

The financial challenges of studying abroad: strategies for Vietnamese international students

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Abstract <p>The phenomenon of Vietnamese students studying abroad was on the surge over the past years. The aim of the study was to identify the financial challenges of studying abroad which Vietnamese international students might face and correspondingly provide guidance and practical advice for those who planned to study abroad. Four main research questions were: Among students who have studied abroad, to what degree was money a factor? For those who were concerned about money, how was this problem address? What external financial resources were available to those Vietnamese international students? What practical strategies did students develop to survive?</p> <p>The literature review provided information on the Vietnamese education system, Vietnamese culture and its effects on the educational environment in Vietnam, Vietnamese students mobility and overview of the economic situation in Vietnam. The descriptive research purpose and inductive approach was selected for the implementation method. The mixed-method data collection was also considered appropriate for the research. 139 Vietnamese students who had been studying abroad were studied via a questionnaire and interviews with eight representatives were conducted for the data collection and analysis.</p> <p>A holistic analysis of the data collection revealed financial challenges Vietnamese international students had faced, how they affected students' decisions and actions, and how they planned to overcome them. 90% of the survey participants concerned about money at some level when making decision to study oversea. Such financial issues affected students in their study choices, caused them to find external financial resources or get personal fund by themselves. Moreover, financial problems also made students' parents plan ahead in years for the student's study by having some specific coping strategies. Recommendations and suggestions from experienced students were also provided for those who wish to study abroad.</p>		
Keywords (subjects) Vietnamese international students, education in Vietnam, Vietnamese cultures, students mobility, economic situation in Vietnam, financial challenges		

Miscellaneous
Appendices is attached in pages 67-72.

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1 INTRODUCTION

In the 21st century, internationalization in higher education started to gain more momentum due to the influence of globalization. The phenomenon of globalization is when countries in the world become more connected and interdependent economically, politically, socially and culturally. As a consequence, the modern labor market calls for workers who are prepared to live and work in such diverse environments, and those who are equipped with necessary expertise and skills to be successful in the international world. One of the various ways in which young people try to focus on internationalization in higher education is through studying in foreign countries.

Over the past few years, there has been a remarkable rise in the number of Vietnamese students studying abroad. Only a decade ago, fewer than 10,000 Vietnamese families could afford to send their child abroad to study (Student World Online, 2014). However, according to the Vietnam Ministry of Education and Training, in 2016, Vietnam had more than 130,000 students study overseas and most of those international students went abroad under the self-funded mode (Vietnamnet, 2016). In 2012, Vietnam ranked 9th in top countries with the most students studying abroad, according to UNESCO Institute for Statistics.

This is considered a phenomenon in Vietnamese higher education system as families are sending their children abroad to study in much more expensive countries. In Vietnam, education (especially higher education) is regarded as a high investment priority. Figure 1 below represents the average monthly wages in Vietnam as calculated by Trading Economics (2017). Vietnam average monthly wages as calculated in the first quarter of 2017 is 5,507,000 Vietnam Dong/ month, which is approximately US\$ 242/ month. These indicators implicate that Vietnamese parents do emphasize the importance of higher education although studying overseas can be a real financial challenge for them. Although the income is not high, or can be seen as low compared to developed countries, Vietnamese families still spend a large amount of money on their priority. However, as much as they wish to study abroad, many Vietnamese students are held back by their financial capacity. And for many

Vietnamese students who have already been abroad, money is still a big challenge for them to live and study in expensive countries.



Figure 1 Vietnam Average Monthly Wages (Trading Economics, 2017)

Research objectives and research questions

Despite the surge in number of students studying overseas in Vietnam, there has not been any in-depth research about financial strategies for Vietnamese international students. In fact, there are guidance and information about this topic; however, it has been scarce and not sufficient enough. This leads to the motivation for conducting this research.

The author, as a Vietnamese international student herself, is personally very interested in the idea and expects to open the scope of this subject, studies the phenomenon deeper and provides practical insights for other students who intend to study abroad. Moreover, during the process of doing this research, the researcher is expected to come across new findings and discover interesting perspectives of the topic. As for the reader-oriented motivation, this research serves as a guide for Vietnamese students who plan to study abroad. In this thesis, they are able to find practical experiences and helpful tips for their future plan.

The objective of this research is to explicate the personal financial strategies that Vietnamese students develop when studying abroad. The thesis can be

developed to become a practical guide for any Vietnamese students who are concerned about financial issue but still plan to study abroad.

The thesis will focus on four main questions:

1. Among students who have studied abroad, to what degree was money a factor?
2. For those who were concerned about money, how was this problem address?
3. What external financial resources were/are available to those Vietnamese international students?
4. What practical strategies did students develop to survive?

Those four questions are believed to explicit (1) how important money is a factor for students and their families, and (2) how they can overcome those financial challenges.

Overview structure of the thesis

This thesis is divided into five main chapters. The beginning chapter is introduction part where the thesis topic is presented along with research objective, research questions and the overview of thesis development.

The second chapter is the establishment of theoretical framework, in which all the theoretical knowledge about the thesis topic is presented. This chapter will focus on issues such as:

- Overview of the education system in Vietnam
- Cultural effects on educational environment in Vietnam
- Vietnamese students' mobility
- Overview of the economic situation in Vietnam

The third chapter will discuss the methodology used in this research. The descriptive research purpose and inductive approach is considered the most appropriate methodology for this thesis. In this research, the researcher will use both primary and secondary data, with the primary data is achieved through questionnaires and open-ended interviews with Vietnamese

international students. The mixed-method data collection and analysis technique is adopted in this research.

The next chapter will present and interpret data collected from questionnaires sent out to the international Vietnamese students community. Also, responses from interviews with some representative Vietnamese students will also be presented and discussed. This chapter will analyze findings from the surveys and interviews in order to answer the four research questions.

The final chapter will be the conclusion part of the research, which summarizes the data analysis and recommendations provided for readers. Limitation of the thesis is also mentioned, followed by suggestions for researchers who are interested in studying the field further.

The overview structure of the research is presented in figure 2 below:

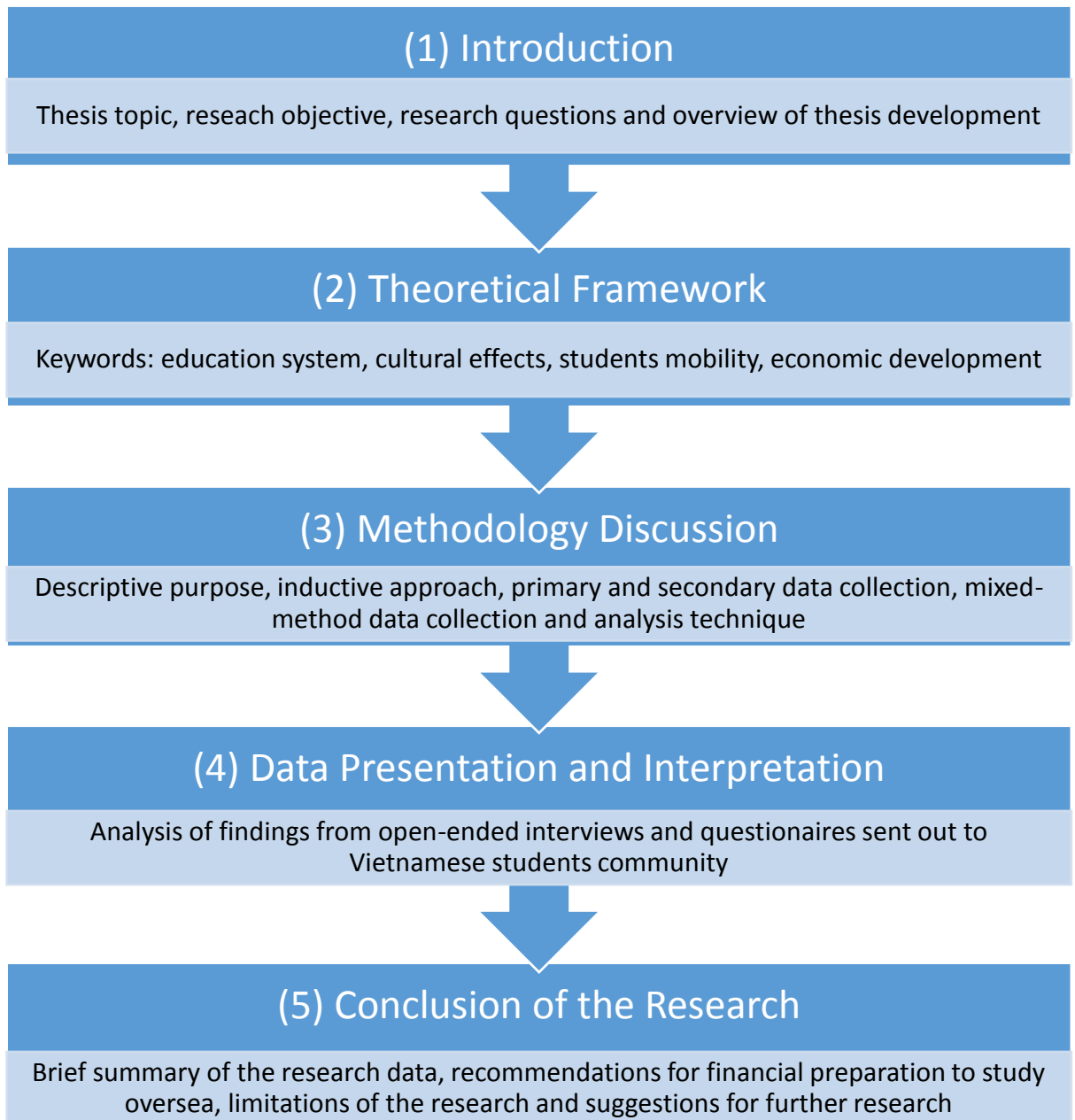


Figure 2 Overview structure of the research development

2 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1 Overview of the education system in Vietnam

2.1.1 Structure of the education system in Vietnam

The Vietnamese education system is under the responsibility and control of Ministry of Education and Training (MOET). The structure of the education system in Vietnam from kindergarten to higher education is illustrated as below:

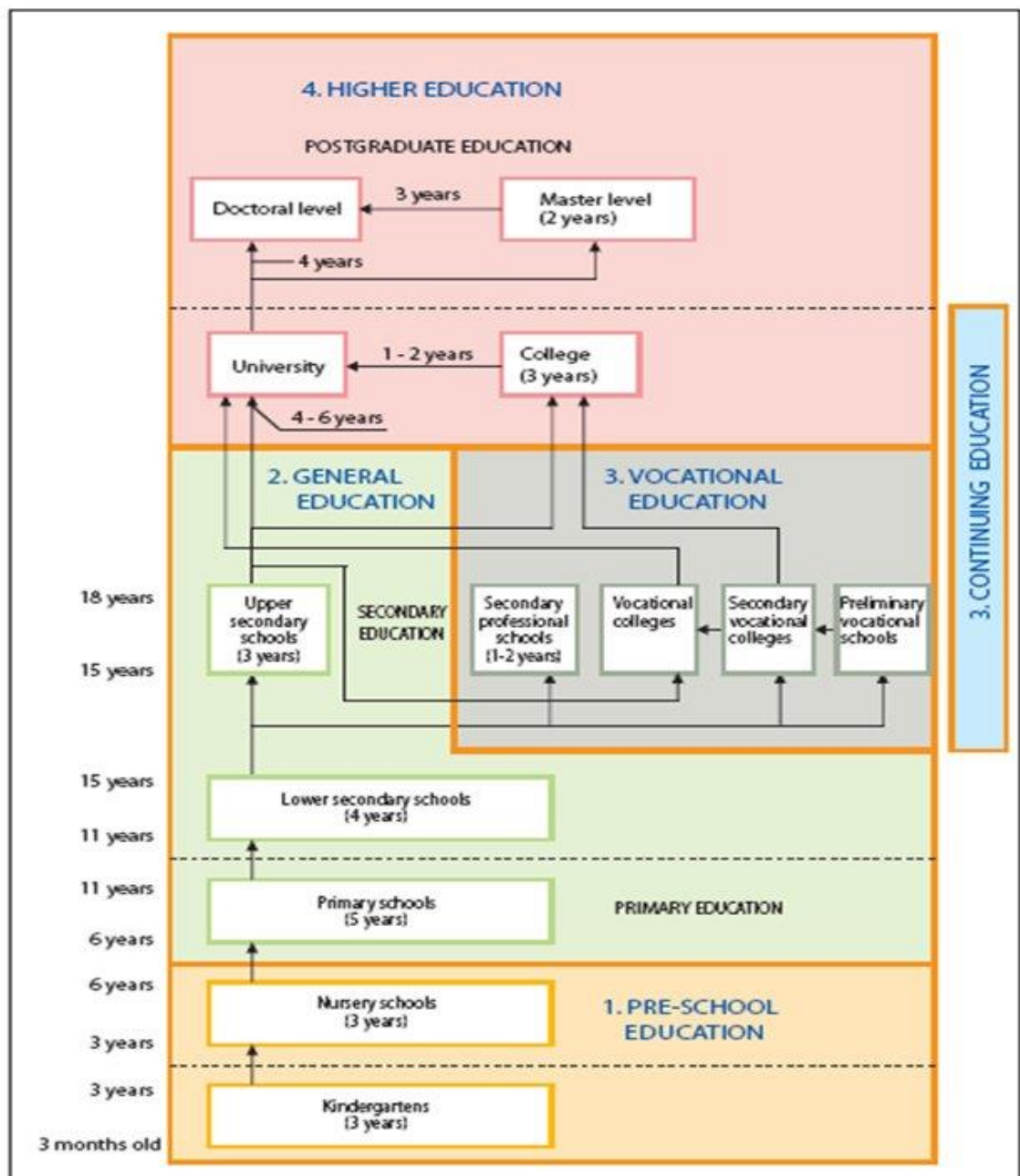


Figure 3 The national education system in Vietnam (Hoa Sen University, 2010)

Pre-school education

The very first stage of the education in Vietnam starts with kindergarten and senior kindergarten. Vietnamese children from 3 months old to 3 years old are sent to kindergarten (or also known as nursery school), and from 3 years old to 6 years old are sent to senior kindergarten. This stage is not compulsory for all children; however, it helps children to develop skills which are necessary to perform well at school. The last years focus more on educational topics such as learning about the alphabet, arithmetic, etc. This early childhood education program is provided by both public and private sectors.

