



## **What are the perceptions of Vietnamese students in approaching the teaching and learning process in Australia?**

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### **ABSTRACT**

Going overseas for study has been a trend of Vietnamese students. Australia is one of the countries attracting a huge numbers of Vietnamese students. During studying in Australian institutions, adapting with new culture, language and also new teaching and learning styles is not an easy task for international students in general and Vietnamese students in particular. Through my own experiences and perceptions of some selected Vietnamese students, there are general pictures of both Vietnamese and Australian teaching and learning approaches, in which other factors such as culture, communication and language are salient exposed.

In this paper, experiences of some Vietnamese students myself included from education in Vietnam to La Trobe University, Australia have been highlighted. These include (1) a review of literature of teaching and learning process in both Vietnamese and Australian contexts; (2) my personal experiences of teaching and learning in both Vietnam and Australia, specifically at La Trobe University; (3) the suggestions and recommendations for: Vietnamese students studying at Australian universities and going back Vietnam, the suggestions for teaching approach of education in Vietnam, and recommendations of Australian teachers.

Based on the results of this study, my expectation is to deliver to the readers an overview of perceptions of Vietnamese students studying overseas. The recommendations and suggestions of this paper are expected to be useful hints for Vietnamese students who are going and studying overseas especially in Australia. Moreover, those one would be useful references for Australian teachers who are teaching international students, and also for Vietnamese educational administrators and teachers.

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## นักศึกษาชาวเวียดนามมีการเรียนรู้อย่างไร ในการใช้วิธีการในกระบวนการเรียนการสอนในออสเตรเลีย?

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### บทคัดย่อ

การไปศึกษาต่อในต่างประเทศในการวิจัยนั้น เป็นแนวโน้มของนักศึกษาชาวเวียดนาม ออสเตรเลีย เป็นประเทศหนึ่งที่ดึงดูดใจนักศึกษาชาวเวียดนามเป็นจำนวนมาก ในช่วงเวลาการศึกษาในสถาบัน การศึกษาในออสเตรเลีย, การปรับตัวให้เข้ากับวัฒนธรรมใหม่, ภาษาและรูปแบบใหม่ ๆ ด้านการ เรียนการสอน ไม่ใช่ภาระการเรียนที่ง่ายสำหรับนักศึกษานานาชาติในนักศึกษาทั่วไป และนักศึกษา ชาวเวียดนามโดยเฉพาะ จากประสบการณ์ของข้าพเจ้า และการรับรู้ของนักศึกษาบางคนที่ได้รับ เลือกชาวเวียดนาม มีภาพทั่วไปของทั้งแนวคิดเกี่ยวกับการเรียนการสอน ทั้งของชาวเวียดนาม และชาวออสเตรเลีย ซึ่งปัจจัยอื่นๆ เช่น วัฒนธรรม การสื่อสาร และภาษาเป็นสิ่งที่เด่นชัด

ในงานวิจัยนี้มุ่งเน้นประสบการณ์ของนักศึกษาชาวเวียดนามบางคน ตัวข้าพเจ้า รวมทั้ง จากการศึกษานี้ในเวียดนาม ต่อมหาวิทยาลัย ลาโทรเบ ใน ออสเตรเลีย มีดังต่อไปนี้ (1) การ ศึกษาวิจัยที่เกี่ยวข้องกับกระบวนการเรียนการสอน ในบริบทชาวเวียดนามและชาวออสเตรเลีย (2) ประสบการณ์ส่วนตัวของข้าพเจ้าเกี่ยวกับการเรียนการสอนทั้งเวียดนามและออสเตรเลีย โดยเฉพาะอย่างยิ่งที่มหาวิทยาลัยลาโทรเบ (3) มีข้อเสนอแนะและคำแนะนำให้แก่ : นักศึกษาชาว เวียดนาม ที่กำลังศึกษาที่มหาวิทยาลัยในออสเตรเลีย และกลับไปเวียดนาม ข้อเสนอแนะให้แก่ แนวคิดด้านการสอนเกี่ยวกับการศึกษาในเวียดนาม และคำแนะนำขอครูผู้สอนชาวออสเตรเลีย

จากผลการวิจัยนี้ ความคาดหวังของข้าพเจ้าคือ การนำเสนอการทบทวนเกี่ยวกับเกี่ยว กับ การรับรู้ของนักศึกษาชาวเวียดนามที่กำลังศึกษาในต่างประเทศให้แก่ผู้อ่าน ข้อเสนอแนะและ คำแนะนำในงานวิจัยนี้ ถูกคาดหวังให้มีประโยชน์แก่นักศึกษาชาวเวียดนามผู้ซึ่งไปและศึกษาใน ต่างประเทศ โดยเฉพาะออสเตรเลีย ยิ่งไปกว่านั้น จะเป็นแหล่งอ้างอิงที่มีประโยชน์แก่ครูผู้สอน ซึ่งเป็นชาวออสเตรเลียที่กำลังสอนนักศึกษานานาชาติ รวมทั้งผู้บริหารการศึกษาและครูผู้สอน ชาวเวียดนามอีกด้วย

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## INTRODUCTION

"During studying here, I found that teachers often apply new teaching methods which are very useful for us. One of the good points of the teachers here is they are very creative and always keep studying up to date knowledge, which is different from the teachers like us in Vietnam.

They are also good at encouraging the activeness of students. A good teacher when observing a group, if he/she finds some students only participate passively, he/she will immediately ask these students some questions about the discussing topics, thus indirectly make them to participate in the group.

