

VIETNAMESE STUDENT MOBILITY AND PREPARATION FOR OVERSEAS EDUCATION

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<p>Abstract</p> <p>This research project investigates how high school students in Vietnam are prepared to travel abroad for their university studies. Nine interviews with three types of guidance and training services providers located in Vietnam, overseas study consultancy firms, English language centers, and local high schools, are carefully examined for how they provide guidance and support services to students planning to study abroad. In addition to focusing on what language and practical services are needed, attention was also paid to identity and cultural issues students may encounter in new cultural environments.</p> <p>Vietnamese students who are presently or have in the past travelled for study abroad are studied via a questionnaire in order to identify their self-assessed support needs as foreign students and assess the effectiveness of the preparation support provided to them by mobility service providers prior to leaving Vietnam.</p> <p>A descriptive research approach was employed utilizing mixed-methods data collection and triangulation analysis in which both sets of data were analyzed simultaneously. Semi-structured interviews with the nine service providers were analyzed and combined with the results of a questionnaire completed by 71 Vietnamese students studying abroad. The questionnaire was distributed through the researcher's host university JAMK University of Applied Sciences' domestic email system and through social networks of Vietnamese students studying overseas.</p> <p>A holistic analysis of the results revealed a range of support that is currently offered by the three types of service providers, which was contrasted with the types of challenges that students reported to experience, and including what specific support they claimed to actually need. Recommendations are provided so that service providers can improve their services. Finally, prior to departure, the importance of increasing the awareness of future students about challenges they may encounter is illuminated, in order to improve their prospects for success in their overseas education.</p>		

Keywords/tags ([subjects](#))

International student mobility, preparation to study abroad, intercultural communication, self-identity, Education in Vietnam

Miscellaneous

Appendices is attached (6 pages).

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1 INTRODUCTION

Higher education is experiencing constant transformation under the influence of globalization. The globalization process leads to an enormous flow of technology and communication throughout the globe. Inside educational systems, there are shifts in professional ideas and knowledge conveyed to students, as well as changes to traditional teaching and learning methods. At the same time, the labor market increasingly demands global workers who possess a deeper understanding of languages, cultures and business information. As a result, educational institutions must commit themselves to educating people with new sets of qualifications to fulfill professional and vocational requirements in the newly global era. (Shields 2013, 104-106.)

In recent years, there has been a surge in the number of Vietnamese students going abroad to study. According to Vietnamese government statistics, in 2012 there were approximately 106.000 students studying in 49 destinations (World Education News & Reviews 2013), a level that places the nation in the top ten countries in terms of student mobility (UNESCO Institute for Statistics 2014). To put this in perspective, this number of students contributes around 5% of the domestic post-secondary enrolment (World Education News & Reviews 2013). In a new and sometimes “strange” environment, a student’s acculturating process may be fairly challenging and hence, it is essential for Vietnamese students to equip themselves with the right knowledge and skills in advance of the travels. (Barron 2006, 92.) Simultaneously, for foreign education institutions, it is important to understand their students’ adaptive capabilities and needs, in order to provide suitable support for a better study experience and hence, gain more merit in educational global market.

In order to gain unbiased views on how Vietnamese students encounter certain challenges, it is important to understand their consistent academic setting in their home country Vietnam. As a result, an overview about Vietnam’s education, especial secondary education system and environment is introduced.

It is undeniable that learning to communicate is important in higher education, and most educational establishments require a certain level in both written and oral communication to complete an academic path. With international students, this is considered basic skills that are necessary to develop more advanced academic skills. However, it is essential at the same time to develop intercultural communication competences. The current teaching and learning environment in educational establishments throughout the world demands one to develop both practical understandings and intercultural competences due to the large number of international students that enrich the increasingly multicultural educational settings. As a result, it is essential for both students and faculty to enhance their intercultural communication skills, both *“learning to communicate across cultures”* and *“communicating for learning across cultures”*. (McNamara & Harris 1997, 76.)

Byram (2006, 1) describes life of international students in foreign society as following:

Foreign students often live in isolation, on the margins of the society they reside. This may be their choices and resistance to the input of life in ‘the West’ by those from ‘the East’. It may be equally be a result of social processes which do not offer an entry even to the most willing student committed to the idea of integration.

Byram’s idea raises a question about whether students are prepared enough in terms of cross-cultural learning to cope with challenges that occur overseas. Together with these external challenges, students should be more aware of and helped to manage internal challenges such as shifts in self-perception and personal identity-related problems in order to free students from possible distress (Gill 2007, 168; Bennett 2013, 105). In addition, international students mainly suffer from stress when dealing with learning experiences in a culturally unfamiliar environment. This negativity is intensified by the lack of preparedness and arriving to the host countries with false expectations or assumptions about studying. (Gill 2007, 171-172.)

Research Problem and Objectives

Despite the popularity of English language training centers and overseas study consultancy agencies, when speaking about the preparation of Vietnamese students for study abroad, research has not yet been conducted to evaluate the effectiveness of these organizations and their services. Also, in practice, there has been very insufficient investigation of the range of needs arising from Vietnamese students, particularly for those needs relating to cultural knowledge and demand about intercultural communication, values and self-perception. As a consequence, the phenomenon of Vietnamese student preparation for overseas studies continues to be somewhat vague. The potential of furthering understanding for both educators and students to recognize what students really need to know before studying abroad, to assess ongoing supports offered by domestic educational organizations and therefore, and to develop a more efficient system are well worth investigating due to the large number of students the results may be helpful to. This motivation led to (1) the development of the theoretical framework and then, (2) the development of the following research questions:

1. What support do Vietnamese students need to prepare for study abroad?
2. Where and how do Vietnamese students locate the needed information and support?
3. What support programs now exist in English language service centers and study abroad consultancy agency for supporting Vietnamese students?
4. How can needed support (pre-departure) be further developed and delivered?

The subsequent phase is (3) the examination of different research methods in order to select the most appropriate research approach, sampling techniques and data collection methods. Afterwards, (4) the data collected from nine educational organizations and from student population is presented and discussed. At the end, the analyses is utilized further to create a set of guidelines for Vietnamese students to provide them insights into the essential preparations they need and for related stakeholders to improve their services for students planning to study abroad. The structure of the thesis is presented by Figure 1 below:

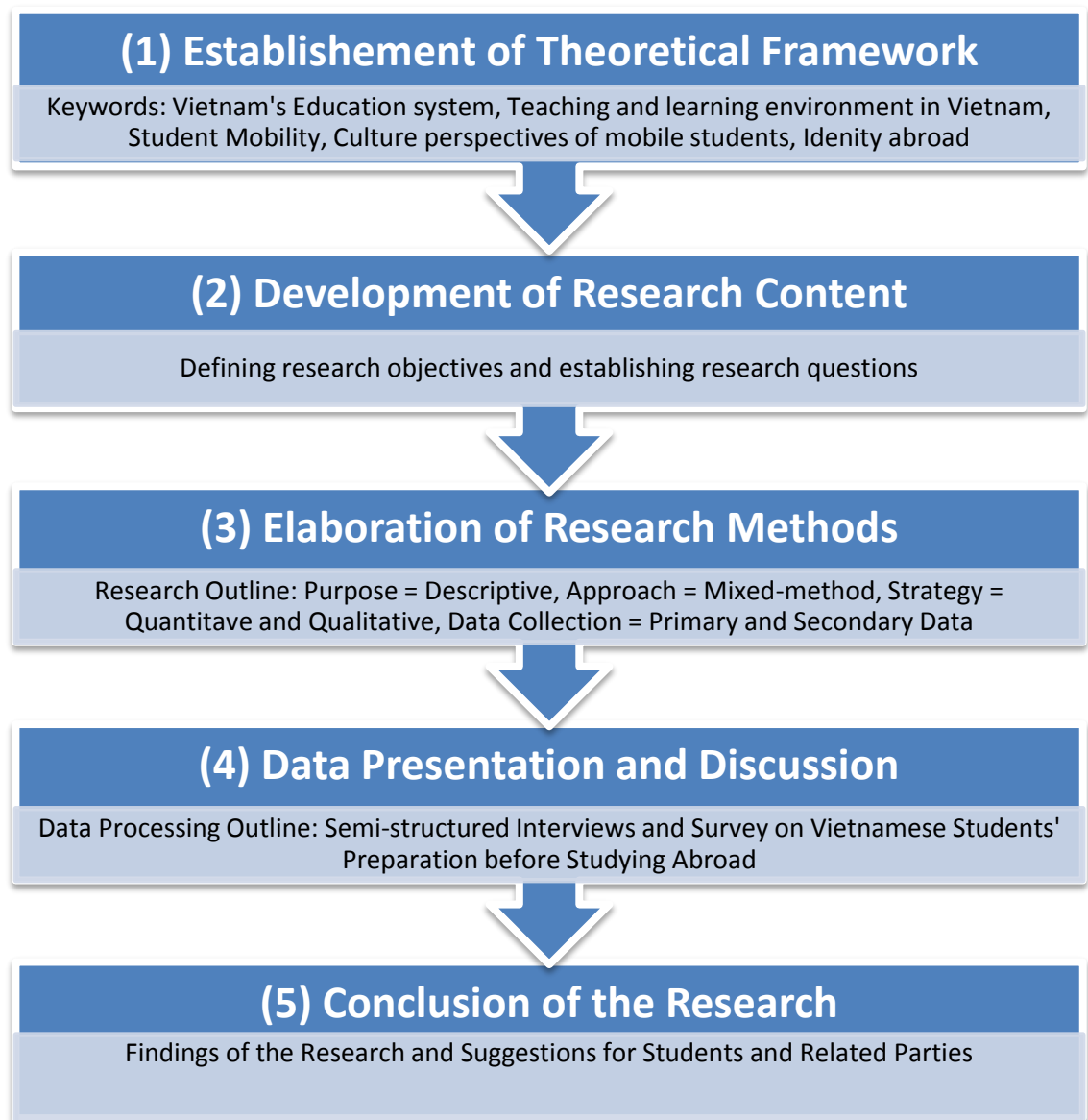


Figure 1. Overview of the thesis development

2 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1 Education system in Vietnam

The illustration below (Figure 2) describes education system in Vietnam from pre-school education to higher education.

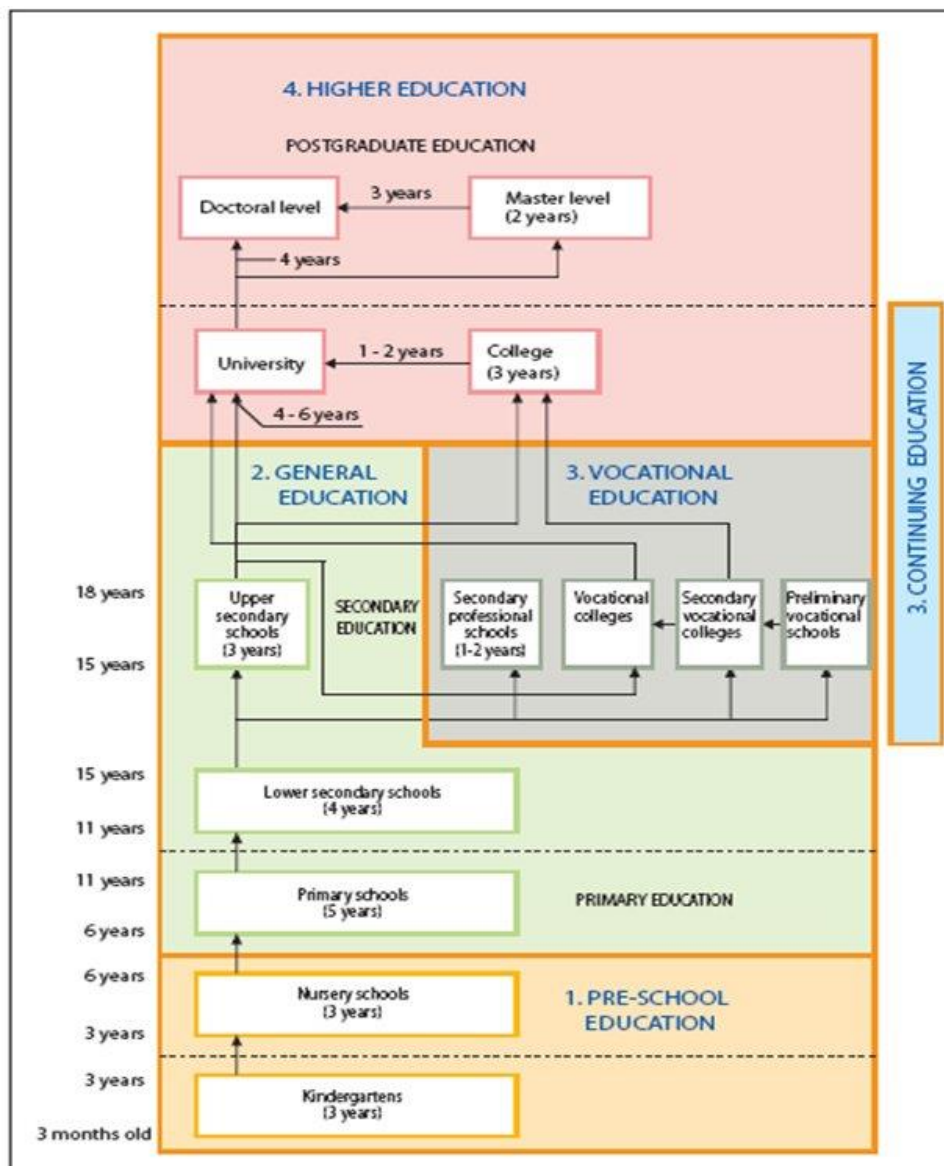


Figure 2. Structure of national education system in Vietnam (According to education law 2005) (adapted from: Education leadership challenges: Vietnam's system of higher education. Hoa Sen University 2010)

The first stage of Vietnam's education is pre-school serving the country's children. According to United Nations Education, Scientific and Cultural Organization – International Bureau of Education (UNESCO – IBE 2010, 8), early childhood education is provided for children from three months old to six years of age. It is not compulsory and is offered by both public and private sectors. Figure 1 shows that units that cater early childhood education are kindergarten for toddlers from three months old to three years old, and nursery schools for children from three years old to six years old.