Primary education

The next stage of the education system is primary education, which is mandatory for all Vietnamese students. Their formal education begins at the age of 6 when they enter primary schools, where they will study for 5 years, until the age of 11.

According to World Education News & Reviews (2012), this stage is divided into 2 phases, in which:

- The first phase is from grade 1 to 3, including six subjects: Vietnamese literature, physical education, morality, nature and society, arts and mathematics.
- The second phase is from grade 4 to 5, including ten subjects: Vietnamese literature, geography, music, history, science, mathematics, basic technology, physical education, arts and morality.

According to World Heritage Encyclopedia (2017), 96% of 6 to 11-year-old children enrolled in primary school. However, the primary education completion rate for ethnic minority children was only 61%, compared to 86% of the majority ethnic students in Vietnam, according to the Multiple Indicators Cluster Survey 2006 of Vietnam's General Statistics Office (ibid.).

Lower secondary education

When children finish primary schools, they go to lower secondary schools, which include four years of study. This lower secondary education is not compulsory for all students. The curriculum guideline is under the responsibility of the MOET. According to World Heritage Encyclopedia (2017), the subjects in secondary schools are: Vietnamese literature, mathematics, foreign language (mostly English or French), history, geography, chemistry, physics, biology, physical education, civics, music, technology and art. Moreover, students occasionally have to take class activities, school activities, vocational-oriented activities and extracurricular activities (ibid.).

Upper secondary education

After completing the lower secondary education, Vietnamese students can go to upper secondary education by entering either upper secondary schools (also known as high schools) or vocational schools. As in figure 3, there are four types of vocational education: secondary professional schools (1-2 years), vocational colleges, secondary vocational colleges, preliminary vocational schools.

Vocational education provides training in many fields such as engineering and technology, allied health professions, banking and economics, teacher training and art and cultural studies (World Education News & Reviews, 2012). However, vocational education is not a popular choice among Vietnamese students as many of them prefer entering high schools. Due to a lack of students, many vocational schools in Vietnam are now struggling to survive (Tuoi Tre News, 2015).

To get admitted to high schools in Vietnam, students have to take an entrance exam which includes Mathematics and Vietnamese literature. The score on the examination determines which school they can apply for. Most often, prestige schools require a very high admission score; that is why the entrance examination can be fierce and competitive (World Education News & Reviews, 2012).

High school education is from grade 10 to 12 and includes following subjects: Vietnamese literature, mathematics, chemistry, geography, history, foreign language (mostly English or French), biology, technology, information technology, military education and training, physical education, and civics (World Heritage Encyclopedia, 2017). In high schools, students have to choose either natural science or social science as their study path to prepare for university admission. The natural science stream requires advanced training on mathematics, chemistry biology and physics while the social science stream requires advanced training on Vietnamese literature, geography, history and foreign language (World Education News & Reviews, 2012). The workload may vary from school to school; however, students have to take approximately 39 hours per week. In addition to that, students have to study extra six hours per week for subjects of their chosen stream (ibid.).

Higher education

The last stage of the education system in Vietnam is higher education. According to World Education News & Reviews (2014), the education system in Vietnam is similar to the one in the United States. The system consists of 12 years of schooling, followed by a bachelor degree that usually takes four years of completion, a master's degree which takes two years and a Ph.D. degree which takes up to three to four years. As shown in figure 3, undergraduate study in Vietnam also includes college program, which normally takes three years to complete.

Students have to take a national entrance exam to get admitted to universities or colleges. The entrance exam is considered to be highly competitive. According to Kelly (2008), under the new system, the entrance exams are divided into four groups according to the major the students choose in university. The four categories are:

- Group A: mathematics, physics and chemistry (for students planning to major in engineering, computer sciences, information technology, physics, etc.)

- Group B: mathematics, chemistry and biology (for students planning to major in natural sciences, medicine, etc.)
- Group C: Vietnamese literature, history and geography (for students planning to major in humanity, social sciences, etc.)
- Group D: mathematics, Vietnamese literature, foreign language (for students planning to major in social sciences, foreign languages, business, etc.)

According to World Education News & Reviews (2014), the Ministry of Education and Training outlined a credit system in which one credit in university equals to 15 hours of in-class lectures, 30-45 hours of practical training, or 45-60 hours of thesis writing. However, some institutions may have their own system of credits.

Undergraduate program requires from four to six years of full-time study, which is equivalent to 180- 320 credits, depending on the major. There are five modes of study for undergraduate students to choose. The most common mode is “full-time” which is relatively competitive and depends on the students’ results of the entrance exam. The second mode, which is “part-time”, has lower entrance requirements and is suitable for working people. Other modes are “open admission” with lower requirements and fewer credits, “shorter specialization” for graduates who want to develop their skills and “distance education” for those who wish to study distantly (ibid.).

Once students complete the undergraduate program, they can go to graduate program to study master’s level with the “full-time” study mode. The graduate program usually takes one-and-a-half year or two-year of completion, which is equal to 40 credits. Students must also pass a graduate entrance examination. The Ph.D. program requires at least two years of schooling and a research or thesis study (ibid.).

2.1.2 Evaluation system

The grading system in Vietnam is based on a 1-10 point scale, which is equivalent to the US 1-4 point scale (EducationUSA Vietnam, n.d.). The grade conversation is demonstrated as in table 1:

Vietnam's grading system	Equivalent		Vietnamese description	English description	% of students receiving this score
9-10	A+	4.0	Xuất sắc	Outstanding	Less than 5% of students
8-9	A	3.5	Giỏi	Excellent/ Very good	5-10%
7-8	B+	3.0	Khá	Good	About 20-25% of students
6-7	B	2.5	Trung bình	Average	About 40-50% of students
5-6	C	2.0	Đạt	Pass	About 5%-10%
<5	D+- X	=<1.0	Không đạt/ Trượt	Fail	For fail courses

Table 1 Vietnamese grading system and suggested equivalency (EducationUSA Vietnam, n.d.)

The 1-10 point scale is applied for all levels of education in Vietnam, except for the pre-school education. As illustrated in table 1, score 10 is the highest students can get and it is equal to a 4 in the US, score 8-9 is equal to a 3.5, score 7-8 is equal to a 3.0, etc. Only less than 5% of the students in a class can receive grade 9-10 (EducationUSA Vietnam, n.d.). In the Vietnamese system, score 10 is rarely given, even to the best students; students with a

grade-point average of 7.5 will probably in the top 10-15% in their classes (ibid.).

According to UNESCO- IBE (2011, 20.), a student's annual promotion at school is decided by both the school's principal and classroom teacher, basing on the student's academic and moral performance at school. The minimum requirements for students to be promoted to a higher grade is their moral performance is at a satisfactory level or higher, and their average score for all subjects is at least 5.0 out of 10, with no subject has lower score than 3.5 (ibid.).

2.1.3 Tuition fees in Vietnam

Tuition fees for public secondary schools in Vietnam may vary from region to region and from cities to cities. According to VUFO- NGO Research Center (n.d.), the monthly tuition fees for students in urban area ranges from VND 40,000 to VND 200,000 (approximately from \$1.7 to \$8.8), for rural area it will be from VND 20,000 to VND 80,000 (approximately from \$0.9 to \$3.5) and for mountainous area it will be from VND 5,000 to VND 40,000 (approximately from \$0.2 to \$1.8). However, this fee does not include uniform fees, course books fees and infrastructure fees. Therefore, the fees in public schools which are mentioned above are not the entire fees students have to cover.

At public universities, students have to pay around VND 4.85-6.86 million (\$230- \$324) for a school year, which lasts for 10 months of study duration (Tuoi Tre News, 2013). On the other hand, private universities in Vietnam charge students VND 10-74 million (\$473- \$3,500) for a school year (ibid.). High tuition, which can be up to 15 times higher than public universities, is considered to be too expensive for some Vietnamese families. The education quality of those private universities is also in question if it matches the high tuition fees or not because many people still believe that public universities outperform their private competitors (ibid.).

2.2 Cultural effects on educational environment in Vietnam

2.2.1 Culture definition

The concept of culture is hard to define and it can vary from different perspectives. UNESCO (2009, 9) defines culture as “*the set of distinctive spiritual, material, intellectual and emotional features of society and or a social group, that encompasses, not only art and literature, but lifestyles, ways of living together, value systems, traditions and beliefs*”. This definition means that culture is a complex whole which exists and occurs in every aspect of people life. In other words, culture can be seen as the behaviors, values and beliefs which a group of people pass along by communication and imitation from one generation to another. Culture has effects on the languages, beliefs, behaviors, attitudes and values of a person and it can determine how a person thinks and reacts to their surroundings. Understanding one’s cultural background helps to understand his way of thinking and behavior.

2.2.2 Hofstede’s cultural dimensions

One of the most famous and notable cultural researches is the cultural dimensions theory developed by Geert Hofstede. He defines culture as “*the collective programming of the mind which distinguishes the members of one group or category of people from another.*” (Hofstede 1994, 5). In his study, Hofstede describes the effects of a society’s culture on its members and how it impacts their thinking and behavior. According to Hofstede (2011), the six cultural dimensions are:

1. Power-distance
2. Uncertainty Avoidance
3. Individualism versus Collectivism
4. Masculinity versus Femininity
5. Long-term versus Short-term orientation
6. Indulgence versus Restraint

These six dimensions help to understand the deeply embedded values of diverse cultures and how these values influence the behaviors of people with different cultural backgrounds. This research will focus on explaining the Vietnamese culture through the lens of Hofstede's cultural dimensions and how it has to do with the Vietnamese learning and teaching environment.

Power-distance

Power-distance is defined as the extent to which the less powerful members of organizations and institutions (like the family) accept and expect that power is distributed unequally (Hofstede, 2011). In other words, power-distance is the degree to which people in a society accept the fact that the distribution of power is not equal. A high power-distance country is more of an unequal society where individuals accept the power-distance as a way of life and that there is always unequal authority in life.

As in Hofstede's study, Vietnam scores 70 on this dimension, which is relatively high compared to other countries. This indicates that the power in Vietnam is not distributed equally but this is accepted as a part of the culture. People do not view each other's positions as equal; people in a higher hierarchy have more authority and power in the decision making. For instance, students have to obey teachers, children have to listen to elders, employees have to follow the bosses, etc.

Uncertainty Avoidance

Uncertainty avoidance is a dimension that describes the extent to which people in society are not at ease with ambiguity and uncertainty (Cleverism, 2015). It demonstrates to what extent people in a culture feels either comfortable or uncomfortable to what could happen in the unknown future.

According to Hofstede's study, Vietnam is a low uncertainty avoidance country with the score of 30 (Hofstede, n.d.). People in a low uncertainty avoidance country are more likely to be comfortable with chaos and ambiguity; the natural uncertainty in life is accepted as it comes (ibid.). Low uncertainty avoidance societies retain a relaxed attitude in which practice is more

important than principles, schedules can always be flexible and rules are not necessary all the time (ibid.). Vietnamese people are seen as relaxed, confident in their country and comfortable with uncertainty of the future.

Individualism versus Collectivism

Individualism vs. Collectivism defines the extent to which individuals are inclined towards belonging to groups (Cleverism, 2015). According to Hofstede (2011), the ties among individuals are loose on the individualist side; everyone is expected to take care of himself/herself and his/her immediate family only. On the collectivist side, people are integrated into strong and close-knit in-groups, which includes extended families (with uncles, aunts and grandparents) (ibid.).

As indicated by Hofstede, Vietnamese culture scores 20 for individualism, which classifies the country as a collectivistic society (Hofstede, n.d.). Vietnamese people are born into extended families which protect them in exchange for loyalty and allegiance; they foster strong relationships and emphasize the importance of belonging to groups. Thanks to their Confucian roots, Vietnamese culture is heavily orientated around family and community (ibid.).

