Academic returnees' knowledge transfer in Vietnamese public universities

by

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Abstract

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In the trend of international education, many graduates have earned a degree from international education programs and returned to work in their home countries. This study explores the institutional factors affecting the process of transferring knowledge from international education to local workplace, taking the case of Vietnamese academic returnees in public universities. The study employs the qualitative approach and institutional theory to understand this phenomenon. Data from interviews of 16 academic returnees show that only a limited amount of their explicit and tacit knowledge earnt abroad could be transferred to their colleagues at home institutions in teaching and research activities, mainly via informal, ad-hoc situations. At the core of the research, it is found that a combination of policies and regulations, especially human resource policies, constrains academic returnees' knowledge transfer. Other factors emerged from the receiving end include the strong values of hierarchy, clearly defined role between academics and upper managers, the mixture of values of individuality and collectivity. The cognitive structure of the group also greatly affects the knowledge transfer process, including the lack of shared mindsets, traditional ways of thinking and doing, perception about criticism and perception about returnees. These factors interact with each other and altogether indirectly affect the knowledge transfer process through directly impacting the receiving group's ability to learn and use new knowledge and the ability to cooperate, and the motivation of the academic returnees to transfer knowledge.

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Chapter 1. Introduction

1.1. Background

This thesis is about knowledge transfer of international graduates into the context of their country of origin. Specifically, it studies the knowledge transfer of Vietnamese academics returning to public universities. The issue of utilizing returnees' knowledge and skills in the service of national development is not a new phenomenon, especially in developing countries, but it is not yet solved. For example, Bovenkerk (1981) started their study on Surinamese returnees from studying in Holland since 1974, figuring out that these returnees have very little chance to apply their new knowledge and skills into reality of their country. It seems 'people in Suriname paid very little attention to their expert knowledge, nor did anyone seem to be especially interested in their opinion', leading the author to question whether they [graduate returnees] would be capable of acting as 'social changes' (Bovenkerk, 1981, p.164). They also cited previous literature, indicating similar situations in Ethiopia and Iran as follows:

> 'It must be said that [Ethiopian] returnees as a whole have so far done little to modernize their country… they have been little more than misfits' (Levine, 1965, cited in Bovenkerk, 1981)
>
> '…foreign study unfits the typical young Iranian for a useful career at home' (Baldwin, 1963, cited in Bovenkerk, 1981)

Balkom (1991) studied returning Indian academics and their fit of knowledge and skills gained from abroad into Indian higher education institutions, pointing out many different constraints to knowledge transfer:

> 'The general public doesn't see any practical use of academics… Many academics are asked to help write up policy for the government…because it looks good to have people on your committee who have published quite a bit, but the bureaucrats feels quite capable to decide on the policy in the first place; the academic is simple asked to write in it' (Ibid, p. 120)
>
> 'No university in India recognizes my field. Thus, you do your teaching and continue your research on your own... there's no audience for your work in India' (Ibid., p.125)

Nowadays, the above-mentioned problem is even emerges due to the significant trend of student mobility in the search for educational and possibly professional opportunities outside their home countries. Indeed, it was recorded that in 2012 there were more than 4.5 million higher education students studying in other countries rather than their homelands, three times higher than that figure of year 2000 (OECD, 2014). While some students decide to stay in the host country or a third country after graduation, a proportion of the mobile student population returns to their home country for various reasons. Even among those stayed, many of them would eventually come back after a period of working abroad (Wells, 2014; Ziguras & Gribble, 2015). In some countries, attracting overseas returnees has become a key strategy of competing for global talents (Shumilova & Cai, 2016). These graduate returnees come back with a foreign degree, intercultural skills and international experience, prospecting to apply them into their jobs and consequently to contribute to the development of their nations. However, it is challenging to transfer their knowledge, skills and experiences into the workplace for several reasons.

Firstly, there is a gap between educational settings and professional world in various aspects, including environment, and knowledge and skills (Graham & McKenzie, 1995). The campus environment is different from the workplace. For example, communication between classmates or between teachers and students is undoubtedly different from communication between colleagues, or between employees and supervisors, or between employees and customers. Another gap that higher education is now attempting to narrow down is the differences between knowledge and skills taught in educational programs and required in professional settings (Eraut, 2004). Even though much attention has been given to developing students' transferable skills, there is not clear evidence of how much students have acquired these transferable skills during their higher education, and later, how much they are able to transfer their knowledge and skills into the workplace (Ibid.).

Secondly, the gap might be even wider when students study in a foreign university with different cultural, social and educational environment from where they are from and are about to come back for work. The local labour market might value and recognize different skill sets and knowledge than what is provided in a foreign educational system. This issue has been researched in developed world. For instance, Waters (2009) researched Hong Kong graduates pursuing the Masters of Business Administration degree from abroad and found that overseas qualification is not enough

to secure best jobs because of 'credential inflation' (p.1881). In the UK, overseas education is not received as beneficial; reversely, it impedes employability as employers do not value international experience as much and the UK higher education is always perceived as highly international and of high quality (Brooks, Waters, & Pimlott-Wilson, 2012). In Finland, a study by Center for International Mobility (CIMO) (2014) shows that employers think international experience benefits personal rather than professional development.

The benefit of international education seems to be highly recognized in the condition that the labour market is international. It is because in that case, internationally competent graduates would become invaluable asset for organizations to do business across borders. It is well proven through research on positive impacts of international education in developed countries such as Australia (Crossman & Clarke, 2010), Italy (Di Pietro, 2013), or Hungary (Bremer, 1998). Noticeably, these studies consider the perspectives of employers from rather highly international organizations. Unfortunately, internationalization does not happen at the same pace everywhere in the world. It may be true for the developed world or international organizations, but might not be the same for developing and less developed countries in Asia, Africa and Latin America while the economy and labour market are much less international (M. L. T. Nguyen, 2012). Therefore, it seems questionable whether students, especially those from developing countries, are able to turn international experiences into skills that local employers want; and whether local employers appreciate the study abroad experience, adaptability, multicultural and multilingual communication and global mindsets that students develop during the time overseas. Indeed, there is an increasing interest on knowledge transfer of graduate returnees into the working context of developing countries. Some studies have touched this critical phenomena, for example studies on graduate returnees in China (Chen, 2015; Gill, 2010), Korea (Lee & Kim, 2010; Roberts, 2012), Kyrgyzstan (Thieme, 2014), and Tonga (Franken, Langi, & Branson, 2016). It is overall not to argue against international education, but to enhance its benefits in different contexts, by not taking a simplistic view that foreign knowledge, skills and culture are automatically acknowledged and accepted in receiving countries.

1.2. Problem statement

This thesis chooses Vietnam as a case study for overseas knowledge transfer in the local labour market because failure to make use of knowledge and skills earned from abroad to make

contribution and develop one's career could be one of the reasons for non-return. Even if someone has returned, for various reasons, voluntarily or compulsorily, inability to integrate their knowledge into local development would be a waste.

Vietnam is now facing severe brain drain problems. Vietnam is one of the largest senders of international students in the world (Kritz, 2015). According to UNESCO Institute for Statistics (2017), the number of Vietnamese international students has risen nearly seven times during the period 1999-2013, from just over 8,000 to 53,546 students, accounting for 2.4% of higher education student population in the country. Vietnam ranks in top 10 sending countries in the US, Japan, and Finland. Given the large population of Vietnamese students pursuing higher education overseas, also a high percentage of them decide not to return to the country after graduation. There is no official up-to-date data on return or stay rates of Vietnamese graduates (M. L. T. Nguyen, 2012), however, it is estimated that in 2000, 27% of Vietnamese international graduates do not return to the homeland, ranked the highest rate of emigration among tertiary educated population (Ziguras & McBurnie, 2015). With high emigration rate, brain drain has become a big issue in the country that calls for solutions to attract returnees. However, as little research has been done on this group of graduates, it is therefore difficult to understand their decision to stay or return after graduation (M. L. T. Nguyen, 2012). Media often attributes the issue of non-return to the lack of incentives for returnees, lack of job opportunities, low salaries, inadequate research facilities and barriers to integrate into working culture back home (see for example Thanh Nien News, 2015; Tuoi Tre News, 2015; Vietnam News, 2005). Graduates remain in the host countries mainly to seek for international work opportunities as international qualifications are no longer guaranteed a good job in both domestic and global market (Gribble, 2011).

Among those returned, it seems to be very challenging for them to fully apply their knowledge and skills into meaningful contribution to their working organizations' development. Some news reports stated that returnees are struggling to find suitable jobs that match with their training specialization so as to make the best use of the knowledge and skills from abroad (L. Nguyen, 2015; Thao Huong, 2014). Take an example of the Project 322 that sent nearly 3,000 Vietnamese academics abroad during 10 years, from 2000 to 2010, with total investment of 2,500 billion Vietnam dong (equivalent to around 10.3 million Euros). Out of 2,268 academics enrolling in PhD programs, 1,074 academics have returned (BBC Tieng Viet, 2012). Vietnamese Ministry of

Education and Training admitted that the biggest failure of the Project is that there is a lack of adequate environment for these academic returnees to transfer their knowledge into research and products and to develop their capability to contribute for their organizations (Tuoi Tre News, 2012). Many of them have not returned after graduation or have left the public organizations (the funding agencies) for private or multi-national companies for better incentives and working environment (Ibid.), or re-expatriated to a foreign country after returning. In a recent scandal regarding non-return of academics under the scholarship Project 922 of Da Nang City, seven scholarship holders have been sued and fined around 10 billion Vietnam dongs (equivalent to 410,000 euros) for not returning to work for the city after completing their study (VNexpress, 2015). In a recent survey, Pham (2016) also figured out that the majority of her participants chose to work for multi-national companies after returning to Vietnam because they think they could make use of the 'cultural capital' acquired from international experience that 'positions them advantageously for employment in foreign firms' (p.147); and they could apply advanced technical skills they earned abroad there. Ho et al. (2015)'s survey shows that re-expatriation decision among Vietnamese returnees are strongly influenced by the poor living and working conditions in Vietnam rather than by pull factors from host countries. They find that re-entry experience is also a factor affecting their intention to re-expatriate. If returnees are more engaged and integrated in the home country professionally and socially, they are less likely to leave their countries (Tharenou & Caulfield, 2010, cited in Ho et al., 2015). 'When the opportunity arose for those young people to find jobs back in Vietnam, they would return' (Ziguras & McBurnie, 2015, p.106). However, if they are not able to develop their career at home, chances are they would migrate permanently, resulting in brain drain. So far the Vietnamese government has had no policy on improving the employment conditions and incentives to attract this group of knowledge diaspora to return and contribute to the national development.

Therefore, failure to tackle the problem of poor knowledge transfer from international education to local labour market would lead Vietnam to (1) even more serious skills shortage as it fails to extract skills and talents from this internationally-trained workforce, and (2) more serious brain drain as it discourages knowledge diaspora to return and contribute to the home country, and pushes the returnees to re-expatriate. In other words, promoting a smooth transfer of knowledge and skills from international study to local employment is both a solution for *effective knowledge*

management and *a pull factor* to motivate overseas students to return and retain in Vietnam to work and make use of their talents for the nation's development.

1.3. Key concepts and motivations

This thesis studies a specific group of graduate returnees implementing a certain type of knowledge transfer: academics returning to public universities and transfer their obtained knowledge from oversea education to their academic units. This section will briefly introduce key concepts used in this thesis and motivations to researching the chosen target group, with more details provided in Chapter 2.

Literature refers to different types of knowledge transfer. In terms of scope of transfer, it refers to intra-organizational knowledge transfer (see for example Minbaeva, Mäkelä, & Rabbiosi, 2010; Szulanski, 1996)), and inter-organizational transfer (see for example Albino, Garavelli, & Schiuma, 1999; Lawson & Potter, 2012). In terms of level of transfer, it refers to organisational level and individual-level transfer, of which research is done mainly on organisational-level transfer (Lazarova & Tarique, 2005; Minbaeva et al., 2010; Wang, 2015). When talking about knowledge transfer in higher education, it often indicates inter-organisational transfer to public audience through outcomes of teaching activities or academic research, including university-industry transfer (see for example Balkom, 1991; Chen, 2014; Jacobson, Butterill, & Goering, 2004; Pham, 2016). Recently, there is a growing concern in literature on transferring knowledge from education to work (see for example Brooks et al., 2012; Franken et al., 2016; Lee & Kim, 2010; Thieme, 2014; Waters, 2009). This strand of research reflects another aspect of knowledge transfer in higher education. This thesis focuses on this later type of knowledge transfer, targeting at the action of transferring knowledge of returning academics into their work group, rather than to the wider public. Therefore, knowledge transfer in this thesis is understood as a process of communicating knowledge from academic returnees to their workgroup, implementing and internalizing the new knowledge by their colleagues. Detailed description of the knowledge transfer process is provided in chapter 2.

In this thesis, academic returnees are defined as those returned from their full-time educational program abroad and currently working for public universities in Vietnam. Generally speaking, returnees are people leaving and then returning to their home countries for different reasons, and therefore their international experience, knowledge and skills are also various. For the purpose of

this study on knowledge transfer, the researcher chooses to define international graduate returnees similarly to Roberts's (2012) definition of returnees in his study on knowledge transfer of Korean graduate returnees. He defines 'international returnees as people who, at the minimum, have completed a post-graduate degree (Master's or PhD) overseas and then returned to work in their home country' (p.6). They gained knowledge from their education and perhaps have international working experience as well and therefore have potential to transfer. This study excludes those going on international assignments for their firms because of three reasons. First, the researcher wants to relate this study to higher education field in terms of the relevance of international education to the working context in Vietnam as a sending country. Second, international graduate returnees and expatriates are different in terms of knowledge and experience gained while abroad, the purpose of going abroad and also the working context in which they return to (Roberts, 2012). Third, the researcher aims to fill the gap in knowledge transfer research in which majority of the research has already been done about expatriate knowledge transfer, as shown in the next section.

Regarding the target group of the thesis, there are three main reasons for choosing to study returning academics in public universities.

Firstly, characteristics of international graduate returnees differ across professions and disciplines. Academic returnees are those attained Master's, PhD or post-doctoral degree from foreign higher education institutions and return to work at local institutions. Deeply involving in research and teaching in a knowledge-intensive environment upon return, one might assume that knowledge transfer from this group of returnees are strongly facilitated and thus takes place smoothly. Even though, theoretically speaking, universities, as learning and knowledge production institutions, should possess an organizational culture that encourage knowledge sharing, it might not be true in practice. Even if it is true, social institutions in which higher education institutions are embedded in also have an influence on, or even compete with, organizational effort to create such a culture (Huber, 2001). Indeed, since previous studies in other countries (such as India (Balkom, 1991)) and Vietnamese media, as above-mentioned, indicates mainly difficulties to their knowledge transfer, it is necessary to explore if that is the case, and if so, why it happens. Therefore, academic knowledge transfer pattern is interesting to research, especially in the context of enormous changes happening to higher education sector and consequently their academic work.

Secondly, in terms of policy, Vietnamese government has targeted at sending academics abroad for advanced education with the aim to firstly modernization of higher education system, and secondly expecting them to widespread their knowledge and skills to their students and wider public through their research and teaching activities. From this stand, it is reasonable to study whether foreign-trained academics are able to transfer their knowledge into making positive changes in their career and their universities, and what could be done to promote their knowledge transfer.

Thirdly, it could also be argued that Vietnamese public universities offer a unique environment for transferring knowledge compared to industry or business organizations. In Vietnam, public universities used to be under supervision and governance of different government agencies, including the central government, the communist party, the local governments and line ministries (Dao & Hayden, 2010). However, the relationship between the states and the universities gradually changes recently whereby universities are more independent from the state budget, and gain more autonomy in academic, financial and personnel decision (Ibid.). This would assumingly affect academics' knowledge transfer in two main ways. First, universities might be under greater pressure to generate their own incomes through research activities, including enhancing partnership with industries. At the same time, the government is encouraging public universities, especially big universities to improve their research profile to catch up with universities in the region (Fatseas, 2010). These altogether incentivize universities to make use of knowledge and research capability of academics, especially those returned from abroad with new knowledge, skills and experience in researching and publishing internationally. Second, universities might be motivated to improve their teaching quality to attract more students who are the main source of incomes for most universities in Vietnam. Foreign-trained academics could help promoting the quality of teaching with their updated knowledge and teaching methods earnt from advanced education systems. Therefore, the universities might have different policies to make use of their knowledge and skills, especially given that universities are more autonomous.

1.4. Research gaps

This thesis is based on and contributes to two sets of literature: research regarding international graduates' employability, and research regarding knowledge transfer.

Previous literature on international graduates' employability mainly discusses the impact of international education on graduates' ability to obtain job and to develop further in the professional environment (Di Pietro, 2013; Gill, 2010; Hao, Wen, & Welch, 2016; Hemmer et al., 2011; Le, 2014; Truong, 2013), how their knowledge, skills and competences acquired abroad are perceived by employers (Brooks et al., 2012; Cai, 2012, 2013, 2014; Shumilova, Cai, & Pekkola, 2012), and factors influencing their employability (Shumilova & Cai, 2015; Shumilova et al., 2012). This set of literature has touched the issue of the relevance of international education to the world of work through investigating the match between the types of knowledge and skills acquired and the types of knowledge and skills needed. However, it needs to be put further, whether international graduates are able to turn their competences, skills and knowledge into organisational changes and innovation, not just to match with the employers' requirements at the first place during the recruitment stage. In other words, there is a need to get deeper understanding on the process of transferring skill set and knowledge from education into the world of work. Some studies on this topic include the work of Prince et al. (2015) on knowledge transfer between MBA programs and workplace, the essay of Eraut (2004) debating why resituating knowledge from education to work is so challenging, the work of Robert (2012) on Korean graduate returnees in multinational corporations, Balaz and Williams (2004) on Slovak student returnees' transferring knowledge from the UK to Slovakia, and Wang (2015) surveying more than thousand returnees from the US and factors affecting their knowledge transfer success. Even though literature on knowledge transfer has grown substantially (Albino et al., 1999; Argote & Ingram, 2000; Nonaka & Takeuchi, 1995; Szulanski, 1996, 2000, 2002), only some recent research on education-work knowledge transfer starts making use of the theoretical base from this field (Roberts, 2012; Wang, 2015; Williams & Balaz, 2008). None of these studies targets at academic returnees' transferring knowledge within higher education institutions upon return.

Regarding literature on knowledge transfer, a mainstream of research is dedicated to identifying factors influencing transferability of knowledge (Jasimuddin, Connell, & Klein, 2003). Some outstanding research includes the work of Szulanski (2000), Albino et al. (1999), Minbaeva et al. (2010). A large body of literature focuses on factors influencing cross-border knowledge transfer (see for example Kostova, 1999; Lazarova and Tarique, 2005; Bonache and Zarraga-Oberty, 2008; and Oddou et al., 2009). Many of these studies offer comprehensive theoretical and conceptual frameworks for understanding international knowledge transfer of expatriates and repatriates.

Little empirical research has been done, with few exceptions such as the work of Kostova & Roth (2002) and Riusala & Suutari (2004). Furthermore, knowledge transfer is often discussed and researched in management and organization studies (Thieme, 2014), where little attention is given to migrants, including international graduates, as knowledge broker (Wang, 2015; Williams, 2007). Among research on intra- and inter-organization knowledge transfer, organizational and group-level transfer and popular and dominating the research theme. Researchers call for more research on the individual-level transfer (Lazarova & Tarique, 2005; Minbaeva et al., 2010; Wang, 2015).

The above review shows some research gaps as follows. Firstly, it could be seen that there is a lack of connection between two sets of literature: international graduates' employability and knowledge transfer. Though there is a growing concern regarding the knowledge transfer from education to work, not many studies have been done using the knowledge and theories developed in the field of knowledge transfer. Meanwhile, knowledge transfer literature has dominantly studied the transfer between and within firms, and barely touched the aspect of individuals transferring knowledge from educational environment to firms. Secondly, though some studies start applying theoretical base from knowledge transfer literature, no work has been done on the knowledge transfer of academic returnees within their institutions. It is important to do so for two reasons. One reason is that academic returnees and their application of knowledge upon return is an important outcomes of international education, reflecting the relevance of international education programs to the world of work. Another reason is that it has potential to contribute to understanding knowledge transfer by investigating the process in a specific type of organisation. As Huber (2001) argues, influence of a certain factor on knowledge transfer varies across types of organization. The culture of knowledge-intensive organizations are rather unique from other organization types. Higher education, he exemplifies, might be the type of strong workgroup cooperation that maybe extrinsic motive such as pay-for-performance compensation systems does not has a significant effect on creating a knowledge-sharing culture. Thirdly, with the growth of international migrants and knowledge brokers, there needs to be more work about knowledge transfer of this group, especially international graduates. Finally, there is a gap in understanding individual-level knowledge transfer.

