

Chapter 11

Employers' Perspectives on Vietnamese Returnee Students



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Introduction

The capacity of university graduates to find jobs and their immediate readiness to perform in the work positions have a highly intuitive resonance: usually, the more graduates have engaged in learning activities of international education programs, the better their employability is presumed to be (McNamara and Knight, 2014). Crossman and Clark (2010) suggest that “international experience appears to support the development of cultural sensitivity and adaptability as well as enhancing graduate attractiveness in a globalised and internationalised labour market” (p. 609). However, employers sometimes do not value this type of experience highly when they are asked to list the qualities and attributes they look for in graduate employees (Fielden 2007). It is argued that although the experiences and skills that graduates developed through their international learning experiences may be the necessary conditions or preconditions for a productive employability, it is often not sufficient in some cases. This chapter discusses whether or not these internationally learned skills support graduates’ personal and professional life in a contemporary society of work in their city and/or their home country such as Vietnam. The chapter firstly reviews the various discussions in the recent literature on graduate outcomes and graduate employability. It then discusses the findings of a recent study (Pham 2014) about employers’ perspectives on the employability of recently returned Vietnamese international students.

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Graduate Outcomes and Graduate Employability

Graduate outcomes describe the knowledge and capabilities graduates have acquired and are able to apply at the completion of their courses (Deakin University 2016) while employability, in general terms, refers to the capacity of graduates to survive and thrive in the labour market (Rothwell and Arnold 2007; Thijssen et al. 2008). In this regard, graduate employability is the achievement of “the skills, understandings and personal attributes that make an individual more likely to secure employment and be successful in their chosen occupations to the benefit of themselves, the workforce, the community and the economy” (Yorke 2006, p. 8). It relates to whether higher education alumni have the developed capacity to obtain or entrepreneurially create work domestically and internationally (Hillage and Pollard 1998; Jones 2013; Kinash and Crane 2015).

Mellors-Bourne et al. (2015), using a global outlook, reported on the “paucity of literature relating to general graduate outcomes from international education and transnational education in particular...and that the development of generic transferable employability skills is almost entirely absent from studies into transnational education” (p. 9). As the scale and array of both onshore and transnational educational programs have significantly grown in Vietnam (Ziguras and Pham 2014; Ziguras 2013) institutional concerns about graduate outcomes have emerged and employers’ opinions of graduate employability are of great interest.

Looking at international students who have graduated from Australian universities, Cuthbert et al. (2008) pointed out that there was little known about their graduate outcomes. Even less sustained research has been done on the medium-to-long-term outcomes of the graduates’ efforts in finding and maintaining jobs. The fact is that we do not know much about the actual employability outcomes of international graduates from both Australian onshore and offshore higher education programs over time. Therefore, further research on this issue is needed to ensure that Australian universities are providing education of quality and relevance to the many thousands of international students from all over the world now studying Australian higher education programs.

Australian Education International’s latest relevant report (2010) describes international graduate outcomes and employers’ perceptions of international students who have graduated from Australian institutions. The report showed positive employment outcomes of Australian-educated international graduates. It highlighted employers’ satisfaction with their performance at work, and found that their attributes were a preferred choice and they were valued as a good source of labour for both Australian and offshore employers. It specifically noted more than half of the big Chinese employers who were interviewed preferred overseas graduates for management positions over students graduating from local Chinese universities. The main reasons cited included English proficiency, effective communication skills, and creative ability. Similar educational credentials in the workplace were also reflected in Cai’s conceptual framework (Cai 2013), listing many highly-sought transferable graduate employability skills, with commitment/motivation, teamwork,

communication skills, foreign language proficiency, networking, leadership, customer service, willingness to learn, interpersonal and intercultural skills among others (Mellors-Bourne et al. 2015, p. 17). These outcomes aligned with the findings found of Koda and Yuki (2013) on the outcomes of the Malaysia-Japan Higher Education Loan Project, which stated that most of the graduates were absorbed for work in Japanese firms which operated in the Malaysian manufacturing sector.

