Solutions to students' intercultural adaptability development in internationalised programmes of Vietnamese universities

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ABSTRACT: *The internationalisation in Vietnamese universities has emerged as an effective vehicle to reform the higher education system. In this process, the intercultural adaptability of students studying in internationalised programmes has been regarded as being critically important for their experiences and outcomes. Drawing on 80 in-depth interviews with education policymakers, programme coordinators, lecturers, students and employers of eight internationalised programmes in five Vietnamese universities, this article addresses four major solutions to student intercultural adaptability development: (i) strong personal dynamics of students; (ii) supportive conditions from academic institutions; (iii) promising employment prospects and preparation; and (iv) adequate supporting legal spaces from policymakers.*

1. Introduction

In today's highly interconnected world, the ability to adapt to the multicultural environment has been proved to be an ingredient for successful integration (Deardorff, 2006a) and, thus, one desirable outcome of education (Messelink et al., 2015; Busch, 2009). OECD (2019a) ranks intercultural adaptability as one of the most important skills for 21st-century workers. The capacity for cross-cultural integration is important in building global readiness, as found in the fourth global survey by the International Association of Universities (Egron-Polak & Hudson, 2014). Skills and capacity to work with professionalism in multicultural environments are essential for a quality labour force in this globalised age (World Economic Forum, 2019a*).*

Koehn and Rosenau (2002) suggest that workers in the transnational environment need (1) *intercultural analysis capacity* in which they understand values, beliefs and cultural practices and can link foreign conditions to their own cultural background and thus be able to evaluate cultural solutions; (2) *intercultural emotional intelligence* in which they are open to diverse experience and cultural influence, respect other values, traditions and can communicate well in multicultural environments and can manage multiple identities; and (3) *intercultural action capacity* in which they master foreign languages, can communicate well verbally and non-verbally and understand messages in intercultural environments.

In Vietnam, the need to develop intercultural adaptability or capacity for international integration has been felt ever since Vietnam adopted its Đổi Mới or renovation policy and sought to promote stronger socio-economic relationship in the region and the world (Pham, 2014; Truong & Tran, 2014). Adaptation capacity became even more pressing as Vietnam entered the World Trade Organization in 2007 and other multilateral associations. Intercultural competence has been found to be significant in enhancing graduates' employability (Nghia et al., 2019; Mai, 2021). The demand for international

exposure and capacity development has been on the rise as more people are seeking to thrive in the global landscape instead of limiting themselves to opportunities inside the country. For example, the survey on ASEAN Youth's employability showed that 45.6% of Vietnamese respondents wished to work overseas (World Economic Forum, 2019b).

Tertiary institutions promote internationalisation as a tool to enhance students' intercultural understandings, knowledge and adaptability and thus boost their overall competence for global integration. The most visible strategies adopted towards this objective are to facilitate international exchanges, at-home internationalisation and curriculum borrowing (Gregersen-Hermans, 2017). In Vietnam, internationalisation has been accelerated, especially since 2005, with the introduction of the Higher Education Reform Agenda (Hayden & Le-Nguyen, 2020). Vietnamese Party's Resolution 29-NQ/TW dated 4/11/2013 sets the objective for Vietnamese education to reach the regional level by 2030 through international integration, including promoting collaboration with prestige universities. Decision 69/QĐ-TTG dated 15/1/2019 by the Prime Minister for *"Enhancing tertiary education quality during 2019-2025"* sets concrete targets for internationalisation in which at least 50% of tertiary education institutions are expected to integrate a part or the entire foreign curricula into their own programmes by 2025. Since then, internationalised higher education programmes have been booming in Vietnam, with 35 advanced programmes in which foreign curricula were adopted, 76 high-quality programmes delivered in English and nearly 550 joint programmes between 85 Vietnamese tertiary institutions and 258 foreign partners from 33 countries. As of 2019, these internationalised programmes had hosted 86,000 students, of whom 48,000 had graduated (Vietnam Education, 2019).