At the age of six, Vietnamese children attend primary school in their district of residence (London 2011, 18). Primary education is a part of compulsory education for children in the age group 6-11 and lasts for five years. Pupils having completed altogether five grades in primary receive a certificate confirmed by the head master of the school. (UNESCO – IBE 2010, 8.)

Following mandatory primary education, lower secondary education is not compulsory and continues from 6th grade to 9th grade (ibid., 8-9). Students having completed lower secondary education receive certificate issued by the Bureau of Education and Training in the district, precinct, town or city under the provincial administration (ibid., 9). The curriculum in lower secondary school is authorized by the Ministry of Education and Training, and consists of thirteen subjects. Students successfully completing lower secondary receive a Lower Secondary Education Graduation Diploma and gain access to upper secondary education. (World Education News & Reviews 2012.)

Once completing lower secondary education, students can decide whether to go to upper secondary education level. Upper secondary school caters to students who have completed lower secondary education and passed an entrance exam. At upper secondary education level, there are two main streams for students to follow: the first stream is vocational training with various duration; and the second stream is academic track which is three years of duration from grade 10 to 12. (World Education News & Reviews 2012.)

Figure 2 also shows that vocational training program is offered in three types of schools: secondary professional schools, secondary vocational colleges and preliminary vocational schools. Vocational schools and colleges provide a wide range of knowledge and skills about a number of fields, including engineering, mechanism, technology, tailoring, fashion, music, arts and accounting. The track encompasses different programs with diverse duration from one to four years and the students will be awarded a certificate or diploma according to his or her particular program. Students attending a vocational college or secondary vocational college, after successfully completing their program, will be awarded the diploma of secondary vocational education. (UNESCO – IBE 2010, 9; World Education News & Reviews 2012.) With this diploma, admission to higher education is subject of passing an entrance exam test and fulfilling the requirements about average grades of secondary vocational entrance program (UNESCO – IBE 2010, 9).

The academic track in upper secondary education and higher education system in Vietnam will be discussed next in separate chapters. Academic track will be referred as “high school education” in this thesis further on.

2.1.1 High school education in Vietnam

In order to get accepted in a high school of preference or into grade 10 Vietnamese students must pass an entrance exam. The higher score the students gain, the more prestigious a high school they will be admitted to (World Education News & Reviews 2012). Simultaneously, UNESCO-IBE (2010, 19) reports that there are three options for high school admission on the basis of local context: (i) entrance exam that takes place in the summer after 9th grade, in which students sit for three subjects, namely mathematics, Vietnamese language and literature and a foreign language; (ii) a consideration of student’s performance over four years in lower secondary school and (iii) a combination of both options (i) and (ii). The decision on which admission option will be applied depends on local authorities’ confidence in the quality of their province’s lower secondary education. There are provinces that strongly believe that screening students’ previous performance is enough without an entrance

examination as the learning evaluation of those particular areas is reliable. (UNESCO Bangkok 2007, 17.)

Vietnamese high schools start their academic year in September, while ending all examination and evaluation activities in May. Students go to school six days per week, having 35-37 classes of 45 minute duration a week. The particular number of class a student has depends on his or her specialization and school. (UNESCO-IBE 2010, 14; World Education News & Review 2012.) Before being divided in a specific class in high school, students are surveyed to choose which stream they want to pursue further. Nguyen and Nguyen (2008, 126) believes that implementation of distinguish in-depth streams is critical element of education reform. Since the school year 2006-2007, high school curriculum are categorized into three streams, which are (1) basic, (2) natural sciences and (3) social sciences and foreign languages. All three streams must include 13 subjects that will be presented in Figure 3 below.

Subjects and Hours per Week			
	Grade 10	Grade 11	Grade 12
Art	2	2	2
Chemistry	2	2	2
Civics Education	1	1.5	1.5
Foreign Language	3	3	3
Geography	1	2	1
History	1	1	2
Literature	2	2	2
Mathematics	4	5	5
Physics	3	3	3
Biology	1	1	2
Sports & Military Education	2	2	2
Technology	2	2	2
Vietnamese	2	2	1
Other activities/classes	13	10.5	10.5
Total	39	39	39

Figure 3. Number of weekly periods in each grade (World Education News & Reviews 2012)

Figure 3 presents 13 mandatory subjects in Vietnam's high school, which are Art, Biology, Chemistry, Civics Education, Foreign Language, Geography, History, Literature, Mathematics, Physics, Sport & Military Education, Technology and Vietnamese. Besides intellectual periods, students can be required by school to participate in extra curriculum activities for more than 10 periods per week. However, the natural sciences stream is required to have advanced level for four subjects: mathematics, physics, chemistry and biology; whereas social sciences stream advances students with four subjects: literature, geography, history and foreign language. High schools have the flexibility to choose what stream they offer to student and to make adjustment in the curriculum for their students (Nguyen & Nguyen 2008, 126).

However, there is still space for the development of the high school curriculum in Vietnam as the education reform has not yet resolved two large-scaled issues. According to UNESCO – IBE (2010, 14-15), the first concern is the lack of a system for regular reviewing high school curriculum and the second problem is that Vietnam's high school program is heavily theoretical, which does not advance students' problem-solving and analytical skills. Nguyen and Nguyen (2008, 131) believe that *"curriculum specialists/ authors always want students to follow the same path they themselves have already experienced"*. In globalization era, when advanced knowledge in every field is being updated constantly and there are more demand for working people, it is essential to establish a system, in which curriculum content is assessed after a fixed period. A modern education cannot provide content that is behind scientific and technological inventions nowadays (ibid.) With regular and in-time review, the educators, hence, can provide an improved version and the curriculum. Curriculum reform will have a positive influence on students learning outcome through cognitive improvement and innovative teaching style. Unfortunately, high school's capacity cannot fulfill to make drastic change in teaching innovation and therefore, the studying style in Vietnam still depends on rote learning (ibid., 14; Nguyen & Nguyen 2008, 131).

2.1.2 Higher education system in Vietnam

According to World Education News and Reviews (2014), Vietnamese university is similar to that of Soviet Union, where university providing bachelor, master and doctorate education but focus mainly in teaching purposes. The research activities are actualized by research institutions which are not necessarily under control of the universities. There are three levels of studies offered by the universities: undergraduate study, graduate study and doctoral study.

Depending on the studies, the duration of undergraduate program can be from 4-6 years with requirements of 180-320 credits. The students can choose from different “modes” of study and this choice would be declared in diploma and study transcript. The most competitive “mode” to get into is full time (chính quy) study which requires students to take a national entrance exam and then the study places will be given to the candidates with the highest scores. The second form of study is part-time study (tại chức) for adult working people. This mode also has lower entry requirements for people. Other “modes” are open admission (mở rộng) with fewer credits completion and also lower entry standards, shorter specialization (chuyên tu) for graduates to update their skills and knowledge and the last mode is distance education (từ xa). (ibid.)

Another type of institution for undergraduate program in Vietnam is college. As presented in Figure 1, in colleges, the study is usually 3 years. After graduation, college students can start working right away or choose to study another 2 years to get university degree; however, this chance is not offered by every colleges.

After undergraduate program, students can decide to attain master education that is available in universities. Admission to graduate study is based on the university degree in full-time mode and an entrance exam. Graduate program last from 1.5 years to 2 years and require 40 credits which combine a course of coursework, research and a dissertation. (World Education News & Reviews 2014.)

After master degree, student can be invited to continue doctorate program which is at least 2 year of study and project work/thesis. The integrated programs, on the other hand, require 4 years of completion. In Vietnam, the exceptional students can take a combination of both master and doctorate studies after attaining their bachelor degree. (ibid.)

In term of time requirement for academic activities, one credit in Vietnamese university is equal 15h of classroom attending, or 30-45h of practical training, or 45-60h of thesis writing. This regulation is set up by the Ministry of Education and Training. (ibid.)

2.2 Teaching and learning environment in Vietnam

2.2.1 Funding high school and higher education

The education institution in Vietnam are financed from six major sources: state budget, tuition/admission fees, ODA funds, loans, donations and grants. Financial resources from the government are distributed at local level though in order to cover necessary expenses in teaching and learning activities (UNESCO Bangkok 2007, 7). A study carried out by Lan and Jones (2006, 3) revealed that more than 73% of total public fund is spent on teachers' salaries and infrastructure development, while a very limited proportion was invested to upgrade teaching methods and interactive learning environment. Moreover, in order to gain more financial resources, institution also participate in other activities such as consultancy, technological services, and establishing its own education products and services.

Although there are a number of program that support partly or entirely tuition fee for specific group of pupil, the education provided by public schools and higher education institution is not free of charge. Students pay tuition fee of 4.000 VND to 35.000 VND (equivalent of 0,13 EUR to 1,3 EUR) for upper secondary education. (UNESCO Bangkok 2007, 9.) However, an increasing number of Vietnamese students take extra private classes after school with a variety of tuition fee (Lan & Jones 2006,

3). Thus, the tuition fee in public schools mentioned above is not the entire expense of Vietnamese students on education.

In public universities and institution that receive funding from the state, the tuitions fees vary from 4, 85 (four point eighty five) million VND to 6, 85 million VND per academic year. In EUR currency equivalence, this amount is equal about 181 EUR to 256 EUR per academic year. In public institution with autonomy policies, overall education fees are from 3 million VND to 39 million VND (112 EUR to 1 456 EUR). In private institution, the students may pay up to 4480 EUR per year. (TuoitreOnline 2014.)

2.2.2 Teaching environment

In order to have a profound view on the teaching method, it is necessary to understand the education infrastructure in Vietnam. As indicated by Pham (2010, 26), as the class size in Vietnam is quite large: 50-70 students; while this figure in China is 50-60, Japan 45 and Korea 43. With such a number of students in class for one teacher to monitor, it is fairly hard to spread knowledge and attention particularly to individuals. As a result, the most appropriate method considered by most Vietnamese student is to lecture. By being the person talking only in the class, teachers think that they can give instruction equally to every students (ibid.) However, Park (2000, 247) believes that Vietnamese teachers “*did not have adequate instructional materials or training in diverse teaching and learning strategies*”. Due to the lack material and tool for a large number of students, there is not sufficient experimental and interactive learning opportunities for Vietnamese students.

Vo and Doan (2013, 2) listed eight most popular teaching methods used by lecturers in Vietnam; they are lectures, lectures and conversations, lectures with audio aids, group work, seminars, experiment and practice, computer-assisted teaching and self-directing teaching. Among those eight methods mentioned above, there are four proving to the most effective; they are lecturing, group work, seminar and situational teaching. Other new approached are used but not as effectively. (ibid.)

Learning goals and objectives are always presented by the teachers at the beginning of the class/course (ibid.) Though application of new teaching initiates in both high school and higher education institution, rote memorization based on teachers' note is common (Park 2000, 247). According to Pham (2010, 38), teaching styles in Vietnam necessitates an adjustment in order to give students skills such as activeness, cooperativeness, creativeness and argumentativeness.

There are no numerous figures in term of foreigners practicing educational activities in Vietnam. According to Pham (2011), there are foreign students in Vietnamese universities, studying Vietnamese studies, Vietnamese literature or Southeast Asian Studies. These students are mainly in Vietnam National University, the Foreign Trade University, the National University of Economics, Hue University and other leading institution that also offer undergraduate and graduate programs for international students (ibid.)

2.2.3 Learning environment

Regarding the learning patterns, Vietnamese share common characteristics with other Asian cultures whose heritage features significant values of Confucian philosophy, which is their obedience to educators. The Confucian set of values, even nowadays, serves to guide people's innermost thoughts and practices, which emphasizes "*self-reflection, modernization, persistence, humility, obedience to superiors, and stoic response to pain*" (Park 2000, 248). In her journal article, by mentioning "Asian students", Pham (2010, 24) indeed implied "Vietnamese students" when she presents ideas forming in the nineties by Westerner researchers that Asian students emphasized heavily on the lectures and text/material provided by the instructors as a source of "*definitive sources of knowledge*". They also consider the information from their education authority as "correct answer" and hence, hardly question the accountability of it. In fact, there is a Vietnamese saying that expresses absolute honor to teachers: "I dare you to achieve success without a teacher" (Nguyen, Nguyen-Ngoc & Saphiere 2014, 11). As a result, during the

lecturing session, students do not volunteer to ask questions or challenge the teacher (Pham 2010, 24).

One important factor contributing to learning style in Vietnam's education context is the concept of "face". According to Haugh and Hinze (2003, 2) explain the notion of "face" as following:

When interacting, most members of society are concerned of what others think of them. This concern is manifested in interaction ranging from conversations with our family and friends through to transient meeting with strangers. This concern about what others think of us results from omnipresent vulnerability to the fact that other people's perception of us can be incongruent with that we consider them to be. We believe that this ubiquitous concern can be used as the basis for developing a deeper understanding of the notion of "face" ...