Masculinity versus Femininity

Masculinity and femininity revolve around the emotional role distribution between genders, which is an essential issue in societies (Cleverism, 2015). A high score in this dimension (masculinity) means that the society is driven by competitions, success and achievement (Hofstede, n.d.). On the other hand, a low score in this dimension (femininity) indicates that the society values quality of life, caring for one another and standing out from the crowd is not favorable (ibid.).

As in Hofstede's study, Vietnam is a Feminine society which scores 40 in this dimension (Hofstede, n.d.). Living in a feminine country, Vietnamese people emphasize "*working in order to live*". They value equality, harmony as well as quality of their working lives (ibid.). In Vietnam, the emphasis is on non-

materialistic aspects of success and showing status is not admirable. Hence, Vietnamese people do not wish to show off what they have or to be outstanding among others.

Long-term versus Short-term orientation

Hofstede (n.d.) describes this concept as how every society has to connect with its past while still dealing with the challenges in the present and future. Societies which score low on this dimension (normative societies) prefer norms and traditions while viewing society's changes with suspicion (ibid.). On the contrary, societies with high score in this dimension (pragmatic societies) encourage thrift and efforts in modern education as a way of preparing for the future (ibid.).

According to Hofstede (n.d.), Vietnam is a pragmatic society with the score of 57. In pragmatic societies, most important events in life are believed to happen in the future, what is good or bad depends on the circumstance, and thrift and perseverance are crucial goals in life (Hofstede, 2011). In Vietnam, people have a tendency to save up for the future, especially money or properties; they attribute success to effort and attribute failure to lack of effort.

Indulgence versus Restraint

The sixth and newest dimension, Indulgence versus Restraint, was based on the World Values Survey, which focuses on the "*happiness research*" (Hofstede, 2011). Indulgence describes a society which allows natural and fundamental human needs which associate with having fun in life. Restraint describes a society in which gratification of needs is controlled and restricted by regulations and norms (ibid.).

With a score of 35 in this dimension, Vietnam is classified as a restrained society (Hofstede, n.d.). People in restraint societies are more likely to be pessimistic and skeptical than people in indulgence societies. They control their gratification of needs and do not put much emphasis on enjoying their leisure time (ibid.). Vietnamese people underestimate the importance of relaxation and do not see themselves as very happy.

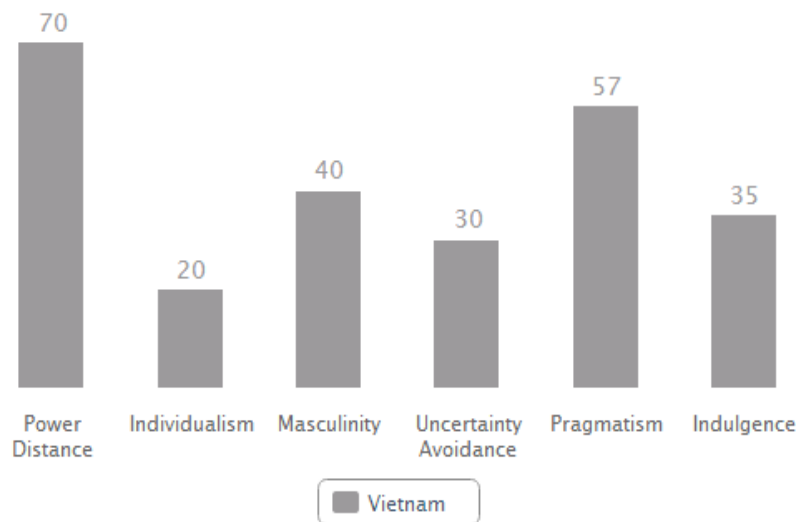


Figure 4 The score of each cultural dimensions of Vietnam (Hofstede, n.d.)

An overview for Vietnam’s scores for six cultural dimensions is demonstrated in figure 4. Vietnam scores 70 in Power-distance and 20 in Individualism. With a low point in Individualism, the society is classified as a collective one. In Masculinity aspect, the country has a score of 40, which is considered as a feminine society. Vietnam scores only 30 in Uncertainty Avoidance aspect, 57 in Pragmatism and 35 in Indulgence- which classifies the country as a restrained society.

2.2.3 The Lewis Model of Cross-cultural communication

Another cultural study which is analyzed and used in this research is the Lewis model of cross-cultural communication. Having visited 135 countries in the world and worked in 20 of them, Richard Lewis had studied the cultures of countries over the world, including Vietnamese culture. He came to develop a model in which he classified countries into three groups of culture. The Lewis model of cross-cultural communication has been used widely in the study of cultures all around the world.

Lewis (2006, 17) regards culture as *“a process to which each one of us has been subjected since birth”* and we are taught the concepts of a specific nation and/or region throughout our lives by surrounding people. These concepts then become our core beliefs as we grow older. In his model of

cross-cultural communication, Lewis classified hundreds of national and regional cultures into three main groups: linear-active, multi-active and reactive (ibid, 28). Linear-active people are those who plan, schedule and organize things; they are more efficient when they do one thing at a time, concentrate specifically on that thing and do it in a planned period of time. Linear-active countries include Germany, Switzerland, Netherland, Sweden, and Norway, to name a few. Multi-active people are more flexible and adaptive; they do various things at once and put their priorities according to situations happening in reality rather than scheduled plans. A majority of South American countries belong to multi-active group, such as Mexico, Brazil, Colombia, Venezuela, etc. (ibid., 30). The last group is reactive culture in which people prioritize courtesy and respect. People belonging to this group rarely initiate action, prefer listening to others and react carefully to their interlocutors (ibid., 32). Vietnam, as well as a majority of Asian countries, is a typical example of a reactive culture type. The Lewis model of three cultural categories is demonstrated in figure 5 with representative countries.

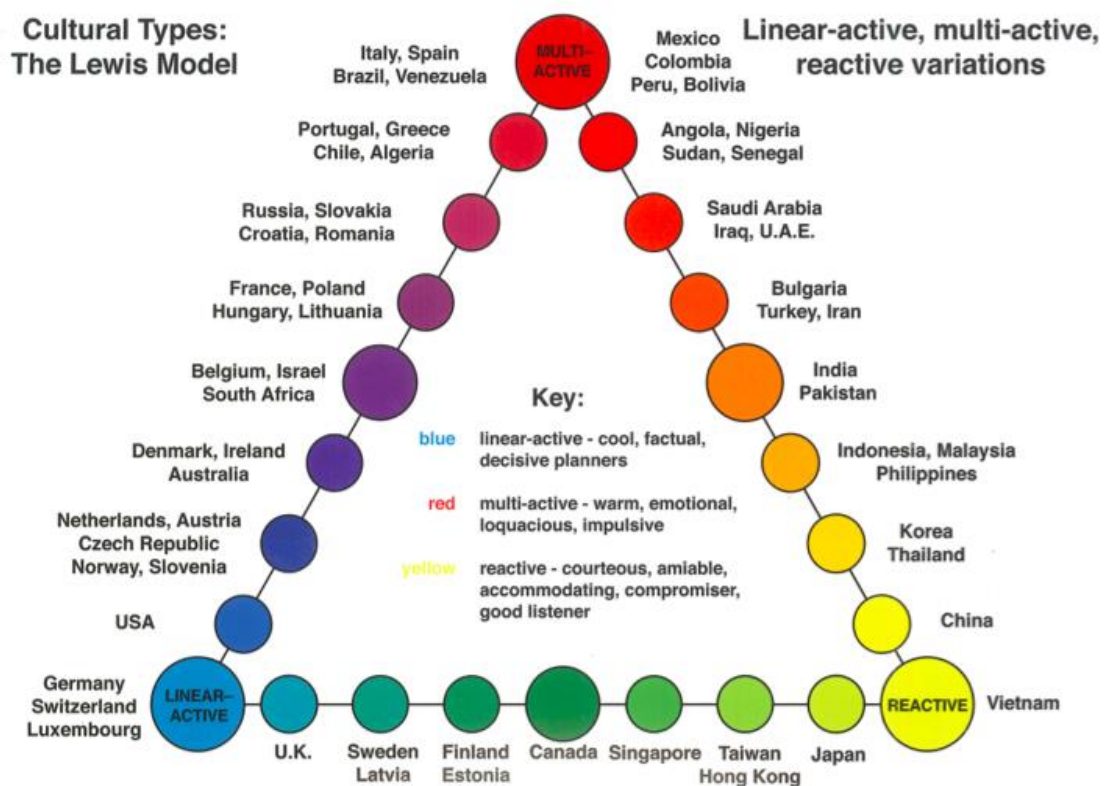


Figure 5 Cultural types: the Lewis model (2006, 42)

According to Lewis (2006, 35), people in reactive culture are “*the world’s best listeners*” who pays great attention to what the speaker is saying and barely interrupts the discourse. They always choose a careful way to reply respectfully such as avoiding giving strong opinions immediately or asking further questions to clarify the intention of the speaker. On top of that, reactive cultures are described as introverted people who may seem to be inscrutable by multi-active people. Reactives give little or no feedback sometimes to the other side; they can tolerate silence very well and regard it as a meaningful reflection part of a discourse. Consequently, small talks do not occur very often in reactive cultures. People in reactive cultures are also very good at nonverbal communication which replaces the infrequent interjections in their conversations (ibid., 37). Some common traits of people in reactive cultures as indicated by Lewis (ibid., 33-34) are introvert, silent, respectful, people-oriented, punctual and quietly caring. They are good listeners who avoids confrontation and protects face of others. It is crucial to discuss the concept of “*face*” in Reactive cultures, as well as in Vietnam, since it is greatly significant in term of one’s self-image. “*Face*” refers to the dignity, pride and respect achieved by or ascribed to an individual, which based on external evaluations rather than one’s own determination (Schalkwyk 2011, 2). In a face saving culture, it is bad and selfish to cause somebody to lose face (Tran 2013, 73). Therefore, the best way to avoid losing face is to not speak or give feedback in public.

In his book, Lewis discusses cultural values and concepts of over 80 countries and territories, including Vietnam. According to Lewis (2006, 481), Vietnamese values are influenced by Confucian tenets in aspects such as work ethic, duty and morality. Vietnamese people also value filial piety, a Confucian philosophy in which one has a duty to respect, obey and care for one’s parents and elder people. Other dominant cultural values of Vietnamese people include forbearance, respect for learning, tenacity and sacrifice. To support Hofstede’s idea that Vietnam is a collectivism society, Lewis (ibid., 482) indicates that as a group-oriented country, Vietnamese people are used to working and living in a close proximity. High population density can also account for this phenomena as the Red River Delta is considered to be one of

the most populous area in the world, with the population of more than 10 million people. Like most of the Eastern cultures, their sense of time is cyclic (ibid., 482). Vietnamese people see time as repeated and going around in circle. Events happened in the past can affect their decisions and Vietnamese people also have a tendency to think in long-term (ibid., 57). In communication, Vietnamese people use facial expression and body language more than other Easterners, for instance, Korea, China or Japan. Being influenced by French colonialists, Vietnamese people tend to express emotion in arguments as well. Moreover, people in the Southern part of Vietnam are more open and honest than many Asians due to the influences of American cultures. Like most Reactives, Vietnamese people are very good listeners in communication. In meetings and negotiations, people in Vietnamese culture are courteous but still can counter back if necessary (ibid., 482-483).

2.2.4 Cultural effects on educational environment

Studying the overview of Vietnam's cultural dimensions helps to further understand the cultural effects on the society's educational environment. As culture of a society has effects on the attitudes, behaviors, values and beliefs of the people in that group, culture dimensions will help to explain why people in a specific group think or behave the way they do. In this research, the focus is on how culture effects Vietnamese people in educational setting.

As a high power-distance country, the power is distributed unequally in Vietnam but less powerful people accept that fact. In a lot of Asian countries where the power-distance is high, children are taught obedience and do not have much authority over their choices. Children are expected to take whatever is given to them and showing disagreement can be seen as a sign of disrespect to elder. In Vietnamese educational setting, parents and teachers have great authority over students. Vietnamese students have little decision-making authority in choosing their school or study field. In many cases, teachers and parents are those who decide the future career path of students. Students might not disagree with their parents or teachers because they do not want to disrespect them and feel obligated to accept what they are told to do. As suggested by Lewis (2006, 481), the influence of filial piety in

Confucianism of Vietnamese cultural values is a major reason for this phenomena. Meyer (2014) states that Confucius creates such a system in which lower obeys higher and it is the higher people's responsibility to protect and guide the lowers. It is not only the responsibility of the lowers (such as children, students, staffs or youth) to follow, but also the responsibility of the higher people (such as parents, teachers, bosses or elder) to protect and take care of those lower (ibid.,).

