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Global learning, local impact: The international mobility experiences of Vietnamese academics

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ABSTRACT

The opportunity for individuals to build broad global capacities from international mobility programs is common practice within the higher education community in Southeast Asia. Very little is known, however, about the experiences of mature-age academics who return home to their work setting following international experiences. In this article, we report on the perspectives of Vietnamese academics who participated in international mobility programs in more than 10 host countries. We used a thematic analysis of 20 in-depth interviews to reveal the insights of Vietnamese higher education colleagues on the potential for change in Vietnam at three levels: 1) governmental, 2) institutional, and 3) classroom. As participant colleagues re-entered Vietnamese culture and society, they encountered both opportunities and challenges in implementing their international learning and practicing lifelong learning. We further share important implications for governments in Southeast Asia and around the world that sponsor international mobility programs to develop internationally focused academic staff.

Keywords: international mobility, adult education, lifelong learning, social change, global partnerships

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INTRODUCTION

As one important aspect of a country's internationalization approaches, mobility programs allow citizens to move to other countries for tertiary education purposes. Academic opportunities include taking a full degree abroad (degree mobility), participating in a semester or a year-long program to gain academic credit (credit mobility), or taking part in research or fieldwork as a part of the program (internships) (de Wit & Altbach, 2021; Teichler, 2017). The common trend of degree mobility is the flow of international students from Asia to English-speaking top host countries, such as United States, United Kingdom, Germany, France, Australia, Canada, and New Zealand (Altbach & Engberg, 2014). There are many positive outcomes of international student mobility for stakeholders. Host institutions can increase ethnic and cultural diversity, promote training quality, and improve institutional ranking (de Wit, 2019). Governments of developing countries sponsor international mobility programs to improve educational and research capacity, support national socioeconomic development, and establish relationships with other countries (Altbach & Engberg, 2014). Participants in international mobility programs gain the opportunity to achieve personal growth, develop professional knowledge and skills, advance their career preparation and promotion potential, foster international learning, and enhance global engagement (Collins et al., 2017; Silva et al., 2026; Elliot et al., 2016; Roy et al., 2019; Tran et al., 2020). Many governments in Southeast Asia have sponsored degree mobility programs in English-speaking countries to build the capacity for their academic workforce (Altbach & Engberg, 2014).

In Vietnam, the development of international student mobility has long been influenced by the effects of historical, political, economic, and social factors on the higher education system (L. Hoang et al., 2018; Trần et al., 2014). Until 1986, under the Đổi Mới, or 'Open Door' policy, Vietnam transitioned from a socialist model of centralization to a socialist market economy. This Open Door policy established new directions for Vietnam's foreign affairs policies and relationships with Western and capitalist countries, such as the United States, Australia, and many European countries (N. Nguyen & Tran, 2018). International mobility programs have been among the critical strategies for internationalization in higher education (Tran & Marginson, 2018). The government purposefully used this strategy to respond to Vietnam's human resource and skill shortage, promote economic and social development, and prepare the future Vietnamese workforce to be ready in a multicultural context for international integration and global citizenship (L. Hoang et al., 2018; P. Nguyen et al., 2016; Tran & Marginson, 2018). The Vietnamese government funded higher education academics to participate in degree mobility programs through the government's scholarship schemes (Project 322, then replaced it with Project 911; Project 89). This initiative aimed to develop internationally focused academic staff in Vietnamese universities (Prime Minister of Vietnam, 2019).

Vietnamese government officials expected returning academic staff to contribute to higher-quality education in Vietnamese universities (National Assembly of Vietnam, 2019). However, little is known about how Vietnamese academic returnees incorporate learning from degree mobility programs into their work in local contexts. Drawing on the qualitative phase of a PhD research project conducted between 2020 and 2023, in this article, we examine the perspectives of Vietnamese academics who participated in degree mobility programs in more than 10 host countries. We address two research questions:

- 1) To what extent did participating Vietnamese academics believe they could contribute to the potential of change in Vietnam?
- 2) What challenges did these academics encounter in bringing their learning home?