In other word, "face" refers to pride, respect, dignity attributed to and achieved by an individual and based on external evaluation of others, rather than self-perception (Van Schalkwyk 2011, 2). In Vietnam and much of Asia, people modify their behavior to avoid "losing face" for themselves as well as for others in surrounding context. In many parts of Asia, the negligent behavior in public which results in losing face of another person is considered as disrespect. Nguyen and Tran (2013, 24) emphasize that "losing face" in front of the public is "a disaster" for Vietnamese. The concept of "saving face" hence is influential upon communication, management and conflict resolution style in Vietnam (ibid.). In academic environment, "saving face" means there is avoidance in questioning whether others' statement is right as well as in exposing self-disadvantage. One example, in which Vietnamese students avoid "losing face" of another, is that they do not disagree with teachers. Challenging teachers is viewed as decreasing teachers' academic expertise and hence, a disrespectful act. Also, Nguyen and Tran (ibid.) reveal that, in teamwork, Vietnamese are less willing to ask for clarification as they do not want to show that they do not understand. As a result, the question "Do you understand?" for Vietnamese teammates may be necessary.

In the class, Vietnamese tend to keep quiet and wait to be called upon to answer the questions raised by the teachers. According to Park (2000, 247), the California

Department of Education (1994) remarks that classrooms are highly organized and students are taught at early age to be polite and not to interrupt teachers. The primary motivation for such practices is because humility is highly valued in Vietnamese culture. Expressing that one knows the answer might be interpreted as showing off in the Vietnamese classroom, and students also do not want to lose face in case the answer is wrong (Park 2000, 247; Lewis 2005, 481). In general, Vietnamese students tend to be passive and nonverbal in class. This passivity can sometimes be misinterpreted as an un-cooperative attitude, even by Vietnamese teachers (Pham 2010, 24; Tuyet 2013, 74).

Referring to a number of opinions by other scholars, Pham (2010, 24) introduced certain drawbacks of Vietnamese students:

In general, the overall picture of Asian students' approaches to learning tends to be categorized by various researchers as:

- *Learning by 'rote' rather than by understanding*
- *Surface learners rather than deep learners*
- *Viewing the teacher and/or text as the definitive source of knowledge*
- *Unwittingly guilty of plagiarism*
- *Passive, quiet and non-participative in class*

However, recently, under influence of education transformation, Vietnamese students have become more active in the education environment. They are acknowledged as successful in the academic environment, even outperforming their Western colleagues; hence, it is hard to conclude that Vietnamese students are rote learners. There are group discussions inside the classroom as well as further group-work outside of the class. The group-work can be a part of both class work and projects. (ibid.)

Vietnamese students nowadays no longer want to depend entirely on the information given by their teachers. They can still be found passive and obedient in their class, but outside the class, they can be seen voicing in radio, TV channels and especially in social network group discussions (Tuyet 2013, 74). Beckman-Brito (n.d, 23) also discovered that Vietnamese students think that it is acceptable to ask

questions of professors during class and offer personal views/comments during the class.

Vietnamese students, with their cultural traditions, also carry unique learning styles that is essential to be aware of. Awla (2014, 240) describes learning styles as *“cognitive, affective and physiological traits that are relatively stable indicators of how learners perceive, interact with, and respond to the learning environment”*. More specifically, according to Awla (ibid., 241), learning styles are seen more as strategies students prefer using to learn. Park (2000, 263-265), discovers that Vietnamese students prefer visual and kinesthetic or tactile learning styles as well as group learning. According to Awla (2014, 242), visual learners think and absorb information more effectively through diagram, picture and video; while kinesthetic or tactile learners learn best when they carry out physical activities, working with touchable objects. Furthermore, Vietnamese students also prefer working in group than working individually. Park (2000, 265) confirms that usage of visual materials is widely beneficial to Vietnamese and he also recommend applying experimental and interactive learning for students in small group.

In regard to gender equality, based on the statistics of General Statistics Office of Vietnam (2013), the proportion between male and female students in Vietnam universities and college in 2013 is 1:1,022. The figure is interpreted that there is gender equality in Vietnam in term of higher education opportunities for both genders.

2.2.4 Examination and Evaluation

In high school, student's annual promotion is proceeded based on academic and moral performance in 9 months of study. The academic and moral record of the whole secondary periods is combined and managed in a pamphlet with comments from teachers involved. In order to go to next grade, student must not be absent from school more than 45 days during 9 months of study and their average scores for all subjects must be at least 5.0, with no subject under 3.5. (UNESCO – IBE 2010, 15.)

The grading system in both high schools and higher education in Vietnam is from 0 to 10 and is classified as below (see Figure 4):

HIGHER EDUCATION GRADING SCALE & SUGGESTED WES (U.S.) EQUIVALENCY			
Vietnamese Grading Scale	Description	Translation	WES Grade Conversion
8-10	Gioi	Excellent	A
6-7.9	Kha	Good	B
5-5.9	Trung Binh	Fair	C
0-4.9	Kem	Poor/Failing	F
<i>Note: Grading scales may vary. Please refer to grading scale on transcript.</i>			

Figure 4. Vietnamese higher education grading scale & suggested the U.S. equivalency (World Education News & Reviews 2014)

On the scale from 0 to 10, Vietnamese higher institution categories grade from 0 to 4.9 as Poor/Failing, which is equal to F in the U.S system. The next class is from 5 to 5.9, which is a fair result in Vietnamese point of view and hence, can be compare to a C in U.S school. Students scoring from 6 to 7.9 will get an equivalent B in the U.S. Vietnamese students will be considered as Excellent if they got grade from 8 to 10 which, is grade A in the U.S education system. (World Education News & Reviews 2014.)

2.3 Student mobility in Vietnam

2.3.1 Mobility in Vietnam

Vietnam is currently one of the fasting growing sources of students studying abroad. Motivations for such prevalent trend are various, because the rapid changes in socioeconomic condition of familial units as well as the economy as a whole. The first reason is the drastic economic changes in Vietnam, where outsourcing, manufacturing and services are become the major industries. As a result, there is a

drive for knowledge and people with knowledge, which can be fulfilled by sending students abroad for studying and research purposes. The second logic for the phenomenon is the persistent quality issues of Vietnam's education system. Vallely and Wilkinson (2008, 1) indicate that Vietnam's education system is "*far behind*" education systems of their Asian neighbors. No Vietnamese universities yet rank in the world's top 200, or even in Asia's top 100 and simultaneously, research and development activities are inadequate, leading to Vietnam's low innovative index compared to other Southeast Asian nations (ibid., 3). The last incentive is the boosting household incomes, because of the developing economy, making studying abroad affordable to an increasing number of families.

According to the government statistics, in 2012, there are approximately 106.000 students studying in 49 destinations (World Education News & Reviews 2013), which takes the country in top ten countries of origin of mobile students (UNESCO Institute for Statistics 2014). To put this in perspective, this number of students contributes around 5% of domestic post-secondary enrolment. Figure 5 below presents 11 top destinations of Vietnamese student when going abroad.

Viet Nam	
Destination country	
United States	15,083
Australia	11,081
France	5,642
Japan	4,047
United Kingdom	3,769
Russian Federation	2,453
Korea, Rep.	1,867
Germany	1,444
Thailand	1,290
New Zealand	1,057
Finland	904

Figure 5. Flow of tertiary students in Vietnam (UNESCO Institute for Statistic 2014)

According to Figure 5, 11 most popular destination for Vietnamese students are the U.S, Australia, France, Japan, the U.K, Russia, South Korea, Germany, Thailand, New

Zealand and Finland. 90% of those are self-financing, which means students and their families afford for the education, without support from other parties. The Ministry of Finance estimates that every year, total spending on overseas education amounts to roughly 1% GDP, ranging up to US \$1,6 billion. (ICEF Monitor 2013, 2014.)

In relation to academic level, Vietnam is vastly an undergraduate market. Roughly 75% of mobile students apply for bachelor degree programs, whereas 17% enroll in graduate studies. The least common study level chosen by mobile Vietnamese students is Optional Practical Training. (ICEF Monitor 2013.)

2.3.2 Preparation for full-time students

As bearing self-financed responsibility, Vietnamese students and their family also experience more independent preparation for students before leaving for the host countries. Barron (2006, 132) believes change in learning and teaching styles might cause students to feel *“de-skilled and depressed”*. For that reason, it is vital to equip students with study skills necessary for academic requirements of the future institutions. Required skills include English proficiency, time management, self-study, teamwork, researching and even public speaking skills. Furthermore, knowledge about intercultural communication also ensure effective information exchange in both academic and ordinary interaction (ibid., 159). Indeed, according to Tran and Truong (2013, 2-3) believe the demand for English and intercultural learning has increased for Vietnamese mobile students. In addition, students are also supposed to manage administrative tasks by themselves. Administration involves school selection, application and further arrangement such as accommodation and visa. While exchange students might have support from home university in mentioned charges to some extent, independent students may have to handle all alone or they might seek assistance from the other organizations.

Though taking great responsibility in preparing students for national exam into higher education level, Vietnam’s high schools have, not yet, had a well-invested scheme to support students planning to study abroad. In fact, Lankford (2010, 13) discovered local high schools in Vietnam neither attain nor utilize an adequate

benchmark for learning styles and English skills needed in international higher education level. Besides, intercultural study program in Vietnam is fairly limited. In fact, there is no evidence about any sort of multicultural exchange program or training at high school level. Regarding foreign language studies, Vietnamese have started to pay attention since the economic and political open policy was applied in 1986 (Nguyen 2012, 4; Phan 2009, 175). Although English has replaced Russian as the most popular foreign language learned in schools (Nguyen 2012, 2), the language is learned with methods that can still be improved in many aspects. According to Lap (2005, 13), English program in grade 11 and 12 spends a large proportion of time on writing and reading skills due to exam-oriented method of teaching the language. However, reading and writing level in Vietnam's high school is not advanced enough for students to engage in academic activities at tertiary education level (Lap 2005, 14).

Subsequently, private section has established strong position in the field of teaching English and study abroad counselor. Lankford (2010, 3-5) concludes foreign teachers have assumed responsibility of *“educating Vietnamese students in reading methods, writing techniques and communication skills, as well as the practical application of general knowledge”*, especially in training students to take required English certificates such as TOEIC, TOEFL or CPE. English centers are reported to use English content to educate students with both linguistic skills and learning methods used in future destinations. To be specific, the most two prevailing materials used to teach English and communication in educational community are Cambridge and Oxford programs. (ibid., 5.)

Popular English centers that have developed outstanding reputation among Vietnamese students are ILA, Australian Center for Education and Training (ACET), Language Link, Apollo English Center, British Council and Cleverlearn English Center. Each of those centers has slightly different corporate mission ranging from ensuring academic English level to everyday level, as well as distinguish target customers such as children and adults. Through reviewing mission announced and courses arranged

by mentioned English centers, it appears that ILA has the most diverse contents offered to customers.

Together with language center, study abroad consultancy agencies established rapidly in recent years all over the country also contribute greatly to the preparation process of Vietnamese students. According to Vietnam Net (2012), overseas study agencies have developed fast in quantity, covering a number of services related to study abroad and serving a large number of customers seeking for educational opportunities throughout the world. The mission of overseas study firms is to support students to find foreign institutions and academic programs that are matching with students' and their families' interest.

Regarding students' own consideration before studying abroad, Barron (2006, 104-169) states that students should think about:

Table 1. Areas of preparation to travel and study overseas (adapted from Barron 2006, 104, 123, 131, 147, 168, 169, cont.)

Areas of preparation	Relating matters
Arrangements for long term studies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Students' individual responsibilities - Getting a study permit / visa - Health requirements - Language preparation - Funding - Accommodation
Upon Arrival	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Immigration authorities - Health check - Settling into accommodation - Converting to local currency - Managing time differences - Assuring self-safety

	- Contacting home
Registration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Getting academic advice and understanding instructions - Attending orientation - Making friends
Study Skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Being prepared for teaching and learning differences - Being willing to learn - Resolving language issues - Using multiple skills - Being active in seeking advice
Intercultural Communication	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Discovering subjective cultural differences - Learning more about yourself - Being aware of and sensitive to cultural differences - Observing formalities

(Table 1: page 27-28)

2.4 Cultural perspectives

2.4.1 Culture definition

‘Culture’ is a difficult concept to define because the term can be examined in a number of angles. As an introduction to most audience, culture is defined as *“every aspect of life”* such as *“music, literature, visual arts, architecture or languages”* and even *“what we do, think and feel”* (Foreign Affairs and International Trade Canada 2014). Dr. Swallow (2014) also explains culture, using a comparison “Language is what we hear. Culture is how we understand”. Once again, culture is seen in a broad way, which include different physical and spiritual values in human being life.

Sir Edward Tylor specified *“Culture is that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom and other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society”* (1871). As mentioned by Sir Tylor, culture possesses two most important elements: it is a *“complex whole”* surrounding a human being and it is a

heritage to pass from generation to generation by a specific group. Features such as languages, belief, customs and so on are all parts of culture and therefore, it is undeniable that culture determined how a person think, feel and react to one another and surrounding environment. In order to understand one in his or her local setting as well as in foreign environment, it is essential to take one's culture into account.

