

NGHIÊN CỨU TRẢI NGHIỆM CỦA SINH VIÊN QUỐC TẾ Ở MỘT TRƯỜNG ĐẠI HỌC Ở VIỆT NAM

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Bài viết này trình bày nghiên cứu về trải nghiệm của sinh viên quốc tế khi theo học tại một trường đại học ở Việt Nam. Sử dụng Khung đánh giá khả năng thích ứng văn hóa xã hội (SCAS) của hai tác giả Ward và Kennedy (1999), nghiên cứu tìm hiểu tác động của các yếu tố khác nhau của môi trường sống mới tới khả năng thích ứng của sinh viên quốc tế khi học tập ở Việt Nam. Kết quả nghiên cứu cho thấy khả năng thích ứng thành công với đời sống sinh viên có tác động lớn nhất, tiếp theo là tác động của việc được đáp ứng về nhu cầu cơ bản, một số khó khăn mang tính khách quan hoặc những chủ quan họ phải đương đầu. Tác động thấp nhất là các vấn đề mang tính xã hội. Sinh viên quốc tế không có quá nhiều khó khăn khi học tiếng Việt nhưng họ mất nhiều thời gian để làm quen với một số hiện tượng ngôn ngữ, văn hóa ở Việt Nam. Nghiên cứu này đưa ra một số khuyến nghị cho sinh viên quốc tế và cơ sở giáo dục đại học trong nỗ lực quốc tế hóa giáo dục.

Từ khóa: sinh viên quốc tế, Khung đánh giá khả năng thích ứng văn hóa xã hội (SCAS), đời sống sinh viên, quốc tế hóa.

This study investigates the experiences of international students during their studies at a university in Vietnam. Adopting the Sociocultural Adaptation Scale (SCAS) by Ward and Kennedy (1999), the study attempts to explore the effects of different aspects of a new environment on international students' overall adaptation while studying in Vietnam. The results reveal that successful adaptation to university life had the strongest effect, followed by basic needs as well as objective and subjective obstacles, while social aspects exerted the weakest impact. International students had few difficulties in learning Vietnamese, but it took them some time to adapt to some social and cultural phenomena. This study offers some suggestions for international students and host universities in their internationalization endeavors.

Keywords: international students, Sociocultural Adaptation Scale (SCAS), university life, internationalization.

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AN INVESTIGATION INTO INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS' EXPERIENCES AT A VIETNAMESE UNIVERSITY

Introduction

Internationalization has long been considered an important aspect in Vietnam's efforts to integrate into the international community. In the 20th Century, these efforts were mainly in the form of sending students overseas to undertake studies at undergraduate and graduate levels, and in importing curriculum from the western universities (Mai Thi Kim Khanh & Chau Huy Ngoc, 2022). However, the 21st Century has witnessed an increasing number of inbound students from both developed and developing countries to Vietnam. According to statistics from Vietnam's Ministry of Education and Training (MOET), from 2016-2021, over 45,000 came to Vietnam for degree and non-degree studies in various disciplines (MOET, 2021).

Higher education internationalization, both inbound and outbound, is a way for countries to enhance the quality of education in general and human resource in particular (de Wit & Altbach, 2020, Nguyen et al., 2017). However, studies on inbound mobility of international students to Vietnam is limited (Do Minh Ngoc et al., 2022; Mai Thi Kim Khanh & Chau Huy Ngoc, 2022; Tran Tho, 2021). Regarding support for inbound students, receiving institutions of western countries like the United States (US), United Kingdom (UK), European Union (EU) and Australia

usually provide orientation sessions for outbound students at their arrival. Nonetheless, this kind of support from Vietnamese higher education institutions (HEIs) is still insufficient and ineffective (Do Minh Ngoc et al., 2022).

When studying overseas, students face a lot of challenges that arise from cultural differences, language barriers, transformation of personal and professional identity, and even different climate. Although some students might have been prepared before departing to Vietnam through the sending international offices or other overseas agencies, support from the receiving HEIs to help the students adapt in the first days of arrival plays a critical role. In this regard, social and cultural adaptation for international students should receive proper attention in the literature. However, research on this issue is still limited in Vietnam, and this study is one of the attempts to fill in the gap through exploring the adaptation of foreign students during their studies at a university in Vietnam.

Literature Review

In the context of developing countries, internationalization in higher education is often synonymous with sending people to, and more recently importing curriculum from western world. Indeed, one of the characteristics of internationalization over the past three decades has been an unbalanced focus on outbound rather than

inbound in terms of education, research and service to society (de Wit & Altbach, 2020). There are many reasons for this phenomenon, but the key driving factor is the reputation, ranking, and excellence of universities in the west, which draw students from the developing world (de Wit & Altbach, 2020).

The mobility of students from the sending countries to the developed, mostly English-speaking ones, is often for three main purposes: degree, credit and certificate, each with different lengths of stay in the host countries (de Wit & Altbach, 2020). In whatever lengths of stay, the ability to adapt, or adaptation, has received much attention from scholars (e.g., Brisset et al., 2010). The unfamiliar socio-cultural and academic practices in the host countries pose quite a few challenges for the incoming students, some of whom may have never been abroad before (Nguyen et al., 2020).

Regarding this adaptation issue, studies on internationalization have used different models to explore how international students undergo sociocultural and psychological changes while being in the host countries (Brisset et al., 2010; Munusamy & Hashim, 2020; Simic-Yamashita & Tanaka, 2010). While the sociocultural adaptation is mainly related to such factors as personal identity, attachment, social support and cultural identification (Brisset et al., 2010), the networking model focuses on the “administration and bureaucracy, vibrant cooperation and vast networking

dimensions in education sector” (Munusamy & Hashim, 2020, p. 44). At the personal level, the push-pull factors have been examined in some studies in which students undergo three stages of deciding to go, choosing a host country, and selecting suitable institution (Mai Thi Kim Khanh & Chau Huy Ngoc, 2022).