Through this analysis, we examine how participants understood their potential to contribute to change after returning to Vietnam and the personal, cultural, institutional, and policy challenges they encountered when they applied their international learning. We contribute evidence that can inform governments and universities in Southeast Asia and elsewhere as they design mobility programs and support academic returnees.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Theoretical Framework

We used a theoretical framework combined from the key concepts in Dewey's theory of experience (Dewey, 1963) and Bandura's social cognitive theory (Bandura, 1999) to examine how international mobility experiences could formulate Vietnamese mature-age academics' thoughts and actions as a result of their participation in mobility programs. Dewey discussed two principles of continuity and interaction that connect one's past experiences and current interactions with one's current knowledge formation and future behaviors. Dewey confirmed that all experiences are educational and that educative experiences result in future growth and creativity. Dewey emphasized that education should consider the value of experience by connecting past experiences with present experiences to understand future experiences and combine interactions between personal experiences and surrounding environments. In social cognitive theory, Bandura (1999) analyzed human development on the basis of the triadic reciprocal causation of three determinants: interpersonal, behavioral, and environmental. Bandura clarified their dynamic interplay in the following ways: 1) people's personal factors, such as self-beliefs, aspirations, and outcome expectations, regulate their behaviors, which, in turn, influence their thoughts and emotions; 2) people's expectations, beliefs, emotional bents, and cognitive competencies are developed and modified by environmental influences; and 3) people's behaviors affect the social environment, and changes in environmental conditions enable their behavior adaptation. We simultaneously used Bandura's model to support the two principles in Dewey's theory of experience by identifying the interrelationships among personal experiences, behavior formation, and the surrounding environment.

Outcomes of International Mobility Programs

International mobility programs offer notable benefits for both individuals, their hosts, and their home countries. Host countries can gain benefits from fee-paying international students in terms of their contribution to university revenues and the national economy (Altbach & Engberg, 2014). International students can contribute to cultural diversity by bringing new perspectives, traditions, and ways of life to host countries and enriching their home countries with new ideas and experiences upon their return (Mellors-Bourne et al., 2013). Graduates of these programs can establish international relationships between home and host countries by promoting long-term trade prospects and strengthening the multilateral effects of research exchange and joint degree programs (Mellors-Bourne et al., 2013; Kang et al., 2025).

International mobility experiences offer several valuable outcomes for participants. Graduates of postgraduate programs can achieve academic success with qualifications, together with professional knowledge and skills. This enhances their academic expertise, provides them with opportunities to work at leading research universities and obtain job promotions, and contributes to the establishment of long-term business connections between their home and host countries (Collins et al., 2017; Elliot et al., 2016; Singh & Jack, 2018). Students with international mobility have opportunities to open their minds to learn new ideas, which helps them encounter challenges in different contexts (Gao & Wesely, 2024; Jing, 2018; Nilemar & Brown, 2019; Raby et al., 2021). Study-abroad experiences can enhance graduates' understanding of diverse cultures and a sense of international issues and empower them to think strategically when they interact with people of diverse cultures (d'Hombres & Schnepf, 2021; Roy et al., 2019; Silva et al., 2026; Tran et al., 2020). This enables them to build and strengthen connections with global social and professional networks. It also provides their families with "life-changing" opportunities to "see the world," attend school on new land, create relationships across cultural barriers, and learn new

hobbies, artistic expression, and sporting interests (Collins et al., 2017; de la serna, 2021; Vo & Fischetti, 2024).

The context of international mobility programs is the desire to increase participants' ability to demonstrate future-focused skills. Future-focused skills are described in the literature as *Twenty-first Century Skills*, *Transversal Competencies*, *Core Skills and Competencies*, *Skills for 2030*, *Key Competences for Lifelong Learning*, *Skills for 2025*, or *Future skills* (Vo & Fischetti, 2024). The outcomes of international mobility experiences are similar to those of future-focused skills, which are categorized as personal (personal competence, self-efficacy, personal agility), cognitive/metacognitive (critical thinking and problem solving, ability to reflect), human interaction (communication and collaboration, communication competence), and global integration (social and cross-cultural skills, cultural awareness and competence, social and cultural awareness) (Vo, 2023). They are not Western or Eastern skills; they are universal capabilities that guide us in a highly technology-driven and interdependent society. They are the human aspects that help us not only achieve work success but also solve complex world problems, collaborate with diverse people, become flexible and adaptable in a constantly changing world, and practice our lifelong learning. Vo and Fischetti (2024) reported that participants in degree mobility programs in Western countries could develop these future-focused skills from their international mobility experiences. These participants could gain more than just an international degree; they can enhance their open-mindedness, embrace diversity, adapt to uncertainty, accept and appreciate cultural differences, etc. Those who exhibit future-focused skills promote their resilience to overcome racism, bias, and prejudice, which are often experienced by international mobility participants in Western cultures. They could position themselves not only to be relevant in a constantly changing professional landscape but also to become global citizens because of their growth in future-focused skills from international mobility experiences.

