

## **The Southern World as a Destination of International Students: an Analysis of 50 Tertiary Education Institutions in Vietnam**

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*Traditionally, students from the Southern world tend to cross their national borders to study abroad. However, in recent times, we have observed a trend in which more and more students, both full-time and short-term, select Southern countries as destinations for overseas education. This paper contributes to the sparse literature on the above phenomenon, examining the case of Vietnam. We surveyed 50 universities and colleges about their international student profiles (including statistics and nationalities) and their strategies for attracting international students. The findings of this study provide implications for Vietnam's policymakers and university/college leaders and other Southern countries when implementing the internationalization of tertiary education.*

*Keywords: international student, student mobility, internationalization, North-South student mobility, South-South student mobility, Vietnam*

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**Acknowledgement:** This research is funded by the Vietnam National Foundation for Science and Technology Development (NAFOSTED) under the National Research Grant No. 502.02-2019.22.

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## 1. Introduction

International student mobility has been regarded as a global phenomenon happening to tertiary education across the world in recent decades (Chan, 2012; Lane, 2014). Traditionally, international students refer to those who leave their homeland to undertake education, work placement or study tour abroad for a certain time period (Sussex Centre for Migration Research, 2004), move either between developed countries or from developing to developed countries (Cummings, 1984; Riemsdijk & Wang, 2017). However, in recent time, there have been appeared some new patterns of student mobility: between developing countries or from developed to developing countries (Chan, 2012; Riemsdijk & Wang, 2017).

Vietnam, like many other developing countries within Asia, is regarded primarily as a sending country of international students instead of a hosting one (H.-H. Pham & S. Lai, 2016; Pham et al., 2019). UNESCO (2020) indicated that in 2017, the number of Vietnamese tertiary education students studying abroad was more than 94,000, equating to 3.6% of the total domestic tertiary enrolment in Vietnam. However, evidence has also shown that Vietnamese tertiary education institutions have now recruited some small but increasing number of international students. In 2017, 4,162 international students came to Vietnam for academic purposes, an increase of 27.7% compared to the respective figure in 2010 (3,260 international students), according to UNESCO (2020).

To the best of our knowledge, no prior studies have selected international students in Vietnam and relevant issues as a subject for investigation. Previous studies mainly chose Vietnamese international students' topics instead of international students' experiences in Vietnam (Le, 2014; C. Nguyen, 2013; H.-H. Pham & S. Lai, 2016; Pham et al., 2019). This paper aims to identify the characteristics of Vietnam's tertiary education institutions that have already succeeded in recruiting international students, based on a survey of 50 Vietnamese universities and colleges. Specifically, this paper aims to answer two research questions as follows:

- (i) What is the current status of international students, including statistics and nationalities, in tertiary education institutions in Vietnam?
- (ii) Which strategies are being adopted by Vietnamese tertiary education institutions to attract international students?