In the context of cross-culture management and communication, one of the most commonly used definitions of culture is that proposed by Geert Hofstede. Hofstede (2005) defined culture as *"the collective programming of the mind that distinguishes the members of one category of people from another"*. Here, Hofstede referred to culture as a "collective programming" that greatly activates individuals who belong to a particular society to think, act and perceive themselves and others. Since almost everyone belongs to a number of different groups, one is likely to obtain several characteristics of many cultures he or she is a member of. For example, at the national level culture is what makes a Chinese person Chinese and thus different in some ways from a German. At the same time, culture also differentiates between Han Chinese and Miao people who only reside in Guizhou Province.

In conclusion, *"the complex whole"* or *"the collective programming"* represents a culture only if it is durable and shared by members of a stable group of people, for example by an ethnic or national group. According to Hofstede (1991, 10), this group basis includes a number of levels, such as:

- *a national level due to one's country of origin or of immigration*
- *a regional/ethnic/religious/linguistic level*
- *a gender level*
- *a generational level, which separates grandparents from parents from children*
- *a role category in the society, for example: parents, son, daughter, teacher and students*
- *a social class level, which involve in one's social opportunities, occupation and profession*
- *For people who are employed, there is a corporate level according to the way employees have been socialized by their work organization.*

2.4.2 Culture effects on mobility in education

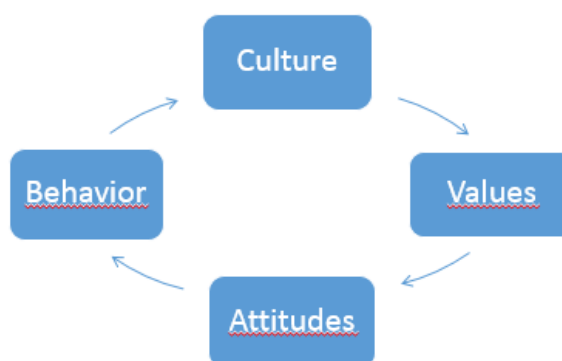
Characteristics of globalization create culturally diverse societies and plentiful cultural experiences. Globalization is changing the way the world is structured and the way people perceive the world. By attaining a global perspective, people are more aware of links to people from different cultures and thus, also are more knowledgeable about possible conflicts caused by cultural misunderstandings. The global perspectives also present the fact that once people involve more with the rest of the world, their behaviors and action will have consequences to others. In other words, globalization means that individuals, organizations and countries become more interdependent.

In the field of education, globalization has encouraged the exchange of educational resources and students throughout the world. This flow of education exchange has brought diversity to educational institutions, as well as a strong demand for students and educators to prepare students for cross-cultural communication (Binder 2004, 67). In Europe, due to rising collaboration within the region, the task of educating the young population of the area is initiated in secondary education level. For instance, the Council of Europe Youth Partnership reports that the creative theater project “Be a Stranger, be a Friend 1939 – 2009 – 2050” is implemented to introduce young teenagers to intercultural topics (Scholten 2012, 141). “Be a Stranger, be a Friend 1939 – 2009 – 2050” and other projects in the Comenius Program demonstrate the importance of cross- and intercultural communication for youth in European communities.

Likewise, recent years have witnessed the growing mobility of Vietnamese students and hence, it is necessary for the students to develop their intercultural sensitivity and competence to enhance their engagement in foreign societies. According to Tran and Truong (2013, 3), intercultural sensitivity relates to students’ capability to recognize and experience cultural differences; intercultural competence is the ability to “*think and act*” in appropriate ways in intercultural setting. Bredella (2003, 38)

defines “intercultural understanding” as the ability to *“reconstruct the context of the foreign, take the others’ perspective and see things through their eyes”*. This definition does not imply that people have to surrender their own culture when interacting with another, but it does mean that people are able to move beyond to some degree themselves from their own values and interests to negotiate with the other party, so that a mutual negotiation of interest and perspective can be produced for every involved agent. According to Bredella (ibid., 39), such process of negotiation can only take place if people are flexible enough to imagine how another person might view things. It is vital to notice that *“although intercultural learning ... may lead to successful coping with new cultural surroundings”*, it does not *“guarantee an advanced intercultural competence”* (Council of Europe Youth Partnership, 9). This means intercultural competence cannot be educated by one-time session or training, but is a result of accumulated practices. The Council of European Youth Partnership (n.d, 2) believes that intercultural teaching should be actualized by not only education institution, but also other sectors of society to generate both formal and non-formal programs for students.

According to Barron (2006, 158), intercultural communication involves only speaking the language fluently, but also about being able to realize cultural differences and gain proper insights into the values, attitudes and behaviors of people in academic and everyday life situations. Nguyen and Ngoc (2013, 20) also believe that in order to attain cultural understanding, one has to *“look deeper into the values and assumptions that are reflected in people’s beliefs and attitudes”*. According to Nguyen and Ngoc (ibid.), Alfred Adler described the interrelation between culture and behaviors through a framework presented in Figure 6.



**Figure 6. Influence of culture n behavior and behavior on culture
(adapted from Adler 2008, 19)**

Figure 6 shows that culture has important influence upon a group of people, especially on what values they share. Those values then define people's attitude and behavior to the surrounding environment and other people. Continuing the circle, behavior affects culture. For example, R. Lewis (2005, 481) introduced one value of Vietnamese people, restraint, which leads to an attitude of being humble and not showing off or talking flamboyantly in public. As a result, Vietnamese students tend to keep silent when being asked for their opinions in class or while working in groups. Understanding the reasons behind Vietnamese students' behaviors could allow tremendous support from educators to maximize Vietnamese students' abilities and contributions.

2.5 Identity and mobility of Vietnamese students

2.5.1 Identity and communication

Identity is the unique product of an individual's search for who he or she is in society. Erikson (1994, 92) concluded that the process of developing identity starts at birth. He explained that personal identity forms when a person gathers and organizes his or her experiences in the environment as a mean to understand himself or herself (ibid., 93). Additionally, Torres, Jones and Renn (2009, 579) suggest one's identity is described and presented by one's personal meaning, personality and characteristics

that one uses to interpret and navigate experiences and relationships with other people. However, in order for an individual's identity to be understood by the individual himself and by other observers, it must be put into a social context that he or she has experienced (Erikson 1994, 74; Torres et al. 2009, 577). Once created, identity is maintained, adjusted and even largely reformed due to historical, economic and political transforms around the self during his or her whole lifetime (Martin & Nakayama 2014, 96). Under the influences of identity, one will develop consistence and continuity about one's self in different situation of life and hence, one's identity will guide one to make major decisions in life (Savicki & Cooley 2011, 341). As an example, Althen and Bennett (2011, 5) state that from a very young age, Americans are trained to consider themselves as an individualistic self that is in control of their own behaviors as well as their own life decisions.

2.5.2 Identity in studying abroad context

According to Gill (2007, 167-168), when the students go abroad for educational purposes, they will carry with them the concept of who they are, which is developed in their home countries. This reality plays an important role in their interactions back home and will probably shape their integration abroad. When students enter the host countries for the first time, they will experience cultures that may seem very different from their own and at the same time, they may encounter quite unfamiliar social situations. Nevertheless, the students may choose to adapt into the new environment in order to manage cultural and social problems, which are both very likely to occur (Gill 2007, 168; Bennet 2013, 105).

According to Martin and Nakayama (2013, 174), in a multicultural environment, communicating or presenting one's self to other people is not a one-way process, but rather involves perspective of the persons one communicates with. Martin and Nakayama (2014, 95-96) also state that during intercultural communication activities, issues are often found when people encounter each other whose identity they are not familiar with. People may misinterpret others' identities and cause confusion when collaborating academically. In some cases, there are even negative prejudices

towards a group or an individual. Hence, as it may be stressful to engage with a new culture, and successful adaptation depends on how students choose to manage self-identity reconstruction as well as turbulent situations both in and out academic scopes.

On the other hand, studying abroad undeniably affects and benefits a wide range of student perspectives. Gill (2007, 176) discovers that becoming independent is a crucial contributor in students' personal growth. Intensifying pressure is placed upon students as a result of their relocation away from their home environment. Correspondingly, in term of pragmatic demand, there will be requirement for problem solving and autonomous functioning skills. As a result, values and skills developed by students studying abroad include leadership ability, self-esteem and independence (Gill 2007, 177; O'Callaghan 2006, 21). In addition, O'Callaghan (2006, 22) acknowledges that experiences accumulated by students in foreign countries have significant impacts on students' sense of self. Overseas experience brings particularly challenging situations to students and thus pushes them out of their comfort zone. At the same time, by entering a new foreign environment, students observe local identities expressed by people of the host country, which may contrast what they have seen in their home nation. For that reason, they have more chances to reflect their self-identity and even recognize opportunities to express themselves more.

3 METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research purpose and research approaches

In order to answer the research questions, the research approach "descriptive research" was chosen. According to Krishnaswami and Satyaprasad (2010, 12), a descriptive research approach is a fact-finding study with deep levels of interpretation following. In a descriptive study, research firstly recognizes a circumstance or a problem and hence, raises questions about particular aspects of

the circumstance. So descriptive research is applied to gather facts and provide information for a subsequent interpretation process (ibid.)

Also, for understanding how Vietnamese students are guided by various service providers and whether the provided guidance is effective, the primary data collection procedure employs both quantitative and qualitative research approaches. The quantitative approach requires a large pool of statistics with uniform features, and a set of variables to test the participants chosen for research (ibid., 6). In order to draw inferences from the data, a questionnaire was designed and sent to a number of Vietnamese students who have studied abroad. As well, in order to explore the roles of three mentioned service organizations, a qualitative approach is also utilized in order to gain in-depth insights about their assumptions and practices (ibid.)

Due to the integration of quantitative and qualitative data collection methods, this research is a mixed-method research, according to Hesse-Biber (2010, 3):

In general, researchers who use mixed methods employ a research design that uses both quantitative and qualitative data to answer a particular question or set of questions. This combination of methods “involve[s] the collection, analysis, and integration of quantitative and qualitative data in a single or multiple study” (Hanson, Creswell, Plano Clark, Petska & Creswell 2005, 224).

Green, Caracelli and Graham (1989) present five reasons for researchers to apply mixed-methods: triangulation, complementary, development, initiation and expansion (cited in Hess-Biber 2010, 4-6). In this research, triangulation and the complementary results of mixed-methods approach is clear, for qualitative and quantitative data provides a broader understanding of the research problem.

3.2 Sampling techniques

In order to make decisions about sampling, the following aspects were considered:

- The size of the population: The research population of the semi-structured interviews represents English language centers and high schools in Hanoi, while the research population of the questionnaire comprises Vietnamese students

who have already had their first experiences abroad for their university studies. Both of these populations are large, and there is no easy way to contact many members of the population in the scope of the present study. As a result, probability sampling techniques are not applicable.

- Funds for the study: As a bachelor' thesis, the researcher did not have access to large monetary funding.
- Facilities: The researcher is the only individual completing the research. In order to approach the research population of the questionnaire, the researcher contacted a large number of Vietnamese students via Internet and social network platforms (Vietnamese Association Forums and Facebook pages of Vietnamese students studying abroad) as well as through JAMK staff members.
- Timeframe: One month was the limitation for the researcher to collect both qualitative and quantitative data to achieve the time schedule of the thesis.

Recruitment for qualitative research initiated with seeking information about agencies and English language centers holding training certificates from British Council, which recognize their experience and quality by an international education organization. This sampling technique is defined as purposive technique because there is a standard of traits for recruited participants (Laerd Dissertation 2012). In this case, researcher set up a standard that the interview will only be implemented with organizations whose quality was acknowledged by the British Council. Next, convenience sampling was applied when three consultancy agents, three language centers and three high schools were invited to participate in the semi-structured interviews. Convenience sampling is explained as a technique in which researcher keeps inviting responders until sample size is reached (ibid.). Considering the limited resources, purposive and convenience sampling proved to be effective in this research.

Self-selection sampling was used in the quantitative component of the research, which involves two simple steps: (1) publishing demands for target group and (2) checking the relevance of the volunteers and either inviting them or rejecting them (Laerd Dissertation 2012). Self-selection sampling was used to direct the

questionnaire to the population with suitable characteristics, to gain a high proportion of responses and to minimize data contamination and distortion. Self-selection sampling can recruit committed respondents whose experiences are relevant to research scope. In fact, the researcher chose to implement Internet and Intranet mediated questionnaires. The survey was widespread, stating clearly its target respondents and was distributed in forums and social network groups for Vietnamese students abroad. The required attributes of respondents were Vietnamese students whose first studying abroad experience is at the bachelor or other equivalent levels. The survey received 71 responses from students studying mostly in Europe, the US and Australia.

3.3 Data collection and processing

3.3.1 Uses of secondary data

For validity of the research, an extensive literature review was conducted to establish a theoretical framework for the thesis. According to Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill (2009, 258), there are three classifications of secondary data reliable to exploit for more thorough answers for research questions:

- Information was compiled from organization's website and academic sources (both printing and online document such books, journals, and theses), which is a source of **documentary data**.
- **Pre-existing survey-based data** is not used in this research, for no relevant survey data was found. As a result, the responsibility to answer research questions depends heavily on the primary data collected. However, survey secondary data proves to be valuable regarding quantitative information of Vietnamese student's mobility.
- **Multiple source data** is the combination of documentary data and survey-based data and so the researcher used this branch of data to establish theoretical framework.