This thesis will contribute to fill above-mentioned gaps by investigating factors influencing the knowledge transfer process of academic returnees in public universities in Vietnam. It is therefore expected to connect knowledge in both international knowledge transfer and university-workplace knowledge transfer, and contribute to the better understanding of knowledge transfer within higher education institutions, and at individual level.

1.5. Research objectives and research questions

This research aims at:

- Identifying institutional factors that affect the successful transfer of knowledge from international educational programs to local work environment
- Identifying institutional factors that affect the successful transfer of knowledge specifically in higher education context

It aims to answer the main question: What are institutional factors that affect the knowledge transfer of Vietnamese academic returnees in public universities?

Sub-questions are:

- What are knowledge and skills that academic returnees acquired during their overseas study?
- What are knowledge and skills that they could transfer into Vietnamese public universities? And in what ways?
- What are institutions that affect their knowledge transfer? And in what ways?

1.6. Significance of the thesis

It is significant to study the institutional factors affecting the knowledge transfer of returning academics theoretically and practically.

Theoretically, knowledge transfer remains a 'black box' (Szulanski, 2002; Wang, 2015). More research needs to be done to explore this black box, and unfold the knowledge transfer process in different types of organization, with different sources of knowledge and different characteristics of knowledge itself (Szulanski, 2002). This thesis will contribute partly to this by exploring the knowledge transfer of academic returnees as sources of knowledge into higher education institutions in Vietnam as a specific type of organization. As Huber (2001) argues, influence of a

certain factor on knowledge transfer varies across types of organization. The culture of knowledge-intensive organizations are rather unique from other organization types. Higher education, he exemplifies, might be the type of strong workgroup cooperation that maybe extrinsic motive such as pay-for-performance compensation systems does not has a significant effect on creating a knowledge-sharing culture.

Furthermore, this thesis will contribute to the development of institutional theory in explaining knowledge transfer from education to work. Resulting from this research, an analytical framework for understanding knowledge transfer in higher education context is also developed. These could be considered the most significant contribution of this research to the pool of knowledge.

Practically, being able to unfold the institutional factors affecting academics' transfer of knowledge will help promote positive factors and impede the negative factors in order to better support them to transfer their knowledge into meaningful changes. It is important for Vietnam to make best use of academics' knowledge as it has invested heavily in this group with the hope to modernize the higher education system, and improve the national science and innovation system so as to develop the economy sustainably.

1.7. Organization of the thesis

This thesis is organized into five chapters. This chapter, the first one, introduces readers to the topic of knowledge transfer of international graduates in the local labour market and related issues including brain drain that leads to the significance of enhancing successful knowledge transfer. The following chapter focus on developing an analytical framework for understanding influencing factors to knowledge transfer process in higher education institutional context. Chapter 3 presents the research method used in this thesis to answer research questions. In Chapter 4, the author will analyze collected data using the developed analytical framework and the chosen theory. The final chapter concludes main findings, reflects on the research process, and suggests future research and practical recommendations.

Chapter 2. Analytical framework

2.1. Key concepts

2.1.1. Knowledge

Knowledge is something more than just data and information, but 'a set of information associated to a meaning by an individual or organizational interpretation process' (Albino et al., 1999, p.54). This definition matters to this study because in the case of returnees, certainly it is hard to differentiate between knowledge gained when studying abroad and their overall knowledge gained somewhere else and at different stages of their life. Furthermore, it covers a wide range of knowledge they might acquire in their abroad experience, instead of the mere factual statements and textbook information. So far there has no definition of knowledge of graduate returnees. Some authors studying repatriation and knowledge transfer attempted to define repatriates' knowledge (see for example Oddou et al., 2009; Subramaniam & Venkatraman, 2001). What is common among these definitions is that they see repatriates' knowledge as knowledge about overseas markets and people, which is different from the knowledge of returnees who studied in foreign countries and might obtain other knowledge other than specific knowledge about doing business in an oversea market. As Roberts (2012) pointed out, there are differences between repatriates and graduate returnees; consequently, the definition of repatriate knowledge does not fully fit with the situation of graduate returnees. Therefore, he offers another definition: 'Returnee knowledge is tacit knowledge of the socially embedded historical environments of the foreign institutions (academic, work, or broader social) in which the returnee was embedded, and the domestic institutions to which the returnee has returned' (p.38). All these definitions recognize returnees' knowledge as tacit and difficult to transfer. It could be argued that returnee knowledge also includes explicit knowledge in which returnees acquired during their educational program, such as via textbook, international standards, technical knowledge. For instance, a teacher of English language during her training abroad got to know an advanced textbook for learning English. She then introduced the book to her home university. Her faculty decides to include the book in the curriculum and her colleagues use the book as materials for teaching. The next section will present different typologies of knowledge and why it matters to knowledge transfer.

2.1.2. Explicit and tacit knowledge

With regard to different typologies of knowledge, Polanyi's (1966) seminal work is frequently cited, in which the author differentiates between explicit knowledge and tacit knowledge. Accordingly, explicit knowledge is codifiable and easily documented in databases, guidelines, or textbooks. It is therefore easy to articulate, transmit and transfer via formal formats such as education regardless of time, place and the knowing subject (Lam, 2000). For example, mathematical formulas, computer programs, and procedures to operate a machine are explicit knowledge. In contrast, tacit knowledge is often personal. It is acquired through experience of an individual, in which one observes, interacts, reflects, learns by doing and internalizes them into one's own knowing (Williams & Balaz, 2008). In other words, tacit knowledge is attached to the knower, and cannot be fully presented, and understood by others, and difficult to transfer via systematic ways such as education and training as does explicit knowledge. More often, it is transferred via personal interaction such as shared experience, observation through group work and interactive talks, which requires the engagement of both knower and knowledge recipients. In line with this typology, Nonaka and Takeuchi (1995, p.62) stated that knowledge can be explicit, tacit, or tacit knowledge could be made 'explicit' to ease transfer and vice versa. They identify four mechanisms of knowledge transfer based on the interaction between tacit and explicit knowledge: (1) socialization – transfer of tacit knowledge through sharing experience, (2) externalization – converting tacit knowledge into explicit concepts to transfer easily, (3) combination – collecting explicit knowledge to transfer systematically, for example documents, computer programs, or educational programs, and (4) internalization – changing explicit knowledge into tacit knowledge through learning from documents, manuals, reading stories that one could learn from past experience without actually doing and observing.

It seems tacit knowledge gained high attention among researchers as many have tried to go further in categorizing different types of tacit knowledge. Nonaka and Takeuchi (1995) divided tacit knowledge into technical dimension, i.e. 'the hard-to-pin-down skills' and 'know-how', and cognitive dimension, i.e. our interpretation of reality and vision for the future such as taken-for-granted beliefs and perception. Boast (1998, cited in Williams & Balaz, 2008, p.57) gives three different examples of tacit knowledge. First, 'things that are not said because everyone understands them and take them for granted' such as awareness about culture of a group and how members of a group make decisions. Second, 'things that are not said because nobody fully understand them', for instance knowledge about art. Third, 'things that are not said because while some people can

understand them, they cannot costlessly articulate them', for example, skills to write and get published internationally that returnees could acquire during their study abroad but not many domestically-trained academics might have known.

2.1.3. Knowledge transfer process

As stated in the scope of the thesis (section 1.3), there are different typologies of knowledge transfer. This thesis focuses on transferring of knowledge within organization and at individual level, from academic returnees to their colleagues.

Argote and Ingram (2000, p.151) define 'knowledge transfer in organization is the process through which one unit (e.g. group, department, or division) is affected by the experience of another'. Similarly, Cutler (1989, cited in Albino et al., 1999) sees it as a process of one actor acquiring knowledge from another. Szulanski (1996, p.28) thinks of knowledge transfer as '*replications* of organizational routines'. These definitions describe knowledge transfer as a rather passive process of one unit taking knowledge from another, by being 'affected by' or 'replication of' the other's knowledge. Therefore, the role of the source is not emphasized, whether they take initiative in this transfer or not, whether they engage in this transfer, and whether they are aware that their knowledge is being used by another group. Furthermore, while the receiving unit takes a certain role in the transfer in these definitions, the context in which they implement transferred knowledge is not mentioned.

While the above definitions focus on the receiving end of the transfer process, Singley and Anderson (1989, cited in Argote & Ingram, 2000, p.151) pays attention to the source, referring to knowledge transfer as 'how knowledge acquired in one situation applies (or fails to apply) to another'. They emphasize the action of sharing knowledge by the transferor, without attention to how the recipient receives and uses knowledge. It contrasts with Kostova's (1999), Wang's (2015) and many others' understanding of knowledge transfer, concerning the successful transfer as a process that requires active participation between both the transferor and the recipient. From an institutional perspective, Kostova (1999) thinks that knowledge transfer does not stop when the receiving unit applies knowledge of the other, but also they internalize this knowledge and make it new institution of the unit. In other words, there are two stages happening in knowledge transfer process: *implementation* (adoption of formal procedures, rules described in the transferred practice), and *institutionalization* (acceptance and approval of the transferred practice as new

institution by the recipient). Similarly, Wang (2015) argues that knowledge transfer occurs in two stages: communication of ideas from transferor to recipient, and evaluation and acceptance of the transferred ideas by the recipient. Only when the new knowledge is adopted and routinized in the new setting, it is considered as a successful transfer. Consequently, knowledge transfer, if successful, creates changes in the receiving unit. Conversely, knowledge transfer fails and has no valuable meaning if the recipient does not integrate the new knowledge, and soon come back to the previous routine (Minbaeva et al., 2010; Szulanski, 1996). Gera (2012, p.257, cited in Tangaraja et al., 2016) also emphasizes the actual process of transferring knowledge must initiate changes in the receiving unit, i.e. by 'applying this knowledge to develop new ideas or enhancing the existing ideas to make a process or action faster, better or safer than they would otherwise been'.

Albino et al. (1999) also share the same understanding about knowledge transfer that involves not only applying knowledge but also internalizing knowledge. The authors consider knowledge transfer has two components: the information system and the interpretative system. Accordingly, they see knowledge transfer in both operational and conceptual level. The operational perspective refers to knowledge transfer as a communication process to exchange information, while the conceptual perspective refers to the concept of learning organization. The conceptual perspective is adopted from the conceptual framework of Gilbert and Cordey-Hayes (1996). Accordingly, knowledge transfer consists of five stages (see figure 1). First, information is acquired from accumulating knowledge from the past, from outside organizations or hiring individuals with new knowledge. Then it is communicated to members of the receiving organization. Next, for knowledge to be transferred into the organization, it has to be accepted among members of the organization. Final stage is to assimilate the knowledge to make changes in the routine, practice, belief, perception and abilities of individuals in the organization as a consequence of using the new knowledge.

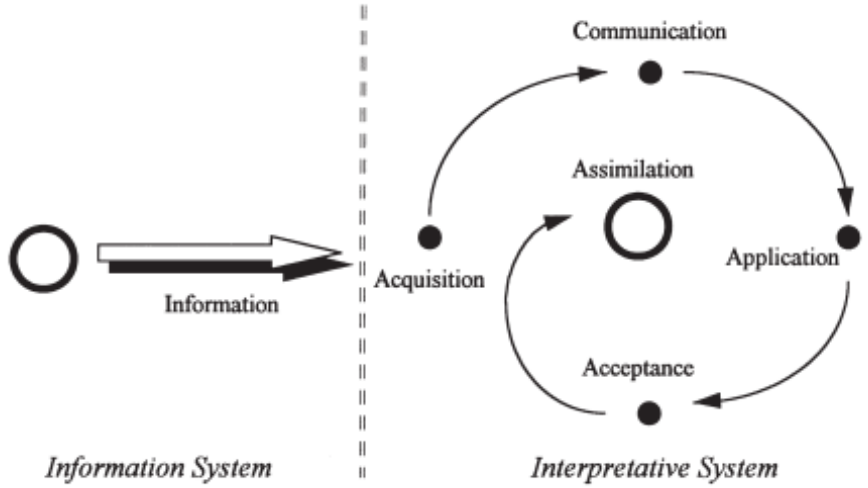

Figure 1: Two components of knowledge transfer (Albino et al., 1999, p.54)

It is noticeable that these definitions describes knowledge transfer at group and organizational level, as well as most research on knowledge transfer analyzes this process at high level and seemingly ignores the individual level. However, knowledge transfer can happen at individual level. For example, an academic staff who acquired a degree in a foreign country could acquire knowledge about that country's culture. They could train other staff about culture, learning styles and communication manners before the department enroll a group of students coming from that specific country. The department later on includes the training materials and his/her knowledge into guidelines for teaching international students. This could be an example of knowledge transfer from an individual to other individuals, group and organization. Knowledge transfer does not limit at intra- and inter-organizational scope. When applying this model to the case of graduate returnees' knowledge transfer, it could be described as follow. Their knowledge is *acquisited* during their education abroad and their prior knowledge. When they joined a new workplace, this knowledge is expected to be *communicated* to the member of their work group, or at a wider context of other members of the organization. This stage involves socializing with the group to build trust and mutual understanding between returnees and group members (Oddou et al., 2009). Returnees and their knowledge then be *evaluated*. If the knowledge is proven suitable for the group or organization, it could be *applied*. The learning stage, *assimilation*, happens when group accepts the returnees as in-group member and the knowledge as suitable to the ability and logics of the group.

However, some authors believe that it is not just the new knowledge that has an impact on the receiving group. When in use with the group's existing knowledge, the transferred knowledge in fact is modified and transformed into new knowledge. Szulanski (2000) described knowledge transfer 'as a process in which an organization *recreates* and maintains a complex, causally ambiguous set of routines in a new setting'. In this definition, the author agrees with others who also look at transfer of knowledge as moving knowledge from one setting to another and recontextualizing knowledge (Antal, 2000; Nonaka & Takeuchi, 1995; Oddou et al., 2009). They show a more mutually-impacted process of transferring knowledge, 'where-by the original knowledge can become *transformed* through the processes of socialization, articulation, internalization, and so forth' (Oddou, 208, p.184). Liyanage et al. (2009, p.124) agrees that 'knowledge transfer, per se, is not a mere transfer of knowledge. It involves different stages of knowledge transformation'. In other words, knowledge transfer in the end leads to changes in the receiving unit and, perhaps, the creation of new knowledge.

In summary, there are several ways of looking at knowledge transfer, depending on how ones define knowledge, who is the main target of research (the source or the recipient, or both), and to what perspective of analysis (operational or conceptual perspective). This study looks at the process of knowledge transfer as agreed by most scholars, that involves not just imparting of knowledge from one to another, but also the implementation and internalization of new knowledge into making changes in the way recipients think and do things. The crucial reason for choosing this definition is because the researcher wants to emphasize the contribution and impact of graduate returnees' knowledge in their working organization. Contribution and impact are considered significant if the new knowledge being used, applied, accepted and re-created by their colleagues.

2.1.4. Knowledge transfer and related concepts

In research about knowledge transfer, there are other concepts that have been used interchangeably or closely associated with knowledge transfer, including *knowledge sharing*, *knowledge resituation* and *knowledge translation*. Understanding the differences and the overlapping between these concepts enables better understanding of knowledge transfer. Therefore, it is important to discuss these concepts and have a clear understanding on the different uses.

Knowledge sharing is often used synonymously with knowledge transfer, as pointed out in the work of Paulin and Suneson (2012), Liyanage et al. (2009) and Tangaraja et al. (2016). From

reviewing previous literature on knowledge sharing and knowledge transfer, they agreed that knowledge sharing is a stage of, but not identical to the knowledge transfer process, and that knowledge transfer should be understood as an overarching concept compared to knowledge sharing. According to Tangaraja et al. (2016), knowledge sharing could happen in a one-way direction, in which an active knowledge owner engages in giving knowledge and making knowledge available to others in their group or organization; or it can happen as a mutual exchange of knowledge among two or more members of group or organization. Knowledge sharing is understood as knowledge giving (in a one-way sharing) and knowledge collecting (in a two-way sharing), but not necessarily involving the assimilating process within the recipient. Therefore, unlike knowledge sharing, the ability to absorb new knowledge of the recipient is crucial to the success of knowledge transfer. According to Paulin and Suneson (2012), most research on knowledge transfer happens at industry level, and research on knowledge sharing happens at individual level. It could be interpreted that it is hard for an individual's transferring knowledge and making changes in the receiving side's belief, values and ability; therefore, knowledge transfer process often ends up in knowledge sharing instead of an actual transfer.

Another term that is closely used with knowledge transfer is *knowledge resituation*. Franken et al. (2016) used Eraut's (2004) definition of knowledge resituation as 'a process engaged in by learners in which they understand the new situation, recognize what knowledge and skills are needed in that situation, extract them to fit the new situation, and integrate them with other knowledge and skills in order to think/act/communicate in the new situation' (p.694). It points out that this process is referred to returnees' strategy to fit in the new workplace. According to Oddou et al. (2009), this is an initial and critical stage of knowledge transfer in order for the returnees and their knowledge to be accepted by the work group, and be able to be transferred successfully. Oddou et al. (2009, p.184) in fact includes '*recontextualization* of knowledge' in the process of knowledge transfer. In his study of Korean graduate returnees in large Korean firms, Roberts (2012) also pointed out that returnees choose the most relevant knowledge to gain trust and acceptance before gradually transferring more distant knowledge to the group's institutional logics. Therefore, knowledge resituation could be understood as one stage or strategy to succeed in transferring knowledge; while knowledge transfer happens when the knowledge of returnees is introduced to the work group, judged, accepted, applied and inserted as part of the group's knowledge.

Meanwhile, other authors use *knowledge translation* concept in parallel with knowledge transfer. For example, Williams and Balaz (2008, p.40) suggested that 'transfers between individuals in the same setting..., let along transfers between settings, are perhaps better thought of as *translation*'. They describe that the translation process happens at both the source, where returnees resituate their knowledge to fit the new setting, and at the recipient, when they make use of the newly transferred knowledge in combination with their existing knowledge and apply in actions. Through the process, knowledge creates changes to the actions and actors, and vice versa, knowledge itself is transformed. Therefore, knowledge translation could be included as part of the knowledge transfer process.

2.2. Factors influencing knowledge transfer

It is difficult to transfer knowledge (Szulanski, 2000) due to various factors. Though different authors have different ways to categorize these factors, the review of different literature shows that the majority of them relate to Szulanski's (1996) set of factors, i.e. characteristics of (1) the transferred knowledge, (2) of the source, (3) of the recipient, and finally (4) of the context in which the transfer happens.

Firstly, as discussed in section 2.1.2, the level of stickiness of knowledge can signify sticky transfer (Szulanski, 1996). Explicit, codified knowledge could be transferred more easily and systematically than tacit knowledge because tacit knowledge requires high level of human interaction. However, Polanyi (1966) argues that all knowledge is tacit to some extent and inherited in the knower, making transfer of knowledge often difficult. The more tacit it is, the more difficult the transfer is (Ladd & Heminger, 2002). Some authors (Lawson & Potter, 2012; Szulanski, 1996) refer to 'causal ambiguity' of knowledge, meaning the inability to understand the logical reasons behind the outcomes or successful practices, which makes it difficult for the recipient to identify the knowledge they need to acquire from the source. Meanwhile, others refer to the relevance of the knowledge transferred to the recipient (Liyanage et al., 2009) or the proven usefulness (Szulanski, 1996), the content of knowledge whether it is instrumental, task-based knowledge or cultural understanding of values, beliefs, language and background of individuals in the receiving group (Albino et al., 1999).

Secondly, the source matters in terms of their motivation or openness to transfer knowledge (Albino et al., 1999; Liyanage et al., 2009; Szulanski, 1996; Wathne, Roos, & von Krogh, 1996).

Some factors influence their motivation, including reward for transfer, or time and sources to support transfer. Their identity and how this identity is perceived by recipients are also important to the success of knowledge transfer. A person highly appreciated as knowledgeable and trustworthy by the group could be more successful in transferring knowledge, even though the transferred knowledge is distant to the group's logics. This could be enhanced through communication; that is why a number of research emphasize the importance of media and channels of interaction in facilitating dialogue, personalized interaction, team learning which increase the opportunities to transfer knowledge (Albino et al., 1999; Minbaeva et al., 2010; Wathne et al., 1996).

Thirdly, equally important, characteristics of recipients affect transfer of knowledge. It is presented by the willingness to receive knowledge, which is correlated to the level of trust, their attitude towards the source (Albino et al., 1999; Wathne et al., 1996); their absorptive capability, referred as ability to recognize, learn and use new knowledge and their prior knowledge (Albino et al., 1999; Ladd & Heminger, 2002; Roberts, 2012; Szulanski, 1996; Wathne et al., 1996); and their retentive capacity to institutionalize the new knowledge (Szulanski, 1996).

