

# Students' readiness for international academic mobility programs: Evidence from Faculty of English Linguistics and Literature, University of Social Sciences and Humanities, VNUHCM

Le Tan Cuong<sup>1\*</sup>

<sup>1</sup>University of Social Sciences and Humanities, VNU HCM, Vietnam

\*Corresponding author, Email: cuonglt@hcmussh.edu.vn

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## ABSTRACT

As a major aspect of internationalization, international academic mobility has been among the most discussed issues in higher education worldwide in recent years. However, while more and more institutions in many countries show a substantial interest in implementing international academic mobility programs, the practices seem to be surprisingly in slow progress in Vietnam higher education. The current study, therefore, aims to fill up the gap by exploring the reality of implementing international academic mobility programs and surveying students' readiness as well as expectations for international academic mobility programs in the setting of the Faculty of English Linguistics and Literature, University of Social Sciences and Humanities, Vietnam National University- HCM city. Using data from archived documents in the faculty, a semi-structured interview with the faculty dean, a semi-structured interview with 5 students having just come back from an international academic mobility program to the Philippines in early 2020 and a questionnaire among 78 students coming from 4 continuous cohorts, the findings evidence that (1) Intra-national mobility programs outperform the international ones, (2) Students expect more orientational activities and support from the faculty, (3) Students show a high level of readiness for international academic mobility programs, (4) Students are more open-minded in choosing where to go and what to do during international academic mobility programs. Recommendations are well elaborated at the latter part of the study as references for institutions that are considering internationalizing their curricular. The study hopefully sheds light on the feasibility of implementing international academic mobility programs in the setting of Vietnam higher education.

## 1. Introduction

In today's world, there are more chances for institutions to internationalize their curriculum and gradually enhance the quality of teaching and learning. One of the common ways to visualize the internationalization of the curriculum in higher education is to implement international academic mobility programs. Notably, this is among the steps to enable their students to enhance employabilities in their world labour market. Over the past 20 years, there have been considerable

changes in the world higher education thanks to international academic mobility programs. However, while these activities have drastically developed in higher education in many countries, they seem to be surprisingly unpopular in Vietnam higher education. This is a big gap between what the world is heading to and what we are currently doing. We do understand that there exist a lot of challenges in the implementation process. Still, this doesn't mean that we just keep ignoring something beneficial to our students. This is the reason that triggers the author's intention of examining the issue. The study is an effort to look into the reality of implementing international academic mobility programs in the Faculty of English Linguistics and Literature, University of Social Sciences and Humanities, Vietnam National University- HCM city. Also, the study investigates students' readiness and expectations for international academic mobility programs. Using data from archived documents in the faculty, a semi-structured interview with the faculty dean, a semi-structured interview with 5 students having just completed an academic mobility programs and a questionnaire for 78 students coming from 4 cohorts, the study highlights students' readiness and expectations for international exposure and confirms the feasibility of international academic mobility in the investigated setting. The findings here hopefully contribute to the existing literature of international academic mobility in higher education in general and in Vietnam higher education in particular.

