

Motivations for Studying Abroad and Immigration Intentions: The Case of Vietnamese Students

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ABSTRACT

This article reports a study that investigated prospective and current Vietnamese international students' motivations to study abroad and their immigration intentions. Analyses of 55 intercept interviews and 313 responses to a survey revealed 12 push and pull factors that motivated students to pursue overseas studies and 18 sociocultural, economic, and political factors that influenced their immigration intentions. Independent samples *t* tests indicated that there were statistically significant differences in the influence of motivations on decisions to study overseas between groups of male and female students and prospective and current students. The analyses, furthermore, suggested that students' immigration intentions depended on their personal attachment to the home country and (perceived) adaptability to the host country.

Keywords: immigration intention, international education, international students, motivations, Vietnam

Physically experiencing life and studying in a host country is a rewarding learning experience for many students. Therefore, the number of students going overseas to pursue international education has continually increased in recent decades, especially to the United States, United Kingdom, and Australia (Doherty & Evershed, 2018; Kritz, 2012). However, the last 2 years have experienced great turbulence in international education. "Brexit" in the United Kingdom will restrict the free movement of people from continental European countries into the United Kingdom, and more recently, Trump's policies against immigrants pose serious threats to international education in the two countries (Choudaha, 2017; Marginson, 2017). These political upheavals are largely rooted in the fear of immigrants competing with local residents for employment and creating a social burden (Somai & Biedermann, 2016). However, many international students arrive in the host country primarily to study and experience a new culture, and unnecessarily to pursue immigration opportunities (Tran & Vu, 2016). Students' immigration prospects also appear to depend on several factors, including political ones, and not solely on their intention

to immigrate (Fenicia, Kaiser, & Schönhuth, 2016; Güngör & Tansel, 2014; Tran & Vu, 2016). Thus, international students' motivations for overseas studies and their immigration intentions need to be further explored.

Drawing from a study conducted in 2015–2016, this article reports findings related to factors that motivate students to study abroad and factors influencing their immigration intentions. This article is a timely tribute to debates about the “risk” of international students in the host country during their studies and after graduation. It also discusses implications for policies related to international students and international graduates.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Benefits of International Education

In recent decades, the number of international students has continually increased. The total number increased from 0.8 million in 1975 to 4.1 million in 2010 and is predicted to reach 8 million by 2025 (Kritz, 2012). The top five host countries of international students are the United States, United Kingdom, Australia, Germany, and France (Kritz, 2012; Lee & King, 2016). Recent years have also seen the rise of international education in Asian countries. For example, the number of international students in China increased from 77,715 in 2003 to 377,054 in 2014 (Ding, 2016). Likewise, the number of international students in Taiwan for degree and non-degree programs doubled from 38,285 in 2009–2010 to 78,261 in 2013–2014 (Lee & King, 2016).

The increase in the number of international students worldwide can be attributed to the many benefits of international education. Studies have pointed out that by pursuing international education, students can become proficient in a foreign language, enhance their academic competence, develop intercultural competence, build a network of international friends and professionals, nurture personal qualities, and increase their employment prospects (Dewey, Belnap, & Hillstrom, 2013; Nilsson & Ripmeester, 2016).

Recent studies have indicated that international students also benefit the host institution and country (Chellaraj, Maskus, & Mattoo, 2005; Deloitte Access Economics, 2015). Economically, international students pay tuition fees and use services such as tourism, accommodation, catering, editing and printing, and language education (Deloitte Access Economics, 2015). For example, in 2014–2015, international students contributed about AUD 18.8 billion to the Australian economy via tuition fees and related educational services (Deloitte Access Economics, 2015). International students are also a future source of skilled labor for the host country (Scott, Safdar, Desai Trilokekar, & El Masri, 2015). In a research paper published by the World Bank, Chellaraj et al. (2005) estimated that every 10% increase in the number of international graduates to the United States would raise patent applications by 4.7%, university patent grants by 5.3%, and non-university patent grants by 6.7%. Socio-culturally, international students enhance local residents' experiences with the different cultures they bring with them and in turn disseminate the culture of the host country upon their return to their home countries (Mellors-Bourne, Humfrey, Kemp,

& Woodfield, 2013). Politically, international students can help tighten the relationship between home and host countries via post-study support programs or scholar exchange programs. Findings from some studies seem to challenge misconceptions about international students as social welfare or migration seekers (for example, Tran & Vu, 2016). Rather, these full fee-paying international students deserve to be respected as customers of higher education and members of the future skilled workforce (Vuori, 2013).