Next, context could facilitate or imped knowledge transfer. It includes internal context such as structure, procedures, systems, and relationship between source and recipient (Szulanski, 1996), external context such as market, political and socio-economic conditions, cultural aspects, or both (Albino et al., 1999; Liyanage et al., 2009).

There are three observations from this set of factors influencing knowledge transfer. First, these factors are mutually related to each other, in which one factor could directly influence another factors and thus indirectly affect knowledge transfer. For instance, prior interaction between source and recipient may help them build knowledge about what the other knows or can do, which can confirm the relevance of the knowledge they intent to transfer. It also relates to the level of favorability of the relationship between them. Second, as Szulanski (2000) points out, knowledge transfer research before him stressed out the impact of motivation of actors involving in transfer activities. In his work, he discovered that motivation to transfer and receive knowledge is not most important factor, in fact, the lack of absorptive capability, causal ambiguity and an arduous relationship between transfer partners cause the most challenges to the transfer process. Thirdly, talking about motivation, Minbaeva et al. (2010) found that intrinsic motivation has far stronger

influence on the individual ability to transfer and use knowledge, which affects knowledge transfer at individual level. In fact, extrinsic motivation such as financial reward has no impact.

2.3. Factors influencing cross-border knowledge transfer

The previous section describes difficulties of knowledge transfer. Given the differences in the cultural, socio, economic and politic context, cross-border knowledge transfer offers more challenges that draw attention of researchers and deserves a separate section. Furthermore, as this thesis is about transferring knowledge of academic returning from abroad into the context of their home institutions, it is related to the theme of cross-border knowledge transfer. As stated in research gaps (section 1.4), research on international graduate returnees' knowledge transfer is rare, and therefore it is reasonable to expand this review to include influencing factors of the cross-border knowledge transfer activities by repatriates and expatriates.

Researchers have developed different theoretical and conceptual frameworks to understand international knowledge transfer. Most of them adopted Szulanski's (1996) approach by dividing influence factors into characteristics of the transferred knowledge, of the involving actors, and the transferred context, with some modification. For example, Bonache and Zarraga-Oberty (2008) build their conceptual framework for transferring knowledge within multi-national companies with four groups of factors: specific characteristics of knowledge, the ability and motivation of international staff, the ability and motivation of local staff, and their relationship. Additional to common factors in normal transfer (see section 2.2.3), international transfer in their framework also deals with other factors such as the similarity in culture, the interpersonal sensitivity of expatriates and the perceived reliability of expatriates. These factors are the highlights of international knowledge transfer research.

Meanwhile, Oddou et al. (2009) only focus on the characteristics of transferors and receivers, and the 'share field' (p.186) between them in which they communicate knowledge. They exclude the characteristics of knowledge. What is different in this model about international knowledge transfer compared to normal transfer in the previous section is that the authors bring in other international factors, such as how important the group perceive repatriate knowledge and whether the group has global mindset. The authors argue that 'a critical mass of repatriates in their work units facilitated knowledge transfer' (p.191). The possible distance in cultural, norms, and social identity between repatriates and other group members is assumed to be higher in international

knowledge transfer, leading the authors to stress special attention on *trust* as a key factor in share field. They said 'in theory, repatriates should have some degree of experience in developing a shared field from their cross-cultural experience where the development of trust is essential' (p.193).

The notion of fit is again emerged in the conceptual framework by Lazarova and Tarique (2005). Their work is based on the fit model that describes three types of fit to achieve knowledge transfer success: i) the fit between repatriate's readiness to transfer and organization's receptivity, ii) the fit between the types of knowledge transferred with the tools organization has to transfer (such as assigning people to the right job positions, team training and coaching, action learning, lectures, presentations, case study discussions, articles in newsletter, intranet), and iii) the fit between repatriate's career goals and organization's career opportunities and support.

Unlike other studies, Kostova (1999) develops a context-based theoretical framework on the basis of institutional theory, organizational culture and resource dependence theory. In this framework, the author identifies influential factors in three levels of analysis: social, organizational and individual. The author argues that cross-border knowledge transfer is affected by the *institutional distance* between organizations setting in two different countries, therefore looking at institutional rather than just cultural dimension when analyzing the social context. Institutional distance can be reflected in three pillars: regulatory, cognitive and normative. Meanwhile, she refers to organizational culture of the receiving unit when analyzing the organizational-level context with factors such as learning orientation, absorptive capability and compatibility between values underlying the transferred knowledge and the culture of the unit. Although these factors are discussed in other studies as well, it seems more logical to apply the institutional aspect as well in the organizational context, because the initial intention of the author is not just to look at cultural aspect of the transfer. The third set of factors lie in the relational context, referring to the attitudinal and power/dependence relationship between actors in the transfer process. If receiving unit is highly committed, or dependent on the parent organization, it is more likely that the knowledge will be transferred successfully. However, high level of dependence could lead to the implementation of new knowledge, but is not a guarantee that it will be internalized (Ibid.).

Kostova's (1999) framework has been empirically tested. Riusala and Suutari (2004) first test the applicability of the model by a qualitative survey. Then Riusala and Smale (2007) follow up with

a quantitative survey of Finnish expatriates. They found that Finnish expatriates often engage in transferring more complex, difficult-to-teach knowledge, however, the uncodificability does not significantly affect the difficulty of knowledge transfer. Furthermore, all three institutional dimensions in social context do not show significant challenge to knowledge transfer. This shows quite similar finding from Kostova and Roth (2002) that only the cognitive dimension has impact on the transfer of organizational practices in multi-national corporations. At organizational level, absorptive capability shows the greatest impact, while organizational culture has little effect on the level of difficulty in knowledge transfer. Relational-related variables also show no significant influence.

As can be seen, many studies on international knowledge transfer offers comprehensive theoretical and conceptual frameworks. However, little empirical research has been done.

2.4. The returning academics' knowledge transfer and higher education context

The characteristics of higher education organizations could possibly affects academics' knowledge transfer as well as the changes in higher education sector that also affects academic work. Knowledge transfer success, by definition, involves changes in institutional rules or beliefs. There are 'some fundamental characteristics of higher education organizations that affect their ability and capacity for change' (Gornitzka, 1999, p.11).

The first characteristic is that higher education organizations are 'bottom-heavy' (Ibid., p.12) because there is the tradition of appraising academic freedom in higher education environment. With high professional autonomy centralized to academic community, 'collective action at institutional level is low and there is a strong diffusion of power in decision-making processes in higher education organization [and] this leaves a weak role for institutional leadership' (Ibid., p.12). In Vietnam, there seems a mix of this characteristic with the culture of hierarchy and seniority. Academics in Vietnam are highly recognized both institutionally and culturally, therefore, leading positions of Vietnamese higher education institutions are often appointed among professors with high academic and political profiles. However, with little experience, these people are less likely to possess leadership skills. Furthermore, culturally speaking, there is the strong hierarchy and stress on seniority in terms of both age (associated with wisdom) and position (associated with power). This strong emphasis puts the decision-making into the hand of leaders rather than academics. However, what makes change difficult is that leaders do not have capacity

and authority to make decisions, because of many regulations and control from top administrators. A dean or leader of a discipline would simply be the reporter of top-down decision or bottom-up feedback. Therefore, it could be said that the Vietnamese system is more 'top-heavy' than 'bottom-heavy' which creates potential challenges for bottom-up change, in this case is knowledge transfer at individual level.

The second characteristic of higher education institutions is that these organizations have a loosely-coupled structure (Birnbaum, 1988), with ‘a high degree of structural differentiation, where ‘each department is a world in itself’’ (Gornitzka, 1999, p.12). Departments within higher education organizations are often organized into disciplines. Disciplines are independent to each other and have their own significant culture and institutions (Becher & Trowler, 2001). The high level of independence makes it hard to coordinate interaction between different academic units, which in turn makes collective knowledge sharing and transfer difficult. Therefore, it is more likely to happen at the group or unit level.

2.5. Institutional theory and application to knowledge transfer in higher education context

Institutional theory has been claimed to be a powerful framework to explain behavior of individuals and organizations in institutional environment (Dacin, Goodstein, & Scott, 2002). Institutional theorists claim that there are taken-for-granted, enduring institutional rules, practices, norms, beliefs and values that shape institutional actors’ behaviors in specific circumstances (Oliver, 1991; Olsen, 2005). Scott (2014) developed a three-pillar framework to understand institutions, consisting of: *regulative pillar* (rules and laws that monitoring and regulating activities), *normative pillar* (norms and values that define the appropriate ways of how to perceive, evaluate and do things; or defined roles given to particular actors or social positions), and *culture-cognitive pillar* (shared frameworks and logics of thinking and interpreting meanings, symbols and actions). In order to gain legitimacy and necessary resources for its survival and development, organizations must conform to institutions in which they are operating. Therefore, organizations within the same institutional environment tend to share the same structures, processes and responses to similar institutional constraints. DiMaggio and Powell (1983) identified three types of isomorphism: *coercive* (pressure to follow laws, and regulations to gain legitimacy), *mimetic* (pressure to follow others’ behaviors when facing uncertainty), and *normative* (pressure to conform to professional practices in an industry or profession).

While the early work on institutional theory focused on explaining the passive reaction of organizations leading to the homogeneity of organizational practices, recent work has shifted focus to the 'deinstitutionalization' process and institutional change (Battilana, 2006; Dacin et al., 2002). DiMaggio (1988, cited in Battilana et al., 2009) introduced the notion of institutional entrepreneurs as 'change agents who initiate divergent changes, that is, changes that break the institutional status quo in a field of activity and thereby possibly contribute to transforming existing institutions or creating new ones' (Battilana et al., 2009, p.67). Institutional entrepreneurs are referred by researchers as both organizations and individuals (Ibid.). Battilana (2006) develops several propositions about the impact of individuals' position within organization on their likelihood to make institutional change. Specifically, in the same organizational field, individuals in organizations of lower status might face more challenges in institutional change than those in higher status organizations, such as academics in national universities versus counterparts in provincial, small universities. Another proposition is that individuals in lower status social groups within an organizational field are more motivated to make institutional change than those in higher status social groups. For instance, being referred as high social groups compared to other social groups such as businesspeople might affect academics' tendency to maintain the existing institutions that 'the higher individual's higher inter-organizational mobility has been, the more likely they are to conduct divergent organizational change'. Furthermore, people in higher position in organizational hierarchy, people new to organization and people with higher inter-organizational mobility are more likely to conduct institutional change.

The change process is further explained by Dacin et al. (2002) that: 'actors are not passive. They make choices in the interpretation of the meaning and put forth. Actors perceive the meaning of institutions and infuse their actions with meaning based upon these perceptions' (p.47). However, institutions are often change resistant because they are embedded in actors' behaviours, cognitive structures and interests (Diogo, Carvalho, & Amaral, 2015). Therefore, institutional changes do not happen immediately and are not easy to implement, but go through a process of 'theorization and legitimation by existing or new actors' (Dacin et al., p. 48). Existing institutions are weaken, new institutions are justified, gain increasing legitimacy, and thus being institutionalized. When actors (organizations, individuals) face institutional pressures to conform, according to Oliver (1991), there are five types of responses: acquiesce, compromise, avoid, defy and manipulate. In the case of institutional entrepreneurs, acquiescence, compromise to comply with existing

institutional rules are not their choice as their goal is to transform and create new institutions that put forward their interest. Neither would they avoid or escape from the institutions that they conflict with by moving to another domain or changing their objectives. They may dismiss, challenge or attack the status quo and insist on injecting new practices and norms, especially in the situations that the institutions are weak, or too diverge with their interests. Ideally, they may choose to co-opt with another actor to leverage conflicts with old institutions, influence, or exhibit controlling power upon the institutions to introduce and empower new norms and values, gain acceptance and thus institutionalize new institutions.

Application of institutional theory to explain the phenomenon of knowledge transfer of academic returnees to local universities is both possible and suitable for three reasons.

Firstly, institutional theory can be used to analyze institutional process in both macro and micro level analysis. The macro level refers to the embeddedness of organizations and individuals in the wide social context of the country or state in which they operate. The early institutional theory often focuses on macro level analysis to deal with organizational isomorphism and convergence. The micro level considers the role of individuals in institutional change. Neo-institutional theory emphasizes the role of both organizations and individuals in institutional change, for instance institutional entrepreneurship (Battilana, 2006). Therefore, it is suitable for this thesis as it concerns social and organizational institutions affecting individual knowledge transfer and whether individuals in a particular institutional environment could act as agent of institutional change, and how they react to institutional pressure to transfer knowledge.

Secondly, by definition, knowledge transfer is an institutionalization process of new knowledge into a specific institutional environment. As discussed thoroughly in section 2.1, knowledge is contextually-embedded, meaning that it is embedded in institutions from its original context. The process of introducing new knowledge in a new context could be seen as bringing new institutions to that context. Academic returnees might go through the process of 'theorization and legitimation' (Dacin et al., p.48) of their foreign knowledge, and face five strategic responses to institutional pressure – acquiescence, compromise, avoidance, defiance, or manipulation (Oliver, 1991). Therefore, using institutional theory to study institutional factors influencing academic returnees' knowledge transfer is suitable. Above-mentioned studies by Kostova and Roth (2002) and Robert (2012) proves the possibility of using this theory in knowledge transfer.

Thirdly, there is no suitable theory in higher education studies that have been applied in knowledge transfer. As pointed out in research gap, there are a few studies about transferring knowledge from international education to work. These studies all borrow different theories outside higher education studies. Moreover, institutional theories have been used to explain some phenomenon in higher education studies. For example, Cai and Mehari (2015) investigated the use of institutional theory in higher education research and claimed that despite the high potential of utilizing institutional theory, only a few higher education researchers use institutional theories. When used, it is often combined with other theories to explain the characteristics of higher education institutions, mainly at the macro level. They called for more higher education research using institutional theory, especially at micro level. Therefore, this thesis contributes to the development of institutional theory by applying it in investigating the knowledge transfer process of academic returnees as agencies of change in higher education context.

2.6. Analytical framework for understanding factors influencing academic returnees' knowledge transfer process

There are a number of analytical framework available for analyzing influence factors to knowledge transfer (see for example Bonache & Zarraga-Oberty, 2008; Kostova, 1999; Lazarova & Tarique, 2005; Oddou et al., 2009). However, none of them fits this study well. The closest framework is Kostova's (1999) where she employs the notion of institutional distance to hypothesize the influence of country institutional differences on knowledge transfer. However, there are four main reasons for not using this framework. First, the framework with many levels of analysis is rather too complicated for the study. It includes three levels of analysis: social, organizational and relational. That means each institutional factor would need to be categorized to appropriate level before analyzing. It is not easy to do so because some institutions, such as value of hierarchy, are presented in all three levels. Second, at organizational level, she looks at organizational culture as factors influencing knowledge transfer. It is not applicable to this study given that Kostova (1999) targets at transferring of specific organizational practices, suitable for case study. Meanwhile, this study is not a case study, but investigates transferring different types of knowledge and skills happening in many organizations. This study does not focus on cultural aspect of the organization, but rather explores institutions affecting the transfer process through which culture constitutes an institutional pillar. Third, it is not necessary for this study to have separate analysis of social factors

and organizational institutional factors. The initial idea of the researcher was to adopt this framework and have two levels of analysis, social and organizational context. However, during data analysis, it was found that many universities adopt similar institutions. It could be explained that (i) public universities in Vietnam are still heavily dependent to the State and therefore, do not have much autonomy to decide on their own policies, including finance and personnel, (ii) many social factors are strongly embedded in organizations and direct actors' behaviors. Fourthly, relational context in Kostova's framework refers to the attitudinal and power relationship between parent company and recipient unit. This is not suitable to apply in this study because it is about transferring of individual knowledge to workgroup that has no dependence on where the returnees is from. Therefore, a suitable analytical framework for this study is developed by adopting Scott's (2014) institutional pillar without separated analysis of social and organizational level, as in figure 2.

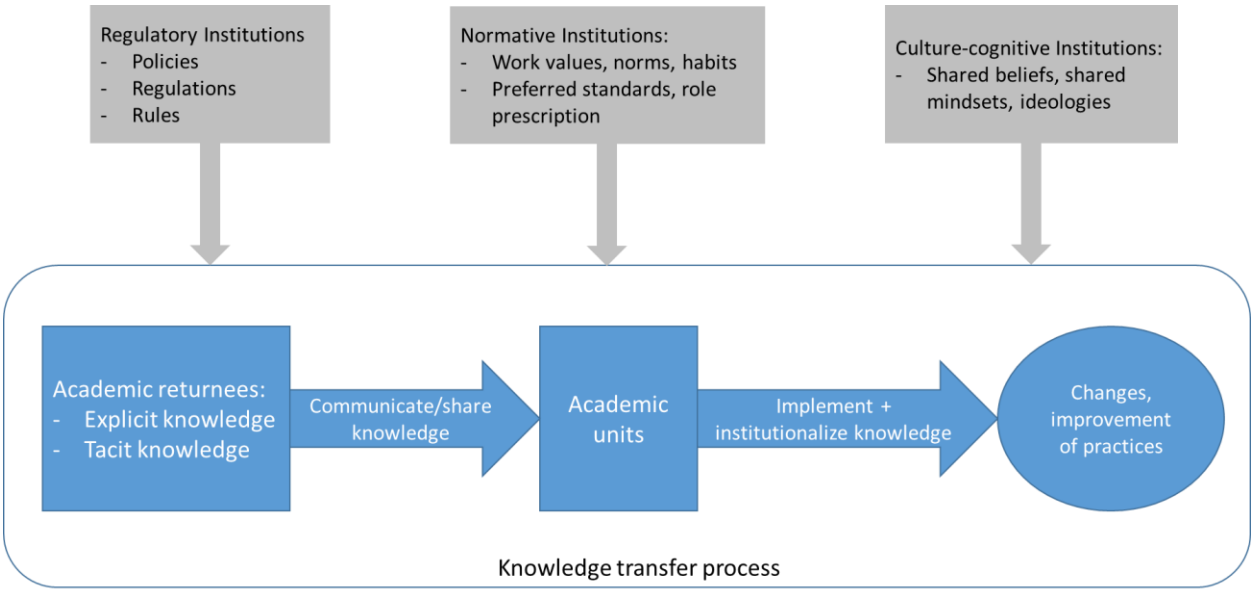

Figure 2: Analytical framework

Adopting the definition by Kostova's (1999), Wang (2015) and Albino et al. (1999), the knowledge transfer process in this study is described in two stages.

In the first stage, academic returnees share their knowledge and skills to their workgroup. As discussed in section 2.1.2, the transferred knowledge could be explicit and tacit. Explicit knowledge of academic returnees could be the textbook, materials, techniques and other expertise knowledge they brought from their educational programs. Tacit knowledge could include

knowledge about culture, educational system of the host countries, academic and scientific network, research skills, learning skills, foreign language or new ideology of education. Knowledge transfer research (Oddou et al., 2009; Roberts, 2012) often refers to tacit knowledge as target for their research and mostly ignore the transfer of explicit knowledge, with assumption that explicit knowledge, defined as highly codifiable and teachable and therefore can be easily transferred systematically through documentation or educational programs. This tendency is understandable because i) most knowledge has tacit components (Polanyi, 1966), and ii) it is both more problematic and more desirable to transfer tacit knowledge as it is considered more valuable and creates greater competitive advantages for organizations. However, it could also be argued that even though explicit knowledge can be teachable and shared easily, it is not guaranteed to be understood, learnt and applied by receivers, depending on various factors such as their willingness to receive, their absorptive capacity or effectiveness of communication channels. According to the survey of international graduate returnees from Germany, explicit knowledge is mainly shared through formal trainings or sharing textbooks and materials with colleagues; meanwhile, with more tacit knowledge, transfer happens mostly in the forms of coaching, mentoring or informal teaching, helping colleagues solve problems or acting as role model or source of inspiration for others (Kuschminder, Sturge, & Ragab, 2014). Meanwhile, Nonaka and Takeuchi (1995) stated that tacit knowledge could be made explicit and easier to transfer. Four mechanisms of transferring knowledge that they described are: socialization – for example, academic returnees share teaching and research experience abroad with colleagues during informal talks, externalization – academic returnees integrate independent learning skills they acquired from the international education programs into the explicit learning assessments of the syllabus, combination – academic returnees' explicit knowledge is documented, computerized or integrated in the curriculum, and internalization – procedures, techniques or other forms of explicit knowledge of academic returnees are put in manuals and guidelines or newsletter of the institutions so as for others to learn from their experience without actually doing or observing it.