## **2. Literature review**

### ***2.1. The popularity of academic mobility programs in higher education worldwide***

Research on academic mobility has a long tradition. Pietsch (2010) highlights that between 1900 and 1930, there existed a distinctly British academic world within which scholars were said to have moved frequently along different migratory axes. The practices were actually found in this period of time although they weren't under the name of academic mobility. This field of study is sometimes referred to as international academic mobility, transnational education or cross-border education. Since the 1990s, academic mobility became widely known thanks to the formation of the Bologna process. In terms of definition, according to UNESCO (1998), academic mobility is the term that implies a limited period of study, teaching and/or research in a country other than a student's or academic staff member's country of residence. Similarly, Rostovskaya, Maksimova, Mekeko, and Fomina (2020) define that in the framework of internationalization of higher education the concept of "academic mobility" is considered as a process of moving students and teachers of the higher education process from one scientific and educational institution to another in order to exchange experience and acquire additional educational opportunities for a limited period of time or for temporary training. In addition, Mizikaci and Arslan (2019) depicted that academic mobility is regarded as a window for students and academics traveling for developing skills and knowledge, enlarging perspectives and vision and seeking cooperative research possibilities. Rostovskaya et al. (2020) point out that plenty of countries have successfully carried out many programmes to promote academic mobility, including such programmes as Erasmus Mundus, DAAD, Tempus, Fulbright Programme, etc. The development of academic mobility programmes is aimed to improve education quality, amelioration of mutual understanding between different peoples and cultures, education of new generation, prepared to live and work in the international information society and bring students a possibility to continue education and to acquire academic experience abroad by participating in short-term educational and research program (Khramova, Khramov, & Ivanov, 2013). Talking about the purposes of those programs, Hashim and Gibbs (2020) also indicate that sending students to study abroad is among the ways that universities and governments respond to globalisation. Generally, the authors above here and there describe academic mobility as an activity that institutions send their staff or students to institutions in a different country to get international exposure and absorb additional values in the

learning process in their institutions. It is, therefore, possible for us to believe in the fact that international academic mobility is an indispensable element in the picture of world higher education, and it is the way ahead that promisingly leverages the quality of higher education in the time to come.

## ***2.2. Influences of international academic mobility programs on students' academic and personal development***

Widely considered to be a good way to internationalize the curriculum in higher education, international academic mobility programs have great impacts on students in many ways. This has also been explored in prior studies by Knight (1994, 2006, 2007, 2019). This author points out the importance and the exponential increase of international academic mobility in higher education. According to her, academic mobility across borders has been considered a central feature of higher education for centuries.

Over the past decades, academic mobility has been commonly known as the most critical dimension in the internationalisation of higher education (Iosava, 2019), and the number of students and academic staff participating in academic mobility programs has increased rapidly (Maadad & Tight, 2014; Rustemova, Meirmanov, Okada, Ashinova, & Rustem, 2020; Siekierski, Lima, Borini, & Pereira, 2018). Academic mobility is known as a growing phenomenon that goes with a source of knowledge creation and brain circulation all over the (Albuquerque, 2013). Showing strong consensus about the potential of academic mobility, Egron-Polak (2017) believes that mobility will work as a cornerstone of internationalization, and its models will evolve. To have an overview of the area of study, Siekierski et al. (2018) in their systematic review of the literature of 36 articles selected from 15 top journals by way of a report indicating that the main impact of international academic mobility to countries of origin is eventually the increase of highly qualified human capital. This indicates that international academic mobility plays an important role in the education sector. Discussing other aspects related to employability, Mizikaci and Arslan (2019) report that across Europe, 93% of the surveyed employers confirmed that the traits gained through mobility programs were indeed crucial for the recruitment and professional development of their employees. Likewise, Kabanbayeva, Gureva, Bielik, and Ostasz (2019) support the idea that academic mobility enhances future labour mobility, decreases path-dependence and homogenizes policy preferences, induces more intensive trade relations and increases international solidarity. Sharing a similar opinion, the results obtained by Bracht et al. (2006) suggest that employers believe that young graduates with international experience have evidentially higher competencies than those without it because international experience notably seems to reinforce adaptability, initiative, the ability to plan and assertiveness. Besides, Mizikaci, and Arslan (2019) share the belief that academic mobility under the form of Erasmus impacts on not only individuals but also on the worldwide labor market with its enlarging scope and comprehensive strategies as well as its challenges by rapid developments in the demands and needs of the new era. Going beyond this limit, Egron-Polak (2017) concludes that academic mobility has profound impacts on regions, countries, communities and institutions.