## 2. Recent Trends of International Student Mobility in Asia

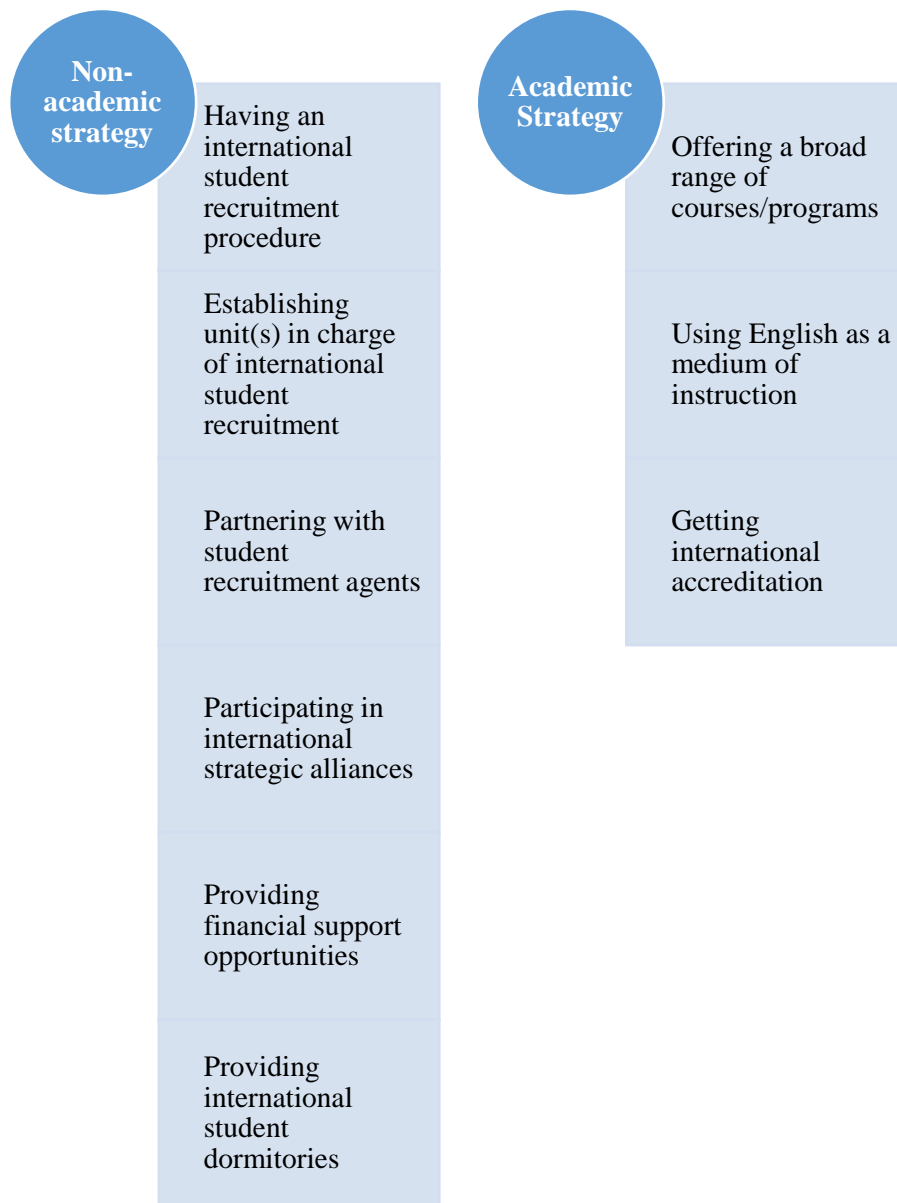
Across the world, tertiary education institutions, in cooperation with their governments, are attempting to recruit international students (Lane, 2014). Several factors drive tertiary education providers in implementing such plans. First, international students bring an additional income flow for host universities and colleges (Hughes, 2019; Pham, 2018a). This has become crucial, given the fact that the function of tertiary education has transitioned from a public good to a commercial service sector, referred to as a move “from aid to trade” (Harman, 2004). Second,

international students can bring prestige and reputation to tertiary education institutions since many renowned university ranking systems (e.g., QS, THE) are using international students as critical indicators (QS, 2020a; Sowter, 2008). Third, international students are also considered a source of future highly-qualified human resources for their host countries (Reinold, 2018), especially in Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) majors. As Ewing (2017) reported, in 2015, for every 100 high-skilled STEM workers in the US, 25 were foreign-born; many of whom used to be international students.

Prior to the 2000s, all Asian countries, except Japan, were regarded as sources of international students rather than recipients. The latest data obtained from UNESCO (2020) shows a shifting picture compared to what was observed previously. The overall population of international students and their respective market share in Asia increased considerably from 2010-2017. Specifically, the total number of international students in this region in 2017 was 2,306,502, which implied an increase of 833,436 compared to 2010. With regard to market share, the share of international students of the Eastern and South-eastern Asian region in 2017 was 26.8%, which represented an increase of 0.1 percentage points compared to 2010. Malaysia is one of the countries putting enormous efforts into enrolling international students; it is planning to have 250,000 international students by 2025 and is applying various strategies to attract them (Mok et al., 2016). The Malaysian government and universities have used English as a medium of instruction (EMI) (Too, 2017), provided short-term courses or exchange programs, and introduced competitive tuition fees as well as living costs (Ahmad & Buchanan, 2015).

### **3. Strategies to Attract International Students**

With increasing competition to recruit international students, universities and colleges across the world have implemented various strategies to appeal to international students. In this section, the key strategies are presented. As indicated in Figure 1, there are two main types of strategies: (i) Non-academic strategy and (ii) Academic strategy.