Although intercultural adaptability and global integration awareness are considered desirable outcomes of higher education (Green, 2012; Hajisoteriou & Angelides, 2020), universities have not paid due attention to developing these qualities for their students. Students often develop their intercultural capacity by themselves through their experience in internationalised programmes (Dimitrov & Haque, 2020). Cultural exposure without proper guidance and interactions without self-reflection thus prevent adequate development of intercultural adaptability among students (Bennett & Bennett, 2004). In Vietnam, educators have tried hard to boost the quality of internationalised programmes, focusing on investment in curriculum, teaching and learning, facilities and materials, and lecturers' capacity (Tran & Marginson, 2018). However, intercultural adaptability competence has been more an implied outcome than a clearly stated target among the existing programs. Obstacles remain strong in the adaptation of the imported curricula and education practices into the Vietnamese context (Nguyen et al., 2021; Nguyen, 2022). Solutions are thus needed to boost the intercultural adaptability of students as one of the most important aspects of internationalised education.

This article presents the results from a 2021-2022 MOET-funded study on students' intercultural adaptability in Vietnamese internationalised higher education programs. Based on the assessment of the current education practices and students' intercultural performance, the study sought to put forward a number of solutions for improving students' intercultural adaptability.

2. Literature review

Numerous studies have addressed the development of intercultural adaptability in general. Many intercultural competence models focus on the processes through which individuals transform themselves to become more capable in cross-cultural environments. Examples of these models include Arasaratnam's Integrated Model of Intercultural Communication Competence (2006) and Deardorff's Process Model of Intercultural Competence (2006b). In these models, individuals' personal assets and transformation occupy the spotlight. Other models look both at the individuals themselves and the contexts in which the transformation happens. The developmental paradigm of Hammer (2015) offers an alternative non-static

perspective allowing investigation into the dynamic interaction between individuals and their surrounding environment. Berry et al. (2021), on the other hand, highlight the strategies and expectations groups have in cultural contact. The relative power between groups in the society and host policies are the contextual factors that affect the outcomes of the intercultural integration endeavour (Berry et al., 2021). Luong et al. (2021) suggest that while individual agency plays a critical role in the adaptation process, competence shall be boosted when hosting institutions provide proper recognition and suitable policies both at institutional and classroom levels.

Various solutions have been put forward for enhancing the intercultural adaptability of students. Focusing on individuals, many studies recommend a list of desirable personal assets in language, past experiences, attitudes, expectations and so on (Deardoff, 2006; Kim, 2015). Cao and Meng (2021) group personal assets into demographic characteristics, personal resources, demands and barriers. Hu et al. (2020), meanwhile, highlight proactive personality as beneficial to the adjustment process. Active engagement of individuals is important so that they acquire new knowledge, skills and attitudes for self-efficacy in the new environments (Yang, 2020; Hoang & Tran, 2018).

Hosting institutions, on the other hand, are suggested to address a number of issues in order to facilitate better the adaptation process for students. For example, Tian and Lu (2018) ask Chinese universities to deal with the linguistic, pedagogical and attitudinal aspects of their institutional environments so that their international students would have fewer difficulties in integration. Hendrickson (2018), meanwhile, advocates for extra-curricular activities and tutor programmes which, he found, are of great help in promoting the international student friendship network development. Especially in the post-COVID-19 era, the adoption of multimedia, online platforms and technology have also been proposed to enhance intercultural competence for students (Liu & Shirley, 2021).

Zhang and Zhou (2019) conduct a meta-

analysis which reviews nearly 3,000 studies on intervention for cross-cultural adaptation published between 2000 and 2018. After careful screening, the authors focus on 31 studies that fit their selection criteria where the interventions are quantitative, student participation-only and come with an assessment for effectiveness. The study finds that overseas immersion and pedagogical interventions were the two major types of interventions. While immersion into the target culture allows gaining first-hand knowledge, skills and attitudes needed for intercultural capacity development, culture-sensitive pedagogy adopted for formal education proved to be of strong influence on building intercultural competence. Four sub-types of pedagogical interventions found were culture-based teaching materials, classroom activities, teaching strategies and integrated intercultural programmes.