In the second stage, recipients evaluate and decide whether to adopt the shared knowledge or not. If the new knowledge is adopted by recipients, only then the knowledge transfer is considered successful. Otherwise, it is merely knowledge sharing. As discussed in section 2.2 and 2.3, there are different factors influencing the receptiveness of the receiving group, including the organizational culture that supports learning and innovation or not, their capacity to absorb and

use new knowledge, the relevance of the transferred knowledge to the recipients and their perception of the returnees. Review of literature on factors influencing knowledge transfer process (section 2.2 and 2.3) also shows that (1) these factors do not exist independently to each other, rather they could strengthen or weaken each other, and (2) each factor is influenced by other factors. For example, absorptive capacity could be influenced by the level of education of group members and their prior international experience, while the perception about returnees could influenced by the organizational knowledge about who is able to do what and who knows what as well as the educational and experience similarity between returnees and their colleagues (Ladd & Heminger, 2002).

Finally, the whole knowledge transfer process always happens in a context, referring to the characteristics of the organization or group in which transfer happens (Albino et al., 1999; Kostova, 1999; Oddou et al., 2009; Szulanski, 2000). According to institutional theorists, there are taken-for-granted institutions shared among members of a specific group or organization. New institutionalism put forward the idea that institutions can be de-institutionalized by active actors and new institutions can be infused in the group or organization. As analyzed in section 2.5, knowledge transfer can be described as a process of institutional change, through which academic returnees with their new knowledge and skills are able to bring about the change in the way their colleagues do the job, their way of thinking or routine practices, or in other words, the enduring institutions. Both academic returnees and recipients are embedded in the same institutional environment that could constrains or enable the knowledge transfer process. The institutional change does not happen automatically when the new knowledge is introduced. Institutional resistance to change might incur. Academic returnees might exploit one of five strategies: acquiesce, compromise, avoid, defy and manipulate (Oliver, 1991) to response to the resistance to institutionalize the transferred knowledge.

In order to operationalize institutions affecting knowledge transfer process, the three-pillar institution framework of Scott (2014) is included in the analytical framework of this study. It comprises of regulatory, normative and culture-cognitive pillars. A summary of elements constituted each pillar and examples is given in the table below.

Institution	Elements	Example
Regulatory	- constitutions, laws, rules, directives, regulations, formal structure of control, procedures, political structure - rule setting, establishing, inspecting conformity, manipulating sanctions - Force, sanctions, expedience	Administrative procedures Policies for teaching Policies for researching Governance policies (Human resource policy, supporting policies, organizational structure, feedback mechanism, funding)
Normative	- values, norms to identify what is moral, right or wrong, the appropriateness - the preferred, standards, prescription of specific roles, professions, positions in society or organization - right and responsibilities, obligatory behaviors - how things should be done	Value of hierarchy Value of cooperation/team spirit Value of social capital Roles in academics in organization What is right/wrong for returnees' behaviors
Cognitive	- shared conceptions, cognitive frames to interpret meanings - shared assumptions, understandings, beliefs, ideologies that affect how actors interpret and respond to the world around them - taken-for-granted logics – 'the way we do these things'	Ideology about education Ideology about doing science Perception of returnees' knowledge Perception of criticism Perception of change and innovation

Table 1: Understanding three pillars of institutions (Scott, 2014)

2.7. Summary

In this chapter, key concepts and influence factors to the process were reviewed in order to develop a suitable analytical framework for understanding factors influencing knowledge transfer of academic returnees. The applicability of institutional theory to explain the phenomenon of knowledge transfer of academic returnees to public universities in Vietnam context was also justified. In the next chapter, method and procedures used to collect and analyze data will be presented.

Chapter 3. Research Methodology

The thesis aims at achieving the following objectives within the higher education context:

- Identifying institutional factors that affect the successful transfer of knowledge from international educational programs to local work environment
- Identifying institutional factors that affect the successful transfer of academic returnees' knowledge specifically in higher education context
- Explore academic returnees' response to these institutional factors.

In chapter 1, the problem statement has shown the urgent need for understanding the challenges of transferring international graduates' knowledge from education to work in their home countries. Research gaps have been identified, including the lack of empirical research in cross-border knowledge transfer in general and cross-border knowledge transfer by academic returnees in higher education context specifically. This chapter will describe procedures in collecting empirical data from academic returnees' experience in transferring their foreign knowledge in local public universities, through which the institutional factors are to be revealed during data analysis. Some limitations and problems of the chosen research design will also be presented.

3.1. Research strategy

The researcher intends to use the qualitative approach to answer the research questions. Specifically, the researcher will implement in-depth interviews of academic returnees (further description of data collection method is provided in section 3.2). The researcher was aware of and also considered the use of quantitative method for this thesis. In the end, the researcher chose qualitative method for three reasons as below. Quantitative method, however, is a valuable alternative option and could be utilized in the follow-up phase of this study.

First and foremost, as pointed out earlier, very few research have been done about knowledge transfer of international graduate returnees from education to work, and even none has been done for the case of academic returnees. Therefore, there is a need to first qualitatively identify meaningful influence factors in higher education context specifically that enables testing the level of influence of factors and correlation between them. Interviews with academic returnees on their subjective experience in transferring knowledge upon return could reveal factors affecting their

experience, what facilitates and what impedes them. Even though influence factors have been identified in knowledge transfer in industries and multi-national companies, other factors would emerge given the specific characteristics of higher education context and of academic profession as discussed in section 2.3.2. For example, the changing landscape of academic profession under the pressure of neo-liberal policies, such as assessing job performance on the basis of publications and grants received for research could be a new factor that is not specifically considered in the industry. Furthermore, Vietnamese higher education is in transition period from centralized governance to decentralization with many new policies and practices introduced into the system. Meanwhile, the higher education sector, as above-mentioned, is rather bottom-heavy and change-resistant. It takes time for Vietnamese universities, especially the public ones, to transform to the new policy setting which make it even more different a working environment compared to the business sector that is privatized long ago, fast changing and market-driven. Meanwhile, some factors identified from industry might be irrelevant to this thesis, such as the commitment of receiving unit to the parent companies because members of receiving units have not obligation to commit to the individual returnees or the foreign institutions and countries from which they used to study. There is no way to ensure that factors enlisted in a specific setting will be culturally and contextually relevant to another setting unless a qualitative survey is conducted to identified what relevant to include.

Secondly, researcher's worldview has an influence on the research design that they choose, qualitative, quantitative or mix approach (Cresswell, 2009). Positivists advocate a 'deterministic philosophy' (Ibid., p. 7) of the world, in which they interpret a phenomena through 'a small, discrete set of ideas to test' (p.7). They target at measuring 'objective reality' that is controlled by certain rules and laws (p.7). This view often leads researcher to quantitative approach. The researcher finds that positivist view is problematic to this thesis in two ways. As it was pointed out above, there is no one-size-fit-all model and constructs that could be borrowed for knowledge transfer in higher education context. Another problem is that these factors are identified by Western researchers in Western context, while my research is placed in the very specific historical and cultural context of Vietnam. Meanwhile, the constructivist worldview looks at reality more flexibly and subjectively. Instead of categorizing things objectively into a few sets of ideas, this worldview acknowledges different meanings that individuals have towards things on the basis of their experience, interaction, cultural values and norms they possess and inherit from their

surrounding world (Ibid.). It helps resolve the 'deterministic' problem in the positivist view that ignores cultural, historical and context sensitivity. Particularly, knowledge transfer is a complicated multi-stage process, making it difficult to measure numerically. Even researchers sometime misconceptualise knowledge transfer with some other terms, as pointed out in section 2.1.4, it would be the case that respondents also fall into that misconceptions if the survey questionnaire fails to operationalize properly the concept 'knowledge transfer' which could lead to the failure of the whole research. In other words, constructivist worldview helps me address the problems related to cultural and contextual difference between my study and previous studies, and avoid highly-possible disastrous failure. Constructivist worldview often suggests a qualitative approach.

Finally, some practical issues arise that affect the choice of research methodology. The lack of information about academic returnees makes it difficult to identify and distribute survey questionnaire to a large amount of them. Additionally, given the time limited to complete this thesis and the lack of previous research in this area, it is not feasible, even too ambitious, to conduct a large-scale survey. The development of an appropriate survey model for study-work knowledge transfer in higher education context itself deserves a separate study. This qualitative approach in fact could serve as an initial step to develop such a model.

3.2. Data collection

3.2.1. Selection of informants

The researcher uses convenience sampling because there is no official list of international graduate returnees and their professions upon return to which the researcher could pick up participants for this research randomly. Furthermore, as the researcher is an international graduate herself, it is convenient to start with the contacts that she have already made during her study abroad and use the snowball techniques to ask interviewees to introduce other contacts that meet specific requirements of the research. Additionally, this research could still be claimed valuable because the research objective is to explore the institutional factors influencing knowledge transfer in higher education context by international academic returnees. This exploratory research serves as a pilot study to prepare for further more detailed statistical testing of the relationship between these factors and the effectiveness of knowledge transfer.

Criteria for choosing participants are:

- Vietnamese international graduates;
- who obtained at least a Master's degree in a foreign country; and
- who returned to work as an academic in a Vietnamese public university for at least half a year.

The reason for choosing participants graduating from a Master's degree is because they have spent a relatively long time period in a foreign country (at least two years) and gained substantial knowledge from their educational program and from their living experience there enough to transfer to their colleagues at home. Those who have had an exchange semester, study tour, study visit or attended short courses are not targeted in this study. Those newly returned and worked for university in less than six months are not included either, because a certain amount of time is needed for them to transfer their knowledge.

The researcher first started contacting Vietnamese international graduate returnees and Vietnamese international graduates from her friend list and asked for their introduction of their friends, and colleagues meeting the requirements. At the end of every interview, the researcher asked interviewees to introduce their colleagues. The advantages of this technique is that the researcher could make use of personal network with many Vietnamese international graduates. It is also easier and more trustworthy for potential interviewees to accept interview invitation when there is certain connection between researcher and invitees. Furthermore, the researcher also called for participants on Facebook pages of Vietnamese international academics and Teaching English as a Second Language as these pages are subscribed by many Vietnamese academic returnees. The researcher crossed check with them whether they met my requirements of sampling before sending official invitation with interview outline and information sheet. From that technique, 56 contacts were obtained, of which 43 of them agreed to participate in interviews. Given the limited time frame and after reaching the stage where responses start repeating, the researcher conducted in total of 19 interviews online and utilized data of 16 interviews. Interviews lasted from 30 minutes to two hours. The reason for selecting data of 16 interviews only is because three interviewees did not meet the requirements stated above. One interviewee works as an administrative staff at a public university instead of working as an academic. Two interviewees work as researchers at a private university and therefore do not meet one criteria. Out of 16 interviewees, there are eight females and eight males. Ten of them work in natural science fields and six work in social science field. List of interviewees is in Appendix 1.

3.2.2. Semi-structured interviews

Preparation

Initially, the researcher intended to conduct structured interviews to collect data according to themes of factors aroused from literature. Advantages of structured interviews are that they are focused, in control, time-saving and easy for data analysis (Burns, 2000). Therefore, the researcher developed a detailed list of open-ended questions to ask the interviewees. The list was presented to the thesis supervisor and thesis panel for their comments. Then, the researcher conducted piloted interviews with a class fellow who is a Vietnamese international student and another friend who is an academic returnee. After receiving feedback and piloted interviewees, the researcher decided to conduct semi-structured interviews for several advantages that it presents, as listed by Burns (2000). First, it gives interviewees more freedom to add new themes and encouragement to share more information when needed; and potentially new ideas come up from their responses. When a new theme or an idea emerges and does not fit in the prepared themes, the researcher could ask further questions to find out more details rather than just pass through it in structured interviews. Moreover, it makes interviews more spontaneous and personal, which is particularly important to build trust and rapport when interviewees do not know the researcher beforehand and are asked to share both negative and positive experience. Third, the researcher could use friendly language to them and explain the concept to them immediately, which does not happen in a questionnaire survey. This is especially useful in the case of knowledge transfer research because even researchers sometime misunderstand the concept. Therefore, the long list of structured questions were improved and replaced by an interview outline.

The interview outline consists of five main parts, starting with warm-up questions about interviewees, including their education program abroad, host country, previous workplace, current workplace, level of education, and year of return. Key point questions are divided into three main themes: (i) their evaluation on the level of utilization of their knowledge and skills in making changes and innovation in their job and workplace, (ii) How certain practices in the academic environment that potentially affect their transfer of knowledge upon return, and (iii) their recommendations to facilitate their knowledge transfer and encourage their contribution to changes and innovations. It is relevant because the chosen definition of knowledge transfer emphasizes that the success of knowledge transfer must result to changes. In part (ii), a few themes was listed

(academic freedom, cooperative environment, human resource policies towards academics, academic activities, facilities and internationalization of the workplace) as triggers for their answer, from which the researcher would ask additional questions to obtain more detailed information or encourage them to come up with other themes they could think of. These themes are generated from literature review of factors influencing international knowledge transfer in chapter 2. The interview outline is in Appendix 3.

The researcher also prepared the information sheet for interviewees to be sent to potential participants. In which, the researcher described the purpose of my research, tasks for interviewees if they agree to participate, estimated time length for an interview, commitment to keep their personal information confidential, possible disadvantages of taking part in this research and contact details of her supervisor and herself. Information sheet for interviewees is in Appendix 2.

Next, the researcher emailed to contacts list and invited them to an online interview for this research. Information sheet and interview outline were attached in emails. Interviewees were asked to respond to invitation in a preferred time frame, with their suggested schedule for interview if they agree to participate. Out of 56 contacts, 43 responded and agreed to participate. Some responses come late when the researcher have already collected sufficient data and therefore no need to conduct further interviews. In total, 19 interviews were conducted during April 2017. 16 valid interviews were used for data analysis.

During the interview

Most interviews were conducted via Skype. Four interviews were conducted via Facebook Messenger because interviewees either not have a Skype account or prefer Facebook Messenger to Skype. The reason for choosing online interviews rather than on-site face-to-face interviews is cost effective and time saving. Since returnees are working across Vietnam and the researcher is staying in Finland, it would be very costly to come back to Vietnam to conduct interviews in different universities located in different cities and provinces. There is also a risk that not all interviews could be scheduled during the planned data collection period in Vietnam. Furthermore, there is limited time given to complete this research. For those reasons, it is more effective and convenient to conduct interviews online. It is also convenient for participants to choose private places, such as at home or at a coffee shop, to talk about negative experience or sensitive issue, if any. The researcher was aware of the disadvantages of conducting online interview that it is harder

to make a connection and build trust with interviewees. Therefore, the researcher was well-prepared for warming up before interviews to make participants comfortable and opened to share opinions. The participants were also informed that they were free to refuse any question that they do not feel like answering or stop the interview at any point they want, so as to make them feel welcomed and not to feel forced to provide make-up answers when it comes to sensitive issues.

Language in all interviews is Vietnamese, mother-tongue of interviewees, to enable them to fully express themselves.

At the beginning of interviews, the researcher recalled the purpose of the research to interviewees, the confidentiality and anonymity of their information, permission for recording and their right to refuse or stop the interview at any time. Most interviewees agree for being recorded, only one interviewee refused recording. This allows the researcher to have accurate and adequate information from interviews and be more focused during interviews, even though it takes much time to transcribe afterwards. Interviews on Facebook Messenger were not recorded because there has not a software to support recording function. The researcher took notes of all interviews to avoid unexpected technical problems happened during the interview, even if they were recorded. It was also figured out that note-taking helps the researcher look at the answer more closely and enables to give additional questions to find out more detailed information.

During the interview, based on the interview outline sent to interviewees, their background information and their responses, the researcher probed additional questions to find out details. The researcher also rephrased their answer in case it is not clear what they said and asked for their confirmation. In some cases, it also encouraged them to talk more about their experience by clarifying their points. Another technique used to obtain more information is to pause and be silent for a few seconds. The interviewees often talked more after that and provided reasons for their answer.

At the end of the interview, the researcher thanked them for their precious time and encouraged them to give further points in case they want to extend topics out of what were asked. The researcher asked them to give feedback on the interview, their overall feelings to improve the sequent interviews. The researcher also asked for their help to introduce their colleagues who also studied abroad and returned to be academics at Vietnamese public universities. Based on the

balance of the interview sample in terms of gender, host countries and field of study, the researcher stated the preferred target so that they could introduce appropriate contacts for the research.

After the interview

The researcher immediately carefully transcribed all interviews words by words. In case there was missing or unclear information, the researcher contacted interviewees for clarity.

3.3. Coding data

Interview data is coded using software Atlas.ti thanks to its availability and user-friendliness. Two stages of coding were implemented.

Stage 1: First-time coding

First-time coding was done to have an overview of the general idea of data, using the analytical framework developed in chapter 2. Super-codes are: knowledge learnt abroad, mechanisms to transfer knowledge, knowledge that is not transferred, regulatory, normative, cognitive institutions, and strategies that returnees used to respond to institutional pressure.

During the implementation of this step, it shows the need for the author to identify more specific codes under each super-codes to facilitate data analysis. Furthermore, an emerging theme is identified. i.e. absorptive capacity. This factor is emphasized in literature review as an influencing factor to success of knowledge transfer. Quite frequently, interviewees mentioned how lonely they felt in their field, and how hard it was for them to find someone interested in their knowledge expertise to collaborate with. When looking closely into this theme, the author realized that there are institutions affecting absorptive capacity. Therefore, it is possible to code absorptive capacity according to institutions. Author then conducted re-coding.

Stage 2: Re-coding

Other codes are identified under super-codes based on emerging themes in dataset. They are summarized in the table below:

Super-code	Ingredients	Code (emerging themes from data)	Key words from data
Regulatory	- constitutions, laws, rules,	Administrative procedures	Project leaders taking care of admin procedures Itemed regulations

Super-code	Ingredients	Code (emerging themes from data)	Key words from data
	directives, regulations, formal structure of control, procedures, political structure - rule setting, establishing, inspecting conformity, manipulating sanctions - Force, sanctions, expedience	Policy on teaching	Stress on teaching Regulate certain teaching hours, overtime High teacher-student ratio
		Policy on researching	Incentivize researching (funding, reward, priorities) Regulate researching hours Some support to attend conference, journal submission Quota on published articles Support (facilities, resources, administrative)
		Governance	Top-down feedback mechanism organizational structure setup policies for promoting knowledge sharing capacity to implement regulations (in effect, take action, transparency, fairness, changing regulations, transparency of information) University autonomy <u>HRM policy</u>: Low salary Assigning job tasks Performance assessment (Rank A,B,C,D) Promotion policy Recruitment policy
Normative	- values, norms to identify what is moral, right or wrong, the appropriateness - the preferred, standards, prescription of specific roles, professions, positions in society or organization - right and responsibilities, obligatory behaviours	Hierarchy	Seniority (age, position in organization) means more experienced and knowledgeable High ego affects ability to learn new things Top-down Not argue with your boss Generation gap. Juniors must learn from seniors. Cây đa, cây đề (big trees with large shadow) Ideas mainly come from senior staff, old staff. Junior, young staff rarely have a say. I do main job but senior academics take leading role in projects You are young, it's hard for you to be leader. Let seniors do. You just return. Let wait a few years and we'll assign you a project and promotion. Student-teacher hierarchy Promotion should be basis of years of stay in organization (sống lâu lên lão làng) Disregard expertise.

Super-code	Ingredients	Code (emerging themes from data)	Key words from data
	- how things should be done		Not to criticize/comment to seniors to show respect, even if they are wrong No or little sharing with senior academics
		Roles	Deputy leader doesn't take responsibilities, no need to be active Academic is highly independent job, leading to lack of sharing and cooperation
		Team spirit/ Cooperativeness	One does one's job, no other's business Lack of cooperation, supportiveness, not shared objectives Individuals are busy concerning their own business (part-time job, managing companies) Loosely connected Feedback only if that involves myself Each academic has own teaching method, rarely discuss & exchange
Culture-cognitive	- shared conceptions, cognitive frames to interpret meanings - shared assumptions, understandings, beliefs affecting how actors interpret and respond to the world around them - shared ideologies - taken-for-granted logics – 'the way we do these things'	Ways of doing these things	The system still works over years, no need to change, just leave it work. Confusion between expertise and leadership Traditional ways of thinking and doing, especially from senior staff, embedded in my university culture Stick to standards, no matter what If the system stills works, no need to change. When it stops working, then we will think of plan B (don't fix if it still works) Think of teaching as easy job, applying same textbooks in years
		Perception about Returnee	Threat to one's power, authority Foreign-favorism, show-off, arrogant Sharing knowledge is perceived as teaching/patronizing
		Perceived criticism	Listen, but not positive response. Not taking my feedback seriously Academic freedom Some issues considered taboo, not to be researched Criticism/comments as disrespecting and pointing out weakness No straightforwardness, preferred underneath meanings Avoid giving feedback and debate in public

Super-code	Ingredients	Code (emerging themes from data)	Key words from data
			Disagreement means hindering the collective effort
		Shared mindset	The presence of other returnees in the field or in organization Formulate of research groups with other returnees, sharing research interest and objective Critical mass Areas of knowledge well-research abroad is lack of interest or too distant to Vietnam context/common understandings Using foreign indicators, foreign report format is not acceptable

Table 2: Coding emerging themes from interview data

3.4. Limitations and potential problems

This research chose qualitative approach over quantitative approach. With this approach, findings are generated on the basis of interpreting people's intuition, emotion, and experiences rather than precise statistics. Opinions of participants could be bias or chances are they could not fully recall memories of a specific event related to the research topic. Therefore, a potential problem could be data could be bias and inaccurate. This problem is dealt with by conducting a number of interviews so that data is collected from different participants rather than from one or two only. Furthermore, to increase objectivity and reduce bias from the researcher's side, interviewees are introduced to researchers through a third person and have no relationship or connection with the researcher before. The day of interview is the first time the researcher met with interviewees. Interviews are recorded and carefully transcribed to ensure the transparency of the process and increase reliability.