*Figure 1.* Successful strategies to attract international students of tertiary institutions.

### **3.1. Non-academic strategy**

#### **3.1.1. Having an international student recruitment procedure**

According to Bista (2016), the international student recruitment process is a vital tool for attracting international students to a specific education institution. A typical overseas student recruitment process consists of 8 steps (Vargas, 2019): (i) Defining requirements; (ii) Planning

marketing and communication activities; (iii) Working with marketing, accounting, and academic coordination departments; (iv) Screening and selecting the best applicants; (v) Assisting students with the visa application process; (vi) Taking care of the enrollment process; (vii) Integrating new students to the university/school, and (viii) Following up with students. Another study shows a similar procedure with fewer steps: (i) funding the recruitment process, (ii) developing an international recruitment team, (iii) creating targeted advertising related to university specialty programs, and (iv) creating a multicultural atmosphere (Onk & Joseph, 2017).

### **3.1.2. Establishing unit(s) in charge of international student recruitment**

Establishing an international student recruitment unit is considered one of the successful precursors for recruiting international students to tertiary education institutions (Onk & Joseph, 2017). For example, international recruitment units have returned an amount equal to about ten times the cost incurred by Canadian technology-based institutions in operating those offices (Cudmore, 2005), proving the importance of international student recruitment. More than 1,400 such programs exist both within and outside the US for Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) to partner with.

### **3.1.3. Partnering with student recruitment agents**

As the international student market is becoming increasingly competitive, universities across the world, even those in countries considered as traditional hosts, such as the UK and Australia, are increasingly relying on student recruitment agents to meet their recruitment goals (Raimo, 2012). For instance, the rate of international student enrollment through Nottingham University agents in the UK in 2011 was 25%. In Australia, the percentage of new international students recruited through agents in 2010 was 57.6% (Raimo, 2012).

### **3.1.4. Participating in international strategic alliances**

Along with the trend of internationalization, regional alliance among tertiary education institutions has become more pervasive (Anh, 2009). To succeed in internationalization, universities and colleges often find it necessary to collaborate with others (Sandstrom & Weimer, 2015), and such relationships have been considered a source of competitive advantage (Mazzarol, 1998).

Connected networks are not only regional but also global. *In Europe*, The Bologna Process, a very typical process, is one of the most important global alliance in tertiary education signed by 29 European countries (Anh, 2009; Crosier & Ruffio, 2009). *In Latin America*, some regional organizations in the field of tertiary education are the Unión de Universidades de América Latina Financiera (1949), the Convenio Andrés Bello (1949), Grupo Montevideo (1991), and the Central American Council on Accreditation-CCA (2004). *In Africa*, most international strategic alliances aim to harmonize regulatory frameworks and higher education

policies and energize academic mobility to improve circulation in the region. The Southern Africa Development Community (SADC), the African Higher Education Area (AHEA), and the African Development Fund (ADF) are the prominent regional organizations (Anh, 2009).

### **3.1.5. Providing financial support opportunities**

Available scholarships or financial incentives are the second criterion that international students look at when choosing an educational institution for their overseas study purposes (QS, 2019). Scholarships have long been defined as a vital tool for attracting international students to countries or educational institutions (Mathur, 2016). Annually, Australia's government and educational institutions provide international student scholarships, with a total value of about 500 million dollars (Mathur, 2016). To counter stiff global competition for international students, Japanese universities have supplied more scholarships to overseas students. Typically, the University of Tokyo's Global Science Course offers a 150,000 JP¥ (£1,000) monthly stipend and fully funded accommodation to talented international students (Stanislaus & Juul, 2018).

### **3.1.6. Providing international student dormitories**

Satisfaction with university dormitories is one of the significant aspects of higher education (Ning & Chen, 2016). Several tertiary institutions have invested in outstanding facilities for their international students.

Providing accommodation for international students, such as student dormitories, could improve their experience and enhance student retention rates (Onclin, 2014). For example, some universities in Japan, such as Meiji University's Global Village (MGV), have transformed their campuses, and built dormitories with social spaces and cafeterias for international students (Stanislaus & Juul, 2018). To keep up with the trend of globalization in education and competitive pressure among universities, the requirement for proper living conditions for international students increases with the improving quality of life (Song, 2016).