This is very good to encourage students promoting their ability and activeness in study" (A student who are doing master in Science Technology in Education at La Trobe University) The above reveal would be one of the comprehensive views of teaching and learning in Western universities in general and Australian universities in particular.

International students, who come from different social, cultural and educational backgrounds, might have an adequate and comprehensive appraisal about the quality of teaching approach and learning environment in Australian institutions. Thus,

in this paper, I will explore the perceptions of Vietnamese students in approaching the teaching and learning styles in Australian universities, typically, it will be mainly examined at La Trobe University.

In the beginning, international students in general and Vietnamese students in particular usually find it difficult to adapt to the teaching and learning environment in Australia for. Coming from a country, where the education system is very traditional, the initial obstacles are unavoidable toward Vietnamese students. Ho, Holmes & Cooper (2004) show that, most international students experienced the initial shock when they were imagined to be and what was actually required.

As a result, this paper will investigate the perceptions of Vietnamese students toward the teaching and learning styles in Australian institutions. There are three following sections which will be discussed in this paper:

1. The literature review in term of teaching-learning process and teacher-student relationship.
  - Vietnamese context
  - Australian context
2. My personal experiences in term of teaching-learning process
  - My experiences in Vietnam



- My experiences in Australia: at  
La Trobe University

3. The suggestions and recommendations

- The suggestions for Vietnamese students who are studying at Australian Universities.

- The recommendations for Vietnamese students who are going back Vietnam.

- The suggestions for teaching approach in Vietnam.

- The recommendations for Australian teachers.

This paper is an attempt to bring to Australian teachers, local students and international students the perceptions of Vietnamese students.

The different teaching and learning contexts between Vietnam and Australia will be delivered to the readers. This paper also expects from the readers an empathy and sympathy to the obstacles and difficulties which international students in general and Vietnamese students in particular are coping with.

## **What is going on: a review of the literature**

### **1 Vietnamese context**

In the past, Vietnam was dominated by China for thousands of years, and parallel with the influences in culture, language or political, education is still impacted by Confucianism. Confucianism is a progressive ideology which heightens the values of morals, humanity and tolerance among humans. Furthermore, Confucian ideology praises peace and condemns inhuman wars.

These ideas are valuable and true in any circumstances and in any society. However, in the educational field, some instructions of Confucianism are not suitable and not appropriate in current societies, especially in Vietnam — one of the countries which is on the way to integrate with the world. The confucian influence in education has been quite apparent until now when the distance between students and teacher is changing. Especially, Confucianism has deeply impacted on teaching and learning, which are indispensable features of education system.

Importantly, Phuoc (1975 cited in Ellis, 1995) indicated that "the Confucian model is teacher-centered, closed, suspicious of creativity, and predicated on an unquestioning



obedience from the students" (42).

Generally, traditions may contain elements to hinder progress and create inappropriate attitudes towards improvement (Tong 2000, cited in An, 2001).

One aspect of Vietnamese tradition is reflected in the hierarchy of both the society and education systems (An, 2001).

This hierarchy makes the traditional Vietnamese teaching-learning style a teacher-centered one-way communication. In recent years, these traditional styles are changing towards student-centered approaches. However, the changes are not yet very effective, as educators become influenced by ideas from Western education.

Regarding the teacher-centered approach, Elsey (1990, cited in M. Kinnell 1990) expresses the idea that the control role of the teacher is a reflection of the perception that **"teachers know best"** and therefore **"the learners have very little say"**. Hence, the learners in Vietnam from generations are trained to be "listeners". Vu (1995) reports that "In Vietnam, the teacher gives lectures in the forms of reading, speaking about the content of the lesson and writing on the board what is required to be remembered. The students listen to the teacher's talk and take notes in silence" (9).

Contributing to that Duong, Diller & Sutherland (1975) comments "Inside a Vietnamese classroom, the courtesy observed is silence, to allow the teacher to speak without interruption and classmates study without interference" (21).

In addition, the students are only allowed to speak or ask the questions with the permission from their teacher. Otherwise, questioning the teacher is considered to be rude and unacceptable. The students' responsibilities are obeying teachers and having good behavior toward their teachers. They are trained to be thankful to the teachers. Hoang Tuy (2000:54) said that owing to the hierarchical system and the notion that "the teachers know the best", the teaching becomes dictatorial and the learning becomes forced and passive. Consequently, this is the reason why the Vietnamese student "finds it easy to imitate, but difficult to do creative works" (Nguyen, 1998. p20).

Moreover, teacher and learner's communication is more difficult in terms of "keeping face". Wei (1977) said that "the Vietnamese traditionally do not reveal any of their problems to outsiders because such of the revelation is view as sign of the weakness. Problems are solved within the family, and exposure of them to non-



family member is considered shameful not only for the individual but also for the family and even for the entire nation" (12).

Contributing to the perception of face, Sullivan (1994) notices that "Asian cultures like to pay more attention to face in the form of saving face or losing face" (87).

In the class, neither the teachers nor the students should be made to lose face. On one hand, the students keep quiet in the class without discussing and contributing to the teacher's lecture to show their respect toward their teacher and to avoid making mistakes and losing face in public. As Hwang (1986) points out "he or she must pay attention to preserving other's face in social encounters, especially the face of the superiors" (248).

On the other hand, the teachers rarely give students a chance to question to avoid having to answering the learners' question by "I do not know" (Teachers are at all times supposed to know everything). As a result, the communicating transactions between the two partners are weak and the students are not really connected to the class and the lessons.