However, in the investigation of international students’ adaptation in a foreign country, the Sociocultural Adaptation Scale (SCAS) has been a more popular theoretical framework (Bierwiazek & Walduś, 2016; Wilson et al., 2013), and is revised regularly (Wilson et al., 2017). This framework has also been used in different studies on how inbound students adapt in the contexts of Asian countries like Japan and Vietnam (Do Minh Ngoc et al., 2022; Huang & Horiuchi, 2019; Simic-Yamashita & Tanaka, 2010). This framework consists of four main constructs, namely: basic needs, social life, impersonal endeavors and perils, and adapting to college life. To some extents, these four constructs are similar to the need-response agency, which deals with international students’ desires to meet learning, social and well-being needs in a new environment (Tran Thi Ly & Vu Thi Phuong Thao, 2017).

As an emerging country, Vietnam is attracting more and more international students to its higher education institutions (MOET, 2021). The country’s universities are competing to enroll students from both government sponsored programs and self-funded ones to study Vietnamese language

and some other disciplines (Mai Thi Kim Khanh & Chau Huy Ngoc, 2022; Tran Tho, 2022). Nonetheless, research about their academic endeavor and sociocultural adaptation is limited (Tran Tho, 2022). Most studies so far have been on both outbound and inbound mobility with suggestions for higher education institutions on how to attract more international students. A study by Do Minh Ngoc et al. (2022) was one of the few that explored the adaptation of international students at a university; however, it was limited by the quantitative analysis only. This study expands Do Minh Ngoc et al. (2022)'s research by exploring the effects of different factors (basic needs, impersonal endeavors and perils) on the students' overall adaptation.

In this research, the majority of participants were studying Vietnamese language. In this regard, it is noteworthy that one of the unique features of Vietnamese language is the presence of six tones (thanh điệu), which are (i) mid-level – thanh ngang, (ii) low-falling – thanh huyền, (iii) high-rising – thanh ngã, (iv) low-falling-rising – hỏi, (v) high rising – sắc, and (vi) low-falling – nặng (Doan Thien Thuat, 2007). In the writing system, these tones are used harmoniously throughout the country, but in spoken language, two tones (high-rising and low-falling-rising) can be merged as one (Vu Thanh Phuong, 1982). In addition, a difference in tones may change the meaning of a word completely, for example, the word 'mả' (with low-falling

rising tone) means a tomb, grave while the word 'mã' (with high-rising) means a code. According to Ngo Nhu Binh (1998, p. 12), "The six tones in Vietnamese cause a variety of difficulties for learners, both in producing and maintaining the tones in speech flow".

In addition, the current study investigated the impacts of demographic features (e.g., gender, nationalities, duration of stay) on their adaptation. This inclusion aimed at finding differences among the students (eastern and western ones) in their adaptation. It also included qualitative data from interviews with the students to find out their experiences of studying and living in Vietnam. In short, the aim of this study was to investigate the adaptation of inbound students to a university in Vietnam. The research question of the current research was:

How did the international students adapt to sociocultural and college life during their study of Vietnamese language at a higher education institution in Vietnam?

The following section presents the methodology employed in this study

1. Methodology

1.1. Participants

The participants (No=195) of this study were international students taking part in certificate and degree courses in Vietnamese language and culture. The former group (certificate seeking) had a total study length of three months and learnt Vietnamese language only while the

latter one (degreed) took a three-year Bachelor of Art degree course at the Vietnamese Studies Faculty. It is worth noting that the above number of participants accounted for more than 40% of the number of international students (about 450) at the time this study took place (in 2022). During the Covid-19 outbreak period, these students had to study fully online, and they only came back to the University campus in May, 2022.

1.2. Instrument

A questionnaire (in both English and Vietnamese) was adapted from the Sociocultural Adaptation Scale (SCAS) by Ward and Kennedy (1999). The questionnaire contained two main parts. The first one collected demographic information about the participants, and the second one (41 items) was about the participants' basic needs, social life, impersonal endeavors and perils, and adapting to college life (Ward & Kennedy, 1999). The original questionnaire had 41 items, but after the pilot with 20 students, and basing on the actual situation of the University, one item was removed, i.e., *living with your host family* because the majority of the students either lived in the University dormitory or their families in Hanoi (where the research University was located). One item was modified from 'dealing with foreign staff' to 'getting support from foreign staff'. These modifications and additions were based on past studies about inbound mobility to Asian universities (e.g., Do Minh Ngoc, 2022; Simic-Yamashita & Tanaka, 2010).

The final questionnaire had 40 items on a 5-point Likert-type scale.

The questions were translated into Vietnamese and checked by language teachers trained in English and Vietnamese. The questions were then commented on for clarity in a group discussion with Vietnamese nationals, and some modifications were made. For example, the term 'local' in the original questionnaire was specifically translated into 'Vietnam' or 'Vietnamese language' to make the term more contextually appropriate. The questionnaire was then piloted on 20 students, who were studying Vietnamese in one class. These students had had different lengths of study in Vietnam by the time this study took place, and they were also excluded from the main survey. While completing the questionnaire, they were also invited to comment on the wording and clarity of the items. Although not all the students could fully understand the Vietnamese sentences in the questionnaire due to their low language proficiency, the teacher, who did the piloting, was present to explain each and every item in details to ensure the clarity of the items. Minor changes were further made following their comments. During the offline data collection process, the class teachers were also present to provide further help with language issues. A check on the overall reliability of the items produced high Cronbach's alpha of 0.934, suggesting that the items were valid for the study (Hair, 2019).