Students' Motivation for International Education and Migration

Many studies have examined factors that motivate students to pursue education abroad (and the choice of study destinations) using the push-pull factors concept (e.g., Eder, Smith, & Pitts, 2010; Maringe & Carter, 2007; Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002). Push factors are defined as factors that operate within the home country and influence a student's decision to undertake international study (Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002). Push factors include the unavailability of a desired study program, lack of access to universities, and poor quality of education in the home country. Pull factors consist of factors in the host country or institution that attract international students (Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002), such as culture, living standards, socioeconomic status of the host country, improved career prospects, and immigration opportunities. Other studies that do not use the push-pull model have reached similar conclusions and further revealed that international students' decisions to study abroad can be influenced by their family, teachers, and other socioeconomic, political, and cultural issues in both the home and host countries (e.g., English, Allison, & Ma, 2016; Liu & Morgan, 2016; Nguyen, 2013; Spinks, 2016).

Recognizing the potential socioeconomic and cultural benefits that international students and graduates may bring, many host countries have used different strategies to attract them, including scholarship programs and permanent residency or work visa schemes (Hawthorne & To, 2014; Scott et al., 2015). For example, in 2012, the Canadian government decided to increase the number of international student enrollments from 240,000 in 2011 to 450,000 by 2022 in an attempt to make Canada the place to be for top talent (Hawthorne & To, 2014). By 2012, about 3,983 students had successfully converted their international student status to permanent skilled migrant status in Canada (Hawthorne & To, 2014).

However, international graduates respond differently to these skilled immigration schemes. Generally, international graduates prefer to stay in the host country because of the high standard of living there, and this can also help enhance their career prospects (Arthur & Nunes, 2014; Lin, Shi, & Huang, 2016). Their social networks and marriage to local residents also increase their likelihood of staying in the host country (Arthur & Nunes, 2014; Bijwaard & Wang, 2016). Güngör and Tansel (2014) found that economic instability in the home country, established intentions to stay abroad, and negative work experience in the home country increased international graduates' likelihood of staying. In contrast, many international graduates decide to return to their home countries right after graduation or after their post-study visas expire because of a lack of employment opportunities in the host country (Bijwaard & Wang, 2016), family issues, and gender factors, according to

which females seemed to be less willing to return than males (Fenicia et al., 2016; Güngör & Tansel, 2014). Moreover, Bijwaard and Wang (2016) found that international graduates often leave the host country after they have accumulated a certain amount of savings. Furthermore, language barriers, disconnection with local communities, and perceived discrimination and unjust treatment in regard to employment opportunities can push international graduates to return to their home countries (Scott et al., 2015; Tran & Vu, 2016). Finally, political issues can be a detrimental factor that influences international students' decision to return (e.g., Spinks, 2016). For example, in Australia, international coursework graduates are entitled to post-study visas that allow them to work in the country for up to 2 years, and they are advised to leave before their visas expire (Department of Immigration and Border Protection, 2017).

In summary, regardless of local residents' fear or misconception of the presence of international students and graduates, whether they stay or leave after graduation, international students benefit both themselves and the host country. The literature review showed that international students and graduates do not always consider immigration to be the top reason for pursuing an international education, but this varies across individual students. Thus, these factors should be further explored with different cohorts of international students to confirm our understanding in this regard as well as provide justifiable implications for international education policies.

THE PRESENT STUDY

Context of the Study

Current statistics show that Vietnam has become one of the top countries to send students abroad. In a recent commentary, Dr. Mark Ashwill, Director of Capstone Vietnam, reported that approximately 200,000 Vietnamese students are studying in host countries in 2018. Japan is the leading host of Vietnamese students, with 61,671 students in 2017, followed by the United States with 31,613 students, Australia with 23,000 students, and Canada with about 15,000 students (Ashwill, 2018).

However, only a few studies have directly investigated the reasons that Vietnamese students want to pursue their studies abroad (e.g., Nguyen, 2013). Nguyen's study, combined with other studies about Vietnamese higher education, revealed that increasing demands for skilled workers, low quality of higher education, globalization and regionalization, governments' commitment to sending students overseas, families' desire to improve their children's career prospects, and many international educational organizations have contributed to promoting the value of having an international education experience (Bodewig, Badiani-Magnusson, & Macdonald, 2014; Nguyen, 2013).

Vietnam is also among the countries that have the highest number of emigrants. For example, the latest statistics available on the website of the Department of Immigration and Border Protection from the Australian government show that 3,835 individuals were granted the Australian citizenship in 2014–2015. Records show that the number of skilled Vietnamese immigrants to Australia with permanent residency in that period was 1,618, an increase of 51.5% compared with 2011–2012 (1,068

individuals). Likewise, Australia's *The Guardian* reported that the number of Vietnamese people gaining permanent residency in Australia grew from approximately 2,000 in 1997 to approximately 5,500 in 2017 (Doherty & Evershed, 2018). Although there are no figures available to corroborate this, many of these permanent immigrants could be Vietnamese international graduates.

