Research choice: Pragmatism in conducting research about university-enterprise collaboration in the Vietnamese context

Thi Tuyet Tran

Abstract:

This article discusses the choice of methodology I had when conducting research on the university-enterprise collaboration (UEC) in the Vietnamese context. As I am more interested in how best to address the research problems rather than in the politics of methodology, the discussion in this paper will not focus on the differences between the two dominant approaches to educational research (qualitative and quantitative). Rather, this paper will discuss my way to approach the problems in order to find the best possible answers for the research questions. In this study, pragmatic approach was employed to develop a rich, contextualized understanding of underlying values, beliefs and assumptions that guide actions. This was done by a two phases research study: quantitative surveys focusing primarily on revealing current UEC situation, its obstacles and solutions were used first, then the qualitative interviews were followed to explore in depth why those obstacles existed and how feasible the solutions were - this was also the goal of this study. The focus on the second phase – to discuss the most meaningful and revealing issues related to the local issued of UEC, ultimately, helped me produce more meaningful study outcomes.

Keywords:

qualitative; mixed methods; pragmatism; constructivism; university-enterprise collaboration; Vietnam.

Escolha da investigação: Pragmatismo na condução de investigação sobre a colaboração universidade-empresa no contexto vietnamita

Resumo: O presente artigo aborda a escolha da metodologia que efectuei na análise entre a colaboração universidade-empresa (UEC) no contexto vietnamita. Como estou mais interessada no modo de abordar os problemas levantados pela investigação do que nas políticas em torno da metodologia, este paper não contempla as diferenças entre as duas abordagens dominantes na investigação educacional (qualitativa e quantitativa). Ao invés, este artigo irá discutir a minha abordagem ao problema de forma a encontrar a resposta mais adequada para as questões da investigação. Neste estudo, foi aplicada uma abordagem pragmática de forma a obter um entendimento contextualizado e rico dos valores subjacentes, crenças e assumpções que guiam a acção. O estudo contemplou duas fases: uma primeira fase, em que foram aplicados inquéritos sobre a situação corrente da UEC, obstáculos e soluções e, uma segunda fase, em que foram realizadas entrevistas qualitativas com vista a explorar em profundidade as razões da existência dos obstáculos identificados e a exequibilidade das soluções – este foi igualmente o objectivo deste estudo. O focus da segunda fase – discutir os aspectos mais significativos e reveladores da situação actual da UEC, ajudaram-se em última análise a obter resultados significativos.

Palavras-chave: qualitativo, métodos mistos, pragmatismo, constructivismo, colaboração universidade-empresa, Vietname

Opción de investigación pragmatismo en la investigación sobre la cooperación entre universidades y empresas en el contexto vietnamita

Resumen: En este artículo se debate la elección de la metodología que tenía cuando estaba realizando investigación sobre la colaboración de universidad-empresa (UEC) para mejorar la empleabilidad en el contexto vietnamita. Como estoy más interesado en encontrar la mejor manera de abordar los problemas de investigación que en las políticas de metodología, el debate en este documento no se centrará en las diferencias entre los dos enfoques dominantes en la investigación educativa (cualitativo y cuantitativo). En cambio, este artículo tratará de mi manera de abordar los problemas con el objetivo de encontrar las mejores respuestas posibles a las preguntas de investigación. En este estudio, un enfoque pragmático fue empleado para desarrollar una comprensión contextualizada de valores subyacentes, creencias y supuestos que guían acciones. Esto se logró mediante un estudio de investigación de dos etapas: estudios cuantitativos que se centraron principalmente en relevar la situación actual de la UEC, obstáculos y soluciones se utilizaron primero, para luego seguir con las entrevistas que tuvieron el fin de explorar en profundidad por qué existían esos obstáculos y qué tan factibles eran las soluciones – esto fue también el objetivo de este estudio. El enfoque en la segunda etapa – en discutir los temas más significativos y reveladores relacionadas con el local de la UEC, en última instancia, me ayudaron a producir resultados más significativos del estudio.