## **2 Australian context**

In Anglo-Australian higher education (Ballard & Clanchy), there is a notion that tertiary education emphasizes the potential for extending the students' knowledge base,

and for the creation of "new" knowledge. This notion is rooted in the relationship between teaching and learning strategy and the cultural attitudes to knowledge which inform them.

Ballard & Clanchy (1997) believe that higher education in Australia is based on an extending attitude to knowledge; therefore, the teaching strategy directs the students to independent and critical thinking, the development of a capacity for abstraction, and the expansion of knowledge. To have a broader overview of Western higher education, including Australian education, it is useful to look at some theories of holistic education. These conceptions are not exactly the same, but share the progressiveness of teaching and learning approaches.

According to Flake (1998) the purposes of holistic education are to:

1. Give young people a vision of the universe in which all animate and inanimate are interconnected and unified.
2. Help students synthesize learning and discover the interrelatedness of all disciplines.
3. Prepare students for life in the 21 st century by emphasizing a global perspective and common human interests.
4. Enable the young to develop a sense of harmony and spirituality — which are needed to construct world peace.



The theory shows a more comprehensive purpose of teaching and learning. Following this point, teaching and learning is not only to transmit and to receive the academic knowledge from textbooks, but also assist learners to develop harmoniously. Supplementing this point, Miller & Drake (1998) suppose that the holistic teaching usually focuses on relationships:

1. Relationship between linear thinking and intuition.
2. Relationship between mind and body.
3. Relationships among domains of knowledge.
4. Relationship between self and community.
5. Relationship between self and self.

Western education in general and Australian education in particular often requires from the teacher a combination of "the theoretical, the personal and the political" (White, 2006). Moreover, White indicates that, teachers not only equip themselves but also know what should be required from students. For example, teachers would "require students to focus on their own educational experiences and identity, and demands the articulation and documentation of beliefs, values and philosophy" (16). White (2006) establishes five key elements of learning:

1. Creativity derived from risk-taking and daring.
2. Support and encouragement for students, especially when working in unfamiliar ways.
3. Collaboration and collegiality in dealing with challenges, negotiating and solving problems.
4. Encouragement and inclusion of innovative thinking and ideas (including the personal and the political).
5. Exploration of ideas and learning through the creation of performance rather than learning about ideas through discussion and reading only.

One of the important jobs of teachers is to maintain the relationship between mind and body. From this, the student can sense the unity and connection between mind and body. The relationship could be discovered through movement, dance, and centering exercises. Miller & Drake (1998) observe at Simcoe Street School and describe that at this school, almost teachers use role playing, drama, or theater in their programs. Through these movements, students might express their feelings indirectly as well as practice movement skills.

Complementing this point, White (2006) says that the performance of students will be much more effective if they are all



engaged in singing, dancing, and high levels of emotion and drama.

Clearly, if coping too much with academic knowledge, students could be stressed, and it might negatively affect their studying outcomes. Therefore, the implementing of some activities such as dance, singing or drama could enhance the mind-body connection of students. Miller (1998) suggests that, to do this, teachers "select a piece of music that evokes strong

images for you"(11). This idea would seem out of place in Vietnam.

The studies reveals that, in Australia, along with most other Western societies, education is designated as having small power-distance relationships. Hofstede (1986) indicated that the power-distance flexibility impacts the nature of the teacher-student relationship (see Table 1)

**TABLE 1**

*Differences in Teacher/Student and Student/Student Interaction Related to the Power Distance Dimension*

<b>SMALL POWER DISTANCE SOCIETIES</b>	<b>LARGE POWER DISTANCE SOCIETIES</b>
1. stress on impersonal "truth" which can in principle be obtained from any competent person	2. stress on personal "wisdom" which is transferred in the relationship with a particular teacher (guru)
3. a teacher should respect the independence of his/her students	4. a teacher merits the respect of his/her students
5. student-centred education (premium on initiative	6. teacher-centred education (premium on older)
7. teacher expects students to initiate communication	8. students expect teacher to initiate communication
9. teacher expects students to find their own paths	10. students expect teacher to outline paths to follow
11. students may speak up spontaneously in class	12. students speak up in class only when invited by the teacher
13. student allowed to contradict or criticise teacher	14. teacher is never contradicted nor publicly criticised
15. effectiveness of learning related to amount of two-way communication in class	16. effectiveness of learning related to excellence of the teacher





SMALL POWER DISTANCE SOCIETIES	LARGE POWER DISTANCE SOCIETIES
17. outside class, teachers are treated as equals	18. respect for teachers is also shown outside class
19. in teacher/student conflicts, parents are expected to side with the student	20. in teacher/student conflicts, parents are expected to side with the teacher
21. younger teachers are more liked than older teachers	22. older teachers are more respected than younger teachers

**Re-printed from:**

Hofstede, G. (1986). Cultural Differences in Teaching and Learning. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, Vol.10, pp. 301-320.

Hofstede (1980) found that most traditional societies in Western society, including Australia, are individualistic, while in South East Asian areas are collectivist. In individualist society, a person looks primarily

after his or her own self interest and the interest of his or her immediate family.

In contrast, a collectivise culture consists of a tightly knit collection of clannish groups, all uniformly labeled and arranged hierarchically according to social standing. As with power-distance, this also has specifications for the teacher-student interaction (see Table 2).