When it comes to international academic mobility programs, it is unable to skip ERASMUS which stands for 'European Community Action Scheme for the Mobility of University Students'. This is a typical example of academic mobility programs in higher education. The program is typically an action plan promoted by The Bologna Process which is a decentralized but coordinated intergovernmental process of 48 European countries and the European Commission (Klemenčič, 2019). Since 1987, the program has enabled approximately three million students from more than 4000 higher education institutions all over Europe to pursue enriching learning

experiences in other countries (Aramburu, 2015). This is a mobility program providing its participants with experiences in their fields of study and work by presenting them global trends, and it also promotes the academic, professional and individual development of the participants while contributing to the extension of the worldwide work market (Mizikaci & Arslan, 2019). ERASMUS was later known as ERASMUS+. The programs initially offered international academic mobility to students intra-european countries. Then, after the great success of ERASMUS, ERASMUS+ became open to countries outside of the European Community. An Association of Colleges report (2019) demonstrates that Erasmus+ helps the enrichment of both student soft skills and technical skills. In the report, the respondents (n=32) agreed that they experience improvement in personal confidence (100%), team-working (94%), technical knowledge in the vocational/academic subject (91%), problem-solving (91%), communication (91%) and decision-making (84%).

The references reveal that international academic mobility programs generally help enhance students' academic and personal skills as well. Also, the programs predictably prepare students for higher employabilities and in a larger picture, they contribute to the sustainable development of high-qualified human capital of the countries that originally send students to join academic mobility programs.

### ***2.3. The reality of implementing international academic mobility programs***

The contribution of international academic mobility programs has been widely acknowledged in many parts of the world. However, institutions face a number of obstacles in the process of making the idea work. Khramova et al. (2013) state that international academic mobility goes with a number of problems associated with its realization such as: development and implementation of individual educational trajectories, creation and development of joint educational programs of several institutions of higher education, sources and mechanisms of financing, status, rules of distribution and recognition of documents, the language of teaching and academic communication. Having similar concerns, in a recent paper by Rustemova et al. (2020) one of the most important pull factors influencing the decision-making of international academic mobility programs reported is cost, including accommodation, tuition, travel, etc. Besides, affordability, recommendations from acquaintances, or lack of awareness about the country; and absence of a supportive legislative basis for the development of cooperation on higher education between the two countries are among the obstacles that prevent institutions from establishing international cooperation and implement academic mobility programs (Rustemova et al., 2020). In addition to this, Monastyrskaya and Medvedeva (2019) studied this issue and their results showed that the main factors that limit international academic mobility include a high competition to participate in the programs (23.1%), need for extra self-financing (21.4%), insufficiency of information about programs (17.8%). Talking about the side of students, Albuquerque (2013) reports that obstacles related to students are lack of motivation, lack of information and counseling, perceptions of quality, financial constraints, prior learning, language competence and that for institutions are an administrative burden, inadequate infrastructure (strategic plan, investment, recognition expertise, counseling and support, project management, language provision), replacement labour costs, fear of losing good students and staff, collective agreements. Because of these constraints, it is tough for a lot of institutions to boost international academic mobility programs in their settings no matter how beneficial these programs seem to be to their students. This helps explain why mobile students are a minority among student populations. In such high-end settings as European countries, the number of students who can actually join academic mobility programs is considerably less than 10% (Byram & Dervin, 2009). Similarly, results in the study by Egron-Polak (2017) reveal that despite the EU support, mobility programs remain

available to a small minority of students and staff in European countries and the fact is that opportunities for international academic mobility are only available to those who can pay (at all levels - individual, institutional and national).

In such a scenario, the idea of international academic mobility for students becomes an enormously expensive one for the majority of students. Predictably, this leads to the fact that students joining academic mobility programs are normally gifted or self-funded ones, leaving the majority of students who are more disadvantaged in the higher education system in the country with almost no opportunity to approach the light of world education. However, while these facts are widely accepted by a number of students and they know that they can't afford international academic mobility programs, their readiness for the programs are existing. Findings in Rostovskaya et al. (2020) show that a huge number of students (86%) indicated their interest in programmes of educational mobility. Also, Aba (2019) reports that data from an investigation among student participants (N = 89) from two state and two private universities in Turkey indicated the participants were found to be quite ready for their academic mobility experience from an intercultural communicative perspective. At the same time, almost one-third of the respondents in the study by Monastyrskaya and Medvedeva (2019) which accounts for 28% are noted to be ready to participate in the programs of outbound international academic mobility, 30% of respondents answering "I need time to think about it," 27% of respondents stating that "I do not think so, I do not have time to get ready," and 15% of respondents showing their unreadiness to participate in such programs. Hence, 58% of respondents confirm that the idea of mobility interests them.

