A Quest for International Curriculum Innovation and Change in Vietnam Higher Education Institutions

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Internationalization of curriculum has become an essential component of higher education.   One of the key driving forces of internationalization in higher education is to respond to the national, regional and international labor market demands, and the changing needs of the society.

Under this pressure, higher education institutions (HEIs) need to improve their academic and professional capacity to produce high quality human resources to meet the needs of the society and the demands of the labor markets. It embraces the improvement of knowledge, skills and attitudes of graduates, and students' preparedness by enhancing the academic curriculum. To help students living and working in a globalized world, HEIs need to consider developing their students' lifelong learning skills with international perspectives where the curriculum is seen as the "backbone of the internationalization process".

The Vietnam higher education renovation project for 2006 – 2020 calls for universities and colleges to develop international strategies and enhance the quality of education to produce highly qualified human resources to meet the competitiveness of both local and international markets. How can Vietnamese higher education institutions change or reform to meet the government's goals? What should the key strategy be for this resolution?

This paper focuses on (1) the context and the needs of internationalization of Vietnam higher education institutions basing on the government and institutional documents and practices; (2) theories on curriculum development and management; (3) good practices from other international curriculum innovation and (4) recommendations for internationalization of curriculum in Vietnam Higher Education Institutions.

Keyword: internationalization, international curriculum, curriculum innovation, good practices.

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Introduction

Internationalization has become global conversation over the years because it is widely accepted by academics and professionals, social requirements, and it has a significant impact on institutional income and of national economics interest. Besides, "institutions see internationalization as a means of rising in the rankings and enhancing institutional prestige and visibility" (Green, 2012).

In response to socio-economic development and World Trade Organization (WTO) integration, Vietnam has adopted national education development plans and strategies to meet the needs of the society and the demands of the labor markets.

Despite an increased interest in internationalization of curriculum over many the universities and countries around the world, there are very few studies have actually been conducted on the topic in Vietnam, especially from the perspective of curriculum development. Research on internationalizing the curriculum in Vietnamese educational setting is particularly rare. Few studies focused on international curriculum such as how to develop and manage an innovative international curriculum, reflecting appropriate knowledge, skills and attitudes for Vietnamese students in the global context (Nguyen at el, 2016).

This paper presents partly the result of the study about the current state and needs of internationalization of curriculum, including (1) the context and the needs of internationalization of Vietnam higher education institutions basing on the government and institutional documents and practices; (2) theories on curriculum development and management; (3) good practices from other international curriculum innovation and (4) recommendations for internationalization of curriculum in Vietnam Higher Education Institutions. The data were collected by analyzing related literatures, interviewing opinions from policy makers and administrators, surveying instructors and students in five Vietnam higher education institutions.

Context and Needs of Internationalization

In Higher Education Renovation Project for 2006 – 2020 period (Resolution 14/2005/NQ-CP, 2005), the overall objectives emphasized on fundamental changes in higher education quality and size; improving institutional and system competitiveness; enhancing higher education institutions responsive and operating efficiently within- the socialist-oriented market mechanism.

To achieve the above objectives, the universities, colleges and the entire higher education sub-sector need to focus on following resolutions: (a) reorganizing and completing the system of universities and colleges: their structures and scope; (b) renewal subject content, teaching methods and training procedures to improve quality of Bachelor, Master and Doctoral degree; (c) enhancing training for faculty members and educational managers; (d) developing science and technology; (e) increasing the financial supports from many other channels; (f) modernizing the management system in higher education; (g) focusing on international integration.

Secondly, Higher Education Law 2012 (Decision number 08/2012/QH13, dated on 02nd July, 2012) mentions three types of Higher Education Institutions, including state-owned public and private institutions and foreign – invested universities. In this framework, Higher Education Law also regulates the higher education institutions having autonomy and responsibility in developing, promulgating the curriculum at Bachelor, Master and Doctoral level in accordance to the national requirements.

Thirdly, the Education Strategic Development Plan 2011-2020 (Decision number 711/QĐ – TTg dated on 13/06/2012) included an analysis of the educational challenges in the current state of higher education, which include poor school facilities, learning, and teaching equipment as well as the weak capacity of teachers and school management staff. Therefore, to ride on the rapid economic growth and the globalization process, there is a need for higher performing education system to emphasize two strategic objectives: (1) to improve the educational system, (2) to produce highly qualified human resources equipped with critical thinking, creativity capacity, professional skills, language competences to meet the competition of both local and international markets. The Education Strategic Development Plan will be implemented in two phases:

- Phase 1 (2011 - 2015): improving the educational management, completing the national educational system, developing the national qualified framework, and implementing internal and external quality assurance.

