

8 Coming Home: Internationally-Trained Vietnamese English Language Teachers' Perceived Employability

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Abstract

Having insights into returning graduates' employability in their home country has become critical given that many international graduates choose to head home after their overseas study. However, there is a paucity of the positioning and re-positioning of international graduates in their home labor market, especially those who work as English teachers. In this study, we interviewed eight Vietnamese English teachers who used to sojourn for their further education at the Masters or PhD levels outside Vietnam. The findings show that although the returnee teachers experienced some barriers and constraints, they successfully navigated the domestic labor market to adapt and advance their career development. This study brings more insights into international graduate employability in Vietnam, which has experienced a marked shift in the labor market. Important implications are provided for returnees and home employers to facilitate returnees' re-integration into the local market.

Keywords: employability; international education; international graduate employability; international students; positioning theory; returning graduates; Vietnam

Introduction

Employability is an essential aspect of studying overseas for international students. The future of work is changing, and international students need to be equipped with the skills and experience to ensure their success. According to Cturtle's International Student Employment Outcomes and Satisfaction Report 2019, improving career opportunities is the number one reason students choose to study abroad. However, there is a current shift in international graduate mobility from host countries to their home labor market (Tran and Bui, 2021). For instance, Official Chinese Ministry of Education statistics (2020) show that by the end of 2019,

more than 86% of Chinese students chose to return to their country after finishing their courses. More than 50% of international students in Australia also returned to their sending countries after finishing their studies (AUIDF, 2017).

Push-pull factors could explain this phenomenon. “Push” factors operate within the source country and drive a student’s decision to study abroad, while “pull” factors operate within a host country that attract international students (Mazzarol and Soutar, 2002). In the host countries, international students experience considerable social, cultural, and economic constraints, which are the push factors for their homecoming (Li, 2017). Moreover, the lack of network, language skills, and familiarity to cultural and local practices hinder chances of employment of international students, leading to many cases in which graduates end up unemployed or survive in jobs that are below their expectations (Li, 2017). They, therefore, are faced with hopelessness, instability, and concerns about employment prospects upon their graduation (Forbes-Mewett and Sawyer, 2016), which is similar to the situation of new immigrants. On the other hand, these international graduates are pulled by the increasing opportunities offered by emerging economies, and on the other hand, they can enjoy some advantages from their foreign language proficiency and international experience (Saito and Pham, 2018).

Researchers have paid more attention to the post-study life of international graduates. Because of the large investment into international education, the achievements of returnees should be worthwhile (Bijwaard and Wang, 2016). One of the most prominent trends emerging in the world of higher education in recent years is the demand for better returns (Pham and Soltani, 2021). While there is a large body of studies on employability from the perspectives of employers, students’ perspective on their employability once they fly home remains missing. Whether foreign credentials help international graduates in the labor market and career trajectories is left murky. To address the gap, this study explores the perspectives of eight Vietnamese educators studying postgraduate overseas on their employability, the advantages and constraints in their employment, and navigating strategies they applied to adapt to the home labor market.

Literature Review

International education and employability

There are a number of definitions of employability, but they all come down to one’s (perceived) ability to obtain and maintain employment throughout one’s career (Römgens et al., 2019), or an individual ability

“to find, create and sustain meaningful work across the career lifespan” (Bennett, 2018, p. 5). In higher education, employability is a key concept and graduate employment rate is often used to assess the quality of university education provision. The responsibility of student employability has been transferred from the government to higher education institutions, although Cheng et al. (2021) argues that the involvement of all stakeholders is necessary to increase graduate employability. The purpose of the higher education programs would be to equip graduates with initial employability skills, to promote a culture of lifelong learning, and to facilitate the process of *transition* from education to employment (Kornelakis and Petrakaki, 2020).

International study is believed to foster students’ career planning, knowledge-based economies and subsequent employment success, and possibly enable migration purposes (Waibel et al., 2017; Coelen and Gribble, 2019). There has been a great popularity of international educational mobility schemes, and a number of studies have been conducted on their merits. For instance, in research by Pietro (2013) and Sisavath (2021), it is reported that students gain a number of benefits from their overseas study, such as increasing job opportunities, developing employability skills, enriching academic knowledge, enhancing international competence, and forming global citizenship. Higher-demand, higher-wage career pathways and job opportunities in the 21st century economy are also reported as positive outcomes of international education regarding students’ employability (Waibel et al., 2017).