**TABLE 2**

*Differences in Teacher/Student and Student/Student Interaction Related to the Individualism versus Collectivism Dimension*

COLLECTIVIST SOCIETIES	INDIVIDUALIST SOCIETIES
1. positive association in society with whatever is rooted in tradition	2. positive association in society with whatever is "new"
3. the young should learn; adults cannot accept student role	4. one is never too old to learn; "permanent education"
5. students expect to learn how to do	6. students expect to learn how to learn



COLLECTIVIST SOCIETIES	INDIVIDUALIST SOCIETIES
7. individual students will only speak up in class when called upon personally by the teacher	8. individual students will speak up in class in response to a general invitation by the teacher
9. individuals will only speak up in small groups	10. individuals will speak up in large groups
11. large classes split socially into smaller, cohesive subgroups based on particularist criteria (e.g. ethnic affiliation)	12. sub groupings in class vary from one situation to the next based on universalist criteria (e.g. the task "at hand")
13. formal harmony in learning situations should be maintained at all times (T-groups are taboo)	14. confrontation in learning situations can be salutary; conflicts can be brought into the open
15. neither the teacher nor any students should ever be made to lose face	16. face-consciousness is weak
17. education is a way of gaining prestige in one's social environment and of joining a higher status group ("a ticket to a ride")	18. education is a way of improving one's economic worth and self-respect based on ability and competence
19. diploma certificates are important and displayed on walls	20. diploma certificates have little symbolic value
21. acquiring certificates, even through illegal means (cheating, corruption) is more important than acquiring competence	22. acquiring competence is more important than acquiring certificates
23. teachers are expected to give preferential treatment to some students (e.g. based on ethnic affiliation or on recommendation by an influential person)	24. teachers are expected to be strictly impartial

**Re-printed from:**

pp. 301-320.

Hofstede, G. (1986). Cultural Differences in Teaching and Learning. International Journal of Intercultural Relations, Vol. 10,

The teacher-student communication in Australia can be viewed as following the requirements of holistic education. Miller



(1998) suggests that the teacher-student relationship should be open and dynamic in holistic settings, instead of following bureaucratic and conservative rules. In fact, the effective and efficient teaching-learning activities do not totally depend on rigid models in classroom. In contrast, it mostly comes from the mutual sympathy and understanding between teachers and learners. And the most important thing is to set up an open communication between teachers and learners. In factual lives, it is challenging to work effectively without cooperation with others, especially in education. According to Miller (1998) teachers should not work in isolation. He recommends that they should work together with students to seek the suitable ways of instructional and classroom management strategies. Contributing to this, Miller (2000) states one of the principle of holistic educators is "we must respond to the learner with an open, inquisitive mind and a loving heart, and a sensitive understanding of the world he or she growing into (...). A holistic teacher is acutely sensitive to the student's needs and, at the same time, acutely aware of the challenges and possibilities the world offers this person at this moment and in this place".

Apparently, these ideas are still so strange toward Vietnamese context which usually exist a barrier between teachers and students.

## Methodology

### 1. The rationale for choosing a qualitative approach

To carry out this paper, a qualitative approach was chosen. The rationale for the qualitative approach relates to the nature of the essay and the availability of data. This paper is placed in a particular situation, the teaching and learning approach at Australian University. In this case, the information will be perceived differently by different participant according to their values, backgrounds and experiences. Thus, the qualitative approach generally examines people's words and actions in different ways more closely represents the situation as experienced by the participants (Maykut & Morehouse, 1994:2)

### 2. Research design

There are four students who were chosen to be participants of this paper. The criterion for these participants are as follows.

1. Vietnamese students who had experiences in both learning and teaching in



Vietnam.

2. Studying at La Trobe

3. Doing coursework

### **3. Method of data collection**

The means of data collection in this paper is interview. The questions for interview were designed as follows.

**Question 1:** In your experiences, what are differences in teaching and learning approach between Vietnam and Australia?

**Question 2:** What are your initial difficulties for the beginning time in Australia?

**Question 3:** What is your recommendation for Australian teachers?

**Question 4:** What are your implications for Vietnamese students and Vietnamese education?

### **4. Data analysis**

The summary of the participants' responses from interview was prepared for analysis by identifying units of meaning in the data. Based on those propositions, the integration of data was carried out to bring the new insights and understanding of the participants.

### **My personal experiences**

Every Vietnamese person knows by heart proverbs and sayings about the role

and position of the teacher, such as: Vua, thay, cha ay ba ngoi Kinh tho nhu mot tre oi ghi long.

The King, the teacher and the father are at different positions; but children remember that they should venerate them equally as one unified person (Phuoc, 1975, cited in Ellis, 1995)

Or

Cha me sinh con thay cho cuoc song

My parents give me birth but my teacher made a man of me

Or

Khong thay do may lam nen

You would do nothing without a teacher

Or

Muon sang phai bac cau kieu

Muon con hay chu phai yeu lay thay

To get over a river, you must need a bridge

To become a good student, you have to admire the teacher At school, there are several slogans which are attached to the class wall to praise the teacher's credit in graduating, for instance:

Nhat tu vi su, ban tu vi su

Whoever teaches me a letter, He should be my teacher

Or



Tien hoc le, hau hoc van

Learn moral first, learn literacy later

For the Vietnamese, the meanings of the above proverbs and sayings are positive about the role of the teacher in any educational system and any society. Teachers are people who not only transmit academic knowledge to students, but also teach students how to live and behave to each other morally and humanely. As a result, teachers deserve to be deeply respected not only by students but also by a whole society. However, the respect and admiration of students toward their teachers does not mean that students have to absolutely follow everything that teachers say and do. This respect does not mean that students must always answer "yes", "agree" or "right" without arguments or discussions. If we incline too much in that direction, it would affect both teaching and learning activities: inhibiting the teaching approaches of teachers and blocking the creativeness of students. These concerns have been raised and being raised in Vietnamese education. In the following sections, I will describe and evaluate these contents through my personal experiences, and also through my observations when I was in Vietnam.