The data presented here show that institutions share similar challenges in their process of implementing international academic mobility. This leads to the fact that institutions either wait for fundings from external resources or organize self-funded mobility programs. That seems relevant to the reality of a number of institutions nowadays and institutions are happy with their ways of handling the case. However, the majority of students in the institutions are neglected and to some extent this fact seems unfair to them. The same case can actually be found in Vietnam higher education where international academic mobility programs are normally for a group of selected students and the programs are on an irregular basis. However, Vietnam's economy is improving, so the picture is different now. Data from Ha (2016) reveals that in 2016, there were approximately 130,000 Vietnamese students studying abroad, an increase of 15% from 2015 and the fact is that Vietnam has always been among the top countries of origin among international students in the USA, Australia and the UK. Furthermore, Pham (2019) evidence that the number of student mobility which means students move to other countries to take their full university programs has been rapidly increased. The evidence here indicates that more and more students can afford higher school fees going with better quality, but the problem is that most curricular in universities assume that students are unable to handle the high expenses of international academic mobility programs. That's why they do not include any international experience in students' learning process. Because of this, for those students who want to experience better education with international exposure, there is no way for them to do, but go and get their university degrees in other countries. This is a big gap in Vietnam higher education. The author of this study, therefore, came up with the intention of looking into the reality of implementing international academic mobility in the setting of a public university in Vietnam and investigate students' readiness and expectations for international academic mobility programs. The findings of the study hopefully reveal insights on the possibility of applying for international academic mobility programs in Vietnam higher education in general and in the investigated setting in particular. This study aims to find answers for the three following research questions:

- How have international academic mobility programs been implemented in the Faculty of English Linguistics and Literature, University of Social Sciences and Humanities, Vietnam National University- HCM City?

- How ready are students in this faculty for international academic mobility programs?

- What do students in this faculty expect from international academic mobility programs?

### **3. The study**

#### **3.1. Participants**

The setting of this study is at the Faculty of English Linguistics and Literature University of Social Sciences and Humanities, Vietnam National University- HCM. About the university, there are roughly 22.000 undergraduates and graduates in this institution including bachelor, master, doctoral and short-term programs. For the faculty, as the biggest unit in the university, the Faculty of English Linguistics and Literature takes the responsibility of training more than 3000 students of undergraduates, graduates and short-term programs. Participants in the study are the faculty dean, 5 students having just completed an academic mobility program in the Philippines and 78 students from 4 continuous cohorts in the faculty. Among the participants, juniors account for 33,3%, sophomores are 25,6% and the rest are freshmen and seniors. Their ages range from 18 to 30 years old.

#### **3.2. Research instruments**

In this study, data is collected from archived documents in the faculty, two semi-structured interviews and one questionnaire. We started by going through the archived documents related to academic mobility in the faculty and then a semi-structured interview with the faculty dean who completed his PhD with internationalization focus in 2008 and has been in his role of the faculty dean in the last 8 years. In this way, we obtained data about how the faculty has been working on international academic mobility programs. After that, in the second semi-structured interview, we got data from 5 five students who successfully finished their academic mobility programs in the Philippines in early 2020. As the students were particularly happy with what they had obtained from the trip, there were many things for them to share about the issue. In this interview, 50% of the questions were the same and based on the students' replies we also made other questions to get further data. The last tool we did is the online questionnaire among 78 students of 4 different cohorts in the faculty. The data collected from the second interview and the questionnaire contribute to our understanding of how ready for international academic mobility programs the students are and additionally what they expect from the programs.

#### **3.3. Data analysis**

The data collected from the study reveals four findings.

