

Student Mobility and the Issues of Integration

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The last ten years have witnessed a rapid increase in the number of Vietnamese students going overseas to study. Having an opportunity to access to high quality education, updating the world latest knowledge and skills, fully integrating in an international environment and becoming a global citizen are the expectations of cross-border students. However, while there are students who adapt quite straight forward to the host institutions, there are others who find it difficult to adjust to and integrate in the new environment. This paper provides summary on Vietnamese student mobility, discusses different views about integration issues and the impact of integration on students' academic performance, and finally provides solutions on how Vietnamese students can fully integrate in the new academic and social life.

Keywords: *Integration, social integration, academic integration, international students.*

1. Vietnamese Student Mobility on the Rise

According to the Vietnam Ministry of Education and Training, there were 125,000 Vietnamese students studied abroad in 2013 of which 90% students were self-funded. This represents a 15% increase over 2012 and the highest annual growth since 2008/09. The top five countries that educated the most Vietnamese students are Australia, the US, Japan, China, and Singapore of which the two top countries named Australia and the US are homes for about 37% of all 2013 enrolments from Vietnam (ICEF Monitor 2014). Given the in-country modest quality education, especially at higher education sector, going overseas to study is considered to be a dream of Vietnamese students

and parents as they believe that Vietnamese education does not provide the skills and knowledge they need. In addition, universities in Vietnam are not regionally and globally ranked which is the most concerned among parents who mostly play a decisive role in their children future study, as shared Ms. Tran Thi Que Anh who lives in Binh Thanh District, Ho Chi Minh City.

2. Student Integration

International student mobility brings to host countries a diversified, enriched culture, apart from contributing to the countries' economic growth. In return, students are expecting to experience a high quality education and obtain international knowledge and skills they need for their future career.

However, whether international students are able to fully integrate in the host institutions and countries is still questionable.

Firstly, integration is defined as a sense of belonging on campus. It can be understood that if students feel comfortable on the campus and enjoy their college as well as class, they are considered being integrated. While Tinto and Cullen (1973) describe that student integration process comprises two dimensions which are social integration and academic integration, Lester, Leonard and Mathias (2013) argue that a sense of belonging can only be developed through academic connection. Involving in social activities does not promote the sense of belonging; therefore, social activities hardly



have any effect on student integration. Nevertheless, in line with Tinto's classic integration model, Severiens and Wolff (2008) conceive that naturally, integration has the two above integration elements, because if one has the ability to engage and belong to a group which is considered social engagement, he or she automatically has certain academic level.

2.1. Academic Integration

Tinto's integration model suggests that academic integration occurs when students engaged in academic activities and become attached to the intellectual life of the college. Academic integration is measured by grade performance and intellectual development. While grade performance is a tangible measure of academic success which can be understood as an extrinsic reward, intellectual development is considered as an intrinsic reward which is part of an individual's intellectual development and was found as a factor that has impact on students' persistence in a college. While there are a number of studies emphasizing

that academic engagement means students have strong focus on academic activities which have connections with faculty staff, academic challenges and active and collaboration learning, Lester, Leonard and Mathias (2013) argue that student interaction with faculty staff is not considered as an academic engagement, rather it is a part of the course taking. To be able to measure the level of integration, Severiens and Wolff (2008) classify academic integration into formal and informal academic engagement of which formal engagement is contacts relating to the institute itself, and informal academic engagement is the interactions with peers, and teachers outside classroom.

2.2. Social Integration

Similar to the academic integration, Severiens and Wolff (2008) divide social integration into formal and informal integration. The former involves contacts with peers in the learning environment whereas the latter is more involved in social contacts and students activities. On the contrary, Rientie et al. (2012)

claim that social adjustment reflects the level students deal with interpersonal-societal demand of the study regardless of whether they are formal or informal adjustment. According to Tinto's integration model, social integration is a component contributing to an individual's integration success. Social integration has various forms from informal interaction with peer group associations, semi-formal extra-curriculum activities to contact with faculty staff. They stress that social integration is as equal important as academic integration in student study success. Conversely, Lester, Leonard and Mathias (2013) study reveals that students consider engagement important to their college success, but it does not come from on campus social activities, rather from the structure outside the university including family, mentors, colleagues, church, and other community-based groups. Students feel they are engaged if they have strong academic connection not activities relating

to college life.

