaries (McBurnie & Ziguras 2007). Additionally, McBurnie and Ziguras (2007, p. 21) isolates the central stakeholder, the student, in transnational education stating, “Learners are located in a country other than the one in which the awarding institution is based”. Such an international educational delivery format has the power to absorb and facilitate a large student body and disseminate knowledge beyond the geographical boundaries of a state and/or a country.
(Hussain 2007). Though transnational education in itself is not a new phenomenon, such a global expansion may be a new development for some academic institutions. To Pimpa (2009) transnational education is attractive to students seeking foreign qualifications as overall costs can be greatly reduced. The option is also attractive to host or local employers and governments as well as multinational and global corporations considering human resource training and development options.

2.2.1 Corporatisation of higher education (HE)

A key challenge affecting the global education market sectors is the corporatisation of HE (Goh 2008; Lee cited in Sugimoto 2006; Mok 2006; Sanderson & Watters 2006; UNESCO 2012, Yang 2006) and the increasing focus on the provision of short courses (Goh 2008). Choudaha, Orosz & Chang (2012) suggest that the increasing U.S focus on undergraduate internationalisation is directly or indirectly related to a reduction of government funding to its universities. The increasing focus and development of the internationalisation of education is aligned with the corporatisation of education resulting in many higher educational institutions than ever before to become involved with the delivery of transnational educational programmes (Choudaha & Kono 2012).

In their paper 'The corporatisation of higher education: A question of balance', Sanderson and Watters (2006 p. 317) draws our attention to the idea that HE has always been setup as a corporation with two contrasting arms, which they refer to as the ‘corporate-collegial’ and the ‘corporate-mercantile’. The former is concerned with the core functions of education itself (such as teaching, learning, research and community services) while the latter is concerned with the actual management of the educational institution. The traditional university focus is argued to be ‘corporate-collegial’. Their paper suggest that dwindling Government funding to universities, arguably due to many more education providers sharing the same has resulted in many universities assuming a more ‘corporate-mercantile’ centric focus and this is what is being inferred to in reference to the ‘corporatisation of higher education’. Sanderson and Watters’ study used the Competing Values Framework (CVF) framework to confirm such a shift to a more corporate-mercantile focus in their case organisation, an Australian university.

As a result of the direct or indirect influence of the ‘corporate-mercantile’ spin - that there is plenty of money to be made in this sector - there has been increasing numbers of providers and competition in the higher educational sector whether it is within the domestic or international setting. The globalisation of the higher education sector has opened up opportunities for local universities to collaborate with international reputable universities to provide various types of degrees such as offshore, twinning, and distance education programmes. These new opportunities have caused local universities to face increasing pressures of competition. As more local and international resources such as Finance and expertise are made to lift the country’s educational and economic profile there will be increasing battle by local universities to get a share. Given the Government’s policy of diversified education system, it is envisaged that there will be more privately-run universities. At that stage, fierce competition is expected in many
areas including academic program, curriculum, teaching methodology, staff compensation policies, and access to financial support from the business sector.

As the nation gets wealthier there is also the option and desire for a segment of the Vietnamese population to opt for self-financed overseas education. No longer are the destination countries restricted to the United States and European countries but increasingly neighbouring countries like Japan, Korea, China, Thailand, and Singapore are being sought as preferred destinations. Some universities that have established their names in this education market include Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology (RMIT) Australia, National University of Singapore (NUS), Nanyang Technical University (NUT), Singapore and the Asian Institute of Technology (AIT) Thailand. Given their good facilities, reputable quality, close proximity, and reasonable pricing, these schools/universities are newer players in the market (Nguyen 2009).

Additional competition to entice prospective students also comes in the form and influx of ‘newer players’ in the higher education sector in the form of corporate universities (Nelson & Watt 1999). Large corporations are actively participating in the provision of higher education, establishing their own universities to handle their own specific training and developmental needs. While corporate universities have not made their presence in Vietnam as yet, there are no assurances that they will not be doing so in coming years.

Mok (2006) writes that corporatisation of HE and the import of foreign education has pervaded even traditionally socialist economies like China and Vietnam – the adoption of user-pays system helps lessen the burden on government and public spending. The ‘corporate-mercantile’ focus and the aggressive expansion into the markets brings a number of issues and challenges in terms of business education design and delivery (Hopstaken 2012) and the quality of the education and the graduates produced, and this is especially challenging for emerging economies (Anto 2012).

2.2.2 Transnational education

In recent years the internationalisation efforts have focused on the establishment of branch campuses beyond national borders and the provision of offshore programmes. Current developments in transnational education are largely characterised by programme and institution mobility (Choudaha, Orosz & Chang 2012; Sugimoto 2006) and an increase focus in the offshore education market. This means that international students have access to foreign education in their home country; this is an attractive alternative for many - there are potential savings from otherwise incurred costs - international travel, accommodation and living expenses, all at generally first-world prices.

Huang (2006a) notes the factors that have significantly influenced providers’ policies and strategies to promote transnational HE in Asia and the Pacific region are those that touch on building mutual understanding, encourage skilled migration, revenue generation, and capacity building. Huang also stresses that for emerging markets, from the host or receiver perspective, two other factors also feature in decisions to import transnational
HE activities i.e. enhancement of the host competitiveness and improvements in local academia.

While transnational business education is expanding and offers tremendous opportunities for education providers there are also challenges and concerns surrounding issues such as financial viability of programmes, decision-making in a complex multinational environment, quality assurance, partner relationships, the curriculum and teaching and learning methods (Davis, Olsen & Bohm 2000). For Huang (2006b) the major issues of transnational HE revolves around quality assurance of programmes and the limited focus on tailor-made programmes for the needs of the receiving country. Pyvis (2011) reinforces this very notion in his paper ‘The need for context-sensitive measures of educational quality in cross-border higher education programme provision’. Pyvis, inspired by the 2010 keynote presentation of Juan Ramon de la Feunte, calls for transnational programme providers to shift their focus from solely relying on an ethnocentric home-country perspective to one that includes the ‘other’ in issues related to programme provision and quality. To add weight to this present study and thesis it must be emphasised that the author had in effect reflected on this same issue in late 2009 when she first articulated and submitted her DBA research proposal to the University of Western Sydney.

Castle and Kelly (2004) view the primary issue of quality assurance in offshore education to be the totality of the student experience and the need to measure the effectiveness of the programme as a whole. They also locate another key issue to the cultural and language contexts especially in relation to students’ style and approaches to learning in host countries. Student concerns about their experiences tend to revolve around course contents including its reflection of the local society and industry needs (Yang 2006).

Pimpa (2009) asserts that the strong field and competition in transnational business education has made programme quality a primary concern among the providers, users and potential clients. He identifies a range of concerns including recognition or accreditation of the programme by the local or host country, course content, appropriate cultural sensitivity of the programme and/or its teaching methods to the local environment, appropriateness of the teaching methods in meeting course objectives and the finally concerns of adequate provision of physical, administrative, communication and other resources to support successful learning.

The Chinese have a word for transnational education which effectively translates to “co-operation between China and foreign countries in operation and management in higher education institutions to offer various education programmes” (Huang 2006a, p.vi). From a cultural perspective it appears that the Chinese expect to have some if not equal say in how programmes are designed, structured and delivered. Huang (2006a) posits that Chinese students tend to choose transnational programmes to gain an international education and furthermore tend to hone in on those that are particularly valued internationally for quality. McBurnie and Ziguras (2007) make a similar observation as Pimpa (2009) and Huang (2006a) that programme quality remains a key
ingredient to successful transnational education programmes. Morshidi and Sarjit (2007) has narrowed issues of programme quality down to programme content and programme management citing more specifically three issues a) inadequate understanding of the assessment criteria by host (local) country students b) foreign providers not understanding local needs and c)) the imported education policies and quality assurance mechanisms of the provider.

As the transnational educational sector continues to evolve and competition increases, students and other key stakeholders must be satisfied (Merican et al. 2009) through more rigorous attempts at quality assurance. Sugimoto (2006) claims that quality assurance is one of the urgent priorities that needs to be addressed for offshore education providers to secure their reputation in international settings. To Castle and Kelly (2004) the issues of quality assurance can be grouped into three main categories:

i. pre-delivery issues such as partnership model and student selection and admission;
ii. programme delivery issues such as the mode of delivery, marking and providing feedback and
iii. outcomes such as regular review of student performance and problem identification, feedback from staff and students, and regular meeting with partners.

In rendering quality programmes, it appears from the discussions so far that the international provider must tailor programmes for each different international setting. One size does not fit all; not only because of the influences and impacts of the political, economic, social and cultural forces on the educational sector but also of the wide-ranging diversity of stakeholders involved and their respective needs. This is especially crucial in the context of emerging economies as Anto (2012) argues in the Indian context. Similarly, this study recommends a similar approach for the Vietnamese context.

2.2.3 Offshore education

In the past, offshore education used to be a part of institutional development policy motivated by political and cultural motives (Vossensteyn et al. 2007) however in the last few decades there has been a dramatic shift in this view. Offshore education is today viewed as an opportune global export commodity with profit in mind (Walker, Redmond & Morris 2010), in line with Sanderson and Watters’s (2006) ‘corporate-mercantile’ tag; it is now increasingly considered an entrepreneurial activity, an academic enterprise.

Cross border education is increasingly viewed by many providers as a viable way to stay afloat as a result of reduced government subsidy. The HE institutions are able to market their courses offshore as there is a growing demand for international HE in Asia, especially East- and South-East Asia.

Most educators concur that many transnational programmes are being pursued as global trade commodities in tandem with the logic of corporatisation of HE and therefore from a
purely profit-generating perspective while others e.g. economists and members of the trade sector argue them to be legitimate public service endeavours (Guevarra 2007; Pimpa 2008; Vossensteyn et al. 2007; Walker, Redmond & Morris 2010).

The advent of the lucrative offshore educational market has witnessed dynamic competition in this area and as highlighted previously, quality of the programme offering and its delivery has become paramount. Internationalisation is a high priority for Australian universities. Ingleson (2009) makes a very valid point in stating that good offshore programmes can play a very important role in positioning the university in that market and opening up other lucrative opportunities. Ingleson emphasises that for this reason all offshore activity must be planned, sustainable and consistent with the broader strategic objectives of the university. Cort, Das, and Synn (2008) provide additional insights. They argue that all levels of the partnership - presidents, provosts, deans, department chairs, and other influential decision-makers - need to be supportive and committed to the project. Another challenge they have identified is the reliability of the coordinating and integrating efforts of the providers.

2.3 Business education

Business education can be defined as the transfer of skills and knowledge with the objective of “preparing students for the future global business challenges” (Emiliani 2006, p. 364). Before the advent of the 21st century Karpin (1995) identified transfer of skills and knowledge as crucial to national and international growth and development especially with respect to globalisation and its challenges for the [Australian] economy.

Management education in particular was traditionally viewed as a means to facilitate learning of job-related behaviours essential to improving employee and organisational performance (Krishnan 2008). However, rapid changes in the external environment of firms and businesses, including globalisation, demographics, social and technology, has meant that contemporary management education has placed a greater focus on the objectives and developmental needs of firms and businesses to manage the impacts and challenges of the aforementioned challenges (Anto 2012). Additionally, the educational environment is undergoing significant and rapid changes across many areas of education itself including but not limited to teaching and learning methods and principles, flexible learning technologies and shifts to student-centred learning. Overall, these changes have replaced much if not all of the traditional paradigms of business and management education (McMurray & Sharma 2005). Acito et al (2008, p. 1) highlight the tremendous changes in these areas noting “The quality of the next generation of business leaders will be determined by ways in which business schools respond to a host of dramatic changes emerging in the environment of higher education”. Similarly, Paninchukunnath (2012, p. 6) note the main objective of business schools is “to prepare students for flexible adaptation to new business problems and settings”. One of the key drivers for internationalising business school curriculum is to create opportunities for students and faculty to effectively advice the business community in compete in a global marketplace.
and to help prepare and mould students for international career prospects (Cort, Das & Synn 2008).

While a number of notable trends in business education programmes are evident, Acito et al (2008) caution educational providers against simply going with the flow and mimicking and/or offering more of the same. Instead, providers are advised to be strategic with their programme design and urged to offer what is appropriate for particular regions. However, the greatest advice for business schools operating offshore entities in emerging markets is Anto’s (2012) call for indigenisation of curriculum in the Indian context. While contemporary albeit western management philosophy is crucial to operating successfully in global markets, theory alone is insufficient in building student capacity to effectively manage global business. Students in offshore locations, especially in emerging markets, may not have sufficient exposure to global business therefore the programme must provide opportunities for managerial skills and competencies development. Thus, it is important to ensure that offshore MBA programmes are suitable and effective for the local context. Hopstaken (2012) has also made such an observation in the Vietnamese context and the present paper suggest that indigenisation of curriculum is also made a priority in the Vietnamese context. The findings of Hall and Young (2008) and Anto (2012) suggest that a number of business schools have done so aligning their programme design and curricula with contemporary knowledge and local business needs and practices.

2.3.1 The MBA programme

The world has witnessed an increasing demand for HE and never has this been more evident than in the management sector, where the MBA degree is undoubtedly regarded a significant educational prerequisite for employees in upper echelons of management. According to Baruch (2009) although the MBA programme was first developed in the USA it has since grown and achieved global popularity and recognition as the most pedagogically sound management course structure. It is well received and formally endorsed by the business sector as providing the necessary managerial development training. Alongside this beneficial view of MBA programmes to the ultimate users is the harsh reality of it as a ‘money-spinner’ and ‘global commodity’ (Walker, Redmond & Morris 2010) to providers.

Much of the MBA programme documentations list as their key objective the tasks of preparing graduates for employment in the global economy i.e. to be international managers which means building their capability to operate internationally with a global mindset, knowledge of international markets and the functional and cross-cultural competencies necessary for the roles (Crosling, Edward & Schroder 2008; Sharkey & Beeman 2008).

The MBA education market is made up a variety of customer groups i.e. stakeholders and hence it is expected that there will be differing needs and perceptions of quality. This may be because, as Ray and Jeon (2008) argue, different stakeholders have different
objectives. For example, students who are the ultimate receivers of the educational services may be interested in career development while corporations, who financially sponsor their employees and/or are the future recruiters of MBA graduates, may want graduates who are critical thinkers and problem-solvers. On the other hand faculty members who teach on the programme may want truly committed and engaged students. Finally programme providers and administrators may be interested in balancing the different (and sometimes conflicting) objectives of students and employers while operating within an overall resource constraint (Madu & Kuei 1993).

Recognising the trend in the return of working or practising managers to the classroom (Edgington 2004; Hall & Young 2008) it does make sense that demand for traditional full-time MBA programmes is on the decline. Quality MBA programmes are increasingly viewed as able to embrace the multiple needs of its student cohort. These traditional programme types are increasingly facing competition and pressure from the abundance of new and more innovative institutional offerings, the complexities and interrelated nature of business today and the programme proliferation (Wilson 2007; Hubbard 2007).

Generally speaking, the image presented of the merits of an MBA award is that it is an essential piece of qualification for staff who endeavour to one day make it to the ranks of the management echelon. It is promoted as highly valuable and essential postgraduate programme capable of providing prospective students in-depth knowledge, exposure and up-to-date understanding of a wide range of management knowledge and critical skills crucial to being good leaders and managers. Most MBA curriculum rely on case study teaching methodology to supplement student learning; students are provided business case studies to authenticate and test contemporary theory, scientific findings and business realities across the whole range of business areas including strategy and planning, finance, marketing and human resource management.

Hopstaken (2012), an MBA professor from The Netherlands and Chairman of the Advisory Board of ERC Institute Vietnam, posits in his blog ‘MBA 2012: its image & identity’ that prospective students to the MBA programme generally need to have prior working experience in management-related areas. For these students it may be argued that the MBA degree may be regarded as a ‘finishing touch’ enabling them to integrate their prior management experience and skills with exposure to the latest theory and knowledge in the field of management. Hopstaken suggests that the rigorous mix of theory and practice potentially opens up students to ‘C-suite’ careers or failing that, to financially lucrative, successful and rewarding international career prospects. He claims this image of the benefits of an MBA education is promoted by business schools all over the world making it a very much sought after programme.

Hopstaken provides rare insights into the issues and challenges of the MBA in the Vietnamese context. He writes that in many countries including Vietnam employers demand the MBA award as a basic requirement for many positions, even though it may not be essential to some. It appears that the MBA award’s prestigious value is not only regarded as a status symbol but also as an indicator of trust – for example the board of
directors can trust the MBA qualified CEO to lead the firm. According to Hopstaken, senior management officials in Vietnam are all required to hold a master’s degree by 2015, and with the MBA held in such high esteem it is no wonder that students view it as ‘the qualification’ to obtain. The consequence of this is that students, many without any management experience, enrol in the programme – there is “MBA inflation” due to a ready market of potential students. However, unequivocally it may be assumed that these students are placing unanimous trust in the business schools to provide them a quality educational experience.

Other challenges Hopstaken cites relate to the foundations of the MBA programme itself. Having originated in the U.S Hopstaken argues that the programme is heavy on American cases and use of American texts. Additionally, Hopstaken asserts that the curricula in many instances uses outdated texts and teaches old business models which have been proven to be wrong and which have resulted in well publicised disasters. This ‘old’ focus is out of touch with the new global world where it is not really only knowledge that is paramount for business success but the right set of managerial competencies and skills to make well-informed decisions at the opportune time.

The corporatisation of HE and the financial lucraternity of internationalisation and transnational programmes (Ingleson 2009; Hopstaken 2012) have led many universities, corporations and business schools to join the bandwagon and offer MBA programmes. The result has been MBA programmes mushrooming all over the world, especially in emerging economies; many are offering sub-standard programmes, to students who lack management experience, and churning out ‘MBA graduates’ who cannot really benefit from their expensive education.

### 2.4 Higher education (HE) in Vietnam

A number of authors including Pham (2010) and Ngo (2011) note and write of the tremendous changes in the Vietnamese education sector in the 21st century. However, although Vietnam’s education system has developed into a large and diverse sector Pham (2010) asserts there continues to be great challenges in the State’s management of HE including in issues relating to quality management. Pham claims that the current methods adopted by the State do little to ensure education quality neither does it have effective policies and strategies to guarantee future improvements. Another issue Pham notes is that there is insufficient attention and support to develop the creativity of local Vietnamese teachers and students.

To Ngo (2010) the reason why the Vietnamese HE sector is facing such great challenges is directly linked to the State’s relentless hold on governance matters relating to universities and colleges. Bureaucratic control means that the State is slow to embrace change and is therefore unable to facilitate/promote timely improvements in training quality, encourage local creativity (teachers, education administrators and students) and permit timely decision-making needed to operate in a progressively competitive global
market. There is also poor overall management of human capital. Ngo further posits that for Vietnam to compete and succeed economically in a global market it is paramount that due attention and investment be given to quality control of the HE sector. The poor State control and management of HE continues to be and is the prime reason for the overall shortcomings in the quality of HE. Bui (2011) concurs stating that the quality of HE in general, and especially the master’s and doctoral training in business programmes are limited and these shortcomings have negatively impacted the Vietnamese economy in terms of her ability to adequately respond to the challenges of a global marketplace.

The following tables and discussions are based on Bui’s (2011) paper which demonstrates the impetus for quick action on quality control in HE. Table 1: Vietnamese higher education sector 1987-2010

shows the overall growth in the sector in the last 23 years. Firstly, we observe that there were 101 universities and colleges in 1987 however by 2010 the figure had risen to 441, representing a massive 337 per cent increase. Breakdown analysis shows a 254 per cent increase in number of universities (63 to 223) compared to 474 per cent increase in the number of colleges (38 to 218).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1987</th>
<th>2010</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Universities</td>
<td>63 (63%)</td>
<td>223 (50.6%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Colleges</td>
<td>38 (38%)</td>
<td>218 (49.4%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>101</td>
<td>441</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

We further observe that while universities made up 63% of the HE sector in 1987 they were down to 50.6% in 2010 implying a massive increase in the number of colleges during that period. Table 2: Vietnamese higher education – Institutional ownership shows the changes in institutional ownership patterns over three time periods, 1987-1997-2010.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1987</th>
<th>1997</th>
<th>2010</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Universities and colleges</td>
<td>Public</td>
<td>Private</td>
<td>Public</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>101 (100%)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>111(82%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>101</td>
<td>126</td>
<td>441</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

However, before we delve into ownership analysis, it is important to note the tremendous growth in the HE sector overall. There was close to 25 per cent (101 to 126) increase in the numbers of universities and colleges by 1997 and from then to 2010 there was a huge 250 per cent increase (i.e. 126 to 441). More remarkably however, we see the emergence of private university presence in the Vietnamese HE sector by 1997 and by 2010 that figure had grown exponentially. Theses finding suggests the attractiveness of the Vietnamese HE as a trade commodity and potential educational investment market.
The Ministry of Education and Training (MoET) provides us a glimpse of the trends and growth opportunities for postgraduate studies in Vietnam. By September 2009, there were 159 institutions (includes universities and research institutes) offering post-graduate programmes. Of these 71 (or 44.7%) were research institutions while the remaining 88 (or 55.3%) were universities. 121 of the institutions also offered PhD degree while 100 institutions also offered masters degree; four of the latter were private universities. In terms of PhD awards these institutions have in total, from 2000 onwards, provided training for an average 650 national doctorates annually (MoET (2009). Table 3: Vietnamese higher education – Postgraduate enrolments below summarises the growth in postgraduate student enrolments over the two year period 2008-2009.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Award</th>
<th>2008</th>
<th>2009</th>
<th>Increase</th>
<th>% Increase</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Nos</td>
<td>1,805</td>
<td>22,885</td>
<td>2,509</td>
<td>30,638</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>24690</td>
<td>33147</td>
<td>8,457</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>As % of Total</td>
<td>7.3</td>
<td>92.7</td>
<td>7.6</td>
<td>92.4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

While overall there were significantly more Masters than PhD student enrolments in both years, there was more than 30 per cent growth across both PhD and Masters enrolments. This increase in enrolments highlights the very important role of post-graduate studies in Vietnam. The demand apparently is driven by individual citizens hoping to tap Vietnam’s comprehensive need for highly qualified manpower and human resources to enable socio-economic development and progress.

While the scale of development in the Vietnamese HE sector and its capacity to provide its citizens easier access to postgraduate education has improved significantly in recent years MoET (2009) claims that it has come with some serious costs. MoET claims that the Government has compromised programme quality and due diligence by allowing indiscriminate programme development and offerings by many universities and colleges. The long term impact of such risky business is reduced stakeholder interest in these programmes and the sustainability of the programmes and viability of the institution itself. Jensen (2010) suggests that educational leaders utilise a variety of management tools including innovation, strategic thinking and independent decision making to successfully design and implement the changes in HE that is required for a progressive Vietnam (Jensen 2010).

With a national population of around 86 million, 60% of which is younger than 30 years of age, a cultural tradition that values education, and a fast growing economy, Vietnam is viewed attractively globally as a viable export market for HE. However, Vietnam’s HE sector can be problematic for the incumbent exporter with wide range of challenges such as administration, economics, pedagogical and political (Ngo 2011).
Globalisation has a huge impact on education especially in the HE sector. The world is getting ‘closer’ and more connected with rapid advances and development in technology and communication. Increased communication across institutions at student, staff and the public level help to raise awareness of issues including quality of the various programmes and their curriculum which makes quality management increasingly crucial to the survival of HE institutions (Bon 2010).

Vietnam’s education, especially in the HE sector, has in the recent years opened up to the international market namely due to increasing global competition among foreign universities as well as because of WTO and other international obligations. Contemporary Vietnam is in dire need of well qualified and trained graduates – graduates who can apply the latest knowledge and theory to practice; in the case of MBA graduates these are professional who are able combine latest theory and knowledge from the university environment to the actual field that is their practice (Nguyen 2010).