### **1 In Vietnam**

When I was a learner in Vietnam, I

was not aware that the education system, which I was following, was very traditional and conventional, because I did not have any chance to approach another educational system. Everything that I had learnt was already recognized and acknowledged nationwide. In brief, I believed that all of the knowledge from textbooks and all the talk from teachers were the best. I always thought that I had to follow, copy and imitate them whatever the reasons were. In my mind, there was no room for argument or discussion. The absolute obedience to teachers was the target which I was trying to reach. I could not be aware that the way I thought and the way teachers performed were following the teacher-centered approach.

From elementary school to high school, I had to learn every academic subject except music, art and dance. The classroom was usually divided into two, with a few rows on each side, and an aisle between the two sides. Students had to sit in the same place until the end of the school year. When going to class, we always had to bring the textbooks which were published by the government, and open them when the lecture started. During the lectures, we tried to copy all the content which teachers wrote on the board. Almost



all the content written down in class would be used for tests and exams.

At tertiary level, I studied at the Education University where I was trained to become a teacher. This was not much different from high school level regarding teaching and learning styles. In the first two years, we had to cover plenty of knowledge from natural to social subjects, even though some subjects were not relevant to my professional area. This period of time is called *Dai hoc dai cuong* (general university), and we called it "*cuoi ngua xem hoa*" (riding a horse to see flowers). This means that we learnt lots, but knew little.

In addition, we were not allowed to assess the teachers' work. I have an unforgettable memory that, in 1997, I was in the third year student at university. We had a usual test in class, and the requirement of the test was "*danh gia vai tro dac thu cua mot giao vien day van sau khi ra truong*" (to evaluate the specific role of literature teacher). One of my classmates wrote in his paper that "*nguai giao vien day van co nhung dac thu riêng khac voi giao vien cac bo mon khac nhu toan, ly hoac ngoai ngu. Nguai giao vien day van ngoai kien thuc co ban phai co tri tuong tuong phong phu va co su cam nhan tinh te tu nhung*

*tac pham van hoc. Theo toi, chi co nam giao vien o khoa ngu van cua truong ta la co du tieu chuan ay*" (the literature teachers have specific requirements, in the comparison with teachers of other subjects such as mathematic, physic or foreign language. The literature teachers beside the basic knowledge, they should have aptitude of fantasy and sensitive feelings. In my opinion, there are only five lecturers in our faculty might meet these criteria). After that, this paper was handed to the lecturers in faculty, and almost all the literature lecturers vented their unhappiness and anger with that student. It is worth noting that, at that time, I also disagreed with that student and I always thought that his evaluation was inappropriate and improper, until I went to Australia to study. Then, I understood that he was right, and he was much better than me in the way of thinking about the teaching activity when we were at university.

From my personal experiences above and the overview of Vietnamese education, it can be briefly summed up that Vietnamese education has developed slowly. There is no holistic education in Vietnam. The huge impacts of Confucianism still deeply affects Vietnamese education. What can we do to strengthen and enhance the education



system in Vietnam? This question is complex and difficult to solve, and it really needs the consensus of a whole society.

As mentioned above, the idea of the powerful position of a teacher, who is one of the most respected persons in society, has been stuck in the thoughts of students as a sacrosanct hierarchy. Thus, the classroom seems to be a reserved place for teachers only, as students are likely to have no chance expressing their own ideas and opinions.

Unlike the Western way of addressing people, Vietnamese do not use the family name to call, talk or address others. This is because of the respect for the addressed person and his ancestors. So the given names are used. However, in most of the conversations, Vietnamese rarely use names to address people because it is considered impolite. The normal ways should be a polite term following by a personal pronoun like "thua thay" or "thay A", "thay B". (A and B are the given names). When talking or addressing the teacher, Vietnamese learner always say "thua thay", "thua co" to show their great respect. "Thua" is a very polite form which is used before a personal pronoun to talk to someone superior in both family and social rank. In return, the teachers often address their students by using "con" (child), "em" (younger sibling), or "anh/

chi" (elderly brother/sister). The terms "con" and "em" are used in most of the educational level. Other terms like "anh/chi" are only used when the learners are older than the teachers (at the university or higher education).

Inside the classroom, there seems no argument between teachers and students, and the activities in class are mostly operated by teachers. Sometimes, I disagree with teachers about some issues, but I often do not dare to give feedback to teachers. During lectures, I usually sit quietly, and observe the teaching in silence without interruption and interference. In addition, the students are only allowed to speak or ask the questions with the permission from their teacher. Otherwise, questioning the teacher is considered to be rude and unacceptable. The students' responsibilities are obeying teachers and having good behavior toward their teachers. They are trained to be thankful to the teachers. Moreover, some teachers sometimes show their attitude unhappily if students make questions.

## **2. My experiences in Australia**

When I first came to Australia, I felt not confident, as I had to use English, which is not my first language, to communicate. In



the first days, when I spoke English, teachers at La Trobe Language Center understood nothing, but they still kept their patience to listen to me. In class, when I pronounced wrongly new words, the teachers corrected thoughtfully for me and showed me how to pronounce correctly. Step by step, spending four months at language center, my English have been enhanced gradually. It could be asserted that, without the studying time at language center (LC), Vietnamese students are likely impossible to approach the master course at La Trobe University. At the LC, we had been equipped with comprehensive skills of presentation, especially academic writing. Furthermore, that is a useful time to initially adapt with Australian teaching and learning environment.