International Graduate Returnees: Reasons, Benefits, and Constraints

In a study by Kim and colleagues (2010), international doctorates in STEM fields tend to stay in the US after their study due to the rising demand for high-skilled labor. The highest return rates, however, were recorded among those in the social sciences, agriculture, and education fields because of the lower demand and limited job opportunities in the study countries (Kim et al., 2010). The number of returnees tends to increase substantially in recent years. According to Statista (2020), around 519,000 Chinese students returned to their homeland in 2018, a large increase from 135,000 students in 2010. The decisions and patterns of stay or return after study do not remain static, but depend on country-specific changes, such as the shifts in economic development or national policy (push/pull factors) (Kim et al., 2010). Besides, international students encounter difficulties while finding jobs overseas. For instance, one key aspect in recruitment in China, India, and Australia is “cultural fit” or “best fit” (Blackmore et al., 2018). Recruiters tend to be more comfortable with people like themselves, who are more able to integrate into existing working cultures. Moreover, many students have reported

experiencing discrimination in some form during their time in foreign countries (such as America, Australian, and Europe) (Lee, 2015), which bars them from seeking employment in these countries. Meanwhile, some pull factors by source countries are employment opportunities, fast development of the country, and existing social connections (Zhai et al., 2019) are encouraging factors for the graduate return.

Despite differences in their demographics and backgrounds, most returnees in the study by Gu and Schweisfurth (2015) perceived their studying and living abroad as a transformative experience. Their new connections, competencies and identities enabled them to view and live life with a new sense of self at 'home' and, as a result, function in ways that continued to distinguish themselves from those around them over time (Gu and Schweisfurth, 2015). However, returnees also face a range of barriers hindering their progression, such as the 'rigid working culture' and 'stereotyped perceptions' about foreign qualifications (Pham and Saito, 2019). They also show dissatisfaction with the local working environment and experience reverse culture shock and poor cross-cultural readjustment (Ho et al., 2018).

There is no simple answer to whether foreign credentials are useful and applicable in students' home countries. The usefulness and application of international education is determined by the returnees' ability to use their skills and knowledge gained overseas (Pham and Saito, 2019). The accumulation of skills, knowledge, work experiences and networks are referred to as a process of cultivating different forms of capital (Bourdieu, 1986). Cultural capital (non-economic resources such as skills, knowledge, education, and qualifications) and social capital (social connections and networks) contribute to a successful return and position international graduates in the labor market (Bourdieu, 1986; Thieme, 2014). In fast-developing countries such as China, India, and Vietnam, holding an international qualification no longer guarantees employment success in the competitive labor market; rather, different forms of intellectual capital need to be consolidated and utilized (Hao et al., 2016; Blackmore et al., 2018). Also, the structural settings and national socio-economic and political environments influence the way skills and knowledge can be applied (Thieme, 2014).

Vietnamese Students Returning Home and Vietnamese Labor Market

Vietnam has become one of the top countries to send students abroad, with Japan, the United States, Australia, and Canada being the leading host of Vietnamese students (Ashwill, 2018). However, only a few studies have directly investigated the reasons that Vietnamese students want to pursue their studies abroad. Tran's study (2019) identified 12 motivational factors that are consistent with existing literature. Among the

pull factors, those related to international career development, improvement of foreign language competence and international experience appeared to influence students' decision the most. The majority of push factors denoted the negative characteristics and practices of the local higher education system, which were less strong than the pull factors. All of these suggest that the students, to some extent, were aware of the determinants of their employability and career and therefore, pursuing international education was one of their strategies.

According to Tran and Bui (2021), similar to other returning international graduates, the primary motive for Vietnamese returnees revolves around professional advancement opportunities given the substantial growth of the country's economy in recent years. Despite global recessions, the Vietnamese economy grew 2.9% in 2020 and is likely the top-performing Asian economy in 2020 (CNBC, 2021). In addition to employment opportunities, family related issues and desire for building their home country were the two main determinants of those who chose to return to Vietnam (Tran, 2019). Tran (2019) explained a number of factors that pull Vietnamese international graduates back to their home country, including: a Confucian tradition, socialist educational values, familiarity with Vietnamese sociocultural practices, and attachment to their social network. For those who choose to immigrate, international work experience, work conditions, and high incomes in the host country strongly contribute to their intentions (Tran, 2019). It can be seen that whether international students decide to return or stay, their intentions are affected greatly by the employability advantage, especially in a competitive labor market.