Therefore, the role of the HE sector in Vietnam’s progressive development is of paramount importance and understandably the value of the sector in shaping the future of Vietnam is constantly being raised and reinforced. Transnational education programmes including offshore programmes play a huge role in the Vietnamese HE system (Sugimoto 2006) and these can assist Vietnamese people play key roles and be serious competitors in global business. However, as discussed the quality issues facing Vietnam’s HE system are serious and require timely intervention. Jensen (2010) advises due discourse in areas such as academic quality and accreditation, developmental progression of the university/college student, changes in student recruitment and marketing, advancement of the teaching profession, application of technology and software, opportunities for curriculum development, campus environment and the evolution of the library. The growth in the HE sector discussed here is a challenge for any government to manage let alone a state-run one such as Vietnam with its stringent bureaucratic control and governance of the HE sector.

2.4.1 Internationalisation – the Vietnamese context

Internationalisation of the higher education sector has a substantial impact on domestic and international curriculum integration (Candelaria 2007). As Ngo (2011) points out there are two major motivations underlying HE internationalisation. First, the need and gap within the domestic market for suitably qualified human resources. The second motivator is its potential as a revenue generator. While the latter is mostly from the foreign provider perspective, especially providers from western developed countries with long traditions of corporate universities such as Australia, UK, and the US, it is also equally important for the local Vietnamese partner institutions. Ngo asserts that internationalisation, especially those based on partnerships between foreign universities and local institutions, is a viable and good method and process of assisting an economy in transition, such as Vietnam’s is, mould and develop its national HE sector.

Vietnam’s open-door policy and economic reforms has resulted in greater transnational
education co-operation between Vietnam and foreign countries. The cooperative efforts have manifested in changes in the types of educational programmes that are being offered as well as in way Vietnamese HE institutions have traditionally operated or managed. Over the past decade there has been a substantial expansion in the number of transnational HE programmes, including joint programmes.

Warner, Goodall and Zing’s (2002, p. 168) write that China’s decision to, in the early 1980s, invite joint venture operations between firms from western developed nations and the Chinese state-owned enterprises was to enable transfer of “both technical ‘hardware’ and managerial ‘software’”. This was a targeted strategy to enable China’s relatively smooth transition to a market-based economy. Both technology and management skills are crucial to global competition and success and therefore the decision to use joint ventures as a way of transferring and accessing latest developments in ‘hardware’ such as infrastructure, technology, and machinery and ‘software’ such as leadership and management styles and techniques is very strategic. Similarly Vietnam’s transition to a market-economy and doimoi in 1986 (Hayden & Thiep 2010) has followed a similar approach. Thang, Rowley, Quang and Warner (2007, p. 114) write that in Vietnam “local managers are short of management knowledge to deal with people-related issues arising in a market economy” and therefore the country’s leaders have embraced China’s model of economic reform, including the emphasis on the transfer of management skills especially human resource management practices, to deal with the shortage. Much of the transfer is via the foreign partners of joint ventures as well as via foreign direct investors.

Huang (2006b) writes that the driving forces which have led to the proliferation and tremendous growth of transnational HE programmes in Vietnam is positively correlated to the growth of the socio-economic profile of the people. As people become more affluent there is an interest in acquiring education. Vietnam’s participation in the WTO in 2007 has provided a stronger and more direct impetus to the development of transnational HE programmes, and especially to degree programmes jointly provided by local and foreign universities in Vietnamese campuses. By undertaking joint programmes with prestigious foreign partners, there is a focus not only on importing contemporary programmes from the foreign partners but equally too the emphasis and attention and changes to mission statements, operating instructions, curriculum development, faculty development, teaching ideas, and delivery of educational programmes (Huang 2006b); this may be likened to Warner et al’s stand that ‘software’ transfer can improve through collaborations with foreign partners. Pham (2010) backs Huang’s (2006b) views that Vietnam’s HE sector can only improve through greater emphasis and promotion of joint programmes with international partners.

Presently, there are 215 joint-programmes, involving some 80 Vietnamese universities and colleges and 120 overseas partners, approved by the MoET-Vietnam International Education Development (VIED) (VIED-MoET 2012). These approvals have been granted between April 2000 and December 2012. The fields of study of the approved courses range from Business Administration to Journalism to Rural Sociology. Most of the programmes are in business- and economics-related fields such as Accounting,
Banking, Business Administration, Finance, Information Technology, and Marketing. The top six countries in terms of numbers of approved programmes (in parentheses) include 1) France (32), 2) Australia (27), 3) England (22), 4) USA (16) and 5) Taiwan and Singapore (12). Recently, the Ministry has been cracking down on institutions offering unlicensed programmes and those saddled with other problems. These actions by the MoET and their officially sanctioned list of approved programmes suggest attempts at quality control of transnational programmes. Joint programmes that do not appear on the list are either in the process of obtaining MoET approval or are illegal. The degrees of programmes that fall into the latter category are not officially recognised in Vietnam. Hence, stakeholders are able to gauge the credibility, sustainability and therefore some extent of the quality of transnational programmes being offered.

MoET has stringent regulations for the establishment and operation of overseas cultural and educational institutions in Vietnam under the Foreign Investment Law, Decree 18/2001/ND-CP. MoET’s circular 15/2003/TT-BGDDT outlines guidelines for foreign representative offices, affiliates and independent educational institutions wishing to operate in the field of education and training. The management of these institutions is controlled by MoET’s Vietnam International Education Development (formerly referred to as the Department of International Cooperation). In terms of process involved in the management of quality control MoET conduct inspection, but have not done accreditation of any joint-programmes. Some of the programmes were accredited by international accreditation agencies such as the European Quality Improvement System / Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business (EQUIS/ACCSB). There are more and more overseas HE institutions investing in Vietnam that have moved on from offering solely granted programmes to including some self-funded programmes. Most of the programmes focus on Masters awards in business administration, finance and banking. In terms of future prospects and ensuring quality MoET is developing guidelines on regulating cooperation, investment from overseas in the field of education and ensuring that only accredited institutions or programmes from overseas have the right to conduct joint-programmes (Bui 2011).

Vietnam has undergone rapid growth and development in transnational or cross-border HE since the 1990’s. Currently, transnational HE has become an integral part of the Vietnamese HE sector. The term “transnational higher education” is defined in many different ways. Furthermore this term is often used interchangeably with terms such as “cross-border”, “borderless”, or “multinational” HE (Huang 2006b, p. 21). Expanding on the definition Huang considers transnational HE activities to include a range of HE products and services provided by institutions from one country/area to another country/area principally for the use of the latter’s local students. The present study is focussed on the offshore MBA education programmes that are designed and delivered by partnerships formed between local Vietnamese and foreign institutions.

In typical offshore programmes all curricula, textbooks and teaching materials are provided by the foreign partners. Subjects are delivered in that program’s language of instruction such as French although most foreign partners use English as their medium of
instruction (Harbridge 2007). Foreign lecturers are generally involved in the teaching although some local lecturers, i.e. those who have been recommended by the Vietnamese partner institution and approved by the foreign partner institution, are also involved in the teaching. The Vietnamese lecturers are required to deliver accredited courses in accordance with the foreign partner’s curricula and subject outlines. Assessment process and quality assurance are controlled by the partner universities. Upon completion of the programmes, students are awarded degrees from the foreign partner’s institution (Ngo 2011).

Since 1998, joint programmes have undergone extensive development and have become very popular in Vietnam. Recently, the MoET publicised a list of 215 authorised offshore programmes. This list does not include the joint programmes offered at the Vietnam National University (VNU) Hanoi, VNU Hochiminh, or the three regional universities in Thai Nguyen, Da Nang and Hue. These five universities do not have to rely on the MoET to approve any joint programmes, instead they have sole rights to authorising any partnership programmes.

VNU Hochiminh has a member institution, the International University - VNU Hochiminh, which specialised in conducting joint programmes in English. The International School of the VNU Hanoi (ISVNU) offers joint programmes in four foreign languages, Russian, Chinese, French, and English. Since its foundation, ISVNU has recorded remarkable developments in both academic scope and quality of programmes offered. From its initial conception in 2002 offering only one undergraduate programme in Russian, the School has designed and successfully offered many joint undergraduate programmes in cooperation with universities from the US, Australia, Malaysia, France, Russia, China, to name just a few. ISVNU has also offered graduate programmes, such as Master of Business Administration, Master of Business Administration (International), Master of Finance, Banking, Insurance (Vietnam & South East Asia), Master of Market Research and Marketing Decision Making. In 2010 ISVNU had over 2,000 students, a significant increase in numbers compared to only 43 in 2002. Among the 2010 batch of students, 136 are foreign students (Canadian, Chinese, and Russian), while 291 students have since transferred to ISVNU’s partner universities (Australia, USA, Holland, China, Russia, UK, and Malaysia) (Ngo 2011).

MoET (2009) reports that over 30 universities have specially designed combined programmes aimed at international cooperation. Many combined programmes 3 +1 and 2 +2 years have been signed. Students with good performance are able to use their academic credits to pursue part of their studies overseas in the universities of the member institution through one of these programmes. More and more doctoral students are receiving instructions from both Vietnamese and foreign professors. A recent phenomenon in the Vietnamese HE sector is the influx of foreign students. According to statistics from the MoET, there are now 10,000 foreign students studying at universities and colleges in Vietnam. These students however can only study in programmes that are delivered in English (MoET 2012).
2.4.2 Offshore MBA programmes

The strong demand for transnational business education, including the MBA program, has led many reputable business schools in North America, Europe and Australia to establish campuses in various overseas locations. There is growth in transnational business education especially in terms of foreign campuses in the Asian region including Vietnam (World Bank 2008). In the case of Vietnam there are currently 194 offshore education programmes of which 25 are MBA programmes comprising 18 from the European countries, 2 from the US and 5 from Australia (VIED-MoET 2012). Until recently although there were 215 offshore programmes in total only 194 have been cleared by the State to continue operating, another 15 have been asked to stop recruiting students and a further 6 have been granted short extensions. What these figures demonstrate is the need for offshore providers to ensure that programme quality is not compromised if programme sustainability is to be a top priority.

As of 12 December 2012 there were 28 offshore MBA education programmes in Vietnam (VIED-MoET 2012). Of these, four MBA joint programmes were from US: two were approved by VIED-MoET in 2009 and the other two in 2010 and 2011 respectively. One of the criteria for the present study is that the graduate stakeholder group must be recent graduates with at least one year of work experience (after their MBA graduation). This criterion was essential as it would allow employers and/or sponsors to provide some feedback on their performance. The fact that the US joint MBA programmes are relatively new meant that this last criterion could not be fulfilled and the study therefore could not use them as potential case organisations. Of the remaining 24 programmes, 18 were from European countries. One of these, ‘The Solvay Brussels School of Economics & Management, Université Libre de Bruxelles’ (hereafter referred to as Solvay) has been the longest-serving institution. Solvay formed a partnership with two major universities in Vietnam, the National Economic University in Hanoi and the Open University in Ho Chi Minh City and has been offering Business Masters programmes in Ho Chi Minh City (HCMC) and Hanoi; close to 1,500 students have graduated since its inception.

Solvay’s course catalogue lists several Masters programmes across specialised and general management. Solvay’s vision is to consolidate strategic position as a major international business school in Vietnam i.e. to become a full provider of management education and research at masters and post-master level (in general management programmes, specialised management programmes, executive training, etc). To help them achieve this vision Solvay Brussels School adopted the same philosophy as the parent European School. Their mission and philosophy is framed around two key ideals. First, is the preference to being selective and being stringently demanding at all levels of their offering (such as programmes, students, professors) and to therefore focus on quality rather than quantity. Second, to focus on personalisation rather than on uniformity; this effectively means that they are more interested in providing a range of small but flexible offerings, rather than providing a huge mass market offering. One of its key flagship programmes is the MBA programme.
There are a number of challenges associated with any dynamic competitive environment and offshore educational market is no different. The challenges include but are not limited to changing needs and personalities of the student market, the needs and wants of young promising future business leaders, and more demanding labour market after more skilled, knowledgeable and creative graduates to cope with the new types of business challenges Solvay Brussels School of Economics and Management Vietnam - SBSEM VN (SBSEM VN Road Map 2011 – 2012). Today’s businesses need strong, inspiring leaders who can address complex issues using a more comprehensive and cross disciplined view of problems and challenges.

There has been a proliferation of offshore MBA programmes in Vietnam but paralleling this growth is the number of concerns raised especially around issues of quality. The biggest drawback to international HE programmes generally is the scarcity of resources allocated to them and/or attention given to the logistics involved for their continued sustainability (Candelaria 2007; Walker, Redmond & Morris 2010). The timing is right for this present study as there is very little research on the quality and effectiveness of the offshore MBA programmes especially from the context of quality as highlighted in section 2.4 above.

2.5 Quality assurance

Quality assurance in all aspects of HE is an essential requirement given the tremendous development and growth in the sector as well as cost to the public and individual consumers (Daunoriene 2011). Attempts to address education quality is undeniably challenging because of the multi-dimensional nature and complexity of education as whole. First, the notion of quality comprises the whole gamut of elements involved in the input, process, and output of the education system and from a systems perspective, complexity is an inherent feature (Mason 2008). Second, complexity can be argued to arise from the fact that educational providers provide a unique bundling of ‘product and service’ to students (the ultimate user). The ‘bundling’ includes the tangible (the paper qualifications) and the intangible (student experiences) which consequently introduces a two-dimensional aspect to education quality. Third, there are internal and external strategic constituencies, and fourth these constituents have varying explicit and implicit expectations that need to be fulfilled (Cheng & Tam 1997).

Lagerweij and Voogt (1990) highlight yet another challenge - perceptions and expectations of ‘quality’ change over time; therefore quality needs to be continually monitored and assessed from the perspectives of the different stakeholders. The points raised here demonstrate that quality is complex and cannot be successfully discerned by any one indicator alone and/or in any one particular point of time. The ‘Quality Assurance’ body of the Asian University Network considers quality in HE to be “a multi-dimensional concept in view of its varied stakeholders’ needs and expectations” (Asian University Network – Quality Assurance [AUN-QA], 2011, p.6).
Daunoriene (2011, p. 718) notes that across the range of HE quality approaches (dynamical, subjective, multidimensional, multi-conceptual) most tend to revolve around issues such as “compliance with the objectives, performance management, exceptionality, economic benefits, confirmation to quality standards, different interest’s group’s satisfaction, quick reaction to environmental changes, continual development”. There are also critical differing quality variables across approaches. For example, in terms of the dynamical approach, quality is characterised as continually changing and dependent on particular internal and external factors operating at the point of time. The fact is that quality is a subjective dimension; it being perceived differently due to inherently different and often contradictory needs of the various stakeholder groups – therefore making it quintessentially difficult to find a unified definition for quality.

To Madu and Kuei (1993) quality in the educational context is quite different from how it is perceived in manufacturing and other service industries. Thus, it follows that any notion of managing education quality should also be handled differently. According to Merican et al. (2009) quality is a core success ingredient in the HE sector. Elaborating further they argue that educational providers should focus on students as their core customers if they want to succeed in this market but also point out providers must also be able to identify who are their other core customers. Following through with this argument the authors posit that universities should attempt to identify what quality means to students as core customer and other equally important core customers. This is what the present study hopes to fulfil by gathering viewpoints from multiple stakeholder groups from within the local Vietnamese offshore market sector.

According to Daunoriene (2011) value of a business school is understood beyond not only the quality of the professors, the campus facilities, or any other similar things but on the extent to which the school helps graduates’ future career. In terms of the latter, the most important factors are the value of the school’s brand (how others perceive the quality of the school) and the network of contacts students build while they are studying. Seven critical elements of top management’s efforts to ensure quality assurance include a) obligation to improve organisational effectiveness, b) identification of critical processes for improvement, c) selection of scalable processes, d) measuring processes before beginning the improvement, e) appropriately proportioning time among design, development, and implementation phases, f) periodic measures taken during the improvement cycle and g) reporting results and improvements in terms meaningful to the stakeholders.

2.5.1 Quality assurance – multiple stakeholder perspective

How do employers and businesses rate the quality of MBA programmes? The literature demonstrates that employers and businesses are looking for graduates with the necessary competencies to handle the growing international market, develop new businesses and manage flatter organisations as well as have the necessary skill sets, such as analytical skills, team building skills and conceptual skills, especially in terms of developing a global view of the business world (Colbert, Levary & Shaner 2000; Tay 2001). Graduates
are also expected to not only to reflect the knowledge of a sound education but also to become independent thinkers and competent problem solvers (Paninchukunnath 2012).

Abraham and Karns (2009) claim that there are significant discrepancies between the MBA graduate competencies business organisations value and those that business school curricula are emphasising. If this is true, such a mismatch can feed into the perceptions of poor quality of programme offerings by significant others, including potential customers, employers and businesses as users of MBA service providers.

Customer satisfaction is according to Pizam and Ellis (1999) recognised as of great importance to business organisations because of the influence of word-of-mouth recommendations. Satisfaction is not a universal phenomenon and not everyone gets the same satisfaction. The reason is that customers have different needs, objectives and past experiences that influence their expectations. Customer satisfaction can be defined as satisfaction based on an outcome or a process (Walter & Riter 2003).

Loyalty behaviours, including relationship continuance, increased scale or scope of relationship, and recommendation (word of mouth advertising) result from customer’s beliefs that the quantity of value received from one organisation is greater than available from other organisations. Pizam and Ellis (1999) have distinguished satisfaction (i.e. pleasurable fulfilment) from loyalty (a deeply held commitment to repeat purchases consistently in the future). The organisation finds that loyalty is associated with increased satisfaction; it could directly focus on enhancing its loyalty programmes. Loyal customers are profitable to an organisation for the long term. Customer commitment forms when a customer's expectation is satisfied (Shankar et al. 2003).

Scholars (Hallowell 1996; Ahmad & Buttle 2002) have recognised loyalty as an essential ingredient for successful long-term relationships and have shown the positive impact of customers’ loyalty on sales. Customer loyalty is the unequivocal desire of an existing (satisfied) customer to maintain, built and continue a lasting relationship and therefore a deep commitment to remain with the service provider. Thus, when stakeholders are satisfied with, and become loyal and committed to the program, that in itself can bring about programme success and ultimately long-term viability of the business school.

Hence what is the success of the programme? The answer to that question depends on how effective an organisation is in achieving the outcomes it has regarding programme design, programme quality and programme management (Kettner, Moroney, & Martin 2008).

There continues to be significant discussion on the ability of postgraduate management education to prepare students for their future roles and challenges as managers and leaders of business organisations (Emiliami 2006; Baruch 2009). There is recognition that the teaching curriculum, design and process needs to be constantly updated in response to business needs as well as well-designed strategic options to address the challenges in the management education market itself. (Goh 2008; Hopstaken 2012; Hall
& Young 2008). These challenges include but are not limited to the significant numbers of institutions and business schools offering a variety of business education, the internationalisation of the education market, the influx of new education providers, new methods of delivery and the increased emphasis on managerial competency (Reddy 2009; Henry & Rezania 2010).

There are a number of current and emerging conditions that are likely to shape the future landscape of business education such as the increased competition in the MBA provider market, growing acceptance of e-learning and heightened expectations from multiple stakeholders (Acito et al. 2008). Rapid and unpredictable changes in the business environment alongside issues such as, but not limited to, scarcity of energy resources, global competition for markets, demand for environmentally-friendly and sustainable practices and ongoing need for improvements and innovations, have all placed a tremendous burden on present-day managers. MBA students, MBA faculty, business school deans, corporate recruiters, employers, and the public in general are increasingly questioning the quality of graduate business school education around the world today (Neelankavil 1994; Pfeffer & Fong 2002; Feldman 2005) to address such concerns. On the positive side, the complexities and challenges of global business signal the need for MBA providers to consider the ongoing construction of a solid body of knowledge of market needs, continuous revision of programme offerings (Anto 2012; Cabrera & Bowen 2005; Hopstaken 2012) and assessment of transnational competition (Wilson 2007).

2.5.2 Offshore MBA – quality issues in Vietnam

The Ministry of Education and Training (MoET) and many other Vietnamese educators have supported the notion of quality as “fitness for purpose” – that is if you are in the business of providing education, ensuring quality of your education programme would be a given purpose (Woodhouse 1999). However, many Vietnamese academics refer to quality from the perspective of meeting institutional goals such as relevance of courses offered to students and preparing them for the job market. The focus is on the education provider – how they implement programmes and how committed they are to the needs of stakeholders. To summarise, acceptable education quality is achieved when the teaching and learning goals and objectives are met to the satisfaction of the various stakeholders, especially students, the academic staff and potential employers. More specifically the focus of universities is that the needs of the society should be met (Nguyen et al. 2009, p.127).

In Vietnam’s HE system, the issue of quality as from the teaching and curriculum design is of paramount importance and from a systems perspective needs to be assessed from the entire range of inputs, processes and outputs aspects (Gai 2010). Two of the key quality process indicators include ensuring teaching underpinned by research and curriculum frameworks that are aligned to industry needs. Additionally, there is also the need to move the learning outcomes closer to international standards. From the output dimensions, there is an urgent need to assess if the quality of offshore graduates meets
with the industry and society’s demands for qualified human resources with high skills and capabilities (Gai 2010). It is therefore the aim of this present study to investigate these issues and provide further insights into quality issues of offshore MBA programmes.

With regard to the quality issues of offshore MBA programmes, there are significant quality issues around the educational standards and the quality of applicants i.e. from an input perspective of the HE system. The selection standards for suitable applicants are an essential key determinant of the quality of graduates, the quality of the programme as a whole and any discussion of programme sustainability. While the selection criteria for MBA admission is generally quite stringent for example in Vietnam applicants are required to have good Graduate Management Admission Test (GMAT) scores, relevant work experience, hold a first degree and English language competency. In practice the selection criteria for application and recruitment are not always adhered to. As a result selection and admittance of MBA students into the programme are key quality issues and essential elements for quality control. Further, faculty members at programme level are also equally responsible for the quality of teaching and learning in offshore education programmes (Huang 2006b) and staff themselves requires reasonable language proficiency and prior academic experience and achievement in offshore MBA delivery (Harbridge 2007).

It is apparent that due attention to the challenges discussed above can in totality help ensure long-term viability and sustainability of transnational programmes including the offshore MBA. Business schools and universities face many challenges in designing their curricula. Unless the business faculty possesses international knowledge and skills, it cannot adequately impart a global mindset onto their students crucial to their successful participation in the global marketplace (Cort, Das, & Synn 2008).

Included in the AUN-QA model at programme level are variables including expected learning outcome, programme specification, programme structure and content, teaching and learning strategy, student assessment, academic staff quality, support staff quality, student quality, student advice and support, facilities and infrastructure, quality assurance of teaching and learning process, staff development activities, stakeholders’ feedback, output and stakeholders’ satisfaction (AUN-QA 2011).

From an input perspective programmes that are developed and offered to prospective students need to be of premium quality. There are two critical aspects involved in this assessment. The first is that the quality programme meets stakeholders’ satisfaction and so helps ensure survival and growth of the programme itself. The second is to provide quality units along with the necessary checks and balances to fulfil the requirements of associated quality standards. Quality assurance and quality management processes are therefore important control mechanisms to monitor performance and ensure continued enrolment in offshore MBA courses (Davis, Olsen & Bohm 2000). Three common aspects of quality assurance models in transnational education are the areas of student administration such as admissions and enrolments; assessments and notification of
results; and curriculum and pedagogy and the associated learning and teaching resources (McBurnie & Ziguras 2007).