A limitation of this research is that results could not be generalized. However, the primary goal is not generalization, but exploration of the phenomenon in the specific context of higher education that has been under-researched. The relatively high number of interviews allows the researcher to identify potential factors and understand how these factors make an influence on knowledge transfer process. Therefore, this thesis would serve as an initial pilot study for large-scale survey with clear definition and operationalization of influence factors as variables. Furthermore,

qualitative approach could mitigate the limitations of quantitative approach, which is highly standardized findings based on the 'deterministic philosophy' (Creswell, 2009) and ignorance of complexity in the context, individual' characteristics and ways of thinking (Burns, 2000). Through interviewing my participants, I am able to understand the different organizational context of their universities in which they exercise transferring their foreign knowledge. Though public universities in Vietnam might share similar characteristics with each other and with other universities worldwide, each university has their own culture, regulations and organizational features that affect knowledge transfer. Even more, their unique characteristics as profession autonomy, state-dependent, loosely-coupled are far different from industrial organizations. Therefore, it is unreasonable to either standardize higher education context or apply the model of knowledge transfer in firm to higher education institutions as might be the case of quantitative approach. Qualitative interview looks more closely into these differences and may suggest a more reasonable categorization of higher education institutions for future quantitative survey. In short, the researcher is aware and cautious in data interpretation not to generalize causal-effect relationship between factors. The researcher will mainly focus on determine the emerged factors from given research site.

Furthermore, convenient sampling is a non-random data collect technique, thus data is not indicated as representative. It is acceptable taking into account that the primary goal of this thesis is not to generalize findings for a large population of academic returnees. Convenient sampling is reasonable for the researcher to collect sufficient data in a limited timeframe and aim at exploring the research phenomenon. The researcher has done different procedures to reduce bias and increase reliability from this non-random technique, including recruiting participants through third party instead of interviewing known colleagues or friends, recording and transcribing data carefully, interviewing participants from different institutions across the country and using open-ended questions to provide participants freedom rather than embedding the researcher's ideas during interviews.

Chapter 4. Data analysis and discussion

4.1. Knowledge gained abroad

Most interviewees claimed that they gained both explicit and tacit knowledge during their overseas period. Explicit knowledge includes knowledge in their expertise areas, for example computer science, quality management in education, bio-materials and chemistry.

It is clearly shown from data that all interviewees appreciated and emphasize the importance of tacit knowledge they gained from abroad. Most of them mentioned research skills, independent learning skills, analytical and critical thinking skills as the most important skills gained during their time abroad. They shared the same opinion that thanks to studying abroad, they are able to conduct research independently and confidently, being open-minded to others' opinions, know how to read, write and present research papers, apply scientific approaches to solve problems, and so on. These are skills and knowledge that are attached to them and can be used in different circumstances.

> 'I think the most important thing I learnt in the UK is critical thinking skills, ability to self-study, actively search and critically evaluate materials and create teaching materials by myself. Before going abroad, I was very confused, now I know where to find materials, and how to evaluate materials for my teaching. I become more independent and active in researching. For example, I am currently doing research about blended-learning.' *(Interviewee 8)*

> 'I studied bio-materials, relatively new area in Vietnam. However, what is important to me is the way to think and address a problem that I learnt abroad, totally different from Vietnamese way, more systematic and step-by-step… So, even if I have to change my research direction, it is not so challenging.' *(Interviewee 12)*

Another noticeable tacit knowledge that is repeatedly mentioned is the new philosophy of education and teaching methods. Many of them commented that the deeply-rooted Confucian's philosophy in Vietnamese culture has been embedded in Vietnamese education system, in which appreciate the hierarchy in student-teacher relationship. This is very different from the Western

philosophy of education of which students are seen as a customer, and education is considered a service sector. There is no such hierarchy relationship in education service.

> 'Vietnam education is still strongly influenced by Confucian's ideology. The way of learning and educating remained the same for many years. The hierarchy culture is heavily embedded, teachers are always in higher position than their students. In Ireland, it is different. They see education as service, and with that ideology, they do the best to deliver high quality educational service. So my philosophy of education also changed accordingly. I think that teachers and students have their own roles with their own responsibilities, and no one is higher and more senior than the other. Therefore, I try my best to share my knowledge with my students, and encourage them to be independent learners, ask questions and discuss with me in classes, or via emails.' *(Interviewee 7)*

Not only their way of thinking about education changed, but also their philosophy of life and their perception about the surrounding world including their thinking about science and research. For example, an academic returnee from the UK stated:

> 'I think a Master's degree in the UK will not bring you much new knowledge, but it opens your horizon, your vision and changes many of your opinions and brings you the new lens to see through your expertise areas, even your world… It is for sure what I learnt in the UK is useful in many ways. First of all, it is about the honest academic spirit. I am strongly aware of and appreciate the integrity in conducting scientific research, respect the truth from scientific research and accept different opinions in science and in everyday life. Before going abroad, I only saw the traditional opinions and traditional ways of conducting research. After coming back from the UK, I have been able to introduce to my students new research methods, new approaches to a research phenomenon… Education in UK changed me a lot, from research methodology, vision, attitude towards scientific research. It changed the way I teach and research.' *(Interviewee 11)*

Other important tacit knowledge that returnees gained from abroad includes the host countries' culture, foreign language, educational systems, academic network, professionality and teamwork skills.

In summary, during their stay abroad, academic returnees in my sample gained not only the textbook knowledge and degree certificates, but also soft skills, new philosophies and ways of thinking. Through their expression, it could be seen that they highly appreciate the tacit knowledge over the explicit knowledge, which could be applied and useful in many different ways, as one returnee said:

> 'I learnt to learn independently, become an independent researcher, look for materials and resources by myself, doing presentations, writing essays, research papers, etc. To be honest, you only learn expertise knowledge to a certain level, you cannot learn everything, but it is important that you got skills that could be used everywhere.' *(Interviewee 15)*

The next section shows whether their knowledge and skills are transferred successfully in their home institutions upon their return, what have been transferred and what have not, and how they are transferred.

4.2. Transferring knowledge at home

Upon return, academics returnees in my sample used various ways to transfer their knowledge into their institutions. There are formal, official ways of transferring knowledge. Formal knowledge transfer activities include research and teaching activities, seminars at institutional level, suggesting new ideas to do a specific task, organizing workshops and contributing in meetings, working in projects, sharing materials, books and experience, and writing books. Other ways are informal, for example group discussions, assisting colleagues in solving problems, personal talk between colleagues.

Among 16 cases of transferring knowledge, it is rarely the cases of successful transfer in which the academic returnee is able to make a change in their group's way of doing things. In most cases, it is hard for them to know whether the recipients have utilized and internalized the new knowledge into their daily practice, or not. Therefore, it would be considered as knowledge sharing, and not yet successful knowledge transfer.

> 'I contributed my ideas and they listened, but it's difficult to say if I could make change. Everyone is independent in their job, they teach their classes, I teach mine. We met around one to two times per month in meetings, not frequently, so it's hard to make any influence

or change to group. If any change to be made, it must come from the top, in accordance with the strategy of faculty, or of the universities.' *(Interviewee 3)*

4.2.1. Explicit knowledge transfer

Some returnees stated that they were able to transfer their new expertise knowledge to their students through teaching and thesis supervision activities.

> 'Supervising students' thesis is part of my job. I have supervised many students to design technology for processing the environmental waste. Some Vietnamese standards has become outdated and not suitable for design. I instructed my students to use other standards rather than Vietnamese standards to design more environmental-friendly and sustainable technology.' *(Interviewee 6)*

> 'Before going abroad, I often developed my teaching notes based on the outline and experience of senior lecturers at my university. The content was not updated. They used the same textbook for many years, from around 15-20 years ago, without any change. When I came back from abroad, I also developed new teaching notes based on the general outline, but I selected and integrated new knowledge I learnt abroad. I also downloaded foreign textbooks in English and include them in my lectures.' *(Interviewee 7)*

However, they could only transfer part of their knowledge, because the capacity of students to absorb this knowledge is limited.

> 'I wanted to apply the flipped class model to my classes, but I couldn't because students do not do their pre-class readings, and they learn quite passively.' *(Interviewee 8)*

> 'Initially, I want to include as much knowledge I learnt abroad in my lectures as possible. I was so eager to share it with my students. Later, I realized that it is not possible because their ability to acquire knowledge is different. I have to adjust my teaching notes, and teaching methods to suit their capability, but not to include all new knowledge.' *(Interviewee 7)*

However, this case of transferring knowledge from academic returnees to students is not included in this thesis. What could be important to this thesis, according to the chosen definition of knowledge transfer, is whether academic returnees could share this knowledge with other

colleagues in their organization and their colleagues integrate it in their teaching activities. For example, an academic returned from the UK with a Master's degree in Applied Linguistics has learnt about new textbook to teach English and suggested to use that textbook in the faculty of English at her university. By doing so, she contributes to change the curriculum. Once the new curriculum is approved, other colleagues in her faculty will use this new textbook in their teaching practice.

> 'I suggested to have a meeting with all teachers in the faculty to discuss using Life as textbook to teach English. This semester, I will experiment to teach my classes with Life. Next month I will report the advantages and disadvantages of this new textbook to the faculty. If it works, the faculty will agree to use Life.' *(Interviewee 8)*

The textbook and materials that academic returnees brought from abroad if proven useful could also be used by their colleagues in teaching, as in the following cases. In one case, even though not everything from these materials could be applied in his faculty, it has become a practice that his colleagues used to assess learning outcomes of students:

> 'Colleagues at the faculty asked for my materials, textbooks and dissertation, and see if they could be useful for their students. There are some basic things from these materials that they introduce to students, and ask them to prepare journals and small assignments from these new topics.' *(Interviewee 9)*

In another case, the knowledge has been shared and used by other colleagues, even though not all colleagues in her faculty internalize it in their teaching practice:

> 'From what I learnt abroad, I see which is good ideas and share with my colleagues. Some of them find it useful, so they use that in their classes. So I shared my knowledge in a small scale like that…' *(Interviewee 1)*

Majority of the cases in my sample show that they have shared their knowledge whenever possible, for instance during academic meetings at their faculty, or during informal talks with their colleagues, but little is known whether the new knowledge is adopted by their colleagues. Only very few cases show that the transferred knowledge is internalized in formal activities and common practices shared among members of their workgroup, for example curriculum design, or it is used

by their colleagues to improve their teaching content. They commented that it is difficult for them to know if the new knowledge they introduced is actually applied in their colleagues' teaching job.

Another common channel for transferring knowledge in academic environment is research, through seminars, asking colleagues to join research group, or participating in a research project. During the research work, academic returnees have the chance to exchange their knowledge with colleagues.

> 'My faculty has two research groups. One is led by director of the faculty who was a research fellow in Australia. He has broad knowledge, reputation and is able to lead the research direction of the group. The other group is led by an academic returnee with strong academic profile, many international publications and wide academic network. I participate in the first research group. The group has a seminar every Friday, 20 seminars per semester. In weekly seminars, the leader will assign one member to present a research paper, proposal or research interest, and everyone could give feedback and learn from his/her presentation.' *(Interviewee 1)*

According to some interviewees, though teaching is a channel for transferring knowledge, they consider researching as a more potential way to transfer knowledge. They explain that it is because academics are highly independent with each other in their teaching, each has their own way of teaching.

> 'Teaching has little room for interaction between academics, mainly between academics and students. Teaching only cannot encourage cooperation between academics. When participating in research, especially in interdisciplinary research, then academics get the chance to discuss with each other and share knowledge.' *(Interviewee 13)*

However, most Vietnamese universities heavily focus on teaching, and much less time, resources and chances for academics to engage in research activities. Many interviewees in my sample do not have opportunities to transfer their knowledge with their colleagues through research, but only a small part of their expertise is transferred through teaching activities, as described above.

> 'In a year after returning from Europe, I could not do much … Then I could apply for research project and got accepted. I apply theories and methods to continue my research, however, there's a problem. The research could not be transferred into practical outcomes

because we lack technology and equipment in Vietnam. Therefore, I cannot go further and deeper in my research, even just to do pilot is difficult in Vietnam context.' *(Interview 6)*

'I don't think I could optimize my knowledge in my work. I am majoring in food technology, but my university does not have a major in this area. So I am assigned to Faculty of Chemistry. I work on bio-chemistry food area, while my colleagues focus on inorganic chemistry, organic chemistry, or analytical chemistry, pretty distant to my area.' *(Interviewee 15)*

One interviewee could only transfer her knowledge to other universities and external group, but not with the workgroup at her institution:

'I felt very sad that I could not contribute my knowledge to my university… However, I could use my knowledge in research project outside my university. I participated in a research project on quality accreditation to develop a model for accreditation for universities in Hochiminh city. My job is to provide feedback and contribute my expertise knowledge for external assessment. I also shared knowledge about the practices in other countries, their accreditation models, their standards. I consult universities to design output indicators, quality management principles, forms, procedures and implementation these principles in order to meet quality criteria. I do all these things together with them and help them understand quality management and how to practice quality management in their organization.' *(Interviewee 14)*

In one case, interviewee disappointed that her explicit knowledge could not be transferred through both teaching and research:

'My expertise is in educational program evaluation, but my university doesn't accept my proposal to evaluate their current Bachelor's programs. It doesn't offer this course in their programs either. So I cannot share my expertise knowledge either in teaching or research.' *(Interviewee 11)*

In summary, explicit knowledge of academic returnees is transferred mainly through teaching and research. In teaching, the transfer process happens when returnees share their expertise knowledge, materials, and textbooks with colleagues and their colleagues could apply and adopt into their teaching content or include them in the new curriculum. Transfer happens mainly in informal

context, without a formal mechanism to share and internalize the shared knowledge into common practices of the organization. The knowledge is received and adopted on an individual, personal basis. Some cases are considered as knowledge sharing rather than knowledge transfer because there is no way to check if the shared knowledge has an impact on the recipients. Regarding research, interviewees evaluate research as a better way to transfer knowledge, where they engage their colleagues in joint research projects, participate in seminars and research groups. However, interview data shows limited opportunity to transfer explicit knowledge through research. In an extreme case, the returnee' expertise is of no use in both teaching and research.

4.2.2. Tacit knowledge transfer

Tacit knowledge is transferred through teaching and research activities. Besides, transfer happens through utilizing returnees' network, contributing to and organizing seminars and conferences as well as influencing the way of thinking of their colleagues.

In teaching, academic returnees apply their foreign academic experience in teaching and creating an independent learning environment for their students. However, even though they are aware of the need to improve the teaching and learning methods at their institutions, they could only apply new methods to their own students. They occasionally share teaching methods with their colleagues, for example during weekly seminars at their faculty, or when their colleagues encountered problems and asked for help. A formal channel to transfer their teaching and learning experience to improve teaching practices is totally absent in all interviewed cases. As many interviewees claim, academics are highly independent in their teaching jobs, and prefer their own ways of teaching. One's class is his own kingdom that others would rarely interfere. It is totally up to the individual academic to decide whether they would want to change his teaching method and content. Furthermore, it is not always ideal to apply a foreign way of doing things into Vietnamese context, as one interviewee shared:

> 'I lived and studied in that environment (in Belgium) so I understand how it works, but it is difficult for my colleagues to imagine what I have experienced, imagine that environment, so that for them to apply my experience into their teaching.' *(Interviewee 9)*

In some cases, academic returnees made an attempt to share their knowledge related to teaching, but cannot make any change accordingly.

> ‘When my faculty wanted to improve curriculum, I contributed my ideas based on my experience and knowledge I gained from abroad, but nothing changed. My colleagues listened but gave no response, if that doesn’t directly relate to them.’ *(Interviewee 7)*

Through doing research jointly with colleagues, returnees are able to transfer research methods, writing skills, tactics to submit papers to conferences and publish research in journals through observation and learning-by-doing. By doing this, academic returnees contribute to motivate research and increase research capacity of their institutions.

> ‘When I newly returned, I cannot do much with my knowledge, because I was too busy with teaching. After that, my university gave priority to foreign-trained PhDs to do research and provide funding for us to do research,… and organize seminars twice every year to share research findings. I asked my colleagues to join me in research projects. At first, they were not confident in doing research, but after about a year working with me, they became more confident. Some of them are now able to apply for their own research project and got approval. We also write and publish research papers together. Before, they didn’t have experience in writing international publications, they lacked both writing skills and research methods. Working with me, they have improved a lot and learnt new skills. I often take care of things related to international standards, when we complete the task, I think my colleagues observe and learn from my experience and turn it into their own skills. I don’t have time to organize workshop, seminar or training to coach them in details.’ *(Interviewee 10)*

Another way that academic returnees could make use of their tacit knowledge to boost research capacity of their institutions is through their foreign network. During their time studying and working abroad, they have made connection with other researchers and their professors. When they returned to Vietnam, they continue their connection with these colleagues abroad, inviting them to conferences in Vietnam, asking for help with research facilities and expertise when doing research in Vietnam. During this interaction, not only academic returnees themselves keep updating their knowledge and skills and expanding their international network, but so do their colleagues working in the same research projects.

> ‘I contacted my professors and invited them to projects with my university and to the conferences organized at my university.’ *(Interviewee 2)*

> ‘My friend invited two of his professors from KU Leuven to be chairman at his institution’s conference. Young researchers like us should keep contact with professors abroad and connect science in Vietnam with the world. It will be meaningful to research environment in Vietnam. Through my friend’s connection, the deputy director of his institution was sent to KU Leuven to do research for several months, then came back and also contributed some publications.’ *(Interviewee 5)*

When experiencing an active and cooperative academic environment in the UK, an academic returnee was inspired to organize conferences at her home university to promote knowledge sharing and learning. The conference has been institutionalized into annual event that engaged participants from other university national-wide. It is therefore a successful case of knowledge transfer.

> ‘It’s me who establish the first conferences for young teachers at my university. This year will be the third year it is organized, and it even expands into conferences for young teachers from all universities on pedagogy. This is forum for knowledge sharing.’ *(Interviewee 11)*

Even though not being able to make use of her explicit knowledge, this interviewee was able to transfer her tacit knowledge into creating environment for knowledge sharing. Her new way of thinking, her attitude towards science and philosophy of education have an influence on her colleagues and changes their thinking as well.

> ‘I think I had a positive influence on some of my colleagues. I encouraged and guide many colleagues, as well as my students to go study abroad. These people start having more open-minded approach to many issues in education, from program development, building content, developing independent learning skills in their students, respecting different opinions in academic debates. I can see the positive change.’ *(Interviewee 11)*

However, interviewed returnees also admitted that not all the time they were successful in making a change with their knowledge and skills. In some cases, their ideas were not received by their group. In other cases, they cannot talk to senior academics and chose to transfer knowledge to younger colleagues or those they are closed to. There are also cases that they gave up transferring because they foresaw that between them, their knowledge, and the recipient there are too strong

institutions. These institutions are consistent and hardly change in a short time period. The next section will analyze institutions that imped and enable knowledge transfer.

In summary, tacit knowledge could be transferred through many ways. In teaching, it is transferred through sharing new teaching methods experience with colleagues and integrating new learning assessments in the curriculum. However, there is no formal mechanism to transfer such knowledge more widely and collectively to the teaching group. Moreover, it seems hard to transfer knowledge through teaching due to highly independent nature of teaching profession. Knowledge transferred through teaching happens on an individual and ad-hoc basis. In research, there are both informal and formal ways to transfer knowledge. Informally, recipients learn new knowledge through working with returnees in research projects, observing and learning by doing. Returnees' tacit knowledge could make an impact to inspire other academics to pursue knowledge abroad, and together create an open and more progressive academic environment in Vietnamese universities. Formally, tacit knowledge is transfer through making connection between foreign academic contacts with home institutions through which cooperative projects and conferences take place.