Theoretical Framework

In this study, we posit that international graduates need to position and re-position themselves in the home labor market after their overseas study. Positioning theory attempts to describe the way people understand and see the world, which in this study means how the participants saw themselves on completion of their study. According to positioning theory (Harré and Langenhove, 1999), people's behavior, in this case the teachers' behaviors, can be understood as being intentional in order to cope with particular situations that force them to act or change. Positioning theory has been described as "an analytic tool that can be used flexibly to describe the shifting multiple relations in a community of practice" (Linehan and McCarthy, 2000, p. 441). The social discourses and the graduates' lived experiences are argued to have effects on their positions and positioning process. Positioning theory highlights ideas of people as characters in storylines, their presumed duties, and the meanings of their actions (Anderson, 2009). How people are positioned in any situation

depends both on the context and community values and on the personal characteristics of all the individuals concerned, their personal history, their preferences and their capabilities (Barnes, 2004). Davies and Harré (1990) posit that people understand positions in accordance with their own lived narrative experience, including beliefs, emotions, and subjective histories “as well as a knowledge of social structures (including roles) with their attendant rights, obligations and expectations” (p. 42).

In this chapter, we based on two main forms of positioning: self-positioning and re-positioning. Self-positioning arises when one wishes to express his/her personal agency in order to “achieve a particular goal in discursive practice” (van Langenhove and Harré, 1999, p. 24). This category will enable the analysis of the ways the participants positioned themselves in their study abroad and the home labor market. Meanwhile, re-positioning occurs when “an individual adopts a new position as a result of previous experiences and interaction” (Tran and Vu 2018, p. 172). Since positioning theory highlights the shifts in positions, meaning that initial positioning can be challenged and requires repositioning when people cope with certain situations which in this chapter refer to the return to home labor market, it will unpack the Vietnamese English teachers’ perceptions on their employability and the transition to (re-)integrate to the domestic labor market. This makes it useful for dealing with the complexities of interactions of the teachers in the workplace and social settings in Vietnam.

Research Method

The participants in this study are eight graduate returnees who used to study abroad for their post-graduate education (either Masters or PhD study) and came back to Vietnam upon their graduation within the past ten years and worked as English language teachers in different workplaces (universities or English centers). Most of them, except for one teacher who studied in Korea, received Western-trained education in English-speaking countries. They were recruited for this study through personal connections of the authors and individual referrals. We chose to study English language teachers because in Vietnam, in response to the increasing global demands for greater economic integration, Vietnam has promoted foreign language instruction in the higher education system for the past three decades. According to Vu (2018), “Vietnamese policy on languages has always been an integral part of its nation-building project” (p. 28). Like many other countries such as Singapore, nation building is increasingly associated with both economic development and English proficiency of citizens since English is key to national development (Altbach, 1998). Therefore, the group of English teachers are considered important in producing efficient skilled

workers for the national economic development. In addition, studies show that while STEM graduates tend to stay in their host country, non-STEM graduates, including those in education, tend to return to their home country (Kim et al., 2011). The focus on Vietnamese English teachers, therefore, would bring more insights into their motivations to stay and the implications for policies related to international graduates and employability in Vietnam.

The first researcher conducted an in-depth one-on-one interview with each participant through online platforms due to the social distancing protocol in Vietnam amid the recent COVID-19 outbreak. We used interviews as the reflexive moment of engagement to encourage our participants to discuss how the overseas study might influence their employability, career, and life. The participants were reminded of the purposes of the study and their anonymity before the interview started. Their verbal consent was obtained at this point. All interviews were guided by an interview protocol including questions about the participants' motivations for their study abroad, their experiences of domestic labor market re-entry, and their satisfaction with their current employment. All interviews lasted about 30-60 minutes, and were audio-recorded and transcribed using pseudonyms and were conducted in Vietnamese. Table 1 provides demographic information about the participants.

We started with a careful reading of each transcript to identify salient themes and significant variations across the participants. We divided the transcripts to independently conduct the preliminary coding of the interview and highlighted the phrases, sentences and paragraphs that align with a specific pattern of positioning and repositioning as described in the framework. We then coded all interviews together based on the preliminary independent coding. While we discussed how we interpreted the data according to the theory of positioning and the literature on employability and international education, we were also flexible to allow for the data that did not entirely fit with the theoretical framework to emerge. The coding resulted in three broad categories, which are: motivations for international education, push and pull factors for returning home, and returnees' experiences when (re)entering the Vietnamese labor market. Examples of this process can be seen in Table 2. These categories were then used as the foundation of the analysis, which is presented in the following sections. The next section will unwrap our thematic findings that are discussed in light of relevant theory and literature.

