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**The Internationalization of Higher Education in Vietnam: National Policies
and Institutional Implementation at Vietnam National University, Hanoi**

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Set against the backdrop of increasing economic interdependence in the Asia region, the idea of ‘regional integration’ is most often articulated as a policy instrument and political ideal. Arguably, this objective is being pursued to further promote regional competitiveness in the world economy and to bring about a new stable political order. Nevertheless, any move in this direction has been repeatedly challenged from perspectives that emphasize socio-cultural diversity in the region and shared histories. It is in this context that Waseda University received the Global COE research grant from the Ministry of Education of Japan. Waseda University was tasked with establishing the Graduate Institute for Asian Regional Integration (GIARI) to investigate problems and prospects relating to Asian regional integration. Issues of education are central to any dialogue that seeks to further integrate political, social, and economic systems in the region. Taking European integration as a precursor, it is clear that education plays a critical role in the integration process. It is certainly, therefore, within the purview and moreover, a responsibility of Waseda’s Global COE—sponsored research to examine the role education will continue to play in a more comprehensive integration of the Asia region.

There is not a single nexus of research where the study of Asian regional integration and education meet; rather, there exist a diversity of approaches that form a matrix of research. A first feature of regional integration studies is the empirical study of ‘de facto’ integration of the region’s education systems. From this approach, we conclude that education systems, economic systems and societal values are already intertwined and integrated to a certain degree. This first approach endeavors to take stock of the extent of actual integration. A second approach emphasizes the purpose(s) and governing principles which inform the integration process. It may then be possible to derive ordered conceptual frameworks that reveal future pathways of regional cooperation and integration. This approach asks why we need to integrate and the answers come mainly from historical and philosophical investigations of policy arguments. The third type of regional integration studies attempt to analyze existing frameworks and institutions for regional cooperation and integration of education systems. It is a political analysis that reveals practical and organizational implications for future regional cooperation and integration processes. The fourth approach focuses on the study of the actors involved in the regional integration process. Countries and governments are probably the most important actors in these processes, but educational institutions are also important. The fifth approach is best described as the comparative study of regional integration drawing on experiences from different regions; education regionalization in Europe, for example.

In doing these researches, we must share a vision concerning Asian regional integration and education that can foster mutual trust and a concept of people’s Asia, and strengthening the competitiveness of Asian human resources in the world. By comprehensively discussing and internalizing diverse views, rather than relying on a single model or ideal, it will be possible to build a regional framework for education in Asia that can be expected to contribute greatly to the formation of an Asian Community, and thus, to peace and prosperity in the region.

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1. Introduction

Over the last two decades, globalization has become a central component of any number of academic discussions; its impact and influence increasingly difficult to ignore. It is an irreversible process “that is increasing the flow of people, culture, ideas, values, knowledge, technology, and economy across borders resulting in a more interconnected and interdependent world” (Knight, 2006). Globalization presents both opportunities and challenges for each country, depending on the nation’s specific circumstances. It is a force that permeates all fields of human life and academic disciplines. Cultural and social issues have been shaped by this phenomenon as well and therein education figures prominently as a field undergoing change.

If globalization is seen as an objective and an unalterable process, internationalization is considered the riposte. Governments and higher educational institutions all over the world have adopted policies of internationalization as a response to globalization. Internationalization of higher education can be an aim in and of itself, where an international, intercultural, or global dimension is incorporated into the purpose, functions or delivery of postsecondary education, as defined by Knight (2003). In addition, internationalization can be defined in broader terms, as “an important resource in the development of higher education towards, first of all, a system in line with international standards; secondly, one open and responsive to its global environment” (Qiang, 2003).

The past decade has bore witness to a vast growth in student mobility among East Asian countries and an increasing number of inter-university linkages within the region. East Asia is a diverse region in terms of ethnicity, culture, language, religion, politics, socioeconomic development and topography. In the field of higher education, variances between East Asian countries are also remarkable. Their higher education systems stem from different historical backgrounds, possess different characteristics and now stand at different stages of development.

However, despite this diversity, higher education systems in East Asia are also facing similar problems and challenges as those outside the region; for example, they have wrestled with an explosion in demand, budget constraints, quality assurance issues and processes of internationalization. Therefore, it is fitting that closer, constructive and effective cooperation within the region be a primary target for regional actors. In so doing, these countries will be able to promote mutual understanding, share lessons of experience and best practices, and more effectively support countries in need; helping them solve enduring problems and overcome obstacles in the development of their higher education systems (UNESCO, 2006).

Since the adoption of the ‘Doi Moi’ line in 1986, Vietnam, a developing East Asian country, has undertaken the dual process of transitioning from a centrally planned economy to a socialist-oriented market economy and integration into a rapidly changing world. Along with the open door policy and market-oriented reforms, in recent years Vietnam has accelerated international integration in many fields, including education. In the field of higher education, Vietnam has achieved remarkable progress in terms of the magnitude, quality and efficiency of its higher education system, narrowing the gap between itself and neighboring countries in the region. However, like many other systems in the region, Vietnam’s system of higher education is also struggling with a range of chronic and emerging problems. While internationalization is identified as a priority of utmost importance at both national and institutional levels, it is meaningful and necessary that Vietnam strengthens and accelerates cooperation and collaboration with other East Asian countries in the field.

The paper will focus on the case of Vietnam National University, Hanoi, examining the internationalization process as it occurs at the institutional level. Furthermore, this paper will place these developments in the context of internationalization of Vietnam’s higher education

system. Throughout, East Asian dimensions of the internationalization process of higher education in Vietnam are elaborated.

2. The state of higher education in Vietnam

Since 1986, together with the Doi Moi process, higher education in Vietnam has developed considerably, contributing to the intellectual advancement of the nation, human resource training, and to a number of socio-economic improvements.

The number of higher education institutions has increased dramatically, from 153 in 1999 to 322 in 2007. Enrollment numbers have followed suit, with 1,540,201 students enrolled in the 2006-2007 academic year, a 172.4 percent increase from 1999. There are 183 colleges and 139 universities, of which 275 are public and 47 are private (MOET, 2006). The diversity in the types of institutions and the form of education dispensed has better served the growing demands of the population and has also helped generate new spaces of higher learning. Vietnam's higher education system has developed so as to be compatible with the global system in terms of qualifications and degrees granted; specifically, the modular approach (using credit) has been incorporated into the system in order to enhance the quality of teaching and learning (Nguyen, M. H, 2005).

Despite these initial achievements, Vietnam's higher education system continues to struggle with many challenges. In general, educational quality remains low and has become a major social concern in recent years. The output from higher education does not match the demands that arise from an economy struggling to develop its socio-economic infrastructures. These problems can be traced to multiple causes. The teaching staff is weak in terms of both quantity and quality. Many of them do not have the means or necessary conditions to upgrade their skills, and are furthermore left no choice but to engage in a myriad of income-generating activities to supplement a meager teacher stipend. Faced with such working conditions, they are

not able to justify conducting scientific research as a top priority. Curricula and teaching methodology are undergoing a slow process of review and modernization. However at present, they remain academically biased, with instruction that is incongruous with work skills, and a lack of creativity and vocational guidance. The ubiquitous ‘chalk and blackboard’ method, as well as illustrative and dictative methods remain the main tools for delivering knowledge, none of which encourage active learning. Characteristic of insufficient and ineffective investments in higher education, lecturer wages remain low and facilities and equipment impede quality teaching and learning environments. Management in higher education is still characterized by an inflated bureaucracy, which is still too centralized and in which the division of functions and tasks has generated gaps, constraining innovation (Tran, Q. T, 2005).