Therefore, the context above suggests that the Vietnamese international student cohort can serve as an appropriate case to explore international students' motivations for pursuing their studies abroad and their immigration intentions upon graduation. Results from this exploratory study can contribute to moderating debates and policies regarding international students.

Focus of the Article

In 2015–2016, a study was conducted to explore (a) prospective and current international Vietnamese students' motivations to study abroad at the higher education level, (b) their immigration intentions, (c) factors influencing their choice of the host country, and (d) factors influencing their choice of the host institution. In this study, prospective students were defined as those planning to study abroad in 2015, 2016, and 2017. Current students referred to those who were enrolled in a higher education course at the time of the research.

However, this article only reports findings related to the first two aims of the study. Findings related to influential factors on students' choice of the host country and institution were reported in a separate paper because of word limitations. This article specifically answers the following research questions:

1. What factors motivate prospective and current international Vietnamese students to study abroad?
2. To what extent do these motivational factors influence their decision to study abroad?
3. What factors influence their decision to return to the home country or stay in the host country upon graduation?

The study used a mixed-methods approach to explore the research issues in depth and increase the robustness of the findings with both quantitative and qualitative data (Lisle, 2011). The study was conducted in two phases using a sequential exploratory design. Qualitative data were collected first to explore the research issues. This was followed by quantitative data collection to further explore the findings from the first phase using a larger sample size (Creswell, Plano Clark, Gutmann, & Hanson, 2003).

Data Collection and Analysis

In the first phase, intercept interviews were used to collect qualitative data from 55 Vietnamese prospective international students. Intercept interviews are "a straightforward and direct method for gathering data on public perceptions or other locally relevant information" (Flint et al., 2016, p. 106). Students were informed of the purpose of the study and their roles in the study and asked to sign a consent form. Among the four key research issues, students were asked to identify motivations for

their overseas studies and immigration intentions. The interviews were recorded, transcribed verbatim, and analyzed using a content analysis approach (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). By the end of this process, 12 motivations for overseas studies (Table 1) and some reasons for returning home or staying in the host countries were identified.

In the second phase, a paper-based and online survey were developed based on the findings of the first phase to collect data from Vietnamese prospective and current international students, respectively, using a snowball sampling technique (Browne, 2005). Among the four key research issues in the survey, participants were asked to provide some demographic information to rate on a 5-point Likert scale (in which 1 = *very weak* and 5 = *very strong*) the influence of the 12 motivational factors identified in the first phase on the students' pursuance of international education. Students were also asked to indicate their likelihood of immigrating upon graduation: returning, not determined yet, and immigrating (temporary and permanent). Instead of asking participants to rate the factors influencing their intentions to return or stay identified in the first phase, they were encouraged to explain the reasons for their intentions. This was because the factors identified in the first phase appeared not to fully capture the reality because of a small sample size, imbalance between to-be returnees and stayers, and participants' hesitation about expressing their intentions with regard to immigration, which is associated with the "disloyalty to the country" notion. This question in the survey allowed the collection of qualitative data on the research issue but simultaneously produced some quantitative insights from a larger number of participants who felt more comfortable expressing their viewpoints with little direct interaction with the researcher.

Quantitative data were analyzed using SPSS version 20. Demographical data were analyzed using descriptive statistics. In total, 313 responses were recorded in the second phase. Among them, 249 were prospective students, and 64 were current students from 17 countries. Regarding gender, 27.8% of students were male, and 72.2% were female. The majority of the participants planned to study or were attending a business program (44.4%), whereas the remaining participants were planning to study or attending social sciences (21.4%); science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (15%); agriculture (7.7%); education (7.7%), and healthcare (3.5%) programs.