Results

Motivations for international education

The participants in this study had different reasons to study abroad, including education quality, new education experiences, and a

Table 1 Participants' Information

<i>Pseudonyms</i>	<i>Qualifications</i>	<i>Most recent study destination</i>	<i>Year returned home</i>	<i>Years of teaching experience</i>
An	MA	England	2014	10 years
Lien	MA	Australia	2011	13 years
Thu	PhD	Australia	2016	Over 20 years
Hoa	MA	England	2012	15 years
Mai	MA	England	2016	8 years
Lan	PhD	Australia	2018	16 years
Phuong	PhD	Australia	2021	13 years
Thanh	MA	Korea	2021	3 years

professional break. The most important reason that they all mentioned was the higher education quality they could receive in more developed systems. Internationally recognized programs and well-equipped resources, experts, and facilities were what they lacked in Vietnam, while these academic infrastructure could be found abroad. As teachers who were the main instructors of courses such as American and British culture, Hoa and An strongly believed that the first-hand experience living in an English speaking country would be beneficial for their teaching practices, enabling them to teach students more effectively. Furthermore, since new undergraduate programs related to American and British study would be opened, their academic and social exposure in these countries was expected to help them with the curriculum design, material development and actual teaching of these courses.

The second main driver of international education pursuit was the opportunities to explore a new environment. Lan had studied her Master's degree in Vietnam, so she hoped she would be trained differently in Australia, "I understand the Vietnamese education system, and I know Vietnamese teachers' styles. I want to experience a new environment. I could learn a lot from different teachers with different styles and different mindsets". Lien, another teacher, added that the linguistics and cultural immersion into an English speaking country triggered her excitement. "I want to speak English, communicate with others using English, and live in an English speaking country, so I chose to study in Australia."

Another factor that motivated the participants to study abroad was the desire to focus on the study and to break from their monotonous routine of the teaching job. Phuong, Lan, and Thu agreed that it was impossible for them to focus on doing research if staying in Vietnam, as the teaching schedules and other personal responsibilities prevented

Table 2 Coding Process

<i>Broad coding categories</i>	<i>Themes</i>	<i>Definition of category</i>	<i>Example</i>
Motivations for international education	Higher education quality Educational experiences Professional break	Reasons why Vietnamese English teachers undertook overseas study	I decided to study abroad simply because I wanted to have a break from my routine life of teaching. Also, I know that if studying in Vietnam, I would work and study, rather than focusing on study only. And it was not ideal for me. Moreover, no one can deny that some countries have better education quality than Vietnam, so I did not want to miss the opportunity. (Phuong)
Push and pull factors for returning home	Career prospects/ advancement Nation building Age disadvantage in immigration policy Social and cultural comfort and stability	Factors from both host and home country that influenced the participants' decisions to return to Vietnam after their studies	I was already at an old age, so it was not as easy for me to stay as other young applicants. They have the advantage of being young; they can contribute more for the host country. (Thu)
Returnees' experiences when (re)entering the Vietnamese labor market.	Work satisfaction/ dissatisfaction in Vietnam Perceived roles of overseas credentials in employability in Vietnam	The participants' perceptions of overseas qualifications and their integration in Vietnamese labor market	Overseas qualification is definitely important in employability. I have worked hard and learnt a lot to earn the degree. Also, in Vietnam, people generally prefer graduates from Western countries, so it is certainly an advantage. (An)

them from dedicating themselves to their research projects. Therefore, pursuing international education afforded them the necessary time and space to achieve their study aims without having to bear the burden of “multitasking” as in Lan’s words.

In this sense, the participants self-positioned themselves as those who wished to achieve particular goals (van Langenhove and Harré, 1999). Their narratives illustrated their beliefs and knowledge of their roles as English language teachers in Vietnam where English is not the first language. They were aware of the social structures, specifically the institutional settings where they worked. Thus, the international education in an English speaking country became desirable and important for their professional development and careers. Like the students in Tran and Vu’s (2018) study, the teachers in this research had a vision of self-change, opportunities, transformation and mobility even before their geographical mobility actually happened.