2.3. The Impact of Integration

Going overseas to study is a critical decision of international students and their families. Students are neither simply enrolled in an institution, nor a customer of a service. They are human beings whose global mobility is associated with opportunities and challenges. Students coming from different countries adjust to the new environment differently. There are some groups of students who experience substantial personal-emotional and social issues while other groups of international students adjust fairly easily. In Australia, both Australian and international students prefer working with their own group on assignments because they are different in cultural-emotional connectedness; language; pragmatism; and negative stereotypes, which contribute to curbing the progress of student integration both local and international groups. Student academic and social integration is a complex process which has strong impact on student academic performance. The study by Renties et al. (2012) found that non-Western students have more adjustment issues, which leads to lower personal/ emotional well-being. Smith & Khawaja's (2011) study draws similar findings when comparing students coming from Confucian countries' score and their Western peers'

Discussing on the correlation between academic and social integration and academic performance, majority of researchers found a strong positive connection between academic integration with a student's

study success while there are still arguments about the impact of social integration on student academic performance.

2.3.1. The impact of academic integration on academic performance

Many previous studies found the positive correlation between academic integration and student academic performance. Tinto & Cullen (1973, p.43) state that "The higher the degree of integration of the individual into the college, the greater will be his commitment to the specific institution and to the goal of college completion". Similar findings about the positive impact of academic integration on an individual's study success stated that student academic adjustment is the primary indicator for academic success. If students adjust well in a learning environment, the likelihood of their study success is very obvious regardless of their cultural backgrounds. The two indispensable constructs of student integration are developed simultaneously through the same activities. For example, classroom activities help students not only connect to the college, but also develop the relationships with peers who they can work with after class hours, and these two forms of integration play a critical role in student academic success.

2.3.2. The impact of social integration on academic performance

Unlike academic integration, the role of social integration in student academic performance is still debatable. Tinto & Cullen (1973) believe that together with academic integration, social integration is an indispensable component in the

student integration process. They particularly consider the role of social integration as critical as academic integration in determining students' success in their study. By contrast, Lesley et al. (2010) found that students' academic work can be distractive if students get involved in social activities. Social engagement can only be viewed helpful if it contributes to academic purpose; therefore, it needs to take place in learning environment. Renties and Tempelaar (2013, p. 198) while emphasizing that the integration process of international student is much more complicated than just taking about "The international students", they hardly find the impact of social integration on student study success. In other words, the extent to which students adapt to the academic way of-life in terms of motivation, learning style, drive and/or study approach is the key driver for academic success. Renties et al. (2012) even claim that social adjustment influenced negatively the students' success because they believe that if students extensively participate in extracurricular activities, they may devote less time on academic activities, which eventually leads to lower study-performance, which contradicts to Tinto's model.

3. How to integrate?

As discussed above, students coming from different background will adjust differently in a new study environment. Confucian-heritage students are those who come from countries that were greatly influenced by Confucian culture such as China, Taiwan, Singapore, Hong Kong, Japan, Korea and Vietnam. Vietnamese students who are considered as

Confucian-heritage learners often find it difficult to fully integrate in a new learning environment. The reasons are various, and language barrier is one of the major causes. In Vietnamese state schools, English is considered as a foreign language which is delivered as a study subject, not a second language which can be used as a tool to teach other subjects such as mathematic, physics or chemistry as it is being used in other countries such as Singapore, the Philippine, India, or in Malaysia.

Students coming from Confucian-heritage culture are viewed to be passive in learning, shy, quiet, and unwilling to ask questions because their background education was based on teacher centered approach which views teachers as having “fount knowledge” who deliver the lesson contents which are supposed to be absorbed by students. This learning approach eliminates independent and creative learning skills which are of the utmost importance when students study in a Western-based education. In general, Confucian-heritage students, apart from having difficulty in social integration, are found to have some problems in their academic integration, especially freshmen although with their hard work, their academic results are still acceptable. Hence, in order to truly integrate in the host country academically and socially, Vietnamese students should have a good preparation not only during their study but also during their pre-departure

3.1. Academic Integration

Firstly, apart from the advice obtained from education fairs, information sessions, student

recruitment agents, pre-departure briefing, students should allow sufficient time to have a well academic preparation. In terms of timing, they need to determine when it would be appropriate to go abroad to study, whether it is high school, undergraduate or post graduate study. They need to allow at least one to two years to mentally and financially prepare for it.