## **3.2. Academic strategy**

Academic matters always stand at the center of the internationalization of tertiary education (Kolster, 2014). Previous studies identified several strategies and measures employed by universities to attract international students.

### **3.2.1. Offering a broad range of courses/programs**

The ability to offer a wide variety of courses and programs is seen as a competitive advantage for tertiary education institutions (Mazzarol, 1998). Improvement and increased availability of higher education courses are the initial push factors that higher education policies can focus on (Becker & Kolster, 2012). For example, Peking University in China opened

summer school to appeal short-course international students from the UK (London School of Economics, University of Oxford, University of Cambridge), Australia (the Australian National University) and the UK (the University of California) (Sharma, 2014).

### **3.2.2. Using English as a medium of instruction**

English-medium instruction has been considered one of the most mainstream techniques used by non-English-speaking nations to internationalize their education systems (Coleman, 2006). The Netherlands is one of the highest-profile countries employing this strategy. The number of degree programs offered in English by Dutch universities is higher than ever compared with continental European countries. It was accounted in 2010-2011 that over 50% of undergraduate and master's programs in Dutch universities are delivered in English. Specifically, Dutch universities provided 1,500 and more international English-taught programs (Becker & Kolster, 2012). According to Kirkpatrick (2017), the emerging wave of using English as the medium of instruction to attract international students also occurred to universities in the Asia Pacific region. For example, between 2010 and 2018, the number of universities in China offering English-taught programs increased more than three-fold (Yang & Wit, 2019).

### **3.2.3. Getting international accreditation**

The quality of teaching is the most important factor for international students when choosing a university to achieve their overseas study goals (QS, 2019). For example, international students select the US as their destination for education purpose thanks to the country's prestige in higher education quality, which is reflected through the high rankings of the US's universities in international leagues, small class sizes, renowned professors, advanced technology and research competencies (studyportals, 2020). Accreditation helps tertiary education institutions to achieve numerous partnerships and attract outside funding (Fulbright, 2020).

## **4. Overview of the Vietnamese Tertiary Education**

Over the past three decades, the education system in Vietnam, especially the tertiary education system, has witnessed significant changes. The first change was the appearance of massification. In 1987, there were only 101 public tertiary education institutions, no private institutions, and 133,000 students (Trines, 2017). In 2018, there were 226 public tertiary education institutions, 70 private institutions, and 1,772,137 students (Ministry of Education and Training, 2020). The second one is the changing function of Vietnamese universities and colleges. In the past, universities and colleges were regarded as human resource training units for the state sector; nowadays, they have become the backbone of the Vietnamese economy, providing human resources for the country's industries (T. L. H. Nguyen, 2013). In addition, universities and colleges' research functions have also changed significantly, since research has become one of their essential roles in conjunction with the traditional purpose of teaching (T. L. H. Nguyen, 2013).

However, the tertiary education sector in Vietnam still faces many challenges. The first challenge is that the quality of Vietnamese universities has not yet met the labor market needs or the needs of students and their families (Tran, 2015). In fact, in 2018, the unemployment rate in Vietnam was 2.19% (GSO, 2020). Also, as mentioned above, the proportion of students choosing to study abroad to complete their academic path in 2018 was 94,662, accounting for 3.6% of the total tertiary enrollment in Vietnam. The second challenge is that tertiary education institutions' research performance in Vietnam is still modest (Hien, 2010; Nguyen & Pham, 2011; T. Tran et al., 2020). Although in recent years, the Vietnamese tertiary education system has made innovations, in 2018, the number of publications internationally indexed for Vietnam was 14,877 (6,040 in Clarivate Web of Science and 8,837 in Scimago/Scopus) (Tran et al., 2020). Among six significant ASEAN (i.e., Malaysia, The Philippines, Indonesia, Singapore, Thailand, and Vietnam), the performance of Vietnam only exceeded the Philippines in recent years and lagged behind the other four countries (Tran et al., 2020).