1.3. Data collection and analysis

The actual collection of data was conducted from the 7th to 11th of November 2022, during the students' offline lessons. A total number of 195 students did the survey, but after cleaning the data, only 180 surveys were eligible for the analysis. Some of the survey did not provide sufficient data (eg., missing ages and times to stay in Vietnam), and some students circled one or two scales for all the items in the questionnaire. Nearly 50 students indicated in their survey that they were happy to be interviewed, but only 15 replied the phone calls, and only 12 came for the interviews conducted in Vietnamese, each one last around five minutes due to the students' time limitation, and possibly their language proficiency. The interview questions were based on the results of quantitative analyses for further explanation and clarification. The participants were interviewed individually after their class time, and the interviews were recorded, transcribed and analyzed under the prescribed themes (identified through

quantitative data analysis and theoretical model of the study).

In this study, the quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive and inferential techniques starting with identifying the means and standard deviation for each item of the questionnaire. This was followed by principal component analysis, correlation and regression analysis, and independent sample t-test and ANOVA in order to explore the relationships among the four main variables of the SCAS model. The study also investigated the differences among the participants in relations to their accommodation (in dormitory versus homestay and nationalities – westerners versus easterners, etc.). The qualitative data were analyzed under the themes that had emerged from the quantitative data analysis (triangulation of data analysis)

Results

To answer the question of the study, the quantitative data was analyzed with descriptive and inferential techniques. Table 1 presents some demographic information about the participants.

Participants' demographic information

Table 1: Participants' demographic information

Information		Frequency	Percent (%)
Nationality	Chinese	79	43.9
	Japanese	28	15.6
	Korean	22	12.2
	Laotian	29	16.1
	Others	22	12.2
Gender	Female	82	45.6
	Male	98	54.4
Accommodation	Boarding	99	55.9
	Renting	65	36.7
	Others	13	7.3

Information		Frequency	Percent (%)
Age	18-24	128	71.1
	25-63	52	28.9
Time in Vietnam	0.5 – 03 months	120	66.1
	04 – 180 months	60	34.1

Data in Table 1 show that nearly half of the participants came from China (43.9%) while those from Japan, Korea and Lao were almost the same, accounting for around 12%-16%. There were 22 students (12.2%) from other countries like the US, Mongolia, Russian. The percentage of female and male participants were 45.6% and 53.8% respectively. More than half of them lived in the University's boarding house while 36.7% stayed in rented accommodation, and the rest lived with their families. The majority of students' ages ranged from 18-24 while the remaining ones were from 25-63 years old. Most of them (66.1%) had only been in Vietnam from half a month to three months while the rest (34.1%) had been in the country from four to 180 months. Table 2 presents the results of descriptive analysis

of 41 items adapted from the Sociocultural Adaptation Scale (Ward & Kennedy, 1999).

Analysis of quantitative data

Descriptive analysis

In order to explore how the international students adapted during their study at the University, quantitative responses collected from the questionnaire were datamined through some simple descriptive and inferential techniques. Table 2 shows the results of the participants' response to the survey questions about sociocultural adaptation. The instruction was: "*For the items below, please circle a number from 1-5 that best describes the amount of difficulty that you have experienced in Vietnam (1= extreme difficulty, 2 = a lot of difficulty, 3 = neutral, 4 = a little difficulty, 5 = no difficulty)*".

Table 2: Descriptive analysis of the items

Item	N	Mean	SD
1. Making friends	180	3.84	1.124
2. Using the transport system	180	3.58	1.196
3. Making yourself understood	180	3.40	1.065
4. Getting used to the pace of life	180	3.71	1.049
5. Going shopping	180	4.00	1.019
6. Going to social events/gatherings/functions	180	3.39	1.081
7. Worshipping in your usual way	180	3.50	1.033
8. Talking about yourself with others	180	3.58	1.108

Item	N	Mean	SD
9. Understanding jokes and humor	180	3.20	1.235
10. Dealing with someone who is unpleasant/cross/aggressive	180	3.16	1.157
11. Getting used to the local food/finding food you enjoy	180	3.97	1.118
12. Following rules and regulations	180	3.93	1.020
13. Dealing with people in authority	180	3.33	1.148
14. Dealing with the bureaucracy	179	3.29	1.173
15. Seeking support from the university administrative staff	179	3.54	1.177
16. Adapting to local accommodation	180	3.83	1.147
17. Communicating with people of a different ethnic group	180	3.71	1.194
18. Relating to members of the opposite sex	180	3.63	1.157
19. Dealing with unsatisfactory service	180	3.25	1.143
20. Finding your way around	180	3.63	1.098
21. Dealing with the climate	179	3.58	1.244
22. Dealing with people staring at you	180	3.42	1.108
23. Going to coffee shops/ food stalls/ restaurants/ fast food outlets	179	4.05	1.088
24. Understanding the local accent/language	180	2.97	1.279
25. Living away from family members	179	3.73	1.174
26. Adapting to local etiquette	179	3.80	1.050
27. Getting used to the population density	180	3.59	1.162
28. Relating to older people	179	3.51	1.041
29. Dealing with people of higher status	180	3.47	1.080
30. Understanding what is required of you at university	180	3.63	1.036
31. Coping with academic work	180	3.59	1.082
32. Seeking support from the teachers of Vietnamese Studies Faculty	180	3.68	1.060
33. Expressing your ideas in class	179	3.56	1.065
34. Seeking support from the administrative staffs of the Faculty	180	3.64	1.056
35. Accepting/understanding the local political system	180	3.57	1.124