Vietnam's low score in Hofstede's uncertainty avoidance dimension explains the fact that Vietnamese students hardly question or challenge their educators, especially their teachers. Many researchers argue that Vietnamese students see their teachers as the definitive source of knowledge and they rarely question their teachers or the given materials since they believe these sources of knowledge can never be incorrect (Pham 2010, 24). Vietnamese students are comfortable with uncertainty and hardly do they want to question the accountability of educators. Hence, there is little or no debate at all during class. There is a close link between the power-distance and the learning style of Vietnamese students. In Vietnam, children are expected to be obedient and respect those who are older or have higher rank (Tran 2013, 73). Hence, teachers are considered as the "*found of knowledge*" and students should "*struggle to attain*" that knowledge (ibid.). On top of that, Vietnamese people do not want to lose face in front of the crowd and be seen as not smart. In academic setting, saving face means avoiding questioning or exposing others' accountability in order not to make anybody lose face. Therefore, Vietnamese students are often seen as uninterested or inactive in class since they do not want to express their opinions in public. As mentioned by Lewis (2006, 35), Vietnam shares a common trait of reactive culture, which is giving little or no feedback at all during conversations and being able to tolerate silence very well. This helps to explain why Vietnamese students are often seen as shy and inactive in class; they prefer being lectured to voicing their opinions in public. In general, Asian students, including Vietnamese students, are seen as passive, quiet and non-participative in class (Pham 2010, 24).

In a restrained country, people underrate the importance of leisure and do not indulge themselves too much. Living in such society, Vietnamese students have a strong control over their study and less time for their leisure. That is why many Vietnamese students are caused stress and anxiety over schoolwork. In general, Vietnamese students are focused and they take their study very seriously (Pfeiffer, 2016). They are very disciplined by how students are not likely to be late for school or skip class. They spend around three more hours per week outside of school studying than students from other developing countries (ibid.). The majority of students have to take extra classes outside of school to obtain necessary knowledge. According to Vietnamnet (2013), many students admits that they cannot understand the lectures during the school hours; therefore, they have to attend private tutoring classes even they are run by the same teachers. Even if they want it or not, Vietnamese students have to spend a large amount of time on studying either at school or outside school rather than having free time for their own.

2.3 Vietnamese students' mobility

2.3.1 Vietnamese students' mobility

The past few years have witnessed a sharp rise in the number of Vietnamese students studying abroad. Studying oversea has been a trend among Vietnamese families for a decade since more and more students are planning to pursue their degree in a foreign country.

In 2012, there were 106,104 Vietnamese students studying in 49 countries and territories (ICEF Monitor, 2013). In 2016, the amount of Vietnamese students studying oversea increased to more than 130,000, according to the Vietnam Ministry of Education and Training (Vietnamnet, 2016). In 2012, Vietnam ranked 9th on countries with most students going oversea, according to UNESCO Institute for Statistics. This number of Vietnamese international students contributes approximately 5% of domestic postsecondary enrolment (ICEF Monitor, 2013).

Top 4 Destination Countries for Vietnamese Students at the Tertiary Level

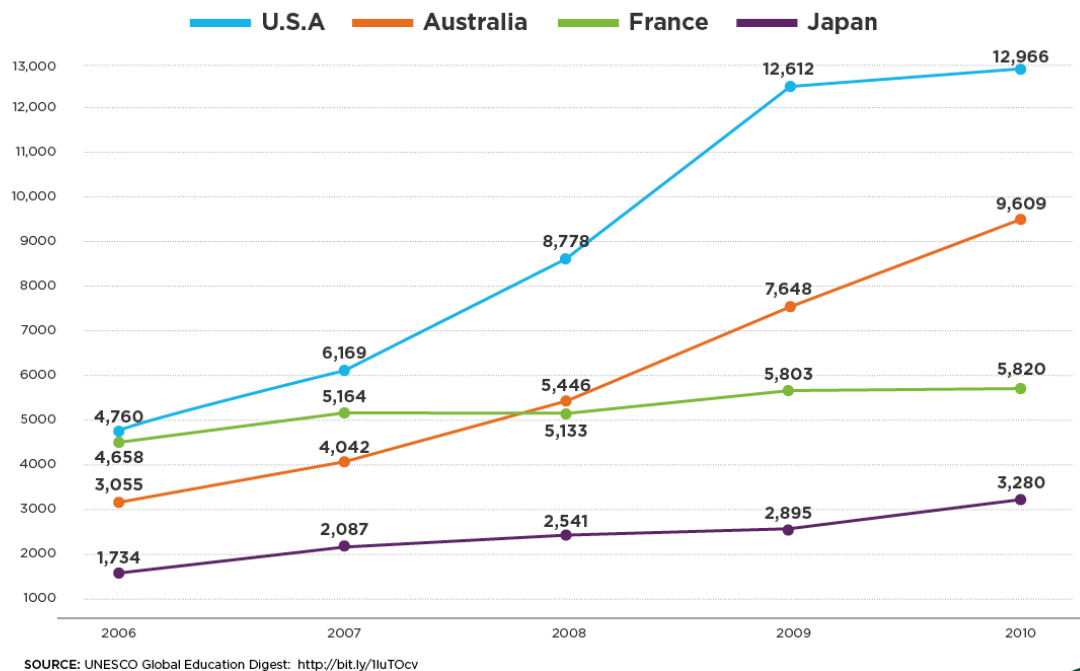


Figure 6 Top 4 destination countries for Vietnamese students at the tertiary level (Word Education News & Reviews, 2012)

As shown in figure 6, top 4 destination countries for Vietnamese students at the tertiary level in 2012 are the US, Australia, France and Japan (Word Education News & Reviews, 2012). The US was the first study destination for Vietnamese students with 12,966 students, followed by Australia with 9,609 students. France came in the 3rd place with 5,820 students and Japan came in the 4th place with 3,280 students.

An updated statistic from UNESCO (2017) points out the top destination countries for Vietnamese students. As indicated in table 2, top 10 countries include: the USA, Australia, Japan, France, United Kingdom, Korea Republic, Germany, Finland, Russia and Canada. There is no change in top 4 study countries compared to 2012 as the US still takes the lead, followed by Australia, Japan and France. Popular study destinations for Vietnamese students in Asia are Japan and Korea, while in Europe are France, the UK,

Germany, Finland and Russia. In America, the US and Canada are top choices among Vietnamese students.

Destination country for Vietnamese students	
Country	Number of students
United States	19,336
Australia	13,147
Japan	6,071
France	5,284
United Kingdom	4,236
Korea Republic	2,548
Germany	1,808
Finland	1,600
Russian Federation	1,557
Canada	1,407

Table 2 Global flow of tertiary student in Vietnam (UNESCO Institute of Statistic, 2017)

A majority of Vietnamese people regard US higher education as the best in the world and they see education as “*a priority worth of significant financial investment*” (Word Education News & Reviews, 2013). According to a survey conducted in 2010 by IIE Briefing Paper, among 700 responses by Vietnamese students in three major cities in Vietnam, 80% of the respondents choose the United States as their first choice to study abroad (ibid.). A report from Word Education News & Reviews (2012) identified Vietnam as the 3rd emerging country from which universities in the US can recruit international students. The Vietnam Ministry of Finance estimates that the total amount of invested money from Vietnamese students falls in the US \$1-1.6 billion range (ICEF Monitor, 2012).

2.3.2 Motivations for the global flow of Vietnamese students

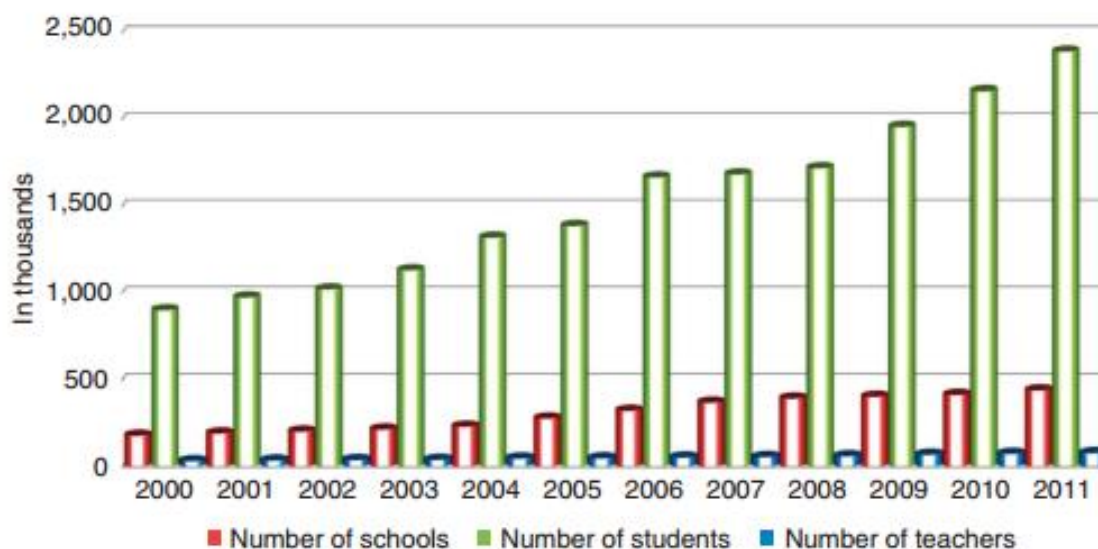
One of the crucial motivations for such prevalent trend is low quality of the Vietnamese education system. Vallely and Wilkinson (2008, 1) argue that Vietnamese higher education is far behind their Asian neighbors since there is not a single Vietnamese university in top leading Asian universities. Most Vietnam's universities are behind international standards of knowledge and they are not producing the educated workforce needed for Vietnam's economy and society (ibid, 2). There have been excessive numbers of low-quality Vietnamese universities but a lack of high-quality ones. According to Brown (2014), a university degree in Vietnam is considered as a ticket to the middle class and a promise of "*an urban professional class*". As a consequence, the enrolment in higher education among Vietnamese youth has raised from 162,000 in 1992 to over 2 million in 2013. Accordingly, the number of universities has "*sprouted like weed*" to meet the high demand (ibid.).

There are still many flaws in the Vietnamese education which prompts students to go oversea. Rote learning has been a popular learning style of students of all ages due to the fact that students are taught to be obedient to their teachers from a young age (Tran 2013, 73). According to Pham (2010, 26), the normal class size in Vietnamese schools is 50-70 students (in Korea 43, in Japan 45 and in China 50-60), which is much higher than that number of Western classes. With one teacher taking care of such a number of students in one class, the only possible teaching method by which Vietnamese teachers can distribute knowledge fairly is lecturing. This has a close link with the fact that Vietnamese students are passive, obedient and uninvolved during class. As a result, there is no room for debating or public-speaking skills development at school for Vietnamese children. Insufficient instructional material is another factor making Vietnamese students rote learners. As indicated by Pham (2010, 26), materials are in short supply at all higher institutions in Vietnam. Universities in Vietnam have used text books as the primary source of information; hence, students rely on the course books required by lecturers as the definitive written source of knowledge (ibid.). Teachers usually highlight points which will appear in the exams and students

just have to learn by heart carefully those readings without questioning or challenging what is presented in the book (ibid., 27). This matter of fact keeps Vietnamese students away from critical thinking and independent learning.

Many Vietnamese students and parents are not content with the outdated curriculum of the education system. In Vietnamese schools, all subjects are considered equally important, so that teachers try to cover everything at school and students are overloaded with information (Pham 2010, 27). To cover such an amount of information in limited time allowance, teachers can only reach the surface of the matter but not elaborate on the topic or discuss subjects outside the curriculum (ibid.). Consequently, students just try to memorize what is taught in class to pass the exam without deeply understanding the subject matter. Vietnamese students neither have room for skills development at school nor specialize in any particular subject. According to McCornac (2012, 265), the curriculum in Vietnamese higher education is somewhat irrelevant to the demand of the emerging labor market. The number of graduates in Vietnam is on the rise; however, the skills and experiences do not meet the requirement of employers in growth industry (ibid.).

Another drawback of the education system is the fact that teaching job in Vietnam is being depreciated and underpaid. Over the past few years, the number of teachers in Vietnam have been in short supply. McCornac (2012, 264) points out that the number of lecturers in Vietnamese universities has tripled since 1987; however, the number of students has raised more than 13 times since then. The student-teacher ratio of countries such as the USA, Japan or the UK is less than 20:1 while this ratio of Vietnamese schools is much higher, which is around 29:1 (ibid.).



Source: Adapted from data provided by GSO Vietnam (2011)

Figure 7 Number of schools, students and teachers in the higher education sector of Vietnam from 2000 to 2011 (McCornac 2012, 265)

As illustrated in figure 7, the number of students have grown rapidly over the decade, which represents the increasing educational demand among the youth population of the country. Consequently, this surge has led to the demand for more schools and teachers. The number of schools has nearly doubled throughout the decade; nevertheless, the number of teachers has slightly increased, or grown very little in 10 years. The major reason for shortage of faculty is the very low salary of lecturers. According to McCornac (2012, 264-265), although the student-teacher ratio is very high (which is 29:1) and the workload for professors at universities is massive, the salaries for Vietnamese professors stay very low forcing them to find other ways of earning money. As estimated in 2011, the average monthly salary for Vietnamese teachers is less than four million Vietnamese Dong, which is approximately US\$ 200 (ibid., 265). Due to the low salary, many Vietnamese teachers are forced to move to another job or open extra classes outside school to earn more money.