- Phase 2 (2016 – 2020): reforming high school, vocational, higher education curricula, and improving educational quality.

Those above top national policies in education have begun to apply in institutional annual plans. Such efforts are implemented in the forms of developing the international strategy; improving the capacity in cooperation and competitiveness of universities with other foreign partners through different kinds of partnerships and MOUs; implementing teaching and learning foreign

language, especially in English; studying and implementing advanced programs that attract foreign lecturers and students; encouraging joint training programs; encouraging staff and student exchanges and "study abroad in Vietnam"; creating good opportunities to attract foreign investors and educational organizations to open prestige universities in Vietnam.

In this context, universities have actively expanded and established international relations and cooperation with an increasing number of partners in many forms such as establishing 100% foreign-funded education institutions or cooperating with foreign institutions on postgraduate and undergraduate training, vocational training, distance education, short-term training courses etc. With these cooperation activities, the number of overseas students who have studied and done research in Vietnam (under bilateral cooperation agreements and at their own cost) has significantly increased. According to data from the Ministry of Education (2012, 2016), nearly 200 joint programs are permitted (VIED, 2016) coming from various foreign partners such as University of Hawaii, Washington State University, University of Houston; Troy State University etc. The outbound students was very high, rising significantly over the year; reaching more than 100,000 students in 2012 (MOET, 2012), ranking Vietnam becomes second highest country in term of foreign students in the Southeast Asian region (UNESCO, 2013), eighth highest in the USA (Institute of International Education, 2013). According to the Global Education Digest 2007 (UNESCO, 2007), the number of inbound foreign students in Vietnam in 2005 was 2,053, of which 2,016 students were from East Asian and the Pacific countries. These numbers are predicted to increase because "Vietnam is an emerging center" of internationalization in Asia Pacific and ASEAN region (Albatch and Knight, 2011). Furthermore, hundreds of managers, teachers, and students went abroad on cooperated and exchange programs over decades, which propel the institutional and national internationalizing process to change faster.

In the process of internationalizing the curriculum in 2008, the government officially approved the project " Training by advanced programs at some Vietnamese universities in period 2008-2015", which focuses on technical trades, technology, natural sciences, business management, agriculture, architecture and construction, planning, biomedical engineering, law and social sciences. These advanced programs are designed and established curriculum by Vietnamese universities with reference to the curricula currently used at prestigious universities in the world, including their contents, teaching methods, organization and training management processes and are taught in English (MOET, 2008, p.3). The overall target of this project is to develop a number of specializations, faculties and universities to reach the regional and international education standards; implement and enhance the quality of programs of

Vietnam's higher education; endeavor to have some Vietnamese universities being ranked in the top 200 of the world universities by 2020 (MOET, 2008, p.2). Although there are many graduates who earned ~~their~~ good jobs from foreign companies, many universities shared that they met difficulties in student enrollment. Tuition fees was higher than the normal tuition rate by two times and the English proficiency of some Vietnamese teachers as well as textbooks were not good enough for teaching and learning. The allocation of time for invited foreign lecturers was often out of plan because it was difficult to invite them coming for the entire period. In reality, the foreign teachers just taught for 2-3 weeks and this could not guarantee the quality of education (Conference on Advanced Programs, 2016).

Since the national goals focus on reforming higher education curricula and improving the quality of education, the following concepts of curriculum development and curriculum management are considered as the primary sources to support administrators and lecturers to develop ~~the~~ international curriculum in Vietnam higher education institutions.

Curriculum Development and Management

There are many theories and perspectives to curriculum development. In 1940, Tyler's suggested four important steps, which are determining objectives, identify educational experiences, organize experiences, and evaluate purpose. Tomb and Tierney (2005) suggested a curriculum model with three parts including the context, the content and the form. The Backward design model was developed by Wiggins and Mc Tighe (2005) which emphasizes identifying desired results or intended learning outcomes, determining acceptable evidences and designing learning experiences and instructions. More recently, to adapt with the global workforce and personalized learning of students, competency-based approach was developed, focusing on mastery of knowledge and skills. Nodine (2015) proposed three important components to develop competency-based education including (1) establishing clearly competencies in intended learning outcomes of each subject, (2) assessing students' competencies through various actions and performance, and (3) focusing on flexible timeframe and personalized instructions. Wiles and Bondi (1979, 1984) mentioned that to manage a curriculum effectively, there are four important stages to focus on including analysis, design, implementation or management and evaluation.