However, there remains the concern as to whether or not the skills and attributes embedded in international curricula are relevant for returnee graduates to succeed in their home country. In fact a gap existed between employers' requirements of graduates with intercultural skills and those graduates from Indonesia, the Philippines, Thailand and Vietnam (Ilieva 2012, cited in Jones 2013). To fill the gap, Jones and Brown (2007) suggested contextualising the curriculum toward the required learning outcomes. Specifically, Campbell (2010) recommended to position graduates' employability skills within their own culture and /or society, considering the influence of the cultural, ideological, economic and political contexts on educational process and exercising some degree of caution before assuming that foreign generic skills are globally relevant since learning experiences among international students were varied. In fact, it was reported that the experiences of Asian graduates from transnational education programs, with wide exposure to the educational traditions of their own culture, and those who relocated to another country to undertake an international degree were very much different (Dunn and Wallace 2008). This leads to the need for further research on each group's graduate employability. A case study of Singaporean students engaged in Australian transnational programs, for example, found that offshore international students were "subject to culture shock" which affected their learning, but this was not more of a problem than for those engaging in onshore international education (Chapman and Pyvis 2005, p. 6).

Other concerns included the impact of re-entry shock facing 'returnees' from overseas study (Robertson et al. 2011) once they graduated, came back, obtained employment domestically and tried to put the knowledge and skills acquired from their international education experience into practice in their home country's work environment. Significant to this is the concern about the gap between the graduate outcomes that institutions and students target and the expectation of employers, and the difference between students' voices and those of institutions and employers (Mellors-Bourne et al. 2015; Naidoo et al. 2011).

Students' opinions of an Australian offshore program in Singapore were explored in Hoare's study (2012). The findings regarding the forms of adaptation made including those by 'second chance' students and those in lifelong learning identified high-level locally-valued outcomes and internationally-adapted learning habits among the graduates. While it was unclear whether these positive results were replicated at other sites of offshore provision, negative responses were reported in Robertson et al. (2011) in terms of career advancement, leading to the urge of changing the language of internationalisation in order to emphasise the employability skills developed through mobility and an internationalised curriculum at home (de Wit and Jones 2014). Unanswered questions remain whether employers nominate differences, if any, between degree and professional capabilities in describing

graduate employment satisfaction. If so, what are employers' perceptions of the knowledge and skills of these graduates? This leads to the important question on employers' opinions about the employability of returnee Vietnamese international students as proposed in this research project, whose employability is briefly described in the next section.

Research Design

This chapter presents part of the findings of a PhD research project conducted from 2011 to 2014 at the School of Global, Urban & Social Studies, RMIT University, entitled 'The Contribution of Cross-Border Higher Education to Human Resource Development in Ho Chi Minh City' (Pham 2014). The project explored employers' perspectives on the employability of Vietnamese returnee graduates, especially on their ability to seek employment locally in the context of skill demand in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam. The research project's key question was "To what extent are graduate attributes of Vietnamese graduates from international education programs aligned with the demands of locally-based multinational employers?"

Graduate attributes as perceived by employers in key industries in Vietnam were mainly explored at face-to-face interview discussions with HR managers of locally-based multinational companies. Twelve semi-structured interviews were conducted with experienced senior HR managers working for selected Vietnamese and/or multinational employers in various key internationally exposed industries to identify industrially-valued graduate employability. These managers had many years of experience and were extensively involved in sourcing, staffing, and coaching newly-graduated employees. Above all, they were working in and had great knowledge of the skill demands of the local labour market.

It is worth noting that the number of twelve HR managers as participants may be small but their views were significant in many ways. Their perceptions, on the one hand, reflected the local HR requirements of each industry for educated and skilled workers. Their long-term work experiences in skill sourcing for international and national employers, on the other hand, helped to provide a better understanding of the employability skills required in the labour market and, more importantly, revealed returnee employability discussed in the following sections.