Palabras clave: cualitativo, métodos mixtos, pragmatismo, constructivismo, cooperación universidad-empresa, Vietnam

Choix de la recherche: Le pragmatisme dans la réalisation des recherches sur la collaboration université-entreprise dans le contexte vietnamien

Résumé: Cet article expose le choix de méthodologie que j'ai eu lors de la recherche sur la collaboration université-entreprise (UEC) dans le contexte vietnamien. Comme je m'intéresse beaucoup plus à la meilleure façon d'aborder les problèmes de recherche plutôt qu'à la politique méthodologique, la discussion dans cet article ne se concentrera pas sur les différences entre les deux approches dominantes de la recherche en éducation (qualitative et quantitative). Au lieu de cela, le présent document discutera de ma façon d'aborder les problèmes afin de trouver les meilleures réponses possibles pour les questions de recherche. L'approche pragmatique dans cette étude a été employée pour développer une compréhension riche et contextualisée des valeurs, des croyances et des hypothèses sous-jacentes qui guident les actions. Ceci a été réalisé par une étude de recherche en deux phases: des enquêtes quantitatives portant principalement sur la révélant situation actuelle de l'UEC, ses obstacles et les solutions ont été utilisées en premier, puis les entretiens qualitatifs ont été suivis pour explorer en profondeur pourquoi ces obstacles existaient et comment les réalisables solutions étaient - C'était aussi l'objectif de cette étude. L'accent mis sur la deuxième phase - pour discuter des questions les plus significatives et révélatrices liées à l'émise locale de la CUE, finalement, m'a aidé à produire des aboutissements de l'étude plus significatifs.

Mots-clés: qualitative, méthodes mixtes, pragmatisme, constructivisme, collaboration de l'université-entreprise, Vietnam.

Introduction

This paper discusses how a mix methods study can be designed to enhance the credibility and transferability of data. My aim in this project is to investigate how graduate employability can be better enhanced in the Vietnamese context, and to explore the possibilities of connecting workplace training and university curricula more closely to better address the economy. The research approach needed to be careful selected to help best address the problems and suggest the best possibilities to develop university-enterprise collaboration (UEC) to enhance graduate employability in the Vietnamese context. This paper will discuss how and why pragmatic approach is chosen to help me achieve this aim.

The study was designed with the belief that local issues need local solutions. It was also based on the principles derived from Connell's work on Southern Theory: the need to include voices from the periphery in the conduct of social science research (Connell, 2007). This lesson has been learned from the failure of many Vietnamese government plans, reports and resolutions that have privileged knowledge and theories from the North[1] for too long (Hayden & Lam Quang Thiep, 2007). Indeed, the Vietnamese government has recognised the mismatches between higher education (HE) training and the employment market, these have been stipulated in numerous documents, policies, plans and resolutions which aim to increase the training quality in universities and to reinforce the central mission of HE: to provide a highly skilled workforce for the development of the country. Nonetheless, many of these resolutions and plans have been criticized as impractical, based on western ideas without careful research into the background context, culture, as well as teaching and learning infrastructure, conditions, traditions and habits in Vietnam (Tran Thi Tuyet & White, 2012). Together with unclear implementation, in most cases, the results have been unsurprisingly ineffective (Hayden & Lam Quang Thiep, 2007). The current situation of the higher education system (HES) in Vietnam and the gap between education and the real needs of the society in terms of university graduates in particular, call for more close research into the problem. This is to find out the obstacles and potential solutions to develop and strengthen the UEC to help students better integrate theory into practice and develop knowledge and skills desirable by the industry.