Item	N	Mean	SD
36. Understanding the locals' world view	179	3.54	1.056
37. Taking a local perspective on the culture	179	3.59	1.021
38. Understanding the local value system	180	3.68	1.022
39. Seeing things from the locals' point of view	180	3.58	1.057
40. Understanding cultural differences	180	3.89	1.019
41. Being able to see two sides of an intercultural issue	179	3.73	1.020

Data in Table 2 indicate that generally the students adapted very well with the new environment, evidenced from the means score from 2.97/5.0 to 4.05/4.0 (the higher the mean, the less the difficulty). The vast majority of the means was above 3.0. The students had very little difficulty in going to coffee shop or shopping (mean scores of 4.05 and 4.0 respectively), and “*Understanding the local accent/language*” was the area that caused them the most difficulty (mean score of 2.97/5.0). The students also had very little difficulty in seeking support from the administrative and teaching staffs of the University and Faculty with the mean score of over 3.5/5.0.

They did not have much difficulty in understanding what was required of them from the University either (M=3.65).

Principal component analysis

In order to investigate further the relative importance of each factor, a principal component analysis (PCA) using Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS), version 24, was conducted. The 40 items were subjected to this analysis. After eight rounds of iteration and fixed number of four factors (as suggested from the literature), 27 items with loadings higher than 0.3 were identified and presented in Table 3.

Table 3: Principal component analysis

Factors	Variables	Component			
		1	2	3	4
Adaptation to college life and cultural issues	1. Seeking support from the staff of Vietnamese Studies Faculty (34)	.892			
	2. Being able to see two sides of an intercultural issue (41)	.848			
	3. Understanding what is required of you at university (30)	.848			
	4. Seeking support from the teachers of Vietnamese Studies Faculty (32)	.759			
	5. Expressing your ideas in class (33)	.669			
	6. Understanding the local value system (38)	.653			

Factors	Variables	Component			
		1	2	3	4
	7. Understanding cultural differences (40)	.637			
	8. Seeking support from the university administrative staff (15)	.624			
	9. Taking a local perspective on the culture (37)	.599			
	10. Accepting/understanding the local political system (35)	.431			
Basic needs	11. Going to coffee shops/ food stalls/restaurants/ fast food outlets (23)		.743		
	12. Using the transport system (2)		.683		
	13. Living away from family members overseas/independently from your parents (25)		.676		
	14. Adapting to local accommodation (16)		.630		
	15. Getting used to the population density (27)		.505		
	16. Getting used to the local food/finding food you enjoy (11)		.490		
	17. Following rules and regulations (12)		.447		
	18. Finding your way around (20)		.403		
Impersonal endeavors and perils	19. Understanding the local accent/language (24)			.831	
	20. Dealing with the climate (21)			.750	
	21. Dealing with people staring at you (22)			.643	
	22. Worshipping in your usual way (7)			.630	
	23. Dealing with unsatisfactory service (19)			.563	
	24. Getting used to the pace of life (4)			.545	
Social life	25. Making friends (1)				.753
	26. Relating to members of the opposite sex (18)				.639
	27. Communicating with people of a different ethnic group (17)				.638

Data in Table 3 reveal that the first component includes ten items (1-10) that are related to the students' adaptation to college life (06 items) and cultural issues (04 items). The highest loading for this

component is on seeking support from the administrative staff of the Faculty where they were studying, suggesting that they had very little difficulty in this matter. The smallest loading for this component is on

accepting/understanding the local political system. With the exception of the students from China with similar political system to Vietnam, students from other countries (e.g. Japan, Korea and especially western ones) might find it had to understand Vietnam's political system. They had also been in Vietnam for a short time; hence, their knowledge about Vietnam's political system was also limited.

The second component is comprised of eight items (11-18) and can be categorized as basic needs, for example, 'using the transport system' and 'getting used to local food'. The students did not seem to have much difficulty in going to coffee shops (highest loadings), which were available around the University campus, but it seems that they found it harder to find their way around. Again, this is probably because they had not been in the country for long enough - the majority (66%) had been in Vietnam for only three months at the time this study was conducted. Interestingly, item number 27 (getting used to population density) is in this component, possibly because most of the students' home countries (China, Japan, Korea) have similar population density to Vietnam.

The third component has six items (19-24), and relates to impersonal endeavors and perils. Overall, the loadings for this component are high, suggesting little difficulties for the students. They had the least problem in understanding local accent/language (loading of 0.831). This is probably because the teachers and other

people adjusted their language when communicating with these students (foreigners). Again, it is interesting to discover that they had more difficulty in getting used to the pace of life in Vietnam (loading of 0.55). This is possibly because of the change from life in their home country to the students' life in the host country's University, where they had to study five days a week.

The fourth component includes only three items (25-27) and can be considered as students' social life, more specifically relating to other people. Interestingly, however, the original items like 'going to social events' and 'understanding jokes and humor' are removed from the iteration. Again, this is possibly because the students had been in the country for a short period of time; hence, they had not experienced these activities and events. With relatively high loadings (from 6.4 to 7.5), the students did not seem to have difficulties in these matters. Finally, it is safe to say that there is a match between the descriptive data presented in Table 2 and inferential data in Table 3.

Correlation analysis

In order to investigate the correlation among the aforementioned components and the students' overall adaptation of the participants (computed for all 41 SCAS items), a correlation analysis was performed, and the result is shown in Table 4.