Noticeably, there is a big change from the LC to university. At the LC, all students are international students, and we were quite similar level at English, so we often felt quite confident when speaking English, even pronounced wrongly. In contrary, at Educational Faculty, there are a lot of local students, and some of them are undergraduates. They spoke very fast and using a lot of schoolboy slang, and the lecturers also spoke quickly. It really made us puzzled and unconfident. Sometimes, during the lectures, lecturer and local

students laughed and smiled when they found something interesting or funny. Interestingly, we did not understand what's going on? Why did they laugh and smile? What things made them to be interested? And we still laughed and smiled following them, even understood nothing. However, step by step, we have been getting used to with the teaching and learning environment in classroom. And another thing which cannot be ignored is that Vietnamese students have been received huge encouragement and assistance from the lecturers and local students. They have assisted us to overcome the initial difficulties not only in study, but also help us to integrate quickly with a new studying environment.

In addition, Vietnamese teachers appear not to habitually employ compliments as a positive technique to encourage their students' studies which is unbelievably different from Australian teachers. In my culture, the teacher appears to give compliments to only students who richly deserve to be justifiably praised. For this reason, Vietnamese students frequently take great pride in the teacher's rare compliments which are implied as an affirmation of their genuine success in studies. Due to the influence of Vietnamese culture, like many other international Vietnamese students, I





am occasionally suspicious of sincerity of complimentary comments that Australian teachers usually employ in class. I wonder whether their praise is a bit hackneyed and whether my work is actually excellent or not so as to further endeavor in the future. I do believe that the transition from the learning culture of an expected "large power distance" society like Vietnam to the Australian learning culture with the motto "when you are in Rome, do as the Romans do" requires international Vietnamese learners to achieve an entirely unbelievable adaptation which may be "easier said than done". Taken for an example, writing 4,000–5,000 argument essays seem to be a tremendously challenging issue to Vietnamese students in terms of critically written communication. Coming from a hierarchical society with the "large power distance" is greatly anticipated, they seem to be inevitably influenced by their uncritical writing as an upshot of conventionally cultural factors.

Another factor I have experienced is the classroom environment at La Trobe University. The obvious aspect I have realized is that there is no distance between teachers and students. Under the conducting and organizing of teachers, the classroom environment is informal and comfortable.

During the lectures, students do not have to sit on the chairs, they can sit on floor or stand against the wall if they want. Students might interrupt teacher's talk if they desire to express something. Most of the activities in class have made my mind from surprised to shocked and from curious to interested now. In the unit Intercultural Communication & Education which was lectured by Dr Keith Simkin, he talks while making coffee and tea, and he talks while walking. When the lecturer talked, one student suddenly lied down on floor and did breathing exercise. At that time, I was sure that her action could attract attention of others, but nobody cared what she did. Moreover, the lecturer danced and sang together with students in class. In the unit Holistic in Education conducted by Dr Peta Heywood, she often guides students learning by doing. For instance, when she mentioned about meditation in holistic curriculum, she showed students how to do meditation in class, and students could do meditation on chairs or on floor. In this case, I am really interested in the way of the lecture transaction which is applicable in practice I found that, during the lectures, there is no boundary between her and students. Sometimes, in presentations, she danced and sang together with students as



a friend. This would be acknowledged that Dr Peta has done as she said in an article with the title Looking at Learners (2002) "We're not teachers — we're facilitators of learning developing lifelong learners". Another unit has made me and Vietnamese students interested in are Interpersonal Skills and Communication lectured by Mrs Tricia and Mr Barry. When she mentioned about the skills of interactions between person and person, she asked one students to do a short conversation with her, and other students observed the performing between two people. To be frank, we learned a lot by that way as we could connect the theories and practice, which was performed through the conversation.

Although not all of the teaching and learning approaches are perfect and suitable in Vietnamese context, it is worth for Vietnamese students to learn. My experiences in both Vietnamese and Australian contexts show me that I have learnt from Australian education in the following factors:

1. No distance in teacher-student relationship.
2. The casual and informal environment in class.
3. The helpful assistance from lecturers.

4. The collaboration among students.
5. The empathy and encouragement from lecturers and local students.
6. The teaching approach: student-center.
7. Independent and creative learning.
8. The effectiveness and efficiency in applying theories into practice.

All factors mentioned above are very valuable to Vietnamese students who will contribute to reform of Vietnamese education in the near future. Importantly, the studying experience in Australia is reliable to give implication for Vietnamese education.

In the next part of this paper, some holistic theories in education will be examined. They would provide useful instructions and recommendations to Vietnamese learners and Vietnamese education.

## **Suggestions and recommendations**

### **1. Suggestions for Vietnamese students in Australian Universities**

It is impossible to immediately adapt with new teaching and learning approaches in a new environment. So, one of the initial factors, which Vietnamese students should do is how to integrate and adapt with a multicultural environment at classroom. Blyton (2001) asserts that



through cultural exchanges, students can recognize and discover the commonalities between themselves and others and view differences in positive way. Furthermore, this is one of the important steps in learning and preparing for life in a diverse and global society. Clearly, these activities have brought the mutual understanding and learning to Vietnamese students in particular and international students in general.