Student experience is a key indicator of the quality of educational provision (Pyvis & Chapman 2004). Yang (2006) adds that factors affecting applicants’ MBA offshore programme choice include reputation of university, cost of programme and mode of delivery and especially reputation for quality. Additionally, perception of the quality of joint programmes is important not only to the students but also to faculty members. Therefore, their perception concerning the quality indicators is significant in regards to the improvement of the offshore education programmes (Tanasugarn 2007). Most research on offshore MBA programmes have been conducted from the perspectives of students; however, as pointed out by Merican et al. (2009) such a single-stakeholder view can only provide limited insights and value. Therefore, more work is needed to understand the perceptions of different MBA stakeholders, for example, programme administrators, administrative and academic staff, students, faculty members and employers. Such a ‘multiple stakeholder perspective’ of the challenge can help MBA providers design more effective, successful and sustainable programmes.

As mentioned in the previous paragraph students, arguably the most important stakeholder, expect in return for the time, effort and financial expenditures, a quality educational experience as one of the key outcomes of the MBA programme and the business school they enrol in.

Researchers and practitioners generally concur on two key outcomes of the MBA business schools – first, they are the primary source of highly ambitious knowledge workers and second, these graduates provide the greatest retention value to employers (Sandweiss & Lewin 2000). While these two outcomes of MBA education are crucial equally significant is Espey and Batchelor’s (1987) finding of the special value of MBA programmes that are specifically tailored for individual organisations or ‘users’ for their own employees. Their findings highlight that these companies benefit from their employees working on projects and or writing dissertations that actually address their business needs. The business-tailored programmes make these MBA graduates better managers, through greater involvement and commitment to issues of their workplace, and through greater self-development and self-actualisation.

Another significant finding is that, overwhelmingly, students tend to rate the quality of their MBA programmes in terms of the contribution of teaching staff as well as curriculum content and design (Sulaiman & Mohezar 2008; Bruce 2010). Other student rating factors include opportunities for career progression and knowledge development (Baruch & Peiperl 2000; Thompson & Gui 2000).

Therefore, from the perspective of students it cannot be denied that well-designed MBA programmes provide value to students through enhancing their insights into the challenging and dynamic business environment and by developing critical competencies and skills needed to succeed in such a working environment (Baruch & Leeming 2001;
In stating this we should also keep in mind of Anto’s (2012) recommendation for the indigenisation of curriculum especially in the context of inexperienced and less globally-savvy businesses and students in emerging economies.

2.6 Theoretical framework - offshore programme quality

The extant literature on offshore HE was used to contextualise the research problem and structure the conceptual framework as shown in Figure 1: The Theoretical Framework.

The framework identifies the central issues related to programme quality and delivery and the evaluation of offshore MBA education programmes from multiple stakeholders’ perspectives. As shown in the framework the key issues for quality and effective delivery of offshore MBA education programmes are centred on stakeholders’ perceptions and expectations of student admission requirements, curriculum design, mode of delivery, programme management and the teaching and learning across cultures. The framework shows that high quality and effective programme delivery leads to satisfied stakeholders which, in turn, builds loyal and committed ‘customers’, and this leads to the success and sustainability of the offshore programme.

It is therefore important that the research investigates the perspectives and experiences of key stakeholders to identify the central factors underlying effective quality, delivery and sustainability of offshore MBA programmes.

Figure 1: The Theoretical Framework
This framework is central to the design of the research, the research questions and the interview questions. Furthermore this framework will inform and guide data analysis and findings in attempts to answer the research questions and solve the research problem.

2.7 Chapter summary

The chapter reviewed the extant literature on various aspects of higher education in general and more specially the offshore MBA education in the Vietnamese context. The review covered the internationalization of HE and then proceeded with a discussion on the corporatisation of HE and provided literature review on the growth and development of postgraduate management education. It also dealt with the rise of the internationalisation of management education and specifically the offshore MBA programmes. The literature on quality issues and challenges in relation to the design and delivery of offshore MBA education programmes was also provided; it allowed a deeper understanding of challenges and issues confronting various Vietnamese stakeholders.

The next chapter provides a detailed account and the rationale behind the qualitative case study method.
CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

In Chapter 2, the study examined the extant literature on quality issues central to the design and delivery of offshore MBA education programmes. This background literature helped the researcher uncover and understand issues and challenges which could undermine the successful delivery and sustainability of offshore MBA education programmes in Vietnam. Here in Chapter 3, I present the research methodology which has informed this study.

Section 3.2 discusses the research strategy, the research design and the research method in particular the justifications rest for a qualitative paradigm and case study approach... The research question, the framing of which is guided by my philosophical underpinnings is also discussed. In section 3.3, I discuss the rationale underlying the selection of particular case organisations and the participants while section 3.3.1 covers the three key stakeholder groups. Section 3.4 presents the participant coding procedures. In section 3.5, I discuss data collection and analysis procedures and finally in section 3.6, I provide an overview of the research plan and key processes. The chapter is summarised in section 3.7.

3.2 Research strategy

This research is about understanding issues of quality and sustainability of offshore MBA education programmes in Vietnam. Researchers Creswell (2009) and Sekaran and Bougie (2010) propose two key areas to focus on in attempts to develop the appropriate research strategy for their study. The first and most important is to ensure that the research design addresses the research questions, and second, to ensure that the data collection is suitable for achieving that objective. These two points of focus are discussed in sections 3.2.1 and 3.2.2 respectively.

3.2.1 Research design

The starting point in any research design is to determine the research paradigm (Collis & Hussey 2009) and in the following section I provide the rationale and justification to use a qualitative/interpretive design in this study.

This study aims to identify critical factors that underlie the success and sustainability of offshore MBA programmes in Vietnam. As previously introduced Vietnam is a transitioning economy. Like China it has only relatively recently opened its doors to trade with the outside world although the state continues to bear much control in the governance of the seemingly ‘free enterprise’. The four research questions that drive the study are exploratory and descriptive in nature because they are aimed at understanding
the HE sector in a transitioning economy that is Vietnam. In essence, exploratory studies are undertaken to better comprehend the nature of the problem (Sekaran & Bougie 2010). This research is exploratory since very few studies have been conducted in that area. In this study, extensive interviews with a range of key stakeholders will be undertaken to understand the expectations and needs of students, employers, and teaching staff involved in the offshore MBA programmes. The goal of a descriptive study is to enable the researcher to profile and describe relevant aspects of the phenomenon of interest from an individual, organisational, industry-oriented, or other perspective (Sekaran & Bougie 2010). This study is descriptive as it describes the key stakeholders’ attitudes, perception and knowledge in relation to offshore MBA programmes.

The exploratory and descriptive aspects of this study align well with a qualitative/interpretative paradigm; and there are a number of reasons for this. First, qualitative business research gives the researcher an opportunity to focus on the complexity of business-related phenomena in their contexts; why they work in a specific way and how they can be made sense of in a way that they might be changed (Merriam 2009). Second, such research can also be used to provide a critical and reflexive view about the social world of business and its core processes (Eriksson & Kovalainen 2008). These two points imply a reliance on interpretation of the researched phenomenon guided by relevant literature. Third, as Silverman (2006) highlights the interpretivist paradigm fits in well with contemporary business research. Thus, consistent with my ontological and epistemological stance and the managerial nature of the research problem under investigation (Jonsen & Jehn 2009) a contemporary qualitative/interpretative approach is used in this study. The next step of the research design is to determine the research methods and data collection strategies.

3.2.2 Research method

The case study method is considered appropriate to produce the outcomes in a way that is consistent theoretically and practically with the research paradigm. The qualitative research fits in well for the types of questions asked of the offshore MBA program’s success and sustainability. The choice of research method has to reflect the research topic and the overall research strategy as the methodology shapes which methods are used and how each method is used (Silverman 2010).

The research topic focuses on the factors underlying the success and sustainability of the offshore MBA education programmes in Vietnam. Such a focus makes the research problem inseparable from its context, in which case Yin (2009) argues that the case study to be most appropriate as a research design. Yin also justifies the case study as most applicable to describe the real-life context situations, where the purpose is to a) understand the dynamics present within single settings (Eisenhardt 1989), b) uncover the interaction of significant factors and c) capture complex perception and interpretation (Merriam 2009) and d) describe the phenomena under investigation. In this study, the case study approach will be used to explore, describe and evaluate the effectiveness of offshore MBA programmes and it can also be useful in informing policy
recommendations (Merriam 2009).

Another reason for the choice of the case study approach is that it is particularly useful in management research (Merriam 2009). The natural world is characterised by diversity and interactions, continuous change, learning and unexpected (Norberg & Cumming 2008) which contributes to its complexity. This is especially true of the educational environment - there is a plethora of agencies and structures including teachers, students, and other community leaders, the state and its education departments, economic structures and business organisations (Mason 2008). Hence, data drawn from the reality of the offshore MBA stakeholders’ perceptions, experience and practices makes it especially relevant as a case study approach. Moreover, the findings can greatly contribute to changing practice (Merriam 2009).

Finally, the case study method is most appropriate for this study for the nature of the study questions ‘how’ and ‘why’ (Yin 2009) are the foundations of this study’s research questions.

The case study approach supports and promotes theory building and theory construction (Eisenhardt 1989; Eriksson & Kovalainen 2008) by making comparisons, looking for similarities and differences within the data collection and for future questions or issues to be explored or examined (Neuman 2009). Hence in this study, different offshore MBA education programmes providers will serve as the cases (organisations) from whom a range of data relevant to understanding issues of quality and sustainability of offshore MBA programmes will be collected. Additionally, each of the case will be investigated from multiple stakeholder perspectives.

3.3 Case selection

Since the researched phenomenon and context are not always distinguishable in real-life situations, the case study strategy begins with logic of design. The design includes not just the scope of the study but other technical characteristics as well, such as data collection and data analysis strategies (Yin 2009).

As outlined above the study is based on a multiple case study approach which permits greater breadth and depth understanding of the phenomenon being investigated. Moreover, multiple case approaches can also benefit from prior hypothesising of different types of conditions and the desire to have subgroups of cases covering each type (Yin 2009).

Hence, in this present study three programme providers are used as case organisations and these have been purposively selected to provide better insights into quality. To protect the anonymity and confidentiality of the providers the case organisations will not be identified though every effort is taken to provide readers with an understanding of them.
Two of the case organisations were selected for their relative long standing records of existence i.e. of more than 10 years, suggesting satisfactory attempts at quality management. One of these was selected because of its long and consistent successful track record while the other started of successfully but then dropped in popularity but when on to pick up and dramatically improve performance and popularity. The final of the three cases was chosen because it has a relatively short history of existence and it is also does not have the ‘popularity’ status of the other two. It is envisaged that using a range of stakeholders from these three case organisations as participants will provide the study valuable insights into quality indicators and what takes programmes to be sustainable in the long-term.

The first case organisation used in this study was formed more than 10 years ago as a partnership between a European educational institution and a university from a Vietnamese metropolitan city (henceforth referred to a CASE A). Its offshore MBA programme has had a successful track record throughout Vietnam. The objective of their programme is to provide students with an in-depth understanding of specialist areas in business management and leadership as well as management approaches, perspectives, competencies and skills. The programme is regularly updated with the latest knowledge, competencies and skills congruent with the development needs of a growing economy in a globalised world. Graduates from this programme are highly sought and appreciated for their professionalism, leadership skills and adaptability to the global business environment. To date, there are around 400 Master Graduates from the program, most of these graduates are employed by major international organisations based in Vietnam as well as local companies and many graduates have had several promotions since graduation.

The second case organisation is also a partnership between another European educational institution and a university from a Vietnamese metropolitan city (henceforth referred to a CASE B). It has also been around for more than 10 years. This programme initially started out successfully but dropped in popularity in terms of recruitment sometime later. However, concerted efforts to improve performance soon resulted in a dramatic surge in popularity and survival. CASE B has a long history of providing MBA education in Vietnam although it has characteristic ‘dip’ in its popularity and performance in the earlier part of its existence.

There were, at the time of the study, a number of partnerships between Australian /New Zealand educational providers and those in Vietnam. Among them is one which was relatively recently set up and which has attracted a lot of interest from a range of stakeholders. This is the final third case organisation and is referred to as CASE C in this thesis.

This range of three different types of offshore MBA providers will allow in-depth study of programme offerings, stakeholders’ perceptions and expectations regarding the design, delivery and management of the off-shore MBA programmes and provide valuable insights into ‘quality’ indicators. The rich information that can be derived from using just
three case organisations is similar to and therefore supported by the methodology approach Perry (1998) used in his study on postgraduate research in marketing. Additionally, the multi-case approach allows me to gain insights into real-world contexts and also provides me a means of evaluating the effectiveness of particular policies or practices (Eisner & Peshkin 1990).

A range of theories including stakeholder, quality management, systems approach, organisational effectiveness will inform and guide this study including coding and analysis of all qualitative data collected from the three case studies.

3.3.1 Participants - key stakeholder groups

This research is about understanding issues of quality and sustainability of offshore MBA education programmes in Vietnam. The study sought to identify from key stakeholder perspectives the critical factors that underlie the success and sustainability of offshore MBA programmes in Vietnam.

The key stakeholder groups were narrowed down to 1) graduate students, 2) employers (of offshore MBA graduates) and 3) programme providers (programme manager, administrator and/or teaching staff). To obtain a representative sample, a combination of purposive, systematic and snowball sampling techniques were used to recruit participants. Two students, two business representatives and three programme providers were selected from each case organisation providing a total of 20 participants for the individual interviews.

Triangulation allows the same phenomenon to be studied from different approaches (Veal 2005). Though Veal argues that generally triangulation should embrace both qualitative and quantitative paradigms he acknowledges and cites Duff’s stand that using for example different participants and different methodologies to study the phenomenon is equally valid. Following Veal’s advice, a focus group session was conducted with representatives from each of the student, programme provider and employer stakeholder groups from the three case organisations.

The present study therefore provides triangulation in studying the phenomenon being investigated by using three different case organisations, 20 one-to-one participant interviews from three different stakeholder groups and a focus group session using seven totally different participants from the three stakeholder groups. The overall effect is that the research design provides rich data for comparative analysis and a richer deeper understanding of the phenomenon being investigated (Jonsen & Jehn 2009; Veal 2005).

The three stakeholder groups are dealt with in the following sections.

3.3.1.1 Stakeholder 1: Grade student

This group comprised recent graduates of offshore MBA programmes in Vietnam. These participants would typically be under 25 years of age and have at least one year of work
experience since graduating from the case organisation’s offshore MBA programme. Being recent graduates these participants would recall matters related to programme delivery and quality with relative ease. They would be able to provide the researcher with valuable insights into students’ attitudes, perception and knowledge relating to offshore MBA education programmes in Vietnam. These participants can also provide valuable insight into the benefits and limitations of the MBA programmes they enrolled in respect to their current job.

3.3.1.2 Stakeholder 2: Employers

This group comprised business managers who are typically older than 30 years of age. These participants are the financial sponsors of their employees (students) enrolled in offshore MBA education programmes. These participants are crucial to the research because they are able to provide insights into the performance of their employees before, during and after these MBA programmes. This group is of importance in terms of providing alternate perceptions, expectations, knowledge and experiences about their employees’ performance and efficiency before and after graduating offshore MBA education programmes. They can share insights into MBA graduate preferences i.e. whether they prefer offshore MBA or local MBA degrees/graduates and the underlying reasons for these preferences. They can also provide key insights into the quality, the benefits and limitations of the programme delivery.

3.3.1.3 Stakeholder 3: Programme providers

This group comprise programme providers (such as programme manager, administrator, and teaching staff) i.e. the faculty staff. Programme managers/administrators manage the design, marketing, management and delivery of offshore MBA education programmes; implicit in responsibilities of these roles is management of programme quality. Teaching staff are involved in course delivery, mode of course delivery; this group is able to reflect and provide insight into factors which impinge upon and affect the overall quality of the programmes.

3.4 Interview and focus group coding

Table 1 in the following page shows the characteristics of participants used in the two primary data collection exercises (interviews and focus group). Every care has been taken to preserve the identity and anonymity of the case organisations and the participants - and in line with this, pseudo names are used in all references to case organisations, focus group and interview participants.

The participants are categorised into the three groups identified in section 3.3.1 above and the three case organisations identified in section 3.3. Participants are coded as graduate students (gradstd), employer (emp) and programme providers who are broken down to three further sub-categories: faculty staff (provider facstf), programme manager (provider promgr) and administrative staff (provider adminstf).
This study relied on two research instruments, semi-structured interviews and focus group sessions, as primary means of data collection. Data was also collected from document analysis of these case organisations.

For ease of data presentation each participant has been coded according to group type (graduate students, employers, and programme providers broken into three further sub-categories ‘faculty staff, programme manager and administrative staff”), geographic location (Hanoi, Ho Chi Minh city) and data collection type (interview or focus group).

Table 4: Participant coding

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant type</th>
<th>Nos</th>
<th>Case Organisation</th>
<th>Participant Code</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gradstd</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>CASE A</td>
<td>CASE A INTERVIEW gradstd 1 (2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gradstd</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>CASE B</td>
<td>CASE B INTERVIEW gradstd 1 (2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gradstd</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>CASE C</td>
<td>CASE C INTERVIEW gradstd 1 (2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provider adminstf</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>CASE A</td>
<td>CASE A INTERVIEW provider adminstf</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provider adminstf</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>CASE B</td>
<td>CASE B INTERVIEW provider adminstf</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provider adminstf</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>CASE C</td>
<td>CASE C INTERVIEW provider adminstf</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provider facstf</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>CASE A</td>
<td>CASE A INTERVIEW provider facstf</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provider facstf</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>CASE B</td>
<td>CASE B INTERVIEW provider facstf</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provider facstf</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>CASE C</td>
<td>CASE C INTERVIEW provider facstf</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provider promgr</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>CASE A</td>
<td>CASE A INTERVIEW provider promgr</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provider promgr</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>CASE B</td>
<td>CASE B INTERVIEW provider promgr</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provider promgr</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>CASE C</td>
<td>CASE C INTERVIEW provider promgr</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emp</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>CASE A</td>
<td>CASE A INTERVIEW emp 1 (2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emp</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>CASE B</td>
<td>CASE B INTERVIEW emp 1 (2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emp</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>CASE C</td>
<td>CASE C INTERVIEW emp 1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**DATA COLLECTION - FOCUS GROUP**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant type</th>
<th>Nos</th>
<th>Case Organisation</th>
<th>Participant Code</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gradstd</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>CASE A</td>
<td>CASE A FG gradstd 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gradstd</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>CASE B</td>
<td>CASE B FG gradstd 1 (2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provider facstf</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>CASE A</td>
<td>CASE A FG provider facstf 1 (2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emp</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>CASE A</td>
<td>CASE A FG emp 1 (2)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Key: Graduate students (Gradstd); Programme Providers: Faculty staff (provider facstf); Programme manager (provider promgr); Administrative staff (provider adminstf)

### 3.5 Data collection and analysis

As noted by Eriksson and Kovalainen (2008) interviews are often used as the primary source of empirical data in case study research. Creswell (2009) also informs researchers
that they can get closer to the phenomena being investigated by using multiple sources of qualitative data such as interviews, documents and reports. Both of these advices have been adhered to in the present study.

3.5.1 Data collection

The data was collected from various sources to serve the research aims and objectives divided into primary data and secondary data. The nature of documents to be collected is as secondary data (Veal 2005) gathered insights from external sources such as existing studies, research and conference papers, and from internal sources of the 3 offshore MBA education programmes.

Veal (2005) points out that secondary data i.e. data gleaned from published sources or documents relating to an issue or problem being investigated can be a powerful and useful source of information. The data can be collected from documents used in related studies, research publications and conference papers. In this present study, there were substantial secondary data relating to a number of key themes central to the thesis that were explicitly stated in a number of internal publications of each of the three offshore MBA education providers. Hence, it was pertinent that these data were collected and used where relevant to understand the primary data.

The themes included, though were not limited to, the internationalisation of higher education (HE), corporatisation of HE, the growth and development of postgraduate management education, internationalisation of management education, and the future of the offshore MBA education programmes in Vietnam. The documents specifically emphasised issues of quality, quality management and challenges. Thus, it was vital for the study to use these documents as secondary data.

The documents helped the researcher to better understand each of the providers and their reasons and rationales for adopting specific designs and/or delivery of their offshore MBA programmes. The documents also helped the researcher to have a deeper understanding of the complex problems, challenges and issues providers had because of the multi-stakeholders involved. The Vietnamese education sector and the provision of the MBA education is vastly different from that of industrialised nations and hence it was important for the researcher to gain secondary data from these sources to have better understanding of the issues involved as well as to better understand and analyse the primary data. Ultimately, insights from the secondary data helped the researcher gain a comprehensive understanding of the offshore MBA market sector in Vietnam and specifically the issues relating to quality and quality management as a means of providing sustainable offshore MBA programmes.

The primary data is through interviews and focus group sessions with key stakeholder groups (students, employers, faculty, and programme managers, administrative and academic staff) in the three case groups. Semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions were conducted at times and place convenient to participants. The interviews and focus group discussions (Collis & Hussey 2009) were formally arranged and
participants were notified of the requirements through formal statement of information and consent forms. The formal statement described and explained the study and required each participant to sign the consent form prior to their being interviewed and/or participating in the focus group session.

Semi-structured interviews are organised around a set of predetermined open-ended questions. Doing this provides the interviewer opportunities to raise other related and relevant questions during the course of the interview and therefore provides the researcher access to a wider range of participant experience (Collis & Hussey 2009). A focus group discussion held after individual interviews provides researchers with the venue and opportunities to further investigate and explore insights from the interviews (Eisenhardt 1989).

Blaxter, Hughes and Tight (2006) emphasise the importance of recording significant observations during the research process. I have followed this advice and have relied on an array of tools such as research diaries, boxes or files, coloured paper and sticky notes and card indexes.

3.5.2 Data analysis

The interview and the data were transcribed. Content analysis using grounded theory principles was used to identify and code themes in the transcripts, and documents and reports. While this was a manual process and quite tedious it allowed me as a researcher to read, identify and cluster themes. Themes were traced to the literature on offshore HE where applicable and such process helped uncover 'new’ or emergent themes. The latter themes are especially important in isolating and understanding aspects that are crucial in the context of understanding offshore MBA education programmes in Vietnam and other similar developing and or transitioning economies.

This study relied on Braun and Clarke’s (2006, p. 79) note to qualitative researchers that thematic analysis has the ability to help “…make sense of the themes that emerge from the data as it allows for rich, detailed and complex description of the data”. In accordance with this advice the researcher carefully read interview and focus group session transcripts and undertook coding and annotations. There were two key aspects to coding of the themes. First, the researcher perused the transcripts and was on a lookout for themes that were identified in the literature review that would help to answer the research questions. Secondly, the researcher also scrutinised the transcripts for any new themes that were emerging. Consistent with a grounded theory approach these themes represented ‘new’ findings of my study. The following is a summary of the steps taken:

- Read through the transcripts several times, underlining significant concepts and making marginal notes.
- Identify themes and colour code them. Annotate transcripts with observations e.g. who else identified with a particular theme? Was there a pattern?
- Check that themes are not covered in the literature i.e. they are new findings.
- Scrutinise repetitions and relationships in themes/codes, noting important similarities and differences, and why.
- Identify issues important in responding to the research questions.
- List codes and themes that emerge from the initial analysis.
- Sort the raw data (extracts of interview transcripts) under themes.
- Review and amend where necessary the fit between transcript extracts and code themes.
- Review the results, looking for overlap and redundancy.
- Lay out the codes graphically to see the relation of one variable to another and facilitate explanation development.

Select verbatim narrative from the data to elaborate each theme.

The following is an example of the coding processing that I undertook. In the extracts presented here the researcher observed that all four participants were saying similar things which could be isolated and coded under the theme ‘prestige’ (of the provider).