Fully aware of the important role higher education plays in the development process, as well as the limitations and shortcomings apparent in the status quo, the government of Vietnam has promulgated and implemented a number of plans, projects and policies to reform its higher education system. In 2001, the 9th National Congress of the Vietnam Communist Party set up the Socio-economic Strategic Development Plan 2001-2010¹ which states: “In order to meet the demand for human resources, a decisive factor in the country's development plan in the period of industrialization and modernization, it is necessary to create radical changes overall in education and training”² (Communist Party of Vietnam, 2001, p. 22).

According to the Strategy for Education Development 2001-2010,³ the goals defined for the higher education sector are to i) meet the demand for high quality human resources for industrialization and modernization; ii) enhance Vietnam’s competitiveness in the process of international economic integration; iii) facilitate the expansion of higher education through

¹ Chiến lược Phát triển Kinh tế - Xã hội 2001-2010 (Báo cáo của Ban Chấp hành Trung ương Đảng khóa VIII tại Đại hội Đại biểu Toàn quốc lần thứ IX của Đảng)

² Author’s translation from Vietnamese.

³ Chiến lược phát triển giáo dục 2001-2010.

diversification of training programs on the basis of a pathway system, suited to the development framework, employment conditions, local and regional human resource needs and the training capacities of educational institutions; iv) increase the appropriateness of training to the employment needs of the society; and finally, v) empowering the workforce to develop entrepreneurial skills. The Plan also set specific targets for the Vietnamese higher education sector, such as increasing the ratio of students in tertiary education per 10,000, from 118 in the 2000-2001 school year to 200 by 2010, and increasing the enrollment of master students from 11,727 in 2000 to 38,000 by 2010, and of doctoral students from 3,870 in 2000 to 15,000 by 2010 (Ministry of Justice, 2001).

In order to achieve these goals, a number of solutions have been proposed, some of which have already been carried out. Among these, internationalization is one of the most important approaches adopted to ameliorate the higher education system in Vietnam, especially if better integration in the region and the world is to be achieved.

3. Internationalization of higher education: National processes

3.1 National strategy for international cooperation and integration

Internationalization, as a strategy for the development of higher education, is quite a new concept in Vietnam. The term has been used in several policy documents at both the national and institutional level, as well as in academic papers. However, Vietnamese officials have not yet provided a specific definition for this process. Generally, the internationalization of higher education in Vietnam is interpreted as an enhancement of international and regional cooperation and integration in the field of education. This process is considered indispensable to improving the higher education system in Vietnam. To this end, the Strategy for Education Development 2001-2010 and the Vietnam Higher Education Renovation Agenda 2006-2020 outline policy targets, listed below:

- Developing an international integration strategy for the country's higher education system within the context of the Vietnamese-American Bilateral Trade Agreement (BTA), the ASEAN Free Trade Area (AFTA) and the General Agreement on Trade in Services (GATS);
- Expanding cooperation with foreign countries and institutions to establish high-tech centers in higher education institutions and able to carry out joint scientific research projects;
- Launching a strategy on teaching and learning in foreign languages, especially in English. And, selecting and putting into use advanced and modern training programs, curricula and materials, which are being used in foreign universities and which are suitable for Vietnam's development needs in the areas of natural science, engineering, technology and economic management;
- Improving the quality of research and training programs with specific national features in order to attract foreign researchers and students, while maintaining national identity and traditional values;
- Developing relations by exchanging lecturers and students, joint training and research programs with foreign universities and continuing to send teaching staff and students overseas to study in key areas using state funding;
- Developing mechanisms and policies to facilitate and encourage study abroad for self-financed students;
- Ratifying the "Regional Convention on the Recognition of Studies, Diplomas and Degrees in Higher education in Asia and the Pacific", and signing similar bilateral treaties and establishing organizations for the promotion of related activities;
- Establishing clear and favorable principles and procedures to encourage foreign entities with experience, potential and high qualifications to establish education institutions with 100% foreign capital or joint ventures with Vietnamese partners in higher education, vocational training and distance education, offering courses at regional and international level;
- Exercising quality control in training services (including on-line programs) provided by foreign training institutions;
- Participating in and building up relationships with quality accreditation organizations in the region and in the world to protect domestic learners;
- Taking every opportunity to attract highly qualified experts from foreign countries to provide training and research support, while formulating systematic policies to attract overseas Vietnamese and Vietnamese citizens trained abroad to come back and make contributions nation-building;

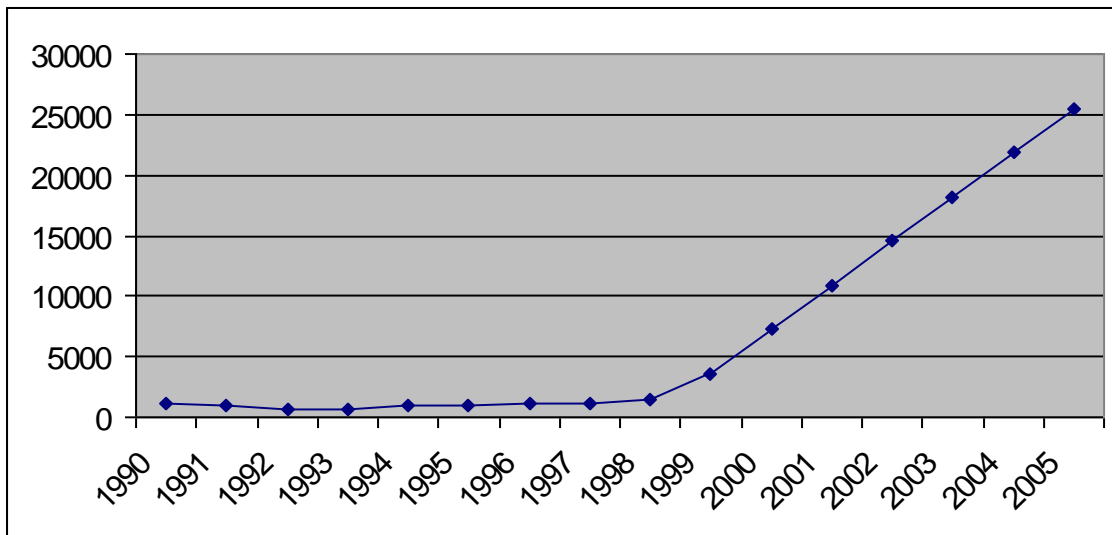
- Participating in the international human resource training market, moving towards the export of skilled labor.

3.2 Staff and student mobility

3.2.1 Study abroad

There has been significant growth in the number of Vietnamese students studying abroad in recent years. These students fall into three categories: i) those who receive scholarships from foreign countries, institutions or organizations; ii) the Vietnamese government scholarship recipients; and iii) self-financed students. From 1990 through 2005, the number of students studying overseas has increased sharply from 1,139 to 25,505⁴ as can be seen from the follow graph:

Number of Vietnamese Students Studying Abroad from 1990 to 2005



Source: MOET, 2005b

This remarkable change in Vietnamese student mobility can be attributed to a number of factors. First, it can be attributed to the implementation of the open door policy, especially since

⁴ This number is much lower than actual figures, because MOET cannot keep records of large numbers of self-financed students and recipients of foreign scholarships who go abroad to study without reporting to MOET.