Studies on factors affecting intercultural adaptation of students in Vietnam in general and in Vietnamese internationalised programmes have been sparse. The biggest obstacle to students' performance and satisfaction with internationalised programmes has been language proficiency (Nguyen, 2021; Vu & Dinh, 2022). The institutional role has been mentioned, but the focus is more on language support policy (Nguyen, 2021). Pedagogical issues have also been discussed. For example, poorly adapted teaching materials, underqualified teachers and old-style teacher-centered instruction methods (Tran & Marginson, 2018; Chau & Truong, 2019; Nguyen, 2013). However, few suggestions have been made on the necessary interventions to promote the intercultural adaptability of students in Vietnam. There is thus a wide gap related to the assessment of the current state of intercultural education, especially among internationalised programmes and the approaches to enhancing adaptability among students.

3. Methodology
Research design
This article presents the result of a MOET-financed study on students' intercultural competence in Vietnamese international universities. The data were collected from

students, lecturers and managers of eight internationalised programmes in five universities located in three different regions in Vietnam. Two types of internationalised programmes were selected for this study: (1) the so-called "advanced programme" with an imported curriculum delivered in English, and (2) the articulated one or the degree programme jointly managed by a Vietnamese university and a foreign counterpart.

Participants and context

Among eight international training programs, four advanced programmes enrolled international students who primarily came from Asia (i.e. Laos, Cambodia, Thailand, the Philippines, etc.), Africa (i.e. South Africa, Nigeria, etc.) and America (i.e. Canada, Mexico, etc.). The remaining programmes only had Vietnamese students. Notably, four articulated programmes offered Vietnamese students exchange and/or mobility programmes (one month to two years) to their foreign partner's university after they completed the second year.

The study collected qualitative data from 80 participants, including 41 females and 39 males. Accordingly, 69 in-depth interviews were conducted with Vietnamese participants and 11 with international ones.

Data collection and analysis

The rich and detailed data set, which included recordings of in-depth interviews and a collection of life stories based on the participants' lived experience, enable us to analyse students' intercultural adaptability. The interviews were semi-structured and conversational within 60-90 minutes.

The in-depth interviews were audio-recorded with the consent form from the participants and were then transcribed by the research team. A data log was created with the code number assigned to each participant for administering and analysing. To account for what are the solutions for students' intercultural adaptability, qualitative data analysis was completed to prepare data for comparison and interpretation using an abductive coding process (Tavory & Timmermans, 2019; Flick, 2014). Through this process, the major themes or categories of solutions have emerged as presented in the "Results and discussion" section below.

4. Results and discussion

Four crucial solutions for developing intercultural adaptability for students have emerged from the data analysis, including: strong personal dynamics of students; supportive conditions from universities; promising employment prospects and preparation; and adequate legal spaces from policymakers.

Strong personal dynamics of students

It is asserted that human behaviors in social interaction can be oriented and directed by one's strong aspirations or motivations (Emirbayer & Mische, 1998). In this sense, students' strong belonging motivations and aspirations as personal dynamics have been addressed to effectively drive their intercultural adaptability (Hoang & Tran, 2018). Specifically, the interview data indicate that securing their status recognition, social and friendship networks and international career opportunities can reinforce students' personal dynamics in their adaptation behaviours.

Status recognition

Students' self-recognition of their equal position in social interaction with lecturers and peers from international countries and those from mainstream programmes in the universities has been pointed out to significantly fuel a strong motivation in their intercultural adaptability. Moreover, the internationalised programmes need to be equally treated as regular programmes in the universities. As a result, students' strong sense of belonging and self-concept can motivate them to pursue this programme and enable them to make efforts in intercultural adaptability.

"International lecturers and peers come from the developed countries that have better education in both family and school… So almost all Vietnamese students thought their international peers and lecturers are more superior to them. Therefore, they passively accept this peer group's ideas without questioning them though their ideas may be wrong… I see that if we are equally treated and respected in the learning and sharing process, we shall become more active and confident in this process, even pointing out our international peers' or lecturers' wrong ideas… This is a very important dynamic for us in order to believe in our capability and effectively perform in this international environment…" (a first-year

graduate student of the advanced programme of Hanoi University of Mining and Geology).