- ... When I want to decide on the program, one of the aspects I considered is the quality of the programme.... I asked MBA alumni, current students and lecturers from some of the offshore MBA programmes, I concluded that there were two MBA programmes with great feedback. However, at that time, [one] xxx [named program] was losing its prestige...; the other programme seemed to be better, in quality (CASE A INTERVIEW gradstd 2)

- [T]heir prestigious brand name...one of the first MBA programme in Vietnam. ...the lecturers are mainly from xxx [named country], they are all from very prestigious school in xxx [named country] (CASE B INTERVIEW gradstd 2)

- Why I joined the programme. It is because of the strategic partnership between my university in Vietnam and xxx University. ... I prefer xxx’s [named country] education system and I trust their prestigious programme here (CASE C INTERVIEW gradstd 1)

- It is because there is a partnership between our university that means the xxx [named institution] and xxx [named institution]. The image of the two xxx [named institutions] is popular and well-known (CASE C INTERVIEW gradstd 2).

The analysis and findings provide vital clues as to the identity and nature of factors which are critical to the success and sustainability of offshore MBA programmes.
### 3.6 The Research Plan

Figure 2: The Research Process on the following page outlines the steps and process that has guided this study.

The research process is divided into three phases, Phase 1, 2 and 3 respectively. In the first phase I undertook extensive review of the literature surrounding the HE sector including corporatisation of the sector, internationalisation, transnational education and the offshore MBA as well as management theory on quality, organisational theory of effectiveness, sustainability and systems. Using the literature the research questions that will drive the research were formalised. This phase also involved applying for ethical clearance for the research and establishing contacts and short listing potential offshore MBA programme providers as case organisations. Ethical clearance for the research (H9000) was obtained on 2 May 2011 (See Appendix 1: UWS HREC APPROVAL) and following this interview and focus group participants were sought and letters inviting participation were sent out.

The second phase involved designing the actual interview questions and conducting interviews and focus group. It also involved transcribing interview scripts, coding, categorising and analysing the primary data. Document analysis of secondary data gathered from relevant publications from the case organisations also featured during this phase. The analysis was manual and involved careful scrutiny and identifying of recurrent themes and attempting to link these, where relevant, to existing literature and or the supporting documents and literature from the case organisations’ offshore MBA education programmes. The analysis also attempted to isolate emergent or new themes that might explain the challenges and issues of offshore MBA provisions in a transition economy such as Vietnam’s.

![Figure 2: The Research Process](image-url)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Phase I – Initial preparation (April 2010 – October 2011)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Review of the Literature (LR)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Researcher to seek out potential offshore MBA programme providers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Select potential cases for the study</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Draft letter seeking offshore MBA programme consent for research</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Apply for ethical clearance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Send out letters, establish contacts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finalise case studies</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Phase II – Qualitative method (November 2011 – August 2012)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Collect data from multiple stakeholders</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Document analysis - analyse supporting documents such as offshore MBA education programmes using relevant literature</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Design interview questions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conduct interviews and focus groups</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Transcribe interview scripts
Code, categorise and analyse the data

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Phase III – Analysis and Findings (September 2012 – December 2012)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Synthesise the analysis of the three cases to uncover critical factors;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elaborate the factors using principles from theories of stakeholder, quality management and system-based approach and effective-based approach;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scrutinise any emergent findings;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Write up findings and discussions, noting limitations</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The third and final phase of the study involved synthesising the analysis of the three cases to uncover critical factors, elaborating the factors using principles from theories of stakeholder, quality management and system-based approach and effective-based approach, scrutinising any emergent findings, writing up findings and discussions, and noting limitations. This phase also included putting the first draft of the final thesis together and working on it to final completion.

3.7 Chapter summary

This chapter has provided an account of, as well as the rationale for the research process and design of this study. The research decision to use multiple case studies and a qualitative paradigm is justified as it provides the right framework and approach for understanding quality issues as perceived by core stakeholder groups of offshore MBA programmes. The mixed approach of using interviews and focus groups provide opportunities for data triangulation. The participants of the interview sessions and focus group sessions are different and therefore the data collected can be used to verify if perspectives and findings are reliable. Overall, the multiple case and triangulation of data collection methods can provide for a richer and deeper understanding of the research problem. In the following chapter the thesis provides and discussed the data collected.
CHAPTER 4: RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Introduction

The previous chapter provided the discussion, rationale and justification for using a qualitative paradigm to investigate issues of quality associated with the design and delivery of offshore MBA education programmes in Vietnam. The case study method was used and three case organisations were purposively selected in line with the research problem and the objectives of the inquiry. The qualitative study comprised 20 semi-structured interviews and a focus group session as well as content analysis of relevant documents and reports of the offshore MBA education programmes from the three case organisations.

In this present chapter the analysis and results of the qualitative investigation into the three case organisations using the interview and focus group methods are presented. Where relevant the data is checked against relevant offshore MBA programme documents and reports from the provider case organisation and comments are included. To protect the anonymity of case organisations direct and indirect references to named programmes, countries and or institutions have been removed from the narratives.

It is important to keep in mind that the researcher, interview and focus group participants in this study are all Vietnamese nationals and that English is not their first language and even as a second language many do not have adequate proficiency. In most cases the interview excerpts are provided as is, that is no attempt is made to correct it. Hence, readers are advised to read and understand the extracts of the transcripts included in this thesis using a different cultural lens. Where relevant and feasible the researcher has attempted to provide some clarification within parentheses to make the meaning clearer.

The results are presented in order of the three key stakeholder groups: graduates, programme providers and employers. Section 4.2 covers the demographics and discusses the analysis and results of the interview sessions involving the student, programme provider, and employer stakeholder groups. Section 4.3 deals with the analysis and results of the focus group sessions involving the student, faculty and employer stakeholder groups. In section 4.4 the chapter summarises the results and analysis of the two data collection methods regarding quality factors affecting the offshore MBA education programmes and finally the chapter summary is provided in section 4.5.

4.2 Analysis and results of the interview sessions

4.2.1 Graduate interviews

This group of participants was purposively targeted from among those who recently
graduated, i.e. in the last five years, for effective recall experiences. Table 5 below lists key demographics of the recently graduated student stakeholder group. The results show that the majority (4/6 or 66.7%) graduated in 2008 i.e. three years prior to the study. The average age of the graduate group is 27.5 years and the majority were female (4/6 or 66.7%). The results of the face to face interviews also show that one of the six participants, CASE A INTERVIEW gradstd 2 went on to further her studies after graduating with the MBA.

The interviews posed three areas of questions in relation to the MBA programme these graduates enrolled in: i) reasons underlying selection of the program; ii) personal expectations and needs of the program; iii) perceptions of the strengths of the program; iv) perceptions of the success of the programme (Refer to Appendix 2: Interview Schedule).

Table 5: Interview demographics - Graduate student

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Case organisation</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Year of graduation</th>
<th>Position of work before graduation</th>
<th>Position of work after graduation/Place of work</th>
<th>Participant code</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CASE A</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>2008</td>
<td>Sales executive</td>
<td>Head of representative office/C.Illes &amp; Co.</td>
<td>CASE A INTERVIEW gradstd 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CASE A</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>2008</td>
<td>Sales manager</td>
<td>Managing director/EVERGOOD C.L.C – Consultant &amp; Logistics</td>
<td>CASE A INTERVIEW gradstd 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CASE B</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>2007</td>
<td>Teaching assistant</td>
<td>Lecturer/National Economics University – Hanoi</td>
<td>CASE B INTERVIEW gradstd 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CASE B</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>2008</td>
<td>Lecturer</td>
<td>PhD student in Japan</td>
<td>CASE B INTERVIEW gradstd 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CASE C</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>2008</td>
<td>Marketing executive</td>
<td>Lecturer/National Economics University – Hanoi</td>
<td>CASE C INTERVIEW gradstd 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CASE C</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>2010</td>
<td>HR executive</td>
<td>Programme coordinator/Academy of Finance – Hanoi</td>
<td>CASE C INTERVIEW gradstd 2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4.2.1.1 Graduate interview: Reasons for choosing offshore MBA

The graduate student interviews were designed to understand the reasons why the graduates selected their offshore MBA programme. The analyses uncovered eight broad themes (in no particular ranking of importance) and these are discussed in the sub-sections below.
4.2.1.1 International program/affordable cost

The following extracts from the interview show that the ability to obtain an international qualification whilst living and/or working in Vietnam and the underlying cost implications appear to be an important factor in students’ choice for the offshore MBA programme.

This programme offered ...the opportunity to pursue my study ... in Vietnam ... [I] could save my cost of study instead of going to study abroad. [T]he school fee is comparable and comparative to relevant different course from other education providers in Ho Chi Minh City. It was suitable to my budget. ...It was suitable for part-time students like me [who are working full-time and studying part-time] (CASE A INTERVIEW gradstd 1)

I looked at ... financial efficiency [T]he xxx [named program] seemed to be ... more affordable (CASE A INTERVIEW gradstd 2)

One of the four participants also mentioned the international context but the degree was funded and so cost appeared to not be an issue:

[O]ne of the first MBA programme in Vietnam...the lecturers are mainly from xxx [named country], they are all from very prestigious school in xxx [named country]. ...I don’t need to pay anything (CASE B INTERVIEW gradstd 2)

4.2.1.1.2 Recommended by others

By far recommendations from others -friends, past students and academics, appear to be most significant in influencing graduates’ choice of the offshore programmes:

I got great feedback about this programme from a lot of old students. They are impressed by the quality of the programme (CASE A INTERVIEW gradstd 2)

I consider the advice from my mentors, they all keen on the xxx [named programme institution] (CASE B INTERVIEW gradstd 1)

I had one friend graduated from the programme who introduced this course to me (CASE B INTERVIEW gradstd 1)

[M]any of my friends studied in xxx [named institution] and [were] really keen on the experiences there (CASE C INTERVIEW gradstd 1)

[M]any of my friends studied here and introduced me to take this MBA (CASE C INTERVIEW gradstd 2).

4.2.1.1.3 Prestigious name of the foreign partner

While graduates generally mentioned opportunities to improve their knowledge and skills among the many reasons for enrolling in the offshore MBA program, three graduates specifically emphasised the reputation of the university partner and the quality of the programme offered.
The ‘prestigious brand name’ of the offshore partner appears to be a key influencing factor in participants’ decisions to enrol in their chosen MBA programme. The notion of ‘prestigious’ is itself perceived as an important indicator of the quality of the programme. Finally, the analyses point to significant others, e.g. alumni, former lecturers and students etc., having influenced the graduates’ views of the prestigious institutions and their programme. The following extracts provide us with a glimpse into these views:

... When I want to decide on the program, one of the aspects I considered is the quality of the programme.... I asked MBA alumni, current students and lecturers from some of the offshore MBA programmes, I concluded that there were two MBA programmes with great feedback. However, at that time, [one] xxx [named program] was losing its prestige...; the other programme seemed to be better, in quality (CASE A INTERVIEW gradstd 2)

[T]heir prestigious brand name ...one of the first MBA programme in Vietnam. ...the lecturers are mainly from xxx [named country], they are all from very prestigious school in xxx [named country] (CASE B INTERVIEW gradstd 2)

Why I joined the programme. It is because of the strategic partnership between my university in Vietnam and xxx University. ... I prefer xxx's [named country] education system and I trust their prestigious programme here (CASE C INTERVIEW gradstd 1)

It is because there is a partnership between our university that means the xxx [named institution] and xxx [named institution]. The image of the two xxx [named institutions] is popular and well-known (CASE C INTERVIEW gradstd 2).

4.2.1.1.4 Teaching and learning quality

Another factor influencing participant’s choice and decision to enrol in their select offshore MBA programme had to do with perceptions of quality with regard to teaching and learning. In the main this discussion largely revolved around the teaching and the interactive learning environment.

xxx [named institution] had provided good facilities and staff quality. I personally really like [the] xxx [named institution] building... recommend xxx [named institution] for its quality, facilities and staff (CASE B INTERVIEW gradstd 1)

A particularly different point raised by a graduate student is provided here:

Its marking and assessing system is strict and candid [transparent]. Moreover, students can give direct feedback about the professors’ teaching skills so they could change their methods to further improve the teaching-learning quality (CASE C INTERVIEW gradstd 1)
This participant’s account illustrates satisfaction with the grading and assessment system of the programme and the fact that the programme provides avenues for students to voice concerns and suggest ways to improve students’ learning experiences.

4.2.1.1.5 Flexibility in programme delivery

One participant indicated that programme flexibility was an inherent factor underlying choice:

*The reason I chose this...MBA [was] because of its timetable. It was suitable for part-time students like me (who [are] working and studying)* (CASE A INTERVIEW gradstd 1)

This participant had also previously identified ‘International program/affordable cost’ as important need factors (see 4.2.1.1.1). Thus, the flexible programme delivery has enabled participant to not only combine work and study but to also fulfil the previously identified personal needs.

4.2.1.1.6 Stringent enrolment

One of the participants mentioned the stringent enrolment condition underlying her selection:

*Through the entrance examination and interviews of the program, I can learn more regarding practical aspects of the course. From the approach of examining the students, I prefer joining the programme as it can bring more practical thinking to the students as well as equipping students with effective study methods* (CASE B INTERVIEW gradstd 2)

It appears that the enrolment requirement to sit and pass a compulsory admissions test and interview allowed her to learn more about how the programme works. The entrance examination gave her valuable insights into how the programme itself would be run, suggesting she perceived this as an important element of ‘programme quality’; she found the practical nature and the study methods especially appealing.

4.2.1.1.7 Opportunity to go abroad

For two of the participants the opportunity to travel to the external provider’s country was appealing and instrumental in their choice of the programme:

... *I will get a chance to come over to AIT or a university in xxx [named country] after completing the course* (CASE B INTERVIEW gradstd 2)

"I also heard from my friend that this programme also offered scholarship to students which were a study trip in xxx [named country]. At that time, I did not think that I could get that scholarship" (CASE B INTERVIEW gradstd 1)
English course delivery

The fact that the offshore MBA programme was in English was another attractive factor; it allowed participants opportunities to improve their language skills.

*I knew that in the first nine intakes, this offshore MBA programme was taught in [xx][identified language]. They started to teach in English from the 10th one. Some of my friends and I took the entrance test at that time because of this course delivery in English. I could improve my English skills and get more knowledge from this MBA course which I did not have from the university (CASE B INTERVIEW gradstd 1)*

Another participant narrates:

...if my aims were achieved .... my English writing and comprehension skills [would have improved] beyond my hope (CASE C INTERVIEW gradstd 1)

Her account demonstrates that one of her aims for selecting the particular offshore MBA programme was to improve her command of the English language and in this narrative she perceives that her aims have been fulfilled beyond her expectations.

Graduate interview: Personal expectations and needs

Participants were queried on their expectations, needs and learning outcomes underlying their choice of the offshore MBA programme. Overwhelmingly, most cited expectations for self- and/or business improvements through increased productivity and performance; for some these translated to opportunities for promotions in their workplaces. While the general expectation was that the programmes would assist in building and improving their own knowledge base and skills, some viewed the exposure to international study environments with different teaching and study methodologies particularly attractive. A point made by graduates specifically alluded to developing research skills.

*I can especially improve my writing skills and adopt an integrity mindset in research. Secondly, I want to improve my time management, human resource management and critical thinking skills. Moreover, I want to gain broader international knowledge (CASE C gradstd interview)*

*I want to take this chance to continue to explore the sophisticated research and learning methodology from the programme ...Firstly, I expect to improve global management knowledge, to learn how to state the problem and write up a proposal. Secondly, the teaching staff with different teaching methods we could improve our study as well as have an opportunity to go abroad to experience (CASE C INTERVIEW gradstd 2)*.

Similarly, as expressed in the following narratives other graduate participants also perceived that the offshore MBA programme provided opportunities to study abroad as
well as improved specific skills including among others, decision-making, methodology and English language skills.

... I can improve my English skills and I will have a chance to study abroad after successfully completing the course (CASE A INTERVIEW gradstd 2)

My main expectation [of] the MBA programme was through the course could help me to reform my work and business experiences systematically, based on MBA studies could help my business grow up and I can improve decision-making skill. Besides that, I got qualification MBA degrees that hopefully can I get promotions during my working (CASE A INTERVIEW gradstd 1)

The final insight into graduate participants’ personal expectations and needs of the offshore MBA programme is noteworthy.

One of the graduate participants talks of his expectations of the offshore MBA programme he chose to enrol in:

Firstly, I’m not really good [handling real-life] situations. I want to be a manager so what I expect most is to learn modern knowledge in management to develop my career. Secondly, I want to work in an international environment. Finally, I want to master an international language which is English (CASE A INTERVIEW gradstd 2)

What is apparent is the underlying significance of the potential transfer of modern management knowledge and skills through the offshore MBA and the potential this has for career development and opportunities to work in global business.

The section has provided a glimpse into the recent students’ perceptions and needs behind their selection and ultimate choice of their offshore MBA programme and provider. We have observed those students’ selection criteria of which offshore programme to target range from opportunities to study overseas, to developing specific skills including but not limited to research, communication (specifically those that are delivered in English), problem-solving and decision-making.

4.2.1.3 Graduate interview: Were expectations and needs met?

The interviews also attempted to understand if participants’ perceptions, expectations and needs underlying their choice and enrolments of their selected offshore MBA programme were met. Their responses were categorised and a number of themes emerged among which were knowledge applications, mindset improvement, practical business skills and English skills. The following excerpts provide the testimony:
Yes, absolutely. I didn’t get more specialised knowledge however I adopt a manager’s mindset and a lot of practical skills that is really valuable for my career in the future (CASE C INTERVIEW gradstd 1)

I can tell that the programme ... 100% met all my expectations. But it mainly improved my visionary view to daily problems that I faced in doing business. That I thought is my biggest improvement from studying MBA (CASE A INTERVIEW gradstd 1)

Firstly, before I did my MBA, I haven’t had particular skills for business management. After the course I learn how to approach management problem logically and carry out my task efficiently (CASE A INTERVIEW gradstd 1)

Yes, I can improve critical thinking and analytical skills and research methodology. I can also learn how to search articles/ to search for database (CASE C INTERVIEW gradstd 2).

The following extract provides evidence and justification for how and why the programme met and exceeded the graduate’s expectations:

Even better than what I expected. Firstly, I learned up to date modern information, understand thoroughly about management. Most of the subjects spread over all aspects of management such as finance, law and policies. This broadens my knowledge and helped a lot for my job. Secondly, I learned how to work in a team, develop my personal advantage and work well with my team mates. Finally, I learned to apply my English skills in reality situation (CASE A INTERVIEW gradstd 2)

Time management skills, how to organise, self-independent skill, and teamwork skill, how to think logically and critically, how to guide the others. Those are the skills that I acquired from the programme. After graduation, for the first month, I was assigned tasks by my manager but one month later I have the right to develop the plan and to improve the autonomy. When I work I can improve how to organise and think logically and critically as well as I argue on the basis of evidence (CASE A INTERVIEW gradstd 2).

An observation worth noting is student’s expectations regarding course delivery in the English language and their assessment of the teaching staff:

Yes, the programme met my expectations. Because my course was delivered in English and I could improve my English and all the lecturers are qualified in order to teach us, no matter where they come from xxx [named country] or Vietnam (CASE B INTERVIEW gradstd 1)

Yes, I have been offered English course before the main course so I can write up or develop an essay or a report more easily or in other words I can improve my English writing skill (CASE C INTERVIEW gradstd 2).
The same participant also stated:

*My marketing knowledge has improved. I have learnt new practical things from lecturers from xxx [named country]. I also improved my presentation and communication skills from the MBA course, which I learnt from my lecturers in this programme. Critical thinking skills also helped me a lot during my studies and in my work - I have been able to apply those skills when working (CASE B INTERVIEW gradstd 1)*

In this last narrative above, the participant explicitly acknowledges that some of the learning gained was in terms of the valuable lesson delivery skills of the off-shore MBA lecturers – their presentation and communication skills were singled out. The participant further acknowledges that these skills were emulated in her subsequent career (see Table 5 above; data shows this particular participant became a lecturer post-MBA).

However, some of the graduates complained about the poor curriculum management on the part of the Vietnamese partner of the offshore programme. This following excerpt provides us insight of the nature and reasons for one student’s dissatisfaction with their offshore MBA programme:

*There were some regulations which were causing problems to students such as they [the local partner] forced every student in MBA programme to study one compulsory subject ‘Advanced Philosophy’ that should have been an optional subject because ... MBA programme is an international programme if they should keep the same structure as in .... This Advanced Philosophy should not be graded or considered as part of MBA programme. [The] problem occurred when we did thesis defence presentation in front of thesis committee (which normally had 1 member from the foreign partner, 2-3 members from Vietnamese partner). [While the] ... foreign partner tended to focus on our [thesis] content...the Vietnamese committee members [tended to] focus on our thesis structure and ... presentation. [The] foreign partner guided [advised] us [that the] final project is kind of [a] case study, but Vietnamese members considered it as ‘Master by Research’thesis’ (CASE A INTERVIEW gradstd 1).*

However, the following participant’s narrative clearly shows the dissatisfaction is levelled against her current employer and not the MBA programme itself:

*My workplace environment could not provide me the opportunity to apply [the] knowledge and skills learnt from MBA programme into my job to develop my capacity to improve performance as a part-time university lecturer and full-time researcher in economics. I have to teach many hours in the university and little time for research (CASE B INTERVIEW gradstd 2)*

Elaborating further she said:
...I decided to further my studies ... for the purpose of being a [better] economics lecturer and researcher ...I improved greatly my determination and hard work towards my goals for the future (CASE B INTERVIEW gradstd 2)

Clearly, the participant views her MBA qualifications as the foundation for her aspirations to future career developmental goals.

The following excerpts showcase graduate views on how programmes could be improved to help achieve student outcomes:

The MBA course needs to have more practical internships to improve the student’s experiences. Moreover, the timeline needs to extend a bit so that there would be enough time for students to fully understand every aspect of the lecture.... In addition, the course needs to improve the students’ language ability to meet the course requirement. Moreover, the course work needs to update their course continuously to satisfy the continuously changing world (CASE A INTERVIEW gradstd 2)

From the above narrative it is apparent that the student’s primary focus for programme improvement is centred on the need for continuous evaluation of curriculum design (programme duration, language classes, teaching and learning content).

The narratives in this section are crucial in understanding the needs and expectations of the graduates and their concerns about programme management.

4.2.1.4 Graduate interview: Perception of programme strengths

Graduate students were specifically asked for their perceptions of the strengths of their offshore MBA programmes. The results demonstrate that by far it is the learning and teaching context that has attracted student attention and interest. The teaching methods from foreign professors have made students improve group discussion skills and knowledge sharing. The following extracts provide the evidence:

My purpose is to experience an international learning environment as that provided in ... [named country]. As a result, I gained practical experiences that are valuable for my future career (CASE C INTERVIEW gradstd 1)

A graduate from another programme expressed similar sentiments:

[Their] practical experiences help me practise a lot of things. The programme has offered a good studying environment (CASE B INTERVIEW gradstd 1)

The programme structure and design focused on both soft management skills and updated knowledge which prepared them for future career roles.
Problem-solving skill is critical to me; I have learnt it throughout the MBA programme. It helps me to realise what causes problems and how to solve them. Besides that, I found out Financial Management study subject also helped me to learn new things and let me understand more about accounting and finance issues that I did not know before. There were skills like: group-study working, presentation skill, team-work building (CASE A INTERVIEW gradstd 1)

Flexible program, students can learn in Vietnam and then can be transferred to xxx the [named country] or we can learn in Vietnam with qualified teaching staff both foreign and local teachers (CASE C INTERVIEW gradstd 2).

One graduate specifically mentioned knowledge application in regard to strategic plan development and knowledge sharing to achieve the target.