The 12 motivational factors were reduced to principal components. To do so, the researcher first tested the internal consistency of this set of data. Cronbach's alpha ($\alpha = 0.74$) indicated that the internal consistency of this set of data was acceptable. Then, the researcher tested the uni-dimensionality of the 12 motivational factors by computing item-total correlations. Typically, an item (i.e., the motivational factor) with a coefficient value $r > 0.30$ is retained for interpretation (Coolidge, 2013). Ten items had coefficient values ranging from 0.31 to 0.49. The items "competitive entry to Vietnamese universities" and "being asked to study abroad by my family" had low coefficient values, $r = 0.24$ and 0.18 , respectively. However, the researcher decided to retain these items because removing them did not significantly increase the alpha value and because they were relevant to the motivations of Vietnamese international students. Next, the results of the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin test showed a value of 0.75, suggesting that this data set was sufficient to extract the items into principal

components (de Vaus, 2014). Because the number of participants was large enough, principal components were extracted based on the scree plot and using the Varimax rotation method. Two principal components were extracted using this method, which together explained 49.36% of the variance. The resulting scale is as follows (Table 1):

- Factor 1: Pull factors (six items, $\alpha = 0.83$, variance explained: 29.18%)
- Factor 2: Push factors (six items, $\alpha = 0.70$, variance explained: 20.18%)

After extracting items into principal components, mean scores and deviations were computed to examine the extent to which these motivations influenced participants' intentions/decisions to study abroad. Independent samples *t* tests were run to test whether there were differences in the influence of the factors between different groups of (a) male and female students and (b) prospective and current students.

Qualitative data from the last question were analyzed using a summative content analysis approach (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). The researcher read the participants' explanations, coded factors influencing their intention to immigrate, and counted the frequency of each factor. The researcher compared these factors between groups of prospective and current students as well as male and female students to identify the commonalities and outliers of these factors.

FINDINGS

Motivations for Pursuing International Education

The analysis of 55 intercepts with prospective students revealed 12 factors that motivated them to pursue international education outside Vietnam. These motivations can be categorized into push and pull factors.

Pull Factors

Fifty-three interviewees stated that they would like to gain international experience by attending a university program abroad. In their view, because the world has become more globalized and the Vietnamese economy is open to the world, international experience is important for their career development, especially those who want to start their own business or run their parents' business. Similarly, 32 interviewees believed a foreign credential would make them competitive internationally in terms of employment opportunities. Among these interviewees, establishing relationships with international friends was also mentioned as a strategy to explore other cultures as well as make potential business partners for their future careers. Twenty interviewees were motivated to study abroad because of their desire to experience foreign cultures. Many of them stated that they had watched movies and learned about Western cultures or interesting festivals in other countries and wanted to witness them firsthand. Thirty-one interviewees revealed that they wanted to obtain a foreign degree and, at the same time, take advantage of being in the host country to improve their foreign language skills, which they believed were important

in the current context of Vietnam and the world. Finally, 33 interviewees considered studying abroad to pursue the educational values of the host country. In their view, the quality of university education in host countries such as the United States, United Kingdom, and Australia, is well known, and these can be a platform for them to thrive in their career and personal lives.

Push Factors

Eleven interviewees stated that they wanted to study abroad so that they could pursue immigration opportunities. These interviewees explained that their intention stemmed from the fact that the quality of life in Vietnam was not good enough. Some interviewees implied that they were discontent with the political issues and social injustice in Vietnam, so immigrating via pursuing international education was a feasible alternative. In parallel with the recognition of the high quality of foreign education mentioned earlier, 12 interviewees agreed that Vietnamese university education is of poor quality. A limited number of these interviewees also suggested that they left Vietnam to seek international education because they could not stand the “bad practices” of the local educational system, such as suppression of students’ academic freedom, injustice in university admission, and lack of transparency in assessment and evaluation. Three of them wanted to study abroad because they could not find a trustworthy education program that could support their personal and professional development. Similarly, an interviewee mentioned competitive entry to Vietnamese universities as a push factor. Two interviewees admitted that they did not want to study abroad, but their families asked them to go and look for immigration opportunities.

Influence of Motivational Factors on Students’ Decision to Pursue International Education

Descriptive analyses of quantitative data (Table 1) showed that participants’ motivation for pursuing international education was influenced by pull factors ($M = 4.12$, $SD = 0.70$) more than push factors ($M = 2.48$, $SD = 0.78$). Among the pull factors, three factors, “improving chance of employment internationally” ($M = 4.30$, $SD = 0.96$), “improving foreign language competence” ($M = 4.23$, $SD = 0.94$), and “obtaining international experience” ($M = 4.19$, $SD = 0.93$), appeared to very strongly influence participants’ motivation for studying abroad. The other three factors, “pursuing foreign educational values” ($M = 4.08$, $SD = 0.97$), “experiencing foreign cultures” ($M = 4.02$, $SD = 0.94$), and “establishing relationships with international friends” ($M = 3.87$, $SD = 1.00$), appeared to strongly affect participants’ motivation.