Challenges faced by Returnees in International Mobility Programs

Scholars report several challenges related to international students' re-entry into their home countries. Overseas graduate returnees can encounter reverse culture shock, as they must readjust to their home norms (Alkhalaf et al., 2024). This dissonance is created because of changes in participants' worldviews, the influences of their new personal and professional relationships, and the profound social impacts of their experiences abroad. Transitioning home can lead to other challenges, such as rebuilding their professional network, experiencing psychological and emotional adjustment, and finding ways to incorporate their international learning back into their home contexts in departments or teams that are used to business as usual (Attah et al., 2018; Conroy & McCarthy, 2021; T. Pham & Saito, 2020).

Experiences of Vietnamese Overseas-graduated Returnees

Several authors have examined the experiences of Vietnamese mobility program returnees and highlighted the following aspects. Anh Pham (2018) reported that employers were satisfied with Vietnamese overseas-graduated returnees' work-integrated knowledge and skills, which were acquired from their international learning. The employers highly valued the capacities of these returnee participants in terms of their communication and presentation skills, project management attributes, teamwork ability, negotiation traits, marketing techniques, talent in initiating and leading conversations, English fluency, future-focused skills use and an international mindset. Lien Pham (2018) reported that participants who were both academics and non-academics demonstrated their work-ready generic skills and attributes and their global-minded professional identities upon their return home. Overseas-educated academics particularly employed their Western-acquired knowledge by applying Western texts and pedagogy in teaching practices. Le and LaCost (2017) reported that international learning experiences significantly

changed the personalities of Vietnamese overseas-graduated returnees. These experiences are both an opportunity and a threat to current Vietnamese culture.

One major challenge for these returnees was their readjustment to Vietnamese working and living environments (Le & LaCost, 2017). Another important challenge was the returnees' rebuilding of social relations with others in their home country after a few years (L. Pham, 2018). Some returnees were not successful in their ability to integrate an innovation mindset, and they had difficulty with their cultural alignment (i.e., networking knowledge, local work experience) in the local social context (A. Pham, 2018). The work by Trong Hoang and Ho (2019) highlighted that returnees faced challenges with their work readjustment because of the longer time spent overseas, unmet work expectations, and subjective norms.

In the educational context, several factors can challenge Vietnamese mobility program graduates to promote the use of critical thinking and independent problem-solving in their teaching. Graduates often face resistance to their new ideas because of a centrally controlled curriculum, rigid assessment system, and deep-seated hierarchical teacher–student relationships in the tradition of Vietnamese society and many other countries in Asia (H. Pham & Tran, 2013; L. Pham, 2019). This leads to challenges for overseas-educated academics to implement the Western style of independent creative thinking and other nontechnical skills with their university students (L. Pham, 2019). Vietnamese overseas-educated returnees reported that it was challenging to practice their overseas-acquired skills and newly discovered international mindset when they returned to their workplaces in Vietnam (A. Pham, 2018). Returnees had to adjust their overseas formulated dispositions to readapt to the national culture and social relations (T. Hoang & Ho, 2019; L. Pham, 2018).

RESEARCH METHOD

Research Design

In this article, we report on the qualitative phase of a mixed-methods PhD research project that employed an explanatory sequential design. The project began with a survey of 132 Vietnamese academics to identify broad patterns in their international mobility experiences, followed by in-depth qualitative interviews. We used the survey responses to purposively select participants with varied backgrounds and mobility experiences. The interview phase enabled participants to explain in depth how they applied their international learning after returning to Vietnam and the factors that supported or constrained that process. We integrated the two phases during analysis and interpretation by considering the interview findings alongside the broader patterns identified in the survey (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018).

Participants and Sampling

We purposively selected 20 Vietnamese academics from the 132 survey respondents. Among the 48 respondents who volunteered for follow-up interviews, we selected participants to represent variation in destination country, gender, academic discipline, region of affiliation in Vietnam, and highest qualification (see Table 1). During data collection and preliminary analysis, we monitored saturation by comparing successive interviews with the existing codes and themes. In the final interviews, the participants largely repeated the established patterns, and no substantive new themes emerged; therefore, we considered 20 interviews to be sufficient for this study (Townsend, 2013).