Returnee Employability

The overall findings of the research showed most of the employers were satisfied with returnee employability regarding key job specific knowledge and skills. This echoes what was recently found in Mellors-Bourne et al.'s (2015) and in Pham's (2014) research regarding employers' preferred choice of returnees, which highlighted their greater satisfaction on graduate employability of students from the

transnational education sector. This affirms the findings from previous studies about the internationalisation of the higher education curriculum at home (Jones and Brown 2007; Leask 2009; Fielden 2007), the capacity of international education in preparing students for the world of work (Jones 2013), and the value of embedding employability skills into internships locally and internationally (Bisland et al. 2014; Tran and Soejatminah 2016). Some of the employers' perspectives including returnee knowledge, mindset, skillset, language competence and cultural alignment were as follows.

Knowledge

Employers' requirements of graduates varied. However, their main requirements focused on the knowledge, skills and attitudes that the graduates can potentially bring into their roles (Fielden 2007; Hillage and Pollard 1998; Jones 2013; Leask 2009). In this research, the HR managers broadly agreed with the World Bank's (2013) view that graduates from the international sector were described as having updated work-integrated knowledge and skills while those graduating from the domestic sector were "full of knowledge irrelevant to the employers' expectation" (World Bank 2013). These findings were consistent across key fields of international education, including business management, IT, banking and finance. The knowledge the graduates obtained during their international education sojourn, especially with overseas study, was highly valued by both foreign and local employers with prominent profiles as exporters. This outcome supports the findings acclaimed in the above mentioned Australian Education International's report (2010) on employers' perceptions of the positive outcomes of international students who have graduated from Australian institutions. The main theme emerging in every interview of this research concerned the knowledge that the graduates obtained from their international education. One HR manager working in one of the important industries of Vietnam, coffee industry retailing, observed:

The graduates from foreign education programs understand good practice of foreign enterprises such as ISO standards. This is what we are after from the applicants with an educational background of overseas study or transnational education programs (HR Manager, Vietnamese Employer).

Crossman and Clarke (2010) stated that "in a global environment graduates with international experience would seem to have an employability advantage over those with only local knowledge" (p. 603). Yet this is not the case in Vietnam since although several HR managers who were interviewed expressed satisfaction with graduate knowledge, this did not equate with relevance to the local workplace. In some cases they explained that international graduates' knowledge is more up-to-date but the work environments in Vietnam were sometimes behind in their practices, and so up-to-date knowledge was not so important among educational indicators of graduate outcomes. This suggests that although knowledge is globally

valued, graduate skills should fit the regional and/or local work environment to enhance graduate employability, and as such, internationalisation at home and/or contextualisation for offshore delivery should be both globally and locally positioned (Jones and Brown 2007; Jones and Killick 2013; Knight 2004; Leask 2009). This finding makes sense in reference to de Wit's newly proposed definition of internationalisation which demonstrated the intentional process of integrating an international, intercultural or global dimension into the purpose, functions and delivery of post-secondary education for a meaningful contribution to society (de Wit 2015). In this regard, employers' views of skill set gaps in Vietnam's labour market and of graduates from foreign education programs should be considered in the context of skill shortages of great concern across Southeast Asia (World Bank 2013)