3.3.2 Scheduling interviews and questionnaire

Semi-structured interviews

The qualitative data was collected first employing semi-structured interviews with three related types of organizations: overseas study consultancy agencies, English language centers and local high schools. The researcher developed a set of questions to approach different angles of how the mentioned service providers work to support students. Because the theoretical framework of the research suggests possible challenges that students may encounter when going abroad, those challenges were investigated during interviews. However, aware of the fact that the theoretical framework about the phenomenon is not yet fully established, the researcher developed the content of semi-structured interviews based on her own experiences. In a semi-structured interview, following the main questions, probing questions were asked in order to understand further about the motivations of, and actions and their effects on the participant. Nevertheless, leading questions were carefully avoided and open-answered questions formed the core of the process (Saunders et al. 2009, 319). For better understanding, semi-structured interviews were implemented in Vietnamese – the mother tongue language of interviewers and interviewees, and the results were then translated and now reported here in English.

Survey “Vietnamese Students’ Preparation before Studying Abroad”

After implementing the semi-structured interviews, the survey was carried out. The first step of developing content of the survey was to identify dimensions that were relevant to the research purposes and research questions. The two dimensions investigated in the survey were the supports available to students and the effectiveness of organizations that have provided those supports. In order to investigate these two dimensions, the survey was developed based on (1) Preparation for full-time students, (2) Teaching and learning environment in Vietnam, (3) Culture effects on mobility of education and (4) Identity in studying abroad contexts, all of which were characterized earlier in the theoretical framework.

In addition, when scanning the results of the interviews, several additional challenges emerged from the overseas study consultants and high school representatives that were not identified in the theoretical framework. Hence, the questionnaire content was revised and improved. The complementary benefit from mixed-methods is shown as previous semi-structured questionnaire provides content with perspectives that are not found in theoretical review. The questionnaire was created and implemented on the Webropol survey platform, which is a survey creation tool selected by JAMK University of Applied Sciences for survey development and presentation. As the target group of student participants have studied abroad in Europe, including in three English speaking countries (the UK, the US and Australia) the survey was developed in English with revisions conducted by a native English speaker and two Vietnamese students who fit the population pool. All three individuals confirmed the questionnaire's language validity.

3.3.3 Data analysis

Krishnaswami and Satyaprasad (2010, 160) define data analysis as an examination of assembled and grouped data for studying the characteristics of the phenomena under study, and for determining the patterns of the relationships among variables relating to it. With regard to analyzing purpose, analysis can be categorized into descriptive analysis (or inductive analysis) and inferential analysis (deductive analysis). Descriptive or inductive analysis provides information about the characteristics of a subject or a phenomenon. This analysis describes data on one or more than one variables. On the other hand, inferential or inductive analysis highlights drawing inferences and conclusions from results of the research. The purpose of using inferential analysis approach is either to present statistical estimation or to test hypotheses. (ibid., 161-163; Saunders et al. 2009, 127.)

With both qualitative and quantitative data collected, both type of analysis approaches were applied to explore the data efficiently. To analyze data from nine semi-structured interviews, the researcher chose to employ inductive or descriptive analysis. This is because the semi-structured interview provides an understanding

about meanings of the three service providers and the analyzing objective is to explore data and introduce hypotheses about the subject. Based on guidance by Saunders and colleagues (2009, 491), the process of analyzing qualitative data was adjusted, including following steps: (1) transcript interview records into English text, (2) comprehend the document, (3) identify key themes or patterns from the data, (4) develop hypothesis and (5) draw descriptive interpretation.

For quantitative data that resulted from the questionnaire, deductive or inferential analysis was applied. First of all, the questionnaire content was developed from both the theoretical framework and the insights developed from the semi-structured interviews. In this case, the analysis technique used was inferential analysis because data from the questionnaire was used to draw statistical estimation of the population (Krishnaswami & Satyaprasad 2010, 162).

4 DATA PRESENTATION

4.1 Semi-structured interview results

4.1.1 Available supports to students

Interviews with representative (rep.) from study abroad consultancy firms, English language centers and local high schools offer perspectives of involved stakeholders who give students vital support and guide them through steps of preparation. The conversation with these organization was firstly intended to explore their services and support for students intending to study abroad. (See Table 2).

Table 2. Responses about supports to students and interpretation (cont.)

Participant's statement	Interpretation
<u>Consultancy firm rep.'s original text</u>	
<i>We have consultancy and placement service to</i>	Consultancy is available in all level of

<i>all levels of studies abroad interested by students, including summer school, English programs, foundation schools, high school, community college, undergraduate and postgraduate.</i>	<p>studies:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Summer school - English school - High school, foundation program - Undergraduate and equivalent programs - Post graduate programs
<i>We will help them with building study plan, applying for foreign schools, arranging accommodation, preparing VISA paper work, buying insurance and flight ticket, arranging guardians abroad and supporting students the whole time they are abroad.</i>	<p>Consultancy firm can support students in their application, pre-departure, arrival and during studies abroad in following tasks:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Building study plan - Apply for foreign schools - Arranging accommodation - Preparing for VISA application - Handling travel and insurance paper - Supporting students abroad
<i>I told this girl not wear heels to school abroad as it can be very troublesome walking around the huge campus. Many students are spoiled in their family, so I advise them to share house chore with homestay family and keep the shared house clean</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Specific advices in life which are helpful for individuals are given to students before departing. - Examples of specific advices are: to share house chores with homestay family and housemates; not to wear heels on a large campus.
<u>English language center rep.'s statements</u>	
<i>For teenagers, we have programs that help students to develop communication and achieve international certificate such as KEY, IELTS, TOEFL iBT and TOEFL Junior.</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - In language centers, English are taught to attain English certificates, such as KEY, IELTS and TOEFL and to develop communication skills. - Language testing is mandatory for Vietnamese students when applying for higher education abroad.
<i>Students need many other skills to succeed in</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - English courses also train students to

<i>international environment. Our course content is built to help students to develop those skills, such as presentation, critical thinking, group work and reporting.</i>	<p>live, study and work in foreign countries.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - English centers integrate academic skills, together with linguistic skills in course content. - Students are equipped with academic skills in language centers.
<i>...other exams in French, German, Korean and Japanese. We also collaborate with English language schools in Philippines.</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Other language programs are offered. - Students can study English in either Vietnam or abroad.
<i>We arrange picnic trip quite frequently so that our teachers and students can have relaxing time together. In our Facebook, we have quiz game every week to introduce students with every day knowledge they may want to know when living in international society. Just in January, we created Global Village festival, which brought intercultural heritage of many nations. We always consider those occasion as a chance for students to know more about how to integrate into multinational environment.</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - There are outdoor and online activities for students to learn English. - Language center recognizes importance of intercultural learning. - Multinational cultures are presented to students by English centers. - A deeper level of cultural understanding and intercultural communication is not yet provided.
<i>Our teachers work and keep track on each student's progression and therefore, have timely solutions to help each of them.</i>	There is individual support by language teachers for each student in language centers.
<u>High school rep. described</u>	
<i>I encourage them when they get stressed. I write recommendation letter for them and consult them if being asked. And if they ask, I can reduce the amount of assignment in my subject for them as I know they are really busy.</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - With high school, support for students comes from their class teachers and only is provided when being asked by students. - Examples of support include providing recommendation letters, consulting,

	<p>reducing school-work for students and encouraging students.</p> <p>- Studying abroad is individually planned and teachers only become aware when being informed by students.</p>
<p><i>The students themselves also have many clubs and activities that involve foreign material. They have public speaking club where they discuss about international issues. Or they have cheerleader club where they update quite often about foreign music and cheerleader dance.</i></p>	<p>- In high school, students are active in studying about foreign cultures through temporary entertainment material.</p> <p>- Teachers are aware of activities or clubs students organize to learn about foreign cultures.</p> <p>- There is no practical support from school staff members.</p>

(Table 2: page 40-43)

4.1.2 Challenges experienced by students

Interviews with three mentioned stakeholders reveal a variety of matters students may undergo (see Table 3).

Table 3. Responses about challenges occurring to students (during preparation and after arrival) and two levels of interpretation (cont.)

Participants' words	Interpretation level 1	Interpretation level 2
	<u>Consultancy firm rep. said:</u>	
<p><i>The first barrier is getting information to apply for schools and level of their wish abroad. For example, in the U.S, every higher education institute has their own policy of choosing students. Nowadays, there are many sources for students to</i></p>	<p>- Finding information can be a challenge.</p> <p>- Each school or university has its own recruiting policy.</p> <p>- There are too many sources of information in the market.</p>	<p>- Finding information to study abroad is a challenge for students.</p> <p>- There are opportunities for Vietnamese students to improve their research skills.</p> <p>- Not all available information is correct and</p>

<i>refer to and that makes them easy to get confused.</i>		helpful. - Not every information available is correct and helpful.
<i>Vietnamese students do not have a good career orientation when they are at such young age. It is because Vietnamese students go to universities due to temporary current trend. And no one wants to study vocational schools.</i>	<p>Students lack study and program orientation programs.</p> <p>- They likely choose a program based on current trends in the job market.</p>	<p>- Study and program orientation for Vietnamese students is insufficient.</p> <p>- Some Vietnamese might have entered unsuitable programs in higher education.</p> <p>- Vocational programs are not favored by Vietnamese.</p>
<i>For example, this one student is very exceptional, but her financial resource is limited. Therefore, we have to research about countries that give good scholarship.</i>	<p>- Students need scholarships in order to afford studies abroad.</p> <p>- Some information is not always available in consultancy firms.</p>	<p>- A number of students need assistance in finding scholarships to afford overseas study.</p> <p>- For some students, their study destination is decided based on their financial condition.</p>
<i>When people want to find scholarship, as I said earlier, they need to know very well what they are passionate about. Only then they can persuade foreign schools to give them scholarship.</i>	<p>- In order to receive scholarship, students need to persuade foreign schools about what they are passionate about.</p>	<p>- Strong study or career orientation is essential for students to attain scholarships.</p>
<i>Parents actually play an important part of where students are going to and what they are going to study. Most parents, now, want students to study finance, business, or</i>	<p>- Parents are important in making study abroad decision because they may help to finance students.</p> <p>- Now, parents prefer</p>	<p>- Financial independence in parents bring challenge to students when making decisions.</p> <p>- Parents tend to favor certain studies programs</p>

<p><i>accounting. But some students have other passions. Sometimes, I even observe some arguments in our office.</i></p>	<p>degrees in finance, business and accounting.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Conflicts sometimes occur between parents and student in term of studies choice. 	<p>due to their popularity or high demand at the time.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Vietnamese parents have considerable influence on students.
<p><i>To study abroad, students mostly come from wealthy family or they are outstanding to receive scholarship. Therefore, we choose to approach students in those schools.</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Students studying abroad are either wealthy or outstanding. - Consultancy firms mostly approach students from outstanding schools or schools with affluent students. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Information about studying abroad is not equally distributed to all students in Vietnam.
<u>English language center rep.'s statement</u>		
<p><i>Only with these language proof (language certificates), they can get admitted in foreign schools and be able to study there.</i></p>	<p>Language certification is mandatory for Vietnamese students when applying for schools abroad.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Vietnamese students need to investigate extra resources to improve English skills. - English programs taught in local high school are not enough to prepare Vietnamese students to study abroad.
<p><i>Students planning to study abroad have different English foundation as well as time resource so the amount of time studying with us also varies. I can last from months to more than a year.</i></p>	<p>Studying English to go abroad can last from months to more than a year.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Preparing to study abroad can take a long period of time. - Students spend a large amount of time in studying English.

<u>High school rep.'s opinions</u>		
<i>When they apply for scholarship, they need good GPA at school, which means they need to study hard at school and also spend time handling all requirements from foreign schools. My students who plan to study abroad spend a great amount of extra time to study English after school so they are very busy.</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Students need good grades to apply for scholarships. - Preparation to study abroad makes students very busy. 	<p>Balancing between study abroad preparations and normally required high school performance may be a challenge for students.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Studying English in local high schools is not enough to prepare students to study abroad.
<i>They may feel difficult to blend in both environment, both overseas and in Vietnam. Their personal traits and mind-set, after studying abroad, is a combination of foreign and Vietnamese influence. So they might see themselves different from their social circle in both country.</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - It may be difficult for students to repatriate in Vietnam, as it might have been when traveling foreign countries for studying abroad. - Students' development will be influenced by both Vietnam's and foreign cultures. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Students are likely to experience substantial changes relating to self-identity when studying abroad. - Students are likely to handle situations abroad using their Vietnamese cultural lens. And when they come back to Vietnam, their mindset will present foreign cultures' influences. - Students may feel as an outcast in foreign countries and in Vietnam.
<i>And if the students so to study on scholarship, I think they may need to study very hard to keep that scholarship. And that can stress them as well.</i>	Students need to study hard to maintain scholarship.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Academic activities abroad can bring stress.
<i>Another problem might be they</i>	Some Vietnamese find it	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Adaptation to local

<i>cannot adapt and have friends in the new places. Some of them quite often find themselves lonely and cannot get along well with local students.</i>	hard to make friends with the locals and hence, feel lonely.	cultures is a challenge to students abroad. - Students' overseas situations can be updated by former teachers in Vietnam.
<i>So when they are along in a strange country, they need to be independent to manage their own life.</i>	Students need to learn to be independent.	- There is space for students to improve their self-reliance trait. - Self-management is a required skills for students.
<i>They will surely miss their friends and family.</i>	Students will miss their life in Vietnam.	Emotional distress can occur to students.
<i>There is a student who one day, suddenly told us that she wanted to change to another university, just because a friend told her that the other university was better.</i>	A student wanted to drop one university and go to another based on her friend's comment.	- There are forces that cause changes to students' study plans overseas. Some influences can be negative. - Without professional advice, students may rush into making bad decisions.
<i>We do not cover this phenomenon in our regular meetings.</i>	High school teachers and staffs do not discuss about student's studying abroad.	Support for students planning to study abroad is not covered by high schools and is limited.