Table 1*Description of the Selected Interviewed Participants (N=20)*

Participants	Destinations of mobility programs	Genders	Disciplines	Locations of affiliations in Vietnam	Highest Degrees
P028	Australia	Female	Information Technology	North	MA
P083	Australia	Male	Psychology	South	MA
P005	Australia	Female	Tourism	South	MA
P063	Australia	Female	Business	North	MA
P017	Australia	Female	Business	North	MA
P104	Australia	Male	International Relations	Central	MA
P002	Australia	Male	Education	South	PhD
P021	Australia- New Zealand	Female	Education	South	PhD
P048	Australia- New Zealand	Female	Linguistics	North	MA
P004	Hungary	Male	Linguistics	North	MA
P051	The Netherlands	Male	Medicine-Pharmacy	South	PhD
P008	Belgium	Female	Education	South	PhD
P084	Belgium	Female	Law	South	PhD
P135	Germany	Male	Environment	South	PhD
P148	Germany	Female	Sociology	South	MA
P065	United States	Female	Education	Central	PhD
P020	United States	Male	Agriculture	South	PhD
P086	United Kingdom	Male	Management	Central	BA
P125	New Zealand	Male	Education	South	MA
P015	Canada- US	Female	Gender & Development Studies	South	MA

Data collection

We collected data through in-depth semistructured interviews, an approach suited to generating rich accounts of participants' experiences (Cohen et al., 2018; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). After selecting the participants, we arranged the interview times and formats to suit their availability. Because of COVID-19 restrictions, we conducted the interviews via Zoom, which can support high-quality qualitative interviewing (Archibald et al., 2019). Each interview lasted approximately 45–60 minutes and was recorded with the participant's consent. Zoom generated an initial transcript for each interview, which the first researcher reviewed during transcript preparation.

Data Analysis

We analyzed the interview data inductively using Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase approach to thematic analysis. The analysis proceeded in five connected stages. First, the first researchers read the transcripts repeatedly and conducted preliminary open coding manually to become familiar with the data and identify initial patterns. Second, we imported the transcripts into NVivo 12 Pro, where we applied line- and sentence-level codes systematically. Third, we grouped related codes into broader categories. Fourth, we developed candidate themes and subthemes from those categories. Fifth, both researchers reviewed and refined the themes against the coded extracts and the complete dataset. For interviews conducted in English, we saved the reviewed Zoom transcripts as Microsoft Word documents. For

interviews conducted in Vietnamese, the first researcher transcribed the recordings in Vietnamese, translated the transcripts into English using Microsoft Word Translator, and checked the translations carefully for accuracy and meaning. Manual coding supported familiarization and initial interpretation, whereas NVivo supported systematic data management and the transparent organization of codes, categories, and themes (Creswell, 2012).

Trustworthiness

Following Lincoln and Guba (1985), we addressed credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. To support credibility, we returned the interview transcripts to the participants for accuracy checking and used direct quotations to preserve their accounts. We supported transferability by reporting the study context and participant characteristics so that readers could judge the relevance of the analysis to other higher education contexts. We supported dependability by following Braun and Clarke's (2006) documented six-phase process and retaining the coding records in NVivo. Reflexivity supported confirmability. The first researcher is a Vietnamese academic with international mobility experience and recognized that this positionality could shape interpretation. She discussed the developing codes and themes with the second researcher, and both authors reviewed the final thematic structure against the transcripts. These procedures helped us distinguish participants' perspectives from our own assumptions.

Ethical Considerations

The University of Newcastle Human Research Ethics Committee approved the project before data collection commenced (H-2021-0119). Potential participants received an information statement and consent form with an email invitation. Before each recorded interview, participants provided either oral consent or a signed written consent form. We protected confidentiality and anonymity by replacing names with participant codes (e.g., P028 and P083), and we stored the interview data securely in accordance with the university's ethics requirements.

RESULTS

Contributions to Possible Changes Back Home

Our analysis of the data indicated that respondents detailed their contributions to the potential for change in Vietnam from their international mobility experiences at the following levels.