Push and Pull Factors Contributing to the Participants’ Decision to Return

There were a number of push and pull factors that contributed to the participants’ decisions to return to Vietnam. One of the main reasons was that they believed they would have better career prospects in their home country. Being Vietnamese language teachers, most of them found it challenging to find a teaching job in other countries. Mai, for instance, was “very stressed” when seeking employment in England. Her Bachelor degree in English language teaching in Vietnam was not recognized and only international teaching certification would be accepted for her job-seeking attempts. In addition, non-natives were greatly disadvantaged in English teaching, especially in an English speaking country.

Students prefer to study with native teachers. They have to travel further afield, pay a lot of money, and of course they want to study with English teachers. There were not many chances for non-native teachers to teach English in schools. (Mai)

Similarly, Thanh also struggled to find an English teaching position in Korea because:

Well-off families in Korea prefer native teachers to teach their kids. And if they want to improve English grammar, they prefer Koreans. So, it was very difficult for me to find a job there. There was no progression in my career path.

Meanwhile, career opportunities in Vietnam were wide open for them. Before returning to Vietnam, Mai already had three jobs awaiting her. With a strong record of language competence and qualifications including a master's degree and CELTA certification (Certificate in Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages), Mai could easily find a teaching job as a language teacher in Vietnam, which was "much easier and more pleasant" than in England. It should also be noted that An and Hoa decided to study abroad to develop new undergraduate programs in their faculty, so they said that they had a responsibility to return and contribute to the development of their institution. Similarly, Thu and Lan earned the Australian government scholarship for their doctoral training, whose purpose was to empower the award recipients to contribute to Vietnam's development and to strive for a better future. They viewed their return to their home as a sign of loyalty, as well as commitment to and responsibility of the nation building project. Read that way, the self-positioning of the participants in the global higher education landscape was influenced by discourses or social structures of the contemporary Vietnamese society where highly-skilled human resource is critical in the national development. Their self-positioning showed that their pursuit of an international degree was for not only their self-transformation but also positive changes at a wider scope, their home institution and home country.

Another reason for the teachers' homecoming decision was that some of them believed their age did not allow them to begin a new career or easily gain a foothold in the market in the host countries. Take the Australian migration policy as an example. Age restriction was one factor that limited the possibility of becoming permanent residents in the country, and Thu decided to return to the father land. In Vietnam, several participants (Thu, Lien, Hoa, Lan) already had stable positions at a senior or managerial level in their institutions, and their overseas qualification would not only enable them secure these positions but also allow them to have career progression. In contrast, remaining in Australia would take them longer to establish their careers, if not starting from the beginning.

Besides, the sense of stability and comfort in lives in Vietnam was another contributing factor to the participants' decision of repatriation. The lack of support from family members and financial precarity caused challenges to Thanh and her family with a young child in Korea. Meanwhile, the cultural comfort provision for her parents encouraged her return which would guarantee reassurance and familiarity with language and social environment to the elderly. Similarly, the wish to stay close to take care of aging parents also pushed Lien, An, and Phuong to build their life in Vietnam.

I feel happier in Vietnam. The wide range of food choices in Vietnam is important to me. Besides, I want to be close with my parents, my brothers, sisters, and my nieces and nephews. I really miss them. (Phuong)

The push and pull factors identified in this study are consistent with the existing literature (Pham, 2020; Tran, 2019; Tran and Bui, 2021). Pull factors appeared to influence the participants to return to Vietnam more strongly than push factors did. Career opportunities, nation building, family attachment, and sociocultural familiarity were pull motivations for the returnees. Meanwhile, limited job opportunities and age restriction in migration policy were the push factors that contributed to their intention to return to Vietnam. We could observe that the participants enacted self-positioning in the host labor market and repositioning themselves in the home labor market to identify their possibilities of being employed and assess their employability upon graduation.

Returnees' Experiences of Re-entering the Labor Market

Most of the participants did not have difficulties in re-adapting their lives in Vietnam. Five participants returned to their previous organizations, so they were familiar with their working culture, colleagues, and supervisors. Importantly, to many participants, it was not their first time studying abroad, so they developed the ability to adapt to different situations. Phuong, for instance, considered herself a “global citizen” and “living in any place may not cause a lot of difficulties” for her. However, other participants needed transition time to re-adapt to life in Vietnam. Mai and Thu were “shocked” because of the changes and developments of their cities.