Low quality of education, universities with low recognition, poor teaching and learning method, outdated curriculum, unpaid teachers, etc. are reasons forcing Vietnamese students to go abroad for a better educational environment. However, studying abroad has been much easier than before for

Vietnamese families due to the booming economy of the country. In other words, the development of Vietnamese economy plays an important role in the phenomena of more students studying oversea. Around 30-40 years ago, only a limited number of outstanding students were rewarded with scholarship to study abroad and it was relatively impossible for students to study abroad with a self-founded mode. While this research's main focus is on the financial strategies of Vietnamese students while studying abroad, the chapter below focusing on the country's economic situation will help to explain the phenomena from a financial point of view.

2.4 Overview of the economic situation in Vietnam

2.4.1 The economic reform in 1986

After defeating France at Dien Bien Phu in 1954, Vietnam was divided into two parts under the control of two different governments: North of Vietnam, as known as The Republic of Vietnam and South of Vietnam, as known as the Democratic Republic of Vietnam. The North followed the Socialist system similar to China and the Soviet Union, focusing on “*state-controlled agriculture*” and a “*collectivization of peasants*” in which the state kept a major role in all sectors of the economy (Sepe 2003, 1). On the other hand, the South was under the rule of Capitalism. Private industries, especially in manufacturing sector, have more room for development and was the main player in the economy. The South was more economically developed than the North; however, both regions had to rely heavily on aids from other countries. The North received aids from other Socialist parties like China and Soviet Union, while the South received aids from America (ibid.).

After the unification of the country in 1975, Vietnam still faced many economic challenges, one of which was how to unify the differences of the two economies (Nguyen et al., 2015, 4). On top of that, the US embargo against Vietnam in 1977 had negative effects on the aid supply from foreign countries and confined Vietnam from international trade. From 1977 to 1979, Southern Vietnam was attacked by Cambodia while Northern Vietnam was attacked by China, which led to the increasing expense on defense and damage costs

(ibid., 5). The sixth party congress in 1986 introduced “Đổi Mới” policy in order to reform the economic situation at that time. In Vietnamese, “đổi mới” means “renovation” or “reconstruction”. “Đổi Mới” program was introduced with the intention of bringing significant changes and reformations to the economy.

As the result of “Đổi Mới” program, Vietnam has achieved impressive economic growth. According to Vuong (2014, 2), the Vietnamese economy in the period of 1991- 2000 had achieved an average growth rate of 7.5%. Given the economic situation before 1986, Vietnam was forced to open to more international trades with other countries. Accordingly, Vietnam signed trading agreement with the European Union in 1992, normalized their diplomatic relation with the US in 1995 and joined Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) in the same year (Nguyen et al., 2015, 5). In 1998 Vietnam joined Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) and signed the very first US-Vietnam Trade Bilateral Agreement in 2001 (ibid.). In 2007, Vietnam officially became a member of World Trade Organization (WTO) (Vuong 2014, 2). As an ASEAN member, Vietnam participated in a number of free trade agreements between ASEAN and its trading partners, such as China, Japan, South Korea and India, to name a few (Nguyen et al., 2015, 6). These changes have created an environment for Vietnamese entrepreneurs and exporters, who played a crucial role in the development of the economy.

30 years after “Đổi Mới” was launched, Vietnam has enjoyed an outstanding economic improvement. Vietnam transformed from one of the poorest countries in the world to a lower middle-income country (World Bank, 2017).

2.4.2 The current economic situation

The country’s GDP

When studying the economic outlook of a nation, people often look at the gross domestic product (GDP) of that country. According to Trading Economics (2017), GDP is a reflection of the national income and output for an economy. In other words, GDP is the total value produced by everyone in a

country. Many economists and investors use GDP as the best indicator to gauge the economy of a given country.

Based on data from World Bank, GDP of Vietnam is US\$ 202,62 billion in 2016, ranks 46th in the world. The total population of Vietnam as calculated in 2016 is 92,7 million people (World Bank, 2016). GDP of the country in the last 10 years is shown in the figure below:



Figure 8 Vietnam GDP in the period 2006-2016 (World Bank, 2017)

As presented in figure 8, Vietnam GDP has been on the rise constantly over the past years. The GDP in 2016 has increased by 5.1% in comparison with 2015 and the number is expected to continue growing in the future. Vietnam's GDP per capita has been among one of the fastest growing in the world since 1990, with an average of 6.4% growth every year in the 2000s, according to World Bank (2017). Despite the fluctuation of the global economy, Vietnam still manages to remain a stable economic growth.

One of the top reasons for the strong GDP growth of Vietnam in recent years is the fact that the country has become an attractive investment destination for foreign investors. According to Dam and Barbour-Lacey (2015), many businesses have located their operations to Vietnam due to the country's low costs and favorable position. Vietnamese government is also trying to make the country friendlier to investors in terms of financial incentives and

regulatory (ibid.). In addition to that, Vietnam is now rising as a top country in low-cost manufacturing and sourcing, with 25% of the country's GDP is from manufacturing as calculated in 2015 (ibid.). According to Hart (2017), labor and operating costs in Vietnam is lower than its giant neighbor China. Many multinational firms and foreign investors have adopted a strategy called "China-plus-one", with an attempt to reduce risks and costs which might have in China, and to diversify their business in East Asia. As a result, Vietnam is the chosen destination for many international companies (ibid.).

Trading market

Vietnam's trade also attributes greatly to the remarkable GDP growth of the country. Due to "Đổi Mới" reform, Vietnam has been doing trade with a wider market than ever before in term of both trading goods and trading partners. In 2015, Vietnam exported US\$ 185 billion, becoming the world's 24th largest exporter (The Observatory of Economic Complexity, 2017). In the same year, Vietnam imported US\$ 169 billion, becoming the world's 27th largest importer. The country experienced a positive trade balance of US\$ 15,8 billion in 2015 (ibid.).

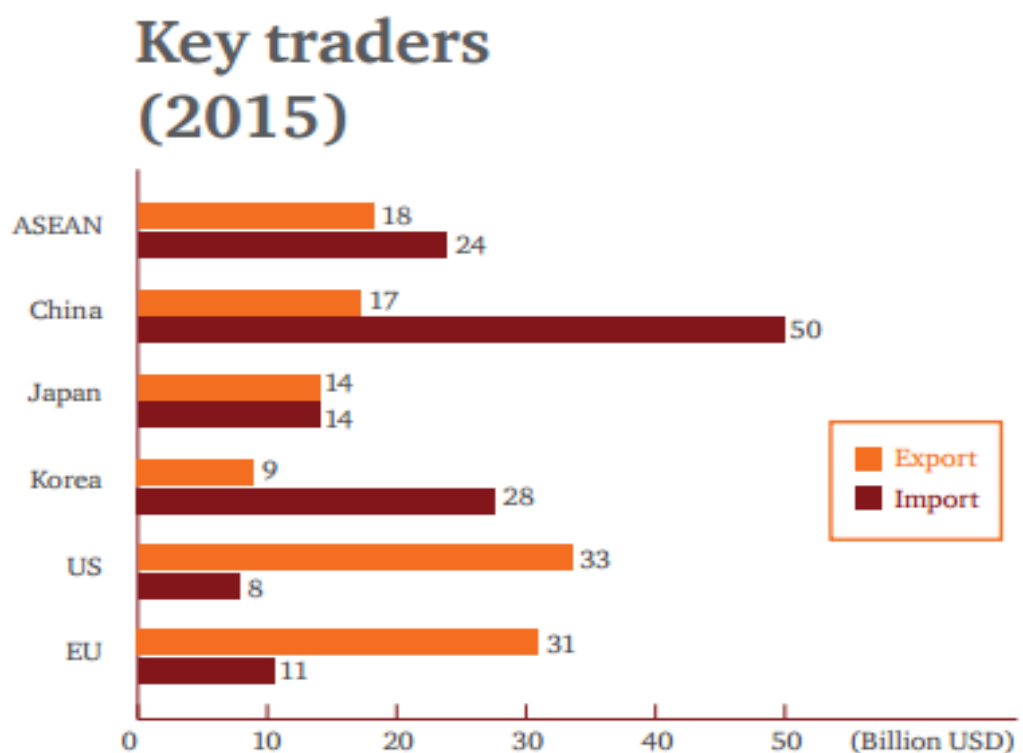


Figure 9 Vietnam's key traders in 2015 (PwC, 2016)

Based on statistics from PwC (2016), Vietnam's top traders in 2015 are ASEAN, China, Japan, Korea, the US and EU. Notably, Vietnam mostly imports goods from their Asian neighbors, with half of the imported goods are from China. On the other hand, Vietnam mostly exports goods to the US (33%) and EU (31%).

Vietnam's top import commodities are: machinery, computers, telephones, textiles and iron (PwC, 2016). Vietnam's top export commodities are: telephones, textiles, computers, footwear, machinery, wood and wooden products, seafood, plastic materials and petroleum oil (ibid.). On top of that, Vietnam is the second largest coffee exporter in the world, behind only Brazil. However, Vietnam is expected to overtake Brazil as the world's number 1 coffee exporter due to the country's low-cost production and favorable climate condition (Dam and Barbour-Lacey, 2015).

Vietnam average wage

For Vietnamese families, studying in other countries is a high financial investment due to the low wage in Vietnam. Based on statistics from Trading Economy (2017), Vietnam average monthly wages in the first quarter of 2017 is 5,507,000 Vietnam Dong/month, which equals to US\$ 242/ month. Although this number is higher than previous years, it is absolutely very modest in comparison with other countries which are top study destinations for Vietnamese students. For example, in Finland- a rising destination among Vietnamese students, the average monthly earnings as calculated in the first quarter of 2017 is 3,392 euros/ month, which equals to US\$ 3,986/ month (Trading Economy, 2017). In the US- top study place for Vietnamese students, their average hourly wage is US\$ 22, as in June 2017 (ibid.).

A global wage report by the International Labour Organization (ILO) in 2016 helps to compare the nominal wage in the 2013-2015 period around the world. Nominal wages are measured in term of the money that employees receive, regardless of the changes in prices. According to the report, average monthly nominal wage of Vietnam in 2015 is 4,716,000 Vietnam Dong/ month, equals

to US\$ 207. On the other hand, this indicator in most study destinations of Vietnamese students is much higher. For instance, the average monthly nominal wage is US\$ 3,746 in the US, 4,946 AUD in Australia (equals to US\$ 3,951) or 333,300 JPY in Japan (equals to US\$ 3,011), to name a few.

However, it is important to mention the fact that although its economy is on the rise, Vietnam is still just an emerging market and a lower middle-income country with a lot of economic challenges. Given the historical background and current circumstances, there are still a many improvements Vietnam has to make in order to become a strong and large economy. Therefore, it is impractical for Vietnam to reach the level of such developed society in term of income. Those abovementioned indicators are just to illustrate the fact that with the average Vietnamese salary, it really is a major challenge for most Vietnamese families to pay for the tuition fees and living costs in more expensive countries. Demand for a better education environment is unquestionable, but the financial challenge has held many students back. That is why this research is done to help and provide guidance for Vietnamese students in term of financial strategies.

3 METHODOLOGY

3.1 Overview of research method

Research purpose

Among four main research purposes, which are exploratory, descriptive, explanatory and predictive, the descriptive purpose is considered as the most appropriate one for this research. According to Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill (2009, 140), the objective of descriptive research is to have a clear picture of a phenomena by collecting data and giving an accurate portrait of persons, situations or events. Descriptive research does not answer the question “How”, “When” or “Why”, rather it addresses the question “What” by going further and drawing conclusions from the data collected. In this research, the

purpose is to portray the phenomenon of Vietnamese students studying abroad and provide financial strategies for those who plan to study abroad.

Research approach

The two most commonly used research approaches are inductive and deductive approach. Having considered both choices, the researcher decided to choose the inductive research approach. In an inductive approach, the research does not start with any predetermined theory or idea; instead it starts with collecting data relevant to a chosen topic, exploring that data and then developing theories from them as a result of the data analysis. (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill 2009, 61). A research with an inductive approach still needs to have a clearly defined research purpose, research questions and objectives (ibid.). One of the advantages of inductive approach is to make meaning of collected data and to develop such an understanding of the nature of the problem. While deductive approach does not permit other explanations of the predetermined hypothesis, inductive approach has a more flexible structure allowing changes of research emphasis during the research process (ibid., 126). In other words, inductive approach welcomes new findings and discovery as the research progresses.

In this thesis, the researcher begins by gathering data relevant to her topic of interest, which is the financial challenges and strategies of Vietnamese international students when studying abroad. The next step is to analyze and make sense of the collected data. The final step is to develop general theories regarding the research questions.

Data collection and analysis technique

To gain insight into how Vietnamese students cope with financial challenges while studying abroad, the primary data collection process uses both quantitative and qualitative approach. Quantitative refers to any data collection technique which generates or requires numerical data, while qualitative refers to any data collection technique that generates or requires non-numerical data (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill 2009, 151). Such method employing both quantitative and qualitative data collection techniques and analysis

procedures is called mixed-method approach (ibid., 152). “*Mixed method research uses quantitative and qualitative data collection techniques and analysis procedures either at the same time (parallel) or one after the other (sequential) but does not combine them*” (ibid.). Either quantitative or qualitative approach alone cannot provide such a broad and complete understanding of the research problem like mixed-method approach does (Creswell 2014, 5).