(Table 3: page 43-47)

Challenges to students who plan to study abroad has been detected by all of the studied stakeholders during three time periods: when students prepare to apply for higher education placement, when students are accepted and prepare to travel abroad, and after students arrive to destination. A number of challenges can be grouped into the following categories:

- English or other language skills
- Preparation for studying and interacting skills
- Information research

- Application to foreign institutions and for VISA
- Financial pressure and
- Settlement abroad
- Issues related to cross-cultural communication and self-identity

It was revealed that overseas study counsellors and some teachers in high school do follow up with students when they are abroad and due to advanced communication, and are aware of challenges occurring to students. That means students' difficulties overseas can possibly be detected and timely support can be offered. However, due to the matter of distance, intervention from Vietnam when students are already abroad may be ineffectual.

4.2 Survey on Vietnamese students' preparation before studying abroad

4.2.1 Organization and individual support to students

Figure 7 below compares seven forces in term of effectiveness of their support delivered to students who plan to study abroad.

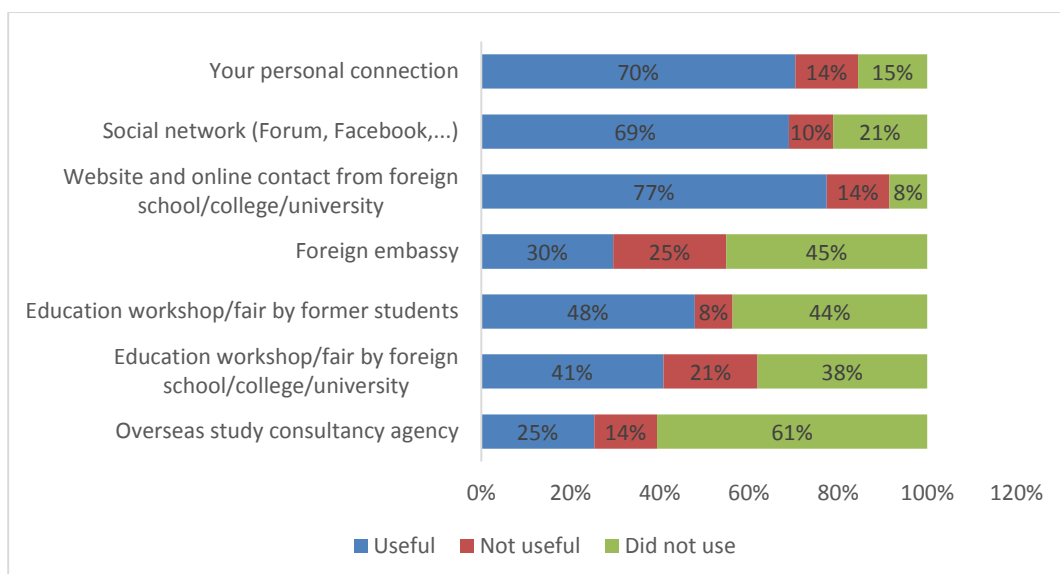


Figure 7. Survey: How useful have you found support from following sources: 1: useful, 2: not useful, 3: did not use?

It is clear that support from websites and online communication with foreign education institutions is by far the most used and also the most useful in students' opinion, because approximately 77% number of respondents evaluated these sources as "useful". Students' personal connection and contact through social networks are the second and the third significant sources, being useful to 70% and 69% of respondents respectively.

Among 71 respondents, 48%, 41% and 30% have found it useful to seek help from workshops organized by former students, and education workshops by foreign institutions and foreign embassies respectively. However, workshops by former students seems beneficial as only 8% among 71 students (or 14% of students actually receiving this support) classified this event as "not useful". The less common organization employed by students is overseas education consultancy firms; however, more than 75% of those who actually used services from consultancy firms have found this organization's support useful.

4.2.2 Challenges before going abroad

Figure 8 presents the percentage of 71 respondents who have experienced specific challenges when preparing to study abroad.

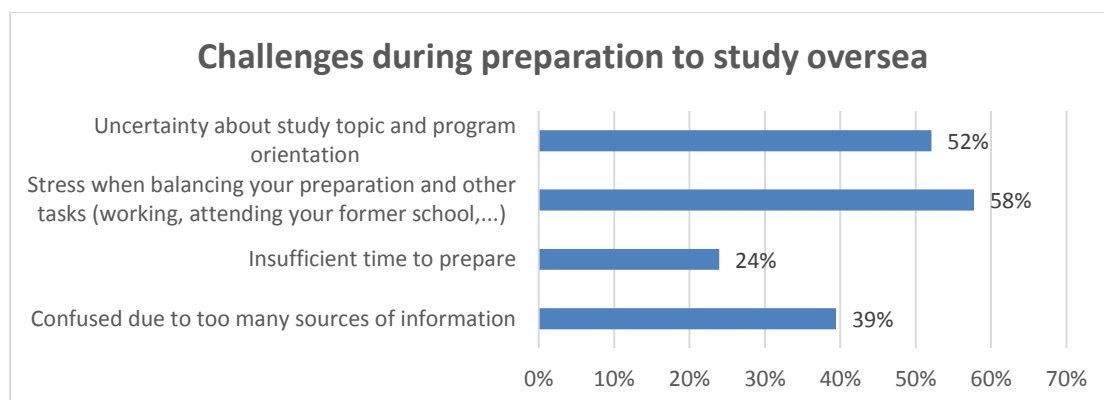


Figure 8. Survey: What challenges did you encounter when preparing to study abroad?

According to figure 8, stress due to balancing preparation and other tasks in life is the most common challenge to students planning to study abroad, with 58% of respondents admitted to experience this burden. Uncertainty about which program they are going to study overseas is of concern to approximately 52% of respondents, which makes study topic and program career become the second most challenging issue to students. The third typical challenge is confusion caused by too many sources that provide a great deal of information to students, for around 39% respondents have faced this challenge, while time insufficiency has been faced by the smallest quantity of students, with only 24%.

4.2.3 The most essential support ranking

Table 4 below provides statistics about the most important support ranking rated by students. From 71 responses, the researcher presented 62 valid responses to identify which support is the most needed by students.

Table 4. Survey: Please rank the following support areas you felt you needed, using a 1-6 scale (1 being the most important).

Areas of support	1	2	3	4	5	6	Total responses	Mean value
Language studies	15	12	7	10	10	8	n = 62	3.19
Placement Application	9	11	14	8	11	9	n = 62	3.45
Study topic and program orientation	18	12	9	11	7	5	n = 62	2.85
Cross-cultural training or support	6	11	4	12	13	16	n = 62	4.02
VISA application	9	8	12	10	12	11	n = 62	3.66
Accommodation arrangement	5	8	16	11	9	13	n = 62	3.81

The survey question asked students to rank six areas of support, with 1 being the most important and 6 being the least important. In table 4, the data can be read as following:

- Horizon reading: 15 people rated Language studies (LS) as the most important (score 1). 12 people evaluated it as the second important (score 2). 8 people thought of LS as the least important support (score 6) and so on.
- Vertical reading: 15 people rated LS as the most important. 9 people agreed that placement application is the most important, whereas only 5 people found accommodation arrangement the most important.

From the ranking (1 being minimum and 6 being maximum score), the researcher determined the mean value of each item. For example, the mean value of Language Studies is:

$$\text{Mean (LS)} = [(15 \times 1) + (12 \times 2) + (7 \times 3) + (10 \times 4) + (10 \times 5) + (8 \times 6)] / 62 = 3.19$$

Other support mean values were similarly calculated. The mean value determines the average ranking each item received. As “1” is the highest ranking, the item with the lowest mean is the one that was ranked most importantly. The final ranking is illustrated in table 5.

Table 5. The most important support for students ranking (from students' point of view)

Mean values	According support	Ranking
2.85	Study topic and program orientation	1 st
3.19	Language studies	2 nd
3.45	Placement application	3 rd
3.66	VISA application	4 th
3.81	Accommodation arrangement	5 th
4.02	Cross-cultural training or support	6 th

It appears that the ranking order in Table 5 follows chronological logic: before applying for overseas school, after being accepted into that school. It is interpreted that during the preparation process, the most important goal of students is to be accepted by foreign schools, and that explains study topic orientation, language studies and placement application were rated highly by students. Once chosen by foreign schools, students start to arrange their VISA and settlement abroad practicalities so that they can arrive to the future destination with ease. As students only start interacting with people in multinational environments when they start their studies, the rank for cross-cultural support is considered less important.

The researcher also included open-answer questions about post-arrival supports and received many more descriptive opinions from respondents, which can be summarized in the table below (see Table 6):

Table 6. Survey: Please share any support useful for you when arriving to foreign destination. (cont.)

Particular support	Areas of Support
- Information about transportation and travelling guidance from airport to destination city - Pre-booked accommodation	Settlement support

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Information about nearest health clinics - Guidance to shop for furniture and supplies - Internet banking - Information about VISA renewal 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Guidance about how the foreign institutions work, e.g., information about their library, and their referencing system used in assignments - Regular meeting with school staffs to discuss about any difficulties and problems and find solutions - International students clubs and services - English as a Second Language support 	Direct support from institutions about their system and policy
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Support coming from homestay host and school's tutors - Opportunities to network, make new friends abroad and learn more about culture of host countries - Support from both locals and Vietnamese students in the destination - Students should actively open up with every one and not spend time with other Vietnamese all the time. 	Social activity support
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Students should be independent and stay strong 	Self-reliance

(Table 6: page 52-53)

A number of specific opinions about support students presently or have needed were commented by responders. Those particular notions were summarized and put into four large categories, which are (1) support for students' settlement in the new country, (2) direct and detailed guidance from academic establishments about their system and policy, (3) introduction for students to local social activities and (4) support to boost up students' self-reliant ability.

4.2.4 Students' adaptation when studying abroad

Figure 9 illustrates self-evaluation about how well students adapt to everyday and academic life abroad.

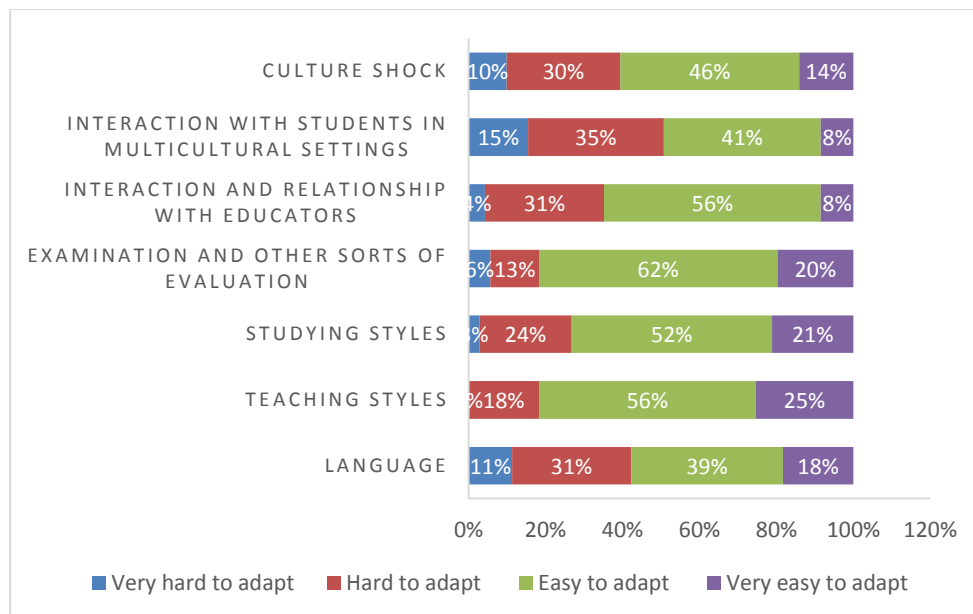


Figure 9. Survey: Please evaluate your adaption to these issues after your arrival to the foreign country, using a 1-4 scale: 1: very hard to adapt, 2: hard to adapt, 3: easy to adapt, 4: very easy to adapt.

Figure 9 demonstrates teaching style and evaluation style in foreign institutions are the simplest challenges for students, with only 18% among 71 respondents find have found these two matters hard and very hard to adapt to.

On the other hand, interacting with students in multicultural settings, language, interacting with teachers and culture shock are the four most challenging subjects for students, with 35%, 31%, 31% and 30% of respondents have evaluated them as “hard to adapt”. Turning to the topics that students have assumed “Very hard to adapt”, interaction with students in multinational context, language and culture shock are the most challenging in that order.

In general, interaction with students in an international environment, language, culture shock and interaction with teachers are harder for students to get used to, whereas teaching and examination/ evaluation styles were not too difficult for most respondents to adjust to.

4.2.5 Self-identity challenges when studying overseas

The chart above (Figure 10) displays frequency of students' experiencing self-identity challenges when they study in foreign countries.