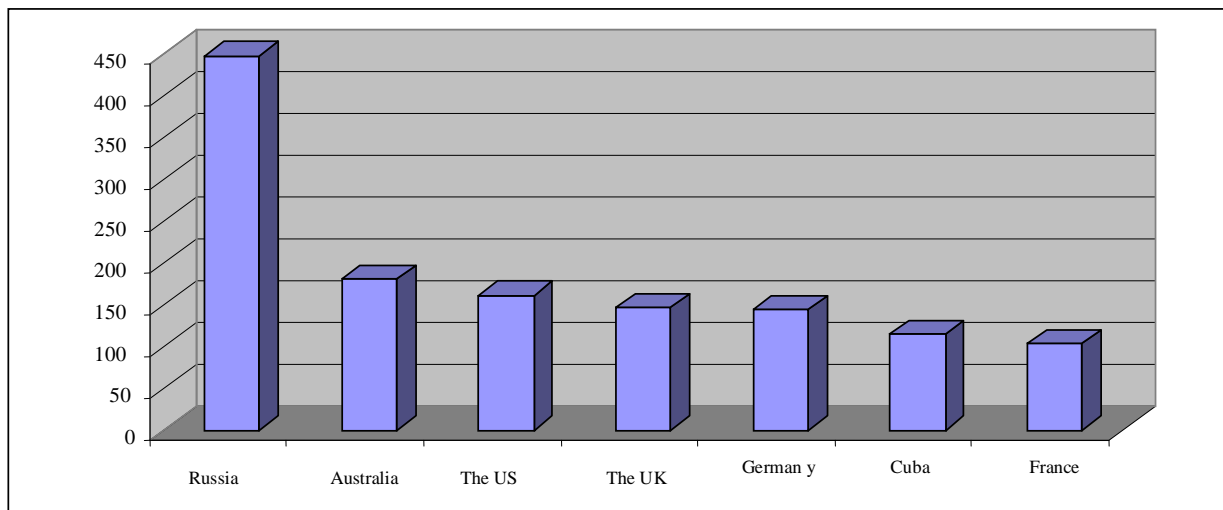
1991, when Vietnam supported a policy of diversification and multilateralization of external relations, including significant support for international integration. Thus far, the Ministry of Education and Training (MOET) has expanded its relationships with a wide range of countries, international organizations and institutions from all over the world. These countries and organizations provide scholarships to Vietnamese students to study and research in their countries or overseas. Among the countries which offer the greatest number of scholarships per year for Vietnamese students are Australia (150-200), India (110), SNG countries (the association of formerly Soviet republics) (700), as well as other countries, such as Sweden, Netherlands, France, the US, the UK, Canada, Japan and Korea (Tran, V. N, 2000).

Nowadays, more and more Vietnamese students pursue studies abroad without outside financial help. An increase in living standards and family incomes has allowed for more individually financed students to study abroad. From 1991 to 2000, about 3,600 Vietnamese self-financed students studied abroad, a figure that reached 7,133 between 2001 and 2005 (MOET, 2005c). Many of these students chose to study in Asian countries like Singapore, Japan, China, Korea, Malaysia, or Thailand, where educational quality has been upheld and recognized by universities worldwide. Competitively low tuition fees, affordable living, as well as close geographic proximity and better opportunities for employment after graduating, are but a few advantages attracting foreign students to these higher education destinations.

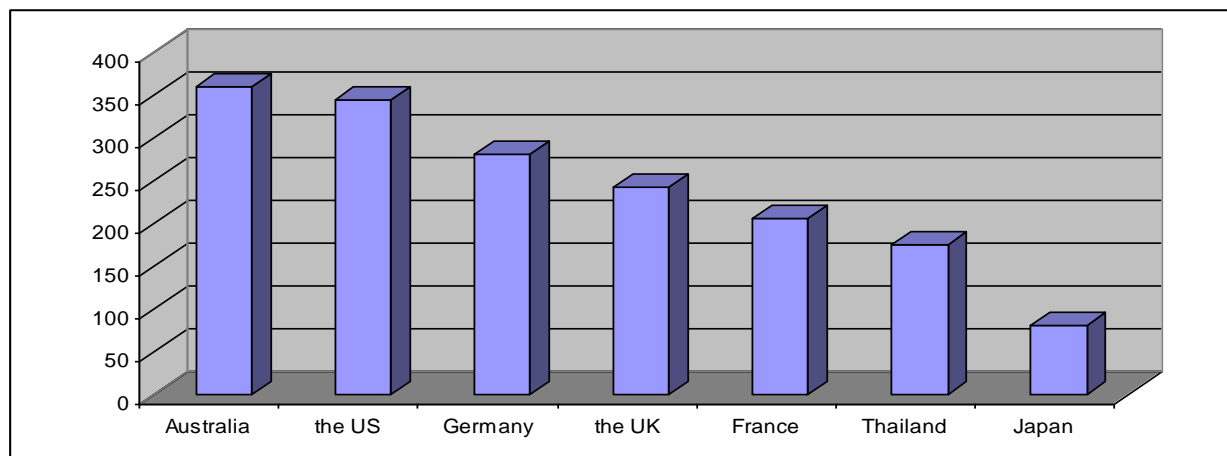
Since 2000, 'Project 322' (Training Scientific and Technical Cadres in Institutions Overseas with the State Budget) was implemented to train and cultivate leading science and technology staff for key sectors. Each year, VND 100 billion of the national budget is spent to send some 450 students overseas, of which 200 cadres will study in doctoral programs, 100 in master degree programs, 60 to become engineers and 40 to become scientific trainees. This policy combines two training methods, including full-time courses in foreign countries and

‘sandwich courses’. This is the first time Vietnam has used part of the state budget expenditures to send its staff overseas for training. Priority training sectors are telecommunications, information technology, biological technology, and new materials. MOET has promulgated a project to train 20,000 PhDs by 2020, in order to provide universities and colleges with qualified lecturers. Project 322 is seen as one way to realize this target. These newly trained professors will make up 25 percent of the total lecturers in the higher training network, meeting 50 percent of the country's demand for lecturers at this level. Up to 2007, 3,212 students and cadres had been sent to study abroad on state funds, of which 2,050 were postgraduate students and 1,162 were undergraduates (MOET, 2007a). Looking at the 2005 and 2007 data of the 322 Project, we note changes in the host countries where Vietnamese students enrolled. Specifically, Thailand and Japan have flourished in the higher education market, attracting more and more Vietnamese students to their higher education sectors.

**Top Seven Countries Chosen for Postgraduate Studies by
State-sponsored Vietnamese Students
(2005)**



2007



Source: MOET, 2007a

According to a decision issued by the Prime Minister in 2005, the second phase of Project 322 will run until 2014, during which time VND 260 billion will be spent each year to send students abroad. MOET will sign contracts with foreign countries enabling 10,000 junior faculty members to study abroad. Among those countries selected, MOET will send 2,500 faculty members to the United States; 1,000 to the United Kingdom; 1,000 to Germany; 1,000 to Australia; 1,000 to Japan and 700 to France, as well as a host of other countries.

3.2.2 Foreign students in Vietnam

In the past few years, Vietnam has also welcomed an increasing number of foreign students to its higher education sector. Between 1998 and 2000, 600 students from 12 countries came to Vietnam to pursue their studies and research under bilateral agreements. According to

the Global Education Digest 2007 (UNESCO, 2007), the number of inbound mobile students in Vietnam in 2005 is 2,053, of which 2,016 students are from East Asian and the Pacific countries.