Moreover, on the way to adapt with other cultures, Vietnamese students should always be proud of their culture and language, and transmit them to others. Phillips, (1999) stated that "Each student brings to school a wealth of information that reflects the student's life, experience and cultural background" (21). It is also important to note that to adapt and integrate quickly in multicultural environment, people should understand more about each other. In fact, many international students have never known or heard about Vietnam. Their knowledge about Vietnam is zero. Because of that, Vietnamese students should introduce and tell them about Vietnamese culture and history. For example, Vietnamese students can tell the others about the way of communication in Vietnam or the disciplines in classroom.

Furthermore, Vietnamese students need to strengthen the activeness and confidence in classroom. As the above evaluation, Vietnamese students feel shock as I did in classroom in the first few days. There are many strange things in classroom such as: behaviors between students and teachers, the communication, dressing style or the way of participation in discussions. Hofstede (1986) draws the teacher-student interaction in Western classrooms that "teachers expects students to initiate communication" and "students may speak up spontaneously in class" (Table 1). Actually, it should be impossible to require Vietnamese students to immediately get used to those things. It takes time to digest and understand step by step. However, an important thing that Vietnamese students should do first is to overcome the shyness and lack of confidence to initially participate with a diverse cultural environment. I found it helpful in the first few days to observe what the others do, the way they act and ask questions what are the differences between the environment in classroom at Australian universities and Vietnamese ones? What are the efficiency and effectiveness? Moreover, Vietnamese learners should make more questions to teachers if they do not understand or not sure about something. Resulting from



interviews, Hong, a Vietnamese student confided to me that in the first semester, she rarely asked questions to teachers even though she did not understand the lectures. She was reluctantly to participate in group discussions as she found it not interesting and she usually felt stressed after class. However, in the second semester, I saw a big rise of confidence in her. She said "now I feel more familiar with the learning style here, I feel interested in discussions because it is a good chance to speak out my understandings about the issues".

Moreover, I think that Vietnamese learners should join actively and frequently in group discussions. This model was not common at Vietnamese classrooms. The traditional culture has deeply influenced on studying environment in which students were passively received the knowledge from teachers. This is drawn more specifically by Hofstede (1986) that "students expect teacher to outline paths to follow" or "students speak up in class only when invited by the teacher" (Table 1). At universities in Australia, group discussions or co-operative learning are normal models in classroom. Coelho, (1998) indicated that "mixed cooperative learning promotes inter-group relations" (23). He emphasizes that "Mixed cooperative learning allows second language learners

to hear other students using language of the subject and to have a non-judgmental forum in which to ask questions" (26). In this way, non English speaking students such as Vietnamese will have good opportunities to exchange and express their ideas. I found that group discussions is very helpful, as they brought to me alternative information about the mentioned issues, and expanded my understanding.

Furthermore, English is also one of the obstacles that Vietnamese students have to overcome to adapt with. Most Vietnamese students usually spend more time at Language Centre before starting the main course than those from other countries. At La Trobe University Language Centre, Vietnamese students have to work very hard to catch up with other students. Typically, Vietnamese learners must learn to get used to the academic writing which is not important in Vietnamese writing style. With the support of teachers, Vietnamese students have learned how to quote and paraphrase the opinions from other authors. In addition, they have practiced about presentation in English in front of the class. Huong — A sponsored student from Vietnam said that she had a big trouble at 4A level when she presented in class. She said "My pronunciation was terrible, when



I presented in class nobody understood me. However, it has been much better now, as I did more practices with pronunciation, listen to radio, watching TV and speak to native students". Another useful way for Vietnamese students to improve English is making friends with local students. This is a very good way, because students can have good chances to naturally learn English and it also helps to quickly enhance speaking ability. It can be concluded that Vietnamese students have handled with English weakness by many different ways and it should be efficiently intensified in the future.

## **2. Recommendations for Australian teachers**

In a multicultural environment at university, it not only requires teachers to present the normal teaching activity, but also expects from teachers other virtues. Probably, one of the essential criteria of teachers at international universities in Australia is the ability to meet the needs of international students. Teachers play an indispensable role in the educational achievement of different background students. They should have a cognitive base, sympathy and ability to deal with problems emerging in multicultural classrooms (Alton- Lee, 2003; Thomas, 2000, cited in

Ho, Holmes and Cooper, 2004). Clearly, it is quite a difficult task for teachers to adapt with students coming from different cultural backgrounds. Hence, the question is how and what teachers should do to effectively approach with international students in general and Vietnamese students in particular?

From my experience, I think teachers should create an inclusive learning environment. Typically, teachers should effectively gather different students from different backgrounds of knowledge and cultures. Currently, there seems to have no cooperation in studying among Vietnamese students. They often work and study separately. This is not suitable at universities in Australia. Hence, teachers should encourage positive interaction between Vietnamese students and other students from different backgrounds. For example, teachers may locate Vietnamese students in discussion group or presentation group with different students who come from different countries. This is a efficient way to assist Vietnamese learners integrate and follow quickly with others. Moreover, Vietnamese students should be encouraged to be more confident to participate in class. In my own experience, in the first semester, sometimes, I wanted to share my opinions in class, but I felt timid and did not dare to



speak out. However, at that time, if there was an encouragement from teachers, I might have enough confidence to express my ideas although I was not sure they were true or false. Obviously, for Vietnamese students, the timely encouragements can have a positive effect on them.