4.3. Institutional factors influencing the transfer process

4.3.1. Regulatory institutions

Interview data shows regulatory institutions relates to governance policies and regulations, including policies on teaching and researching, funding research, university autonomy, human resource management, and administrative procedures.

As described above, there are two main ways to transfer knowledge from academic returnees to their home institutions: teaching and research. Knowledge transfer through teaching mainly happens through informal channels. There is an absence of regulations and policies to foster transferring knowledge through teaching, such as cooperation in curriculum design, exchanging new teaching methods, or guideline on innovative teaching. As transferring through researching takes place both informally and formally, regulatory institutions may have some impacts on the process.

It is repeatedly mentioned in the majority of interviews that the regulative environment in Vietnam higher education system has a strong focus on teaching. Teaching is considered 'right hand', while researching is considered as 'left hand', a voluntary task and a way to improve teaching quality

(Interviewee 4). It is up to 'the passion and interest of individual academics to do research' (Interviewee 6).

> 'Universities focus too much on teaching. It takes most of the time and energy of academics. Nobody would have time to organize seminars, conferences, or academic debates to share and exchange ideas. Meanwhile, in my university in the UK, I can't count exactly how many talks, seminars, guest speakers from different universities coming to present their research, talks, having webinars, etc. There are many of them, and it happens every day. You seldom see that in Vietnam.' *(Interviewee 11)*

Many policies attribute to this phenomenon. The most significant influence comes from human resource policies. Academics are paid according to their teaching and researching hours. Interviewees refer to 'low paid' as a taken-for-granted issue, a tradition in Vietnamese universities, that everyone knows, and being an academic requires the person to 'sacrifice' many things in their lives due to low paid and long hours working, as interviewee 6 said. Researching takes much more effort than teaching, and promises almost no incentives, academics prefer teaching as its outcomes are immediate. They are less likely to cooperate with other colleagues in researching. Meanwhile, in teaching, they are autonomous and independent in their job. Interviewed returnees shared that their colleagues reused the same textbook for around 15-20 years without updates. Many earn good money from teaching for many universities at the same time without engaging in any other academic activities. Therefore, with a teaching-focused and low interactive environment like this, it is less likely that academics are interested in cooperation, idea exchange or academic debates. Consequently, returnees rarely got a chance to transfer knowledge.

> 'They [academics] are not interested in research but only teaching because they could earn more money and more working hours from teaching. If they teach in another province, their teaching hours are multiplied. At the end of the year, some colleagues earn 100 million dongs [around 4,000 euros] thanks to overtime teaching. Research is counted in hours as well, but it is more complicated and difficult. Many colleagues teach the same things over years. Especially senior academics, they are not confident and not motivated to do research because they have been appointed main lecturers, they can't be dismissed. So they are comfortable with only teaching the same way years after years.' *(Interviewee 10)*

> ‘Academics are more concerned with earning for living, no time to care about academic issues. Lecturers at public universities are busy with teaching at private universities more than teaching at their own universities. With that salary, they cannot fully dedicate their time and effort to contribute for their organization, let alone making changes, innovative teaching or doing research. It is so unrealistic a dream.’ *(Interviewee 13)*

> ‘Teaching hours include standard hours and overtime hours. Meanwhile, you earn almost nothing from research. Oh, you do, if you publish an article, you got 3 million [120 euros]. It takes a lot of time to do research. Academics have to teach a lot, plus teaching overtime and supervise thesis, because there are too many students. There is almost no time for research or any other activities but teaching.’ *(Interviewee 6)*

Furthermore, in order to earn a living from research, academics need to apply for research funding, which is limited in amount and involves complicated administrative procedures. It demotivates researching:

> ‘Doing science in Vietnam is very complicated. Payment takes so much time. It causes a lot of confusion and headache. In a research project I participated in, payment is delayed to 1-2 years, and they distributed budget accordingly to stages of project, I cannot continue researching because of waiting for the budget.’ *(Interviewee 6)*

Another regulatory factor that constrains knowledge transfer is recruitment policy. According to interviewees, academics in Vietnam is highly secured job. Furthermore, performance assessment policy does not encourage innovation. Therefore, academics are less likely to engage in other activities outside their daily routine teaching. It is hard for academic returnees to engage their colleagues into learning new knowledge, exchanging new ideas for development, and making changes in their organization. There is little incentive for their colleagues to do so.

> ‘Once you are recruited and appointed main lecturers, you are a civil servant. It’s a permanent job. No one could fire you, except the director of Department of Domestic Affair. As long as you do not commit too severe mistakes, you can sit on your chair forever.’ *(Interviewee 5)*

> ‘The way we recruit academics is problematic, and it affects the development of our academic environment. After a three year contract, an academic will get indefinite contract

and they can rest on their chair. In such a short time period, it is impossible to assess whether the person has qualified academic competences and skills and passion with academic career. In Germany, you need around 12 years continuously researching, publishing, you gone through many positions such as research assistant, project leader, associate professor before you are appointed to full professor. In Vietnam, once you are recruited, you can never be dismissed, unless you want to leave. I found myself very lonely in this academic community, because I cannot find colleagues to do research with me, who share interest and passion to pursue research career.' *(Interviewee 13)*

Interviewees mentioned the policy on assessing academic performance, but they show mistrust on this method due to the inefficiency in implementing them. First, there is no clear indicators for assessing staff performance. Secondly, there is lack of transparency in the assessment process. In the end, everyone has similar assessment results.

'They assess academics' performance by ranking A, B, C, D. But it's just the surface, acting to show authority that they do as required, but it is not fair and accurate at all. For example, if you lack teaching hours, you can borrow from other academics, the same with researching hours. Your managers know that, but they say nothing, because it's not their money, it's state's money.' *(Interviewee 12)*

This situation does not encourage academics to learn new things and adopt new practices to improve their teaching and research performance. It is rather safe for them to just follow their daily routine of teaching. Regulations and policies in this case lack empowerment for changes and innovations, for learning and development. It is highly dependent on the individuals' passion and self-interest, which is rarely a case because their biggest concern is still making enough money for living as well as avoiding administrative troubles. This helps explain the neglect and inactiveness in academic debates, discussions and seminars. As one interviewee described that he contributed ideas, others seemed to listen but they gave no responses unless there is something relevant to their immediate concern.

Some returnees complained that universities want to encourage academics to share knowledge, but there is lack of concrete action and policies for that. Even if they do, their implementation is rather formality, without actual meaning and outcomes.

> ‘My faculty have annual seminars to report research outcomes, but it is very general and does not improve anything. They do it so they can report that ‘faculty X has done seminars’. It does not base on any scientific research, no specific research problems, no methods or specific recommendations. I don’t want to participate in such kind of seminars…. There is very few opportunities to share knowledge and discuss with each other. They encourage us to exchange ideas and knowledge, but there is no incentive or any action plan to do so.’ *(Interviewee 8)*

Policies exist but they do not produce practical outcomes and positive impact on knowledge transfer because there is lack of an effective mechanism for enforcing them. For example, when universities want to boost research, they lack of indicators to assessing quality of research. These policies refer mostly to the quantitative indicators, for example, publications as a must to be promoted to main lecturers, researching hours, number of article published, number of seminars organized and attended. Without much incentive to conduct real research, academics implement these policies without attention. There is no ‘share field’ for academics to interact and communicate with each other, and in turn, no knowledge transfer could happens.

> ‘The university has the regulations on the research hours, and number of publications, but many academics do it just to meet the requirement. The quality is low. They can publish in any tabloid journals. Writing and publishing makes no income, sometimes they even have to pay these journals to get published. So, they prefer teaching to researching.’ *(Interviewee 7)*

> ‘Policies are not suitable. They are designed in a top-down, ask-and-give manner. The bottom level has to ask and please the top level to be given some research funding. It limits the chance for academics to work with each other, communicate and exchange ideas and knowledge. We cannot do that if we do not have research project together.’ *(Interviewee 16)*

In two cases, the structure and organization of the university constrains the transfer of explicit knowledge. When returnees’ explicit knowledge is not included in the universities’ course offering or research agenda, there is little interest from both managers and colleagues in that knowledge because the knowledge is not relevant to their job.

> ‘My expertise is in educational program evaluation, but my university doesn’t accept my proposal to evaluate their current Bachelor’s programs. It doesn’t offer this course in their programs either. So I cannot share my expertise knowledge either in teaching or research.’ *(Interviewee 11)*

> ‘I don’t think I could optimize my knowledge in my work. I am majoring in food technology, but my university does not have a major in this area. So I am assigned to Faculty of Chemistry. I work on bio-chemistry food area, while my colleagues focus on inorganic chemistry, organic chemistry, or analytical chemistry, pretty distant to my area.’ *(Interviewee 15)*

In the first case, the university provides support for her to transfer tacit knowledge through organizing seminars, conferences, and trainings to promote active academic debates and discussions, for example funding, venue, inviting leading experts and senior academics in the field to participate, inviting external experts and guest speakers to participate and deliver trainings for academics in those events. In the second case, interviewee works for a big and leading university. The multi-disciplinary structure of the university facilitates her interaction and cooperation with colleagues from other disciplines through which she could exchange knowledge through multi-disciplinary research. Her university also organized specialized seminars with participants from different disciplines and faculties. It is a mechanism to bring academics together for knowledge sharing and transfer.

> ‘They organize seminar on different topics, anyone who is interested in is welcome. For example, seminar on start-ups for scientists will bring together business and economic experts and scientists. Or the club for scientists organize seminars for researchers and also provides support for researchers. We can connect and communicate with each other in this club.’ *(Interviewee 15)*

In summary, regulatory factors found in this study mainly have an impact on the motivation of both recipients and transferors in transferring knowledge. Specifically, interview data shows that some policies such as low salary, unfair performance assessment, inefficient research funding mechanism have discouraged both returnees and their colleagues to do research, therefore, there is little space for communication and interaction, an important stage of knowledge transfer, both tacit and explicit. These policies also stress academics to focus too much on teaching to meet the

standard hours, to earn money, but not to improve teaching practices. Therefore, even though heavily teaching, there is little knowledge being transferred through this activity. In some cases, there are policies and mechanisms attempting to foster knowledge transfer, such as providing resources for seminars and conferences, required publications among academics, ranking performance or rewarding publications. However, they do not accomplish its goals because they are not seriously implemented. Final finding from this section is that university structure could negatively or positively impact on transfer of explicit knowledge.

4.3.2. Normative institutions

Normative institutions refer to norms and values that determine the appropriateness of behaviors of group members and define how things should be done. It also sets the standards of behaviors expected and preferred to specific roles in the group, organizations or society. Normative institutions influencing the knowledge transfer found in this study include the hierarchy, defined roles in group, and the mixture of values of individuality and collectivity.

It is clearly shown from the interview data that hierarchy has been embedded in many universities and the national higher education system. Research funding is often allocated to senior academics with long years of experience. Even though there is no clear statement on any documents or regulations, it is implicitly understood among academics that ministerial funding is often assigned to senior academics; and funding by NAFOSTED (National Foundation for Science and Technology Development) is more supportive to young researchers. Opinions and ideas of senior academics are also considered more seriously. Their saying has strong influence in decision-making. Especially, it is not appropriate to discuss and transfer knowledge with senior academics if they used to be returnees' teachers. Even now they have become colleagues, their role and voices are not equal. There are gaps between generations through which younger academics need to show respect to senior academics by following and not to disagree with seniors.

> 'The funding mechanism to national, ministerial projects is that they prioritize senior academics. A young academic, no matter what degree and where he obtained his degree, the US, Europe, hardly get funded. Sometimes if we are lucky, senior academics will invite me to join their project. They will have their name as leaders, but we must take main responsibility in researching. Of course, it would be great if we can have our name as

leaders in these projects. But there's no such thing. We must follow this trend to get an opportunity to do research.' *(Interviewee 3)*

'Senior academics' saying has more weight than mine and other young academics. We talked about teaching methods and curriculum design during weekly meetings, but mainly the young academics have to listen and learn from senior academics, never the reversed way. So, ideas for changes only come from senior academics who are in core positions. My ideas and opinions are not respected and seriously considered. There is no open discussion and debates so I cannot share my knowledge.' *(Interviewee 7)*

'With those who used to be your teacher, and are now your colleagues, they never accept to have discussion with you. For example, when you suggest that other institutions in the world have done this and that method, they will reject it with the reason that we must respect the unique context of Vietnam. They trust their knowledge and experience of tens of years in the field, so there is no space for a young academic like me to share my knowledge with them… I am only a Master's graduate, it would be very difficult for me to initiate something new in my organization with many seniors above me.' *(Interviewee 11)*

Seniority is also embedded in performance assessment. The longer someone stays in the organization, the higher salary and higher position they got. Some academic returnees in my sample spent from 2 to 9 years abroad and return to be junior with low salary and low position in their organization. They are supposed to listen to the seniors in their group rather than to discuss, give feedback or disagree.

'After returned to my institution, I met the manager of administration department and received a message like this: 'Your future will be bright, but at the moment you must sit in your chair and wait for two, three years to your turn to receive funding and promotion to deputy manager of research department, then manager, and then deputy director…' So they asked me to wait for the seniors to get their part of the cake, and then it comes to my turn. But it's not my goal to return, I can't just sit there doing nothing, wait and waste my knowledge just to be promoted to a high position.' *(Interviewee 5)*

According to interviewees, these senior academics have stayed many years at the institution and gained a secure position and have high ego. They are considered 'cây đa, cây đề', being respected

for their knowledge and experience. When returnees introduce new knowledge, it could be that they are unconfident to adopt new things, or they felt their positions, reputation and ego are threaten by the new knowledge of returnees. Therefore, in many cases, academic returnees encountered rejection from them when trying to introduce new idea or share new knowledge.

> 'It is difficult for them [senior academics] to change or adjust to new thing, because most of them are afraid of change. I felt that they are not confident about themselves and their performance, so when there is something new, they fear to try.' *(Interviewee 12)*

Another normative institution is the defined role in the organization. Most academic returnees engaged in teaching and researching task. They themselves considered that as an academic, they are not playing an important role in initiating changes. Only managers do. Therefore, many returnees choose to adjust to the institutional environment, and avoid conflicts if their colleagues resists to their new knowledge.

> 'We are just academics, not managers, our opinions are just for their reference.' *(Interviewee 3)*

> 'My faculty have annual seminars to report research outcomes, but it is very general and does not improve anything. They do it so they can report that 'faculty X has done seminars'. It does not base on any scientific research, no specific research problems, no methods or specific recommendations. But that's responsibilities of management board, I am only an academic. I can't change it even if I want to.' *(Interviewee 8)*

Even returnees in management position find it hard to transfer knowledge if they are not on top. Interviewee 14 was appointed to be deputy manager of quality accreditation department at her university. However, all of her proposals for improving quality were rejected and left unused because her manager does not want to adopt her ideas. When she reported to higher level personnel, they replied to her:

> 'Don't do anything, just wait there. You are just deputy manager, you don't have to be responsible for anything, why are you so enthusiastic?' *(Interviewee 14)*

Many returnees mentioned about cooperativeness as a strong value in the foreign institutions but almost absence in the Vietnamese institutions. In order to create changes in their work group with

their new knowledge, they need the cooperation and support from their colleagues. Without this core value, it is difficult to fully internalize new concepts and practices to the whole group. Even if knowledge transfer happens, it may not have a wide impact on the group but only to some individuals.

> 'In Korea, each laboratory has their own research direction. They engage experts, external organizations, industries together to do research project. Working together creates synergy. In Vietnam, we do things individually. Some academics work part-time for other universities or companies, some others establish their own business. Each person is busy with earning money and doesn't care too much about the development of the faculty. One passionate person does not create anything without his team.' *(Interviewee 1)*

> 'When my faculty wanted to improve curriculum, I contributed my ideas based on my experience and knowledge I gained from abroad, but nothing changed. My colleagues listened but gave no response, if that doesn't directly relate to them. The interaction and cooperation between members, units, work groups are not good, totally different from the abroad environment. People don't care to contribute for common development, they care only about their own business. There is little support to each other, therefore, we do not work collaboratively to create big contribution… My university has resources, huge resources. I think there many things could be done with the resources. But in fact, I cannot not do much because of the lack of cooperation and the close-minded culture.' *(Interviewee 7)*

> 'Here I felt we mind our own business only, we don't support each other. Sometimes personal interests go against the university's strategy. There are three vice presidents in charge of three areas, but there is no connection among the three. After each meeting, each goes back to their office, everything goes back to place it used to be. Nothing changes. It is not a community, but a collection of individuals. When I want to propose a change, I have to contact individual units, yet not a single one responds to me. Even changes come from top-down, but no one follows.' *(Interviewee 14)*

As clearly shown from the above, there is a lack of synergy from different individuals. Academic groups in the cased interviews show high level of individuality. However, the value of collectivity is also shown, but not directly contradict with individuality. It is because collectivity is only shown

when there is something or someone against the collective common understanding or decision. It is further analyzed in the cognitive construct (section 4.3.3)

In summary, hierarchy and stress on seniority are presented vividly in Vietnamese academic environment. Thanks to this norm, it looks taboo and inappropriate for young academic returnees to transfer new knowledge to more senior colleagues and constraints other young academics to receive new knowledge as they are used to listen to their senior colleagues' saying. It also contributes to define the role of individuals in organization. Even academic returnees described their role in organization as weak and not possible to make changes. Changes happen only from the top and senior academics. Finally, interview data shows that working environment in many cases is highly individualistic and low cooperative, making it impossible and discouraging for academic returnees to share their knowledge and get it institutionalized.

4.3.3. Culture-cognitive institutions

Many culture-cognitive institutions significantly influence the transfer process. These institutions are shared mindset, 'the way we do these things', perception about criticism and perception about returnees' knowledge.

Many cases of transferring explicit knowledge failed because knowledge is perceived too distant to the group's logics and shared mindset. For example, a few years ago when a returnee suggested to evaluate education programs at her institution, she got rejection when her colleagues said it is too difficult. They were not aware of the importance and necessity of program evaluation. A few years later, the organization is in need of her expertise.

> 'Program evaluation has different levels. My university did the simplest one, which was evaluating based on students' satisfaction. I suggested to conduct evaluation in a higher level, that is evaluation of graduates' skills involving evaluation of labour users. They said it was too difficult. If they were aware that evaluation for improving programs is compulsory for all programs, they would have supported my proposal. And now all institutions must conduct quality accreditation, and they are in need of expert in this field.' *(Interviewee 11)*

Similarly, some other interviewees do not find common interest and same level of knowledge and skills among their colleagues in order to cooperate and transfer explicit knowledge.

> ‘Sometimes I suggested an idea, something that are popular in foreign countries, but other colleagues, especially senior academics, said they have never heard about that, that is too distant. Then the idea is dismissed immediately.’ *(Interviewee 3)*

> ‘Here I don’t have anyone to share same expertise, same research interest to work with me. My colleagues do not care and do not want to learn about my expertise, they prefer spending time to teach. So the opportunity to share and exchange knowledge is very rare.’ *(Interviewee 16)*

A returnee at management position expressed loneliness in her pursuit of research interest. She cannot either establish her research team because there is no one of same research interest, or recruit personnel to join her due to recruitment policy unable to select qualified and passionate researchers.

> ‘I want to engage my colleagues to seminars, conferences and research in my expertise area, but it’s very difficult. I don’t find anyone specialized and interested in my area. I want to recruit new personnel with research competence and passion, but many things strict me. Budget cut, low salary, current personnel feel uneasy, etc. Plus I only have a short period to assess my recruited personnel, that is not enough to see if they are the right person. This human resource policy makes it very difficult to find passionate researchers. Like me now, I felt so lonely in my academic career. You know the concept ‘critical mass’? We can expect to make changes if we have ‘critical mass’… Me alone, I think it is very difficult to make any change or innovation.’ *(Interviewee 13)*

Returnees acknowledged that the presence of other returnees in their organization makes the transfer of knowledge easier. For example, a young academic returnee (Interviewee 9) who transferred textbook knowledge from his program in Belgium and have it included in the new learning assessment of his faculty shared that his faculty has quite many academic returnees from Europe, as well as does projects with other international groups. In a group with a global-mindset, it is quite comfortable for him to share ideas, and get support from his colleagues in implementing these ideas. Another interviewee (Interviewee 1) joined a research group ran by another returnee and found space for knowledge transfer and learning.

Returnees also encounter resistance to change when transferring knowledge that is different from the group's ideology – or 'the way we do these things'. Traditional way of thinking is embedded in the culture of the organization and constrains their members to receive new knowledge and open for learning opportunity. This happens mainly with senior group.