The Curriculum management is fundamentally concerned with effective teaching and learning management. The process of curriculum management consists of managing what students are expected to learn, evaluating whether or not it was learned, and seeking ways to improve student learning. The

curriculum management consists of two major areas, curriculum development/review and assurance of learning (University of Central Arkansas, 2015).

Ideally, curriculum management is the process through which educators and administrators collaborate on the creation, development, design, review, approval, assessment, and refinement of curriculum to achieve the desired learning outcomes. It is also considered as a subsystem of educational management and as an interconnected activity in managerial and curricular dimensions. The dominant functions of curriculum management are conceptualization, planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation (Tirado, Barriga, 2016). Wiles and Bondi (1979, 1984) stated the responsibility of curriculum planners or managers are assisting others gaining the goals, assessing the status of programs, developing plans, identifying the priorities and evaluating the process to assure the curriculum being adaptability and accountability. The curriculum management model basically includes four stages: analysis stage; design stage; implementation or management stage; evaluation stage.

As presented in previous paragraphs, it is not simple to develop and manage the whole process of curriculum because it requires institutional changes. It needs the agreements and supports from many stakeholders for big issues such as curriculum development, academic autonomy, budget, resources allocation etc. (Glenda Crosling, Ron Edwards and Bill Schroder, 2008). Carnall (1997) identifies three conditions for effective change. They are (a) awareness of the organization (understand the need for change), (b) capability (feel that can deal with new circumstances), and (c) inclusion ("ownership" feeling, commitment from the leaders, understand the accountability and reward of the system). Furthermore, Burnes (1996) mentions two types of change management, including planned and emergent. The planned change takes place basing on action research, data collection, and having feedback to organization for better decision making while emergent change takes a less structured approach on change management, it fulfills or adapts to the changing environment in a rapidly way, Trowler (1998) stated that it is important to understand the attitudes of the existing staff, the academic value and autonomy to overcome the resistance or objection of change.

To illustrate this aspect, there are numerous examples or good practices, which provide innovative programs and activities about internationalization of curriculum throughout the world. They will be a useful benchmark for ministry, universities and lecturers to develop and to boost their curriculum in becoming more international within a global, regional or national context.

Some Good Practices of Internationalization of Curriculum

Similar to the theories of curriculum development, the concepts of internationalization of curriculum are complicated and vary from different contexts or nations. It can be understood as the incorporation of international, intercultural and global dimension into learning outcomes, content, assessment, teaching methods, support services (Knight, 2007; IDP, Leask 2029; Gyn, Lehr, Caws, Preece, 2009). The rationales for internationalization in higher education in most of universities are political, economic, academic and social/cultural issues (Johnson and Edenstein, 1993; Knight and Dewit, 1995; Zha Qiang, 2003). To implement internationalization, Zha Qiang (2003) proposed approaches such as activity approach, competency approach, ethos approach, and process approach. Nilsson (2003) refers internationalization at home relating to all international activities with exception of outbound mobility. According to International Association Universities (2015), the method to implement internationalization at home need to involve domestic students in extra-curricular activities.

In 2015, Leask presented a framework for internationalization of curriculum, which recommended the concentration of knowledge disciplines in developing an international curriculum including the requirement of professional practice and citizenship, assessment of student learning, systematic development curriculum. Moreover, the institutional context, local context, national context, and global context are considered as elements, which influence the international curriculum.

Relating to the competences taxonomy and intended learning outcomes, Edwards and colleges (2013) identified three levels of internationalization of curriculum including international awareness, international competence and international expertise, whereas American Council on Education suggested international and intercultural knowledge, skills and attitudes as student's global learning outcomes. Other foreign universities like Florida International University developed global awareness, global perspectives and global engagement or Michigan University proposed global competency in their learning outcomes.