Indeed, under the pressure of neoliberal governments and the call for more 'value for money' education from students' families in the mass HE era, not only Vietnamese HE, but most HESs all over the world now are trying to find ways to better equip their students with the knowledge and skills desirable by the labour market. Numerous studies have discussed the gap between HE and the need of the labour market and ways to connect these two stakeholders to enhance the work-readiness for students in

different countries, which I discuss in a separate research paper (Tran Thi Tuyet, 2016). Nonetheless, the situations in different countries are different, and in general, it requires careful investigation into the local situation in order to come up with feasible solutions for enhancing graduate employability for each case. In this case, the aim at empowering the local voices, or finding solutions based on local expertise or local experience matched really well with the constructivist paradigm, my favorite research paradigm when approaching this study. It seemed, at the beginning, that qualitative research methods would be the best methods to be used in this study. Local people would be selected for interview to explore the current situation of the connection between HE training and the local labour market, the obstacles and possible solutions for enhancing the quality of that collaboration. Nonetheless, after some time researching the literature and considering the methodology for the study, I decided to follow pragmatism in conducting this study.

The reason for the shift of the worldview was that although aiming at empowering the local voices, this research project has been developed based on the understanding that the selection of research approaches needs to be aware of 'what questions are most meaningful and which procedures are most appropriate for answering these questions' (Morgan, 2007, p. 53). In other words, the researcher needs to be flexible in their choice of how to approach the problems to find the best possible answers for the research problem. This paper first provides a brief summary of the background information of the research, then pulls up the research questions of the study. The second part of the paper discusses the choice of methodology and the reasons why pragmatic approach was chosen to, on one hand, address a wide perspective from related stakeholders, on the other hand, help to focus on the interaction with the participants to explore the realities, possibilities and solutions, which are local, specific and constructed (O'Donoghue, 2007).

1. Research background

Although Vietnam has opened its door to the world economy since 1986, its economy and the HES are still at much lower stages of development compared with the West. Although the HES has been 'fundamentally designed to meet the needs of the labour market' (George, 2010, p. 34) with different small, mono-disciplinary universities operating under both their Line Ministries and the Ministry of Education and Training (MOET), the 'products' of the system has increasingly dissatisfied contemporary employers. The call for changes from HE to make their education and training more relevant to the employment market is often loud (Tran Quang Trung & Swierczek, 2009). Universities are now required to report the rate of employed graduates and this has become one of the important criteria in HE quality assurance evaluation.

Regardless how universities have tried to response to the call and pressure, the ratio of unemployment among university graduates in Vietnam has remained disappointing. In 2010, the number of unemployed HE graduates aged from 21 to 29 was less than 60,000 (about 6.84%). In 2013, this number had increased to 101.000 (9.89%), by the third quarter of 2016, it reached 324,700 (8.36%) (Ministry of Labor - Invalids and Social Affairs & General Statistics Office, 2016). Mass HE is suggested to be one of the reasons. The number of students enrolling in the system in the school year 2013-2014 has increased more than 200% compared to the school year 2000-2001 and the number of HE institutions increase from 178 to 421 with the number of universities is nearly triple (Vietnamese Government, 2015). Nonetheless, the mass HE itself does not seem to be the only reason for the unemployment among graduates as although the HES in Vietnam has expanded rapidly recently, the number of its graduates are still lower than the high demand of skilled labour force from an increasing integrated economy (World Bank, 2012).

The fast changing requirements of the labour market and the slow response of the HES is often considered the critical and significant reason for the increase number of unemployed graduates. As the economy has changed from central planned economy (where university graduates were all allocated a workplace after graduation) to market led economy and students are required to find work for themselves in a competitive labour market. Employers now also seek employees who have good communication skills and personal skills, good English skills and can help them compete and survive in a competitive market (Ketels, Nguyen Dinh Cung, Nguyen Thi Tue Anh, & Do Hong Hanh, 2010; Tran Quang Trung & Swierczek, 2009). These requirements are different from requirements in the central planned economy and from the characteristics of the workers trained by the traditional educational system: obedient and good listeners (Tran Thi Tuyet, 2013a). Thus, although both the number of universities and number of unemployed graduates increase, research increasingly reports the difficulties experienced by enterprises in Vietnam in recruiting skilled workers in recent years (Ketels et al., 2010). This reveals the gaps between what students are trained and what expected by employers. These gaps are also claimed to be the main reason leading to the popular unemployment among recent graduates.