Among the push factors, factors related to Vietnamese higher education were found to influence participants’ decisions the most. Specifically, “poor educational quality in Vietnam” ($M = 3.46$, $SD = 1.13$) affected their decisions the most, followed by “avoidance of bad practices in Vietnamese education” ($M = 3.26$, $SD = 1.33$), “pursuit of immigration opportunities” ($M = 3.20$, $SD = 1.21$), “unavailability of a desired program” ($M = 2.44$, $SD = 1.20$), and “competitive entry to Vietnamese universities” ($M = 2.35$, $SD = 1.16$). Interviewees’ decisions were also influenced by their family ($M = 2.34$, $SD = 1.34$). Standard deviations of these factors were much

higher than those of pull factors, suggesting that the influence of these push factors varied between participants.

Table 1: The Influences of Push and Pull Factors on Vietnamese Students' Motivations To Study Abroad

| Principal components | Loading | All students (<i>N</i> = 313) | | Prospective students (<i>n</i> = 249) | | Current students (<i>n</i> = 64) | |
|---|---------|-----------------------------------|-----------|---|-----------|--------------------------------------|-----------|
| | | <i>M</i> | <i>SD</i> | <i>M</i> | <i>SD</i> | <i>M</i> | <i>SD</i> |
| Pull factors | | 4.12 | 0.70 | 4.04 | 0.73 | 4.40 | 0.51 |
| Experiencing foreign cultures | .818 | 4.02 | 0.94 | 3.89 | 0.95 | 4.52 | 0.69 |
| Obtaining international experience | .794 | 4.19 | 0.93 | 4.08 | 0.96 | 4.66 | 0.60 |
| Establishing relationships with international friends | .763 | 3.87 | 1.00 | 3.82 | 1.03 | 4.03 | 0.84 |
| Improving foreign language competence | .699 | 4.23 | 0.94 | 4.24 | 0.96 | 4.20 | 0.89 |
| Improving chances of employment internationally | .652 | 4.30 | 0.96 | 4.27 | 1.01 | 4.44 | 0.75 |
| Pursuing foreign educational values | .651 | 4.08 | 0.97 | 3.96 | 1.00 | 4.55 | 0.69 |
| Push factors | | 2.84 | 0.78 | 2.80 | 0.80 | 2.98 | 0.67 |
| Competitive entry into Vietnamese universities | .715 | 2.35 | 1.16 | 2.45 | 1.15 | 1.94 | 1.14 |
| Unavailability of a desired program | .690 | 2.44 | 1.20 | 2.40 | 1.18 | 2.59 | 1.28 |
| Avoidance of bad practices in Vietnamese education | .662 | 3.26 | 1.33 | 3.12 | 1.31 | 3.78 | 1.27 |
| Being asked to study abroad by family | .618 | 2.34 | 1.34 | 2.46 | 1.38 | 1.84 | 1.09 |
| Pursuit of immigration opportunities | .588 | 3.20 | 1.21 | 3.10 | 1.18 | 3.56 | 1.28 |
| Poor educational quality in Vietnam | .502 | 3.46 | 1.13 | 3.28 | 1.10 | 4.16 | 0.93 |

Independent samples *t*-test results showed that male students' decision to study abroad was influenced by push factors more significantly than female students' decision to study abroad, $t(311) = 3.37, p = 0.00, MD = 0.33$. At the same time, the decision of female students was influenced by pull factors more significantly than the decision of male students, $t(137.17) = -2.57, p = 0.01, MD = 0.24$.

Independent samples *t*-test results also indicated that although push factors influenced the decision to study abroad of current students more than that of prospective students, the difference was insignificant, $t(137.70) = -1.80$, $p = 0.07$, $MD = 0.18$. The results also showed that pull factors influenced the study motivation of current students ($M = 4.40$, $SD = 0.51$) significantly more than the study motivation of prospective students ($M = 4.04$, $SD = 0.73$), $t(137.73) = -4.53$, $p = 0.00$, $MD = 0.35$.

Return or Stay Upon Graduation?

Data collected in the first phase of the study showed that 43 out of the 55 interviewed students (78.1%) would like to return home upon graduation, 10 (18.2%) would like to stay in the host country, and two (3.7%) students had not made up their minds. Reasons for return included developing the country and taking responsibility for caring for parents. Reasons for staying were to gain international work experience or to fulfill parents' wishes. Although the findings resulted from a small sample size and imbalance between participants who wanted to stay and those who wanted to return home upon graduation, they were consistent with the findings in the second stage, which are reported in the following section.