Griffith Institute for Higher Education (2011) identified good practices to internationalize of curriculum as follows: 1) Course content, 2) learning and teaching activities, 3) materials, 4) tools and resources, 5) classroom practices, 6) assessment, 7) international exchange, 8) evaluation and review, 9) international accreditation. Leask (2015) identifies four course-planning elements in internationalization of curriculum:

a. Content: case studies and examples from different countries; intercultural issues in professional practice, comparative contemporary content;

b. Teaching and learning activities: international contact and networks, internships, problem solving assignments with international or intercultural components, guest lecturers with international experience

c. Materials: recently published, international textbooks, international sources like journals and conference proceedings;

d. Assessment: criteria assessment specify and evaluate cross-cultural communication skills, link to international standards.

Leask (2015) studied the process of internationalization of curriculum in different disciplines such as Accounting, Journalism, and Public Relations. She applied the framework of five stages including (1) Review and Reflect; (2) Imagine; (3) Revise and Plan; (4) Act; (5) Evaluate. The figure below shows the process of internationalization of the curriculum.

Table 1: The process of internationalization of the curriculum

Stage 1: Review and reflect	▪ Clarify the goals, purpose, scope of project ▪ Define what is internationalization of curriculum.
Stage 2: Imagine	▪ Discuss existing paradigms within the discipline to imagine the new possibilities. ▪ Build the team, make connection, and identify new directions and opportunities for internationalization of curriculum.
Stage 3: Revise and Plan	▪ University planning, approval processes and timelines must be considered. ▪ Establishing program specific goals and objectives, detailing end of program international and intercultural intended learning outcomes, mapping the development and assessment, identifying blockers and enables, identifying sources and resources to assist staff and students, setting priorities and developing action plan focuses on who will do what, by when, and what resources and support will be required.
Stage 4: Act	▪ Focus on cultural foundations of knowledge in the discipline. ▪ Professional development for teaching staff in teaching and assessing intercultural skills. ▪ Negotiating and implementing new teaching arrangements and support services for staff and students, introducing new assessment tasks, introducing new courses/unit into the core curriculum, introducing a new elective, developing assessment rubrics for use in different courses across the program, collective evidence required for evaluation of changes made on the development of international and intercultural knowledge, skills and attitude sin students (qualitative and quantitative).
Stage 5: Evaluate	▪ Evaluate how effective changes have been in achieving the design goals. ▪ Analyzing evidence collected from stakeholders, reflecting on impact of action taken, considering any gaps in evidence, summarizing achievements, negotiating ongoing roles and responsibilities for internationalization of the curriculum within the program team.

(Leask, 2015), p.22

Recommendations and Conclusions

To investigate the current state and needs of internationalization of curriculum in Vietnam higher education institutions, this study conducted twelve interviews with policy makers and administrators at government and university levels and survey opinions from 67 instructors and 217 students from five Vietnamese higher education institutions with the objective to investigate the needs of internationalization of curriculum in Vietnam higher education institutions.

The result shows that internationalization of curriculum in Vietnam higher education is highly valued and academically prioritized.

From the policy makers and administrators perspectives, to develop and implement the innovative curriculum in global context, the educational leaders should focus on the following policies:

- It is essential to develop a legal mechanism for developing and implementing the international programs for Vietnamese universities to reach top-ranking universities in ASEAN and Asia. Another important factor that might have affected Vietnam internationalization is enhancing the university autonomy and cooperation with foreign countries.
- Developing strategies for international programs that are applicable and bring benefits to Vietnam economy and society. Those strategies should express the combination between internationalization with nationalization.
- Another important issue is to emphasize is reviewing, updating, and replacing the out of date curriculum but also developing distinctive and competence-based programs. Besides, it is considerable to develop more international programs in English, French, German, Japanese, Chinese for sustainable and diversity purposes.
- There is a need on investments and evaluation on the efficiency of the programs. These investments should be big, holistic and in long-term.
- Improving the foreign language ability for lecturers and students by national projects.
- Increasing staff's development and attract good staff through good salary policy.
- Developing website, playgrounds and activities for students learning and to invest and provide more up-to-date materials, teaching and learning facilities.

- To attract students for international curriculum, the university should develop strategy on prospective students and marketing for the program as well as diversify the goals of program to create more opportunities for students to learn and get good job after graduation.
- To assure the quality of international program, the university should enhance the quality of training and research, meeting the standards of international universities and conduct feedback from employers and alumni.