"This internationalised programme is considered a non-formal programme in our university, so it is not as well known as the regular training programs. As such, the recognition of this programme as a formal programme is important because it makes students feel an integral part of the university like their peers in other regular training programs… Once its equal recognition has been achieved, more good students register and pursue their study in this program" (a coordinator of an internationalised programme at Hue University)

Social and friendship networks

Some studies have found that social and friendship networks are significantly related to communicative adaptability, language proficiency, and sense of belonging (Gareis et al., 2011; Sawyer & Chen, 2012; Hendrickson, 2018). Our data show that these networks facilitate students' integration into a new intercultural learning environment owing to students' better understanding through intercultural interaction. Moreover, the feelings of caring and belonging to these networks have helped students overcome the challenges facing them in their international learning and working environment.

"An exchange platform and mobility programmes between Vietnamese students and teachers and their Austrian peers will be very meaningful for their responsive help, experience learning and future supports… When I was in the university, the connection with Vietnamese and Austrian professors helped me to improve our English language a lot. Owing to this, we could achieve a good IELTS certificate… Notably, they introduced and encouraged us to take many good employment opportunities in international companies. Though I graduated from Hanoi University 2 years ago, I still keep in touch with them and often receive their valuable advice on working in an international environment." (a second-year graduate student of an articulated programme at Hanoi University)

Many students in the study have shared the role of these networks in improving their language and communication, in addition to its benefits for their further study, employment opportunities or professional networks for employment prospects.

International employment opportunities

International career aspiration has been identified as a strong motive for students' intercultural adaptability to secure employment and effectively work in international and multicultural environments (Carballal-Broome & Pinillos, 2022). Many students shared that they pursued the internationalised programme because of its promising employment prospects in international companies or abroad.

"To clearly identify the possible employments in different sectors helps me prepare for my university study. As I aspire for a job in an international company, I prepare a plan to improve my English competencies and communication in an international environment apart from my professional knowledge." (a third-year graduate student of the advanced programme of Thai Nguyen University)

Furthermore, improving their cultural awareness and knowledge has been pointed out to be a valuable asset for them to secure a good job in a multicultural working environment.

"I find the project-based assignments with different cultural perspectives very interesting and useful to broaden my knowledge and working skills in an intercultural environment. I know it will help me prepare and effectively perform in the future multicultural working environment." (a third-year student of an articulated programme of Ho Chi Minh City Transportation University)

"For students who clearly identify their goals of earning employment in international companies, they tend to actively seek extra-curricular programmes with their international peers or lecturers to improve their intercultural communication and English proficiency." (one coordinator of the advanced programme of Thai Nguyen University)

As such, students' personal dynamics play a crucial role in their intercultural adaptability. It can be reinforced by securing an equal status recognised through their social interaction with their peers from different cultural backgrounds and their internationalised programmes with mainstream ones in the universities. Additionally, intercultural adaptability can be strengthened by developing social and friendship networks that

can be conducted through exchange platforms, mobility programmes and extra-curricular activities between Vietnamese students and lecturers with their international peers. Finally, students' dynamics can be fueled by their aspirations for international career opportunities that can, in turn, be nurtured by providing them with adequate information about potential job opportunities in international companies and the prospects for their further study.

Supportive conditions from academic institutions

This study addresses five key categories of supportive conditions from academic institutions for student intercultural adaptability: (i) Language and cultural knowledge development; (ii) teacher professional development; (iii) culturally relevant training program; (iv) enabling intercultural environment; (v) administrative and career development support.