I can apply my knowledge straight away from classes. For example, after the course I have learnt to have a strategic plan for the company which helps the company to run smoothly and achieve the target. Moreover, I can share a lot of my knowledge with my college (CASE A INTERVIEW gradstd 2)

Another graduate is clearly able to demonstrate the value of the MBA qualification. His testimony shows improvement to his management style; he attests that not only is he aware of the change but his ‘boss’ is able to see the difference and the two now have a better working relationship:

My boss [was able to] assess the value [of the MBA training] immediately. The changes in the way I look at a situation now create harmonious relationship between us. [Previously] I only judge people on my point of view only and creates a lot of misunderstanding between departments. However, I can now work efficiently with other employees hence increase the effectiveness and efficiency of my job. This pleases my boss a lot (CASE A INTERVIEW gradstd 2)

Some other favourable points were voiced by the two graduates:

Firstly, it is the friendly good study environment created by the teachers and support staff from the centre. Secondly, the education quality is great. Thirdly, interesting coursework, even though it was [at times] too much. Moreover, the facilities and teaching and learning infrastructure are very good (CASE B INTERVIEW gradstd 2)

The criteria for assessing students’ performance are detailed and specific. Additionally the programme has provided good facilities and staff quality (CASE B INTERVIEW gradstd 1)

The strengths of the offshore MBA programmes are raised in this section as the teaching and learning environment, teaching methodology, knowledge sharing and update and its
application, programme structure and design, and skills development to prepare for MBA graduates qualified business administrators. The following section looks at graduates’ perceptions of why the offshore MBA programme is successful.

4.2.1.5 Graduate interview: Perception of programme success

Graduates were quizzed on their perceptions of how successful or not their selected programme was and their reasoning for it. In the main all graduates thought their programmes were successful in the context of knowledge and skills transfer. The teaching staff brought a wide-range of practical management experience and knowledge to their teaching. Lectures and classroom discourse and dialogue on contemporary issues and challenges helped improve students’ critical-thinking, problem-solving and decision-making skills. Students perceived that overall the programme helped them improve their management and leadership skills. The following excerpts capture the essence of their overall sentiments of why their offshore MBA experience was deemed successful:

We have (at work) a group of 4 MBA students from the same MBA programme. We are planning to set up a business in vocational training, educational consultation services and language learning education. We have applied entrepreneurship knowledge that we have acquired from the programme to prepare business plan and set up the operations of business. I was chosen as leader of the group,... thanks to the negotiation skills that I learnt from International Business subject, I had dealt $2 million contract with overseas partner. I balanced between supplier and customer in dealing business (CASE A INTERVIEW gradstd 1)

It is evident that knowledge and skills amassed via the offshore MBA programme have been instrumental in the decisions behind the group of four recent MBA graduates wanting to set up their own business in the Vietnamese educational and vocational sector. The participant also clearly identified the negotiations skills he learnt as part of the programme behind the successful bid in securing an overseas partner.

Some participants specifically attributed programme success to the international context of the teaching team equating them to better quality teaching and teaching methods:

In regard to the teaching staff, they are mainly from ... (named international partner); they are all from very prestigious school in ... Most of them are well qualified (CASE B INTERVIEW gradstd 2)

I felt that foreign lecturers have had more practical and broader experiences with very good methods of teaching that has made the difference (CASE B INTERVIEW gradstd 1)
The quality of the programme in regard to teaching quality and good facilities, and the prestige of the two xxx [named institutions] (CASE C INTERVIEW gradstd 2).

Additionally, there is a strong sense that the programme enabled skills improvement and this was perceived as key factors in why the programme overall was successful.

In terms of skills, I have learnt to consider issues in many perspectives and aspects. Secondly, I have learnt how to deal with stress and pressure at workplace. More importantly, I have learnt how to cooperate and working in team during the time there (CASE C INTERVIEW gradstd 2)

Before my MBA course, I struggled to analyse the problems and what needs to be done in order to solve it. Secondly, I often find it hard to adopt new ideas and methods to solve a problem arise at work. I often tackle the problem intuitively not logically. However, after the course and my practical work, I can logically analyse the problem and develop an efficient way to solve it. I am ready to accept any changes and adapt with the differences (CASE C INTERVIEW gradstd 1)

Special mention is made of how the programme helped drastically improve their research skills:

I [have] changed a lot in my research approach. In the past [before doing] the course, I only analysed a research problem superficially. After the course I learn how to research and analyse deeply (CASE B INTERVIEW gradstd 2)

Another element of what made their offshore programme ‘successful’ is the apparent link to Trust in the educational system of the foreign university partner.

I prefer xxx's [named foreign country] education system and I trust their prestigious programme here (CASE C INTERVIEW gradstd 1)

From the following excerpt it appears that the prestige of the foreign partner is closely linked to trust and therefore prestige is a critical factor in participants’ success rating of programmes. Another important ‘success’ factor appears to be the availability of financial assistance provided by employers to select employees who pursue the programme.

Firstly, it is because of their prestigious brand name. This is one of the first MBA programme in Vietnam. Secondly, it is the [financial] assistance programme that helps the programme to promote itself (CASE B INTERVIEW gradstd 2)

Programme design and flexibility also appear to be a critical contributory factor for the following student’s perception for the success of their offshore MBA programme.
The [providers] have created suitable programmes for students who come from different industries. The structure of this course is really clear for students to understand and follow... I had contacts and connections to the program’s alumni. We had alumni events and contact with the program’s administrators. (CASE B INTERVIEW gradstd 1)

The alumni network and events organised were also key factors - it appears to students that it adds to and accounts for the integrity of the offshore partner.

While Section 4.2.1 discussed recent graduates’ views and experiences of the offshore MBA programme they enrolled in the following section provides the analysis and results of interviews conducted with providers of offshore MBA programmes.

4.2.2 Provider interviews

This group of participants was purposively targeted from among the programme managers (provider promgr), administrators (provider adminstf) and faculty staff (provider facstf) of offshore MBA programme. Faculty staff are those who teach on the programme. Table 6: Interview demographics - Provider lists key demographics of the interviews with programme provider stakeholder group, the majority 6/9 or 66.7% of who are males.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Case organisation</th>
<th>Participant type</th>
<th>Nos.</th>
<th>Gender / Nationality</th>
<th>Participant code</th>
<th>Notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CASE A</td>
<td>Provider adminstf</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Male/Belgian</td>
<td>CASE A INTERVIEW</td>
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<td>provider adminstf</td>
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<tr>
<td>CASE B</td>
<td>Provider adminstf</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Male/French</td>
<td>CASE A INTERVIEW</td>
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<td>provider adminstf</td>
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<tr>
<td>CASE C</td>
<td>Provider adminstf</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Female/Vietnamese</td>
<td>CASE A INTERVIEW</td>
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<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Is a recent graduate herself, now programme coordinator</td>
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<td>CASE A</td>
<td>Provider facstf</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Male/Belgian</td>
<td>CASE A INTERVIEW</td>
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<td>provider facstf</td>
<td>Head of representative office</td>
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<tr>
<td>CASE B</td>
<td>Provider facstf</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Male/Vietnamese</td>
<td>CASE A INTERVIEW</td>
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<td>provider facstf</td>
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<tr>
<td>CASE C</td>
<td>Provider facstf</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Female/Vietnamese</td>
<td>CASE A INTERVIEW</td>
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<td>provider facstf</td>
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<td>CASE A</td>
<td>Provider promgr</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Male/Belgian</td>
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<td>provider promgr</td>
<td>Programme manager now previously faculty member</td>
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<td>CASE B</td>
<td>Provider promgr</td>
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‘CASE A INTERVIEW provider promgr’ clarified that prior to his present appointment he was, since programme inception, a regular member of the program’s faculty or teaching staff. He was appointed full-time programme manager of the branch campus in 2010. Additionally, ‘CASE A INTERVIEW provider adminstf’ also identified that she herself was a graduate of her university’s offshore MBA program; she has been its programme coordinator since 2010.

The interviews posed three areas of questions in relation to their MBA programmes: i) expectations of programme quality; ii) perception of strengths iii) perception of the success.

4.2.2.1 Provider interview: Expectations of programme quality

The key expectations of providers (faculty staff, programme coordinator and programme manager) with regard to programme quality appear to resonate around the following themes:

i. Attention to the design and content of the programme and its curriculum;
ii. Curriculum that is designed to meet the needs of multiple stakeholders;
iii. Attention to specific needs of the multiple stakeholders regarding for varied modes of programme delivery (i.e. full-time, part-time);
iv. Provision of quality teaching facilities and resources that are adequate and aligned with the aims and objectives of the programme offered;
v. Ensuring graduate quality (via well-defined and clearly articulated Student admission policies and qualifying criteria)
vi. Adequate staffing— including quality teaching staff and support staff (library, administration and student services);
vii. Good interactions and networking of lecturers (local and visiting), instructors and students;
viii. Effective assessments and assessment methods that are aligned to the curriculum’s aims and objectives.

The comments of one programme manager highlight the emphasis on producing graduates capable of leading and managing Vietnamese institutions and businesses.

We want to train young people to become great managers and leaders (CASE A INTERVIEW provider promgr).

The category of ‘faculty staff’ includes all employees who are directly involved in the actual teaching and or delivery of off-shore MBA programmes; and as such have varied roles. Co-lecturers team teach on coursework while lecturers (Vietnamese or foreign) have responsibility for the unit or module design. In some programmes the foreign lecturer assumes key responsibility for course design while the Vietnamese lecturer takes on the role of tutors.
All the teaching and learning standards, course credit and structure are strictly adopted from the university abroad. But all lectures are delivered by Vietnamese lecturer (CASE A INTERVIEW provider facstf)

Whatever their roles there appears to be an emphasis on producing graduates who will become high calibre future leaders; the following excerpt demonstrates one such sentiment:

[Want to] produce excellent managers in Vietnamese businesses (CASE A INTERVIEW provider facstf)

It appears, from the extract below that that such sentiments are themselves based on student expectations and appears therefore that faculty (teaching) staff priorities are largely student-centred.

[We] consider students’ needs and expectations as [our] first priority and satisfy them (CASE A INTERVIEW provider facstf)

A participant’s comments, shown below, suggest a link between international partners wanting to retain their prestigious programme brand name and their general reluctance to modify the coursework design to fit in with the specific requirements of the local student cohort. The participant also claimed that students construed this limitation as concerns of programme quality.

We have a prestigious brand name so we need to maintain this prestige by our teaching quality. However, there is a paradox here, while all other programmes are flexible in their modules, and even the English teaching class, we cannot change our programme because this might affect the quality of the course. There is so much emphasis on theory coursework that we lose our competitive aspect as this will [could] limit [future] student enrolment (CASE A INTERVIEW provider facstf)

Further elaboration was sought. The participant explained that these concerns were raised with the international partner and the response was that that the programme in its original form could not to be changed. However, there were assurances that a new course, the Executive Master of Business Administration (EMBA) would be introduced. The EMBA would have a greater focus on practice in the context of the Vietnamese business sector and lesser focus on theoretical aspects. The international partner envisaged that the new programme would meet the quality needs of the students, employers and business sector.

A review of the programme documentation showed that there were around 24 to 26 modules in the programme with the majority of the coursework focusing on theory. While the learning objectives listed developing strong teamwork, self-discipline and interaction skills the participant explained that the programme and curriculum design made it difficult for students to achieve this. Besides their studies, students had to put in very long hours in their regular full-time jobs as well and therefore there were minimal
opportunities to build teamwork and interactive skills.

Another participant commented that their offshore MBA programme had celebrated a great milestone in 2011 and the providers felt it was an opportune time to assess if the programme (its specification, structure and content) fulfilled the expected outcomes; and if it did not where could it be improved. The following extract from the participant highlights one outcome of the assessment:

> We switch to real MBA programme which, I would say, again, a mix of the old concept of the programme and some innovations which is in fact, what I would say, a modern MBA you know (CASE A INTERVIEW provider promgr)

When asked to elaborate what ‘real MBA program’ meant the participant clarified that there was a sense that the programme needed to embrace and include more current and contemporary knowledge of local business and its needs (such as functioning with a truly dynamic globalised marketplace).

The same participant also commented that the learning environment needed improvements in terms of the facilities and infrastructure that were being offered. His excerpt below suggests that a significant gap exists between what students have/use in their workplaces to what is offered in the offshore MBA context.

> ...The learning environment...and for this we have two sides: hardware and software. The hardware is you know the classroom, the materials, all of it. So in that situation we need [our] partners. In Vietnam we understand the need to offer couple of facilities for people. I have students in the MBA programme - most of them are working in quite big companies with the top level [state of the art] offices and facilities. And when they come to the MBA classes they expect to find the same kind of environment (CASE A INTERVIEW provider promgr)

An important point raised was the need to monitor and update programme curriculum design and content. A participant recalled that he had been teaching in the offshore MBA programme for the past 11 years.

> I can give examples to students, relating each of them with case studies from companies in US, in Japan or Europe. 11 years ago, those students did not know these companies [identified in their case studies]. They had little knowledge about the management in general and they had much smaller [less] access to information. At that time, the internet had not been fully developed, so I could teach only about basic things. Now they [students] have become more aware and much more interactive in terms of discussing strategic management in these companies, that is they are able to discuss more management-orientated issues rather than purely technical things (CASE A INTERVIEW provider facstf)
The participant’s observation was that the current cohort of offshore MBA student demographics and their access to managerial knowledge and information had significantly changed in the past eleven years. Previously, most students came into the programme with little or no management experience. They also had limited access to management literature and knowledge. However, in recent times nearly all students come into the course with significant management experience across various disciplines (finance, marketing etc.) and they also have greater access to management literature and knowledge. Such exposure means they are better equipped and able to share their experiences and knowledge and are in a better position to improve their learning on how to become better managers. The programme manager posits this to be an important reason as to why the programme quality needs more frequent revisions. If the programme is perceived to not cover the latest developments in management theory and practice the chances are that students are likely to perceive the programme to be of poor quality.

The same participant also recounted how important faculty-student interactions and student feedback are in terms of students’ perceptions of key factors of programme quality.

*The feedback from students over the years showed satisfaction with the approach I took when they asked me for information. I would challenge them by asking questions as to what they would do and that makes students become more active and more participating. That becomes more exciting for teachers too to have more interactive style of teaching (CASE A INTERVIEW provider facstf)*

This section has analysed the interviews with the programme providers. We see that these participants, having been in direct contact with the student cohort, are able to provide deeper understanding of the issues confronting the successful delivery of offshore MBA programmes.

### 4.2.2.2 Provider interview: Perception of programme strength

Overall, programme providers perceived that their offshore MBA programme was able to equip students with the latest management knowledge and skills to be competent managers and leaders. As one programme manager stated:

*I think for sure it benefits their organisations because we train young people to become better managers and they are to be equipped with the latest and most advanced management techniques which are needed for the country and for the company to grow. About how it benefits, I think it makes the people be more confident in themselves. It’s the question of techniques; it’s also the question of transformation of the flexibility. Of course this increases their self-confidence and benefit the company they are working for (CASE A INTERVIEW provider promgr)*
The above statement suggests that the participant believes that the offshore MBA programmes provide students with courage, strength and confidence in their abilities to lead and grow their respective companies and ultimately benefits the country. Another strength the participant identified was in relation to the MBA curriculum being regularly researched and updated. According to him:

[T]he MBA program, just focusing on [historical] perspectives, so it has been, in fact, three phases since the last 15 years. The first programme allowed was the MBA; it was the Master in Management ...the traditional management programme in xxx... In the second phase we switched to a real MBA program, and in the third phase – which we started in the beginning of this year – was one with a totally reduced programme load. There were a lot of thinking about the future of MBAs in the world; some research has been done the last two years in America and in Vietnam including your conference paper in Australia about that. ...I used the content of these researches to build this new programme [we offer]. This is something practical and relevant (CASE A INTERVIEW provider promgr)

According to the same participant the curriculum clearly formulated and updated learning outcomes, through regular reflections of the demands and needs of stakeholders especially employers of business organisations. Furthermore, the curriculum clearly outlined the learning outcomes and the expected competencies of graduates and this gave students, employers and the business community confidence about the programme. Some of the programmes had timely evaluations and reviews and adjustments were made as and when required to cater to the needs of the various stakeholders.

Similar observations have been made by a programme manager from another offshore MBA programme.

The MBA programme of ... is one of the first MBA programmes in Vietnam. It started in.... [year]. When it began, for the first two years, the degree could be finished within one year and then it was extended to two years to ensure quality of the programme. To describe briefly, the programme is structured and organised according to the international standards, it has also changed its structure while maintaining its quality to adapt to Vietnamese society...For example, in every semester, students can choose specialised subjects even though this option is not available [to the MBA] anywhere else in the world. So the students can choose the x [number of] elective subjects ... required of the course (CASE A INTERVIEW provider promgr)

Overall, it appears that the programme providers perceive flexibility with programme design and structure to be key strengths of their respective MBA programmes. Their offshore MBA programmes are updated regularly to not only reflect changing global needs but to fit more closely with the Vietnamese business context.
Programme providers of both CASE A and CASE B also mention that the teaching methodology specifically using the case study approach offers a clear vantage point for their programme (See section 4.2.2.1 for the account of the faculty staff from CASE A narrative on case studies). The programme manager from CASE B elaborates this point on case study approach, stating:

The MBA content is changing according to the changes in the world’s economy. Additionally, a local expert and the foreign lecturer as co-lecturer combine to deliver the practical changes in Vietnam’s economy. We use the case study, and adapt or develop it on the basis of the practical situation of Vietnam. Both of the two co-lecturers research and update these case studies’ content in about every two to three years (CASE A INTERVIEW provider promgr)

His account suggests that the teaching partnership used in their programme is especially outstanding. The teaching methodology is built on a partnership between local Vietnamese expert and a foreign lecturer partnership; together they research and identify existing international case studies which are then adapted to the local Vietnamese context. The case studies so structured and used in the curriculum are regularly updated suggesting that students, business and community are kept abreast of the global business problems, challenges and the strategic solutions to help solve them.

Programme providers rated the strength of the offshore MBA programme to its ability to offer an ‘international study environment’ to local students. Throughout the data analysis we have seen that ‘strength’ has been identified as a key point by all participant groups. The fact that Vietnamese students can, while living and working in their home country, still obtain an international MBA award is especially attractive.

The following excerpt from the CASE B programme manager also suggests that another plus point is that offshore MBA programme offers good infrastructure, facilities and study environment that benefit local students by helping them improve their performance.

We have a lot of good feedback about the study environment here, especially the MBA programme. We provide the best environment for self study and group study with well-equipped learning infrastructure and facilities (CASE A INTERVIEW provider promgr)

The programme manager narratives also indicate that the opportunity to partake in the exchange programme as part of their MBA programmes was also regarded as a key strong point as it provide students opportunities to experience and work in the international business arena.

We have a strong exchange programme with a lot of universities and institutions abroad. We will extend our exchange programme to another university in xxx [name foreign country] (CASE A INTERVIEW provider promgr)
A participant from another of the offshore MBA providers provided similar views. There is support for the programme equality.

*The first thing is the course timeline of [just] 1 year and the night time classes. These can attract more working part-time students. The second point is the program’s structure with the total 8 subjects [in one year] are about 2/3 of the MBA program, and this can help students focus on their work mainstream (e.g.: Management, Marketing, Finance, Accounting, Economics ...). The third point is students study [load progresses] from easier to harder subjects; the first 3 subjects with Vietnamese lecturers then with foreign lecturers later on. Then comes along 6 months of study abroad in [named foreign country] (CASE C admstf)*

The excerpt above shows that programme structure and teaching mode of delivery (flexitime and opportunity to study abroad) are especially favoured and count as ‘quality’ indicators

Equally important as a student recruitment strategy is the emphasis on the quality of the teaching staff and the teaching and learning strategies to stimulate active learning. Students are able to acquire and apply knowledge and skills in their current and future jobs. As pointed out by the programme coordinator of the CASE A program,

*...we have sent here [to Vietnam] experienced and senior [foreign] teachers most of the time. We can say that they are great teachers and students are very happy with the faculty (CASE A INTERVIEW provider admstf)*

Further elaborations suggest that the program’s accreditations internationally are well recognised by a teaching board from many different countries and therefore a key indicator of quality.

*The point is that we really have an international MBA, meaning that of course we have local students first and some international ones but our teaching faculty includes an international teaching staff. They are not only from xxx [named foreign partner], you know, we have teachers coming from Germany, Spain, Italy, France, and USA. I think it’s kind of unique in this country. It is the fact that really senior and best teachers have been chosen to teach here. I mean we didn’t send young assistants just to teach here. The teachers here are the best teachers (CASE A INTERVIEW provider promgr)*

The very strong and committed relationship between the two partners is considered a key strength of the offshore MBA education programme in Vietnam. The reputation of the two university partners has made the programme stable and viable in the long term.
One of the strong points of the MBA programme here is that we have the stability, we have here over [x number of] years, that’s a long time in Vietnam and always with the same partners (CASE A INTERVIEW provider promgr).

The programme manager also attributes their strong position and sustainability over the many years of operations to the close network of the alumni in the business and public sector communities.

4.2.2.3 Provider interview: Perception of programme success

The interviews with programme managers and programme coordinators offer rich data and understanding of some of the reasons why providers regard their offshore MBA programme as particularly successful. The reasons are varied and include among others interactions among alumni network, stringent student admission criteria, international faculty, reputation of the provider and reasonable cost of an international qualification. The following excerpts provide the evidence.

...I do take part in the organisation of the business lunches with alumni. In the last 16 months we organised 3 business lunches, where foreign professors and I got a bunch of the alumni; we gather together for lunches. In terms of student admissions we are very careful to select students [who are] qualified enough and the students who have the capacity to complete an MBA....

...We believe that all the students that graduate ... are good employees and they are able to perform, have a love [and respect] of the expectations of employers. So that’s worth the money. Because it’s a very good product that if you compare it to other international MBA programmes here, we are among the cheapest....

... and the way we teach ... So that’s our strength. And we know what feature here is our teaching. One is international faculty. Second is the reputation of the school, which is important. So thanks to the network we have, more than 1300 alumni and most of them have good position in companies, so it’s easy for us to recruit students. Alumni support the programme as they are happy with it and so it is easy to recommend. So recommendation is the key here that makes the number of applicants of our programme to increase (CASE A INTERVIEW provider adminstf).

In terms of programme quality, ‘fit for purpose’ namely aligning students’ needs and satisfaction with programme design has been confirmed by the programme manager

...The first [requirement] in the program, something which is really fit what students need. That’s one of the most important (CASE A INTERVIEW provider promgr).

From the provider interviews it was apparent that staff generally found a positive change in the way Vietnamese students participated in the classroom, their motivation levels and enthusiasm to gain knowledge and skills. The students were professional, hard working,
bright, dedicated and actively participated in discussions. They demonstrated greater enthusiasm for learning and were more demanding. Staff also noted that students reported being more impressed with the teaching methodology and its practical applications. One example of the provider narrative is provided here:

You know a few years ago, when we were teaching here, it was very difficult to have discussions, to have students discussing between themselves and exchanging ideas about the problems because they always refer to the professors and ask for solutions from professors... And now it has changed a lot and we have students who work much more practically and who are now really discussing together and so we can really use case teaching and case discussion. And this means that this new generation of students and young managers is much more interested into case discussions more than just commenting and listening to us. And they are very demanding about not only knowledge but also the practicality of the cases (CASE A INTERVIEW provider facstf)

One of the providers, a programme coordinator, linked the quality of their offshore MBA programme to student interest namely in terms of increase in student enrolments:

The MBA programme [has gown] from [year identified] to now, we have had had x [numbers of] student intakes. The 1st intake we had only ‘xx’ [number of] students. The reason why we had less number of students at that time was because we followed [foreign partner’s] semester. [But by] the third intake we had yy [twice xx] students...and in the next intake zz [slightly more than four times xx] and [now] we are down to aa [less than zz but slightly more than three times xx] (CASE A INTERVIEW provider admstf)

In the following extract we see that the provider admstf (i.e. the programme coordinator) takes great care to explain that the slight drop in the last intake in the above narrative was not to be mistaken for any perception of drop in their programme quality or popularity.