Government Level

One notable goal was to contribute to changes in education policies and the management of higher education training programs upon returning home. P065 shared her ways of making changes in terms of identifying gaps and persuading policymakers:

It is very useful for me when I go back and look at the current context of Vietnamese higher education. I can see many gaps where I can make a contribution. I think that's an advantage for my work, to study abroad...I am currently working with the prime minister, the Ministry of Education and training about innovations that I learned abroad and persuading them to apply them to the current Vietnamese policies...the good thing is that they listened, used such kinds of ideas to update the policies, tried to use it to improve the management of the academic programs.
(P065)

Institutional level

The respondents reported their contributions to the prestige of their universities by promoting the process of opening doctoral programs (P051) and international cooperation programs (P104). The respondents shared their implementation of international learning back into their universities as another way to foster development. P083 demonstrated his performance in different roles by applying his knowledge and skills in research, such as being a principal researcher, a member of the research evaluation committee, a peer reviewer, and a supervisor of undergraduates. P020 implemented “the US experiences, the skills of can-do and can-do experiences” to enhance working performance at his university. The respondents further shared their positive influences on their colleagues by motivating and inspiring their colleagues for professional development (P104) and supporting their colleagues in conducting research and writing for publication (P051).

What I can do is inspire other lecturers from my perseverance and flexibility...Some lecturers had already done research and had products, but they were struggling with writing and publishing. I have supported them as their coauthors. (P051)

Classroom level

The findings indicated that respondents applied their international learning experiences in the classroom by supporting their students' growth in knowledge and skills, as well as their positive changes in their behavior and awareness. P084, P004, and P021 supported their students with the knowledge they learned abroad, including how to organize research activities and conduct research projects. P135 reported his way to enhance students' augmentation, analysis, and reasoning skills: “I told my students that they can say any time they feel it is not right, but what they say must have evidence and they must analyze and prove it”. The respondents also reported on ways to formulate students' self-awareness and influence their positive attitudes toward learning.

When I work with students, I also push their egos up a lot. Any students who worked with me were given chances to maximize their own abilities...For students who constantly asked me, I pushed them toward independence. When they contacted me, I did not answer ... I let them decide by themselves... This is what I learned when I studied overseas. (P051)

Especially with respect to my attitude in studying, I learned it in Australia. I used that attitude to approach students. I expected students to have that kind of independent, proactive attitude and spirit of development. That expectation is reflected in the ways I interacted with students, through the ways I instructed them, and my requirements in training. (P083)

With respect to self-control and self-responsibility, I clearly described the problem of plagiarism. I paid more attention to those things. In the past, I did not see its importance, but now I see its importance and take responsibility for it. I teach and guide them on how to use it. I also set out regulations on plagiarism. (P021)

Challenges Bringing the International Learning Back Home

Our analysis of the data revealed several challenges for Vietnamese overseas-graduated academic returnees that arose from both personal and external factors.

Cultural shock

Our data analysis revealed cultural shock as one main personal factor that many respondents might encounter upon their return to their home context. The respondents reported it as readapting and readjusting their own home culture: “When I came back, there were lots of shock and gaps.” (P065), “If I go back after 5 years, I will start things over again, find a new job or go back to my old organization, which has changed greatly. It’s scary.” (P048). The respondents reported challenges with their work adjustment (P015, P005, P051, P021).

I have learned new things such as how to do research, methods, or my opinion on research... I was more or less influenced by my professor. When I returned to Vietnam, I often believed in that. What I said, gave advice, or defended was difficult for people to agree with in terms of research methods. In management, I find myself requiring a bit of detail, such as having to plan and control everything... People feel some of the things I do were very demanding and created pressure on them... I often get comments from my boss that I am pressured and demanding. (P021)

Cultural Differences

The respondents reported challenges with readjusting their thinking between their recent international learning experiences and their home culture, including the following examples of experiencing back home: a lack of professionalism, poor responsiveness, and an unwillingness to have an open dialog in the workplace.

When I attended a meeting of master’s thesis evaluations, professors used words to abuse students. I found it very disrespectful. I found it was over judgmental and repetitive. (P084)

People’s way of working is not suitable. When I sent them emails, they did not respond to my emails; they only talked on phones. (P051)

I don’t know whether other people have the same thinking, but I think it’s a kind of open conversation, such as talking about the issues just to solve the problems. We don’t have that in our working culture. (P008)

Resources

The respondents were challenged by limited access to resources for research and technological tools and facilities for teaching and learning.