Secondly, language preparation: students are required to meet English language proficiency requirement of the current IELTS 6.5 (to enter to universities) or an equivalent International Certificate such as TOFEL IBT or SAT. However, this minimum English requirement does not help much because students with this minimum level will find it hard to understand and articulate when are in the host country. They, therefore, need to improve their English much further if they would like to quickly settle in academically and socially. The more fluent in English they are, the greater the possibility for integration.

Thirdly, study method in the host institution: students need to be aware of and familiar with, as much as possible; the host institution’s learning method before they arrive. This is especially critical for freshmen because otherwise, it will take enormous amount of time to learn and to get used of it to shorten the gap with local and other international students. This is because the home and host education systems are very different. Study skills such as browsing a database, searching a peer review, reading a journal, taking note, doing literatures, making in text citation, and making references are vitally

important but are not taught in Vietnam. Majority of Vietnamese students seriously struggle with doing assignments when they study abroad, particularly during the early months.

Fourthly, presentation and group work skills: this is one of the most important skills required. Students in other countries, especially Western ones, are encouraged to carry out group work, conduct group and individual presentation at very young ages whereas Vietnamese students hardly get involved in such kind of assignments. Therefore, they find it difficult to meet with such requirements. Apart from the Confucian-heritage culture which is thought to be conservative, language is an obstacle that prevents students from being confident to speak out. Thus, Vietnamese students tend to gather and form a group together to work on assignments as they do not feel comfortable to work with other international or local students. To fully integrate both academically and socially, Vietnamese students should overcome the feeling of being an Asian, being low English proficient, and being inferior. They need to have goodwill to learn and appreciate others’ cultures, throw themselves into non-Vietnamese communities, keep asking questions, and take the opportunity to introduce Vietnamese culture to other students

3.2. Social Integration

Social engagement is considered to be an issue for most of Vietnamese students because of cultural differences, inadequate language competency, intercultural misunderstanding,

and psychological concerns. To socially integrate

Firstly, students should learn about the host country culture before arrival, and they should understand that cultural differences and conflicts are unavoidable. Hence, they should pay more attention to cultural sensitivity and increase their cross-cultural awareness, learn about local customs and traditions, improve language proficiency, and build confidence in communicating with local community.

Secondly, students should develop student-peer interactions because it will help them not only integrate in their academic life but also feel inclusive. Therefore, relationship development and management is a very important skill for cross-border Vietnamese students. They will also need to diversify their friend groups, and not to confine themselves within the Vietnamese communities. In addition, relationships and interactions with the university's staff are needed to develop for social integration as well because once students get along well with the university and the faculty's staff, the need to belong to the institution has been met, and this is when the integration occurs.

Lastly, becoming part of the host country's society is essential for integrating because students will be updated on what is happening around them to act appropriately. Apart from school, students should take part in community-based groups such as sport clubs, churches, and colleagues, which will enable students to build relationships

and network with local inhabitants, and become part of the community where they live

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Thực trạng và giải pháp phát triển...

(Tiếp theo trang 72)

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- Các doanh nghiệp cần chú trọng việc nghiên cứu, thiết kế, chế tạo các sản phẩm mới nhằm đáp ứng nhu cầu đa dạng của khách hàng.
- Các doanh nghiệp cần tiến tới việc xây dựng và áp dụng chứng chỉ FSC, COC, ISO...
- Các doanh nghiệp cần tăng cường hợp tác, liên kết với các cơ sở đào tạo để đào tạo tại chỗ, gắn đào tạo với sử dụng lao động nhằm nâng cao tay nghề cho công nhân và cán bộ kỹ thuật đáp ứng nhu cầu của các doanh nghiệp

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