Skill Set

Graduates from domestic universities received strong criticism for their poor graduate employability assets (Tran 2014). Specifically their competency and skills, especially their interpersonal skills for effective teamwork, were below standard (Tran and Swierczek 2009). The results from this research showed that the skill sets of graduates of international education programs reached the standards expected by employers. Their communication and presentation skills were very persuasive to employers and the communication skills detailed in resumes were core to their employability. According to the HR manager of a large US-based IT company, the way that graduates from this group wrote their resumes reflected their good communication skills; they knew how to demonstrate their skill set to potential employers. For example, by describing their contribution to small projects, they highlighted their skills in project management, teamwork and negotiation. They knew how to sell their soft skills as well as their knowledge and work styles. They emphasised their career aspirations and level of commitment, as well as their long-term and short-term objectives. With regard to the ways they undertook job-interviews, they took advantage of this precious time for marketing their skills, and initiating and leading conversations in a comfortable and relaxed way instead of being frustrated. Since presentation skills were listed among the four main components of employability, and described as the graduate's ability to demonstrate their employability assets and present them to the market in an accessible way (Hillage and Pollard 1998), this finding suggests the higher employability of graduates from international education programs over their local counterparts. Another comment by a HR manager in the plastics industry on their overall soft skills was as follows:

It is quite clear that most graduates from foreign education curriculums overseas or in-country are persuasively outstanding in terms of soft skills (HR Manager, Vietnamese Employer).

Reasons for better market outcomes in terms of workplace performance of the graduates with international experiences are many. According to the HR manager of

a company in the cosmetics industry, graduates' engagement in internship and/ or family business contributed greatly to graduate skill development. This finding is aligned with the preliminary findings reported in Bilsland et al. (2014), which appraised transnational university internships as offshore practice in developing employability skills. In fact, many of these graduates are from elite families with family-owned private enterprises. Through taking part in their family business, they have gained the necessary skills to be better communicators. While student performance and graduates' part-time experience can also contribute significantly to improving competencies in terms of skills of students from domestic higher education (Tran and Swierczek 2009), this is also true for a small number of elite graduates with high distinctions from top local universities. Many of those who won places in the trainee programs of recognised global companies listed their work experiences as interns or managers of their own small family business while they were still students. The descriptions of the mindset of this group provided some further insights.

Mindset

The importance of commitment, motivation and obedience were spoken of in the interviews with HR managers. However, assessment of the performance of graduates with different mindsets is difficult as the graduate outcomes of students engaged in international education programs have not been sufficiently measured (Murray et al. 2011). One way that these HR managers evaluate graduates' mindsets is through their demonstrated 'work commitment', which most of the HR managers explained as employee loyalty. The graduates from overseas programs were described as having the least work commitment since their employment background showed very quick shifts between jobs. However, according to a HR manager working in the electronics industry, it is worth differentiating between different overseas study groups. For the graduates who had worked prior to their overseas study, a positive mindset change could be seen in their work performance. They were very confident and effective in communication at work. However, those who went for overseas study just after their high school education usually had a slower pace of favourable mindset development.

In other cases employers were sometimes not sure of the employee's commitment. Since the investment in a potential talent to a position in the management stream requires quite a big budget, employers will not provide training if they find it risky. As mentioned above, the graduates from foreign education were considered among the most mobile groups and showed the least commitment to corporate development. Their employers might therefore be very careful in not putting them in very important positions in the first stages of their work contracts.

Another feature which these HR managers observed in a graduate mindset was their 'work motivation', translated from a common Vietnamese term, '*nhiệt tình trong công việc*' [this is the researcher's translation]. Those who have graduated from foreign and transnational programs were described as having a less

work-motivated attitude. Regarding this, graduate family income background might provide an explanation. A middle-income family background turns into a workplace advantage – and one shared by most HR managers. One of their comments described the graduates’ mindset as follows:

The graduates from families with middle-incomes and with family-owned companies tend to come for trying out the position rather than for work or for exploiting the position for their own family company interest. Some may join internship programs for fun or for being pushed by institutions while employers didn’t want them to come to try out and to be trialled (HR Manager, Indian Employer).