Moreover, in order to develop the international curriculum in Vietnam higher education institutions, the result from the survey instructors and students' opinions shows five dimensions will need to be addressed as following table:

Table 2: Dimensions for developing international curriculum

Dimension	Instructors' opinions	Students' opinions
1	Strategy of an international curriculum	Mission of the institution
2	Program evaluation	Learning outcomes of an international curriculum
3	Student services Learning resources of an international curriculum	Vision of the institution
4	Vision of the Vietnam higher education institution	Goals, objectives of an international curriculum of education management
5	Program structure, learning experience Instructions of an international curriculum	Vision of the faculty of education

According to instructors, the university and faculty should focus on developing strategy of international curriculum, conducting program evaluation, enhancing student's services and learning resources as well as developing the vision of internationalization for institution. On the other hand, students consider on vision, mission of the institution, learning outcomes, goals, objectives and program structure of an international curriculum.

Though the dimensions from instructors and students can be slightly dissimilar, their opinions about the quest for internationalization of curriculum innovation and change are highly common in many items of questionnaires. For example, they both have the similar opinions about "to be a leading university, meeting national and international quality standards" (vision of the institution), "to foster innovation, enterprise, discovery and lifelong learning in the globalization of education" (mission of the institution) or "to prepare graduates to work and live in a global society" (goals and objectives of international curriculum).

Overall, these findings conclude about the quest of developing international curriculum and suggest that fundamental strategies on internationalization of curriculum emphasize big areas such as university governance, standardization of curriculum, enhancing international experience and expertise of staff and students, improving the infrastructures and facilities for faculty and university, and quality assurance of international curriculum.

Besides the above important issues, there are some challenges or educational policies hinder in international curriculum as follows:

- The survey about the needs of the curriculum from students and employers are not enough.
- Ethics in teaching, learning, and research are unclear in government and university policy.
- There are factors, which influence the process of internationalization such as the resistance culture and low salary policy for faculty members.
- It is not easy to develop the policy in tuition fee for international curriculum since it doesn't only require the good quality of the program but also the affordability of students.

According to Pham and Fry (2004, p.301), "Vietnam is successful in realizing its economic and human resource potential which depends on improving both the quality and efficiency of the higher education system". Part of the improvement and innovation should focus on reviewing and enhancing the curriculum to produce high quality human resources to meet the needs of the society and the demands of the labor markets. In fact, information from analyzing national and institutional documents and interviewing top managers reveal that the higher education leaders in Vietnam highly recognized the important of internationalization and the role of curriculum innovation within the context of competition.

Even though internationalization of higher education and curriculum is not a new issue, the meaning of internationalization "varies from one university to another, especially with respect to curriculum and disciplines" and it will continue to change going forward (Elspeth Jones, 2012, p. xi) because curriculum change is often occurring under conditions of "ongoing confusion, challenges, and frustrations" (Chidress, 2010; Polak and Hudson 2010; Leask and Beelen, 2009). There is a need to have more discussions among educators about the practical meaning in each discipline, program, faculty and university before designing and implementing the international curriculum in Vietnam higher education institutions.

Besides, it is clear that the journey for seeking the active partnerships and collaborations in order to support for the effectiveness of the internationalization will be the essential step for internationalization and curriculum change in higher education. Since not many academic staff have good qualified English or foreign language, there is a need to invest in their career development, especially in teaching the specialized subjects.

In order to enhance the quality of international curriculum, there is a need to develop a national and institutional quality assurance mechanism or regulatory frameworks for accreditation so that both local and international institutions, educational organizations that deliver cross-border courses and international programs can be registered, licensed and recognized by the regional and international accreditation. More importantly, the accreditation process should be more internationalized for purpose of development and recognition in education.

In summary, to achieve the national higher education renovation targets, Vietnam higher education institutions (HEIs) need to improve their academic and professional capacity to produce high quality human resources to meet the needs of the society and the demands of the labor markets. It embraces the improvement of knowledge, skills and attitudes of graduates, and students' preparedness by enhancing the academic curriculum. Besides, to help students living and working in a globalized world, HEIs need to consider developing their students' lifelong learning skills with international perspectives where the curriculum is seen as the "backbone of the internationalization process". Some distinctions need to be made to help the curriculum develop, innovate and change. The following theories and suggestions from the study can propose some directions for the institutions and educational leaders to formulate new goals and sets of strategies to design and improve the curriculum in both local and international competitiveness markets.

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