To improve the quality of higher education, the Vietnamese government has implemented several initiatives on internationalization of higher education under Resolution 14/2005/NQ-CP in 2005 (The Vietnamese Government, 2005), also known as the Higher Education Reform Agenda (HERA) (Nghị & London, 2018). There were two main new initiatives introduced by the Vietnamese government. The first was renovation of undergraduate programs: the Ministry of Education and Training launched a project, the so-called Advanced Development program, in 2008. The program aimed to set up about 30 EMI undergraduate courses, developing a curriculum and syllabus with reference to world-class universities (Pham, 2011). The second was the reform of research activities that set new standards for scientists and set requirements for university lecturers to have papers published in internationally indexed journals (e.g., Clarivate WOS or Scopus) (The Vietnamese Government, 2005). It is apparent that the Vietnamese tertiary education system's current internationalization has only been considered a tool, not a goal (Nghị & London, 2018). As a result, the outcomes of attracting international students to Vietnam are still relatively lackluster (Pham, 2011). However, as mentioned previously, anecdotal evidence can be found in some Vietnamese tertiary education institutions showing that they have made enormous efforts to recruit international students (Pham, 2011). This paper will focus on the results of those tertiary education institutions.

## **5. The Present Study**

### **5.1. Data collection**

To date, Vietnam has had no unified national source of information about international students, unlike other countries such as Taiwan (i.e., Data from Education Statistics at <https://english.moe.gov.tw/cp-86-18943-e698b-1.html>) or Australia (i.e., Data from Higher Education Statistics at <https://www.education.gov.au/student-data>). Thus, the information about Vietnam's tertiary education system is dislocated and inadequate (ADB, 2010). Therefore, we



opted to use primary data. A survey was delivered via email to divisions in charge of international affairs or academic affairs at 100 tertiary education institutions across Vietnam in February 2019. After 11 months, by December 2019, 60 had been returned.

We rejected any questionnaires with incomplete answers. The number of valid returned questionnaires was 50, which corresponds to a response rate of 50%.

## 5.2. Questionnaires

The questionnaires asked the university's/college's representatives to provide information relating to international students at their institutions. Specifically, three groups of questions were presented to the respondents, including: (i) items regarding to their most recent statistics on full-time and part-time international students (2015-2017); (ii) items regarding the nationalities of international students; and (iii) items relating to the strategies adopted by the respective university/college to recruit international students.

## 6. Results

### 6.1. The basic profile of 50 surveyed tertiary education institutions

Of the 50 surveyed institutions, 44 were universities (88%) and the other six institutions were 3-year colleges (12%). Regarding location, 26 (52%) were located in the North of Vietnam, 15 (30%) in the Central area and 9 (18%) in the South.

In terms of the student population, 18 tertiary education institutions (36%) that participated in this study had fewer than 4,999 students. This cluster of 18 institutions with a student population below 4,999-student was the largest portion of the 50 selected institutions. This was followed by 11 institutions (22%) with student populations ranging between 5,000 and 9,999 students; 10 institutions (20%) with student populations ranging between 10,000 and 14,999 students; 2 institutions (4%) with student populations ranging between 15,000 and 19,999 students; and 9 institutions (18%) with student populations exceeding 20,000 students.

Table 1

*The basic profile of surveyed institutions*

	Characteristic	Number of institutions	Percentage
Level	University	44	88%
	College	6	12%
Student population	20,000 or above	9	18%
	15,000-19,999	2	4%
	10,000-14,999	10	20%
	5,000-9,999	11	22%
	1-4,999	18	36%
Location	North	26	52%

Central	15	30%
South	9	18%

## 6.2. Statistics relating to international students in 50 surveyed tertiary education institutions

Our findings revealed that the number of international students coming to Vietnam had gradually grown from 2015 to 2017. On average, the 50 surveyed institutions each hosted 89 international students (both full-time and part-time) in 2015. The figure increased by 24.1% to 110 in 2016. Subsequently, the figure continued to grow to 122 in 2017, which was an increase of 10.9%. However, a closer look at the types of international students showed two contrasting patterns between full-time and part-time international students. While the growth in full-time international students has been continuous over the period 2015-2017 (from 3677 in 2015 to 4489 in 2016 and 5108 in 2017), the trend for part-time international students has reversed: an increase from 765 in 2015 to 1022 in 2016; and then, a slight decrease from 1022 in 2016 to 1002 in 2017.

Full-time international students contribute on average 1.1% (SD = 0.1) of the total student enrollments at the 50 surveyed institutions. Three outlier cases, with much higher numbers of international students, had 34.3%, 33.0%, and 17.8% respectively. For the other 47 institutions, the institution with the highest percentage of international students had only 6.6%; and there were 10 institutions with no full-time international students at all from 2015-2017.