Language and cultural knowledge development

Support for English language and cultural knowledge development has been identified as a critical component for students' success in internationalised programs. As such, the universities have provided English courses before students pursue their majors. Moreover, Vietnamese teachers and/or tutors have explained the key concepts in the Vietnamese language again so that students are able to better understand and acquire discipline-specific knowledge in lectures given by international academics. Regarding the teaching of new concepts, teachers often offer students from different cultural backgrounds opportunities to share their own ideas in order to promote their diversified perspectives and empathy. Students' cultural knowledge has gradually been enriched through English language clubs, cultural exchange events and extra-curricular activities facilitated by students. To get used to the English language across different regions, students should be offered opportunities for communication with their peers or academics from different countries.

"In order to help students to develop their English language, Vietnamese teachers should entirely deliver their course in English language rather than in Vietnamese language… This is critically important for my friends and me when we travel to Malaysia to study with international students… We gradually get used to English when all teachers deliver their courses in English." (a graduate student of the Sunway training programme at Hanoi University).

"The students enrolled in an advanced programme of Hanoi University of Mining and Geology hardly understood what the experts from India, the Philippines and USA spoke when they first entered the companies. They were not familiar with the accents of these experts because they did not have opportunities to communicate with those from these countries. Furthermore, they had very poor knowledge of cultures of their international colleagues." (a human resource manager of a big oil refinery company as an important partner of Hanoi University of Mining and Geology)

Language competencies and cultural knowledge can effectively be developed for students when they have opportunities to engage in social and friendship networks.

Teacher professional development

A range of professional development approaches for teachers of internationalised programmes have been discussed in our study. Specifically, through participatory, collaborative, critical and action-research models of professional development, teachers achieve changes in their teaching attitudes and practices and, in turn, facilitate improvements in intercultural schools, including student intercultural adaptability (Hajisoteriou et al., 2019). Resonating with this finding, the participants in our study also point out that teachers can improve their intercultural knowledge and competence in terms of contextualising the international training programme or curriculum, exercising culturally relevant pedagogy and reinforcing their English language and intercultural communication in a multicultural learning environment. This can be achieved by promoting professional knowledge learning and sharing between Vietnamese teachers and their international peers on a periodical basis; encouraging the joint teaching between Vietnamese teachers and their international peers under the blended mode in which online lessons can be conducted for several weeks in the beginning and followed by some weeks offline in Vietnam. This cooperation mode enables

teachers of both sides to understand their peers' cultures for effective teaching in a multicultural environment.

"The professional sharing between Vietnamese teachers and their international peers is very useful ... The teachers learn much from their peers in terms of examination design and preparation instructional design through direct access to our international partners' teaching resource database... Furthermore, some Vietnamese teachers have opportunities to deliver exchange lectures in our university and learn to produce some relevant examination samples." (a teacher cum coordinator of the advanced programme of Hanoi University of Mining and Geology)

In order to realise these collaborative modes for teacher professional development, online technology has also been recommended to put in use as a cognitive tool for developing teachers' intercultural competency skills and satisfying their professional development needs (Jiang et al., 2021). All the universities in our empirical study have also enhanced the use of online technology in order to create various online platforms for sharing and learning among teachers between Vietnam and other countries, particularly under the context of COVID-19 over the past years. With such cognitive tools, teachers have continuously and frequently exchanged their professional knowledge and skills with their peers. This has been considered as an effective mode of cost saving for internationalised programmes when international academics can join and share their professional expertise and experiences with Vietnamese ones without having to deliver in-person lectures.

The culturally relevant training program

It has been found that internationalised higher education curriculum is greatly conducive to improving the intercultural adaptation of students (Bodycott et al., 2014; Tran et al., 2018). The study shows that the culturally relevant contents of the training courses enable students to share their thoughts from their cultural perspectives and actively engage in the classroom. In order to develop a culturally relevant training program, the participants suggest that local academics should localise the international curriculum or programmes with contributions from concerned

stakeholders such as employers and experts in the relevant disciplines or areas. The more practical contents of the training courses are, the more active students participate in the classroom.