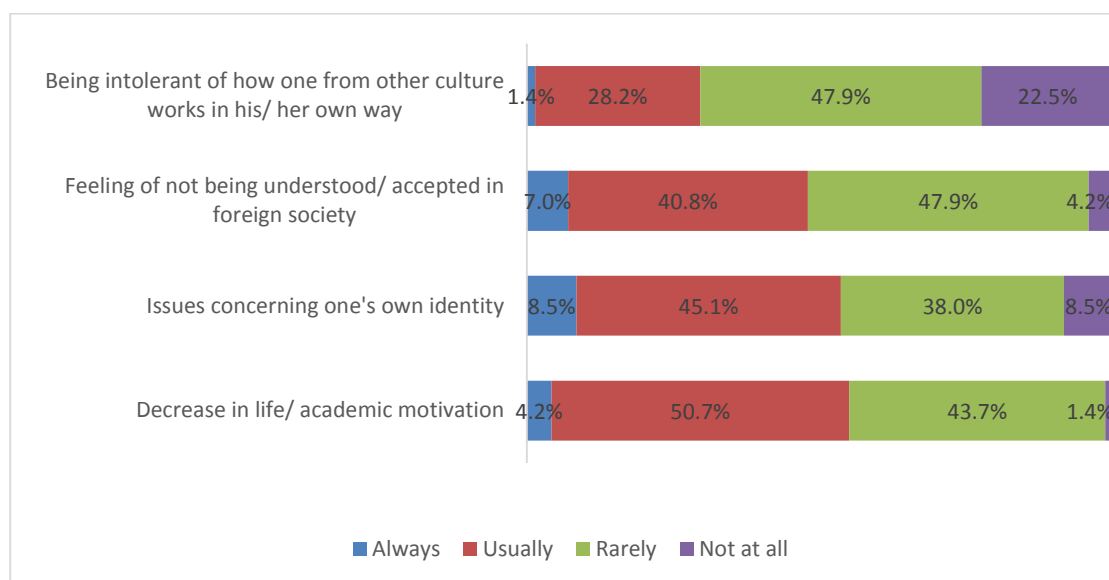


Figure 10. Survey: Self-Identity presents one's meaning, personality and characteristics used to handle situation and relationship with other people. How often have you encounter following challenges? 1: always, 2: usually, 3: rarely, 4: not at all

The most frequent self-identity challenge respondents have experienced is decrease in life or academic motivation, with 50,7% and 4,2% of respondents facing this challenge usually and always, respectively. Issues concerning one's own identity is experience slightly less often, with 45,1% and 8,5% of respondents have come upon it as frequent as "usually" and "always", respectively. The third most common challenge for students is the feeling of not being understood or accepted in a foreign society, for among 71 respondents, 40,8% have face this feeling usually and 7% have always experienced it.

Intolerance to other culture's working style is much less experienced among respondents, with only less than 30% of respondents have encountered it often.

5 DISCUSSION

Summarily, the research benefited both groups of participants. For the three service providers, the interview experience allowed them to reflect on their support provided to students and to discover topics and student needs that were not covered by their services. For students, the questionnaire brought out valuable experiences they have been through while increasing their awareness about challenges Vietnamese students face when preparing for overseas education. And the more knowledge they attain, the more they can apply to their future.

Moreover, for other researchers, this study provides a starting point for researching education and mobility in Vietnam. At the same time, the theoretical contexts provide knowledge about subjective culture and self-identity especially in the case of international students. Conducted at a time when there is a rapid growth in international education mobility, the research can be exploited by a number of parties involved in the phenomenon. Based on the contributions of nine professional organizations and 71 Vietnamese students, the findings of this study can be categorized into three areas: support from three types of guidance and services providers to students; students' understanding about future challenges abroad and nature of students' seeking support activity.

5.1 Support from services providers to students

The information obtained from study abroad consultancy firms, language centers and local high schools suggests there are different levels of support and engagement from those organizations to students. The two former take responsibility for not only training students in needed skills, but also for guiding students through study placement, VISA applications and even rental arrangements. In consultancy firms and language centers, agents and teachers are trained professionally to give advice and

involve themselves at least partially in students' preparations. Through their partnerships with particular foreign international institutions, consultancy firms and language centers are able to obtain updated education information resources. Moreover, getting to know students in person, particular regarding the study abroad counselors, these service providers are even able to provide personal advice that can help individuals to adjust their reactions to and subsequent behaviors in a strange environment.

Customers of overseas education consultancy services are students and parents who want to receive professional guidance about a wide range of academic universities and schools abroad. Big education consultancy firms in Vietnamese have very updated educational information in a number of schools in many countries due to their official partnership with foreign institution as well education departments of foreign embassies in Vietnam. Consultants in those firms not only take responsibility to guide students during their preparation process but also assure certain results for students, such as helping them to gain scholarship from foreign universities. As consultants tend to work with both students and parents, they are able to provide interesting about student and parent attitude.

English language centers have done well their job of educating students with required linguistic and studying skills. In addition, specific language study help is offered to individual students as language centers have realized individual differences in students' capabilities. Though providing mainly English courses, those language centers claimed to train studying skills via activity in English class. However, there is not yet courses focusing on cross-cultural training. However, summer school programs abroad, provided by overseas education firms and English language centers offer opportunities for teenage students to widen their horizon about living abroad. All in all, with their experience in the field, consultancy agents and language centers are worth considering as an option for inexperienced students to confer with.

On the other hand, local high schools mostly help students when asked or when severe problems occur. During staff meeting, concerns about students who plan to

study overseas are rarely discussed. Among three local high schools surveyed, only one school mentions this situation when it influenced students negatively (for example, stress causing by studying abroad plan results in students' skipping class). High school staffs, especially teachers, with their direct influence in studying program, can reduce school work for students in case students inform teachers about their studying abroad plan and ask for this specific favor. To be precise, when students make teachers aware of their study abroad plans, educators can eliminate assignments that prepare students with domestic university exam.

In term of intercultural communication support, overseas study consultancy firms and language centers have recognized its importance, but not yet prioritized this subject in their pre-training and guidance for students. High school teachers are aware of students' attempt to develop intercultural knowledge by themselves, but have not yet provided support.

To conclude, in terms of support for students from education organizations, overseas study consultancy firms and English language centers, these service providers have been effective in ensuring students' admission into foreign institutions, but only reached a surface level of intercultural communication and support. In addition, the fact that many students still experience language issues abroad suggests there is an opportunity to improve language programs for Vietnamese students. It is important to realize that local high schools do not prioritize supporting students who plan to study abroad with English language instruction that meets their future needs.

5.2 Students' awareness about challenges they may encounter

The data revealed that before leaving Vietnam to study abroad, the most challenging matter to students is (1) to manage their preparation with other tasks in their life as well as (2) to decide what study program they are going to pursue abroad.

Furthermore, a variety of information sources can be a challenge because it can result in confusion if students cannot filter knowledge effectively. Although being a

challenge to the lowest percent of respondents, time insufficiency may be still considered as a major challenges because almost a quarter of respondents have faced this issue.

Level of challenges when students arrive to destination countries varies from interaction with people in new cultural environment to pursuing academic path. Respondents of the questionnaire found it harder to get used to (1) interaction with other students in an international environment, (2) the use of language, (3) cultural shock and (4) interaction with educators. Teaching-learning style and examination-evaluation system in a foreign culture is somewhat challenging to some respondents, but in general, these areas do not deter Vietnamese students' adaptation. Students' adaption suggests that Vietnamese students are prepared effectively to fulfill academic requirement when going abroad. Nevertheless, preparation in relation to intercultural communication and language for students prior to arriving should be improved.

Receiving explanation about identity issues when studying and living abroad, around 50% of respondents have, usually or more than usually, experienced challenges concerning their own personal adjustment issues. The three most common self-identity challenges when students study abroad are (1) decrease in life or academic incentive, (2) issues concerning their own identities and (3) ineffective adaptation in foreign environment. These challenges can render students distressed and result in a decline of life efficiency. Last but not least, the fact that intolerance to other culture's working styles is experienced usually by almost 30% suggests that negotiation and communication skills training for cross-culture environments should be offered, in order to provide better working results with people from different cultures.

With their practical experience, respondents provided valuable insights about a variety of support favorable to them during the period of time studying in a new cultural academic setting. Areas of support needed ranging from academic assistance to social life arrangements suggest that students wish to receive diverse support

both inside and outside educational premises. Some respondents pointed out the importance of self-confidence and self-reliance to manage life independently. That said, Vietnamese students have realized their own critical responsibility in improving their experience abroad.

The above findings offer interesting visions about students' self-realization about what challenges they have experienced. When preparing to study abroad, Vietnamese students concern themselves mostly with obtaining study permits. Other post-arrival matters are much less deliberated. Surprisingly, though intercultural and self-identity challenges are often faced abroad, these areas of support are considered the least important by students. Furthermore, difference in teaching and learning styles in foreign environment do not challenge students as much as intercultural communication, interaction and self-identity issues.

5.3 Students' pattern of finding support

The questionnaire result illustrated that the organizations and people that support students the most effectively are (1) websites/online contact with foreign schools, (2) students' acquaintances and (3) contributors in social network platforms. All are helpful only when students make the initial communication, so it can be concluded that Vietnamese students are fairly engaged in exploring opportunities to study abroad. Foreign embassies in Vietnam, in contrast, is the least exploited organization, according to respondents. This fact suggests that foreign government representatives in Vietnam either have not provided adequate amount of educational information or have not been successful in delivering the required information to the target audience. It is also noticeable that consultancy firms are not exploited by 61% of respondents. Explanations for this can be the high fees when using consultancy services and that some people want to take the entire responsibility of preparation by themselves.

It appears that Vietnamese students find it easier to seek support from people who have practical experience with foreign institutions and are willing to help them, and

these are usually former students. Former students and acquaintances, communicating either directly or through networks, are trusted by students as well as their parents. In addition, Vietnamese student associations in foreign countries have played a major role in supporting students before and after arrival to destination countries.

6 CONCLUSIONS

The purpose of this research was to examine the preparation of Vietnamese high school students before travelling abroad for their university education, by exploring current practices of three types of educational services providers namely overseas education consultancy firms, English language centers and local high schools. Students' perspectives and experiences were also analyzed in order to gain knowledge about students' support demands in terms of practical instruction as well as support for identity and cultural issues. A set of recommendations for both service providers and Vietnamese students will be provided at the end of this chapter.

The semi-structured interviews illustrated the comprehensive services offered to students by two stakeholders: English language centers and study abroad consultancy agencies. These two types of organizations have been effective in providing instruction and consultancy for students. With strong connections to foreign partners comprising foreign academies and foreign embassies in Vietnam and their own experiences, these organizations have expanded services pertaining to traveling and living abroad in order to provide additional value for their customers. Both mentioned types of service providers actively approach students and parents to promote their services by distributing their marketing material in local high schools, overseas education workshops and on the Internet. However, it was acknowledged that Vietnamese students used consultancy services based on word-of-mouth recommendations. Local high schools acknowledged that despite their awareness about the study abroad phenomenon, their support to students is still limited, and does not meet international academic needs.

The questionnaire completed by 71 Vietnamese students provided valuable insights from the students' perspective. Though Vietnamese students receive information about overseas education from a number of resources, there is a fairly clear preference for some sources of information over others. Besides researching from official websites of foreign institutions, students are also very active in seeking assistance from Vietnamese students who are presently or have attended universities abroad. The most effective and common sources of information for students are (1) website and online support from foreign institutions, (2) former students of foreign universities who provide information both in online social networks as well as in offline workshops and (3) personal connections.

Another finding about students' needs prior to studying abroad is that they need language training and guidance to complete study applications for acceptance to foreign schools or universities. For some students, this support includes seeking financial aid provided by the schools or universities, but for most other students, this support is about competing for placements among other applicants.

When actually arriving to the new overseas studying destination, though still receiving certain assistance from services providers in Vietnam, students have to take charge personally in settling into and adapting with the new environment. In this stage, it was acknowledged that help from other Vietnamese students in the same regions, from the academic institution and from the locals were the most important and could only be obtained if the students actively reach for them. From the questionnaire results, it appears that students are able to adapt to the teaching, learning and assessment styles and methods in the host countries. However, (1) communication in foreign languages, (2) cultural shocks, (3) relationships with educators and (4) interactions with other students in a multinational setting are reported to be more challenging to students. This could be interpreted that there are still opportunities to improve English language training as well as generate a cross-cultural training program for students during their preparation.

To conclude, the research questions were addressed and the research objectives were achieved. The research offers a number of insights about the phenomenon of Vietnamese students' preparation for their overseas university education. From these findings, a set of recommendation is provided in Chapter 6.2 to improve support deliveries from the three types of service providers to students.

6.1 Limitations and recommendations for future research

In order to evaluate the quality of the research, it is essential to consider validity and reliability of the research. In the qualitative components of this research, validity is to significant degree subject to the credibility of the knowledge provided by participants, who are all professionals that work directly with students in the nine interviewed organizations. Moreover, the purposive sampling method also brings certain advantages for the study. The researcher decided to approach reputable consultancy firms and English language centers to ensure that their experience has been accumulated from working with a large number of students. However, as service providers, it is perhaps in some cases that the interviewees have talked about their own services with bias. To reduce the disadvantage of this bias, the research topic and related research questions were investigated from the students' point of view.

Theoretically, the reliability of a research depends on whether the same data can be generated if the researcher implemented essentially the same research at a different time (Elton-Chalcraft, Hansen & Twiselton 2010, 75). However, in the researcher's opinion, if one does the research on the present topic twice, one researches two different things. The reason for that is because the phenomenon studied does not stand still, but changes accordingly to other related forces around it.