Literature suggests different ways to enhance graduate employability; the majority of which requires the input and collaboration of universities and enterprises. This comes from the call to develop a market oriented curriculum, to create various types of extra curriculum activities, and to bring more practical lessons to help students familiar with the world of work. Numerous studies discuss the benefits of the university-enterprise collaboration and support the practical initiatives such as problem based learning, work based learning, placements, internships, enterprise learning and work integrated learning (O'Leary, 2013). These initiatives help and also require students to integrate theory

and practice (Cooper, Orrell, & Bowden, 2010; Smith, Meijer, & Kielly-Coleman, 2010). They provide students with opportunities to expose in the real context of work to reflect on the knowledge they have learnt in the university context and apply that knowledge in the practices at work to solve the real world problems, these help students develop their skills in a meaningful way (Patrick et al., 2008). It places students in the role of workers to develop 'implicit tacit knowledge about their practice and surfacing this knowledge through reflection' (Smith et al., 2010, p. 2). Not all knowledge is verbalized; some remains tacit and only can be acquired through experiencing (Tran Thi Tuyet, 2013b). The collaboration between universities and enterprises also aims at improving the work readiness and competitiveness for students, as it provides students opportunities to master their professional knowledge in their specific disciplines, and at the same time to become familiar with organizational practices. Because of huge benefits UEC can potentially provide to enhance graduate employability, there is strong history of sharing good practices in the leading countries in graduate employability activities such as The UK, The US, Canada, Australia and other European countries.

In Vietnam, nonetheless, research in this area is still rare. Although there is increasing evidence of the collaboration between enterprises and some universities, and MOET also calls for initiatives to bring more practical lessons into university curriculum, it is hard to find a study reporting on this cooperation in Vietnam. Moreover, there is still a loud complaint about the difficulties to develop a workable UEC collaboration and there exists the evidence of the mistrust between the two parties (Pham Thi Ly, 2013). There is a need to bring about a clearer picture about the current situation of UEC in Vietnam, to understand the problems that each party has faced in order to find out ways to help them settle their problems and make this collaboration work, for mutual benefit and for better enhancing student employability.

2 Research questions and choice of methodology

In this particular study, when the picture of UEC in Vietnam has not been painted clearly in the literature, and when there has been a popular claim about the loose connection between universities and the industry despite the understanding of the importance of UEC and the call from all related stakeholders for more practical curricula which better blend theory and practice. My first aim was to bring about a clearer picture about the UEC situation in Vietnam before exploring its obstacles.

With these aims, it seems to be hard for me to stick with my favorable research paradigm of constructivism. As although constructivist paradigm would help me to 'focus on the specific contexts in which people live and work, in order to understand the historical and cultural settings of the participants' (Creswell, 2009b), it did not seem to be able to help me pull up an overall picture of UEC in Vietnam. This was when I paused

and started reflecting on my research worldview. Although I still strongly believe that 'realities are local, specific and constructed; they are socially and experientially based, and depend on the individuals or groups holding them' (O'Donoghue, 2007, pp. 16-17), I also understand that there are multiple realities out there, and with this study, I wanted to approach as many of those realities or perspectives as possible in order to best develop a current picture of UEC in Vietnam. It was at that moment I started thinking about a mixed method research.

3 The pragmatic approach

When spending time reading more closely about research paradigms, I found out that much of the discussion in education and social research methods has focused on the distinction between qualitative and quantitative research. Nonetheless, it is not my aim here to go into the discussion of the differences between these two dominant approaches to educational research. I am more interested in how best to address the research problems rather than in comparing the strengths and limitations of these two research approaches. Having experience of using both quantitative and qualitative approaches in conducting educational research, I now believe in the possibility of using multiple paradigms in research and understand the warning of Creswell (2009a) that sometimes these paradigms may be in tension, but 'such tension is good'. The desire of connecting positivist with constructivism in this study had led my way to approach the pragmatic paradigm. Pragmatism or the approach placing its emphasis on shared meanings and joint actions (Morgan, 2007, p. 67), is based on the belief that 'theories can be both contextual and generalizable by analyzing them for transferability to another situation' (Creswell, 2009a, p. 4). More specifically, Morgan (2007) has illustrated how pragmatism can connect induction with deduction, subjectivities and objectivity, context and generality and developed new terms of abduction, intersubjectivity and transferability.