Graduates of overseas programs were described as being over self-confident in their demands in terms of salary and work conditions while those from transnational groups were somewhat more flexible. However, the latter groups were still described as “too confident and putting too much value on themselves due to their international qualifications” (AEI 2010, p. 14). A shared characteristic of these two groups was that they usually put themselves on a higher rank of employability compared with those who graduated from the domestic sector. However, some HR managers were concerned about a lack of core values displayed, such as ‘eager to learn’ and ‘quick to learn’ which were among key skills requirements of employers (Mellors-Bourne et al. 2015). The selection criteria for one senior staff of a well-known global head-hunter business were:

to identify attitude toward work and career development before making decision to invest in the applicants. Since it is only the right attitude to work that can bring full potential to fulfil their job duties (HR Manager, US Employer).

In general, there exists a gap in the way graduates’ mindsets were described by corporate managers and graduates. Being hard-working, obedient, and patient, graduates were highly valued by employers, while being innovative and proactive were identified as graduates’ characteristics. In some cases, new employees might feel as if they were outsiders in their local work environment, and as such, their ideas of innovation were not welcomed. In such cases they might feel disrespected and quit their jobs. This indicates one of the difficulties facing graduates who have undergone an internationalised curriculum, especially returnee graduates from overseas study; there is a tension between the understandings acquired in international education settings and those required or expected in daily local workplace settings. Analysing the available data showed a somewhat paradoxical finding: that the skills gained might, in fact, be very standard. However, these skills might not be applicable or welcomed in a particular local work situation. In fact, it is cited in Mellors-Bourne et al. (2015, p. 48) that “the need for intercultural skills has grown significantly over recent years, presumably as their economies and international trade have developed” (Ilieva 2012) and the economic, social and cultural contexts of their nation demand that graduates have the skills for working in an international context (Lunn 2008). This is a challenge to efforts in adapting to the culture of the corporation where they wish to work. Since most employees of a company, whether an international or local company, are Vietnamese with local educational and work backgrounds, their ways of thinking might be much different. However, graduates’

motivation for teamwork and their modes of reporting and making presentations are diverse; their styles of raising issues and finding solutions for a problem are various.

Language Competence

Central to the discussion on the outcomes of international education is institutional concerns on the language competence of international students. Enhancing interaction between international and domestic students was suggested to improve graduates' language competence (Arkoudis et al. 2014). The results of this study revealed that several HR managers appraised the English language competence of graduates from overseas institutions. Some of them expressed concerns about graduates from transnational education programs in HCMC; for the others this was not considered a major issue. However, some HR managers of local companies involved in international business ventures with foreign partners showed surprisingly little interest in the foreign language proficiency of the graduates with an overseas education. They explained that although they have an international business, their interaction and communication with foreign partners are limited. Their international business activity focused on imports and exports, and usually required only routine paperwork responsibilities while the cost to hire graduates with a foreign education background is much higher than those with local qualifications. As a result, these companies felt that it did not make sense to spend more money for overseas-educated employees. At this point, guidelines for contextualising and/ or localising curriculum discussed in Jones (2013) are critically important.

From the standpoint of a specific industry, the concern of HR managers of foreign companies in the IT industry was not for the foreign language competence of returnee graduates but for their local language proficiency. This suggests challenges to language competence at their workplace such as in making presentations about their own fields as below presented, and as such, strategies of internationalisation of the curriculum are institutionally relevant (Fielden 2007; Jones and Killick 2013).

Graduates from international education programs face difficulties of finding the equivalents for the terminologies in their mother tongue. In formal writing, they struggle to write a formal business letter and to put this letter in the right format and/or standard writing mode. What they write seems "weird" to local business practices (HR Manager, US Employer).

There are variations in requirements for English skills among these graduates. Graduates from international education programs overseas in IT or engineering satisfy employers' requirements for English skills needed for successful communication at their workplace. As the jobs in this field require using English for communication with global team members and clients, these graduates are on a priority list. A HR manager of an Australian software corporation in HCMC shares:

Our experiences tell us that the English communication skills among IT graduates from overseas study are very good. They are capable of being quickly adaptive to our corporate culture and progress well. This group of graduates are preferred as our staff need to engage

in global interactions through teamwork with colleges in our Australian headquarters (HR Manager, Australian Employer).