As suggested by Creswell (2014, 19), the study with a mixed-method data collection approach starts with a survey to generalize statistics of the studied population and then focus on qualitative, open-ended interviews to gain insights and thorough perspectives from participants in order to help explain the initial survey. In this study, the research process starts with sending open-ended questionnaires to the Vietnamese international students’ network with the aim of reaching a geographically diverse group of participants. After analyzing the general opinions of respondents from the survey, the research focuses on open-ended interviews with some individuals to gain personal experiences. The interview focuses on their comprehensive views and specific actions they do which contribute to their success.

3.2 Sampling techniques

Since the studied population of this research is very high, it is impracticable to collect data from the entire population. Furthermore, as an undergraduate student, the researcher neither has access to a large budget nor enough time to survey the whole population. As a consequence, the need to sample is out of question. When making decisions about sampling, these aspects were taken into consideration:

- Research population: The research population of both the questionnaire and the semi-structured interview comprises Vietnamese students who have experiences studying higher education level in a foreign country, with the interview focuses more closely on individuals who go abroad with self-founded mode and manage to overcome financial challenges while being abroad. Probability sampling method is chosen for the questionnaire while non-probability sampling is chosen

to select samples for the interviews based on subjective judgement of the researcher.

- Financial base for the research: At the bachelor level, the researcher does not have much financial support for this study.
- Time frame: two weeks is the maximum time allowance for the researcher to collect data for both the questionnaire and interviews to ensure the thesis process is going as scheduled.
- Facility: There is only one person completing this research; however, in order to reach a large number of Vietnamese international students, the researcher calls for her friends' help to invite Vietnamese international students within their network to answer the survey.

For the questionnaire, the recruitment for data starts with sending the survey to Vietnamese international students in the researcher's own network. It can be the researcher's friends, relatives, colleagues or acquaintances who have experiences studying at higher education level abroad. However, spreading the survey only within the researcher's own network may not attract enough samples and may cause bias for this study. Consequently, the researcher will ask the participants to promote the survey and invite other members to take part in. The questionnaire is also posted on a number of social media networks such as appropriate Facebook groups or blogs to attract more respondents. Such sampling technique is defined as probability sampling or random sampling. According to Elder (2009, 4), probability sampling is appropriate to any survey which intends to generalize results from a sample of the research population. In probability sampling, each member has an equal chance, which is non-zero, of being selected in the survey (*ibid.*). As suggested by Elder (2009, 5), random samples are applicable when the sample is representative of the research population and results drawn from the samples can generalize the whole population.

On the other hand, a purposive (or non-sampling) sample is a selection of units which are chosen based on personal judgement (Elder 2009, 6). The non-probability sampling technique is selected for the interview since the samples of the population have to meet a standard of traits. For the qualitative

data collection for the interview, convenience sampling technique is selected. In convenience sampling technique, cases are easy to access because they can be selected haphazardly (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill 2009, 241). The process continues until the researcher has reached the required sample size (ibid.). In this case, the researcher only implements interviews with participants who share all these following traits:

- Vietnamese international students who have experience abroad at bachelor or equivalent levels
- Students who study abroad with little financial support from family
- Students who manage to cope with financial challenges by themselves
- Students who have good academic performance
- Students who are easy to contact

Having considered the limited resources, convenience sampling is the most applicable method to collect qualitative data through interviews. The researcher seeks for participants who share these abovementioned traits to participate in the interviews.

3.3 Data collection

3.3.1 Secondary data collection

Secondary data was employed in this research to provide theoretical framework in the literature review chapter for readers. According to Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill (2009, 259), three main types of secondary data are documentary data, multiple source data and survey-based secondary data.

All of the documentary data used in this research are written material sources, which includes organizations' websites, reports of committees, journals, students' thesis and books. The mostly used documentary sources in this research are books, e-books and online articles. Non-written material sources, such as videos and recordings, are not used in this research. Survey-based secondary data, which refers to data collected through survey and has been analyzed for some purposes already, is not in use in this thesis as the researcher could not find any existing survey data relevant to the topic. As a consequence, the researcher decides to collect primary survey-based data to

acquire general information on the research topic. Multiple-source secondary data comprises either documentary or survey-based data, or it can be a combination of both (ibid., 262). This type of data collection is also used in this study to establish theoretical framework.

3.3.2 Primary data collection

Survey “Financial Challenges of Vietnamese Students When Studying Abroad”

The first step in building content for the survey is to refer back to the research objectives, research questions and the theoretical framework. The questions developed in this survey intend to answer the four research questions, which covers (1) to what degree money is a factor of concern, (2) how these financial challenges address, (3) sources of funding available to students and (4) personal strategies students develop.

The survey was created on Webropol platform, an online tool for survey and data analysis available for students and staffs at JAMK University of Applied Sciences. The advantages of web surveys are fast, low-cost and convenient, which are appropriate for the researcher’s limited facilities and budget. Moreover, Webropol tool is in the researcher’s favor since it enables users to save and share the questionnaire easily while being able to download the results in different formats, such as Excels, SPSS and PDF.

The language of the survey was in English in order to serve both the target population, which were Vietnamese international students, and the readers of this research. The language validity of the survey was checked and revised by a native English speaker and another Vietnamese international student in the study population. The questionnaire comprised eight questions, six of which were mandatory questions. The questionnaire received 139 responses after five days of collecting data, from September 8 to September 12, 2017.

Semi-structured interview

After finishing with the questionnaire, the data collection process continues with the semi-structured interview for more in-depth information. According to Edwards and Holland (2013, 3), in a semi-structured interview, there is a pre-determined set of questions or topics which will be covered in the interview; however, the order of questions can be changed or more questions can be added in accordance with the interviewee's respond. The advantage of semi-structured interview is flexibility for participants to answer on their own terms compared to structured interviews (ibid.,). While the survey intends to get an overall picture of the research topic, the interviews try to gain more detailed insights and specific experiences of Vietnamese international students. The pre-determined questions in the survey are developed based on what the survey participants propose.

The researcher selects the most appropriate students who meet the abovementioned requirements for participating in the interviews. After that, the researcher invites them to participate in the interview via emails, via calls or in person if possible. Before the interview occurs, a list of questions which are discussed during the interviews are sent to interviewees. Providing the interviewees with the interview questions beforehand gives them some time to prepare themselves for the interview. The interviews take place either remotely (mostly through Skype) or in person. The interviews are conducted in Vietnamese since it is the mother tongue language of both the interviewee and the interviewer. Results of the interviews are then translated into English and presented in this research.

3.4 Analysis of data

According to Pham (2015, 39), data analysis refers to the examination of grouped data for studying the chosen phenomena, and for identifying the relationships among variables which relate to it. Analysis purpose can be divided into either inductive (descriptive) analysis or deductive (inferential)

analysis (ibid.). This research adopts both types of data analysis approach for the questionnaire and the interviews.

As for the questionnaire, the researcher chooses to use inductive (descriptive) analysis. As indicated by Pham (2015, 39), inductive analysis explores data and presents information about the characteristics of the research topic. In this study, the questionnaire aims to collect data and explore them to identify which themes and issues to concentrate on in the following interviews. Based on the suggestion from Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill (2009, 491), the process of analyzing data collected from the survey include these following steps:

1. Comprehend data
2. Integrate related data which are drawn from the questionnaire
3. Identify main issues which needs further exploration
4. Develop theories based on the relationships between variables
5. Draw descriptive conclusions

As for the interviews, the deductive (inferential) analysis method is selected to analyze data. Deductive analysis helps to draw inferences or conclusions from results of the research (Pham 2009, 39). The content of the questions which are covered in the interviews is based on the theoretical framework as well as the viewpoints drawn from what the survey participants present. The interview transcript is translated into English and transcribed in Word documents. The researcher will make interpretation of the participant's primary statement and categorize their answers into different themes regarding the research topic.

4 DATA PRESENTATION

4.1 Survey “Financial Challenges of Vietnamese Students When Studying Abroad”

The survey received 139 responses in five days of data collection. Participants of the questionnaire are Vietnamese students who have experiences studying for higher education level in 25 countries: United States, Australia, Japan, Korea Republic, France, United Kingdom, Germany, Finland, Russia, Canada,

Ireland, New Zealand, Netherlands, Belgium, Spain, Poland, Italy, Czech Republic, Denmark, Norway, Malaysia, Singapore, Sweden, Slovakia and Hungary.

4.1.1 The effect of money on decision to study abroad

Figure 10 below presents to what degree the survey participants address money as a factor affecting their decisions to study abroad.

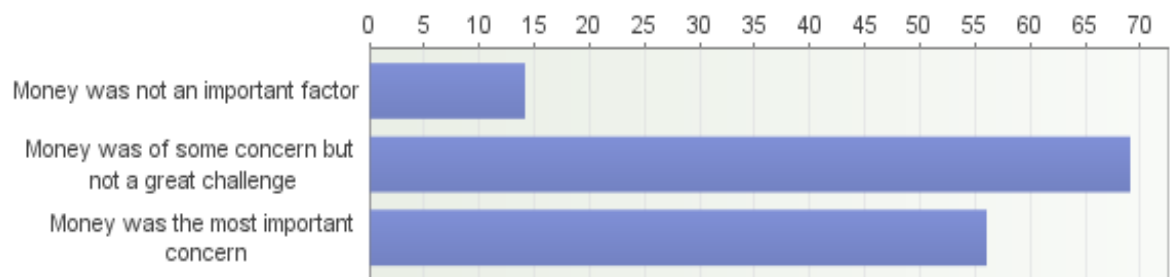


Figure 10 Survey: To what degree was money a factor for your decision to study abroad?

Among 139 people who completed the survey, only 14 people agreed that money was not an important factor affecting their decision to study abroad. This accounts for 10% of the total responses. 69 respondents, which accounts for 50% of the participants, agreed that money was of some concern but not a big challenge for them to make decisions to study abroad. Out of 139 respondents, there were 56 people admitted that money was their most important concern when making decision to study abroad. This takes up to 40% of total respondents.

Based on the survey data, it appears that only a minority of Vietnamese students does not have to worry about financial problem when studying abroad. The majority of Vietnamese students considers financial challenge as an issue affecting their study decision in a way or another.

4.1.2 How financial challenge addressed

The questionnaire comprises an open-ended question asking how this financial challenge addressed to those who were concerned about money. The purpose of this question is to explore in which way this financial challenge affected their decision to study abroad. This optional question receives 87 answers from the participants.

A large number of the respondents admitted that they needed a scholarship or low tuition-fee option if they wanted to study abroad. There are students who said that they would not be able to study abroad at all without a full-ride scholarship. In addition to that, there are students who admitted that they had to find countries with free or low tuition fee although these countries may not be their first choice of study destination. They concerned about the choice of country due to the cost associated with studying and living abroad. And since it was a great investment for them and their family, they needed to make sure that the chosen study destination had good educational quality and reasonable living cost. Based on the respondents' answers, popular countries with free or low tuition fee that Vietnamese students choose to study in are Germany, Finland, Norway, Netherland, Italy and France.

Many respondents also pointed out that these financial challenges led them to find personal funds. The most popular way for Vietnamese students to fund themselves is to work part-time. Some students stated that although their living expenses was funded by their parents, they still wanted to have some pocket money on their own to support their leisure or hobbies. This was because they were aware that it was challenging for their parents to provide them with such an amount of money. Another group of students stated that they had to find part-time job because their parents could only afford some parts of their expenses abroad. Some students had to save up for years in advance for their study abroad by working in Vietnam. They continued to find part-time jobs when they came to the foreign country. However, in countries where English is not their mother tongue, a part-time job usually requires

speaking the local language, which is also a disadvantage of international students.

Another point of view was mentioned among the responses is that students had to live more economically than when they were in Vietnam. They had to come up with ways to cut down unnecessary expenses when being abroad. Some students admitted that they could not hang out or dine out as much as when they were in Vietnam because it was more expensive in those foreign countries.