## 6.3. Nationalities of international students in 50 surveyed tertiary education institutions

For the 50 tertiary education institutions participating in this study, the majority of full-time international students in Vietnam came from other Asian countries. Specifically, among 28 nationalities of full-time international students in Vietnam, 21 (or 75%) were Asian and only 7 (or 25%) were non-Asian (see Table 2).

A closer look at the data revealed that of the countries sending international students to Vietnam, Laos was the biggest market with 39/50 surveyed institutions having hosted Laotian students. More specifically, there were 18 institutions only recruiting students from Laos. Apart from Laos, Cambodia was also a significant sender of international students to Vietnam, as we found Cambodian students at 14/50 surveyed institutions and 3 of those 14 institutions only recruited students from Cambodia.

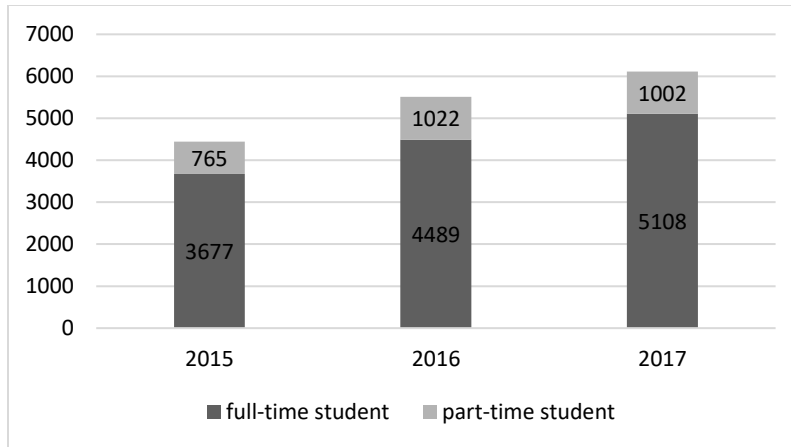


Figure 2. The Number of International Students in Vietnam for 50 Surveyed Tertiary Education Institutions between 2015-2017.

Compared to full-time international students, there were more non-Asian short-term international students. Specifically, among 30 nationalities of short-term international students in Vietnam, 17 (or 56.7 %) were non-Asian, while the other 13 (or 43.3%) were Asian (see Table 2). Among the non-Asian countries sending part-time international students, there were several developed economies (16/17 countries, Morocco being the only developing country). This figure contrasts with the figures for non-Asian countries sending full-time international students (only one out of seven was a developed economy) (see Table 2).

Table 2

*Nationality of International Students Enrolled at 50 Surveyed Institutions between 2015-2017*

Type of student	Asian versus Non-Asian Countries	
	Asian countries	Non-Asian countries
Full-time	Laos, Cambodia, Mongolia, China, Thailand, South Korea, Japan, Philippines, Taiwan ROC, Myanmar, Indonesia, Malaysia, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Tajikistan, Armenia, North Korea, Palestine, Philippines, Pakistan, Turkey (21 countries)	Mozambique, Sweden, Sudan, Congo, Morocco, Angola, France (7 countries)
Part-time	Laos, South Korea, Indonesia, Myanmar, Cambodia, Malaysia, China, Japan, Thailand, Mongolia, Philippines, Taiwan ROC, Brunei (13 countries)	Germany, Finland, Czech, England, France, Netherlands, Spain, Hungary, Canada, Italy, Australia, Sweden, Poland, the USA, Denmark, Morocco, Austria (17 countries)

#### 6.4. Strategies Adopted by Vietnamese Tertiary Education Institutions to Attract International students

Like many other tertiary education institutions across the world, universities and colleges in Vietnam have adopted several strategies in order to appeal to both full-time and part-time international students. As shown in Table 3, providing financial support such as scholarships or loans was the most commonly adopted strategy by the 50 surveyed institutions (42/50 or 84%) in this study. This was followed by using English as a medium of instruction (32/50 or 64%), and establishing unit(s) in charge of international student recruitment (27/50 or 54%). The remaining six strategies, including having an international student recruitment procedure; providing international student dormitories; participating in international strategic alliances; getting international accreditation; offering a broad range of courses/programs; and partnering with student recruitment agents, which received less attention from the surveyed Vietnamese universities and colleges, are presented in Table 3.