Because of the increasing foreign exchange rate of [named country] makes the school fees and cost of living in [named country] higher than before ... The actual number of [students] passing the entry exam was [around] zz, but ...only aa [number of] students enrolled (CASE A INTERVIEW provider admstf)

The drop in enrolments is attributed to the rising currency exchange rate and the higher costs that would be incurred in doing part of the programme in that overseas country. Furthermore, the fact that the actual expressions of interest, by way of students sitting and passing the entry exam, was much higher than those finally enrolled was also used to further drive the point that the drop in numbers was not due to lower programme quality or programme popularity.

In the narrative below the participant elaborates why students like the programme:
...the program’s timetable is suitable for part-time students and they had one semester studying in [named country] for [xx] months. Some married students find it easier to follow this timeline. There were no such big differences between study in Vietnam and [named country] and the lecturers also give good feedbacks about Vietnamese students (CASE A INTERVIEW provider admstf)

It is apparent from the above narrative that CASE C’s programme structure meets the needs of students and other stakeholders. The participant provides further evidence:

Vietnamese students tend to choose management subjects. We have 8 subjects of which 6 are compulsory subjects and 2 elective subjects so that they [students] could choose what their objective mainstream is...

This programme also gave them [students] management knowledge [which can] be applied to many industries. Students improved their English communication skills. There are some businesses that sponsored their staff to study this course without any interruptions to their [regular] work (CASE A INTERVIEW provider admstf)

Overall from the above excerpts we identify three key features of the programme which support students’ and employers’ preference for CASE C’s offshore MBA programme. The programme provides a) knowledge relevant to many industries b) opportunities for sponsored students to improve communication skills in English and c) flexibility in course structure and design. Students can continue with their full-time work responsibilities and pursue higher studies implying that the part-time offshore MBA programme delivery mode is a key attraction or fractal if viewed from a complexity paradigm.

CASE B organisation had, over a couple of years, experienced a steady drop in student enrolments. The following excerpt from its programme manager outlines the steps the organisation took to successfully rectify and reverse the declining trend.

We focussed more on the practical aspects of the programme. We spent [some] hours of coursework to invite specialists to talk about the practical situation of Vietnam and how to deal with different financial problems. We have a lot of strong connection with employers from big companies to consult them about our coursework. This connection really helps our programme to improve its practical aspects (CASE A INTERVIEW progmgr)

To summarise, the discussions in this section have identified the forces programme managers perceive to be critical to programme quality and the underlying reasons for the preferential choice of the various case organisations’ offshore MBA programmes. Most of these are discussed from the perspectives of students as the key stakeholder of the offshore MBA programmes although there are some employer perspectives, given that they are either the principal institutional sponsors of some students and/or the end-users of the graduate students.
Programme strength and quality centre on the practicality of knowledge to various industries, programme flexibility in terms of structure and design, course content, selection criteria for recruiting students, cost factors (reasonable), teaching methodology, and word-of-mouth (recommendations) by alumni. It appears from the narratives that further attention to and investments in content and course design are needed to support local Vietnamese demand and need for qualified business administrators.

4.2.3 Employer interviews

The final group of stakeholders purposively selected for this study are employers (business managers) who have in their employment off-shore MBA graduates from the case organisations used in this study. Table 7 below lists the key demographics of the employers. The results show that all five business managers are aged 30 years and above majority (4/5 or 80%) are male.

Table 7: Interview demographics - Employers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Case Organisation</th>
<th>Nos</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Participant code</th>
<th>Place of work</th>
<th>Financial Sponsor?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CASE A</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>male</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>CASE A INTERVIEW emp 1</td>
<td>Havico</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CASE A</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>male</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>CASE A INTERVIEW emp 2</td>
<td>Savico</td>
<td>Partial</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CASE B</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>CASE B INTERVIEW emp 1</td>
<td>BIDV Bank</td>
<td>Partial</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CASE B</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>CASE B INTERVIEW emp 2</td>
<td>Fideco</td>
<td>Partial</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CASE C</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>male</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>CASE C INTERVIEW emp 1</td>
<td>Intel</td>
<td>Partial</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Of the five employers, four had provided partial financial sponsorship to their staff to undertake the MBA programme while working full-time. The remaining, fifth, employer did not provide any financial assistance but had recruited a graduate from CASE A organisation.

Similar to the approach adopted for the other two previous groups of interviewees this group was also posed three areas of questions in relation to the MBA programme. These questions being employers’ i) expectations of the program; ii) perceptions of the strengths of the programme iii) preference of the MBA education programmes (offshore MBA program, international programme or domestic MBA program).

4.2.3.1 Employer interview: Expectations of the programme

As mentioned above among this stakeholder group were sponsors of offshore MBA graduates. The decision of which employee(s) managers would sponsor is generally based on potential candidates’ capacity to fulfil two selection criteria. The first is that the candidate must, at the time of the application, already occupy a management position. The second is that the candidate’s next round of promotion needs to be to either a middle- or senior-management role. Employers’ decision to sponsor select employees’
MBA education is vested in their ability to improve their management skills and knowledge and in so doing help improve organisational performance and productivity.

Up to now we have operated quite a lot of subsidiaries which have accordingly raised the need of managers. We highly stimulate our staff especially the young effective and devoted ones to undertake MBA’s degree. They can get support and fund from the corporation and they also sign a commitment form (CASE A INTERVIEW emp 2)

The following extracts show two important expectations behind the choice and selection of the offshore MBA programme for those who are sponsored. First, the programme needs to be conducted in Vietnam itself so that the selected employee effectively could combine work and study. Second, the fact that it is an offshore programme meant that an international university was involved and this potentially meant opportunity for valuable transfer of advanced knowledge and skills to the student and invariably to the firm.

The human resource department tends to favour [prefer] their selected employees to take offshore MBA programme just because teachers are [assumed to be more] qualified and they have good training methodologies (CASE A INTERVIEW emp 2)

They are expected to improve managerial and analytical skills. Solving problem skill and strategic and system thinking are to be developed (CASE C INTERVIEW emp 1)

The extracts of managers (sponsors and non-sponsors) below suggest a tendency for managers to perceive that local universities that provide their own MBA courses are not as effective as offshore MBA providers in imparting essential communication and presentation skills to students.

If our employees are expected to be more focused on the management aspects, they can take an MBA course. If the employees have a lot of potential, an offshore MBA programmes will be preferred as they could continue working in the country. The professor from abroad will help the students to further improve their skills and knowledge to maintain the high international standards from an advanced country (CASE B INTERVIEW emp 1)

When employees are sent to an offshore MBA course, the aim is to have better management skills after the course (CASE A INTERVIEW emp 1)

I expect the employees to gain better understanding in their speciality and improve their skills. For the MBA programmes in the country, they tend to be lacking of communication skills and presentation skills. These skills are better taught by foreign professors in offshore MBA programmes (CASE B INTERVIEW emp 1)

While employers provide time, financial assistance and support to select employees to
undertake the offshore MBA they also stress a reciprocal relationship - there is the expectation that employees will return the support. The focus is on knowledge acquisition and skills development of the graduate particularly soft (or interpersonal) skills. In line with this reasoning there is also the expectation that the MBA providers will ensure solid curriculum quality in terms of it being context-driven, relevant and current. One of the CASES A employers singled out and appraised the case study methodology involving real cases as example of relevance and current – it can assist in the development of problem-solving and leadership skills.

Yes, absolutely. We have a whole system to support our employees to take an MBA course if they have got potential in management and we support our employees in terms of time and finance. The support level varies depending on the course. We are interested in developing soft-skills and updating knowledge relevant (CASE B INTERVIEW emp 1)

We expect our MBA graduates to improve problem solving skill. We expect MBA providers to use case study to assess students’ performance. MBA students not only improve how to identify the problem but how to solve the problems as well. Case study teaching methods make sense. We prefer not to have [purely] theoretical MBA curriculum. Beside deeper management knowledge, I’d like to put more emphasis on leadership skills. An employee with an MBA degree needs to do his job systematically and methodically. Case study is learnt through solving real situation problems and integrating analysis with practical applications (CASE A INTERVIEW emp 2)

4.2.3.2 Employer interview: Perception of programme strengths

The interviews showed that managers generally perceive that a key strength of their respective ‘offshore’ programme is the ability to pass on management knowledge and skills from the international provider to the incumbent student. There is a strong emphasis on developing the sponsored student’s leadership and interpersonal managerial skills. The following excerpts provide the evidence raise other important observations.

In regard to the strong point of offshore MBA program, we are interested in developing soft-skills and updating knowledge relevant. However we need to put more focus in soft skills especially interpersonal skill (CASE B INTERVIEW emp 1)

Another employer echoes similar sentiments about the power of the offshore programme to impart valuable knowledge and skills to local students. This employer alludes to the strengths of the offshore programme for its ability to specifically assist employees develop and hone their sense of strategic vision and appropriate strategic decision-making.
The MBA course provides graduates with combining and evaluating all of the knowledge about management. It teaches us to have a visionary mindset and a greater view in strategic decision level and the methods to successfully carry out this decision (CASE A INTERVIEW emp 1)

The participant narrative below positively identifies offshore MBA as their preferred choice. Furthermore, he singles out as exceptional, the design of the course content and the ability of the teaching staff to link theory to practice; they are able to demonstrate to students what it takes to be effective managers.

Firstly the course content is thoughtful and detailed. Secondly, the lecturers from the offshore MBA programme know how to lead the students into a practical method. Moreover, offshore MBA programme is as our preference (CASE A INTERVIEW emp 1)

4.2.3.3 Employer interview: Preference for type of MBA programme

In terms of employers’ preference for the type of MBA graduates, it was clear that MBA graduates with exposure to international programmes were highly preferred to local MBA graduates. Employers perceived that offshore MBA graduates have accumulated contemporary knowledge of business management practices and acquired good work ethics and critical thinking skills to solve the problems.

Four of the five employers had partially sponsored their employees to undertake the MBA. Furthermore, these employers reported graduates having contributed and improved firm productivity. As the CASE B employer commented:

We have five employees [to-date] who have earned international MBA degrees. We offered them higher position after graduation. Since then we have witnessed their profound contribution to the corporation which could not have been made without the programmes (CASE B INTERVIEW emp 2)

Employers’ preference for particular offshore MBA programmes is also based on other factors including the prospective employee’s command of the English language, the company’s objectives, policy and the training budget as well.

One employer reported that their firm has a history of fully and/or partially funding and supporting select employees to pursue international MBA qualifications. A total of three of the firm’s board members have since graduated from the offshore MBA programmes. Limited financial resources means that these staff that lack the necessary level of English language skills are not financially sponsored but the firm provides them assistance to find alternate locally provided MBA programmes to enrol in. An extract of the narrative is provided here:
Quite a few employees in our corporation have gained MBA degrees. The corporation’s first generation of leaders [upper management] are those who graduated from offshore MBA education programmes. We support our potential managers to take offshore MBA programmes but there are still English language barriers for [some of] them. So our human resource department organises the training orientation to [assist them] to choose the appropriate MBA programme (CASE A INTERVIEW emp 2)

As expressed in the following excerpt the same employer also stated that ultimately it is the responsibility of business organisations to create working environments to make the most effective and efficient use of their MBA graduates and the knowledge and skills they have gathered.

After MBA graduation, graduates are satisfied with the knowledge obtained from the programme. The concern is the leader [manager they report to]. Whether that leader brings the chances for graduates to work in a flexible and modern environment where their knowledge can fully be applied (CASE A INTERVIEW emp 2)

A crucial point made by CASE B manager is that the offshore MBA tuition fees needed to be reasonable and affordable. The MBA is worth its value in time and money if it meets the learning needs of its students.

In regard to the quality of the programme it needs to meet learners’ need i.e. reasonable and affordable tuition fees (CASE B INTERVIEW emp 2)

4.3 Analysis and results of the focus group session

4.3.1 Background of the focus group

The research methodology included a focus group comprised of representatives of the same three stakeholder groups, graduate students, programme providers and employers, as was the one-to-one individual interviews. While the seven representatives were sought from the same stakeholder groups the participants were all ‘fresh’ i.e. they were new members. Table 8: Focus group demographics on the following page list key demographics of the stakeholder members of the focus group.

For more effective recall experiences, the graduate representatives, like their interview counterparts, were purposively targeted from among those students who graduated in the last five years. MBA programme providers were represented by faculty i.e. teaching staff while employers were selected from among those who employed offshore MBA graduates.
Focus group members were invited to discuss, from their individual perspectives (as graduate student, programme provider or employer), questions related to their experience and/or understanding of offshore MBA programmes. The questions revolved around the same four themes as the interview i.e. i) reasons underlying students preference and choice for offshore MBA programme; ii) expectations and needs of the program; iii) perceptions of the strengths of the programme; iv) perceptions of the success of the programme. (Refer to Appendix 3: Focus group interview).

A point of clarification is that these participants are ‘new’ meaning that they did not participate in the individual interviews, and therefore provided alternative voices to the research problem. The underlying objective of the focus group sessions was to provide for data triangulation and to allow cross-fertilisation of ideas and greater discourse on the offshore MBA programme.

4.3.2  Focus group: Why do students prefer offshore MBA programmes?

The analyses revealed three broad themes of why students prefer offshore MBA programmes. These are discussed in the following sub-sections.

4.3.2.1 Attractiveness of the programme

Similar to the interview data analysis the focus group data analysis also uncovered the same three broad attractors of why students prefer the offshore MBA programmes. The attractors are a) the fact that the programme has ‘international’ status b) the reputation of the international provider and c) affordability of an ‘international’ qualification.

Both graduate participants from CASE B organisation were forthright in stating that their decision to enrol in offshore MBA programmes was influenced by the fact that a) the offshore provided an international qualification and b) it was at a reduced cost because the programme was subsidised by the government. As one of them stated:

\[T]\text{he offshore MBA programme has subsidy from the government so the tuition fees are reasonable (CASE B FG gradstd 1).}\n
The programme provider (faculty staff) from CASE A organisation added to the
conversation about cost and reputation, stating:

*I think the reputation of the university and reasonable tuition fee is important. This affects students' choice (CASE A FG Provider facstf 1)*

One of the managers made the following comment, adding to the notion of reputation attached to an international award being:

*We prefer the joint MBA programme [for our employees]... Having an international degree sounds better ...CASE A FG emp 1)*

The above extract shows that the employer has a preference for joint i.e. offshore MBA programmes which could be a large influence on students’ preference.

The fact that local Vietnamese students could obtain international qualifications while living and working in Vietnam is especially attractive as it has huge implications on costing and affordability. The fact that offshore programmes by definition include international accreditation also appears to be significant.

### 4.3.2.2 Quality of the programme

All three graduate participants agreed that word of mouth regarding the quality of the MBA course from alumni members and recent graduates were predominant factors influencing their choice. While not all their narratives directly alluded to ‘quality’ the underlying premise of their discourse points to quality issues:

*When we joined these programmes we had been advised by alumni and recent MBA graduates about the quality of the program...not only the reputation of xxx [named institution] and reasonable tuition fees but also the word of mouth for recommendation is important. (CASE A FG gradstd 1).*

*When I wanted to study the MBA, I asked graduates about the programme and they advised me to study at xxx [named institution] because professors are very good and they come from abroad. [It is] especially easy to find a new job with that qualification (CASE B FG gradstd 1).*

The other participant stated that the programme exceeded his objectives for enrolling.

*When I enrolled the MBA program, it was not only suitable to my objectives but gave me more than what I wanted (CASE B FG gradstd 2).*

### 4.3.2.3 Language, knowledge and skills transfer

All three graduates chose their respective offshore programmes for opportunities to improve English language and communication skills.

*When I joined the MBA programme it was because I wanted to study in an English [based] programme (CASE B FG gradstd 1).*
My background is technical I prefer to find programmes that can give me knowledge in economics and also to improve my English in economic field and to contact people in English (CASE A FG gradstd 1)

My first expectation when I join the MBA programme is to enrich my English skill in economic field (CASE B FG gradstd 2).

In the above narratives we note that two graduates have singled out and specifically mentioned competence in English language skills relevant to their specific discipline (Economics) as relevant.

An employer participant also added to the discussion of the credibility of offshore programmes to provide English, knowledge and skills transfer.

We prefer the joint MBA programme. Our employees will improve English and updated knowledge as the programme is delivered in English. Having an international degree sounds better and after their study they will improve their productivity and develop skills as well (CASE A FG emp 1)

To sum up the analysis here we note that a key reason why there is a preferential selection for offshore MBA programme is the opportunities it provides to students to improve English language and communication skills. Reputation of the foreign provider and transfer management knowledge and skills were also cited as important selection criteria.

4.3.3 Focus group: Expectations and needs

Graduate students expect the offshore MBA programme to help fulfil their need to learn and improve their leadership and management skills. These participants were unanimous in their views that the offshore programme would expose them to different ways of managing, general business knowledge, problem-solving and planning as well as help broaden their network. Some of their comments are provided here:

I want to study the methods of approaching an issue (CASE B FG Gradstd 1).

I want the programme to provide me general knowledge in many aspects of the business even though I have been in charge of one specific aspect in the company. I expect to understand how other departments manage their work. With general knowledge from the study it could help me to plan my work well and deal with other departments (CASE B FG gradstd 2).

I prefer a programme that will provide me knowledge in economics and management. I want to have an opportunity to build my network to people in other sectors (CASE A FG gradstd 1).

For one employer a key expectation was that the programme help his employees (students) develop leadership and managerial skills essential to prepare them for future leadership roles in his corporation.
We expect our graduates to develop leadership and managerial skills. After graduation they will all be promoted to middle and senior managers. They could not [possibly] manage people without these skills (CASE B FG emp 2)

A provider contributed to the discussion of graduates’ expectations of wanting to learn and develop new knowledge and skills. To the provider, students expect the learning environment to support their needs and expectations:

The learning atmosphere is also important. MBA students must feel free to discuss and to argue. [The programme needs to]...provide practical knowledge so that students can apply it to real business world (CASE A FG Provider facstf 2)

That the program, “provide practical knowledge so that students can apply it to real business world” in the above commentary has an important underlying meaning; a glimpse into what this could possibly mean is provided in the following commentary by the other teaching member:

Sometime I have some difficulties because I am teaching Supply Chain Management, but ...some [students] do not know about the subject.... [other students] who take care of Supply chains [in their organisations], they know what it is. It is interesting to teach different people but sometimes it is difficult... I have to come from the basic and step by step give them concept of the course (CASE A FG Provider facstf 1)

Supply Chain Management (SCM) is a relatively contemporary management unit and SCM tends to be adopted by large corporations. The dilemma for the teaching staff here is about relevance but also how to deliver something relatively unfamiliar to the students. SCM is very relevant to global markets and competition. One would expect offshore MBA's to teach and transfer such valuable knowledge. However, to those teaching the unit in an emerging economy like Vietnam the challenge is how to fit in an advanced unit such as SCM to fit the needs of diverse students within the allocated short time frame. The students enrolled in offshore MBA include many who do not have an undergraduate unit and work in smaller firms.

This section has provided deep insights into all three stakeholders groups’ expectations of the offshore MBA programme. We summarise that students personal expectations and needs of the offshore MBA range from issues such as the quality of the programme befitting their individual need, to it being an international program, it being affordable, for the opportunity to update knowledge and skills, opportunity to apply knowledge and skills to real business and finally opportunity to improve their English language skills. Local faculty members (as representatives of the provider) expect the programme to present a good teaching and learning environment; one where students feel free to discuss and challenge. The emphasis on expecting the programme to provide practical knowledge is important. For employers, their expectations are centred on transfer of knowledge and skills from the foreign providers to their employees. Employers have
vested interests; their freshly graduated employees will be well equipped to take on future leadership roles in their companies and steer them for global competition and success.

**4.3.4 Were expectations and needs met?**

The focus group session attempted to understand and establish if stakeholder expectations and needs were fulfilled. Did the programme meet graduate students’ perceptions, expectations and specific needs underlying their choice and enrolments of their selected offshore MBA programme? Did it meet the expectations and needs of the provider (the faculty participant)? And finally, did it meet the expectations and needs of the employers who sponsored and/or supported their employees to enrol in these programmes?

Graduates’ responses were categorised and a number of themes emerged among which were knowledge applications, how to think, practical business skills and English skills. The following extracts provide some of their insights:

*Our knowledge has not only improved a lot but the way we think as well. After graduation we have applied [that knowledge] to our business - a big foreign corporation - and improved our work performance (CASE B FG gradstd 1).*

*My negotiation has improved a lot. I could also develop system thinking and look at the issues from multiple perspectives (CASE B FG gradstd 2).*

The following extract demonstrates how and why the programme exceeded this particular graduate’s expectations:

*Professors are from overseas so they have a short time in teaching delivery. [This short time] means students have learnt how to study and work under [high] pressure environment. There was good opportunity to improve my time management, self-study, communication and even interpersonal skill (CASE B FG Gradstd 2).*

However, the other student from the same programme expressed dissatisfaction, stating:

*The contact time was too short for us to get the feedback from our professors as they are teaching [here] for a short time (CASE B FG gradstd 1).*

A faculty respondent added to the conversation highlighting concerns about lack of work experience in some new students:

*I think it is better students have to work at least three to five years then they come to MBA because if they are fresh students they will not be able to understand what professors say and could not apply what they study. (CASE A FG Provide facstf 2).*
From a teaching perspective there is an expectation that the programme has more stringent enrolments – students must have relevant work experience.

Two graduate participants stated that their expectations regarding the course itself had been met however; their concern was that there was limited opportunity for them to apply their new found knowledge and skills in their workplace. A sample of the conversation is provided here:

*The MBA programme has met my expectation but just after graduation I have not got much chance to apply the knowledge and skills in my working place (CASE A FG gradstd 1).*

To questions about how the programme could be improved to help achieve student outcomes, one graduate commented:

*The courses should be updated and the curriculum should be more relevant and more practical as learners prefer ‘doer’ masters to ‘salon’ masters. Learners should be trained how to self-study (CASE A FG gradstd 1).*

The other graduates shared their point of view in regard to the length of each course:

*I think updated information of the course is important. And the course is too short. We are offered essay/written exam, but I like more case studies or group work (CASE B FG gradstd 2)*

*It takes short time for one course. After the course we have to come to another one. So we have no time to review the textbook or study deeply. Even we have final report to link and apply all of our knowledge but we cannot cover all (CASE A FG gradstd 1).*

We note from the above commentaries that graduate students’ focus is centred on how the curriculum design and content has or has not met with their expectations and needs. The curriculum content and its relevance are applauded however there are areas of curriculum design that are lacking. It appears the course is intense with little time for students (noting many are full-time) to read the text or engage more deeply with the content. The issue of foreign professors being available for a very short time has also been raised. Graduate students also expected more case studies and especially those relevant to them i.e. based on local examples as relevant to them.

The following extract from one of the provider participants, a foreign faculty member, gives an insight into student expectations and needs:

*From the students’ side [perspective], sometimes they feel that professors come from xxx (identified region/country) so they do not know what exactly happens in Vietnam; and... [that] professors teach more theory and local teacher bring more practical knowledge; explain how the theory applies to real work (CASE A FG Provider facstf 2).*
The participant continued:

*Students are active, willing to share, ready to win, to compete with others and even challenge teachers as well. From teaching experience it is most like sharing knowledge and experience with students ...we have [many] with practical experience in human resource in big companies, so a lot of things to share and students are willing to share; in return we can learn from students (CASE A FG Provider facstf 2)*

To this teaching staff it is apparent that the profile of the student cohort is an important factor; staff expect and want active participation and discussions in the classroom. However, students perceive that foreign teaching staff are not fully aware of local Vietnamese business context. Most offshore MBA students are practicing managers and their experience is therefore valuable to the foreign staff too. Active classroom participation and discourse provides opportunities for two-way learning. There is synergy to be gained from knowledge and experience sharing between teachers and students and among students themselves. All parties stand to benefit.