In the second phase, students' decisions to return or remain in the host country were better reflected in the data. Generally, out of the 313 participants, 96 (30.7%) reported their intention to return to their home country, 78 (24.9%) were unsure, 98 (31.3%) were considering staying abroad temporarily, and 41 (13.1%) wanted to seek permanent residency overseas upon graduation. Regarding gender, out of the 87 male participants, 28 (32.2%) reported their intention to return, 30 (34.5%) reported their intention to stay (12.6% with permanent visas and 21.8% with temporary visas), and the remaining 29 (33.3%) were unsure. Out of the 226 female participants, 72 (31.9%) reported their intention to return, 105 (46.4%) reported their intention to stay (11.5% permanently and 34.9% temporarily), and 49 (21.7%) had not made up their minds. These percentages showed that females are more likely to stay in the host country than males, which is consistent with GÜngör and Tansel's (2014) findings.

The analysis showed that there were differences in the immigration intentions between groups of prospective and current Vietnamese international students. Among the 249 prospective students, 85 (34.1%) planned to return, 71 (28.5%) were unsure, and the remaining 93 (37.3%) had intentions to immigrate (8.8% preferred to immigrate permanently, and 28.5% preferred to stay in the host country temporarily and then return to the home country). Among the 64 current students, the percentage who had intentions to immigrate was much higher, with 42.2% reporting their intention to immigrate temporarily (27 students) and 25% to immigrate permanently (19 students). Participants with intentions to return or those who were unsure were low in number: 21.9% (11 students) and 10.9% (7 students), respectively. These results suggest that international students' immigration intention may increase after they have been in the host country.

Table 2: Participants' Intentions Regarding Mobility upon Graduation (Second Phase)

| Intention | All (N = 313) | Study status | | Gender | |
|-------------------------|---------------------|--------------------------------------|---------------------------------|------------------|------------------------|
| | | Prospective students (n = 249) | Current students (n = 64) | Male (n = 87) | Female (n = 226) |
| Return home immediately | 30.7% | 34.1% | 10.9% | 32.2% | 31.9% |
| Unsure | 24.9% | 28.5% | 21.9% | 33.3% | 21.7% |
| Stay temporarily | 31.3% | 28.5% | 42.2% | 21.8% | 34.9% |
| Stay permanently | 13.1% | 8.8% | 25.0% | 12.6% | 11.5% |

Ninety-six participants who intended to return explained the reasons behind their intention. The summative content analysis approach showed that return intention was triggered by 10 factors, eight of which were associated with the home country and the other two with the host country (Table 3). The five factors mentioned the most by the participants were:

- *Family ties and obligations.* Of the participants in this group, 40.6% stated that they wanted to live near their family or that they wished to take responsibility for taking care of their parents. Some reported that they had to return to reunite with their spouses and children or to get married.
- *Developing the home country.* More than two-thirds of the participants (39.6%) explained that they were Vietnamese, so they had the responsibility to develop their nation. They considered it a matter of pride and viewed their return to their home as a sign of their loyalty to their country. Some participants wrote that they disliked the idea of developing a foreign country.
- *Work culture in the home country.* Many of the participants (14.6%) wrote that they returned because they felt more comfortable with the work culture in Vietnam. In their view, the work environment there was less hectic, and they felt more engaged.
- *Familiarity with the culture/lifestyle of the home country.* This factor was mentioned by 10.4% of the respondents. In their view, they were born in Vietnam and were familiar with the language culture, customs, and traditions of the country. Therefore, returning to the place where they felt a sense of belonging was natural.
- *Social life in the home country.* This factor was mentioned by 7.3% of the respondents. They stated that they had a solid social network back in the home country, and they needed to maintain it by returning. A few of them felt that it was easier and more comfortable to socialize with people of the same background.

In addition to the mentioned factors, the respondents explained that they wanted to return to the home country because they had signed a contract with the sponsors of

their studies (6.2%), because they did not like the culture of the host country (2.1%), or because they realized that they would face unemployment or discrimination in the host country (1.0%). Some of the participants also acknowledged that with foreign credentials, they would have better employment prospects (3.1%) or that they would have better advantages for personal and business development (4.1%) in the home country. A small percentage of participants wanted to return because of their inability to adapt to the host country's culture (2.1%) or because of their fear of discrimination (1.0%).