4.1.3 Time preparation for study abroad

The next question in the survey aims to ask the participants when their family began to plan for their study abroad. From the participants' responses, it is clear that the time period in which students prepared to study abroad varies from students to students. The responses are presented in figure 11 as below:

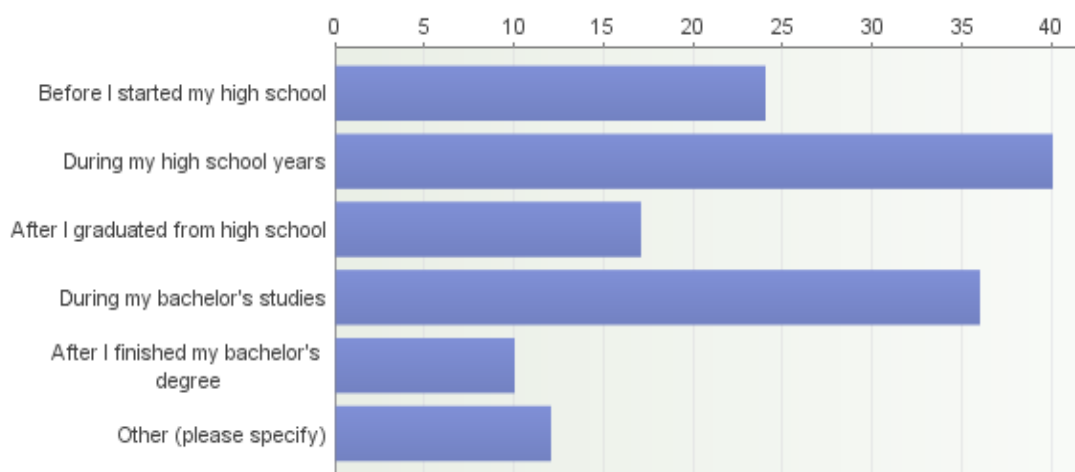


Figure 11 Survey: When did your family begin to think ahead and plan for your future study abroad?

Among 139 respondents, 24 of them had their parents planned for their study abroad before they entered high school. This accounts for 17% of the survey participants. The majority of respondents, with 40 students or 29% of the responses, had their parents planned ahead for their future study when they were in high school. 17 students, which takes up 12% of the samples, agreed that their parents planned for it after they graduated from high school. 36 students, which are 26% of the respondents, admitted that they had plans for

studying abroad during their bachelor's studies. Only 10 respondents, which is 7% of the participants, planned to study abroad after they had finished their bachelor's degree in Vietnam. Other responses, which account for 9% of the answers, suggested that some students plan to study abroad when they began to enter the job market or after they finished their master's degree. Some stated that they did not have any specific plan in mind regarding studying abroad, they started to think ahead only when they were offered some kinds of scholarship.

4.1.4 Strategies employed by parents

The fifth question in the questionnaire invites students to share specific strategies which their parents employ for their study abroad. Based on the answers of 139 participants, the strategies employed by their parents can be divided into five groups: (1) Saving account, (2) Extra work, (3) Financial investment/ educational insurance, (4) Loan from various sources and (5) Long-term investment in education. The most common answers received are parents having a saving account and taking up more jobs or working extra hours. Specific opinions about actions Vietnamese parents took to prepare for their children's education are stated as in table 3 below:

Strategy	Particular action(s)
Saving account	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Having a saving account for years in advance - Minimum spending, maximum saving - Saving salary every year
Extra work	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Parents working extra hours - Parents taking extra jobs, e.g. in some cases, they have to take up to 3 or 4 jobs - Working oversea to send money home

Financial investment/ Educational insurance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Buying educational insurance which parents can draw the interest when it reaches maturity date - Having some financial investments which generate income every month
Loan from various sources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Borrowing money from banks - Borrowing money from relatives or acquaintances
Long-term investment in education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Parents investing in education so that their children would be able to get a scholarship, especially in studying languages

Table 3 Survey: What specific strategies did your parents employ for your study abroad?

4.1.5 Funds available to Vietnamese students

The sixth question in the survey asks students to share any scholarship or grant for international students that they had received. The responses from the survey participants are illustrated in figure 12 below:

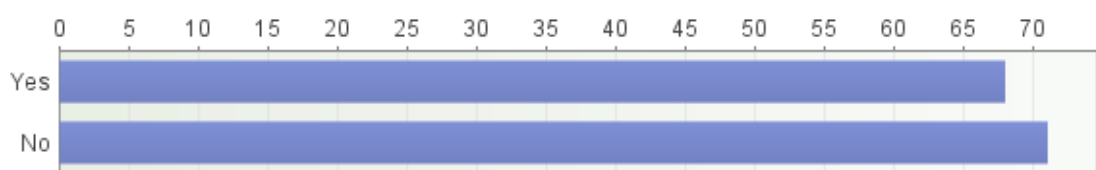


Figure 12 Survey: Did you receive any funding (e.g. grant, scholarship) other than your family's support. If yes, can you please specify which one?

67 students, or 48% of the respondents, did receive some kinds of scholarship or grant for their study abroad. 72 students, or 52% of the respondents, claimed that they did not receive any funding other than their family's financial support. As suggested by the survey participants, many students received Government scholarship either from their home country or from the country in which they chose to study abroad. Some students received grant money from

their university or some special benefits such as free accommodation. Here are some of the scholarships available to Vietnamese students as suggested by the survey participants:

- Orange Tulip Scholarship in the Netherlands for students from Neso countries
- Japanese Government (MEXT) Scholarship for international students studying graduate courses at Japanese universities
- ASPF Scholarship: scholarship to study in France for students from South East Asia
- German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD) Scholarship in Germany for international students
- New Zealand Aid Programme (NZ Aid) scholarship for international students
- Belgian Technical Cooperation (BTC) Scholarship for students from partners' countries
- "911" and "599" Scholarship Program from Vietnamese Government
- SHARE Scholarship: scholarship from the European Union Support to higher education in the ASEAN region
- Fulbright Scholarship Program: American scholarship program for international students
- Chevening Scholarships: UK government's scholarship program for international students
- OFID Scholarship Award for students from developing countries
- Endeavour Scholarships and Fellowships: Australian Government's scholarship for international students
- Singapore-Industry Scholarship (SgIS): multi-industry scholarship in partnership with the Singaporean Government

4.1.6 Financial challenges management when studying abroad

Figure 13 below demonstrates the participants' responses to the question how they coped with managing their financial challenges when studying abroad. In this question, students can choose more than just one option.

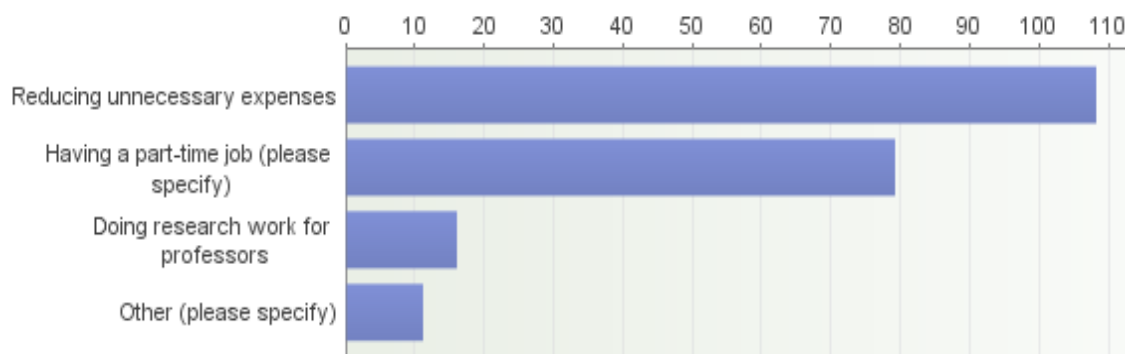


Figure 13 Survey: How did you cope with managing your financial challenges when studying abroad?

There are 108 respondents who chose “reducing unnecessary expenses” as a way of coping with financial challenges; whereas 79 out of 139 respondents selected “having a part-time job” option as a way of managing their finances. As suggested by the survey participants, one of the most popular part-time jobs Vietnamese students pick up when studying abroad is waiter/ waitress in restaurants. Other part-time jobs Vietnamese students adopt that are stated in the survey are: chef, personal assistant, housekeeper, logistics worker, translator/ interpreter, babysitter, private tutor, cashier, receptionist, travel consultant and online jobs. “Doing research work for professors” is not a popular choice among Vietnamese students as only 16 students chose this answer. In the other option, students stated other ways of supporting themselves financially is taking an internship/ traineeship or focusing on studying to get the scholarship for next term.

4.1.7 Advice about managing money

The last question in the survey asks Vietnamese students studying overseas to give practical advice about managing money to students who may choose to study abroad. A summary of 89 responses is demonstrated in table 4 below:

Area of advice	Particular action(s)
Job advice	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Seeking for part-time jobs from multiple sources to gain not only money but also valuable experiences - Not dwelling too much into making money otherwise it will distract you from your study
Study advice	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Concentrating on your study in order not to fail the courses, especially for students who have to pay tuition fee - Trying to finish your study on time or shorten the study time if possible - Borrowing textbooks from library or buying used books if possible - Looking for scholarships that are offered by schools or other organizations
Daily life advice	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Sharing accommodation with friends if possible - Checking bank account balance every week - Using applications about money management which helps to control your expenses, e.g. Expense Manager application for smartphones - Not spending too much money on things that are nice to have but not absolutely necessary - Buying from secondhand shops - Cooking at home regularly - Looking for promotion and discount in supermarkets and shopping malls - Estimating your monthly expenses and trying not to exceed the limit - Comparing prices in different supermarkets - Keeping balance between work, study and social life - Planning ahead and saving up money for rainy days

Table 4 Survey: Please share here your advice about managing money to students who may choose to study abroad

4.2 Data collection from the semi-structured interviews

The researcher conducted interviews with 8 Vietnamese international students studying in 5 countries: Finland, Korea Republic, Australia, Germany and the United States. For the interviewees' preference, their identity and information are kept anonymous. The qualitative data collected from the interviews is presented below in this chapter.

4.2.1 How financial challenges affect students' study

The participants were asked how the financial challenges have an effect on their decision to study abroad and their study during their time abroad. Their answers are demonstrated as in table 5 below:

Interviewee's statement	Interpretation
<i>Because of our financial concerns, my family and I had to choose a study destination or a university with an affordable tuition fee.</i>	
<i>With a limited financial capacity, I had to consider which major I can study abroad. For example, if I want to study Fashion Design or Clothing and Textiles program abroad, I will have to spend quite a large amount of money on such things like materials or textures, which makes me consider if I should study it in Vietnam or change to another major.</i>	Financial concerns affect students' choices of: <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Studying country- University- Study field
<i>I was mentally prepared by my family and by myself that there would be many hardships ahead and</i>	Students have to be mentally well-prepared before their study abroad.

<i>that I had to try harder than other students when I decided to study abroad because I had to cope with those financial challenges while studying.</i>	
<i>I got the scholarship for each academic year if my grades were good enough; therefore, I had to study hard to be able to maintain the scholarship.</i>	Students have to put a lot of effort on their study in order to get the scholarship.
<i>I did not receive any scholarship or funding for my study abroad. Hence, I had to find part-time jobs to share the financial burden with my family. I had to allocate my time wisely to work and study at the same time. It takes a lot of hard work to balance my study and my work.</i>	Students have to find part-time jobs and balance between their study and their work.

Table 5 Interview: How did the financial challenges affect your decision to study abroad and how did it affect your study during your time abroad?

4.2.2 Study as a priority over work

During the interview, an opinion raising from the questionnaire was brought into discussion. The interviewees were asked to what degree they agreed with the viewpoint that study must be a priority over part-time jobs or work in general. All the participants supported this opinion as all of them agreed that the money students tried to save and/or earn is just to support their study at school. Their supporting points are demonstrated in table 6 below:

Interviewee's statement	Interpretation
<i>I totally agree with the opinion that study must be the first priority no matter what. It's important for Vietnamese students to keep in mind</i>	Whatever students do to cope with their financial challenges should be for the sake of their academic study.

<p><i>that whatever they do to cope with the financial challenges is for the sake of their academic study.</i></p>	
<p><i>In some countries where there is no tuition fee, students do not have to pay even if they fail the exam or the course. Consequently, many students may get into working to earn as much money as possible and neglect their study, which can be very dangerous.</i></p>	<p>It is dangerous how students may get into working and neglect their study.</p>
<p><i>In case students can find jobs which support their study (e.g. intern in company, research work, etc.), it would be favorable if they work hard to gain practical experiences related to their field of study. However, their academic record at school should still be their first concern.</i></p>	<p>Work which is beneficial for student's study is favorable, however, academic performance should still be the first concern.</p>
<p><i>In each country, there are law and regulations on how many hours per week students are allowed to work. I have known some cases in which students worked too much that it exceeded the permitted working hours. Not only did it affect their study and health, it also broke the local law and regulations, which could cause them a lot of legal troubles.</i></p>	<p>Working over the permitted hours not only affects students' study and health but also causes them legal troubles.</p>

Table 6 Interview: To what degree do you agree with the opinion that study must be a priority over part-time jobs?

4.2.3 Strategy for work, life and study balance

When students study abroad, they need a strong sense of self-discipline in order to effectively balance their work, life and study. In the interview, the participants were asked to share their tips on how to effectively balance their work, school and social life. Table 7 presents all the strategies suggested by the interviewees.