As mentioned previously employers in this study have MBA students and/or graduates in their employment. Some of these students/graduates were provided partial financial support to undertake the offshore MBA. The potential candidates were selected from staff in managerial (front-line) positions that lacked managerial qualifications. The intention behind the financial support was to enable and encourage employees to improve their individual and organisational performance and productivity. Both employer participants concurred on this view. One of them, who had contributed in the discussion in 4.3.3 about expectations and needs, had this to add:

*Front-line managers are encouraged to take MBA with the tuition fees funded by the corporation. After graduation they were promoted to higher position and their performance has improved (CASE B FG emp 2)*

The above narrative demonstrates that this particular employer's expectation has been met.

These findings in this section are crucial to understanding if needs and expectations of the stakeholders groups were met. Overall, the results demonstrate that needs and expectations were generally met however there were also good insights of their concerns in some areas and what more needs to be done.

### 4.3.5 Perceptions of strengths of offshore MBA programmes

Overall, it is apparent that it is the knowledge and teaching methodology of offshore MBA programmes that have attracted stakeholders’ interest and attention. The following extracts from graduate students attribute the strengths of offshore MBA programmes directly to the teaching methods of foreign professors and the outcome is positive
difference to students’ experiences in learning and teaching:

*The teaching methods from professors are different. We have improved teamwork skills and knowledge sharing (CASE B FG gradstd 2).*

As the following commentaries show knowledge transfer and development, thinking and applied skills and team dynamics are crucial to students’ future managerial roles in the global marketplace.

*Students not only share knowledge but improve the way they think (CASE B FG gradstd 1)*

*We have learnt from group discussions and we have updated our knowledge about the business world that helps us deal with our business (CASE B FG gradstd 2).*

The following two excerpts are provider participants’ (faculty staff) perspectives of the strengths and weaknesses of their offshore programme.

*From the teaching point of view, how the programme is designed and structured is important. The CASE A’s programme is well-structured and it is useful for MBA students who have lots of experience in marketing, human resource and management. Teachers and students can interact and learn from each other. We can build a community (CASE A FG Provider facstf)*

The above excerpt apparently showcases the strengths. The programme has a diverse student cohort with varied working backgrounds. The richness of their experiences is well supported by the course design and teaching format; it allows students and staff to interact, share and learn from each other and the teaching staff. There is a sense of community engagement and rich learning. However, another faculty participant from the same case organisation expresses some concern about the design of that offshore programme.

*[Our] MBA provides students with general knowledge. Students have to be able to develop their own analysis and self-study. ...The programme should be more challenging and structured in such a way that students are required to be more involved in the case studies, group work and self-study (CASE A FG Provider facstf)*

It was established that this meant that the programme format focussed on delivering theory and general knowledge but with limited guidance and focus on the application. Students were very much left to their own when it came to analysing cases and problem-solving.

The following conversations demonstrated as a sense of tension in this discussion and the fact that first faculty staff is from the foreign partner institution while the second is from
the local partner institution helps contextualise the source of the tension. It left me to wonder if the foreign-local curriculum delivery course format was effective:

Students are equipped with theoretical framework and models by foreign professors and brought practical knowledge by local lecturers so that students can apply into their real business world. Local lecturers have working experience in their major [disciplines] and in their practice so they can share what is going on and how to apply theory to work. Students are actually interested in that approach (CASE A FG Provider facstf 1).

From the teaching point of view, it is quite challenge, as I work in HRM so I know how it works, but when teaching I need to discuss with the foreign lecturer to build the session how to structure my sharing to students and how to make it useful and deliver most in a very short time (CASE A FG Provider facstf 2).

It appears that the programme delivery strategy falls short of meeting local provider expectations. Foreign staff would regularly update the curriculum to reflect and fit in with the demands of the changing global market. The local teaching staff would apply the updated teaching and learning curriculum to the local Vietnamese business context and for them to effectively compete in the global market context. However referring back to the discussions in 4.3.4 on p. 77 we note that students’expectations are that foreign staff need to understand local Vietnamese businesses operates for more effective match of theory and practice.

Apparently, the teaching methodologies are also reviewed regularly. This is especially in the context of the duality of the teaching delivery such as the team teaching considered by many to be the strength of the offshore MBA programme. However, while the rhetoric of duality of teachers in the delivery of the offshore MBA appears feasible, the communication exchange in the conversations between the two focus group teaching members demonstrate a degree of tension.

Employers provide financial support to select front-line managers to enrol in offshore MBA program, with the general expectation is that these managers, by the time they graduate, will have acquired the relevant knowledge and entrepreneurial, leadership, and creative thinking skills that can be of use to the sponsor. Hence, this is a crucial area to evaluate if expectations and needs are met.

Employers perceive that the greatest strength of their preferred offshore MBA programme is in the area of transfer of management and leadership knowledge and skills. The MBA programme has a strong focus on developing the global mindset for students to deal with the dynamic changes of the international marketplace.

We deal with our partners in the international markets. There has been an increase in our MBA graduates’ knowledge and their ‘soft’ skills including entrepreneurial and leadership skills and creative thinking are to be developed (CASE A FG emp 1)
There is one thing that is obvious. After MBA courses, all MBA graduates feel empowered, fully armed with knowledge and practices (CASE B FG emp 2).

4.3.6 Perceptions of the success of the programme

In the main graduates generally thought, as far as knowledge transfer and application are concerned, their programmes were successful. The learning space and environment was flexible and effectively structured. Students perceived that the programmes helped them improve their management and leadership skills. The following excerpts capture the essence of their overall sentiments of why their offshore MBA experience was deemed successful:

The programme has created a learning environment to prepare for us to be ready joining a big company and applying into reality (CASE B FG gradstd 2).

Course design and flexibility appears to also be critical contributory factors for students’ perceptions of why their offshore MBA programmes are successful.

The courses are planned to be suitable to learners who have been working. We can manage our time for our work, our study, and our family (CASE A FG gradstd 1)

The local faculty (teaching) participant perceived that a key critical factor for the successful delivery of the MBA programme is more co-operations between university and business community. It was proposed that the foreign teachers who deliver MBA courses need to have some practical experience of business in Vietnam. They can design the course content with the assistance of the local teachers who understand the needs of local companies to make the teaching and learning more relevant and practical. The local faculty participant commented:

I think the co-operation between university and companies can be found, like experts from the university provide the course in MBA and MBA students can give their proposal to the companies. There should be a close relationship between the school of management and the business organisations (CASE A FG Provider facstf 2)

The foreign faculty participant responded stating:

From the students' perspectives sometimes they feel that professors come from [named] country they do not know what exactly happens in Vietnam and sometimes professors teach more theory and local teachers bring more practical knowledge, explain how theory approaches real business world (CASE A FG Provider facstf 1)

Relevance of course delivery to the real world of local business has been a point raised throughout this study by participants from the various stakeholder groups. This finding points to a need to increase the investment in curriculum design and content to continue
to support both the rising student demand and the need for qualified business administrators in Vietnam.

4.3.7 Focus group: Preference for type of MBA programme

Both employers indicated they preferred the offshore MBA programmes where the international partner is from reputable universities or higher educational institutions with a focus on quality assurance and academic standards. They felt that large corporations tended to offer senior positions to those who graduated from the joint MBA programmes where the foreign partner had a brand name. Large corporations they claimed prefer executives with good management and interpersonal skills as well as work attitudes and a drive for achievement.

In the following excerpt it is quite plain that the employer perceives that teamwork at the higher level would not be as effective if the team comprised a mix of MBA graduates from locally run programmes and international programmes. There is a grounded belief that locally run MBA programmes cannot achieve the same results as the international programmes in preparing students for future leadership roles.

*The most important is the leader who graduated from the university which has international quality assurance. When we set up the quality standard system for the corporation, we completed our tasks within six months with the support of four international MBA graduates. They performed very well and at an amazing speed. If we had employed staff who graduated from a not very good school, our goal would not have been achieved. ... If both leaders and followers are well-trained, it will be perfect, as plans and strategies are discussed more profoundly and thoroughly and we find them to be innovative and able to solve problems (CASE B FG emp 2)*

With regard to the quality of the offshore MBA programmes both employer participants said they preferred programmes that have qualified teaching staff who can help create teaching and learning environment to enhance students’ learning. Learning resources are equally important. The programme must ensure that the library resources include rich database and relevant, latest editions of textbooks.

*An experienced and knowledgeable teacher does not only make sure the quality lecture but attracts students as well. Updated textbooks are of great account and the programme cannot reach its goal without a rich database via a library (CASE A FG emp 1).*

It was also expressed that an important criteria was whether the programme regularly reviewed and updated its curriculum so that course content is current. The following extract from an employer is included here:
We do not only refer to the tuition fees but also the curriculum. It should be updated to reflect changes in both the global business world and national environment. It is favourable to design the curriculum. MBA providers should provide the opportunity for students to apply materials learnt in practice through creating learning and teaching environment via case study approach (CASE A FG emp 1).

4.4 Factors affecting offshore MBA programmes in Vietnam

In this section the thesis attempts to summarise the analysis of the interview and focus group sessions in an effort to deduce the factors central to the success, viability and sustainability of offshore MBA programmes in Vietnam. However, before presenting this summary the thesis will highlight the prevalent views that each one of the three stakeholder groups has of the offshore MBA programme.

4.4.1 Recent graduates

Recent graduates were those who had graduated from offshore MBA programmes in the last five years. This stakeholder group had some very invaluable experiences of their own to provide valid feedback about the programme. The most important factors for them in general revolve around the following themes (in no particular order of importance):

i. Prestige and brand name of the foreign and local university partners
ii. Programmes that are conducted in English
iii. Flexible delivery – students can continue to work while studying
iv. Better access to foreign professors
v. Management knowledge and skills improvement/development
vi. Assessment of students’ learning outcomes outlined in policies, procedures and guidelines
vii. Offer opportunities for taking part of the studies (electives) overseas
viii. Good learning environment and infrastructure
ix. Curriculum that takes into account the limited knowledge, exposure and experience of local students to global management
x. Curriculum include focus on theory and practice; currency and relevance of content e.g. need more case studies on Vietnamese business and/or businesses in emerging economies
xi. Teaching curriculum that considers the needs of the local Vietnamese business sector - more collaboration between the partnership and local industry
xii. Alumni network contact-widely sought group; ‘word of mouth’ recommendations for potential students.

4.4.2 Programme providers

This stakeholder group comprised staff involved in the provision of the offshore MBA programme and include three key sub-groups administrative staff, faculty staff and
programme managers. While the interview sessions were well represented by all three sub-groups the focus group was represented by faculty or teaching staff only. The key themes of their perspectives of the offshore MBA programme include:

i. Long-term strategic partnership between the two universities – the underlying essence of this theme is understandable as their future (career) is at stake.
ii. Prestige and brand name of the university partners
iii. Interactions between lecturers and students
iv. Flexible teaching mode of delivery
v. Quality focused philosophy – teaching and learning; facilities and infrastructure; teaching staff – local and foreign; Student admission criteria
vi. Quality as ‘fit for purpose’ – meaning delivering programme that fits in with local stakeholder needs or programme that is tailor made for the local context; includes delivering contemporary management and business knowledge but levelled at the local consumer level (students and employers)
vii. Guide students’ career development
viii. Establish and communicate alumni network
ix. Provide avenues to improve English (global business language).

4.4.3 Employers

The final stakeholder group comprises employers and their inclusion here is due to them either having offshore MBA graduates as employees and/or being current and /or past sponsors of offshore MBA students. Their key views about the programme revolve around the following themes:

i. Unanimous preference for offshore MBA programmes
ii. Prestige and brand name of the foreign and local university partners is important
iii. MBA programmes that are in English
iv. Flexible delivery - employees can continue to work while studying
v. Good facilities and infrastructure
vi. Transfer of ‘software’ - managerial and leadership skills and knowledge
vii. Mould and shape their employees to take on future leadership roles in their companies
viii. Teaching curriculum that considers needs of the local Vietnamese market - more collaboration between the partnership and local industry
ix. Qualified and professional teaching staff
x. Establish and maintain good network with business and industry - work with them to design teaching and learning
xi. Alumni network

4.5 Chapter summary

This chapter has analysed and presented the data collected in this study. The study was
based on a qualitative/interpretative paradigm using three key data collection methods, individual face to face interviews, focus group sessions and where applicable relevant documents related to the programme providers. The qualitative paradigm allowed for deep meaningful analysis of the research problem and questions and allowed me to identify and establish the critical contributing factors for the offshore MBA programme in Vietnam to be sustainable. The data was collected from three key stakeholder groups of offshore MBA programmes namely student group (represented by recent graduates) provider groups and employer groups. The data was thematically analysed and traced where applicable to existing literature so as to produce and conclude the findings to the research problem and questions. The analysis also looked for emergent findings.

The analysis in this chapter provides crucial insight, evidence and understanding of the three key stakeholder perspectives of the offshore MBA programme in Vietnam. The overall analysis of the data shows the following to be areas of contention and paramount in any discussions of success, viability and sustainability of offshore MBA programmes in Vietnam:

i. Program’s quality accreditation (includes student enrolments, assessments and teaching and learning);
ii. Brand name of the university partner;
iii. Programme structure/design
iv. Up-to-date and relevant curriculum (indigenisation of curriculum)
v. Qualified and professional teaching staff
vi. English course delivery
vii. Infrastructure and facilities
viii. Transfer of leadership and management soft skills
ix. Future career development
x. Alumni network
xi. Linkage between university and business community.

In the next chapter, Chapter 5, the thesis answers the four research questions before unfolding and discussing, using the extant literature, the critical factors for the success and sustainability of offshore MBA education programmes in Vietnam.
CHAPTER 5: FINDINGS AND CONCLUSION

5.1 Introduction

In this thesis the case study approach using multiple stakeholder perspective was used in attempts to understand the quality issues related to design and delivery of offshore MBA education programmes in Vietnam. The study was guided by the flow documented in Figure 1: The Theoretical Framework and based entirely on a qualitative paradigm using document analysis, personal interviews and focus groups to collect data. Three case organisations i.e. programme providers of offshore MBA education programmes and three key stakeholders (programme providers, recent graduates and employers) were used to collect data. The analysis and results of this phase was provided and discussed in Chapter 4.

The primary objective of this present chapter therefore is to synthesise the analysis of all data collected to obtain the understanding of the central issues related to answering the research questions and solve the research problem. This objective is addressed in section 5.2 and will be guided by the research questions and supported by reference to literature in the field. A second objective, expressed in section 5.3, is to scrutinise the emergent findings from the research. The third objective of this chapter, covered in section 5.4, is to discuss limitations of the research and the final objective, discussed in section 5.5 is to suggest possible areas of future research. The chapter ends with a final conclusion to the study in the section 5.6.

5.2 Answers to the research questions

The study of the Vietnamese offshore MBA education market from a multiple stakeholder perspective was framed and guided by four research questions. Here, guided by the extant literature on internationalisation of higher education, transnational education, offshore education, MBA education, quality framework and the HE sector in emerging economies including Vietnam, the thesis presents the findings and discussions.

5.2.1 Reasons why students select the offshore MBA programme

This section deals with the first research question, 'Why do students enrol in offshore education programmes?' We find comprehensive understanding of the underlying reasons why students choose to enrol in offshore MBA education programmes. Several reasons for students' choice of the offshore MBA programmes have emerged; the five key reasons are presented here.

First, students choose the offshore version of the MBA programme because they have confidence in the prestigious brand name of the foreign partner university and its
inherent links to notions of programme quality. This finding is well supported by the
literature (see section 2.2.2), and consistent especially with the research of Huang
(2006a), McBurnie and Ziguras (2007), Pimpa (2009) and Yang (2020) who provide us
with empirical evidence that leading Vietnamese universities and educational institutions
look for strategic partnering with international universities with known reputation for
quality. It appears therefore that the strategy is working, going by the views of graduate
students (via alumni networks) and the potential impacts of their views in influencing
and attracting new enrolment (further discussed below). Furthermore, students are
assured that the quality audit parameters are in force and cite various examples including
for example stringent student enrolments (see section 4.2.1.6), assessments, quality
assurance evaluation and the quality of teaching and learning (see section 4.2.1.4),
culturally competent and qualified lecturers (see section 4.3.2) and commitment to
continuous improvement to ensure that quality is sustained (section 4.2.1.4). The call
for continual attention to and improvements in programme quality are well supported in
the literature (see for example Castle and Kelly 2004; Merican et al. 2009; Sugimoto 2006;
Daunoriene 2011).

The second reason why students choose the offshore MBA is because it accords them
international education at relatively reduced costs (see sections 4.2.1.1.1 and 4.3.2.1).
This finding is also consistent with the literature and discussions in section 2.2
specifically the work of Pimpa (2009) and Yang (2020).

The third finding is that word-of-mouth recommendations through the alumni network
are crucial in showcasing and influencing student interest in ‘quality’ offshore MBA
programmes. Alumni members influence potential students as to which offshore course
can help develop the management knowledge and skills required to fulfil business needs
for strong leaders to address complex issues in the global business arena. The data show
that alumni members have been largely content with the teaching strategies, such as the
interactive instructional approaches, used to mould and develop them as future leaders.
This study did not use alumni members as a key stakeholder group, but the huge role
they play in the decision-making of those seeking to enrol in MBA courses suggests they
should be used in any future research.

The fourth finding as to why students select the offshore MBA is for the opportunities it
provides to improve their English language and communication skills. Language study is
a key component of offshore education. The fact that, English, the universal language, of
business is more commonly used as the preferred medium for educational instruction, has
made the offshore MBA that much more attractive. Students are aware that course work
in English not only prepares them for a global competition, but also for their career
advancement As a result, borrowing from the complexity paradigm, course delivery in
English is a prime attractor for students selecting the offshore MBA (see sections
4.2.1.1.8 and 4.3.2.3 for example). As we will note further down in this chapter, it is also
a prime attractor for employers’ choice and selection for sponsoring their employees’
MBA education.
The fifth and final reason for students’ selective choice for the offshore MBA is the confidence they have that it will help transfer advanced management knowledge and skills, from the international provider, to the local students. Students are well aware of the potential transfer of hard and soft knowledge and the inherent power of such transfer to their future career developments. Similar to the point made in the last sentence of the previous paragraph, employers are also well aware and frank about the potential for transfer of knowledge and skills from the provider to local Vietnamese. This finding is noted in the literature – Warner et al (2002) and Thang et al (2007) emphasised the importance of economic reform in China and Vietnam respectively and the importance to these countries of building partnerships with firms from developed countries. Such partnerships are crucial to the effective transfer of ‘soft’ technology i.e. knowledge, practice and skills and ‘hard’ technology (machinery, equipment, facilities etc.). These ambitions about the potential transfer of ‘hard’ and ‘soft' technology is also alluded to by the employer stakeholder group in the present study -both in terms of why they prefer offshore MBA and in terms of their expressed expectations and needs.

Overall the findings in this section are well supported by the literature. Programme quality, language of instruction, knowledge and skills transfer (Creswell 2009; Merriam 2009; Neuman 2009; Sekaran & Bougie 2010) are all measures of programme attractiveness. Additionally, transnational programmes are particularly attractive if international qualification can be obtained at reduced cost, and since there are opportunities for students to improve English language and communication skills.

5.2.2 Reasons why employers prefer offshore MBA graduates

The second research question, ‘Do employers prefer offshore to local MBA graduates? If so why?’ is aimed at understanding why employers prefer these programmes. Sections 4.2.3.2, 4.2.3.3and 4.3.7 are particularly relevant here.

A key reason is the assurance that learning quality standards would be maintained and this fact is well supported by literature (Castle & Kelly 2004; Huang 2006b; Sugimoto 2006; Yang 2006). Arising from this is an emergent finding of the study, employers were very frank and forthright in their views that they would mostly choose to sponsor employees who take up offshore programmes. The findings demonstrate overlap between managers and students preference for offshore programmes and it is apparent that students are quite influenced by managerial expectations and influence for offshore programmes. Especially since it is crucial as to whether their studies will be sponsored.

Another reason for the preference of the offshore programmes is the potential transfer of management knowledge and skills - again a key reason underlying student preference and discussed in the previous section. Two key expectations that employers have are that there would be transfer of good work ethics and that these courses would mould and shape sponsored employees and other graduates to take up key leadership (senior management) roles in their companies.

The literature is abundant with the benefits of transnational management education
programmes - transfer of knowledge and skills, teaching and learning methods and knowledge and business management practices (see Acito et al 2008; Cort, Das & Synn 2008; Emiliani 2006; Karpin 1995; McMurray & Sharma 2005; Paninchukunnath 2012). Graduates are expected to have solid managerial understanding of their own discipline areas and to apply the skills learnt in the context of each situation and their accompanying contingencies. Therefore business organisations seek graduates who can react appropriately.

Employers’ preference for offshore MBA programmes are grounded in their belief that graduates can deal with ad-hoc situations successfully through logical and critical thinking and analysis. Additionally, that such a programme would impart good oral communication and interpersonal skills and graduates would be able to apply it to the real business world (see section 4.2.3.1). The strengths of offshore MBA programmes as perceived by employers are very much aligned to the values and objectives of MBA programme providers (Cort, Das & Synn 2008; Crosling, Edward & Schroder 2008; Paninchukunnath 2012; Sharkey & Beeman 2008).

5.2.3 Do offshore MBA programmes meet quality expectations?

This, the third research question asks ‘How well do the current programmes meet the expectations and needs of multiple stakeholders regarding programme quality?’ Interview and focus group responses to this question can help determine the expected learning outcomes and if stakeholder expectations and needs are met. The answers to this question lie in the analyses in sections 4.2.1.3, 4.2.2.1, 4.2.3.1 and 4.3.3 above.

The key finding is that those employees who had offshore MBA qualifications clearly demonstrated increased performance and productivity in their workplaces. The improvements and confidence they showed were attributed to greater knowledge and skills they acquired, due to the quality of the members of the teaching faculty, the course content and course delivery (e.g. greater interactive study, case studies and applied focus). The offshore programme allowed students to have a critical understanding of global business trends and issues, business models and their applications to the real world. Students’ expectations for career advancements were met with a number being promoted to senior management positions. The benefits of a good MBA qualification is well published (see Anto 2012; Cort, Das & Synn 2008; Crosling, Edward & Schroder 2008; Emiliani 2006; Karpin 1995; Paninchukunath 2012; Sharkey & Beeman 2008).

Other findings include interview participants stating that their expectations for improving research and English language and communication skills were also met.

From the focus group session emerged a finding accounting for how stakeholder expectations were not met. However it is important to state that this finding is not directly attributable to the offshore MBA programme or provider. While students’ personal expectations of the course were largely met, unfortunately there were no or limited opportunities for graduates to apply their new found knowledge and skills in their workplace. This affected their personal needs and expectations. Nevertheless, it does
demonstrate that collaboration between universities (programme providers) and the business sector is clearly needed.

On the subject of quality of the offshore MBA and how it meets with graduate and employer needs and expectations, the findings show that a relationship between the two is very much rated on the transferability of the taught syllabus into the workplace. Also, how that in turn, helps the business to obtain better results and improve performance and productivity (see sections 4.2.1.2 and 4.2.1.3).