Looking beyond the IT industry, the critical point is that English competence is not unique to, nor advantageous for those graduating from international education programs at home and abroad, since it is sometimes not considered a strong selection criterion in current local job markets. Many HR managers explained that this did not mean English language proficiency was not valued by employers, but that their English language proficiency in general was improving due to their engagement in international education. This suggests, at a certain level, an imperative for transforming assessment of learning outcomes and graduate language competence (Arkoudis et al. 2014; Coates 2015).

Experienced HR managers who had significant experience interviewing the job-applicants graduating from international education programs shared in the observation that the local labour market provided an over-supply of experienced people who had previously worked in banking and finance and other industries that were shedding staff. These applicants' industry knowledge and business English for communication and negotiation were demonstrated in local work settings. This suggests some limitations on employment opportunities for recent graduates, challenges the capacity to gain jobs in their chosen fields, and downgrades graduate employability. One HR Director commented:

The HR market now seems saturated. We have less and less contracts to employ and/or training for those newly graduated from multinational companies. Instead we receive orders to employ among available unemployed and/ laid-off staff from other companies in closely related industries (HR Director – Vietnamese HR Employers).

In contrast to graduates from overseas study, graduates from collaborative programs were described as having weak language competency in both English and Vietnamese. One of the explanations for this, with respect to English competence, is the missing piece of the management of English language teaching and learning across various foreign-related educational programs in Vietnam (Nguyen 2017) (see Chap. 7 for detailed explanation). One HR manager recounted being invited to an Industry Guest Speaker program for students of a foreign-linked education program. She was surprised to find that the language of the lecture was Vietnamese though this lecture is part of a UK program. This lecturer was asked to present in Vietnamese as these students were not sure that they could understand her lecture in English.

Many employers were concerned with overall communication skills rather than English language fluency. This concern was affirmed in Jones (2008, p. 1) that “familiarity with another culture or language does not automatically result in the ability to communicate across cultures”. A HR manager of a big employer in the chemical industry explains:

We highly value applicants' fluency and communicative sensitiveness in their mother tongue when recruiting for some particular positions in sales and marketing since our products are for clients with very limited literacy knowledge. The friendlier communicative skill they possess, the higher revenue they can get (HR Manager, German Employer).

In such a complex local labour market, different employers are seeking different sets of skills and prioritising applicants with overseas, transnational, and domestic qualifications depending on the nature of the position and the organisation in which they will be working. The next section will present findings regarding graduates' cultural alignment and adjustment to local workplaces.

Cultural Alignment

Crossman and Clarke (2010, p. 603) suggested that “in a global environment graduates with international experience would seem to have an employability advantage over those with only local knowledge”. However, returnees' English competency, soft skills and international mindset were commonly appraised, but this does not mean that these skills can help them to adapt well to a local workplace since the workplace environment of an international company is very complex in terms of multicultural work style, ownership, and business. The HR managers who were interviewed often spoke of difficulties in cultural alignment that some overseas-educated graduates face. Graduates with foreign higher educational backgrounds in some cases did not demonstrate their understanding of the local social context. They did not only lack networking knowledge with local business but also local work experience. Since they were absent from local social life while studying overseas, they were out-of-date with the local society and economy; they also had not had the chance to build up their own network with local business, or develop experience in the local work style. While networking is previously highlighted as one of the core highly-valued employability skills (Mellors-Bourne et al. 2015), this finding is remarkably significant.

Other challenges facing the graduates could come from the fact that an international work culture does not necessarily mean a Western-dominated culture. This was explained by one HR manager as follows:

Many global companies are originally from Asia. They are of a more Asian style in nature and sometimes are very different from the Western style. In problem solving of technical procedures, for example, Asian bosses tend to be flexible rather than strictly following the expected guidelines (HR Manager, Korean Employer).