The Vietnamese government recognizes the need to enhance the presence of foreign students in their higher education sector. The potential exists for educational institutions to generate increased revenues by levying international tuition fees from foreign students. In addition, with an increased number of foreign students passing through Vietnam, one consequence will be the spread of Vietnamese culture throughout the world. However, in order to attract more foreign students, it is necessary to increase the number of educational programs offered in English so that these students will be able to study not only Vietnamese and Vietnamese studies, but other specializations as well.

3.3 Foreign education programs

Since 2000, there has been tremendous development in the establishment of foreign operated education programs, run either entirely by foreign universities or through some form of joint venture. Two policies were instrumental in enabling this progress, Decree No. 06/2000/ND-CP (March 6, 2000) and especially, the issuance of Decree No. 18/2001/ND-CP (May 4, 2001) on the “Establishment and Operation of Foreign Cultural and Educational Agencies in Vietnam”. In order to protect domestic learners and assure the quality of educational services provided through foreign education programs, MOET issued a circular in 2004, which required foreign organizations wishing to operate in Vietnam to submit an establishment license from their home country to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and MOET. This was done to prevent the establishment “ghost” organizations, educational institutions that in fact have no real existence outside of Vietnam. MOET also encouraged foreign institutions to develop training programs for scientists, technicians, managers and experts in economics, technology, natural sciences, the environment and culture (IIE, 2005).

The Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology (RMIT) International University of Vietnam was the first 100 percent foreign owned international university in Vietnam. Established in 2000, it comprises two campuses located in Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City, and a third is under construction in the urban district of Saigon South. At the same time, a number of foreign institutions have also entered into joint ventures with Vietnamese institutions, many of which may involve a study abroad component. Some of these programs include the University of Hawaii MBA program, in partnership with the Hanoi School of Business; Washington State University MBA program with the National Economics University; University of Houston, Clear Lake undergraduate degree with the Hanoi University of Technology; Troy State University undergraduate degree in collaboration with the International College of Information Technology and Management, to name just a few.

In September 2007, the Prime Minister of Vietnam agreed to establish a German university in Vietnam, which is to specialize in the fields of shipbuilding, seaport and airport construction, and tourism. This university is to open its doors in 2008. In another notable development, MOET agreed to help the Intel Product Vietnam Corporation by inviting a prestigious American university, with expertise in the field of information technology, to establish a specialized university in Vietnam. The Vietnamese government is now considering a co-investment in this university.

3.4 Internationalization of curricula

Curriculum development is an important ingredient in improving the overall quality of higher education. Cognizant of this, in 2004 the government of Vietnam issued document No.1269/CP-KG, which assigned leading higher education institutions the task of designing “advanced curricula”. Advanced curricula refer to curricula which are “properly designed and

established by universities on the basis of the curricula currently used at prestigious universities in the world, including the content, teaching methods, organization and training management processes and are taught in English” (MOET, 2008, p.3).

In academic year 2006/2007, MOET allowed 9 universities to offer 10 advanced programs as pilot projects. These universities include the College of Science, Vietnam National University (VNU), Hanoi, College of Science, VNU, Ho Chi Minh City, College of Technology, VNU Ho Chi Minh City, Can Tho University, Hue University, Da Nang University, National Economics University, Hanoi University of Technology and University of Agriculture No 1.

After two years implementing the pilot projects in nine universities, MOET decided to implement these programs in a larger number of Vietnamese universities. As of November 2008, there were 17 universities nationwide, offering 23 advanced programs as shown in Table 1. In 2008, MOET officially proposed the project “Training by advanced programs at some Vietnamese universities in period 2008-2015” which was then approved by the Prime Minister in Decision 1505/QD-TTg dated October 15, 2008. The overall target of this project is to “put into operation some advanced programs at higher education level in order to establish and develop a number of fields, faculties and universities which reach the regional standards and international ranking; contribute to enhancing the quality of and carrying out fundamental and comprehensive renovation 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).

Table 1: Advanced programs being implemented in Vietnamese Universities

Ord.	Vietnamese Universities	Programs, Starting year	Partner Universities
1.	The University of Architecture of HCM City	Urban Design, 2008	Oxford Brookes University, UK
2.	Hanoi University of Technology	Biomedical Engineering, 2008	Duke University – Durham, USA
		Mechatronics Engineering, 2006	California State University-Chico, USA
		Material Science and Engineering, 2006	University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, USA
3.	University of Transport and Communications	Civil and Structural Engineering, 2008	University of Leeds, UK
4.	Water Resources University	Water Resources Engineering, 2008	Colorado State University, USA
5.	Thai Nguyen University of Tecnology	Mechanical Engineering, 2008	State University of New York at Buffalo, USA
6.	Nong Lam University	Food Science and Technology, 2008	University of California - Davis, USA
7.	Hanoi Architectural University	Architecture, 2008	University of Nottingham , UK
8.	Can Tho University	Aquatic Culture, 2008	Auburn University, Alabama State , USA
		Biochemistry and Molecular Biology / Biotechnology Major, 2006	Michigan State University, USA
9.	National Economics University	Finance, 2006	California State University - Long Beach, USA
10.	Foreign Trade University	International Economics, 2008	Colorado State University , USA
11.	Hanoi University of Agriculture	Agricultural Business Administration, 2008	University of Wisconsin-Madison, USA

Ord.	Vietnamese Universities	Programs, Starting year	Partner Universities
		Crops Science, 2006	University of California – Davis, USA
12.	Da Nang University	Embedded computing System, 2008	University of Washington, USA
		Electronics Engineering, 2006	University of Washington, USA
13.	Hue University	Physics, 2006	University of Virginia, USA
14.	Hanoi University of Science	Mathematics, 2008	University of Washington , Seattle, USA
		Chemistry, 2006	University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, USA
15.	Ho Chi Minh University of Science	Computer Science, 2006	Portland State University, Oregon, USA
16.	Ho Chi Minh University of Technology	Electrical and Computer Engineering (major in Power and Energy System), 2006	University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, USA
17.	University of Information Technology	Information System, 2008	Oklahoma State University , USA

According to this project, the advanced curricula are entirely ‘imported’ from prestigious universities which are listed among the top 200 universities in the world or belong to a grouping the best 20 percent of training programs in the discipline ranking tables of national or international level accreditation associations and organizations. Moreover, these curricula must be suitable with Vietnam’s socio-economic development orientation. Except for the Marxist-Leninist science courses compulsory for Vietnamese students, all other courses are delivered in English by invited faculty from partner universities and/or by Vietnamese lecturers. The project

receives financial support from the Vietnamese government who pays VND 860 billion (equal to about US\$ 50.8 trillion) or 60 percent of the total expenses for the first three courses, while universities themselves spend 25 percent; the other 15 percent is expected to come from tuition and other sources.

By way of these programs, which are taught in English and considered to be of high quality, MOET hopes that by 2015 Vietnam will be able to attract about 3,000 international students and at least 700 international scientific staff who will come to Vietnam to deliver lectures and do research at training institutions in advanced programs.

However, during the first two years of the pilot project, universities have encountered a number of problems in implementing these programs as identified by MOET in its project proposal. One of the difficulties most frequently reported is the English ability of the Vietnamese teaching staff and their students, which is not yet adequate for them to teach and study in English. The lack of faculty is another important problem. Many universities dispose of only the bare minimum Vietnamese teaching staff and face difficulties inviting professors from their partner institutions, not only because of the lack of financial resources but also due to the tight schedules of these professors. MOET is now urging the universities with advanced programs to coordinate with one another so that they can arrange the course schedules in order to take advantage of one professor coming to Vietnam at a certain point of time so that he/she can give lectures in several different universities (MOET, 2008).