Table 4: Correlation among variables

	1	2	3	4	5
1. Adaptation to college life	1	.724**	.683**	.622**	.913**
2. Basic needs		1	.656**	.651**	.863**
3. Impersonal endeavors and perils			1	.591**	.849**
4. Social life				1	.759**
5. Overall adaptation					1

Note: ** $p < 0.01$; small $r = 0.10$ to 0.29 ; medium $r = 0.30$ to 0.49 ; large $r = 0.50$ to 1.0 (Cohen, 1988)

Table 4 shows the Pearson correlation coefficients between the variables. All four components of the SCAS are related to the students' overall adaptation and to one another ($p < 0.05$). The students' adaptation to college life has the largest correlation ($r = 0.913$), whereas their social life records to lowest correlation with the overall adaptation (0.76). Among the components, the students' adaptation to college life is related the strongest to their basic needs ($r = 0.724$), and the correlation between the students' adaptation to college life and their impersonal endeavors and perils is the smallest ($r = 0.591$).

Regression analysis

Next, multiple regression analysis was performed to see how much the four independent variables (individual sociocultural adaptation dimensions) could predict students' overall adaptation. Preliminary analyses were conducted to ensure no violation of the assumptions of normality, linearity, multicollinearity and homoscedasticity. After the entry of the five variables, the total variance explained by the model (adjusted R square) was 0.981 , which indicates that the model explains 98.1 per cent of the variance.

Table 5: Multiple regression of four predictors of student adaptation

	Beta	t	Sig.	Tolerance	VIF
(Constant)		.333	.739		
Adaptation to college life	.428	24.866	.000	.384	2.603
Basic needs	.263	15.366	.000	.387	2.585
Impersonal endeavors and perils	.299	19.035	.000	.461	2.171
Social life	.145	9.673	.000	.508	1.967
Adjusted R square: 0.981					

Table 5 shows that all four components are significant predictors in explaining student adaptation. Comparing the contribution of each independent variable, Table 5 shows that when the variance explained by all other variables in the model was controlled, adaptation to college life makes the strongest contribution to explaining satisfaction ($\beta = 0.43$). Beta values for the next two variables (basic needs and impersonal endeavors and perils) indicate relatively similar contributions ($\beta = 0.263$ and 0.299 ,

respectively). Adaptation to social life has the smallest contribution with β level of 0.145 . The results of regression analysis match those of the correlation above.

Independent sample t-test and ANOVA

Independent sample t-test and One-way ANOVA analyses were conducted to explore the differences and effects of students' background (gender, age, time in Vietnam, nationality and accommodation) on their overall adaptation.

Table 6: Differences in overall adaptation

Gender						
Female (77)		Male (93)		t	Sig	Conclusion
<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>			
3.56	0.71	3.64	0.73	0.70	0.49	No
Time in Vietnam						
0.5-3.0 months (58)		4.0-180 months (112)		t	0.86	No
<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>			
3.59	0.72	3.61	0.73	-.17		
Age						
18-24 years (119)		25-63 years (51)		t	0.68	No
<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>			
3.62	0.72	3.57	0.72	.41		

Data in Table 6 show that there is no significant difference in scores for males ($M = 3.56$, $SD = 0.71$) and females ($M = 3.65$, $SD = 0.73$; $t(170) = 0.70$, $p = 0.49$, two-tailed). Additional exploration did not find any differences between the male and female students in the four dimensions: basic needs, social life, impersonal

endeavors and perils, and adapting to college life. Neither was there a significance difference between those who had stayed in Vietnam from 0.5-3.0 months ($M = 3.59$, $SD = 0.72$) and those who had lived in the country from 4.0-180 months ($M = 3.61$, $SD = 0.73$; $t(170) = -0.17$, $p = 0.86$, two-tailed). Similar to the above findings, further investigation did not find

any differences in the lengths of stay for the four dimensions of the SCAS. Finally, younger foreign students, aged from 18-25 ($M = 3.62$, $SD = 0.72$) did not differ significantly from the older ones ($M = 3.57$, $SD = 0.72$; $t(170) = 0.41$, $p = 0.68$, two-tailed) in their adaptation to the new

environment. Further analysis did not find the differences in age for the four dimensions mentioned above either. Nonetheless, it is worth noting a skew of data about the months of stay in Vietnam (180 months versus three months).

Table 7: Adaptation differences by accommodation

ANOVA						
Totaladaptation						
	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	
Between Groups	.405	2	.202	.387	.680	
Within Groups	85.781	164	.523			
Total	86.186	166				
Multiple Comparisons						
Dependent Variable: Totaladaptation; Tukey HSD						
(I) accomm	(J) accomm	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig.	95% Confidence Interval	
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound
Boarding	Renting	.10219	.11826	.664	-.1775	.3819
	Others	.07678	.21458	.932	-.4308	.5843
Renting	Boarding	-.10219	.11826	.664	-.3819	.1775
	Others	-.02542	.22002	.993	-.5458	.4950
Others	Boarding	-.07678	.21458	.932	-.5843	.4308
	Renting	.02542	.22002	.993	-.4950	.5458

A one-way between-groups analysis of variance was conducted to explore the impact of accommodation on the students' adaptation, as measured by the SCAS. Data in Table 8 show that there is no statistically significant difference at the $p > .05$ level in SCAS scores for the four groups: $F(2, 164) = 0.39$, $p = .68$. Post-hoc comparisons using the Tukey HSD test did not show

significant difference in the mean score for students living in the University boarding house, rented accommodation and those living in other places ($p > 0.05$). Additional exploration did not find any impacts of accommodation on the four dimensions of the sociocultural adaptation for the students.