I could not recognize the city; it has changed dramatically with new-built roads and bridges. Also, it took me 2 months to be able to drive a motorcycle again, as I only used public transportation in England. (Mai)
The city's problems such as air pollution and traffic were much worse than I thought. I needed about a year to re-establish my networks after 4 years abroad. [...] I am also a relaxed person, so I did not rush into working to earn money, but I let myself have some transition time and got back to work later. (Thu).

Several factors emerged when the participants were asked about their satisfaction in their workplace, namely “academic freedom” and “good relationships with colleagues and supervisors”. The teachers also

emphasized the need to be valued and empowered in their work. Thu was satisfied because she was able to do what she considered beneficial for the students with not much hindrance.

We have room for creativity and transformation in education. I have taken part in designing many new courses, the ones that I think are truly liberal. I have freedom to design the courses. The flexibility, encouragement, and support of the university board is what I am satisfied with. (Hoa)

This finding contrasts with Pham and Saito's study (2019) in which the returnees are often unhappy with the "rigid working culture" in their home countries. Nevertheless, there were other factors that caused the participants' dissatisfaction in their workplace. Lien, for instance, did not have many chances to put her knowledge and skills to use after studying abroad. She believed that she had a "more meaningful life" in Australia where she "received positive feedback and praise from the teachers" and achieved more academic accomplishments and recognition. On the contrary, in Vietnam, the normal teaching work failed to bring her satisfaction or opportunities to demonstrate her capabilities, which led to her being less recognized than before. Lien was also the only participant that did not see any advantage of her overseas qualification in her employability and career, because she came back to the previous organization, and "anyone can teach like me no matter where they study". Moreover, the ill-resourced working infrastructure, heavy workload and low pay were common causes for Vietnamese teachers' dissatisfaction. Although Lan and Thu appreciated the efforts of their organizations to have provided better working conditions for teachers, these efforts were not enough to boost their professional satisfaction and productivity. These long-standing problems have existed for decades in Vietnam; however, there have been no practical solutions, leading to brain drain in higher education (Muthanna and Sang, 2018; Waghid and Divala, 2010).

Most of the participants believed that their overseas qualifications played an important role in employability and career. The reason, according to An and Thanh, was that Vietnamese employers "clearly have an attitude of foreign preferences" and "overseas credentials are the evidence of high education quality". Lan emphasized that

an internationally recognized degree definitely increases employability. If I look for employment in another country instead of Vietnam, my PhD degree in Australia would be more valued than a domestic qualification. At least it has more face validity. (Lan)

On the contrary, Thanh and Thu did not see a clear advantage of their overseas qualifications. They did not find any differences in the attitude of their colleagues towards teachers who studied abroad and those who did not. Thu believed that the competence of an individual employee was much more important than their credentials. From what she observed,

an overseas qualification may create a good first impression. Then, in the working process, people usually do not care where one studies, whether in Vietnam or abroad. They care more about his/her ability and work efficiency. (Thu)

All the participants agreed that the knowledge and skills they gained when studying abroad were the most crucial. It was not the overseas qualification that matters, but the academic, professional and social capitals gained from their time living abroad. Thu's statements were an example.

The PhD program helped me to develop better strategic visions, to realize the nature of problems very quickly. In the doctoral program, I had to process a huge amount of information every day, I had to select and summarize information. [...] But when I finished, I could develop the skills of envisaging the overall picture without overlooking details, which now help me a lot in my career. (Thu)

Phuong also believed that the exposure and understanding of a foreign culture helped her a lot in finding and adapting to an international organization where she was working, and commented that an overseas credential became a clear advantage for her employment seeking process.

Discussion and Conclusions

From the analytical lens of Positioning theory, studying abroad was desired because they positioned themselves as those who needed linguistics, research and intercultural immersion in order to advance their career progress and personal development. This point of findings resonates with previous research on the benefits of international education on employability (Brandenburg et al., 2014; Pottes, 2015, 2020). However, we argue that for the specific cohort of Vietnamese English language teachers, what mattered most to them was not the possibility of being employed on their return because they had already seen themselves employable or had secured employment before their

overseas sojourns. Rather, the contribution of their international education to their employability was a career break and long-term career planning and development that would enable them to be more successful professionally and personally in the future. We therefore concur with Robertson et al. (2011) that positional and transformative motivations are deeply imbricated in the teachers' decision to pursue education overseas "and arguably, academic motivations cut across the two" (Courtois, 2019, p. 193).