Regarding quantitative research, validity is about two elements: the first one is whether the research presents a "valid cross section of the whole population" and

the second one is whether research methods are used correctly to measure chosen subjects (ibid., 71). Before the questionnaire was published, different types of sampling techniques were considered and self-selection sampling was chosen to implement due to the lack of sampling frame. This technique was appropriate as the respondents were not under any pressure when providing the answer and were, in fact, willing to give answer to open-ended questions in the survey. However, due to the small sampling size ($n=71$), it is not the best option to generalization for the whole population of Vietnamese students. The data collected from the questionnaire was analyzed, using triangulation technique of data analysis, which means the quantitative and qualitative data was analyzed simultaneously (Mertens & Hesse-Biber 2014, 78). Furthermore, the content of the survey was developed based on theoretical document as well as practical information realized from the qualitative data.

Though all participants are Vietnamese, the quantitative data (questionnaire) was conducted in English as all target respondents were students whose English level is qualified for bachelor or even higher level of international studies. Quantitative data in English also benefited research greatly during the coding and analyzing process.

Recommendations for researchers interested in the field vary. It was revealed in this study that students face various challenges while making decisions and arrangements due to varying international student recruiting policies across different countries. As a consequence, future research may focus on students going to one particular country, for instance Finland or the US, in order to gain more specific understanding about those distinct circumstances. By focusing on one destination, it will be simpler to exploit more efficient sampling with a larger sample size.

Furthermore, O'Callaghan (2006, 66) states that students' self-identity challenges are not permanent, which suggests that a longitudinal study about this subject can be conducted to examine self-identity development over a long-term period, as well as on the effects of culture on students when studying abroad.

6.2 Practical suggestions

In the light of the conclusions, the researcher proposes some suggestions for both service providers and students in Vietnam for a more effective planning process for students.

For guidance and service providers

The results of the research suggest that there are opportunities for study abroad agencies, English language centers and high schools to improve their support to students. The first recommendation is to integrate intercultural communication training into their programs so that students are equipped with basic knowledge to work and study in a multicultural setting in the future. It was revealed in all three organizations participating in the research that intercultural knowledge and competence development is still a very limited subject introduced to students. Of course, it is not applicable to achieve significant adaptation in a short period of time. Nevertheless, it is possible to consistently introduce small-scale activities that enhance intercultural competence for students. For example, intercultural learning can be incorporated in everyday learning content taught by educators in high schools. For example, teachers can provide information to students about values shared by groups or by specific cross-cultural behaviors. Cross-culture seminars could be arranged for Vietnamese students, where up-to-date matters in the field are introduced and comprehension of cross-cultural communication competences are facilitated at appropriate levels to all high school students.

Another example of intercultural training activities could involve students communicating or even working with students from other cultures. Intercultural communication competence is not only about understanding multinational aspects of global society, but also about knowledge about different cultures within one's own nation. If able to access strong financial resources, the three types of organizations studied in this research can build up partnerships with foreign organizations to arrange short-term visits or pen-pal programs for Vietnamese and foreign students.

In the case of limited monetary resources, cultural exchange between Vietnamese students coming from different regions, religion or ethnic groups should be considered as well. A primary aim of intercultural activities at schools is to encourage students to reflect on their experiences within multicultural groups, to broaden their intercultural awareness and sensitivity, and based on that, to develop new behaviors and understandings that will benefit them in a diverse environment. These activities, if carried out by local high schools, should be delivered to all students rather than just to students planning to study abroad. In order to bring the fullest experience to students, high schools, English language centers and study abroad consultancy companies could collaborate more, contributing their unique resources to organize intercultural activities. One value of consultancy firms and English centers is their connection with foreign organizations, while the advantage of local high schools is that they can approach, persuade and gather a large number of students for those activities. If working together, these three stakeholders can generate strong influences upon students.

The second recommendation is that all three related stakeholders should more carefully identify students' challenges and find solutions accordingly. For high schools, the most important suggestion is to update and improve their higher education counselling for students. Students planning to study abroad now depend greatly on overseas counsellors in terms of choosing a study topic and program orientation. As the official and major education institution for students, it is time for high schools to gain more knowledge about their students as individuals and give them needed guidance in choosing their future study field. In addition, local high schools should start to study more extensively students planning to study abroad in order to develop suitable studies program or appropriate support for them. Results from data analyses reveal that students have to attend extra English class after schools, which can contribute to their stress level. To support students in reducing extra time spending on English studies, local high schools can gather students and provide them English programs that address their challenges in overseas education. It is also practical for the three studied organizations to arrange events or create

online forums where former students and students who are planning to study abroad can meet and exchange experience. As Vietnamese students prefer consulting with senior students who have undergone the same processes as they are, this building of bridges between two groups of students can be advantageous.

For students

In spite of the significant support from many sources around them, students should take the foremost charge of managing their own preparation. Before seeking any help, students should discuss and identify with parents about their ability, financial condition and other expectations. Once clarifying those subjects, students can research for information and support through different sources available. It is helpful if students present their study abroad plans to high school teachers or educators at other levels. The reason to do this is to ask teachers for specific forms of support in school works. Informed about the future goals of students, high schools teachers can adjust school-work given to students as well as provide other help.

As well, students should ponder to select the most suitable organization or individuals that they find the most effective to work with. For example, if the student is confident with their research ability, he or she can complete all arrangements by himself or herself, with occasional inquiries to former students support or to recruiting staffs in foreign schools. On the other hand, an inexperienced student should consider consulting from overseas education consultancy firms to receive basic guidance until he or she is self-assured. No matter what support the student receives, it is essential for the student to be independent during the arranging process. In other words, in spite of support from others, students should actively carry out tasks that can be done by themselves. This is how students practice and enhance their independence, which is greatly beneficial for their future life abroad.

The last recommendation for students is to prepare adequately for a long-term study in a multicultural foreign education institution. This can be done by extra research and training about intercultural communication before going abroad. It is essential to find information about the host country. Besides that, students should equip

themselves with intercultural communication skills to handle situations occurring in a culturally diverse environment, as there will likely be significant levels of interaction with people from all over the globe. Intercultural knowledge should be learned, and practiced when possible, to determine how and to what degree to adapt to situations that occur, not operating from or perpetuating stereotypes. It is also advised by several respondents that students should be active and open to seek help in host countries. There is support both in academic institutions as well as in social organizations for international students in host countries. It is students' decision to reach out for that support.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1. Interview questions for overseas study consultancy firms



Interview with overseas study consultancy firms

To begin with, the interview will focus on particular aspects of preparation for Vietnamese students planning to study abroad. The interview is part of my ongoing bachelor thesis "Preparation for Vietnamese students before studying abroad" within JAMK, University of Applied Sciences Jyväskylä, Finland. The interview content will be documented and then analysed as primary data for my research, your identity will be kept anonymously and your contribution is highly appreciated.

At the first part of the discussion, I would like to ask you about your information regarding your position within your firm.

The first part of the interview is about services or products your business offer to Vietnamese students who is planning to study overseas. The second section is about your cooperation with other educational organizations. And the last topic is about the specific support you have with each student.

Services offered

1. **What educational services or products do you offer to students?**
2. **What barriers or challenges exist to students who wish to gain admission to overseas universities?**
3. **Through what means do customers know about you?**
 - a) Where do you direct your marketing activities?
 - b) Do you market directly to schools or to parents?
4. **How knowledgeable about education, apply process and administrative matters in the host countries are students when they first come to find you?**
 - a) What information do students and parents give you when they first come to you?
5. **What sorts of issues or problems occur between parents and students pertaining to study abroad or your services?**



Collaboration with other organizations

6. **What specific collaboration you have with local high schools?**
 - a) Does your approach cover all students of that school?
 - b) Do you have a standard of what school you want to work with?
 - c) What are the standard of schools that make you want to work with them?
7. **What collaboration do you have with foreign university of educational institution?**
 - a) In which academic level do you contact the most with foreign education institution? (High school/Bachelor/Master studies?)
 - b) In what countries do you work with and send students to?
 - c) Please describe how you keep updated on the newest information about their educational programs?
8. **What collaboration do you have with English language center?**
 - a) Do you encourage all students to go there?
 - b) How do you ensure that students are able to study in English?

Your support to students

9. In addition to placement consultancy, what other services to you provide to students to help them to prepare for study abroad?
 - a) What support do you offer after the student gets accepted into a foreign institution?
 - b) Do you support them until they arrive to destination countries and settle down?
10. What tasks do students need to do by themselves to participate in your services?
 - a) What tasks are difficult for them to do and they need your help?
 - b) How often do you have contacts with students to ensure preparation process?

Thank you

Is there anything you would like to add or any questions you would like to ask?

Appendix 2. Interview questions for English language centers



English Center Interview

To begin with, the interview will focus on particular aspects of preparation for Vietnamese students planning to study abroad. The interview is part of my ongoing bachelor thesis "Preparation for Vietnamese students before studying abroad" within JAMK, University of Applied Sciences, Finland. The interview content will be documented and then analysed as primary data for my research, your identity will be kept anonymously and your contribution is highly appreciated.

Firstly, I would like to ask you about your position within [name of English language centre].

The first part of the interview is about services or products your center offer to Vietnamese students who is planning to study overseas. The second section is about your cooperation with other educational organizations.

Serviced offered

1. What services or products do you offer to students?
2. What language test(s) do your courses prepare students for?
 - a) Why these?
3. How long do your courses last typically last?
 - a) How long usually do students study at your center to prepare for their overseas study plan?
4. Do you ask each student about their goals in advance before they enroll your class or use your service?
 - a) Who asks this question?
 - b) Whose responsibility is it to ensure students' achievement?
 - c) What activity do you have with each student to make sure he or she reaches their goal?
 - d) What do you do after the students finish their test or their preparation process to improve your services for next group of students coming?

5. Outside classes, what activities do you have as a part of English teaching and studying?

6. Besides English skills, what other skills do you also train students with?

- a) In addition to English proficiency, what other skills do you think students may need when studying abroad?

Collaboration with other organizations

7. What collaboration do you have with local schools?

- a) How often do you cooperate with local schools per year?
 b) Is there a set of standards of which high schools you are going to work with?
 c) If there is, what are the standards?
 d) What material do you hand out when working with local high schools?

8. What collaboration do you have with other organizations to promote your support to students?

- a) How often do you collaborate with them?
 b) What material is handed out by you when working with these organizations?

Conclusion

Is there anything you would like to ask or any question you would like to ask?

Appendix 3. Interview questions for local high schools

Support for students planning to study overseas

The interview is part of my ongoing bachelor thesis "Preparation for Vietnamese students before studying abroad" within JAMK University of Applied Sciences, Finland. The interview content will be documented and then analysed as primary data for my research, your identity will be kept anonymously and your contribution is highly appreciated.

At the first part of the discussion, I would like to ask you about your information regarding your position within [name of the high school].

The first part of the interview is about current situation of students going abroad in your school. The second section is about the specific support you have with students.

Current situation of students going abroad

1. What is your concept about student going abroad?

- a) To what extent do you and other teachers and staffs discuss about this phenomenon?
 b) Is this topic discussed in regular meeting by teachers and staffs? "

2. What problems do you think the students may have when preparing to study overseas when they still enroll in your school?

- a) How do you come to know about these problems?

Your supports to students going abroad

3. What do you do to support your student's preparation process to study abroad?

- a) Who is the person taking responsibility to support these students?
 b) What do you do to ensure these students working effectively with their goal?

4. In your school, right now, is there any program or activity to develop students' intercultural understanding?

- a) If there is, what is it? And how does it work?

Thank you

Is there anything you would like to ask or any question you would like to ask?

Appendix 4. Questionnaire on Vietnamese students' preparation before studying abroad



Vietnamese student's preparation for bachelor degree abroad

Hello everyone,

The survey is about Vietnamese students' preparation before going abroad for bachelor and other equivalent for the first time. I kindly ask you to reflect and share your own experiences so that I can gain a more thorough understanding about the subject.

The results will be documented and then analyzed as primary data for my research, and your participation is highly appreciated.

Thank you very much for your participation.

1. How useful have you found support from following sources? 1:

Useful 2: Not useful 3: Did not use *

	1	2	3
Overseas study consultancy agency	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Education workshop/fair by foreign school/college/university	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Education workshop/fair by former students	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Foreign embassy	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Website and online contact from foreign school/college/university	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Social network (Forum, Facebook...)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Your personal connection	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

2. Please rank the following support areas you felt you needed, using 1-6 scale (1 being the most important)

Placement application *

Cross-cultural training or support *

Accommodation arrangement *

Study topic and program orientation *

Language studies *

VISA application *

If you needed some other support and guidance not listed here, please describe it here

3. What challenges did you encounter when preparing to study abroad? *

- ☐ Confused due to too many sources of information
- ☐ Insufficient time to prepare
- ☐ Stress when balancing your preparation and other tasks (working, attending your former school...)
- ☐ Uncertainty about study topic and program orientation

4. Please evaluate your adaptation to these issues after your arrival to the foreign country, using 1-4 scale. *

1. Very hard to adapt 2. Hard to adapt 3. Easy to adapt 4. Very easy to adapt

	1	2	3	4
Language	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Teaching styles	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Studying styles	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Examination and other sorts of evaluation	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Interaction and relationship with educators	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Interaction with students in multicultural settings	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Culture shock	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

5. Self-identity presents one's meaning, personality and characteristics used to handle situations and relationship with other people. How often have you encounter following challenges? *

1: Always 2: Usually 3: Rarely 4: Not at all

	1	2	3	4
Decrease in life/ academic motivation	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Issues concerning one's own identity	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Feeling of not being understood/ accepted in foreign society	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Being intolerant of how one from other culture works in his/ her own way	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

6. Please share any support useful for you when arriving to foreign destination.