Besides the problems identified by MOET, questions can be raised about the appropriateness and attractiveness of these programs in comparison with joint or double degree programs operated by a Vietnamese institution and a foreign partner. Graduating from these joint programs, students are guaranteed to receive degrees from the foreign universities which are internationally recognized. Meanwhile most of the current advanced programs can just offer

Vietnamese domestic degrees to their graduates. The selective entrance requirements of these programs are also an obstacle for a vast number of students to benefit from a good quality education. Moreover, the higher tuition fees that students have to bear may also discourage them and their families to take part in these advanced programs even when they are academically qualified. Another question that can be asked is whether the target to attract 3,000 international students into these advanced programs by 2015 is feasible or not. Supposing that by this year the number of these advanced programs will be 30 as planned by MOET, this means that in nine years, from 2006 to 2015, each of these programs will have to enroll about 11 international students. These students will make up 20 percent of the planned total number of students in each program per academic year as specified in MOET's proposal. It is not clearly stated in the proposal whether or not these programs will accept foreign students who come to Vietnam to study via bilateral agreements made at the governmental level. Universities will have a hard time attracting privately funded international students given the above-mentioned disadvantages, especially when they have to compete internationally for this cohort of students. MOET and Vietnamese universities need to have concrete strategies and plans to realize this ambitious target.

With regard to the internationalization of curricula, Vietnam is very much influenced by the Anglo-Saxon tradition of higher education, especially the American higher education experience. In order to achieve international standards in higher education quickly, Vietnam aims to develop similar curricula, materials, teaching methods and educational management as those used in developed countries. An Asian dimension is rarely found in this aspect of internationalization of higher education, because Vietnam wants to access and capture the so-called "source technology" in higher education, which is believed to belong to Western countries.

3.5 Other activities of international cooperation in higher education

In the past few years, MOET has encouraged and assisted Vietnamese higher education institutions to build up and expand relationships with international organizations and foreign institutions. Via such cooperation, Vietnamese institutions can take advantage of and utilize financial, technical and equipment support with the aim of improving educational and training quality at home. To date, there have been approximately 100 projects of different sizes carried out at both undergraduate and graduate levels. However, most of these projects operate with constrained budgets and are only implemented in several key universities that have established good bilateral relations with foreign universities and organizations. Loan projects account for 25 percent of total loan amounts and grant projects make up 40 percent of total grants for the sector (MOET, 2005a, p.76). These projects have contributed to an improvement in the quality of higher education in Vietnam and have helped strengthen the relationships between Vietnamese, regional and international institutions (MOET, 2005a).

Vietnam plays a role in supporting other less developed countries in the region improve their higher education system, such as Laos and Cambodia. Besides training students from these countries, Vietnam also helps to develop there educational infrastructure. For example, Vietnam has supported Laos to establish several upper secondary boarding schools in Sekong and Champasac provinces and a dormitory for foreign students in Vientiane National University (MOET, 2005a).

Promoting and strengthening cooperation with Southeast Asian and East Asian countries is considered to be one of the priorities in Vietnam's international cooperation strategy, both at the national and institutional levels. In November 2007, the First ASEAN Education Forum was held in Hanoi. The Ministry of Education and Training of Vietnam (MOET), the Vietnam National Council of Education and the Asian Strategy and Leadership Institute jointly organized this inaugural forum. The forum's objective was to address crucial issues facing higher education

in the region today, such as broadening access to and improving equity and quality in education, enhancing standards and excellence in higher education, and harmonization education systems within the ASEAN region. The forum focused on exploring the role of education in building an ASEAN identity, enhancing people-to-people interactions, enabling ASEAN youth to adopt a culture of innovation and technology, and finally, pushing developing countries forward through training and skills development (MOET, 2007b).

4. The internationalization of Vietnam National University, Hanoi

4.1 Introduction of Vietnam National University, Hanoi and its missions

Vietnam National University, Hanoi (VNU) is one of two national universities in Vietnam which was established in 1993 by decree of the Prime Minister and for the purpose of reorganizing and amalgamating three big universities in Hanoi, namely, the University of Hanoi, the Hanoi Pedagogy University No.1 and the Hanoi Pedagogy Foreign Language University. Thus far, VNU has undergone various stages of development: the precursor Indochina University, which was established in 1906 under French colonial rule; Vietnam National University (November, 1945); and the University of Hanoi (June, 1956).

VNU is the largest comprehensive higher education and research center in Vietnam. VNU has been entrusted with the task of producing highly qualified human resources and talent for the industrialization and modernization of the country. VNU holds a special position in the [*sic*] Vietnam's higher education system, operating according to a special regulation promulgated by the Prime Minister. VNU belongs and reports directly to the Prime Minister and has high autonomy in organization, personnel, training programs, scientific research and technological development, planning and finance, international relations and other fields. VNU is entitled to work directly with ministries, ministerial level organizations, governmental bodies, people's committees of central cities and provinces concerning affairs related to VNU. VNU's colleges and institutes maintain their juridical person status as a higher education and scientific research institution as regulated by the Law on Education and the Law on Science- Technology (VNU, 2008a).

VNU now comprises 12 colleges, faculties, schools and training centers. There are 8 research institutes and centers and another 10 service units. At present, the number of VNU staff

total 2,886 of which 2,215 are faculty members consisting of 546 professors and 746 PhDs. The number of full-time undergraduate students is 18,716, whereas master students and PhD students total 5,275.

VNU's mission includes a provision to rapidly develop into a leading comprehensive university and the most prestigious institution of excellence for higher education, science and technology in Vietnam, comparable to other advanced universities in the region, and gradually striving to achieve international standards (VNU, 2008a). Moreover, VNU has a key role to play in Vietnam's higher education system, participating in the preparation of national policies and strategies on socio-economic development and providing various forms of academic support to other universities and colleges throughout the country. VNU is also aiming at becoming an advanced higher education center capable of creating new knowledge, producing highly qualified human resources and providing original intellectual and academic services (VNU, 2008a).

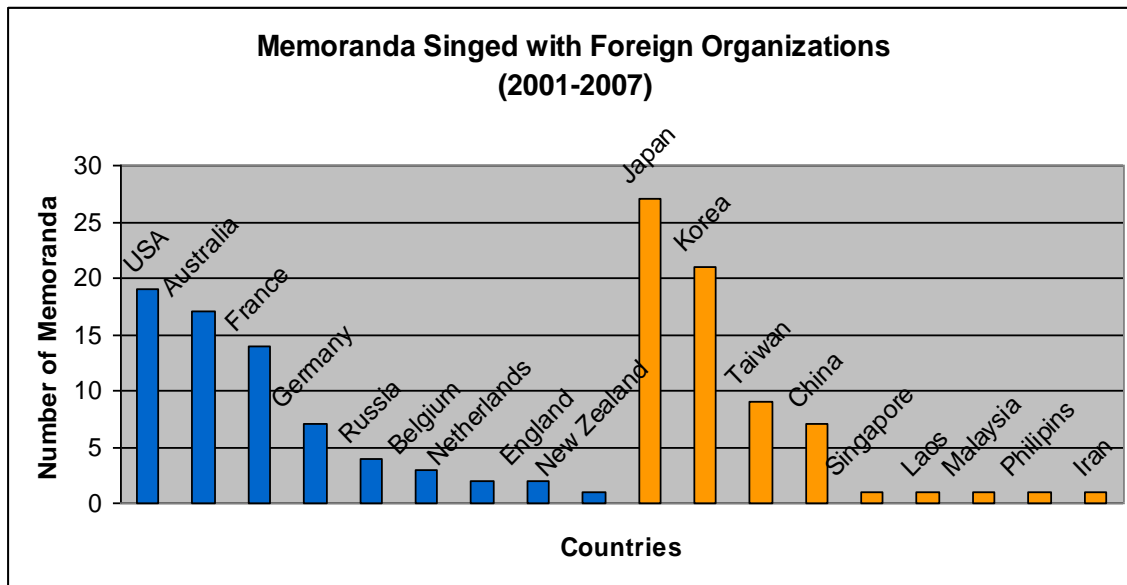
4.2 The Internationalization process at Vietnam National University, Hanoi