Figure 1.

A Pragmatic Alternative to the Key Issues in Social Science Research Methodology

	Qualitative Approach	Quantitative Approach	Pragmatic Approach
Connection of theory and data	Induction	Deduction	Abduction
Relationship to research process	Subjectivity	Objectivity	Intersubjectivity
Inference from data	Context	Generality	Transferability

Indeed, transferability is often claimed to be the strength of qualitative research (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). With pragmatism the transferability of the research is strengthened by both the breadth and the depth of the data provided by the connection of quantitative and qualitative approaches. According to Morgan (2007, p. 71), pragmatic approach is 'to rely on a version of abductive reasoning that move back and forth between induction and deduction' to connect theory and data. It can convert observations into theories and then assess those theories through action. This abductive process is often employed by researchers who combine qualitative and quantitative methods in a sequential fashion where the inductive goals of a qualitative approach are based on the deductive results from a quantitative approach, and vice versa (Morgan, 2007). Pragmatism also allows the potential and possibility to work back and forth between qualitative data and quantitative data, which is often viewed as incompatible. It offers researchers the opportunity to search for useful points of connection between these two types of data.

Similarly, pragmatists argue that there is impossibility of 'complete objectivity' or 'complete subjectivity' in conducting research. They agree with the constructivists that our values and our politics are always a part of who we are and how we act, and that the research questions themselves are not inherently important, and any method that goes with them are not inherently appropriate. It is we ourselves who 'make the choices about what is important and what is appropriate, and those choices inevitably involve aspects of our personal history, social background, and cultural assumptions' (Morgan, 2007, p. 69). However, in conducting research, a sufficient degree of mutual understanding with not only our research participants, but also with people who read and review the product of our research needs to be achieved. Inter-subjectivity is the dimension representing 'the emphasis on processes of communication and shared meaning that are central to any pragmatic approach' (Morgan, 2007, p. 72).

Pragmatism also rejects the idea that researchers have to choose their position between a pair of extremes of either locating their research and research findings in a completely specific to a particular context (constructivism) or designing their research with a generalized set of principles (positivist). Thus, instead of focusing on the issue of context or generality, pragmatism places the central focus on the idea of enhancing transferability based both on the strength of the relation between cause and effect in quantitative data and on the trustworthiness and reliability of the qualitative data (Morgan, 2007; Shannon-Baker, 2015). In other words, rather than trying to make the research results with either context-bound or generalizable, pragmatists is based on the belief that theories can be both contextual and generalizable, and aim to investigate the factors that 'affect whether the knowledge we gain can be transferred to other settings' (Shannon-Baker, 2015, p. 4). Pragmatism breaks the boundary between positivist and

constructivist, and creates a connection between them when looking for what is meaningful from both (Shannon-Baker, 2015).

4 How pragmatism underlines this study

This study is an explanatory sequential design. It started with a quantitative survey. The finding from the quantitative data, then, informed qualitative data collection and analysis. The connecting, comparing and contrasting of the inferences that emerge from both quantitative and qualitative findings in this study, on the one hand, helped to develop and extend the understanding of UEC in Vietnam in a richer way than a study using only a single approach. On the other hand, it also allowed me to address the local context, historical and cultural features which directly or indirectly affected the quantity and quality of the collaboration between the HES and the local industry. This led the way to more feasible and practical solutions to ease the university-industry cooperation in the Vietnamese context.