One hundred and sixteen out of the 135 participants who intended to immigrate explained the reasons behind their intentions. The summative content analysis approach showed that Vietnamese students' intentions for immigration were influenced by eight factors (Table 3). Below are the five most frequently mentioned factors:

- *Obtaining international work experience.* More than half of the respondents of this group (58.6%) revealed that they wanted to immigrate to obtain international work experience. For those who were considering temporary immigration, having international work experience was viewed as a precursor for career development when they returned to their home country.
- *High income in the host country.* A high salary rate for jobs in the host country was reported to attract 17.2% of the respondents in this group to immigration upon graduation. They explained that the higher salary would help them obtain better living conditions and support their family back home. A number of respondents wrote that they needed to work in the host country upon graduation to make back the amount that they and their families had invested in their international education.
- *Work conditions in the host country.* About 13.8% of the respondents suggested that they wanted to stay because of the good work conditions in the host country. They also acknowledged that their work style fit better with the work culture in the host country.
- *Opportunities for personal development in the host country.* Almost 13% of the respondents felt that if they stayed in the host country, they would have more opportunities to develop their skills and nurture their dreams, and they would enjoy more freedom compared with the home country.
- *Quality of life in the host country.* About 9.5% of the respondents suggested that their immigration intentions stemmed from their recognition of the quality of life in the host country. In their report, issues such as sanity, security, living environment, and living standards in the home country were mentioned as triggers for their intention to immigrate.

Although not very influential, factors such as “intolerance with cultural and social practices in the home country” (2.6%), “social life in the host country” (1.7%), and “culture of the host country” (3.4%) were reported to have contributed to their immigration intentions upon graduation.

Table 3: Factors Influencing Participants' Intentions to Return or Immigrate (Second Phase)

| Factors | Frequency | Percentage |
|---|-----------|------------|
| Intention to return | | |
| <i>n</i> = 96 | | |
| Family ties and obligations | 39 | 40.6 |
| Developing the home country | 38 | 39.6 |
| Work culture in the home country | 14 | 14.6 |
| Familiarity with the culture/lifestyle of the home country | 10 | 10.4 |
| Social life in the home country | 7 | 7.3 |
| Work obligation in the home country | 6 | 6.2 |
| Better opportunities for personal and professional development at home | 4 | 4.1 |
| Better employment prospects in the home country | 3 | 3.1 |
| Inability to adapt to the culture in the host country | 2 | 2.1 |
| Disadvantaged living conditions in the host country | 1 | 1.0 |
| Intention to stay | | |
| <i>n</i> = 116 | | |
| Obtaining international work experience | 68 | 58.6 |
| High income in the host country | 20 | 17.2 |
| Work conditions in the host country | 16 | 13.8 |
| Opportunities for personal development in the host country | 15 | 12.9 |
| Quality of life in the host country | 11 | 9.5 |
| Culture of the host country | 4 | 3.4 |
| Intolerance of negative cultural and social practices in the home country | 3 | 2.6 |
| Social network in the host country | 2 | 1.7 |

DISCUSSION

This study identified 12 factors that motivated Vietnamese students to pursue international education abroad and 18 factors that affected their intentions to stay in the host country or return to their home country upon graduation. This section will further discuss the findings in association with the socioeconomic, cultural, and political issues of Vietnam and relevant literature in the field of education.

All 12 motivational factors identified in this study are consistent with the existing literature (e.g., English et al., 2016; Liu & Morgan, 2016; Nguyen, 2013). Pull factors appeared to influence Vietnamese students' decision to study abroad more strongly than push factors did. Among the pull factors, those related to international career development ($M = 4.30, SD = 0.96$), improvement of foreign language competence ($M = 4.23, SD = 0.94$), and international experience ($M = 4.19, SD = 0.93$) appeared to influence students' decision the most. Push factors affected students' decision moderately and varied greatly between students. The majority of push factors denoted the negative characteristics and practices of the local higher education system, some of which were reported in Nguyen (2013). All of these suggest that the students, to some extent, were aware of the determinants of their employability and career

advancement, and therefore, pursuing international education was one of their strategies. This can partially explain why many international graduates are economically successful in their home and host countries, as evidenced in previous studies (e.g., Chellaraj et al., 2005)

In particular, pursuit of immigration opportunities ($M = 3.20$, $SD = 1.21$) was ranked ninth out of the 12 motivations and was correlated the most with the factor of “being asked to study abroad by my family” ($n = 313$, $r = 0.35$, $p = 0.00$). This indicates that pursuit of immigration was not the primary purpose of Vietnamese students, and in many cases, this depended on the wishes of their family, just like in the case of their Chinese counterparts (Liu & Morgan, 2016). This also reflects the current socioeconomic status and culture of many Vietnamese families in Vietnam: Rich families send their children abroad to obtain better quality education, and then the latter come back to continue their family business. This provides them with better advantages than staying in the host country and starting from scratch.