##### *(1) Intra-national academic mobility programs outperform the international ones*

Based on the data collected from the archived documents in the faculty and the semi-interview with the dean, it was noted that over the past 10 years, there have been a number of academic mobility programs both international academic mobility programs and intra-national ones held in the faculty. However, the activities tend to be more intra-national than international. As one of the biggest units in the university, the faculty did actually work hard to boost international academic mobility programs, but due to a number of reasons related to students' motivation, budgets and cooperations with universities in other countries, the number of international programs have been limited. Data found in the Faculty of English Linguistics and

Literature (2010, 2011, 2012, 2013, 2014, 2015, 2016, 2017, 2018, 2019) shows that there have been totally 4 international academic mobility programs in the past 10 years. Students participating in such programs got the chance to visit Thailand, Malaysia and The Philippines for 3-7 days. These self-funded programs are optional and the fact was that only around 20-25 students having the opportunity to join on each occasion which was held on an irregular basis. This means that there have been fewer than 100 students having the chance to officially get international exposure over the past 10 years. According to the faculty dean, as the programs are not mandatory, and only a limited number of students were actually interested. In such a situation, the faculty showed their activeness in boosting intra-national activities as an alternative way to help their students get exposure to the workplace environment. Unlike international academic mobility programs, the intra-national ones are required and all students are supposed to undertake at least two programs during their 4 years. Taking part in these programs in the forms of observation and internships, students have good opportunities to visit language schools, international schools, companies, international organizations depending on their sub majors. Though it is good for students to join intranational academic mobility programs and the fact is that students do benefit from these programs, the faculty actually could do a better job if there are more chances for students to get international exposure. That intranational academic mobility programs outperform international ones is really common in the setting of Vietnam. However, as a leading faculty in a leading university, there remains room for the investigated faculty to advance their success and international academic mobility programs definitely bring students in this faculty a better learning experience and higher employabilities.

*(2) Students expect more orientation and support from the faculty*

In this study, when it comes to international academic mobility programs, another finding that we have found is students' expectation of more orientation and support from the faculty. The first thing students expect is that the faculty should have more orientational activities. 72% of students in the survey (n=78) and 100% in the semi-structured interview (n=5) expressed this expectation. Actually, at the beginning of the university program, the faculty do have orientation sessions. However, as there are a number of barriers preventing the faculty from organizing international academic mobility programs, the faculty does not mention anything about international academic mobility programs. The information of the programs only come out in the semester that the faculty organizes the programs, which puts students in a quite passive situation. Because of this, some students suggest the faculty to keep them informed about where to go, what to do and how much they need to pay for programs right at the beginning of their first years so that they can be better prepared for the activities. Or else, if there are any programs students could take during their university time, they should be included in the orientation so that students may have clear goals in their learning. The two typical suggestions for this from student 12 and 6 can be found as follows:

*"The faculty should make an announcement for every freshman in the beginning of the year (Student 12)"*

*"I think students should be informed about the cost for better preparation (student 6)"*

Another thing that students do expect the faculty to help is their financial obstacles. The reality shows that while a limited number of students can afford international academic mobility programs, the majority of them find it a burden. Therefore, a number of students in this study suggest the faculty to figure out more solutions to help them with their budgets for the programs. Some outstanding suggestions can be found below:

*"We need to have a fund for studying abroad to help students decrease fee. (student 56)"*

*"In my opinion, the faculty should find supporters to supplement our budget. (student 70)"*

*"More scholarships programs will enable more students with financial difficulties to join such a course. (student 25)"*

*"I think what induces participants' willingness to join is the budget. Hence, I expect that we can have a sponsor partially support us financially. (student 30)"*

*"I hope we will have some financial supporters because just simply the fee from "poor students" won't be enough for an abroad trip (student 11)"*

It is clear that though students are eager to join international academic mobility, their concern about the limited budget is noticeable. Therefore, the faculty needs to show more engagement in looking for more sponsors to support students and make their dreams of experiencing international cultures become a possible idea.