In such cases, culture shock at work might be avoidable, and cultural adaptation to a new work environment can take time where the ‘cultural zone’ also includes differences in management culture and ways of thinking across different work cultures.

While most students who study overseas showcase the knowledge they have gained in their resume and at job interviews (Koda et al. 2011), some professional fields, including banking and engineering, require less knowledge about working across cultures than graduates may have gained. According to one employer in engineering, in many ways graduates from foreign programs were better than those who graduated locally but it would be a mistake to place them in the highest rank of applicants for all vacancies. For those who graduated in business management

from foreign education programs with strong points of English, problem solving and soft skills, they were often considered for positions in a support department such as logistics, administration, or purchasing while those who graduated in engineering were placed in an operational department.

The above discussion of HR managers' perceptions of the attributes of students engaged in international education suggests that an international education experience can only partially satisfy international and local employers. The important point demonstrated in this section is that the perceptions of the representative HR managers of the graduate attributes of the students who had graduated from international programs shared many similarities with the key skills requirements which are generally expected by global employers as cited in the above section (Mellors-Bourne et al. 2015). This significantly informs the job satisfaction of these graduates. It should be noted that the interview method used here can only provide employers' views on the 'output' of the educational process, that is, graduate attributes. To ascertain the relevance of these attributes to skill development strategy as a whole, the findings should be read in the particular socioeconomic and educational contexts of the city and/or country where educational programs were delivered, especially in relation to its national strategies of the internationalisation of higher education.

Another important point is that the mismatch between institutional and organisational cultures is also an issue for graduates entering multinational firms in HCMC as the major sources of foreign direct investment in the city are remarkably Asian-based multinational countries. The HR manager of a Korean employer in the electronics industry explained that "all employees stand up and deeply nod to greet the boss of the company whenever he comes and visits their work stations". While interaction between international and domestic students are created to support international students in gaining their knowledge of cultural differences and developing their employability skills (Arkoudis et al. 2013), such cultural traditions at work might be shocking to the graduates who had gone through internships and graduated with a Western work style. This challenges the internationalised curriculum and also the returnee graduates from overseas study when they are employed to work in an Asian global setting. Similarly, conflict can emerge from a teamwork style involving putting views forward, for example for innovation and research, in a firm manner. Again local work culture can throw up a kind of cultural barrier for internationally educated graduates, as was suggested by the above mentioned HR manager of the Korean company who explained: "It is not a big surprise if their voices of innovation and/or new ideas are not welcomed by the old and experienced managers who have been working for over ten years." The value of their ideas is sometimes not the problem; rather it is their direct style of voicing the issues that can matter in such an Asian work environment.

Concluding Remarks

The findings suggest that although notable inconsistency is evident in the quality of graduate capabilities across different modes of delivery of international education, returnees and transnational education graduates' employability skills are recognised not only to locally-based multinational employers and also to well-known domestic companies. While overall language, ICT and intercultural competences were highly appraised attributes among graduates, the unexpectedly interesting points drawn from this research were actually employers' preferences for transnational graduates' mindsets and credential language competency and, in some cases, their lack of interest in returnees' foreign language competence and intercultural skills.

Critical implications are suggested for public and institutional policies of internationalising higher education. The opinions of locally-based multinational employers on graduate employability, particularly on the graduate assets in terms of industry-valued knowledge, skills and attitudes, provide new and valuable information into the function, productivity and quality of Vietnamese graduates from international education programs from across sectors. These opinions also provide insights into graduate supply that has the potential to assist system-and-institution level monitoring and planning. Drawing on these opinions, institutions may sketch out the knowledge required in specific disciplinary curriculums, the skills expected in a specific industry, and the attitudes valued in specific work environments. Institutional reflections on these can hopefully shed light on university vision and mission, program and/or curriculum design, and pedagogy and assessment for better graduate employability of all students across sectors.

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