Moreover, this study found that not all Vietnamese international students want to remain in the host country upon graduation. Several factors were identified to influence their intentions to return or stay. For those who choose to return, family-related issues and desire for building their home country were the two main determinants of their intentions. Vietnam is a country with a Confucian tradition, in which family obligations are considered the standard for measuring one’s morals and success (Tingvold, Middelthon, Allen, & Hauff, 2012). Therefore, in most cases, family—both immediate and extended families—becomes the first priority in the decision-making process of people in the country. Similarly, Confucian and socialist educational values appeared to influence participants’ intentions because they promote “the love of nation, community and family” in each student (George, 2010, p. 42). From a young age, students are taught that being loyal and developing the nation is the responsibility of every citizen. Likewise, Vietnam’s intensive socialist political education often makes many people believe that if they leave Vietnam to live in other countries, they are not patriotic or they are brainwashed by capitalist ideology. Therefore, such ingrained educational ideologies may have significantly hindered the immigration intentions of many international students. Moreover, familiarity with Vietnamese sociocultural practices and attachment to their social network can also pull international graduates back to the home countries. This is natural because people feel more comfortable living in a place they are accustomed to.

For those who choose to immigrate (43.4%, including 31.3% temporary immigration), international work experience, work conditions, and high incomes in the host country strongly contribute to their intentions. Together with the strong influence of pull motivations above, these findings further confirm that international students’ top concern is to develop their employability advantage. In this globalized world, having international work experience is an advantage in the increasingly competitive labor market. Similarly, pursuing international education is a costly investment for students from developing countries; therefore, they would need to earn back, which they would not have been able to do in their developing home country as noted in Bijwaard and Wang (2016). A better quality of life, better work conditions, and better career development opportunities undeniably attract international

graduates. However, this does not mean that international graduates intend to steal jobs or social welfare from host countries; rather, they have to compete for jobs and work and contribute to the socioeconomic and cultural development of the host country through taxes, ideas, patents, or intellectual work. It should also be noted that among these participants, many plan to return to the home country after a certain point in their life. However, they can continue to benefit the host country by disseminating their culture and fostering economic cooperation between the two countries. This has been shown in recent brain circulation studies (e.g., Mok & Han, 2016; Tian, 2016).

It was also revealed that participants' intentions, regardless of whether they choose to stay or return, were affected by their individual experiences with social, cultural, and work practices in the home and the host country as well as by how they could fit in with these practices. Those who chose to return often referred to their familiarity or comfort with the cultural, social, and work practices back home and criticized the negative aspects of the social and professional life in the host country. Meanwhile, their counterparts who chose to immigrate showed intolerance for the negative social, cultural, and work practices back home and preferred the practices in the host country. However, this study suggested that immigration intentions might grow when international students have arrived in and adapted to life in the host country. The evidence for this claim is that the percentage of current students who wanted to immigrate was almost double that of prospective students (67.2% versus 37.3%). This could be because prospective students were still uncertain about and had no authentic exposure to life in the host country yet. The claim, however, should be examined further and confirmed by a longitudinal study using the same international student cohort.

It should also be noted that because it used nonprobability samples and was exploratory in nature, this study might have produced findings that are true for the study participants but may not be for all international students. Future studies should use the probability sampling technique to collect data from a larger sample size and achieve a better balance between current and prospective international students as well as male and female students. That way, the findings will become more robust and better reflect the reality of the research issues. Additionally, the relationship between international students' motivations for studying abroad and their immigration intentions should be determined using longitudinal quantitative analyses. This will provide better insights into the prediction of international students' immigration intention.

CONCLUSIONS

In short, despite its limitations, this exploratory study found that international students were motivated by several factors to pursue international education overseas. The study also indicated that not all of the students were immigration hunters; many were willing to return their home for socioeconomic, cultural, and political reasons. Therefore, the fear that international students arrive in a host country to seek immigration opportunities is biased, especially when the host country has the power to adjust its policies regarding international students (e.g., Spinks, 2016).

Because host institutions and countries sell their education as an expensive good, it is recommended that they take responsibility for international students'/customers' employment outcomes that are in line with that price of good (Vuori, 2013). In particular, host institutions should responsibly train international students in relevant knowledge, skills, and attributes for work and life. Host countries should offer students who want to obtain international work experience post-study visas to fulfill their aspirations. Thus, if international graduates can successfully compete with local citizens for jobs, they deserve respect for their talent and should be allowed to work in a positive and hatred-free work environment so that they can contribute to the host country's socioeconomic development and their own personal growth.

Overall, international students should be treated with fairness rather than making them victims of the misconception that they are constantly seeking permanent residency (Tran & Vu, 2016) because they bring major opportunities to their host countries and institutions. Restricting or rejecting international students from one country will allow another country to gain these potential labor forces, especially when more and more countries are offering international education (Lee & King, 2016).

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