Additionally, besides aspects related to orientation and finance, students are also in need of training and logistics support. Student 47 and 38 represent their groups:

*"Students should be equipped with essential skills when travelling abroad (student 47)"*

*"I think the faculty should help us with Visa, accomodation, travel during the program (student 38)"*

These concerns indicate that there are a lot of aspects students are not sure about, so they hope to receive more guidance from the faculty.

### *(3) Students show high level of readiness in joining academic mobility programs*

Talking about readiness for international academic mobility programs, Monastyrskaya and Medvedeva (2019) report that the first year and last year students show the largest percentage of readiness for international academic mobility, but the readiness is lower by their second and third course year. Similarly, in this study, 93,6% (n=78) of the participants in the survey coming from all 4 years overall show their readiness for international academic mobility programs. Besides, 5 out of 5 students in the semi-structured interview showed their great interest in joining such activities. This analysis found evidence for students' high level of readiness for international academic mobility programs. The data does confirm the feasibility of international academic mobility programs in the investigated setting.

Among the reasons for students to join the programs, Table 1 shows that 35.9% of them wish to learn about cultures and 34.62 % say that they expect to have new experiences. Coming next is 21.79% of students wishing to practice their English skills with locals. The following reasons include broadening knowledge (16.67 %), experiencing a new learning environment (15.38 %), developing personal skills (14.1 %), making friends (10.26 %), learning more about majors (6.41 %), traveling (3.85 %) and making CV look better (2.56 %). The results reveal that there are many aspects students wish to explore if they have a chance to visit a new country. This indicates that students have clear purposes for joining international academic mobility programs. What they may need more is probably an action plan from the faculty.



**Table 1**

Students' purposes of joining international academic mobility

<b>Q5. Why are you interested in the programs?</b>	<b>Frequency (n=78)</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Learn about cultures	28	35.9
Have new experience	27	34.62
Practice English skills with locals	17	21.79
Broaden knowledge	13	16.67
Experience a new learning environment	12	15.38
Develop personal skills	11	14.1
Make friends	8	10.26
Learn more about majors	5	6.41
Travel	3	3.85
Make CV look better	2	2.56

Source: The researcher's data analysis

As international academic mobility programs for the majority of students in the investigated setting is a tough decision, the data are presented in this study shows that 20,5% them report that they wish to attend once in their university time. This number seems modest, but relevant to the scenario where the majority of students come from rural areas. 11,5% state that they are happy to join the programs once every two years, which means twice during their university time. 53,8% of them expect to join academic mobility programs once a year, which means up to 4 programs during their university time. Besides, for some students with higher budgets which accounts for 14,1%, they hope that international academic mobility programs can be held on a semester basis, roughly 8 programs to experience international exposure during their time at university.

About the contents in the programs, Table 2 reveals that the most common aspect students are curious about culture (33.33%). Followings are TESOL (15.38%), English skills (12.82%) and soft skills (11.54%). A number of students also mention Linguistics, Literature, Intercultural communication, management, history and education, but the ratio is not considerable. As students in the study are English-majored ones, they tend to choose aspects closely related to what they are taking in their curriculum.

**Table 2**

Expected content in international academic mobility programs

<b>Q9. What could the courses in the programs be about?</b>	<b>Frequency (n=78)</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Cultures	26	33.33
TESOL	12	15.38
English skills	10	12.82
Soft skills	9	11.54
Linguistics	8	10.26
Literature	7	8.97
Intercultural communication	5	6.41
Management	4	5.13
History	3	3.85
Education	2	2.56

Source: The researcher's data analysis

In term of the length of the programs, a large number of students expect to join the programs for 1 week (20,5%), 1 month (44,9%), 3 months (20,5%), 6 months (9%) and no one is interested in programs that are shorter than 1 week. That is, the longer the programs are, the better learning experience students may have.