Table 3

*Strategies Adopted by Vietnamese Tertiary Education Institutions to Attract International Students*

<i>Strategy</i>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>	<b>Order of preference</b>
<i>Non-academic strategy</i>			
<i>Having an international student recruitment procedure</i>	27/50	54%	4
<i>Establishing unit(s) in charge of international student recruitment</i>	29/50	58%	3
<i>Partnering with student recruitment agents</i>	8/50	16%	9
<i>Participating in international strategic alliances</i>	24/50	48%	6
<i>Providing financial support opportunities</i>	42/50	84%	1
<i>Providing international student dormitories</i>	26/50	52%	5
<i>Academic Strategy</i>			
<i>Offering a broad range of courses/programs</i>	15/50	30%	8
<i>Using English as a medium of instruction</i>	32/50	64%	2
<i>Getting international accreditation</i>	16/50	32%	7

#### 7. Discussion and Conclusion

## 7.1. Discussion

In recent decades, the number of international students going to Asia has increased gradually (Chan, 2012; Pham, 2018b). To a greater or lesser extent, Asia has become a new hub for international students. However, previous studies have mainly focused on the more developed countries within the region, such as China (Ma & Zhao, 2018) Hong Kong (Yu & Wright, 2017), Taiwan (Lau & Lin, 2017), and Malaysia (Singh & Jack, 2018) rather than developing countries such as Vietnam. To the best of our knowledge, our study is the first to investigate international students in Vietnam.

Based on the results of a survey of 50 tertiary education institutions, we explored the current status of international students in Vietnam in terms of actual numbers and nationalities, between 2015 and 2017. We also revealed a number of strategies adopted by Vietnamese universities and colleges to attract international students.

*With regard to the statistics relating to international students in Vietnam*, our findings revealed that the number of full-time international students has increased gradually from 2015-2017: from 3677 (2015) to 5108 (2017). Interestingly, the numbers obtained from our 50 surveyed institutions were larger than the reported numbers for the whole of Vietnam. Specifically, according to UNESCO (2020a), the total number of full-time international students in Vietnam in 2017 was 4,162 (much smaller than the 5,108 from our partial survey). This finding reflects the immature level of Vietnamese tertiary education in terms of internationalization. The data on international students in Vietnam, as reported to UNESCO, may be incomplete and lower than the actual numbers. The immature level of Vietnamese tertiary education in terms of internationalization is also reflected in the low percentage of full-time international students in Vietnam in comparison to the total student enrollment. As mentioned previously, only 1.1% of the full-time students in our 50 surveyed universities/colleges were international. This figure is much lower than in neighboring countries such as Malaysia. According to UNESCO (2020a), the corresponding percentage in Malaysia in 2017 was 9.6%.

*With regard to the the nationality of international students*, the finding that Asian countries appear to be the most important sources of full-time international students is plausible. Given the low quality and reputation of its tertiary institutions, it is difficult for Vietnam to attract many full-time international students from outside the region. Our findings reflect what Chan (2012) called “intra-regional students”. Chan (2012) asserted that most full-time overseas students in Asia are intra-regional students rather than international ones since the majority of full-time overseas students in Asia come from neighboring countries within the region. The finding that Laos is the most important source of international students for Vietnamese tertiary education institutions is also understandable. Previous studies demonstrated that neighboring countries which share land or sea borders are often the most important sources of international students, especially in the early stages of internationalization (OECD, 2016). Our finding that the truly international students in Vietnam (i.e., those from other contingents) tend to be part-time rather than full-time is also plausible. Due to low levels of education quality

and reputation, it's easier for countries such as Vietnam to attract part-time international students rather than full-time ones (Chan, 2012). In Vietnam in recent times, one of the most high-profile part-time programs is the New Colombo Plan (NCP) funded by the Australian government (L. T. Tran et al., 2020).