"We are very curious about acquiring the new knowledge... The training programmes should be more familiar with our living context in Vietnam. For example, the international law course seems quite alien to all of us. It is good that we acquire knowledge of the laws of the UK or some European countries. However, it is better if a part of the course contents related to the local context of Vietnam. Moreover, more field trips and internship courses should be offered for students in the major of hotels, restaurants and tourism. We are more interested in exploring the practice of these services in our real life." (a fourth-year student of an articulated programme at Hanoi University)

It is important to enable teachers to think beyond dominant paradigms in international training programmes to explore emerging paradigms in the local contexts of teaching and learning (Leask, 2015). As noted, this can be achieved through professional practice and systematic development of knowledge, skills and attitudes for teachers of the internationalised curriculum.

Enabling intercultural environment

The teaching and learning environment is significantly conducive to student adaptability in an internationalised programme (Tomin et al., 2016). In this sense, our data indicate that an enabling environment can be promoted through organising talk shows, competitions, cultural exchange events and mobility programmes for both Vietnamese and international students and lecturers. As a result, students have a better understanding of their peers' and teachers' cultures which subsequently motivates them to adapt to intercultural teaching and learning environment.

"Talkshows, competitions and festivals have periodically been organised for students from different universities. Moreover, teachers offer us some team-building activities in which the members of all groups are mixed with both Vietnamese and international ones. This helps us understand about cultures and life in South Korea

in order to adapt to life in this country when we come there for our two final year study…"(a third-year student of an articulated programme in Ho Chi Minh City Transportation University)

Additionally, in order to develop a dynamic international environment for both teachers and students, the universities should maintain a certain proportion of international academics in their training programs. Meanwhile, students are regulated to take one subject course in a foreign country or offered opportunities to take an online class with international students from different countries. These solutions could potentially help improve their intercultural competence in a diversified environment.

"We try to maintain international professors and lecturers (around 40% of our teaching staff) for our advanced programme though we no longer receive the funding from the Ministry of Education and Training… This secures the quality of training programmes and professional development opportunities for our faculty's lecturers as well. Particularly, students are well prepared with their intercultural communication and English language development." (a lecturer cum coordinator of the advanced programme of Hanoi University of Mining and Geology)

"We are going to promote the implementation of an international student exchange programme in which French students come to Vietnam for their one semester at our university. The presence of these French students in the class will force Vietnamese students and lecturers to communicate in a foreign language. As such, their English competence and cultural knowledge will significantly be improved." (a coordinator of the articulated programme of Hue University)

Notably, networking among local universities, particularly those with internationalised programmes in order to intersupport each other has also been disclosed to be a strong dynamic for developing students' intercultural adaptability. Furthermore, networking between teachers and students as well as among students, including both graduate and undergraduate ones, has effectively provided responsive advice or support to students and strongly inspired their motivation and aspirations for their future career development.

"The networking among universities with similar international training programmes creates the collective synergy for our joint training programmes and cooperation. We have more opportunities to learn and share our professional knowledge and skills with our colleagues. Since then, it has opened new opportunities for our cooperation in both teaching and research. Similarly, our students are also more interested in this exchange network with their peers from Hue University and Can Tho University." (a lecturer in the advanced programme of Thai Nguyen University)

"A platform or network for connecting Vietnamese and international undergraduate and graduate students and that for lecturers and students will be very meaningful so that they can share and learn from each other. Particularly, they can intersupport each other when they secure jobs and study abroad." (a second-year graduate student of the articulated programme of Hanoi University)

The development of a caring environment has also been recognised to encourage students to overcome challenges in pursuing their selected internationalised programme as well as to make efforts to integrate in an intercultural learning environment.

"We need to receive the caring from educators in our Vietnamese university when we transfer to Malaysia for our two-year study. We feel encouraged when being asked about our life here, difficulties in our studies, and the need for university support. This reinforces our bonding with the university and the internationalised program." (a graduate student of one articulated programme of Hanoi University)

Administrative and career development supports

Simple and easy administrative procedures and responsive support for students during their study have been reported to be an important determinant for students' adaptation to internationalised programs.

"The programme officers in Malaysia are very caring and responsive to the provision of support to us. Here the educational environment is very democratic, open and professional. If we have any difficulties, we even come to the Rector

for his support and prompt problem-solving. As such, we feel very comfortable, relieved and safe when studying here." (a graduate student of an articulated programme at Hanoi University)

Responsive administrative support often shows the caring of the training institution that encourages students to be open and active in their integration into the learning environment.