I have not approached the information needed to write about Vietnam because Vietnamese does not have online resources and most documents are in papers. I needed to ask many people, and it was hard to find information on websites. I only need to read approximately 50 papers to find research gaps, but I must spend about two years writing about Vietnam. I need help from experienced people who are leading in the research field to look for their conference reports and articles to understand Vietnam. (P065)

When I came back to Vietnam, I found [technological tools] were not available, like NVIVO, which is not equipped in any schools. Quantitative software is also not available at schools, and students must equip it by themselves. (P002)

When I came back to Vietnam, I did not have a very good opportunity to access the technology. (P020)

Curriculum

The respondents shared concerns about imported materials and translated documents that were not appropriate for the home context.

The books can be brought back to Vietnam, but cultural thinking and perception from being a child until they go to university cannot be brought back. Without it, we cannot operate like the host countries. (P135)

In the social field, many theories are translated into Vietnamese. Their meanings become nonsense because the words are not correctly translated. There are no corresponding words because classical theories are very broad in English, so our Vietnamese language does not have appropriate words to translate. We also use equivalent words such as critical thinking, which was translated into “tu duy phan bien”, but that is not the exact meaning of critical thinking. (P015)

The findings indicated that the respondents were concerned about the at-home curriculum, which was more theory-based (P028, P084). This could reduce learners’ creativity. P065 also reported the quality assurance of the training curriculum.

There are eight levels in the Vietnamese quality framework with the requirements of training program outcomes, which include knowledge, skills, and dispositions, but this framework is quite general for all programs. (P065)

Teaching approaches

Our analysis revealed that the influence of teacher-centered approaches is a challenge for incorporating international learning into teaching practices for Vietnamese academic colleagues. The respondents highlighted the following:

Students feel pressured because they are familiar with the approach where their teacher is directed, and they follow...If you introduce the foreign program at the same time...students feel challenged to learn with the new program. (P051)

One of the cultures in Vietnam for a long time is that people have not been encouraged. From a little child, most people have to follow the idea of the teacher. Something true must be related to the idea of the teacher. In many discussions, Vietnamese people rarely dare to express their voice more because many people are afraid that their ideas are not as correct as what their teachers are thinking. (P002)

Policy implementation

The respondents shared concerns about imported policies from other countries that might not operate properly in the home context.

In Vietnam, if you look at the policy and discussion forums, each person can offer a different policy. Those who graduated from France support French methods; those who completed their studies in Germany say that Germany is a champion and that the U.S. is perceived to be powerful by those studying in the U.S. However, each society operates its own law enforcement. It is not good for Vietnamese society to operate in such ways. (P135)

The respondents reported new policies or innovations that frustratingly needed more time for approval.

I'm working with the prime minister and the Ministry of Education and Training. I talked about innovation from abroad and persuaded them to apply it to current Vietnam policies. I spent a lot of time, almost two years back from abroad, and I spent one year talking, persuading, and encouraging them to believe that [innovation from abroad]. There were no policies for people to do it, and no one did it. Therefore, I worked top down, and the new policies were just issued only two days ago. They used such ideas to update Vietnamese higher education policies and improve the management of academic programs. (P065)

For higher levels, such as making policies or proposals to develop on a larger scale, it is also available, but I feel like I have not done much because I think it takes time and seems slow. I contributed, but I found it less satisfying. (P021)

DISCUSSION

Our analysis of the data revealed three levels at which Vietnamese academics of degree mobility programs believed that they could contribute to the possibility of changes in Vietnam from their international learning experiences. These included their contributions to changes in education policies and the management of higher education training programs, the development of their universities, and the positive impacts on the faculty staff and students in their workplace contexts. Our findings affirm that international mobility experiences can promote participants' professional development, strengthen global understanding, enhance international relationships, and enrich returnees' home countries with new perspectives (Collins et al., 2017; Gao & Wesely, 2024; Mellors-Bourne et al., 2013; Nilemar & Brown, 2019, Tran et al., 2020).

The findings revealed that the international mobility experiences of Vietnamese academic participants were educative experiences. This directly relates to Dewey's theory, which suggests that lived experiences are educative for one's future growth. The findings also supported Dewey's principle of interaction in terms of connecting the participants' international mobility experiences with their personal and external factors, which resulted in positive personal and professional growth as their outcomes. The ways in which Vietnamese academics in this study incorporated their international learning experiences could achieve the priority of the Vietnamese government in developing internationally focused academic staff in Vietnamese universities and promoting future Vietnamese graduates' expected knowledge, skills, and attitudes (National Assembly of Vietnam, 2019; Prime Minister of Vietnam, 2019). Our findings align with the literature on the positive impacts of Vietnamese academic returnees' study abroad experiences at the institutional level in terms of promoting the development of teaching and research activities (Kayashima et al., 2024). The results support the opportunity to consider change at the classroom level in terms of the implementation of Western texts and pedagogy (L. Pham, 2018).