In a sequential explanatory design, the priority, or the weight and attention throughout the data collection and analysis can be given to either quantitative or qualitative approach, and this may depends on the researchers' interest, the study's audience and what researchers aim to focus on in their study (Creswell, 2009b). In this particular study, when my major purpose was to explain the factors affecting UEC in the Vietnamese context and to seek feasible solutions from related stakeholders to enhance the quality of this collaboration, the priority was given to the qualitative data collection and analysis, although it was the second phase of the research process. Nonetheless, the quantitative approach was designed to allow me to develop a general understanding about the current situation of the UEC in Vietnam and the common obstacles that the related stakeholders have experienced. Then, the inductive goal of the second phase was based on the deductive results from the quantitative questionnaires as suggested by and Morgan (2007), in other words, the interview questions were developed based on the results of the quantitative data. The themes immerging from the interviews were thus, often the explanation or suggested solutions for the problems occurred in the results of the quantitative phase. This process often helped me develop better and deeper understanding about the current situation of UEC in Vietnam. For example, with the question 'who takes the initial initiative in setting the collaboration', the result of the surveys showed a contrasted picture where both employer and university representatives suggested that they were often the first ones who made the first move to develop the cooperation. This often went with the complaint that the other party (university or employer) was often not enthusiastic in setting up the collaboration; these results appeared confusing. However, the interviews with the representatives from both parties

helped me not only understand the contrasted opinions from enterprises and universities, but also understand another facet of the collaboration, that was the unsustainable connection between the two parties. The situation was often like this: When enterprises needed some sessional staff, they approached universities to seek students for placement or internship, and when it comes to the time for internship (part of the compulsory curriculum in Vietnamese universities), universities often looked around to place their students in enterprises. The collaboration was often for the instant needs and the time enterprises and universities sought the collaboration from the other party often did not match. Very often I could move back and forth between the quantitative and qualitative data like this, and the design of this study really brought me the opportunities to find points to connect the two types of data.

5. Advantages and threads of employing pragmatism in this particular research

One of the obvious advantages pragmatism provided me in conducting the research about the UEC in the Vietnamese context was that it helped provide a more complex understanding of the problem that would otherwise not have been assessable by using only a single approach (qualitative or quantitative ones) (Shannon-Baker, 2015). The quantitative phase helped me reach many more participants than I could if I only used qualitative methods. This provided me with a broad and very firm foundation and understanding about the current situation of UEC in Vietnam to bring with me to the interviews with the selected participants. I could still live with my favorite research approach – constructivism – in the second phase of research, empowering and listening to the local voices in order to develop a deeper understanding of the subject matter and exploring any contextual and cultural issues behind the perception of both universities and enterprises when it comes to the issue of collaboration for student employability.

Secondly, pragmatism brings quantitative and qualitative approaches together to build on their strengths and weaknesses (Morgan, 2007; Shannon-Baker, 2015). The strength of qualitative is often the weakness of the quantitative approach and vice versa. Qualitative research, due to the limitations related to a small number of stakeholders that could be interviewed and topics that could be discussed during the interviews, cannot claim for bringing insights on the breadth of the issues. In the contrary, quantitative studies often fail to address the depth of reactions and contextual factors. Interestingly, in this study, sometimes the quantitative data results appeared contrasting or confusing, but the interviews in the second phase often helped provide reasons for those contrasted findings. For example, the quantitative data showed that one of the significant motivating factors for universities to take the UEC initiative was the vision and openness of the university leaders. Nonetheless, the lack of enthusiasm from

universities was also reported by the representatives from enterprises to be a significant obstacle in developing and maintaining the connection. These two results first appeared a bit contrasting, but the interviews confirmed both two results. Moreover, the interviews also explained this contrasted picture where, in most cases, when enterprises approached universities, the leaders of the universities were often very open and interested in the collaboration, but when it comes to the doers (the ones in charge of the UEC in the universities), these staff often took this task for granted and considered it as only one of their numerous admin tasks. Most of the time, they did not devote for the collaboration and this disappointed enterprises. By connecting, and combining qualitative and quantitative research approaches like this, I could get access to both the breadth and the depth of the issue and provide the answers for the questions 'how' and 'why' for most of the key findings in the quantitative phase. This is to make better, stronger and more accurate inferences, or meta-inferences, the terms used by Venkatesh, Brown & Bala (2013).