Apart from administrative support, career counselling and development support for students have been shared to fuel their aspirations for intercultural adaptability. Specifically, providing students with diversified possible employment in the future, job counselling and networking with employers enables students to orient their relevant careers and achieve their goals.

"The university periodically provides some profession or career orientation workshops for students. Potential employers are invited to attend these workshops. This helps us to have the opportunity to approach our aspired employers for our future jobs. Through these events, we understand employers' human resource recruitment plans and requirements for those expected vacancies in the coming time. On this account, we try to prepare their required knowledge, skills and attitudes for their offered posts in the coming time." (a third-year student of the advanced programme of Thai Nguyen University)

Overall, the supportive conditions of the universities have been a critical component in an ecosystem for developing students' intercultural adaptability (Tomin et al., 2016). All its constituents are interlinked and reinforce students' aspirations and motivation in this process.

Employment prospects and preparation

As noted, employment possibilities have been seen as strong motivation and aspiration for students' efforts in their adaptation (OECD, 2020). As such, potential employers should be involved not only in preparation for student readiness to enter into labour market (i.e. the curriculum design and delivery) but also in the achievement of their relevant employments (i.e. provision of training on professional skills; the employment orienting and counselling activities; and provision of future employment opportunities).

Practical training contents have been addressed to effectively prepare the employability for students. In this process, engaging employers in the training curriculum design and delivery makes the training programmes updated with labour market demand, particularly in the integrated and multicultural context.

"We have a group of international specialists from European, American and Middle Eastern countries that have good expertise and skills and sound understanding and experience in Vietnam. We can cooperate with the universities in the oil refinery area and chemical engineering to train students so as to prepare sufficient knowledge and skills for them. This also creates good human resources for our factory." (an employer in oil refinery production in Thanh Hoa province)

Moreover, the provision of training on professional skills has also been recognised to support graduates in acquiring relevant knowledge and skills to satisfy the requirements of the labour market.

"We invite chief executive officers of businesses to talk to students so that students understand features of potential employments and requirements of companies. On this basis, they know what they need to prepare for their aspired work or jobs. On the other hand, we also provide students with training courses on time management planning and integrate these skills into several courses, for example, the project management cycle with planning and time management skills." (a coordinator of one articulated programme of Hanoi University)

With participation in providing training courses for university students, employers can also provide on-the-job training and future employment opportunities for students. With such opportunities, students are strongly inspired and motivated to improve their professional knowledge and soft skills, particularly in a multicultural environment. It is also suggested by all the participants in our study that students should be provided with employment counselling and information sharing so that they can select the relevant jobs and be well prepared for the labour market.

"Our factory can provide internship and apprenticeship or study visits for students. This

is particularly important for students to acquire the technical and professional skills for some employments with high technical requirements, such as engineers of laboratory and maintenance technicians. Once students are fully aware of their potential jobs in practice, they are able to make a plan on their learning of inadequate knowledge and skills for their future success." (an employer in logistic and port management in Ho Chi Minh City)

"We understand that our teachers should also have employment counselling skills for students while they deliver their courses. More importantly, we have a connection with employers so that we can update the employment opportunities and prospects for students. In some cases, we directly invite trans- and multi-national employers to deliver their sharing in some concerning professional issues in our curriculum so that they can update lecturers and students with state-of-the-art knowledge and skills required for possible employment in the local and international labour market." (a coordinator of an articulated programme at Hue University)

In accordance with many studies on the provision of employment prospects and preparation for students, our study supports their findings about the importance of practical curriculum design and delivery and in-service training courses on professional knowledge and skills with the engagement of employers (OECD, 2019; White et al., 2018; Callan & Bowman, 2021). However, our research contributes a new finding here about the employment counselling and orienting skills that need to be integrated into the training programmes and provided by teachers and specialists in the university. Additionally, the universities should set up employment databases for all concerned stakeholders (including international and local employers, students and policymakers).