Table 8: Adaptation differences by nationality

ANOVA						
Totaladaptation						
	Sum of Squares	df.	Mean Square	F	Sig.	
Between Groups	10.041	4	2.510	5.334	.000	
Within Groups	77.648	165	.471			
Total	87.689	169				
Multiple Comparisons						
Dependent Variable: Totaladaptation; Tukey HSD						
(I) nationality	(J) nationality	Mean Difference (I- J)	Std. Error	Sig.	95% Confidence Interval	
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound
Chinese	Japanese	.55340*	.15249	.003	.1328	.9740
	Korean	-.12327	.16684	.947	-.5835	.3369
	Laotian	.32752	.15667	.229	-.1046	.7597
	Others	-.13156	.16987	.938	-.6001	.3370
Japanese	Chinese	-.55340*	.15249	.003	-.9740	-.1328
	Korean	-.67667*	.19544	.006	-1.2157	-.1376
	Laotian	-.22588	.18683	.746	-.7412	.2894
	Others	-.68496*	.19803	.006	-1.2312	-.1388
Korean	Chinese	.12327	.16684	.947	-.3369	.5835
	Japanese	.67667*	.19544	.006	.1376	1.2157
	Laotian	.45079	.19872	.160	-.0973	.9989
	Others	-.00829	.20928	1.000	-.5855	.5690
Laotian	Chinese	-.32752	.15667	.229	-.7597	.1046
	Japanese	.22588	.18683	.746	-.2894	.7412
	Korean	-.45079	.19872	.160	-.9989	.0973
	Others	-.45908	.20127	.156	-1.0142	.0961
Others	Chinese	.13156	.16987	.938	-.3370	.6001
	Japanese	.68496*	.19803	.006	.1388	1.2312
	Korean	.00829	.20928	1.000	-.5690	.5855
	Laotian	.45908	.20127	.156	-.0961	1.0142
*. The mean difference is significant at the 0.05 level.						

Similarly, a one-way between-groups analysis of variance was conducted to explore the impact of nationality on the students' adaptation, as measured by the SCAS. Participants were divided into four groups according to their nationalities (Group 1: Chinese; Group 2: Japanese; Group 3: Korean; Group 4: others). Data in Table 7 show that there was a statistically significant difference at the $p < .05$ level in SCAS scores for the four groups: $F(4, 165) = 5.3$, $p = .03$. The difference in mean scores between the groups was relatively large. The effect size, calculated using eta squared, was .11. Post-hoc comparisons using the Tukey HSD test indicated that the mean score for Group 1 ($M = 3.71$, $SD = 0.71$) was significantly different from Group 2 ($M = 3.16$, $SD = 0.64$); between Group 2 ($M = 3.16$, $SD = 0.64$) and Group 3 ($M = 3.83$, $SD = 0.72$); and between Group 2 ($M = 3.16$, $SD = 0.64$) and Group 4 ($M = 3.84$, $SD = 0.67$). Group 4, students from Laos ($M = 3.38$, $SD = 0.64$), did not differ significantly from students from all other nationalities.

Nonetheless, further analyses found some differences in the nationalities of the

students with regards to the four aforementioned dimensions. First of all, for the first component, there were differences among students from China, Japan and Korea, but Laotian students did not differ from students from any of other countries. Those from the others (the US, Russia, etc.) were different from Japanese students, but not from China, Korea and Laos in their adaptation to college life. Regarding the second component (basic needs), all the students did not differ from one another. As for the third component (coping with impersonal endeavors and perils), Chinese students differed from all the rest, excepting those from Korea and others ((the US, Russia, etc.). There was also a difference between Korean and Japanese students in this dimension. Finally, component 4 (social life) witnessed the difference between students from China Japanese, Korea and Laos from the rest (the US, Russia, etc.). In short, more differences among the students were found in their adaptation to college life and social life. Table 9 presents the descriptive results of the differences.

Table 9: Adaptation to college life and social life

Descriptives						
		N	Mean	Std. Deviation	95% Confidence Interval for Mean	
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound
Adaptation to college life	Chinese	76	3.7579	.82369	3.5697	3.9461
	Japanese	28	3.0250	.70007	2.7535	3.2965
	Korean	22	3.9318	.67710	3.6316	4.2320

	Laotian	29	3.4793	.75422	3.1924	3.7662
	Others	21	4.0476	.68820	3.7344	4.3609
	Total	176	3.6517	.81724	3.5301	3.7733
Basic needs	Chinese	78	3.8910	.74630	3.7228	4.0593
	Japanese	28	3.5670	.81258	3.2519	3.8820
	Korean	22	4.0284	.75488	3.6937	4.3631
	Laotian	28	3.5446	.78853	3.2389	3.8504
	Others	22	3.7841	.87473	3.3963	4.1719
	Total	178	3.7893	.79070	3.6724	3.9063
Impersonal endeavors and perils	Chinese	79	3.5671	.79255	3.3896	3.7446
	Japanese	28	2.8714	.69541	2.6018	3.1411
	Korean	22	3.6273	.91192	3.2229	4.0316
	Laotian	29	3.0897	.65156	2.8418	3.3375
	Others	22	3.4091	.76713	3.0690	3.7492
	Total	180	3.3700	.81040	3.2508	3.4892
Social life	Chinese	79	3.8987	.77230	3.7257	4.0717
	Japanese	28	3.4643	1.07856	3.0461	3.8825
	Korean	22	3.5455	1.16631	3.0283	4.0626
	Laotian	29	3.1609	.91989	2.8110	3.5108
	Others	22	4.3788	.69233	4.0718	4.6857
	Total	180	3.7278	.95684	3.5870	3.8685

The data show that among three East Asia countries (China, Japan and Korea), Korean students are significant better at adapting than the Chinese and Japanese ones for component 1 (college life) and 3 (impersonal endeavours and perils) while the Chinese students were better than the other two groups in component 2 (basic needs) and component 4 (social life). It is interesting to see that students from Lao (also in South East Asia like Vietnam) have the lower mean scores than the three East

Asia countries in the adaptation to social life and basic needs component.