For the participants, the repatriation to Vietnam guaranteed employment and career advancement opportunities, and they assumed their contribution to Vietnamese society would be more evident and significant. Analyzed through the fundamental principle of positioning theory (Harré, 2012), it can be argued that many of the teachers saw themselves having the rights and duties to perform the meaningful actions of contributing to their institutions and home country upon their graduation. That is why a few teachers said they wanted to "study abroad to return". These rights and duties are embedded in the socio-culturally specific systems and spirit of the "great solidarity" building and the repatriation appeal agenda of the Vietnamese government (Tran and Bui, 2021) to encourage international graduates to come back for the nation-building project. At the same time, the teachers' perceived employability was attached to the way they would convert their gained knowledge into their pedagogical and professional practices that they hoped would be recognized by their employers and colleagues. This point reflects their self-positioning (van Langenhove and Harré, 1999) because they wanted and expected to demonstrate their capabilities through discursive practices.

Moreover, in the host countries, the teachers saw themselves in a disadvantaged position because of their migrant status as neither English native speakers nor local residents who were vulnerable to changes in migration policy (Tran and Bui, 2019). The labor market for a teaching job as English language teachers or university staff was highly competitive, meaning that their qualifications might not be the contributing factor to their employment prospects in the study destinations. However, the return to Vietnam gained them higher employability because the education market, especially in foreign language teaching areas, was still developing. Furthermore, they would also achieve social status mobility that was attached to the symbolic values of their degrees in Vietnamese society. These findings resonate with previous studies of returning graduates (Crescenzi et al., 2017; Pham and Saito, 2019; Pham, 2020). In developing economies, especially in the top source countries of international students such as Vietnam, the prospects of employability was hardly a concern for the teacher graduates.

From the returnees' point of view, there was not much difference between them with international qualifications and their counterparts

who were trained domestically because it was the level of education that weighed in their employability rather than where the degrees were obtained. This self-positioning was formed by both internal forces (the teachers' understanding of the culture and professional contexts) and external forces (the recruitment explicit and implicit policies in the workplaces). After all, it was the teachers' performance at work that made them stand out, rather than their degrees and their affiliation with overseas institutions. In this sense, they had to reposition themselves according to the requirements of the foreign language education market in Vietnam and of their own organizations. In contrast to the findings about Vietnamese student returnees in Pham's (2018) study who set high demands on salary and work conditions when navigating the home labor market, the language teachers in this study did not position themselves particularly differently from their counterparts who got trained domestically. In addition, the issue of person-environment 'fit' (Pham, 2018) was not detected in this study not only because the returnees claimed to have an understanding of local social and cultural contexts but also because some of them were not absent from the domestic labor market for a long period of time. Their positioning as being clear about their career development, and their low expectation, practical market assessment and psychological preparedness for their repatriation prevented them from feeling misfit. Read that way, it was not challenging for the teachers to navigate the market or marketize their employability.

Implications

As can be seen, it is necessary to create opportunities for returnees to apply their knowledge and skill obtained overseas. The findings revealed the powerful impacts of leadership on English language teachers' satisfaction and school improvement. The teachers should be supported and empowered in different ways to do their work effectively and put their accumulated knowledge, skills and network into good use in local workplaces, rather than leaving them unmotivated by the lack of recognition of their educational credentials. The findings in this study are congruent with extant literature that effective school leadership is embedded in various organizational contexts, not centrally vested in a person, a leader, or an office (Day et al., 2000; Mulford, 2003).

We also posit that international qualifications are not sufficient to facilitate career advancement in the home labor market; rather, different forms of intellectual capital need to be consolidated and utilized (Hao et al., 2016) for returnees' career progression. The extent to which graduates are able to use their overseas knowledge and skills determines the application and usefulness of international education. Unlike the previous generation of returnees who gained prestigious positions and

had influential impacts on their lives and workplaces upon their return, the current generation of sojourners faces a different and more complex set of opportunities and challenges in employability (Hao et al., 2016).

We acknowledge the limitations of a small and self-selected sample in our study and henceforth remain cautious over generalizations to a wider population of graduate returnees. Our results below do not seek to confirm that the employability and employment experiences of all of the teachers are similar. However, the study can be a catalyst for (re)considering how the graduates conceptualized their homecoming journeys and employability in the labor market.

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