Our analysis further indicated Dewey's principle of continuity regarding the participants' experiences that translated their mobility-acquired experiences into the home context. On the basis of the findings, we highlight Dewey's principle of interaction and Bandura's model in two ways: 1) the interaction of personal factors and environmental factors in relation to the influences of these participants'

perceptions on their institutions, colleagues, and students and 2) the interaction between behavioral factors and environmental factors in terms of the ways in which they contribute to potential changes in the home context. In this research, we expand the literature on the contributions of academic returnees to the local context at three levels: governmental, institutional, and classroom. We suggest that our findings provide a potential framework for future studies to explore the translation of international mobility program results to tangible social change.

We propose several challenges for our participant Vietnamese academics, as they attempted to incorporate their international learning experiences back into their home universities. Personally, these Vietnamese academics encountered difficulties with their readaptation or readjustment to the local culture upon their return. This created challenges for their practice of overseas learning, particularly in active pedagogies practiced in the West. These findings align with the literature on reverse or re-entry culture shocks faced by overseas returnees (Conroy & McCarthy, 2021; Alkhalaf et al., 2024; T. Pham & Saito, 2020). Externally, the participating Vietnamese academics found it challenging to implement their international learning knowledge and skills because of a lack of resources, a rigid curriculum, narrow teaching approaches, and strict policy regulations. Our results support the work of Tran et al. (2019), who reported that many foreign-trained academics felt discouraged from conducting research. Some of these colleagues reluctantly left their universities or migrated to other countries where they were recruited into a more supportive research environment. On the basis of this work, we affirm the influence of teacher-centered approaches in the Vietnamese classroom (H. Pham & Tran, 2013; L. Pham, 2019). Our results support the implications for the national policy approach with regard to balancing Western ideas and important Vietnamese values to support the practices of overseas-educated returnees (L. Pham, 2019).

CONCLUSIONS AND REMENDATIONS

The findings from our research provide insights into the contribution of international mobility experiences to the transformation of Vietnamese society through the adoption of future-focused components of learning from colleagues who participate in global life-changing exchanges. International mobility experiences provide valuable outcomes and clashes between these international values and the opportunities to practice them in local universities and in their suburbs. In this study, we did not seek to promote Western versus Eastern values. We attempted to determine whether the formal and informal learning that comes from government-sponsored mobility programs fully realized their power to change perspectives. There are clearly negative aspects of Western society that are not appropriate for assimilation in Vietnam or elsewhere. We disseminate this work so that those promulgating these extraordinary programs can understand the profound opportunities and benefits that come from them upon return. We know that the Vietnamese leaders who create these valuable endeavors seek change over time to occur in the ways in which Vietnam employs learner engagement, authentic assessment, real-world applications, and future-focused learning.

We also discovered practical implications for stakeholders who support higher education academics as mature-age learners to participate in international mobility programs. The sponsoring governments could promote the returnees' implementation of innovative ideas in curriculum, instruction, assessment, and/or discipline-focused areas of research-informed practice. Universities sponsoring their staff to engage in international mobility programs can more actively embrace global perspectives and multicultural values to welcome the returnees back into their home settings. They could preplan purposeful strategies to support the returnees in formalizing the use of valuable international learning experiences as part of a broader change process. Academic returnees of international mobility programs should be aware of the potential obstacles to implementing changes back in their home universities and be flexible and patient with colleagues in their local university contexts. They could formally or informally study change leadership as part of their mobility programs rather than become frustrated about the slow pace of change back home.

Across the world, there is a rise in the political need to collaboratively tackle big global problems; to take advantage of the increase and seamlessness of modern communication technologies; to harness the rise of AI's generative, predictive, and analytical tools; and to forge innovative ways to innovate our products, enhance our services, and develop our human talent. Vietnam and other Southeast Asian countries are likely to see benefits in expanding mobility programs in light of the continued internationalization of work and education. We recommend that the sponsors of international mobility programs purposefully plan for participants to return home with ideas, strategies, and lived experiences to contribute to the advancement of the local community and society at large. We recommend that colleagues embrace returnees to bring new ideas back home with them and not feel that they are stymied or silent to propose new ways of doing the business of education (or any other industry). Our research may influence those leaders to make the return home as exciting as the trip abroad.

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