Qualitative data analysis

There were two sources of qualitative data in this investigation: From the answers to the open question of the questionnaire, and interviews with 12 students. Only six students provided more answers in the open question and the majority of whom expressed hopes to get more support from the University, including scholarships;

however, interestingly, one student wrote: *“Không có thời gian nghỉ. Lúc nào cũng học chăm chỉ mà không thể được điểm tốt, chắc là dạy tiếng Việt nhanh quá. Sống ở VN đối với người nước ngoài có nhiều khó khăn, đặc biệt là người không có nhiều tiền. [Not time to rest; study hard all the time but cannot be sure to have good marks, possibly because of fast teaching pace. Foreign students in Vietnam have lots of difficulties, especially for those with little money].* This comment contradicts to the results of descriptive analysis presented earlier. However, this is the view of only one student.

Interviews were conducted (in Vietnamese) with 12 students from different countries, e.g., China, Korea, the UK, and the questions focused on their difficulties in adaptation. Regarding the difficulties, all the interviewees expressed their concerns about transport, more specifically the huge number of motorbikes in the streets, and traffic jam. They stated: *“Cái vấn đề quan trọng nhất em thấy ùn tắc giao thông ở Hà Nội [the most serious matter for me is traffic jam in Hanoi]”* (CN1), *“Em gặp khó khăn nhất là đi lại giao thông. Em thường đi xe buýt nên hay bị gặp tắc đường và khó chịu [I have the most difficulty in transport. I often take the bus and face traffic jam, which I find uneasy]”* (NB1), *“Có rất nhiều xe máy trên trên đường ở Việt Nam, rất là nguy hiểm [there are too many motorbikes on the street in Vietnam. It’s very dangerous]”* (EN1). To deal with these problems, some tried to use a motorbike when they first

came to Vietnam, but stopped that, and took public transport.

The second difficulty for the interviewees was understanding local accent. This result is in par with the quantitative finding. Although the majority of the interviewees were the second- or third- year students, they stated that it was hard for them to comprehend the language, when they first came to Vietnam, and even later, *“Khi em đến Việt Nam thì là cái đầu tiên thì gặp khó khăn là ngôn ngữ. Rất lớn [When I first came to Vietnam, the first difficulty was language. Huge problem]”* (CN2), *“Ừm... khi em nói chuyện với người Việt Nam thì nghe thì rất là khó vì mỗi người có một cách phát âm, cách nói khác nhau [I find it difficult to understand Vietnamese because people have different ways to talking]”* (HQ2). There are many reasons for this language difficulty including the fast speed, jargon, the six tones of Vietnamese language, and even shortened ways of speaking.

Ví dụ là đồ uống của em hết người phục vụ đi đến nói rất là nhanh, *“Cho chị cốc, cho thêm nước vào... Em chưa phản ứng được, em phải nhờ người phục vụ nói chậm lại một chút thì chị ấy nói là “em cho chị cốc của em, chị thêm nước vào”. Thực ra thì em hiểu nhưng nếu nói nhanh thì em không phản ứng được [for example, when my glass was empty, the waitress said, “give me glass, more water”. I could not react and asked her to slow down. She then said, “give me your glass so I can pour in more water”. In fact, I could vaguely*

understand, but due to fast speed, I could not react] (CN3)

In order to cope with the aforementioned language difficulty, the students resorted to watching television, or listening to Vietnamese songs, reading the news on the Internet and talking to the local people. Their comprehension of the information varied: Some could only understand 20% of what was said, others could grasp 60-70%. They also viewed that it was easier to read the news than to listen or watch it, “*Đọc tin tức ở trên internet thì là hơi hơi dễ một chút [reading news on the Internet is a bit easy]*” (HQ3), “*...và khi em đi du lịch, xong rồi thường nói chuyện với người Việt, người bán hàng [...and when travelling, I often talk to Vietnamese people, the sellers]*” (LA2).

Difficulty in understanding cultural aspect was also mentioned by three students, who said, “*Ừm khi học về văn hóa là khó nhất và có rất nhiều từ Hán Việt. Em chưa quen [learning about culture was the most difficult. There are many Sino Vietnamese. I’m not used to it]*”, “*Ừm em cảm thấy học văn hóa Việt Nam là cảm thấy khó nhất. Ừm. Bởi vì có nhiều từ vựng không biết dịch sang tiếng N là gì? I find Vietnamese culture the most difficult to learn because there are many terminologies that I don’t know how to translate into N language]*”. Interestingly, one (western) student found it uneasy when being asked so many questions by the Vietnamese neighbours, “*Ví dụ là hai hàng xóm ở Việt Nam luôn luôn hỏi rất nhiều. Em cũng trả lời nhưng mà bị mệt một chút [for example,*

two neighbours in Vietnam kept asking me questions. I answered but found it a bit tiring]” (EN1).

In the interviews, the participants also mentioned some interesting social and cultural phenomena that they found different from theirs, for example, using the horn “*Em rất là sợ, đi trên đường, nếu người ta đi ở đằng sau, nhanh hơn mình thì cứ bấm loa ‘bep bep bep’ để mình đi nhanh hơn [I find it scary, on the road, people behind me, going faster than me and pressing the horn ‘bep bep bep’ to push me to ride faster]*” (CN1). Another one said “*Em đã gặp khó khăn cũng là nhiều thứ. Chẳng hạn như là khi em đi chợ. Em đi ra ngoài đấy, khi đó thì người bán hàng thường nói thách, nói giá cao quá. Bởi vì chúng em là sinh viên nên không có nhiều tiền để trả. Em mặc cả người ta cũng không giảm, không bớt cho em [I have many difficulties. For example, when I go shopping outside, the sellers often say a very high price, too high. We students do not have much money to pay. They do not lower the price no matter how I bargain]*” (LA1). Other less serious, but interesting, issue included the climate, food and time differences.