Talking about budgets for the programs, our results demonstrate that students' budgets for international academic mobility programs are really limited. As shown in Table 3, the majority of respondents are willing to spend 500\$ for the programs and totally up to 76,9% of respondents can afford 1000\$ and lower. 4 out of 5 students in the semi-structured interview reported that they can afford no more than 1000\$. This is a quite difficult mission as students' budget does not seem to get along well with the length and the activities of the programs. It can be inferred that self-fund programs may not be a good solution for the majority of students in the institution. However, if the programs are in the forms 50/50 which means 50% is students' budget and 50% is from the sponsors, the idea of international academic mobility might be more possible. In the setting of Vietnam, this might be challenging. However, institutions in other countries do share the same constraints and they have got the problems solved as a way to help their students.

**Table 3**

Students' expected budgets for international academic mobility programs

<b>Budgets for academic mobility programs</b>					
		<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percent</b>	<b>Valid Percent</b>	<b>Cumulative Percent</b>
Valid	<500\$	14	17.9	17.9	17.9
	500\$	30	38.5	38.5	56.4
	1000\$	16	20.5	20.5	76.9
	2000\$	7	9.0	9.0	85.9
	3000\$	6	7.7	7.7	93.6
	>3000\$	5	6.4	6.4	100.0
	Total	78	100.0	100.0	

Source: The researcher's data analysis

*(4) Students are more open in choosing where to go and what to do during international academic mobility programs*

In the previous years, when it came to academic mobility programs or any kinds of exchange programs, students normally preferred to go to English-speaking countries. Byram and Dervin (2009) report that when deciding on where to go to join academic mobility programs, 23% of respondents choose to visit the USA, 12% to the UK, 11% to Germany, 10% to France, 7% to Australia and only 5% to Japan. It can be seen that the majority of countries on this list are English-speaking and developed ones. Though students have to pay higher expenses when visiting these countries, they can practice the English language and experience innovation in various aspects of life. This bias has been existent for a long time. However, the scenario seems to be changing in a more positive way. In this study, the data shown in Table 4 indicates that the respondents in the current do like to America (25.64%), Australia (24.36%), the UK (15.38%), Canada (12.82%) and Japan (8.97%), but their number one option is Singapore (29.49%). Besides, students seem to be more flexible in choosing less developed countries. They also choose China (10.26%), the Philippines (7.69%), Taiwan (6.41%) and Thailand (5.13%) which were not common in the dream list of students in previous years. Hence, it is sufficient to point out that students are more open in choosing countries in which English is not really common. This is an important finding in the understanding of students' expected destinations for international academic mobility programs. Though the newly added countries have their attractiveness in term of education, entertainment and tourism, we have to say that the primary reason for students' decision to visit these countries seem to be related to their budgets. Less developed countries definitely go with lower expenses in the programs they join.

**Table 4**

Expected destinations of international academic mobility programs

<b>Q6. Which country would you like to visit?</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Singapore	23	29.49
America	20	25.64
Australia	19	24.36
The UK	12	15.38
Canada	10	12.82
China	8	10.26
Japan	7	8.97
The philippines	6	7.69
Taiwan	5	6.41
Thailand	4	5.13

Source: The researcher's data analysis

In terms of activities in the programs, Table 5 indicates that the most expected activity students would love to do is to visit famous places in the new country (39.74 %). Coming next is to meet local students (24.36 %), which could help them practice the English language. Following these activities are to join cultural activities (16.67 %) and attend lectures (14.1 %). Besides, taking part in workshops/seminars (12.82 %), visiting some universities (10.26 %), doing voluntary activities (7.69 %), doing scientific research (6.41 %), making a presentation (5.13 %) and taking part in microteaching (3.85 %) are among the activities students are eager to experience. This finding provides an overview of what students might be interested in during their programs in other countries, which is meaningful to those who are about to plan international academic mobility programs.