Interviewee's statement	Interpretation
<p><i>I recommend having a calendar in which students write all the to-dos and deadlines which need to be completed. They should identify their priority and complete it before it reaches the deadline, for instance, one week in advance. I personally think this is the best way to manage your timetable effectively.</i></p>	<p>Time management is crucial in achieving a balanced work-life structure.</p>
<p><i>Every day I would allot how much time I would spend on work, study and other social activities and try to accomplish it.</i></p>	
<p><i>TV and social media can be time-wasting activities that you absorb yourself in. Unless students need TV or social media for work or educational purpose, limit the time spending on them. By doing so, students will be surprised to realize how much free time they have.</i></p>	<p>Reducing unnecessary time spent on social media and TV can bring in more free time.</p>
<p><i>Taking some time off to meet friends and talk to family is very important for their happiness and health. I believe having family and friends</i></p>	<p>Nurturing connection with friends and family help students to manage stress and achieve their goals.</p>

<p><i>around is a good way to keep students confident about accomplishing their goal and reduce their stress.</i></p>	
<p><i>Due to my personal scheduling conflicts, I could not join some classes at university. As a result, I spoke with the school secretary about all the options which are available for the courses. I would also take some courses online if possible to have more flexibility in my schedule.</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Students should ask the person in charge at university about all the available options for the courses if they could not join the class. - Students should take advantage of online courses if possible to have a more flexible schedule.

Table 7 Interview: Do you have any strategy or action to balance your work, life and study at the same time?

4.2.4 How local language requirement affects job opportunity

Vietnamese students can still enroll in some study fields taught in English without knowing the local language in some non-English speaking countries, such as the Netherlands, Finland, Norway, Korea, to name a few. However, in those country, the requirement for speaking the local language when applying for jobs is requisite. From the survey-based data, some students stated that they faced a lot of difficulties seeking for jobs in non-English speaking countries when they do not speak their language properly. In the interview, the participants were asked to share how the demand for local language affected their job seeking opportunity. Their answers are shown in table 8 below:

Interviewee's statement	Interpretation
<p><i>Not knowing the local language limits my job opportunity. In Korea, most people cannot speak English well; therefore, all the customer service jobs require speaking</i></p>	<p>Manual jobs which do not require the local language are available options for students who do not speak the local language.</p>

<p><i>Korean. I can only apply for manual jobs which do not require much interaction with colleagues or customers.</i></p>	
<p><i>Since most jobs here in Finland require speaking Finnish, I get motivated to study Finnish. I recommend students to learn the local language to have more job opportunities.</i></p>	<p>Students are recommended to learn the local language to increase employment opportunities.</p>
<p><i>My advice is to study the language before going to that country. Not only does it enhance students' employment opportunity, it is also helpful for their life abroad.</i></p>	
<p><i>My friend found a job as a Vietnamese translator for a Finnish company which wanted to do business in Vietnam. Students can try to find jobs which call for their Vietnamese language skills although such jobs may be very scarce. Or if possible, they can try to apply for companies or restaurants whose owner are Vietnamese, then there are more chances for Vietnamese students who do not speak the local language.</i></p>	<p>Students can try to find:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Jobs which call for their Vietnamese language skills; - Vietnamese companies in the foreign country where they live.

Table 8 Interview: For students who study in non-English speaking countries, how did the local language requirement address regarding their job seeking opportunity?

4.2.5 Whether financially incapable students should study in Vietnam

One argument from the questionnaire participants is that if the financial challenges are big burdens for students who may want to study abroad and their family, it would be better just to study in Vietnam. The interviewees were asked to give their opinions towards this point of view.

Interviewee's statement	Interpretation
<p><i>I strongly disagree with this opinion. It may be risky to study abroad when students have some financial issues, however, if other students could do it, they also can manage it. Of course, they would need a bit of luck as well, but the most important things they need are motivation, strong will and hard work.</i></p>	<p>Students can still study abroad despite their financial limitation as long as they have strong motivation, will and hard work.</p>
<p><i>If they always think that they cannot do it, then they will never make it. By one way or another, they can find a job to support their finances, and online jobs are good options too. Another alternative is to save up money before studying abroad.</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - There are always job opportunities abroad for students.
<p><i>Students can take some time to prepare for their financial sources. Students do not have to study abroad right after finishing high school. They can go when they are financially capable, maybe after a few years of working. My point of</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Students can try to save up before studying abroad. - It is never too late to start studying abroad.

<p><i>view is, it is never too late to start anything.</i></p>	
<p><i>I partially agree with this opinion. There are still many Vietnamese university with good quality which students should apply for. And of course, there are still many Vietnamese students who become successful without getting a degree abroad. If you have a limited source of finances, you can choose to study in Vietnam. In most Vietnamese universities, there are exchange programs or summer school programs which allow students to study abroad for a short period of time. Students can apply for such programs, which are cheaper than studying abroad but students still can learn a lot from that.</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Studying abroad does not determine if students will become successful or not. - There are programs allowing students to go exchange for a short period of time.

Table 9 Interview: Some students claim that if your financial challenges are big burdens for you and your family, it would be better just to study in Vietnam. What is your opinion towards this point of view?

Table 9 above presents participants' perspectives on the idea that students with financial concern had better to study in Vietnam. There had been diverse opinions from the interviewees regarding the question. The majority of the interviewees disagree with this statement, arguing that finances should not be the deciding factor for a student's decision to study abroad. There are plenty of ways to handle their financial challenges as long as they are determined to study abroad. On the contrary, one interviewee partially agrees with the statement, claiming that there are still good universities in Vietnam which offer high-quality programs for students; and that study destination is not the decisive factor that can determine either the students will be successful or not.

He adds that most Vietnamese university have exchange programs or double degree programs with a shorter length of time which students can apply for instead of studying abroad for a few years.

5 CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this research benefits Vietnamese international students who plan to study oversea as well as students who are already abroad. The research serves as a practical guide for students and their family to manage their money and cope with the financial challenges effectively when studying abroad. For other researchers, this thesis provides a general view on the Vietnamese education system, cultures, study mobility and economic outlook. At a time when Vietnamese international students' mobility is on the raise, this study can be employed by different parties who are involved in the phenomena.

The findings from questionnaires with 139 Vietnamese students having studied abroad and interviews with 8 individuals have answered the four research questions. A majority of Vietnamese students (90% of the survey participants) concerned about money at some level when making decision to study abroad, while only a small number of students did not have to worry about the financial issues. This can be explained by the economic situation in Vietnam in comparison with the economy of more developed countries.

The financial problems have affected students in their choices of school, major filed and study country. Moreover, students have to find personal funds by themselves, such as scholarship or part-time jobs. On top of that, the financial problems make their parents plan ahead for their studies by having some coping strategies, such as having a saving account, having extra work, making investments or borrowing money from different sources. More details on how the financial challenges addressed are presented in table 3 and 5.

Not only did the survey participants suggest some external financial resources available to Vietnamese students, they also gave advice on finding jobs, studying and daily-life activities in order to manage the financial challenges

students might face. A more detailed presentation on practical strategies suggested by students is shown in figure 13, table 4 and table 7.

There were interesting findings and opinions emerged from the surveys; some of the controversial viewpoints were brought into discussion during the interviews. Such topics are study as a priority over work, how the local language requirement affects job opportunities for Vietnamese international students and whether financially incapable should study at Vietnamese universities. More thorough views on these topics can be found in table 6, table 8 and table 9.

In conclusion, the four research questions were answered and the research objective was successfully achieved. Along with the practical guide from the survey and interview participants, the researcher will also propose her personal suggestions in regard to the research topic.

5.1 Personal suggestion

With the advancement of technology, students should take advantages of online information to search for scholarships, universities or fields of study. Some popular websites which help students to search for scholarship opportunities are:

- College Board (Collegeboard.org)
- Scholarships.com
- ScholarshipDb.net
- Yconic (Yconic.com)
- FastWeb (Fastweb.com)
- SallieMae (Salliemae.com)
- Hot Courses (Hotcourses.vn)

Other great sources for scholarships search is the websites of universities' admissions office. In every university's website, there is always a specific category for international student or international admission which provides students with information regarding scholarships or financial aid. On top of

that, students can contact the school's admissions office via email or phone calls if there are any inquiries.

For government scholarships, students can find them on the embassy's website or government's website. For instance, students who are interested in studying in the US can visit the website of the US embassy in Vietnam, where there are US embassy grants and scholarship programs for Vietnamese students. Some countries establish their own website which are run by the government to support international students search for scholarships and grants. For example, for students who are interested in studying in Korea, there is StudyinKorea website run by Korean government and for students who wish to study in Japan, there is a website called "Study in Japan Comprehensive Guide", etc.

Facebook is as well a great source for scholarship opportunities. There are various Facebook groups and pages providing scholarships for Vietnamese students; however, students may be overloaded with too much information. One advice is to join the Facebook group of the students' community in that country, where students can find scholarship opportunities or practical advice from Vietnamese students who have experiences living and studying in that specific country already.

There have been many useful and practical advice from the survey and interview participants to Vietnamese students who wish to study abroad. In addition to that, students are encouraged to make the most of their time when studying abroad. The time students study overseas is one of the most challenging yet meaningful time they get to experience. Students should try out new things in the foreign countries, travel to different places to gain valuable experiences, expand their network and make friends with people from other backgrounds. Such experiences are so precious that not even money can buy them.

5.2 Limitations of the research and recommendations for further study

When evaluating the quality of a research, it is crucial to take into consideration both reliability and validity of the research. Reliability of the research is defined as the extent to which results are consistent over time, and if the similar results of a study can be generated under the same methodology, then the research instrument is seen as reliable (Golafshani 2003, 598). However, in the researcher's opinion, the result of this research is open to changes if one conducts the research at a different time. This is due to the ever-changing nature of the phenomenon studied. The phenomenon changes as other factors related to it change, therefore, another result can be generated if the research is conducted at different times.

Validity of the research refers to how truthful the research results are and whether it measures what it is supposed to measure (ibid, 598). In this research, the validity is largely subject to the responses of the survey and interview participants. That is why the non-probability sampling technique was chosen for qualitative data collection. One of the limitations of this research is the small sampling size ($n=139$), which is not able to fully represent the whole population of Vietnamese students studying abroad. Another limitation is that a quarter of the survey participants have studied in Finland (36 out of 139 participants) due to the researcher's personal network. This may somewhat cause bias to the research's findings. Furthermore, as the survey was conducted in English, some Vietnamese students studying abroad in non-English-speaking countries were not able to participate in the survey. For researchers who are interested in further study of the research topic, one suggestion here is to conduct the survey in both English and Vietnamese in order to reach the largest possible sampling size.

Recommendation for further research is to focus on one specific country, for example Australia or Japan, to provide practical insights for students going to that country. Another approach is to focus on different aspects of challenges Vietnamese students might have to face when studying abroad, for instance

cross-cultural communication challenges or learning style challenges. Such topics would bring in helpful and valuable insights for interested readers.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1. Survey Financial Challenges of Vietnamese Students When Studying Abroad



Financial Challenges of Vietnamese Students When Studying Abroad

Since the phenomenon of Vietnamese students studying abroad for higher education has been on the surge over the past years, this survey wishes to study the financial challenges Vietnamese students may face when studying in a foreign country. I kindly ask you to reflect and share your personal experiences so that I can get a better understanding of the research topic.

Your answers will be documented and used as primary survey-based data for my research. Thank you very much for answering this survey and your participation is highly appreciated!

1. Which country do you have experiences studying in for your higher education level (bachelor, master, PhD, etc.)? *

- United States
- Australia
- Japan
- Korea Republic
- France
- United Kingdom
- Germany
- Finland
- Russia

Canada

Other (please specify)

2. To what degree was money a factor for your decision to study abroad? *

- Money was not an important factor
- Money was of some concern but not a great challenge
- Money was the most important concern

3. For those who were concerned about money, how was this challenge addressed?

E.g. was money a real challenge for your family that you had to find other funds yourself?

4. When did your family begin to think ahead and plan for your future study abroad? *

- Before I started my high school
- During my high school years
- After I graduated from high school
- During my bachelor's studies
- After I finished my bachelor's degree

Other (please specify)

5. What specific strategies did your parents employ for your study abroad? *

E.g. father having two jobs, an education savings account, etc.

6. Did you receive any funding (e.g. grant, scholarship) other than your family's support for your study abroad? If yes, can you please specify which one? *

Yes

No

7. How did you cope with managing your financial challenges when studying abroad? You can choose more than one option. *

*

Reducing unnecessary expenses

Having a part-time job (please specify)

Doing research work for professors

Other (please specify)

8. Please share here your advice about managing money to students who may choose to study abroad.

Appendix 2. Interview Questions for Vietnamese International Students



Interview with Vietnamese International Students

This interview will focus on the interviewee's personal financial challenges when studying abroad and his/her strategies to cope with them. This interview is a part of my bachelor thesis "The financial challenges of studying abroad: strategies for Vietnamese international students" within JAMK University of Applied Sciences. Your answers will be documented and used as primary data for my research. Thank you very much for your time and your participation is highly appreciated.

1. How did the financial challenges affect your decision to study abroad? And how did it affect your study during your time abroad? (E.g. some students may choose their university and study destination based on their financial capacity, etc.)
2. Some students state that study must be a priority over part-time jobs, to what degree do you agree with this and why?
3. Do you have any strategy or action to balance your work and study at the same time?
4. Some students claim that if your financial challenges are big burdens for you and your family, it would be better for you just to study in Vietnam. What is your opinions towards this point of view?
5. For students who study in non-English speaking countries, how did the local language requirement affect your job opportunity?
6. Do you have any advice about managing money to students who may choose to study abroad?