With this particular research, when it sought the perspective of both universities and enterprises on the issues of UEC, and when the connection between the two had been loose, the contradictory perceptions between the two on the issues could be expected (two examples in the above paragraphs are examples for these contradictory opinions). The qualitative study which was designed based on the findings of the quantitative data did help to provide rich explanations of not only the contradictory perspectives of the stakeholders, but also the other themes immerging from the quantitative findings. In addition, as in the above examples, the qualitative data not only confirmed the quantitative data findings, but also provided additional insights to those findings. In other words, pragmatism allowed me to use the qualitative data to confirm, complete, complement, explain and develop the quantitative findings (Venkatesh et al., 2013).

Nonetheless, the greatest challenges of employing pragmatic approach in conducting research were related to the time and commitment for the research. Although I have been conducted both qualitative and quantitative research and understood their associated issues and problems, when conducting a mixed methods research I had to be aware of issues related to both approaches. Then, it is more time-consuming. It takes time to develop a sequential research study. Developing meaningful questionnaires, conducting pilot study, making sure that the sample size meet the minimum requirement for factorability, analysis of quantitative data for meaningful interview questions and being aware of all the factors affecting the quality of qualitative data, all require time and careful design. On the other hand, I also needed to be aware and be able to develop the capability to move back and forth between the two approaches and the two sources of data and be able to make sense of their connection and contradiction (Morgan, 2007). There was also a need for me balance between objectivity and subjectivity to make use of the advantages of both qualitative and quantitative research

approaches (Creswell, 2009b). However, the careful design, taking into account all of these factors, has eventually helped me overcome the difficulties and challenges and manage to provide both breadth and depth of the issues related to the UEC in Vietnam.

Conclusion

In this article I have discussed some methodological issues I faced when designing a research project aiming to explore the problems and possibilities to enhance UEC in the Vietnamese context. Those issues included the decision related to the adoption of a mixed methods sequential explanatory study design under the pragmatic paradigm and prioritizing the qualitative approach aiming at exploring related contextual and cultural factors. I also discussed how to connect and make sense of both quantitative and qualitative process and data to develop a more complex understanding of the research problem. Despite some limitations related to the intensive amount of time and commitment I had to invest into the project, the design of this research had really assisted me much in approaching both an overall situation of the current UEC in Vietnam, and the depth discussion about the obstacles and ways to overcome the university-enterprise barriers from the related stakeholders. Employing pragmatic approach to enhance the quality of constructivist worldview of interacting aiming individuals and discussing the most meaningful and revealing issues related to the local issued of UEC, ultimately, helped me produce more meaningful study outcomes.

Note: The project was funded by the Alexander von Humboldt Foundation.

Notes

[1] The North mostly covers the West and the First World, where, with one quarter of the world population, controls four fifths of the income earned anywhere in the world.

References

Connell, R. (2007). *Southern theory: The global dynamics of knowledge in social science*. Crows Nest, NSW: Southwood Press.

Cooper, L., Orrell, J., & Bowden, M. (2010). *Work integrated learning: A guide to effective practice*. New York: Routledge.

Creswell, J. W. (2009a). Editorial: Mapping the field of mixed methods research. *Journal of Mixed Methods Research, 3*(2), 95-108.

Creswell, J. W. (2009b). *Research design: Qualitative, quatitative, and mixed methods approaches*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

George, E. S. (2010). Higher education in Vietnam 1986-1998: Education in transition to a new era? In G. Harman, M. Hayden, & Pham Thanh Nghi (Eds.), *Reforming higher education in Vietnam* (pp. 31-50). London: Springer.

Hayden, M., & Lam Quang Thiep. (2007). Institutional autonomy for higher education in Vietnam. *Higher Education Research and Development, 26*(1), 73-85.