The analysis in sections 4.2.2.2 and 4.3.3 give valuable insights from the provider perspective on the challenges of delivering a one-size fits all model of offshore MBA programme especially to students in emerging economies. The challenge of delivering Supply Chain Management (SCM), a contemporary management unit, to a mixed cohort of students has been raised. In emerging economies like Vietnam the reality is that there will be a number of large corporations (and their employees) who have exposure and advanced knowledge and experience befitting the needs and requirements of global business operations. However, there is also the greater likelihood that there will be businesses and employees who are unaware of or understand the complexities of SCM. For emerging economies, there is clearly a need for a tailor-made MBA curriculum to meet such needs which is consistent with calls made by authors such as Pyvis (2011) and Anto (2012).

As discussed here, the perception of programme quality is important not only to graduates but also to faculty members and employers. A multiple stakeholder perspective of programme quality is therefore significant. It can help ensure the success, viability and sustainability of the offshore MBA in the host country. This study shows that while the three stakeholder groups generally perceive quality to be acceptable, there are specific stakeholder groups who have had concerns about curriculum design and want some changes. The analysis also shows some resistance on the part of the foreign provider to modify the programme for the local context for fear that it would tarnish their prestigious programme brand name (see section 4.2.2.1).

Other challenges relating to programme quality include curriculum design with respect to assessment criteria. Concerns were expressed by all three stakeholder groups (see sections 4.2.1.2, 4.2.1.3, 4.2.3.1 4.3.3 and 4.3.4) on aspects of policy and assessment guidelines. There are conflicting views from both partner providers in the instruction and guidance given to students regarding their final project. The project is regarded as a case study by the foreign partner but as a ‘Master by Research’ thesis by the Vietnamese partner. This inconsistency in how both parties have viewed the project has led to considerable confusion for students. These challenges which were mostly expressed by recent graduates (see sections 4.2.1.2 and 4.2.1.3) included, lack of guidelines for students writing up their final project and lack of assessment policy for teaching staff (Vietnamese and foreign) in evaluating students’ final project.
5.2.4 Critical factors of offshore MBA education programmes

The fourth and final research question, “What factors are crucial to ensuring sustainability of offshore MBA education programmes in Vietnam?”, and its two sub-questions were designed to identify critical factors that are essential to the successful design, quality and delivery of offshore MBA programmes. The answers to this question can be found in the analysis of narratives in sections 4.2.1.4, 4.2.2.2, 4.2.3.2, 4.3.5, 4.2.1.5, 4.2.2.3 and 4.3.6, and section 4.4 and its subsections.

These sub-questions can help in determining the critical factors contributing to the successful and effective delivery and sustainability of offshore MBA education programmes.

5.2.4.1 Perception of the programme strengths by different stakeholder groups

The sub-question, “How is programme strength perceived by different stakeholder groups?” was posed to respondents in an attempt to identify the strong features or attractors of offshore MBA programmes. The answer to this question is derived from the data presented in sections 4.2.1.4, 4.2.2.2, 4.2.3.2 and 4.3.5. One of the key strengths that all stakeholder groups identified was the transfer of management knowledge and skills especially from foreign teaching staff which is congruent with the literature (Karpin 1995; Crosling, Edward & Schroder 2008; Sharkey & Beeman 2008). Emiliani (2006), for example, writes that the transfer of knowledge and skills is valued because it is perceived as essential in helping prepare local students for global business and the challenges that they are likely to face in a growing economy such as Vietnam’s. Graduate student participants shared this same view; that the program helped them receive the latest management knowledge besides helping prepare them for future career roles (see section 4.2.1.4). Programme providers also expressed similar views. Their programmes enable their students to achieve current management knowledge and transfer of valuable management skills to their students (see section 4.2.2.2). To employers transfer of management knowledge and skill from the foreign provider to local students went one step further – they helped students apply the new knowledge and skills to improve performance and productivity in the workplace (see section 4.2.3.2). The focus group session echoed the same views. Offshore MBA programmes’ participants were involved with helping the transfer of valuable management knowledge transfer and skills essential for graduates’ future managerial roles in the global market place (see section 4.3.5).

A second finding centred on the structural elements of the programmes. Key elements included programme structure and design, quality of the teaching staff, and teaching methodology. The role of structural elements of programme design in perceptions of what is important to higher education sector stakeholders is also well supported in the literature (see McMurray & Sharma 2005; Hall & Young 2008; Anto 2012; Pimpa 2009; Paninchukunnath 2012; Huang 2006b). The analysis in sections 4.2.1.4, 4.2.2.2 and 4.3.5 presents valuable insights from the views of graduate students, programme providers and focus group session are relevant to this finding.
Overall, stakeholders expressed a desire for the duality of the teaching and learning experience. While transfer of management knowledge and skills is considered very important, equally, if not more important are the mechanisms that are in place to allow such a transfer. Two key aspects raised were the quality of teaching staff and the teaching methodology used. In many of the narratives explicit reference to a case study approach to teaching was cited as another key strength of offshore MBA programmes (see sections 4.2.1.4, 4.2.2.2 and 4.3.5).

A third finding, a key strength of the offshore MBA programme (see section 4.2.2.2) was attributed to programme accreditation and programme reputation. These two attributes have been raised in the literature as well (Pimpa 2009; Pyvis 2011; McBurnie & Ziguras 2007; Huang 2006a; Morshidi & Sarjit 2007). The fact that offshore MBA programmes regularly updated their curriculum and content was viewed very positively. The evidence from this exploratory study is that the offshore MBA programmes are so sought after and value because of its perceived direct relationship with the improved productivity of these graduates. This finding emerged from the analysis in sections 4.2.1.4, 4.2.2.2, and 4.2.3.2.

Overall, the findings for this sub-question are also well supported by the literature.

5.2.4.2 Perception of the programme success by different stakeholder groups

The sub-question, “How is programme success perceived by different stakeholder groups?”, is aimed at understanding factors which are considered key drivers of successful programmes. The answers to this question lie in the analysis in sections 4.2.1.5, 4.2.2.3 and 4.3.6. One of the key findings is the perception that the programme is successful because it has imparted valuable management practice to graduates. Deeper analysis shows that this is explicitly linked to the transfer of management knowledge and skills (see section 4.3.6) that is aligned with the literature (Emiliani 2006; Karpin 1995; McMurray & Sharma 2005; Acito et al 2008; Paninchukumath 2012; Cort, Das & Synn 2008). This finding has congruence between perceptions of programme strengths and programme success. Stakeholders have very definite views of what attributes make strong offshore MBA programmes and these are the ones that are sought-after. Programme success rated on how well the programmes’ stakeholders are involved in is able to deliver on the programme strengths. A close relationship between strong sought-after attributes and the deliverables equates to a successful programme.

The study also found a range of other closely linked factors which feature in what makes successful programmes. One key success factor is the quality of the teaching staff, translated to mean staff need to have adequate hands-on management experience (see section 4.2.1.5), up-to-date theoretical knowledge as well as their teaching methodology (see sections 4.2.1.5). Other success factors included the reputation of the foreign partner and interactions among alumni network (see sections 4.2.2.3 and 4.3.6). These success factors are consistent with the work done by significant others (Huang 2006a; Pimpa
Participants also recognised, as is also evident in the literature (Castle & Kelly 2004; Merican et al. 2009; Sugimoto 2006; Daunoriene 2011), that stringent student admission criteria, and cost-effective international qualifications (see section 4.2.2.3) are also critical success factors. A final success point covered in the study is the cooperation between the foreign-local university partnerships with the business community (see section 4.3.6), a point also emphasised in the literature (Pyvis 2011; Anto 2012).

The answers to the two sub-questions discussed here provides the answers for the final research question: ‘What factors are crucial to ensuring sustainability of offshore MBA education programmes in Vietnam?’

**5.2.4.3 Critical factors of offshore MBA education programmes**

A number of critical factors especially in terms of quality of programme offerings and programme delivery were identified which have been previously discussed in this chapter. This section summarises the findings in relation to the final fourth questions and its sub-questions.

What we can infer from the study is that the successful and effective delivery and sustainability of offshore MBA programmes depend on a number of critical factors. The key factors resonate on a number of issues, some of which have been previously discussed in this chapter.

The first is that attention be devoted to the curriculum design particularly the level and nature of curriculum focus on theory and knowledge. Foreign partners of the offshore program need to be acutely aware that Vietnam is part of the newly industrialised economies (NIE) and that local businesses would be at various stages of organisational development. Prospective students, especially those that have been sponsored by their employers because of years of service, will not have been exposed to contemporary management theory and practices. Clearly, foreign providers cannot and should not offer MBA programmes that are designed for educational users in developed nations, and which assume prior management theory and knowledge. There is a need for offshore MBA providers to initiate and produce tailor-made curricula that have been developed in collaboration with local industry and businesses.

Foreign providers can seek regular feedback from recent graduate students, alumni network members, faculty members. Additionally, they could engage external consulting and/or research groups to improve and update their programme offerings. Another option is to have more collaboration with local industries and businesses.

The second point which is linked to the first point is the need for programme flexibility in terms of how willing foreign providers are to re-assess and re-design the programme structure and course content. For the local Vietnamese, the MBA course content should be more practical or hands-on i.e. the curriculum needs to reduce its focus on coursework
theory and instead provide students more opportunities to engage in experiential learning through case study methods and work-integrated learning assignments or projects. Ideally, the MBA course should be designed in collaboration with business organisations and presented to and assessed by academics and CEOs or managers in business practice.

A point made here is that providers use case study methodology so that students are able to bring theory to practice. Another finding is that the case studies be relevant for the Vietnamese context, especially Vietnamese business case studies and/or alternatively those from other emerging economies.

The third point is attention to admission and selection criteria for recruiting students and the teaching staff (both local and international). There are calls for more stringent admission criteria of students, if programme quality and sustainability is to be ensured. There are suggestions that students must have at least three to five years working experience in management (see section 4.3.4) to benefit from the programme. There is also the suggestion that foreign faculty members have adequate exposure and experiences of the local business environment (see section 4.3.6). This would naturally eventuate if there is greater collaboration with local industries and businesses. One way of achieving this is by designing work-integrated learning projects with local industry and businesses. This would give foreign faculty adequate opportunity for exposure to and experiences with the local business environment in Vietnam.

The fourth point made here is the teaching methodology. There is clearly a demand for case study methodology with students perceiving that they will be able to use it to more usefully apply theory to practice. However, of equal significance is the finding that these case studies need to be relevant for the Vietnamese context hence the suggestion to use Vietnamese business case studies and, alternatively, those from other emerging economies. To create more opportunities for MBA students to engage in experimental learning programmes, providers could consult local industry members and businesses and write new and more appropriate case studies for future students.

The fifth point to improve quality relates to the need to appoint qualified teaching staff that have both practical management experience and knowledge. The findings suggest that if MBA graduates are to be equipped with advanced management knowledge and skills they need to be taught and trained by educators who not only know theory but have industry experience as well. Such a focus on the quality of the educators will help produce graduates with a ‘fit for purpose’ and align students to fit in with industry needs and be qualified and capable.

The final point is that participants also identified the indiscriminate proliferation of MBA programmes in Vietnam as a crucial issue. Programme sustainability means that the onus is on providers to take more care and attention with respect to programme quality and that the government will not be forced to close offshore MBA programmes. It also means that there must be stricter control of new partnerships - strategic partners should be regularly audited so that the programme quality is consistently maintained to a high standard.
The findings show that programme quality is a complex concept understood and framed by wide ranging factors referred to by the present study as critical factors. These factors include quality of teaching staff, quality of audit parameters, curriculum design specifically with regard to the level and nature of focus on theory and knowledge. Additionally, course content, assessment criteria, linkage between MBA providers and business community, teaching methodology, teaching mode of delivery, admission and selection criteria for recruiting students are also crucial factors to ensure programme quality.

Participants have suggested that providers build up a MBA alumni network and connections to assist graduates in their career development. We have noted previously in this study of the important role of the alumni in advising potential students about programme quality and selection of offshore programmes.

5.3 Contributions of the study

The contributions of this study are three-fold. First, the study uncovered critical factors for the successful and effective delivery and sustainability of offshore MBA education programmes from multiple stakeholder perspectives. Second, the research findings can assist offshore providers in better understanding the needs of the local/host communities, especially in the context of emerging economies. The last is that the findings can serve as critical inputs to educational institutions, to raise awareness of the importance of understanding the local market in strategic planning and management education. The study as a whole can help offshore MBA providers understand what it takes to ensure that the programmes they provide are successful and relevant in the context of Vietnam, and to use the findings to ensure their own long-term sustainability.

5.3.1 Critical factors of offshore MBA programmes

The first contribution of the study is the identification, from a multiple key stakeholder perspective, the quality factors deemed to be crucial for the successful delivery, viability and sustainability of offshore MBA programmes in Vietnam. The factors identified encompass areas of programme design, delivery and management. In exploring students’ perception and experience of the notion of quality, it was evident that the contribution of teaching staff and the curriculum content design specifying instructional materials and pedagogical methods are highly rated. Student selection and admission is also a vital area for quality control, as is the selection of the foreign visiting faculty. Additionally, the marking process and return of marked assignments, setting performance indicators, instructing and onsite management of all aspects of the academic program, including students’ entry tests and evaluation and constant monitoring of outcomes, were also judged to be critical. Students’ knowledge and skills development can markedly increase their chances of career progression; thus the quality of graduates produced is inherently linked to the quality and effectiveness of academic programme. Therefore, academic programmes need to be practical and relevant with interactive and creative teaching methods, and applied teaching techniques using appropriate case studies. Finally,
stakeholders defined programme flexibility as critical factors. The willingness of the foreign provider to adapt the programme to suit local student and business needs, and provide students opportunities to specialise in functional areas was raised. These factors in totality are crucial to the success of offshore MBA education programmes and can help programme viability and sustainability.

5.3.2 Need to consider multiple stakeholders to ensure programme sustainability

What this study has unequivocally shown is the importance of considering the multiple stakeholder perspective in the design and delivery of offshore MBA programmes. The findings can assist offshore MBA providers have deeper understanding of the needs and expectations of the local host communities to ensure the success and sustainability of the programmes. The findings highlight that Vietnamese MBA graduates need tailor-made programmes that can help them take on new roles and prepare them to compete successfully in an increasingly complex and dynamic global environment. The local partner, business and industry representatives should be consulted for advice on culturally sensitive matters and local market issues.

5.3.3 Understanding local context in strategic planning of offshore programme

The study has raised the importance of understanding the local or host context in the design of successful and sustainable offshore MBA programmes. The findings are not drawn from any one stakeholder perspective but rather from a multiple perspective. The fact that students, providers and employers all call for customised programmes is an emergent finding and demonstrates that the foreign partner must be flexible and willing to collaborate and engage with representatives of the local partner, as well as key representatives of local business and industry. Such engagement can do much in designing a ‘fit for purpose’ MBA programme. Paramount to such design and flexibility is continual monitoring and updating of the MBA. As the nation becomes more developed and local business and industry needs change, so too must the programme structure and content.

5.4 Limitations of the study

A major limitation of the study is that the investigation is restricted to three case organisations i.e. providers of offshore MBA education programmes. Therefore, the findings will not be representative of the wider population and cannot be generalised to all offshore MBA programme partnerships in Vietnam. However, the study does provide insights of features that programme providers should take into account in their respective design and delivery of the offshore MBA programme.

5.5 Future research

In the educational context of Vietnam, offshore MBA education programmes tend to have
a significant impact in shaping postgraduate management education. The benefits of an offshore MBA education, arguably, provide graduates with the potential to critically think, interpret, decide and act differently in a way that can benefit business. Future research could trace offshore MBA’s graduates’ performance and productivity in the workplace, and their career progressions. They could also be encouraged to take on more active roles and engagement in the postgraduate management educational process. This would allow them to become suitably qualified MBA graduates and responsible leaders who can help shape postgraduate management education. Another area of potential research is a comparative study of Human Resource managers of foreign-owned and locally-owned companies based in Vietnam about the work attribute, performance and productivity of offshore MBA graduates.

5.6 Conclusions of the study

As a newly emerging economy the Vietnamese, the demand for postgraduate business education and specifically quality offshore MBA education programmes is expected to continue to grow. To ensure programme viability and sustainability it is evident that business schools need to develop quality frameworks to become the dominant providers of MBA education. The multiple stakeholder approach to identifying factors critical to the successful delivery of offshore MBA education programmes in Vietnam can help enhance programme provider performance and sustainability issues. As the literature shows a number of offshore programmes have been shut down by MoET and these actions have had negative repercussions for many stakeholders, including the partners, students and employers. The critical quality factors identified by this study can assist universities to strategically plan and initiate more systematic processes. This will ensure that offshore MBA programmes are more inclusive and consider the multiple stakeholder perspective in providing quality programmes.
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103


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7.0 APPENDICES

7.1. Appendix 1: UWS HREC APPROVAL

UWS HUMAN RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE

2 May 2011

Doctor Santha Fernandez,

School of Management

Dear Santha and Thi Minh,

I wish to formally advise you that the Human Research Ethics Committee has approved your research proposal H9000 “Critical Factors of Offshore Master of Business Administration (MBA) Education Programmes in Vietnam: Multiple Perspectives”, until with the provision of a progress report annually and a final report on completion.

Please quote the project number and title as indicated above on all correspondence related to this project.

Yours sincerely

Dr Janette Perz

Chair, UWS Human Research Ethics Committee
7.2. Appendix 2: Interview Schedule

Recent graduate students

1. What were some of your key reasons for joining this programme?
2. What were some of your key expectations of this programme?
3. Has the programme met with your expectations? If so how, if not, why not?
4. Could you tell me about some of the key learning that you obtained from the programme?
   a) Do you share this knowledge with others at your employment? If yes how, if no why not?
   b) Do you perceive that the knowledge you acquired has changed the way you work? If yes how if no why not?
   c) Do you believe that the knowledge you acquired has changed the way your colleagues/managers perceive your work? If yes how, if not why do you think this is so?
5. Could you tell me about some of the key skills you acquired from the programme?
   a) Have these skills you acquired changed the way you work? If yes how, if no why not?
   b) Do you believe that the skills you acquired has changed the way your colleagues/managers perceive your work? If yes how, if not why do you think this is so?
6. Since completing the programme have you had a promotion at work or changed employment?
   a) If yes, do you think that the programme had any impact on this?
   b) If no, in what ways do you think the programme can help you develop your career?
7. What is your opinion of the academics who taught you on the programme?
   a) Have they met your expectations? If so how, if not why not?
8. Do you find your coursework useful? If yes how or why, if no, why not?
9. Is there any aspect of your coursework that you think should be omitted? Why?
10. Overall, do you feel that the programme been a worthwhile experience for you?
    a) If so, could you tell me your three best experiences?
    b) If no, why not?
11. What do you believe are the main strengths (features) of the programme?
12. What do you believe are the main reason(s) for the success of your programme?
13. Would you recommend this programme to others? Why or why not?
14. What do you perceive are the main benefits of offshore MBA programme to you, your business organisation and to Vietnam?
15. What is/are your ideas/recommendations for offshore MBA programmes to be viable and sustainable in the long run?

**Programme provider - manager**
1. Please provide an overall description of your programme.
2. How do perceive students would describe the learning environment in your programme?
3. Do you believe that your programme can benefit business organisations and Vietnam? If so how?
4. Tell me some of the main issues and concerns that:
   a) students have about your programme?
   b) faculty (teaching staff) have about your programme?
   c) employers have about your programme
5. What are some of the improvements that could be made to your programme to better meet employer /industry/business needs?
6. Do you think your graduates are satisfied with your programme? If so why; If not why not?
7. What do you see as the 3 best features of your programme?
8. What have been the main reasons for the success of your programme?
9. What do you perceive are the key skills and/or knowledge requirements of MBA graduates?
10. Any overall comments or thoughts on your programme not covered above.

**Programme provider – faculty (teaching staff)**
1. Briefly explain your role in your offshore the MBA Programme.
2. What do you see as the main aim(s)/objective(s) of your role?
3. What have been your positive experiences from teaching in MBA?
4. What have been your negative experiences from teaching in MBA?
5. What best describes your impressions of students enrolled in your programme?
6. If relevant, is your teaching and learning approach for MBA students different to that for students in other subjects that you teach at your university campus? If yes how?
7. Is your current teaching methodology and format successful? If yes how, if no why not?
8. Has teaching on the programme met with your expectations? If so how? If not why not?
9. What do you believe are the main strengths (features) of the programme?
10. What do you believe are the main reason(s) for the success of your programme?

11. Do you think that ongoing attention to the teaching and delivery format is essential for programme success?

12. Has teaching on the programme been an enjoyable experience for you? If so why? If not, why not? What do you enjoy best about the MBA Programme?

13. Any overall comments or thoughts on the MBA programme not covered above.

**Programme provider – administrative (programme coordinator)**

1. Briefly explain your role in the offshore MBA Programme.

2. How much, and what kind of, interaction exists between you and the students, faculty members, alumni...?

3. How do the students describe the learning environment in your MBA programme as reported on annual student surveys?

4. Do you believe that your programme can benefit business organisations and Vietnam? If so how?

5. Tell me some of the main issues and concerns that:
   a. students have about your programme
   b. faculty have about your programme
   c. employers have about your programme

6. What are some of the improvements that could be made to your programme to better meet employer /industry/business needs?

7. What do you perceive are the key skills and/or knowledge requirements of MBA graduates?

8. Do you think your graduates are satisfied with your programme? If so why; If not why not?

9. What do you see as the 3 best features of your programme?

10. What have been the main reasons for the success of your programme?

11. What do you perceive are the key skills and/or knowledge requirements of MBA graduates?

12. Any overall comments or thoughts on your programme not covered above.

**Employers**

1. Can you tell me how many of your employees have an MBA qualification and/or are currently enrolled in an MBA programme?

2. In what ways do you support your employees who want to enrol in an MBA programme? (Time off, Financially, Staff support)
3. Do you foresee yourself continuing to support employees undertake the MBA programme in future years?

4. As an employer, can you tell me of you preferred MBA programme and the reasons for it?

5. As an employer, tell me what is your perception of the MBA programme?

6. As an employer, tell me what are your expectations of the MBA programme?

7. As an employer, do you believe MBA graduates are adequately prepared for the job they take on after graduation or do you perceive that they require additional training on the job?

8. Do you believe that MBA programme can benefit your business organisation?

9. Do you believe that the MBA students/graduate in your employment have had a generally rewarding experience in their programmes? Please elaborate.
   a) How has their experience affected your business organisation? (benefitted or otherwise)

10. Tell me some of the main issues and concerns that:
    a) Your employees, have the programme they graduated from or are enrolled in?
    b) You, have of the programmes your employees graduated from or are enrolled in?

11. What do you perceive are some ways MBA programmes can better meet employer/industry/business needs?

12. What do you perceive are the new skills or future requirements of your employees?

13. What do you see as the best features of the offshore MBA programme?

14. What have been the main reasons for the success of the offshore MBA programme?

15. Do you think your employees with offshore MBA qualifications are satisfied with their programme outcomes? If so why; If not why not?

16. Any overall comments or thoughts on the offshore MBA programme not covered above.

THANK YOU FOR YOUR PARTICIPATION
7.3. Appendix 3: Focus group interview

From your individual perspectives as graduate student, programme provider or employer please discuss the following questions in the context of the offshore MBA program/s:

1. What were your expectations/needs of the programme?

2. How satisfied are you with outcomes of the programme? Has it met with your expectations?

3. What do you perceive are the main strengths of the programme? Why?

4. What do you perceive are the main weaknesses of the programme? Why?

5. What are your main issues or concerns with the programme?

6. Should changes be made to improve the programme? How, why?

7. Do you think that the programme is successful? Why or why not?

8. What is/are your ideas/recommendations for offshore MBA programmes to be viable and sustainable in the long run?

THANK YOU FOR YOUR PARTICIPATION