Adequate legal spaces from policy makers

The relationship between the legal system, culture and intercultural communication has been identified in a multicultural environment (Varer & Varer, 2014). Currently, there have been regulations and guidance on opening internationalised programmes in universities.

However, our empirical study points out that standards and legal systems for monitoring and managing internationalised programmes must be developed to facilitate students' intercultural adaptability in their studies.

"Some universities have been granted autonomy with which the internationalised programmes have easily been opened in line with the regulations. However, in order to secure the quality of the programme in which student intercultural adaptability is one of its outcomes, there should be standards for its monitoring and assessment…" (a representative from the Center for Higher Education Studies of the Vietnam Institute of Educational Sciences).

Furthermore, there should be a mechanism of awareness raising for the university leaders and educators about the importance of internationalised programmes for their university development. Additionally, the cooperation mechanism among higher education institutions, including national and international ones, should also be regulated in order to build capacity for teachers and students as well as make full use of available resources for promoting student intercultural adaptability.

"It is important for leaders and educators to change their awareness of the position of internationalised programmes in university development. With its high emphasis on its importance in the training programs, it will be integrated into the university's development policies and teaching & learning practices." (a university leader of Thai Nguyen University)

In practice, the internationalised programmes in all the universities of our study are inadequately recognised to have a position as equal as the other university training programs. Therefore, as noted, this adversely affects the self-concept and self-recognition of students of these programmes in social interaction with their peers from the regular training programs.

5. Conclusions

This article suggests four groups of solutions for developing students' intercultural adaptability including: strong personal dynamics of students; supportive conditions from universities; promising employment prospects

and preparation; and adequate legal spaces from policymakers.

Some studies have made recommendations from an individual perspective, such as desirable personal assets in language, past experiences, attitudes, expectations or demands and personal resources (Kim, 2015; Hu et al., 2020; Cao & Meng, 2021) and active engagement of individuals in acquiring new knowledge, skills and attitudes for self-efficacy in the new environments (Yang, 2020; Hoang & Tran, 2018). Our study resonates with these findings but contributes a new finding related to students' personal dynamics for their intercultural adaptability (Luong et al., 2021). We highlight an equal status recognition for students in their social interaction with peers from other mainstream programmes and an equal position recognition of their internationalised programmes compared with other regular ones in the universities. This can be achieved through social and friendship networks in which students' sense of identity and self-respect are primarily reinforced through social interaction between students and lecturers and among students themselves.

Regarding the solutions of offering supportive conditions from training institutions for student intercultural adaptability, our research reinforces the findings about the role of linguistic, pedagogical and attitudinal aspects of institutional environments (Tian & Lu, 2018; Nguyen, 2021; Vu & Dinh, 2022; Tran &Marginson, 2018; Chau & Truong, 2019; Nguyen, 2013); extra-curricular activities and tutor programmes (Hendrickson, 2018), the adoption of multimedia, online platforms and technology (Liu & Shirley, 2021). This article emphasises that all the constituents of the supportive conditions are interlinked and complement each other in an ecosystem shaping the development of students' intercultural adaptability.

Furthermore, our study consolidates the argument of other studies about the engagement of employers in pre-service and in-service training courses on professional knowledge and skills (OECD, 2019b; White et al., 2018; Callan & Bowman, 2021). However, an emerging finding from our study underlines the importance of employment counselling and orientation skills in the training courses provided by teachers and specialists in the university and the development of employment opportunity databases for students, teachers and employers.

Finally, this article underscores the importance of securing adequate legal spaces for improving institutional conditions for students' intercultural adaptability, specifically, developing: (i) sufficient standards and legal systems for monitoring and managing internationalised programs; (ii) mechanism of awareness raising for the university leaders and educators about the importance of internationalised programs; and (iii) the cooperation mechanism among higher education institutions nationally and internationally.

Actually, all four groups of solutions reinforce each other and should be adopted simultaneously within any higher education institution to facilitate students' intercultural adaptability in the internationalised programs.

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