**Table 5**

Expected activities in international academic mobility programs

<b>Q10. What could be some activities included in such a program?</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Visit famous places	31	39.74
Meet local students	19	24.36
Join cultural activities	13	16.67
Join lectures	11	14.1
Take part in workshops/seminars	10	12.82
Visit some universities	8	10.26
Do voluntary activities	6	7.69
Do scientific Research	5	6.41
Make a presentation	4	5.13
Take part in micro teaching	3	3.85

Source: The researcher's data analysis

### **3.4. Discussion**

The results in the study are consistent with previous works in the literature. Firstly, in terms of obstacles, the main factor that prevents the faculty from operating international academic mobility programs is the limited budget. This was also mentioned in Albuquerque (2013), Khramova et al. (2013), Monastyrskaya and Medvedeva (2019), and Rustemova et al. (2020). Because of this hindering factor, though faculties and students in many institutions are well aware of the values of international academic mobility, not many of them can make the programs work. This fact directly leads to another similarity of the findings in this study to others in the literature which is the percentage of students participating in international academic mobility. Like in Byram and Dervin (2009) and Egron-Polak (2017), an only small number of students in the investigated setting have been able to get exposure to international academic mobility. The study, therefore, once again confirms the challenges of implementing international academic mobility. Talking about the added values, this study points out that students in the investigated context tend to take more interest in joining the programs than those in the previous works. While 28% of participants in Monastyrskaya and Medvedeva (2019) and 86% of those in Rostovskaya et al. (2020) are truly ready for international academic mobility, this study reports on the result of up to 93,6% (n=78) of the participants show their great interest in the programs. Besides, this study indicates there is a need for the faculty to better their orientation and support to their students in the process of implementing international academic mobility. Clearly, the study confirms the feasibility of international academic mobility in the research context and in similar ones.

## **4. Recommendations**

### **4.1. Establishing more international partnerships**

Nowadays more and more institutions set up partnerships with external, especially international ones. However, things should not be just at partnerships with mutual collaborations and supports. When it comes to international academic mobility programs, as finance is always a hindering factor, it is necessary for institutions to come up with effective solutions to tackle financial issues. An example of this could probably be in the way University A offering free training, free accommodation and free travel to students from University B during their international academic mobility and vice versa. In this way, students in both universities could benefit from the programs without worrying too much about expenses when staying in a different country. The faculty actually does need to maintain intra-national academic mobility, but it is international academic mobility that makes a difference to students' learning experience.

### **4.2. Keeping students informed through orientational activities**

There are two occasions the faculty may organize orientational activities for students. The first one is probably at the beginning of the university program. This occasion marks a very important start for students to have an idea of what international academic mobility programs are like and maintain their motivation in joining the programs throughout the following semesters. Then, the second one is at the beginning of the semester which the faculty plans to implement the international academic mobility programs. The orientational activities help encourage students to engage in the planning process and make the programs become even more successful. However, to make orientational activities in particular and international academic mobility in general become successful, the faculty needs to make sure that they include the international academic mobility programs in the curriculum. Without this inclusion, students may not feel a sense of the importance of taking part in them. Obviously, this makes it harder for the faculty to convince their students to join the programs. The programs might be mandatory or optional depending on how much each

institution wishes to internationalize their curriculum. Such a way may encourage students to regard international academic mobility programs as real values in their university time.

#### **4.3. Supporting students before and during the programs**

It takes time for the faculty to organize an academic mobility program. In many cases, students might be confused about the agenda. That's why the faculty should keep students well-informed about where to do and what to do in the programs so that they may have enough time to do research about the places, which definitely puts students in a more active role in the programs.

### **5. Conclusion**

In this study, we explore the reality of implementing international academic mobility programs and students' readiness for these programs in the setting of a public university in Vietnam. In general, our results demonstrate students' high level of readiness for international academic mobility programs. Also, the study highlights aspects related to where students want to visit and what they might be interested in during international academic mobility programs. The contributions made here have wide applicability for those institutions that are considering implementing international academic mobility. Also, the study adds more evidence to the existing literature of international academic mobility in higher education in general and in Vietnam higher education in particular. Future studies could hopefully further explore this issue by extending the number of participants and applying various instruments to analyse respondents' answers.

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