### **3. Recommendation for Vietnamese students who are going back Vietnam**

It can be asserted that, so far, almost all Vietnamese students, who are studying in Australia, could understand and appreciate the nature and positiveness of a new teaching and learning approaches in term of holistic education. However, I suppose that they would not to be sure that holistic education could apply immediately in Vietnamese situation. There is a meaningful proverb in Vietnamese that "Chuoai dao bang vang khong the lap vao mot luoi dao bang sat" (A golden knife handle cannot fit in a metal knife). In other words, we cannot bring whole holistic contents in education to Vietnamese situation. Furthermore, Vietnamese students, who are going back from Australia, is only a small number, so we should not to have a ambition to change education system in Vietnam overnight, that is impractical and infeasible. We should try our best to do the best we can in some ways.

Vietnamese students after going back from Australia should try to transmit the progressive knowledge to their students as much as possible, but in the limited rules of Vietnamese Education and Training Ministry. Teachers should respect the feedbacks from students, and students should be free to express what they understand or what their confusion about the lecture. In addition, teachers should not impose and enforce on students' study. Instead of saying "Do your homework tonight" (7), teachers should say "Try and do you homework tonight" (7) (Heywood, 2002). Moreover, we should try to organize the class to become a cooperative environment, especially there should have more discussions in classes which rarely happen in Vietnamese schools even now. Furthermore, we should show our students, who are going to be teachers at elementary or secondary schools in the near future, the effectiveness and the importance of holistic education, and encourage them to implement in their job even a little. However, only the attempt of some people is not strong enough, it needs a consensus of a whole society, especially from the education administrators.



#### **4. Suggestions for teaching approach in Vietnam**

Firstly, teachers should indicate instruct students other aspects, which they usually meet and cope in real life by a "loving heart". Moreover, teachers should not only facilitate to students in every region, but also creating a risky and challenging environment, and instruct students using their own experiences to cope with troubles, how to overcome doubts (Kirkpatrick, 1998). Contributing to this, Hofstede (1986) recommends that "a teacher should respect the independence of his/her students" and "teacher expects students to find their own paths" (Table 1). These theories are really valuable towards Vietnamese teachers who are deeply affected by Confucian hierarchy. As a result, Vietnamese teachers should overcome the inherent and traditional barriers to communicate and to approach their student and help them by a "loving heart".

Secondly, teachers should pay more attentions to spiritual life of students. Tacey (2003) indicates that "all students have souls and spirits that are rarely engaged in the educational process" (42). Continuing, Tacey also emphasizes that "I think we should stop handing out knowledge and

start receiving wisdom" (43). Actually, most of the educations often focus more on academic knowledge rather than care about spiritual life of students. The nature of human life is complex and unstable. It is a mixture of happiness, pleasure, sadness and also jealousy. Thus, the job of holistic teachers is to take care of student's feelings, values, and personal goals parallel with their intellectual growth (Miller, 2000). Miller also states that "students should be viewed as persons rather than passive recipients of knowledge".

In brief, we cannot expect Vietnamese education improve overnight, it will be consolidated step by step. Vietnamese education in general and Vietnamese teachers in particular should be aware of their teaching methods. The teacher-centered approach should be changed into student-centered approach as soon as possible.

#### **Conclusion**

To sum up, this paper has discussed and analyzed experiences of Vietnamese students in approaching the teaching and learning styles in Australian universities. The essay has given an overview of Vietnamese and Australian contexts regarding teaching and learning. My personal experiences in



Vietnam and Australia have been highlighted. The paper has shown the implications and recommendations for Vietnamese students, Vietnamese higher education and Australian teachers.

In brief, at the micro level, the above discussions would not bring a sufficient and adequate view of the issue. The paper has attempted to highlight what Vietnamese students learn and understand from teaching and learning approaches in Australia. The evaluations have indicated and illustrated that moving from one studying environment to another environment is extremely challenging. Vietnamese students coming to Australia for study face this challenge. The processes that help them meet this challenge and process to become independent learners include: assisting them to improve their English; encouraging them to express their own thoughts and opinions; giving them more opportunities to express their

experiences; guiding them to engage more in group discussion; and locating them with group of local students. Importantly, beside the above supports, Vietnamese students themselves should and must endeavor to overcome these challenges. Without their attempt and cooperation, all the support from others is useless.

Beside, the teaching and learning approaches discussed in this paper suggest a change for teaching approach in higher education in Vietnam. There will never be a good education system until Vietnam changes the authoritarian tradition in schools, the restricted rules, traditional teaching and learning methods, and especially the sacrosanct role of teacher in pedagogical environment. To become more progressive, Vietnamese educators should appreciate the nature of holistic education and apply it to Vietnamese education, better later than never.

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## A survey on application of formative assessment criteria by teachers And relationship with students' academic achievement

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### ABSTRACT

The purpose of this research was to study the rate of awareness and application of criteria of formative assessment by teachers. The research method was descriptive survey tape. The subjects were the teachers who teaches in third grade of middle school in Razavi Khorasan's Province (15748 teachers and their students) and The sample was consists of 736 teachers (362 women and 374 men) that selected by stratified random sampling. They completed a questionnaire consisting of 24 questions that the coefficient alpha was %89.

Data were analyzed by using: T- Test, correlation coefficient, ANOVA and Chi-square. Results showed that: There was difference between the teachers that participate in formative evaluation course was more awareness than others about criteria of evaluation. While %60.5 of teachers were unfamiliar with the principles of formative assessment, %39.5 were aware, out of which %27.6 did not apply the criteria of formative assessment in class. And only %11.9 of teachers under study used these criteria in classroom. There was significant relationship between teaching background, academic achievement and the rate of awareness criteria of formative evaluation. There was relationship between participation in formative evaluation course and application of criteria of formative evaluation.

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