The concept of 'internationalization' has not been clearly defined in VNU's official documents. However, it can be inferred from its development strategy and plans, that internationalization at VNU means achieving regional and international standards. In order to realize this goal, VNU focuses on establishing training programs congruent with international standards, developing a teaching and management staff with international qualifications, whereas the expanding and strengthening of international cooperation with regional and international institutions is considered the main method of implementation.

4.2.1 International cooperation

In the last few years, VNU has developed close and sustainable relationships with more than 130 higher education institutions, research institutes and educational organizations all over

the world. In the period from 2001-2007, VNU signed about 150 Memoranda of Understanding and Memoranda of Agreement with internationally recognized institutions and organizations, of which more than 50 percent were from Asian countries. Japan and Korea are the two countries which have the largest number of MOUs signed with VNU, as illustrated by the following graph:



Source: VNU's website: <http://www.vnu.edu.vn/en/contents/index.php?ID=943>

By way of these close relationships, VNU has carried out a number of joint research projects, training programs, joint workshops/conferences and staff and student exchange programs. From 1996 to 2007, among the exchange and cooperation projects undertaken, 76 programs and projects worth USD 20 million were concluded. These activities have contributed to strengthening VNU's development potential, improving its physical infrastructure and upgrading the academic staff's qualifications. VNU has organized, in collaboration with other foreign institutions, many international and local training courses, international and national workshops and conferences with the participation of experienced visiting professors. This has given VNU's staff and students opportunities to upgrade their skills, as well as to discuss scientific issues.

Each year VNU receives important financial support and assistance from different international funds originating in Australia, Japan, Korea, the USA, among other countries. These funds are offered in the form of scholarships for qualified, but disadvantaged students. Those students with a strong academic record and proven research abilities are recommended by the university to receive a certain amount of money, usually ranging from USD 100 to USD 1,000.

VNU has also established a French University Center and in the last few years, VNU has worked closely with JICA on the establishment of the Japan-Vietnam International School with grant aid from the Japanese Government. All these projects contribute to VNU's mission to achieve parity between its training programs and international standards, which will in turn help VNU speed up its integration into regional and world higher education communities.

VNU is now a member of international and regional organizations that regulate and oversee higher education networks, such as the ASEAN University Network (AUN), the Asia Pacific Quality Network (APQN), the University Mobility Asia Pacific (UMAP), and the Association of South-East Asian Institutions of Higher Learning (ASAIHL). Therein, common concerns relating to higher education, programs, resources and activities can be shared.

In 1999, VNU became a member of BESETOHA, an annual forum of the four leading national universities in East Asia; namely, the University of Tokyo, Peking University, Seoul National University and Vietnam National University, Hanoi. This is a place where senior administrators of the four universities can meet and promote mutual understanding in order to advance common initiatives aimed at improving the development of each institution. At the 8th annual BESETOHA forum, hosted by VNU in November 2006, four presidents signed the "Hanoi Declaration." This declaration endeavors to make the BESETOHA forum an official network, serving the goal of cooperation in higher education and the promotion of academic

exchanges, not only among East Asian countries, but with institutions worldwide. In 2007, at the 9th BESETOHA forum, VNU together with the other three universities, signed an MOU to promote cooperation among the four institutions. By participating in this important forum, VNU can succeed in improving the quality of Vietnamese higher education and enhance its recognition in the region and throughout the world.

4.2.2 Staff and student mobility

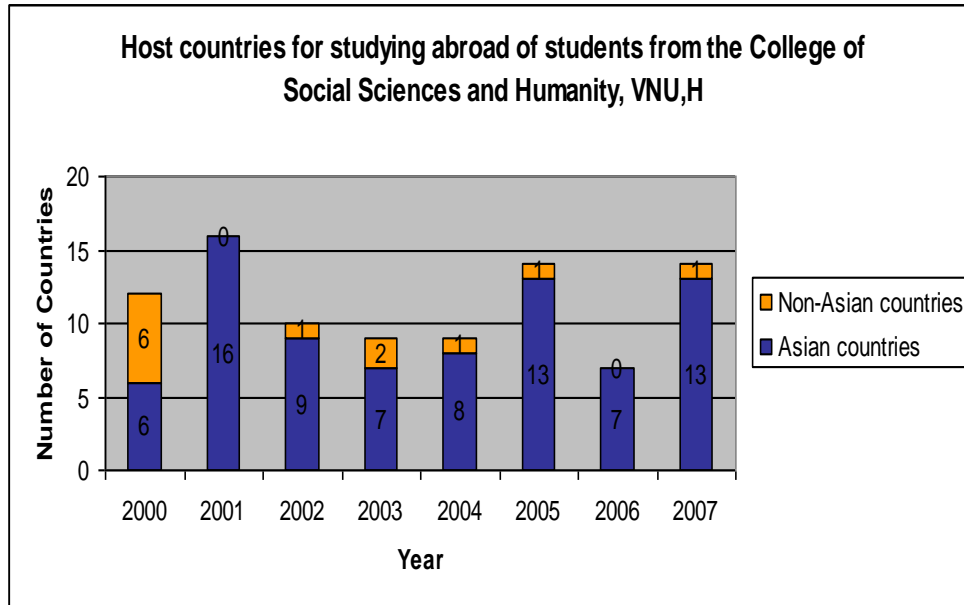
Ensuring VNU staff the possibility to upgrade skills and qualifications, is one of the most important challenges VNU faces in order to enhance the quality of teaching, learning and research. VNU has implemented policies that encourage staff and faculty to upgrade their qualifications abroad. For example, lecturers retain tenure status and a percentage of their salary during the period spent pursuing studies overseas. VNU also offers good working conditions for these lecturers and researchers upon completion of their programs, so that they can continue to develop their research and careers, while contributing to the development of the university.

Each year, VNU sends a great number of faculty, staff, researchers and students overseas for short and long-term training courses, joint research projects, workshops and conferences. However, the number of faculty members going abroad to pursue graduate degrees is still modest and needs to be augmented. For example, from 1999 to 2007, only 18 lecturers of the College of Technology were sent abroad for master and PhD programs. Similarly, in the six years from 2001 to 2007, the College of Economics had 13 lecturers sent abroad to further their studies.