Discussion

The main objective of this study was to explore how inbound students adapted to sociocultural conditions in Vietnam. The analyses of the survey and interviews indicate that the international students, despite their differences in nationalities, age and lengths of stay in Vietnam, did not

seem to have much difficulty in meeting their basic needs, adapting to social and cultural phenomena, coping with the impersonal endeavors and perils, and dealing with college life. The results of the analyses are now compared to past research.

First of all, the result of descriptive and qualitative data analyses reveal that the international students had the most difficulty in understanding local accent/language. These findings are in agreement with the results of earlier studies (Do Minh Ngoc et al., 2022; Simic-Yamashita & Tanaka, 2010). It seems that language barrier was the same issue for international students, especially for those with shorter lengths of stay in the host country. However, the lengths of stay for international students in this study did not have impact on their overall adaptation nor their ability to understand local accents. This result agrees with the findings of a study by Simic-Yamashita and Tanaka (2010). This was due to the fact that the University staffs, teachers and the public adjusted their speech when talking to the new foreign comers in different communication contexts (in the class, shopping, social events, etc.).

Second, the results of PCA seem to be consistent with Simic-Yamashita and Tanaka (2010) although their study used only 25 items for the analysis. There are some differences, though. For example, in this study, going shopping or going to coffee shop/restaurant were removed from the iterations, suggesting that these activities were not an issue for the

international students in Vietnam. Nonetheless, these two items received quite high loadings in Simic-Yamashita and Tanaka (2010)'s study. This is possibly due to the convenience that international students enjoyed when staying in the University boarding house, which was surrounded by shops, cafes, etc. However, with a small sample size, caution must be applied, as the findings might not be transferable to other contexts. It is also worth noting that there was not a difference between the students living in the boarding house and those in the rented accommodation.

Third, in this study, students from different regions of origin did not differ from one another in their overall adaptation. Although this result is different from Simic-Yamashita and Tanaka (2010), specific ANOVA analysis revealed some similarities. For example, like the results of Simic-Yamashita and Tanaka (2010), three East Asian countries (China, Japan and Korea) were different in adaptation to college life, and were generally better than those from South East Asia and other countries (e.g., Europe) in their adaptation to college life and basic needs. However, due to the limited number of studies on these specific aspects and small sample size, these results should be interpreted with caution.

Fourth, the adaptation to college life and cultural issue is the strongest predictor of the international students' overall adaptation. These results match those observed in earlier studies which suggested

that the biggest challenges for international students were adapting to college life (Do Minh Ngoc et al., 2022; Xiong and Zhou, 2018). This result is not surprising because the college life itself seems to cover most aspects of an international student's life. In this study, the college life also included common cultural issues such as understanding the local value system and cultural issues. The majority of participants in this study were from Asia; hence, they could have somewhat similar sociocultural values and customs.

Fifth, concerning support from local staff and teachers, the international students did not find any difficulties, evidenced by high mean scores in the descriptive analysis and loadings in the factor analysis. The findings of the current study do not support the previous research by Xiong and Zhou (2018) who found that East Asian graduate students in the US did not get sufficient support from the department, institution and advisors. On the other hand, these findings partially agree with the results of a study by Mai Thi Kim Khanh and Chau Huy Ngoc (2022) in which reputation of the host institution (in taking care of international students) could be one of the pull factors, together with the advantage of offering language programs for international students.

Conclusion and recommendations

This study aimed to explore how international students adapted to different aspects of college life, including their ability to cope with sociocultural and

impersonal phenomena. The results of this study reveal that international students did not have much difficulty in adapting to social and cultural phenomena in Vietnam. However, they had some problems in understanding Vietnamese language due to its features (having six tones, different accents, etc.). They were also puzzled by the huge number of motorbikes in Hanoi, and to some extent, the driving culture. Adaptation to college life seems to play the most important part in the life of international students, which imply that educational institutions should spare the biggest efforts in supporting the students in the enrolment, orientation, and mostly importantly special features of Vietnamese language.

The above results offer some recommendations for the receiving higher education institutions in Vietnam. First, more efforts should be spared to orient international students before, and in the first weeks of their arrival in Vietnam about 'unique' features of local social phenomena such as the huge number of motorbikes and some drivers' 'different' behavior, such as pumping on the horn or not giving ways to pedestrians. Second, while the students could learn 'standard' Vietnamese language in classes, they should be advised on the differences in the accents, speed of delivery, etc. by the locals. This phenomenon is common for all international students, both outbound and inbound, because of the differences in the academic and non-academic usage by lecturers and other local people, especially

Vietnamese six tones and different accents. The similarity in the ‘look’ between Asian origin international students (e.g., those from China, Laos) may be part of the issues. In other words, Vietnamese people are aware of using simple language when communicating with westerners as compared to those who look like Vietnamese. This issue should be further investigated in future research.

Despite reaching the aforementioned results, the findings in this report are subject to at least three limitations. First, these data apply only to inbound students of Vietnamese language major at a university, future studies should collect data from different regions of the country (north, central, south) to arrive at more comprehensive results. Second, the study relied more heavily on the quantitative data than the qualitative one, which limits the depth of analyses. Considerably more work will need to be done to depict how the international students cope with different social and cultural phenomena of Vietnam. Third, data were collected from language major students only, which also limits the generalization of the results. Future studies should consider investigation with foreign students of other majors in order to compare if there are any differences among the students with respect to their adaptation in Vietnam.

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