> 'Culture at my university and my faculty is very traditional. Senior and experienced academics kept old way of thinking and doing that have been there since the time of central economy til now, generations after generations. This has deep root in the organizational culture. Young academics get used to that, and become inactive in academic activities and discussion. They rarely discuss. So I seldom share with my colleagues, just in a joint program with University X [UK], people asked me about foreign education, then I shared with them my experience, about Turnitin, Moodle, teaching methods, educational ideology, etc. ' *(Interviewee 7)*

Another 'way of doing these things' appears in some interviews is to stick with the standards, even if they are outdated, and 'not change if it still works'. When the traditional ideology is strongly embedded in group members' logics, returnees often face strong resistance to change and absorb the transferred knowledge. Extracts from interviews show that contrast in ideologies could hinder transfer of both explicit and tacit knowledge.

> 'I have supervised many students to design technology for processing the environmental waste. Some Vietnamese standards has become outdated and not suitable for design. I instructed my students to use other standards rather than Vietnamese standards to design more environmental-friendly and sustainable technology. When I did so, there was a strong conflict with my professor [the person used to be teacher of this interviewee]. She insists that I and my students must follow Vietnamese standards, no matter what. These standards are not specific and outdated. In fact, many constructions had to be rebuilt, costing so much money and damage to environment. Conflict happens again with another supervision. And the professor was very strict and strongly conformed to the current standards.' *(Interviewee 6)*

> 'When I have an idea to contribute that is different or opposed to their way of doing, their response is that 'the system still works over many years, no need to change'. So I have

many ideas and recommendations for improvement, but there's no point to propose if they keep telling me to wait and wait.' *(Interviewee 12)*

'I wanted to change the way of reporting in a more systematic and scientific way, but my manager said 'what a strange report, what is this, what is that, what is an indicator'. I wanted to train my subordinates to make report in the new way, they said 'your staff can do report, as they still did before, no need for training'.' *(Interviewee 14)*

Another culture-cognitive factor influences the ability to adopt new knowledge is the perception about criticism. It is outstanding from the interviews that their opinions and feedback for improvement are not welcome because their colleagues are not comfortable receiving different opinions. It demotivates returnees in my sample to transfer their tacit knowledge, such as critical thinking skills, as in the followings.

'Your advantages of critical thinking becomes your disadvantages in Vietnam context. For example, it is normal in my laboratory [in Italy] to present your research and receive feedback so as you learn from your mistakes. In Vietnam, when I comment in discussions and seminars to help my colleagues improve quality of their papers, but it seems taboo. It's very hard to discuss openly and straightforwardly. It's hard to share and learn from each other. My colleagues are not happy about my comments. I pointed out flaws for them to improve, but they thought that I was showing their weaknesses. I wanted to share my experience of publishing with international standards, for me it's normal, but they thought I am 'teaching' them… Their ego is too high. Then I think it does no good for me, and for them, so I do not give feedback… Here they have the unspoken rule 'to venerate teacher and morality', so even if your teacher is wrong, you still accept that is right because that shows your respect. This rule has some merits, but science must be clear.' *(Interviewee 12)*

'In Vietnam, when I contribute my ideas and opinions, I have to consider carefully the surrounding environment, because we don't have criticism culture and there are many unspoken interpretations in communication. When I returned, I forgot how they communicate, so I have a lot to learn to adapt. For example, I would like young colleagues to learn English so they could access to more materials and resources even if they don't have a chance to study abroad. But they though I am showing off, arrogant, foreign-oriented and looking down on Vietnamese, while I'm not. After many times trying to share

and contribute ideas, I received no support, I felt lonely. I stopped sharing. If I shared more, they might think I have nothing to do than getting my nose in their business. I felt not as enthusiastic as I used to be.' *(Interviewee 13)*

How colleagues perceive and receive returnees also affect their integration in the work group and success of their knowledge transfer. Where returnees are welcomed to the workgroup, they are comfortable to exchange ideas with their colleagues whenever possible, both informally and formally, as in the case of interviewee 9 and 10.

'Everybody was welcoming me when I came back. The faculty didn't require to me teach much, and waited til I caught up with the working environment to assign me more teaching hours. And they promoted me to deputy dean…Here in my university I worked in team more than in Belgium where I research independently, I feel glad to work and share my knowledge with my knowledge. I chose members to work in my research, I know them and their capacity, so it's quite comfortable and no problem to work with. I takes care of parts related to international standards, and hopefully my colleagues learnt from the way I do and acquire it for themselves.' *(Interviewee 10)*

In contrast, some other returnees were misperceived and neglected. Their new knowledge and degree from abroad make them more powerful, but also make them disadvantageous because they are considered as a threat to their colleagues' benefits. Their critical thinking becomes taboo, and their effort to share knowledge is perceived as arrogant and show-off or patronizing. In this atmosphere, it is less likely that their shared knowledge is being received, accepted and internalized by their group members, even though some returnees are in managing position.

'They think I am showing off, arrogant, foreign-oriented and looking down on Vietnamese.' *(Interviewee 13)*

'They thought I threaten their power when I returned and got promoted to this position. Someone has worked for that institution 5-7 years and be planned to take that position, but I took that position because I got a degree from abroad. My manager worried that one day soon I would replace him. So they don't trust me and exclude me, senior manager and my subordinates cooperate with each other to dismiss my ideas to change, forcing me to stick

with their rules and ways of doing things… They must have a clear thinking between management and expertise.' *(Interviewee 14)*

In summary, regarding culture-cognitive aspect, interviewed academics expressed their loneliness in tacit knowledge transfer process because they hardly find other colleagues with shared interest and passion in their expertise. The presence of other returnees in the working environment makes it easier for them to transfer as the groups possess global mindset and share same understandings on how things are done. In groups with traditional mindsets and ways of doing things, returnees encounter strong hindrance and neglect in attempting to transfer both explicit and tacit knowledge. Criticism is not popular and welcomed in Vietnamese context is a significant factor that impedes transfer of tacit knowledge such as critical thinking skills. Finally, perception about returnees and their foreign knowledge could enable knowledge transfer in open-minded environment, especially with presence of other returnees; but it fails knowledge transfer and discourages returnees when they are wrongly perceived and excluded from the work group, in even in cases returnees are in high position in their organizations.

4.3.4. Academic returnees' strategies

In most cases of transferring knowledge in my sample, the institutional environment impedes rather than enables the process. There is a strong resistance to adopt new knowledge brought by returnees. Knowledge transfer is successful or not depending on what different strategies they employed to cope with these institutions.

The majority of them choose to compromise, meaning that they try to balance their expectations, partially conform to some institutions while negotiating to not follow some other institutions. In this strategy, knowledge would have to be adjusted to suit the institutional environment and eventually partially transferred to the group.

'When I first returned, I felt so 'fresh' and eager to initiate new ideas and want to implement them immediately. I had some difficulties discussing with other academics, especially senior academics because they have never been studying abroad. Then I gradually persuaded them to apply my ideas. They followed some of my ideas, and there were things I had to follow them. There are things I cannot change, at least in short time period. When I could prove the suitability of my ideas to Vietnamese students, they agree to use my

suggestion. So I myself cannot change the system as the whole, but I can make small changes. When they see positive results, they are ok to follow my way.' *(Interviewee 9)*

Another strategy to get knowledge transferred is manipulation. In this strategy, returnees, instead of directly confronting the institutions and try at all cost to introduce new knowledge, find the opportunity to bring in more acceptable knowledge to build trust, then import more distant knowledge when they have more control on the group.

'I have many ideas, some applicable, some not yet. If an idea is not applicable at that moment, I do not stick to that, but move to another one. I do it to prove myself and gain trust from my colleagues. When they have confidence in me, I come back to the idea that was not implemented at the first try. It's easier for them to accept that idea. I am lucky to live in both oriented culture and western culture, I know the differences. Oriented culture is more reserve and harder to accept new ideas. I have to set up step by step. It's hard to go straightforward.' *(Interviewee 6)*

In some cases, returnees face strong resistance and disapproval from their groups. They are more likely to employ the acquiesce strategy, meaning that they accept the rules and norms, and follow them. When this strategy is applied, knowledge is less likely transferred. Returnees choose to safely adopt the old institution and not attempt to challenge it with their new knowledge.

'Knowledge and ideologies I obtained from developed world have advantages, I felt regret that I could not apply it here. However, I also feel that I am not courage enough to be unique in this environment, I must find a way that suits me. For example, I'm in charge of an educational research center in my institution, I suggested changes in human resource management, again and again, then I stopped suggesting. If they don't listen, I will never mention that suggestion again. This makes me tired and sad. If I insist on doing so, I'll get more opposition. I feel like I don't dare to have my saying, to practice critical thinking anymore. So, adaptation is necessary. I used to be very passionate and enthusiastic, but now, just adapt and adapt. If I cannot lead the crowd, I'll have to compromise and follow the crowd.' *(Interviewee 13)*

Others avoided the conflict with institutions. Some returnees only transferred knowledge to certain people in the group, such as other young academics or returnees if they encountered rejections and

disapproval. Some returnees chose to cooperate with other groups or organizations than their work group. Similar to acquiesce strategy, avoidance strategy also results in no knowledge transferred to the target group.

> 'I only share with like-minded people, such as other young colleagues, and returnees, and avoid the old thinkers. With those with an open-mind, it's easier to discuss, share and work with.' *(Interviewee 6)*

> 'I participated in external evaluation and quality consultancy for other universities. I could contribute my knowledge to external organization than my university. I just felt sad that I cannot do much for my university.'*(Interviewee 14)*

> 'I kept contact and cooperation with my colleagues and professors in Italy. We research and publish together. Working with them, I have both support and pressure to produce outcomes, therefore, I am more productive. Here, I don't have anyone sharing research interest and working with… So I work with my team abroad, or I do research by myself in my free time, for my own passion but not for job or any organization.' *(Interviewee 16)*

In only one extreme case, the returnee chose to defy the institution, or ignore the institutions and do things their own way. In this situation, even though the knowledge is in use in their job as they intend, it is not transferred to other members in the group. It could be proven after the successful application of the new practice or concept, but it may be difficult to be accepted and institutionalized by other group member.

> 'I discussed my ideas with colleagues, even though I knew it was no use to discuss with them. One time, twice, and third time. Then I just do it my own way.' *(Interviewee 12)*

In summary, returnees in my sample response differently to institutional pressure when transferring knowledge. The main strategy is to compromise and acquiesce with the institutions through which knowledge is transferred partially or not transferred at all. Some returnees are active and able to manipulate the transfer process to bring in new knowledge. In cases of employing avoidance or defiance strategy, knowledge is less likely to be transferred.

4.4. Discussion

Academic returnees in this study are aware of the types of knowledge they bring home, both explicit and tacit knowledge. They appreciate tacit knowledge more than explicit knowledge because they could use tacit knowledge flexibly in many different circumstances. Though returnees emphasize the significance of the tacit knowledge they obtained abroad, this shows the difference to the earlier definition of returnees' knowledge as merely tacit (see for example Oddou et al., 2009; Roberts, 2012). Studied returnees also seem to be able to acknowledge what knowledge could be useful to transfer to their colleagues because they experienced advanced educational systems and reflected on the differences between Vietnam and the world. However, similar to findings from Oddou and colleagues (2009), returnees must take time to adjust to home institutions before transferring. Cases of eagerly transferring knowledge right after return often meet with resistance and failure.

According to Nonaka and Takeuchi (1995), there are four mechanisms of transferring knowledge: socialization, externalization, combination and internationalization. Returnees in the study transferred knowledge via teaching and research activities. Regarding explicit knowledge, interviewed academic returnees rarely shared it with other colleagues due to the highly independent nature of the profession, except for two cases when returnees could introduce new textbook and new content to the teaching materials of their faculty. In researching, they share new knowledge through working with each other, writing research papers in which they store and transform new knowledge. In the framework of Nonaka and Takeuchi (1995), returnees use 'combination' mechanism, collecting explicit knowledge into teaching notes to transfer systematically. There is no use of 'internalization' to convert explicit knowledge into tacit knowledge through learning from documents or stories without actually doing or observation. Meanwhile, tacit knowledge is transferred through mainly socialization and occasionally externalization. Interestingly, a form of tacit knowledge is not included in any category of this mechanism framework, i.e. the transfer of network knowledge to organize conferences and bring foreign experts, projects into universities which foster further knowledge transfer. In most interviews, returnees transfer their tacit knowledge through sharing their experience, and ideologies, or 'socialization', for example through personal talks, discussions, faculty meetings, research seminars, working together in the same projects, organizing conferences using their experience abroad. In some cases, they convert tacit knowledge to explicit concepts to ease the transfer process. For example, in teaching, they transfer independent learning skills through

externalization mechanism, i.e. integrate new skills into the learning assessments and assignments for their students, such as writing mini reports, making presentations, looking for new materials and discussions. However, these changes are not transferred successfully to their colleagues. It is rarely the case that a new teaching initiative, or research skills from returnees is documented, put together in a guidelines or a training to their colleagues. In other worlds, it can be seen from interview data that most knowledge transfer takes place via informal mechanisms and on individual, ad-hoc basis. It is because there is an absence of formal regulations and policies to promote knowledge transfer, to acknowledge and document it as an important activity to develop learning organization in higher education system, both from the government level and institutional level.

	Tacit	Explicit
Tacit	Socialization Personal talks and discussions, discussions, faculty meetings, research seminars, working together in the same projects, learning by doing, organizing conferences using their experience abroad	Externalization Integrate independent learning skills into syllabus
Explicit	Internalization Not used.	Combination Integrate knowledge into teaching notes Suggest the use of new textbook in teaching

Table 3: Summary of knowledge transfer mechanisms

It also means that there is no mechanism to cross-check if the transferred knowledge is actually adopted by the recipients. Therefore, many cases of knowledge transfer could only be described as knowledge sharing. For example, in teaching, academic returnees integrate new knowledge in their teaching content, and apply new teaching methods in their own classes. However, when they share this new practice with their colleagues, it is up to their colleagues to adopt these new teaching methods or content because there is no mechanism to obligate or incentivize them to do so. This is not mentioned in literature the pathway through which knowledge is transferred in teaching. Very few research in knowledge transfer actually pays attention to how to measure success of

knowledge transfer, except for the work of Kostova and Roth (2002a) and Wang (2015). As pointed out in literature review, many researchers still use 'knowledge transfer' and 'knowledge sharing' interchangeably. Interview data in this study shows that academic returnees attempted to transfer knowledge but little is known if the process is successfully implemented or just at the stage of sharing. In the majority of the interviews, returnees experienced rejections when introducing new knowledge.

Interview data shows that institutions from all three pillars contribute to impeding, rather than enabling, the knowledge transfer process. Regarding *regulatory pillar*, institutional factors include the complicated administrative procedures for doing research, the strong emphasis on teaching over researching, lack of supporting policies for knowledge transfer, inability to implement existing policy to enable knowledge transfer. Noticeably, many returnees complain about human resource management policies that demotivate them to transfer knowledge as well as their colleagues to learn new knowledge. In *normative pillar*, there is a strong embedment of hierarchy throughout the system, affecting how regulations and policies are implemented and how communication happens within workgroup. Clearly defined role between young returnees and senior academics, between academics and the upper management level also affects knowledge transfer. There is also an existence of values of both individuality and collectivity. Regarding *cultural-cognitive institutions*, the emerging factors include the distance between returnees' knowledge and the logics and understandings of the receiving group, the shared mindset for thinking and doing, perception about criticism and perception about returnees' knowledge.

Analysis of interview data shows that institutions, within one pillar and across three pillars, interact with each other to create a combined impact on the knowledge transfer. They affect knowledge transfer in three ways: on the ability of the group to learn and use new knowledge, on the cooperativeness of the group, and on the motivation of returnees to transfer knowledge.

Firstly, institutions impede the ability of the group to learn and use new knowledge, or its absorptive capacity (see figure 3). For example, majority of interviewees mentioned that the performance management policy has a strong focus on teaching standard hours but not teaching quality. Academics are incentivized to spend time on teaching more classes rather than exchanging new teaching methods and improving teaching content. It leads to the situation that academic returnees in this study could hardly transfer their new expertise and teaching methods to their

colleagues because their colleagues are not very interested. Performance assessment also associates well with the norm of hierarchy. Years of working is an important indicator for deciding salary and promotion. Therefore, there is not much incentive for staff, especially senior staff, to apply new ideas in their job. Another one, the recruitment policy, regulates that once staff is recruited on a permanent contract, the person has job security. Feeling safe in their career, academics would be reluctant to try new things because it causes more effort and time than just doing routine tasks. Instead, they invest time and effort in teaching more and more, even if they have to reuse the same materials in many years. This correlates well and strengthens the ideology about academics as a stable, easy job in the cognitive pillar and their perception of 'only change if the system stops working'. As a result, the organization's ability to learn and use new knowledge is limited. As pointed out in the literature review section, absorptive capacity of the receiving unit, or their ability to learn and adopt new knowledge, is an influence factor to knowledge transfer. In other words, regulatory, normative and cognitive institutions altogether interact and reinforce each other to negatively affect absorptive capacity of the receiving group, and in turn constrains the knowledge transfer process.

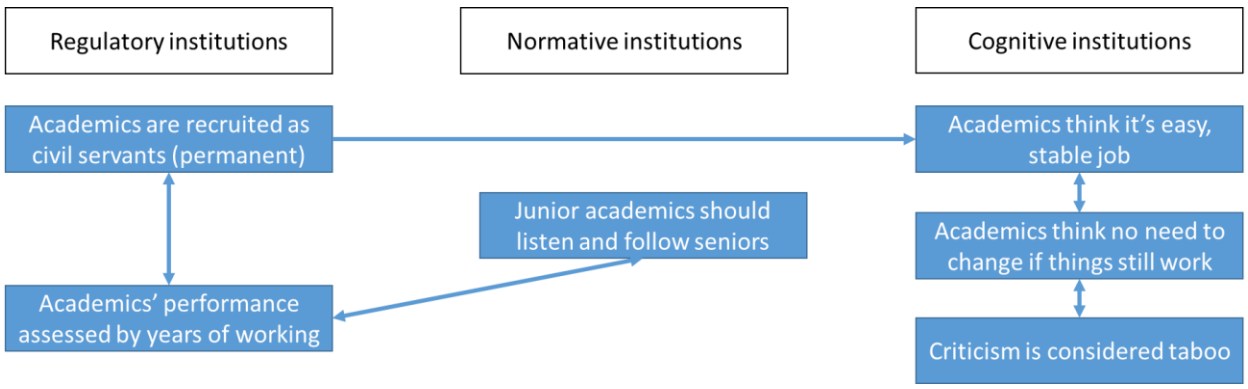

Figure 3: Institutions affecting absorptive capacity

Another finding could be pointed out here is that a combination of inappropriate human resource policies lowers the absorptive capacity of the organization and in turn hinders knowledge transfer. Similarly, Minbaeva et al. (2010) found that certain set of human resource practices that promoting staff' ability and motivation would increase absorptive capacity of the organization and facilitate transfer process. This finding supports Bonache and Oberty's hypothesis (2008) that human resource initiatives that put together a high performance system in the receiving organization

positively impact the motivation of employees to absorb new knowledge and, thus, foster knowledge transfer.

Secondly, institutions constrain the cooperativeness of the group (see figure 4), therefore negatively affect knowledge transfer process. According to Oddou et al. (2009), there is a need of having a 'share field' in which transferors and recipients interact and communicate knowledge. 'Share field' in this study refers to research work, teamwork, collaboration projects, seminars, academic discussion forums, and meetings. Albino et al. (1999) called it 'atmosphere', referring to the cooperation, closeness between actors in knowledge transfer process. Meanwhile, Krogh et al. (1996) mentioned the history of interaction between transferors and recipients that affect the openness and willingness to engage in knowledge transfer process. Cooperativeness of the group is therefore important indicator of the group's openness to share knowledge, communicate and interact with each other through which knowledge transfer happens. Interview data shows that many policies unintentionally create a strong focus on teaching in most Vietnamese public universities which in turn result in reducing cooperativeness. For example, low salary together with assessing performance via standard teaching hours lead to academics prefer accumulating teaching hours or doing external business than participating in cooperation activities, such as seminars, and joining research projects or academic discussions. Overtime it demotivates academics to work collaboratively; instead, they have tendency to work individually to gain more teaching hours. The value of individuality is not really contradicting with the value of collectivity because they are exercised in different areas. The value of collectivity is shown in constraining critics and disagreement. Interviewees shared that criticism is considered taboo, and one should not be against the collective agreement of their group. Furthermore, the norm of hierarchy stresses that junior academics should not disagree with senior academics to show their respect. They should listen and follow the opinions of senior staff. Hierarchy and seniority create a gap between academics, newly returned and not yet obtained a firm position within the organization, and senior academics, been there for many years and supposed to be more knowledgeable about organizations' institutional logics and ways of doing things. It is hard to cooperate if young academics could not equally discuss their ideas with their senior colleagues.