***Regarding the strategies used by Vietnamese universities and colleges to attract international students***, our study revealed that key strategies found in the literature in other countries are also used by Vietnamese tertiary education institutions, but to different extents. Some, such as *providing financial support opportunities, using English as a medium of instruction or establishing unit(s) in charge of international student recruitment* are widely used by Vietnamese universities/colleges; however, others such as *Getting international accreditation, Offering a broad range of courses/programs* and *Partnering with student recruitment agents* are only adopted by a small proportion of institutions. This finding corroborates the immature level of Vietnamese tertiary education institutions in the international student sector. Being in the early stages of internationalization, Vietnamese universities/colleges have started to employ some but not all the common strategies for attracting international students.

## **7.2. Implications**

With no doubt, international students would bring several benefits identified at the outset of this paper for Vietnamese tertiary education institutions and the whole country, these are: additional income, enhanced prestige and reputation and future highly-qualified human resources. Thus, this study has several implications for stakeholders, including tertiary education institutions and the Vietnamese government.

First, as tertiary education institutions in Vietnam are striving to internationalize, recruiting international students both full-time and part-time is moving from a peripheral to a central position as a major objective. To this end, tertiary education institutions may redefine the “sub-market” of international students that they want to attract, in terms of nationality (Asian or non-Asian), and type (full-time or part-time). From our empirical findings, part-time international students from Asian countries (especially Asian countries that share land or sea borders such as Laos, Cambodia, China or The Philippines) may be an appropriate target for universities/colleges that are at the early stages of internationalization. To enhance the efficiency of the international student recruitment process, using strategies that have been widely adopted by institutions worldwide is recommended. For instance, as mentioned above, *partnering with student recruitment agents* should be used more by Vietnamese universities/colleges as it is widely acknowledged as an efficient strategy in other countries.

Second, Vietnamese government, both central and local, should cooperate with universities/colleges in internationalization in general and the recruitment of international students in particular. Previous studies (e.g., see H.-H. Pham and S. L. Lai (2016)) have asserted that internationalization of tertiary education will not be successful without close cooperation

between universities/colleges and governments. For instance, although *providing financial support opportunities* is recognized as one of the most important strategies in recruiting international students, not all universities/colleges have sufficient resources to offer financial supports. A shift in funding from government may be an appropriate intervention and act as the foundation of the internationalization of universities/colleges. In business terminology, this shift in funding may be regarded as a “promotion” cost paid by the government in order to support the country’s universities/colleges to export education by recruiting international students. For many countries worldwide, international students have become an important source of revenue and international education has become an export sector. In Vietnam, the most essential export sectors at present are electrical machinery and equipment (126.9 billion \$US in 2019), footwear (\$24.7 billion in 2019), and clothing and accessories (\$16.9 billion) (World's Top Exports, 2020). In the long run, international education may also become a significant export sector for Vietnam if the government and universities/colleges engage in relevant cooperation now.

### **7.3. Limitations and suggestions for future studies**

This paper has some caveats (Vuong, 2020). Since the surveyed data pool from 50 institutions is small, this paper only provides basic descriptive statistics. An inferencing model, which examines the impact of factors affecting the number of international students attending selected Vietnamese tertiary institutions, has not been constructed. Also, the imbalance between the number of institutions by region is significant due to the random distribution of the questionnaire. Moreover, although we carried out the survey during the COVID-19 pandemic, its effects on international student enrollments in Vietnamese tertiary institutions were not taken into account. Therefore, further studies could examine these issues to gain a better perspective on Vietnamese tertiary institutions' strategies for attracting more international students.

Recent analyses have painted a dark picture with regard to international students' mobility in the immediate future due to the COVID-19 pandemic (Fischer, 2020; ICEF Monitor, 2020; QS, 2020b). However, on the one hand, we argue that if the Vietnamese government and universities/colleges establish a serious plan for international tertiary education now, they may have a chance to make a breakthrough in the international student market in the future. As argued by Marginson (2020), Asian countries, including Vietnam, may have more appeal to international students thanks to their better recovery from the pandemic than many Western countries. On the other hand, the Vietnamese government and universities/colleges should be also aware of their disadvantages in recruiting international students in post COVID-19 period. For instance, students from the West would be less likely to choose Asian countries because COVID-19 aroused racism (Ng, 2020). Moreover, the emergence in anti-Asian racism in recent time seems to be relevant to the origins of COVID-19 as argued by Chung & Li (2020) and Lin (2020). That can make international students less interested in studying abroad in Asian countries in general and Vietnam in particular.

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