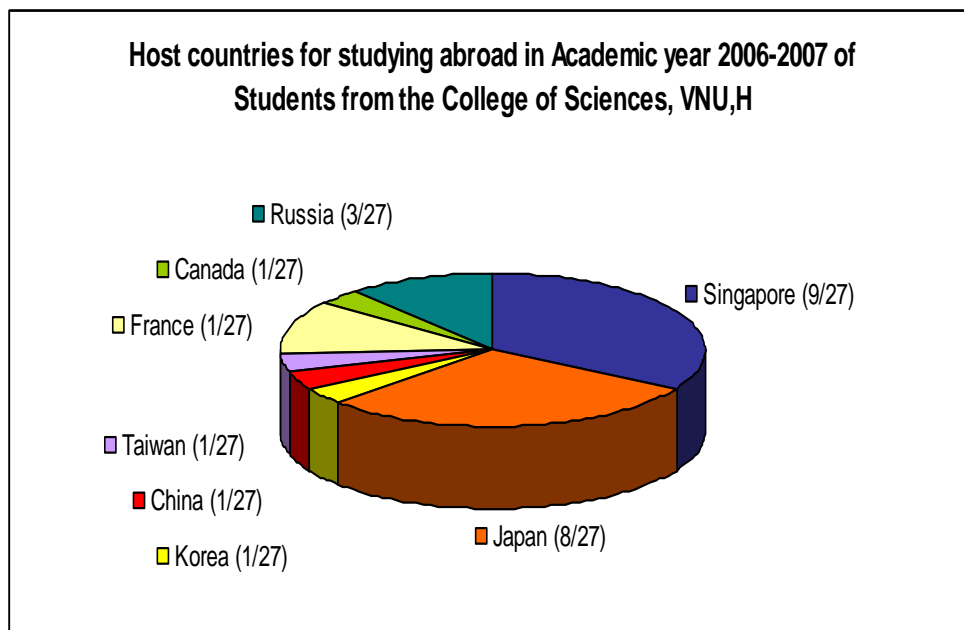
In recent years, opportunities to study abroad have become increasingly accessible for VNU's staff and students. Students and staff pursuing an overseas education belong to one of the three categories: i) those funded by the Vietnamese government, receiving scholarships from governmental bilateral agreements or being sponsored by local budgets; ii) those sent under

bilateral agreements between VNU and other foreign institutions or organizations; and iii) those whom are privately financed.

The following graphs present figures for VNU students who have studied abroad in recent years, as well as destination countries:



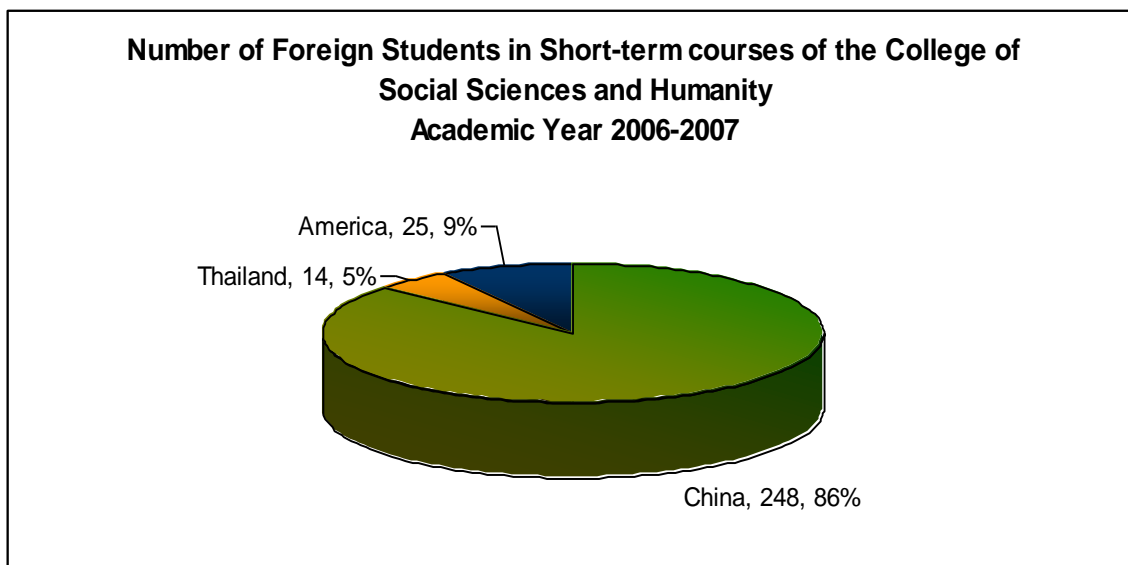
Source: Annual Reports of the College of Social Sciences and Humanity, VNU



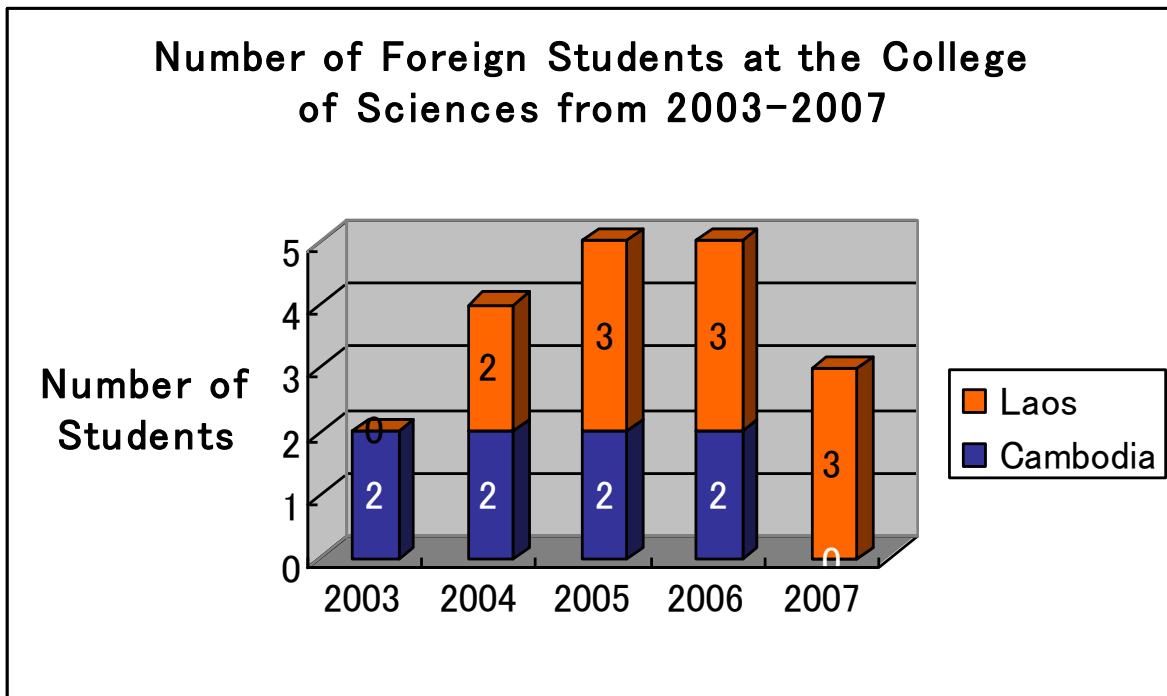
Source: Annual Report 2006-2007 of the College of Sciences, VNU

As illustrated in the diagrams above, East Asian countries have become a popular destination for VNU students wishing to further their studies. There are two reasons for this new trend. First, most of these students chose to study in Japan, Korea, China and Singapore because they receive scholarships from these governments; part of overseas aid funds earmarked for Vietnam's education sector. Another possible explanation is the choice to study in a given field; this is particularly true for students belonging to the College of Social Sciences and Humanities. Most of these students belong to the Faculty of Oriental Studies, and their majors are in oriental studies: Japanese studies, Korean studies or Chinese studies. It is for this reason as well that East Asian countries make up a large portion of host countries among students of this college.