Another institution affecting cooperation is the shared mindset, the 'cognitive structure' of the group (Oddou et al., 2009). Many interviewees do not find others sharing the same interest and

concern on the research area that they are specialized in. It is supported by Antal's finding (2001) that the absence of a shared mindset as one of the barrier to transferring knowledge. Interviewed academic returnees often seek for cooperating with other returnees. The interview data also shows that the presence of other returnees facilitate knowledge transfer. It is explained by Oddou et al. (2009) that other returnees might have the shared global mindset and understanding framework, making easier for them to work with each other.

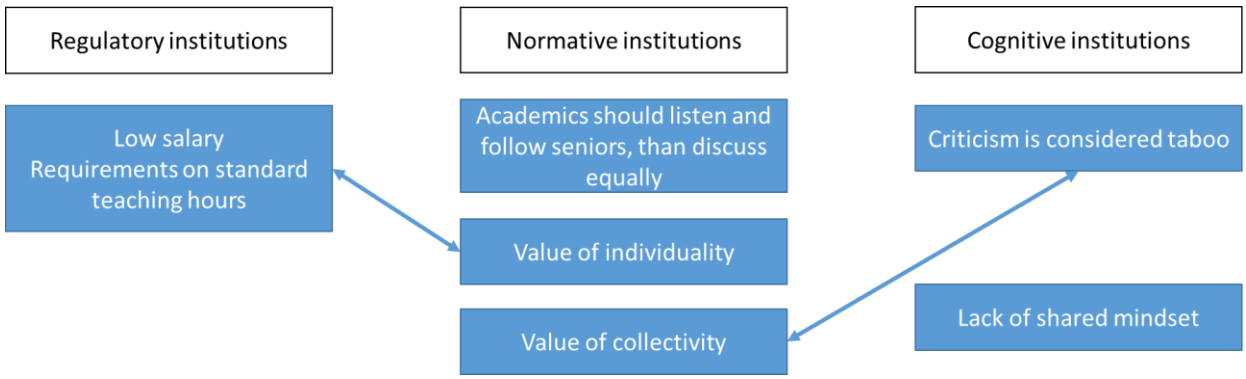

Figure 4: Institutions affecting cooperativeness

It is also found that universities that interviewed academics work for could not make an effective use of supporting regulations and policies to create a 'share field' for knowledge transfer. For example, some universities have policy to organize seminars so as for academics to share ideas and have academic discussions. However, faculties make it formality and general just to 'check the list'. This formality implementation of support policies demotivates academic returnees to participate actively in these events to share their knowledge. Another example is to regulate academics to have publications. This policy is supposed to create a 'share field' for transferring knowledge by encouraging staff to work collaboratively in research, and to learn research skills from each other. As a result, it is expected to create chances for academic returnees to transfer their tacit skills to colleagues as returnees are often more experienced in research and more familiar with international publishing practice. However, in fact, it turns out that academics pay some journals to get published, or publish papers of low quality so as to meet the requirements and have time for teaching and other business that earn them better living. This finding is well supported by Chen's (2015) study on Chinese academic returnees. Accordingly, academic returnees in Chinese universities found their academic environment is more competitive than cooperative. Neither people are willing to nor they are interested in sharing ideas with each other. Chen (2015) calls it

'the absence of invisible college' (p.115) – a culture in which academics encourage idea exchange and engage in academic discussions and debates.

Thirdly, institutions affects motivation of returnees to transfer knowledge (see figure 5). Literature review has shown that motivation of transferor is one of the factor influencing the transfer process (see for example Szulanski (1996, 2000)). As shown in interview data, returnees' response to institutional pressure is to compromise, or acquiesce, through which only a part of or no knowledge is transferred to the group. Just in a few cases, returnees managed to transfer through manipulation strategy. It is rare to have formal mechanisms to promote knowledge transfer. In most cases, it is up to the returnees' voluntary behavior. When this voluntary action met with other impeding institutions, returnees seem to be discouraged to share knowledge. For example, they were asked to wait until their turn to do something innovative, because they were not in the position to do so. When they give feedback for improvement, they were either neglected or criticized as arrogant and foreign favoritism. In other cases, they did not feel like exercising their critical thinking because their group members do not welcome criticism. They were also demotivated in the search for companions with shared research interest and mindset to continue developing their expertise. It is noted that salary and financial incentives affect knowledge transfer in different ways, for example learning ability and cooperativeness of the receiving group, rather than motivation of returnees. Reflecting on previous literature, it is shown that there is a lack of both sources and positive perception towards returnees to motivate them to transfer process. In the absence of cooperation opportunities as above-mentioned, it is even harder for returnees to interact with others and improve their social identity among their group members. Meanwhile, offering returnees high salary seem not have much impact on boosting their motivation or ease the transfer process, as Minbaeva et al. (2010) found that extrinsic motivation such as financial reward has no impact on knowledge transfer process. Instead, the root cause of motivation would be the supporting environment, and the appreciation of the receiving group.

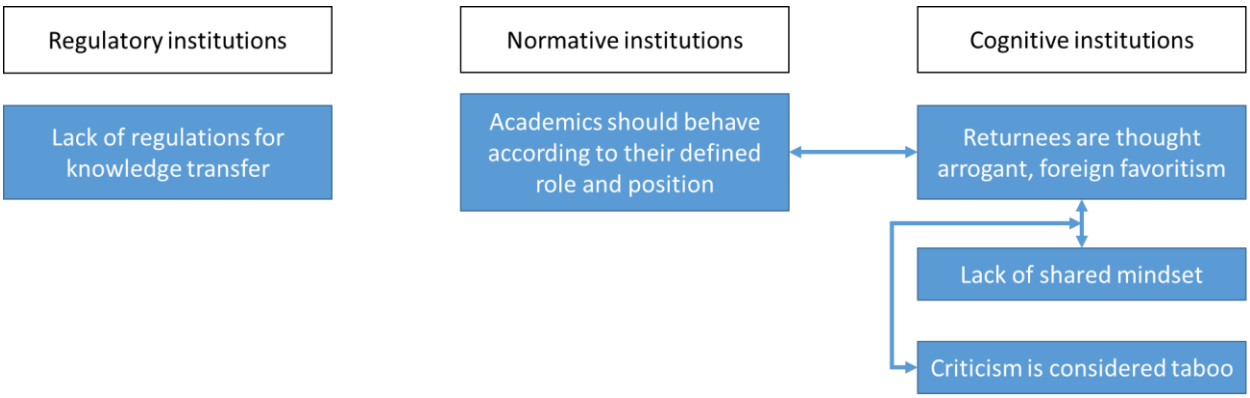

Figure 5: Institutions affecting academics' motivation to transfer knowledge

In conclusion, the above discussion shows two important findings. Firstly, institutional factors found in this study affect knowledge transfer process indirectly through their impacts on absorptive capacity of the receiving group, the cooperativeness of the group and the motivation of the transferors. This finding is different from the earlier expectation and studies by Kostova (1999) and Roberts (2012) that knowledge transfer is affected by the direct relationship, contrasting or supporting, between the knowledge of returnees and the logics and institutions of the receiving groups. Instead, there is rather a weak link between the characteristics of the transferred knowledge and the groups' institutions shown in the study. Secondly, institutions interact with each other and together influence the knowledge transfer process, rather than having single affect. Though previous research on institutional factors affecting knowledge transfer identified different institutions (Kostova & Roth, 2002a; Riusala & Smale, 2007; Roberts, 2012), they do not show the relationship and correlation between these institutions. Therefore, this is the contribution of the study to institutional theory. What is unknown from the study is that how significant each institution impacts the knowledge transfer, and how significant the correlation between institutions is.

Chapter 5. Conclusions

5.1. Summary of the study

This study explores the institutional factors influencing the knowledge transfer of academic returnees in Vietnamese public universities. It aims to contribute to enrich the understanding of what factors affect the process of transferring knowledge from international education programs to local work environment. To put it more specifically, its purpose is to identify institutions constraining or enabling knowledge transfer process in Vietnamese higher education context. The research question is 'What are institutional factors that affect the knowledge transfer of Vietnamese academic returnees in public universities?'. This question is developed into three sub-questions: 1) What are knowledge and skills that academic returnees acquired during their overseas study? 2) What are knowledge and skills that they could transfer into Vietnamese public universities? And in what ways? 3) What are institutions that affect their knowledge transfer? And in what ways?

To answer these questions, the author employed the qualitative approach through in-depth interviews. During April 2017, the researcher conducted 19 online interviews with Vietnamese academic returnees in different public universities in Vietnam, of which data is extracted from 16 valid interviews. Employing institutional theory, the researcher developed a framework for data analysis consisting of Scott's (2014) three institution pillars. Justification of research strategy and procedures for data collection as well as description of data analysis framework are presented in chapter 3.

Regarding sub-question 1, academic returnees brought home both explicit and tacit knowledge. Their explicit knowledge includes their expertise gained at their educational programs, textbooks, and other materials. Their tacit knowledge include independent learning and research skills, writing, critical thinking, culture, network, teaching methods, new ideology about education and science.

Regarding sub-question 2, academic returnees attempt to transfer both explicit and tacit knowledge through teaching and research activities. In successful cases of knowledge transfer via teaching, some academic returnees were able to share new teaching methods, integrate new textbooks in curriculum, or organize conferences on pedagogy for teachers. Through research, some academic

returnees were able to share expertise knowledge, research skills, writing skills, and their international academic network. Most cases of knowledge transfer happens via informal mechanisms and on an individual, ad-hoc basis, such as personal talks and discussions with other colleagues, and contributing ideas to support colleagues solve problems. Formal mechanisms for transferring knowledge among academics include working together in joint projects, learning by observing and doing, contributing new ideas, and challenging status quo in faculty seminars. There is lack of more systematic, formal ways to transfer knowledge such as training or documentation. Noticeably, most cases are considered knowledge sharing only, but not knowledge transfer. In some cases, it is hard for transferors to know if their colleagues adopt the new knowledge. In other cases, it is clearly seen that the shared knowledge is not welcomed and not adopted by recipients.

Regarding sub-question 3, also the main question of this study, it is found that institutions in all three pillars, regulatory, normative, and cognitive, affect knowledge transfer. The main trend is that institutions tend to impede rather than facilitate the knowledge transfer process. Regulatory institutions identified in this study include absence of supporting policies for knowledge transfer, complicated administrative procedures, policy focus on teaching, and ineffective use of existing policies. It is found that a combination of human resource policies in particular greatly constrain the knowledge transfer process. Some normative institutions are found, including the strong presence of hierarchy, defined role of returnees and managers, and other senior academics, value of individuality, and value of collectivity. Cultural-cognitive institutions affecting knowledge transfer include the lack of shared mindset for thinking and doing, perception about criticism, and perception about returnees. Interestingly, there are two important findings drawn out from data analysis. The first finding is that these institutions do not affect the transfer process directly, but indirectly through impacting absorptive capacity and cooperativeness of receiving group and the motivation of transferors. The second important finding is that these institutions do not influence knowledge transfer individually, but they interact and reinforce each other in the institutional environment, and altogether affect the process.

5.2. Reflections

Regarding the scope, this study's purpose is to explore the phenomenon of transferring knowledge from international education into local working environment. To do so, it chose to investigate the transfer process from academic returnees within public universities in Vietnam. Therefore, the

results may not be applicable to wider context. For example, it may be biased to apply the results of the study to private universities or foreign-owned universities. When applying to the context of other countries, it is worthy to conduct new research because of the institutional differences between countries. It should also carefully consider the fact that this study concerns the viewpoint of the transferors only, and therefore could not generalize the view to other actors, for example recipients (individuals, workgroups, organizations or community). The last point regarding the scope of the study is that the transfer process in this study is limited to the transfer of knowledge between academic returnees to their working place, their workgroups. Other scopes of transfer concerning the relevance of international higher education are not included, for example transferring knowledge from education to the community, local and internationally, upon return. Therefore, although academic returnees in this study could limitedly transfer their knowledge to their colleagues, they could make greater contribution by transferring knowledge to wider audience in the local and international communities. In that case, perhaps another way of defining knowledge transfer needs to be applied.

Regarding the methodology, this study employs a qualitative approach. It fits with the purpose of exploring the unknown phenomenon where the variables are not constructed and operationalized. However, the results could not be generalized as in quantitative study with larger sample. This study could be considered a preliminary study for a large-scale quantitative study on the same phenomenon.

Regarding the theory, this study applies institutional theory to identify the institutional factors affecting the knowledge transfer between two different institutional environment, i.e. the foreign educational environment and the local working environment. An analytical framework is developed to understand the knowledge transfer process of academic returnees in higher education context by adopting three institutional pillars of Scott (2014). The contribution of this study to theory is that it does not just apply and prove the usefulness of the theory in the case of knowledge transfer, but it also shows the interaction between institutions in three pillars. Meanwhile, Scott (2014) only describes the three pillars and what constitute each pillar, but does not mention their relationship. However, as above-mentioned, the interaction between institutions found in this study needs to be re-investigated in a larger-scale study.

5.3. Suggestion of future research

From the above reflections, some recommendations for future research could be made. Firstly, there are various ways to extend the study to other scopes: 1) academic returnees transferring knowledge in private universities, or branch campuses, 2) academic returnees transferring knowledge to community, 3) cross-border knowledge transfer in the viewpoints of other stakeholders, such as returnees' colleagues, managers, human resource managers, policy makers.

Secondly, future studies could further results of this study by using quantitative large-scale survey to investigate 1) the significance level that an institution has on the knowledge transfer process so as for different actors in the process to tackle the most significant factors, 2) the relationship and significance level of the interaction between institutions in three pillars.

Finally, a longitude study could also be conducted to explore the effect of returnees' knowledge transfer right after returning, 3-5 years after returning, and more than 5 years after returning. Another suggestion could be studying a policy supporting academic returnees and its effect on knowledge transfer. Vietnamese government is currently putting together a new policy on incentivizing knowledge diaspora to encourage their knowledge transfer for national development. It would be interesting to study the impact of this study by comparing the outcomes before and after issuing this policy.

5.4. Practical implications

For higher education institutions, findings from this study show that the transfer of knowledge from international programs face various obstacles. It would be less challenging for graduate returnees to transfer knowledge if during their learning they are encouraged to reflect, and integrate practice at home and the institutional differences between home and host countries. It means that higher education institutions might need to consider to include such integration and reflection in learning assessments. Institutions should also offer support services and training to international graduates on the skills to not only adapt to new working and living environment upon return, deal with reverse cultural shock, but also to recontextualize knowledge and share knowledge in suitable ways.

For international graduate returnees, it is recommended to take small steps in transferring knowledge. It takes time to understand the prominent logics and institutions of the workgroup. It is shown by both success and failure of knowledge transfer case in this study that introducing

knowledge that is easy to accept and close to the institutional logics of the workgroup gains returnees confidence and trusts from colleagues. After that, it would be easier to introduce more distance knowledge.

For policy makers and employers, this study suggests that extrinsic incentives such as high salary or bonus is not the best policy to attract returnees. In order to make use of their knowledge, they should provide support for returnees to quickly adjust to new workplace, understand the institutional logics and the knowledge needs of the organization. For example, workshops on the new developments in the field of working happening in the country, organizational culture, and knowledge management system should be provided to returnees during orientation period. Other occasions, informal and formal, for enhancing communication and idea exchange needs could also help to promote learning and cooperativeness among returnees and other staff. Regarding monetary incentives, it should be the policy applied to all staff, not just returnees, so as for them to enable them to concentrate on their job, learn and apply new knowledge to improve their performance.

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Appendices

Appendix 1. List of interviewees

Interviewee code	Sex	Country of study	Qualification	Major	Year of Return	Work
Interviewee 1	F	Korea	Master (current PhD)	IT	2014	Teaching
Interviewee 2	M	Russia	Post doc	IT	2016	Teaching and researching
Interviewee 3	M	Korea	PhD	Environmental Engineering	2015	Teaching, researching and administration
Interviewee 4	M	Korea	PhD	IT	2012	Teaching and researching
Interviewee 5	M	Belgium	Post doc	Chemistry	2016	Researcher
Interviewee 6	M	Italy	Master (current PhD)	Environmental Engineering	2011	Teaching and researching
Interviewee 7	M	Ireland	Master (current PhD)	Strategic Management and Accounting	2015	Teaching
Interviewee 8	F	UK	Master	Applied Linguistics	2012	Teaching
Interviewee 9	M	Belgium	Master	Architecture	2014	Teaching
Interviewee 10	F	Belgium	PhD	Language and education	2014	Teaching and researching
Interviewee 11	F	UK	Master (current PhD)	Education	2009	Teaching and researching
Interviewee 12	F	Italy	PhD	Material science and engineering	2016	Researching and teaching
Interviewee 13	F	Germany	PhD	Higher education	2013	Researching
Interviewee 14	F	New Zealand	PhD	Education	2014	Researching and administrator
Interviewee 15	F	Belgium	PhD	Food technology	2015	Teaching and researching
Interviewee 16	M	Italy	Post doc	Computer Science	2015	Teaching

Appendix 2. Information sheet for interviewees

Introduction

I would like to invite you to participate in this interview for my research project. This research seeks to explore the factors affecting your transfer of new knowledge and skills acquire abroad into your university in Vietnam.

Why am I doing this research?

I am doing this research as part of my Master's degree in Research and Innovation in Higher Education, jointly provided by Danube University Krems (Austria), University of Tampere (Finland) and Beijing Normal University (China).

In recent years, many Vietnamese academics are sent abroad for pursuing advanced education, with the aims that they will be able to bring new knowledge back to Vietnam and contribute to the modernization of Vietnam higher education system. In this research, I hope to provide useful information about challenges that academic returnees face, so as for university leaders and policy makers to better accommodate academics' knowledge and experience after their return.

What will you do if you agree to take part in this research?

1. You will suggest a suitable time slot for our meeting, which is most convenient for you.
2. The interview will be conducted via Skype, during which I will ask you questions regarding your professional experience upon return.
3. You can refuse to answer any question you do not feel like answering. You are more than welcome to extend your answer to areas that you feel important but not yet covered in the questions.
4. I will take notes of your answer during the interview. Only with your permission, the interview will be audio-recorded.
5. At the end of the interview, I would like to ask you to introduce your friends, colleagues or acquaintance to me for further interviews. If you agree to provide me their contacts, I will be in touch with them by myself.

How long does the interview take place?

One interview lasts from 45 minutes to an hour. However, you could stop the interview at any time.

Will your information be kept confidential?

Yes. If you agree to take part in the interview, your personal information, including your name and your institutions will remain anonymous, and not be disclosed to any other parties. The information you provide in the interview will be used for research purpose only.

What are possible advantages of taking part in this research?

You will be able to reflect on your returning experience and transferring knowledge. You may find and enjoy sharing this experience as it will make the voice of returnees heard. After the research is done, it could provide information about recommendations for the government and your universities to better accommodate your knowledge and promote more knowledge contributions by returnees.

What are possible disadvantages of taking part in this research?

There is no risks taking part in this research, except that you could feel uncomfortable talking about difficulties you face when returning and transferring your knowledge, or negative factors of your working environment. You can skip any question you do not feel like answering, or even stop the interview at any point. I could also send a transcript of the interview to you to ensure that there is no misinterpretation of your given answer.

Do you have to take part in the research?

No, you are not obliged to participate in this research. You are invited to this interview because your academic and professional experience are meaningful to the project, and that you might be interested in participating, but you do not have to. You could refuse to participate at any time without giving any reason. I fully respect your decision. There will be no consequences if you do so.

Appendix 3. Interview Outline

Dear interviewee,

Thanks for accepting the invitation to participate in this interview. The purpose of the interview is to explore the transfer of knowledge and skills of academic returnees into public universities. Your information will be kept confidential, and only used anonymously in the study after being coded. Only with your permission, the interview will be recorded.

The interview will include the following content:

1. Beginning of the interview, please provide information of your background (Major of study, host country, level of education, year of return, current position)
1. Your evaluation on the use of knowledge and skills upon return. With your new knowledge and skills, what changes have you been able to make in your workplace?
2. Your evaluation on the academic environment in Vietnam in the following aspects, and their impact on your ability to use and share your knowledge and skills after returning:
    - Academic freedom
    - Cooperativeness among academics
    - Policies for academics (recruitment, promotion, assessment, other incentives)
    - Academic activities
    - Facilities and resources supporting teaching and research
    - International aspect of your working environment
3. Your recommendations to better use your knowledge and skills upon return to contribute for development
4. At the end of the interview, please provide your feedback to help me improve my sequent interviews. If possible, please introduce other returnees working at public universities.

Thank you very much!

Trương Thùy Vân

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