Ketels, C., Nguyen Dinh Cung, Nguyen Thi Tue Anh, & Do Hong Hanh. (2010). *Vietnam competitiveness report*. Hanoi: Central Institute for Economic Management.

Lincoln, Y. S., & Guba, E. G. (1985). *Naturalistic inquiry*. Beverly Hills, CA: Sage.

Morgan, D. L. (2007). Paradigms lost and pragmatism regained methodological implications of combining qualitative and quantitative methods. *Journal of Mixed Methods Research, 1*(1), 48-76.

O'Donoghue, T. (2007). *Planning your qualitative research project: An introduction to interpretivist research in education*. Abingdon: Routledge.

O'Leary, S. (2013). Collaborations in higher education with employers and their influence on graduate employability: an institutional project. *Enhancing Learning in the Social Sciences, 5*(1), 37-50.

Patrick, C.-j., Peach, D. D., Pocknee, C., Webb, F., Fletcher, D. M., & Pretto, G. (2008). *The WIL [Work Integrated Learning] report: A national scoping study [Australian Learning and Teaching Council (ALTC) Final report]*. Retrieved from Brisbane:

Pham Thi Ly. (2013). *Quan điểm của doanh nghiệp về hợp tác với các trường đại học ở Việt Nam (Enterprises' perspective of the collaboration with universities in Vietnam)*. Retrieved from Hanoi:

Shannon-Baker, P. (2015). Making paradigms meaningful in mixed methods research. *Journal of Mixed Methods Research*, 1558689815575861.

Smith, J., Meijer, G., & Kielly-Coleman, N. (2010). Assurance of learning : The role of work integrated learning and industry partners. In M. Campbell (Ed.), *Work integrated learning : Responding to challenges* (pp. 409-419). Perth, WA: Australian Collaborative Education Network (ACEN) Incorporated, Curtin University of Technology.

Tran Quang Trung, & Swierczek, F. W. (2009). Skills development in higher education in Vietnam. *Asia Pacific Business Review, 15*(4), 565-586.

Tran Thi Tuyet. (2013a). Is the learning approach of students from the Confucian heritage culture problematic? *Educational Research for Policy and Practice, 12*(1), 57-65. doi:10.1007/s10671-012-9131-3

Tran Thi Tuyet. (2013b). Limitation on the development of skills in higher education in Vietnam. *Higher Education, 65*(5), 631-644. doi:10.1007/s10734-012-9567-7

Tran Thi Tuyet. (2016). Enhancing graduate employability and the need for university-enterprise collaboration. *Journal of Teaching and Learning for Graduate Employability, 7*(1), 58-71.

Tran Thi Tuyet, & White, J. (2012). Managed universities: Vietnam and the West. In M. Vicars, T. McKenna, & J. White (Eds.), *Discourse, power and resistance down under* (pp. 151-160). Rotterdam: Sense.

Venkatesh, V., Brown, S. A., & Bala, H. (2013). Bridging the Qualitative-Quantitative Divide: Guidelines for Conducting Mixed Methods Research in Information Systems. *MIS quarterly, 37*(1), 21-54.

Vietnamese Government. (2015). *Về việc thực hiện Luật Giáo dục đại học và vấn đề giải quyết việc làm cho sinh viên tốt nghiệp (Report on the implementation of Higher education law and the issue of employment for recent graduates)*.

World Bank. (2012). *Putting Higher Education to work, skill and research for growth in East Asia*. Washingon DC: The World Bank.

Thi Tuyet Tran

Dr. Thi Tuyet Tran has been working in the Vietnamese and Australian higher education systems. Currently, she is a fellow researcher at the Institute for Employment Research, German. Her research interest is higher education, language education, cross-cultural study and graduate employability.
Email: Thi-tuyet.tran@iab.de

Correspondência
Thi Tuyet Tran
Institute for Employment Research, Germany
No.100 Regensburger street, 90478 Nuremberg

Data de submissão: Julho 2016
Data de avaliação: Outubro 2016
Data de publicação: Julho 2017