VNU acts a host institution for scientists and students from foreign countries, as well. Each year, VNU receives about 500 foreign students for short or long-term courses and research projects. These students can be broken down in similar categories as those students going abroad to pursue their studies. It must be noted, however, that foreign governments send most students via bilateral agreements between countries. A large number of foreign students in VNU come from East Asian countries, especially China, Japan, Korea, Thailand, Laos and Cambodia.



Source: 2007 Annual Report of the College of Social Sciences and Humanity, VNU



Source: 2007 Annual Report of the College of Sciences, VNU

Those students arriving via more developed countries, such as the USA, Japan, Korea or China, usually come to VNU to study the Vietnamese language and Vietnamese culture in the final years of their programs. However, for less developed countries, such as Laos and Cambodia, VNU helps to train their students in scientific majors on a full-time basis in pursuit of undergraduate degrees.

Attracting more foreign students, especially in joint and high quality education programs, is considered of utmost importance for VNU. This will lead to greater regional and international recognition and will contribute to a more international study environment, as well as generating financial resources. However, thus far, no specific and detailed plans to achieve this target have

been put forward. Furthermore, VNU still lacks a center offering special support services for foreign students. Both the International Relations Department and the Political-Students Affairs Department are charged with overseeing international students at VNU. Each member college and faculty within VNU contains these two departments to help and supervise foreign students in terms of student life, academics and official procedures.

4.2.3 International education programs

Over ten years, VNU has established 34 joint degree training programs with 24 international education institutions, many of which are prestigious universities, such as the University of New South Wales, La Trobe University (Australia), Massey University (New Zealand), Paris-Sud University (France), to name but a few. These comprise 14 undergraduate and 20 graduate programs, offering courses in various fields. The most popular fields of study in joint programs are economics and business administration, with 7 out of 14 programs at the undergraduate level and 9 in 20 courses at the graduate level offered in these fields. Most of these programs are jointly offered by VNU and non-Asian international universities. There are only 9 out of 34 joint training programs that have Asian institution partners, of which 4 are from Malaysia, 4 are from China and 1 institution from Taiwan.

The implementation of joint training programs with international universities is considered to be an important way to enhance the quality of education and achieve regional and international standards. Although these joint programs have helped VNU to generate revenues, financial gain is not the main purpose for developing such programs. Rather, there are a number of rationales for developing such kinds of international training programs, as perceived by VNU and its member institutions' managers and administrators. Firstly, these programs offer very good opportunities for students to study advanced programs, allowing greater access to digital libraries and modern study environments. VNU's faculty and professionals can better their

qualifications via curriculum and technology transfer, accessing and utilizing international knowledge and teaching materials, learning from experiences in curriculum development, teaching methods, student assessment methods, as well as management skills. Moreover, together with the implementation of joint and sandwich programs, VNU and its member institutions can gain regional and international recognition because their curricula and training programs are compatible and comparable with foreign university systems and standards. This is an essential way VNU is strengthening its reputation and prestige in the international community.

In recent years, VNU has become more selective in signing MOUs and establishing joint training programs with international institutions. In the mean time, VNU is preparing a regulation document concerning VNU's international cooperation activities and that of its colleges and faculties. Colleges and faculties at VNU are encouraged to diversify relationships and cooperation with prestigious universities all over the world. Joint training programs must be implemented by VNU with universities in the top 500 of the world ranking. They must offer high quality education programs which are suitable to Vietnam's development.

4.2.4 Strategy to achieve regional and international standards

VNU's Strategic Development Plan sets as an objective achieving the level of an 'advanced university' in the Southeast Asia region by 2010, and achieving international standards in several key fields and sub-fields. VNU's long-term goal is to be ranked in the list of top Asian universities and later, recognized as a prestigious university internationally (VNU, 2008b).

In 2007, VNU launched the '16+23 Project,' which will continue until 2010. This project furthers VNU's efforts to achieve its development goals. The project focuses on establishing and developing 16 scientific/high technology and socio-economic fields and sub-fields at VNU, both of which are to achieve international standards by 2010.

The project gives priority to international training programs and student and staff exchange, targeting qualification upgrades in key science and technology fields. VNU will invest a large amount of money to support their faculty in improving foreign language ability, and in order to send lecturers and researchers abroad for qualification upgrades. VNU's goal is to attract about 400 scholarships for staff and students to study abroad each year. VNU and its member institutions also introduced policies to encourage their faculty and professionals to develop scientific research, to actively take part in and present at international conferences, as well as increasing the number of publications in regional and international peer-reviewed journals. VNU intends to maximize international sponsor resources in order to improve physical infrastructures and equipment throughout its facilities, as well.

In the coming years, VNU will focus on promoting cooperation with powerful countries in the field of education and scientific research, namely with North American, EU, Northeast Asian and Eastern European countries. VNU will also strengthen longstanding relationships with Russia, Laos, and Cambodia. At the same time, VNU will enhance bilateral and multilateral relations with governmental and non-governmental organizations, and regional and international associations, especially via university networks such as AUN, UMAP, BESETOHA, and CONFRASIE.

In its international cooperation strategy, VNU places a significant emphasis on the promotion of close and sustainable cooperation with countries and educational institutions in ASEAN, particularly in East Asia. This is perceived as a good way for VNU to quickly attain a higher quality in higher education, while preserving its national character and identity (Mai, T.N, 2007).

VNU supports and contributes to the higher education harmonization process among ASEAN countries. It is now seeking the 'AUN label', an accreditation of quality standards used

by the ASEAN University Network. These types of accreditation are necessary for the mobility of staff and students, because they help bring about mutual recognition of degrees within the region. In the mean time, VNU is finalizing the Quality Standard for Program Accreditation, based on AUN quality standards. This is an essential step forward in harmonizing education between VNU and other AUN universities (Mai, T.N, 2007).

5. Conclusion

Since 1986, Vietnam's higher education sector has made tremendous progress. However at present, the system is still faced with a wide range of problems and challenges. Internationalization is considered an important policy approach to secure the development and progress of Vietnam's higher education sector, while striving to achieve international standards and greater regional cooperation.

At both the national and institutional levels, an East Asian dimension to internationalization is discernable; and this, most often in the form of student and staff mobility. The number of Vietnamese students going to East Asian countries to further their studies has been on the rise. Vietnam has strengthened relationships and collaboration with countries in East Asia and has become a member of organizations and associations concerned with higher education in the region. Vietnam is now playing an active role in promoting the harmonization of higher education within the Southeast Asian region and amongst East Asian countries, as well.

However, with regard to international standards at both the national and institutional levels, it seems that Vietnam is orienting itself toward Western models of regulation and standardization. This shift is evidenced in the internationalization of curricula and the establishment and implementation of joint training programs, where universities from Anglo-Saxon countries dominate.

It is necessary for Vietnam to invest more in academic research and data collection and data analysis at both national and institution level on internationalization of higher education as the basis for policy and strategy direction in the near future. In order to achieve regional and international standard, Vietnam should strengthen and enhance the quality assurance system as well as prepare man power and financial resources necessary for the development and internationalization of higher education. Vietnam needs to build the road map for further stages in the internationalization process and identify its position in at regional and international context.

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