Multicultural education in the Vietnamese higher education in globalization era

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Abstract: Multicultural education is quite a new concept in Vietnam. In the globalization and integration era, together with the open-door policies in Vietnam, a lot of higher education reforms have been made to meet the requirements of the labor market and emphasis has been placed on training the high-quality human resources. Although more and more higher education institutions are aiming to train global citizens who can adapt themselves in the international or global working context, adequate attention has not been paid to multicultural education with global views and concrete measures for multicultural education have not been taken due to the lack of experts in this field, lack of staff's cultural, language competence and lack of resources. The integration of multicultural education into curriculum development, implementation and evaluation as well as staff development should lead to fulfilment of the stakeholders' expectations in higher education in Vietnam, and as a result, lead to students' future success and better brand-name of higher education institutions.

Key words*: Multicultural education, higher education, globalization era*

1. Multicultural education and global citizens

The concept "multicultural education" first appeared in the U.S. in the 1960s as the result of the *Civil Right Movements* and strongly developed with a series of educational reforms in the 1970s and 1980s in the U.S. and later spread throughout the world. It became an integral part of teacher preparation in the 1977 standards of the National Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE) with the following definition "Multicultural education is preparation for the social, political, and economic realities that individuals experience in culturally diverse and complex human encounters. These realities have both national and international dimensions". This preparation provides a process by which an individual develops competencies for perceiving, believing, evaluating, and behaving in differential cultural settings. Thus, multicultural education is viewed as an intervention and an ongoing assessment process to help institutions and individuals become more responsive to the human condition, individual cultural integrity, and cultural pluralism in society [Ramsey and Williams 2003: 214].

As for Vietnam, the preparation for students' future integration, especially for the upcoming event of ASEAN Community has been largely discussed in higher education recently. Although the concept "multicultural education" has not been well-known among the Vietnamese scholars and educators, the topics such as "global citizens education", "integration education", "well-rounded education",… have been increasingly considered important in the multicultural (national, regional and global) settings. Since the era of *Doi Moi (Renovation)* and regional/global integration in Vietnam with the quick

development of ICT, international exchanges and global labor market, there has been an urgent demand for high-quality human resources who are expected to have not only good awareness of their national identity but also good knowledge of other cultures in the world for effective integration and contribution to the process of industrialization and modernization of the country. Therefore, multicultural and global education are of great importance in the Vietnamese higher education.

A global citizen is willing to (1) open his mind to learn, (2) open his eyes to observe; (3) open his heart to connect and (4) open his hands to take actions in cooperation [Gerzon 2011: 243-302]. Therefore, the main characteristics of a global citizen should consist of: (1) global thinking and cultural tolerance, (2) a good sense of responsibilities and cooperation for the global issues, (3) competence to use necessary tools for lifelong learning and (4) good awareness of one's own national identity. In short, a global citizen must learn about the world and learn to interact with the world as mentioned in one of UNESCO's pillar "Learn to live together".

2. Renovation in the awareness of multicultural and global education in Vietnam

The document of The Eighth Party Congress defined the renovation policy of the Party and the Vietnamese government concerning the international relations as follows "Vietnam wants to become *a friend of all countries* in the world community, striving for independence, peace and development" from the viewpoint of "strengthening its independence, autonomy together with enlarging international relations, multilateral and diverse external relations …" [Dang Ba Lam 2003: 405]. The Party expressed their perspective that "the training and improvement of *international competence* and competence to *acquire a good knowledge of human cultures* are required for the effective fulfilment of cooperation duties and adaptation in the *international context, …*" [Dang Ba Lam 2003: 204, 247]. The dramatic changes in the economical, political, social and external relations contexts as well as the need for international exchanges and learning about other cultures in Vietnam together with the UNESCO's guidelines in promoting the tolerance for cultural diversity have put strong impact on the Vietnamese higher education in the training for human resources with these competences.

Article 5 in the Law on Vietnamese Higher Education issued in the year 2012 states clearly the aims of the Vietnamese Higher Education as follows "the training for human resources, improving intellectual standards of the people, cultivating talented people, ... to serve the socio-economic development ... and *international integration*". The Vietnamese educational strategies for the period 2009-2020 set by MOET (Ministry of Education and Training) have pointed out that "Education and training have the missions to make Vietnamese students well-rounded citizens who can make good contributions to the country's *advanced culture in the globalization era*". Therefore, several higher education institutions in Vietnam have recently become more concerned with the formulation of their missions, visions and expected learning outcomes in the new context, adding new attributes for their graduates such as problem-solving skills, lifelong learning, integration competence and knowledge of the global world while improving internationalization strategies.

3. Organizing multicultural education activities in the Vietnamese higher education

Multicultural education activities in the Vietnamese higher education can be found out specifically from a case study of the University of Social Sciences and Humanities, Vietnam National University of HoChiMinh City (USSH, VNU-HCM), a typical Vietnamese university with a long history in HoChiMinh City, the biggest city of Vietnam, where thousands of foreign students come to study each year and various courses in social sciences, humanities, cultures, foreign languages, management,… are offered. Thanks to their active engagement in international exchanges, the relationships between teachers and students of different cultures and nationalities frequently occur which require their efforts

to learn from each other for effective communication and cooperation as preparation for the future integration context.

3.1. Organizing multicultural education programs

One of the multicultural education typologies developed by Banks (1994) refers to the content-oriented programs. According to Banks (1994), these programs have three goals: (1) to develop multicultural content throughout the disciplines; (2) to incorporate a variety of different viewpoints and perspectives in the curriculum; and (3) to transform the canon, ultimately developing a new paradigm for the curriculum.

As for USSH, VNU-HCMC (http://www.hcmussh.edu.vn/) and many other universities in Vietnam, multicultural content has been integrated into several courses of general education programs for the last two decades such as *Introduction to Oriental Cultures, History of the Western Civilization, History of the World Civilization, Environment and Development, Fundamentals of Vietnamese Culture…* Some courses at USSH, VNU-HCM also consist of comparison aspect such as *Comparative education, Comparative linguistics, Comparative Literature, Intercultural communication, ASEAN and Vietnam-ASEAN relationships, ASEAN cultures, The US, Vietnam and Globalization, History of Latin America, Culture and History of Europe….* A lot of new multicultural programs have been opened since the year 2000 at USSH, VNU-HCM such as International Relations program, Anthropology program, program of Oriental studies, program of Vietnamese studies, Spanish and Italian linguistics and literature, Korean studies, Japanese studies,....

Some expected learning outcomes have been formulated so as to provide students with the diverse knowledge and social-cultural competence such as (1) international integration and adaptation ability, (2) ability to cooperate with domestic and foreign partners, (3) multicultural communication, (4) critical thinking, ability to compare and contrast, (5) cultural tolerance,.. which are aimed to help students get success in the multicultural working environment in the future,.... The survey conducted at USSH, VNU-HCMC in 2013 into the 70 academic staff's awareness of the global education showed that 89.29% of the staff supported the training for *integration ability* and 82.14% agreed that multicultural knowledge, foreign language and intercultural competence are of great importance.

However, the survey also showed that their awareness of the long-term benefits of global and multicultural education such as "critical thinking, lifelong learning, communication skill and cultural tolerance" was lower: only 60.71% of the staff were aware of these benefits, only 17.86% of the academic staff admitted that they knew about the principles and methods of integrating multicultural, international and comparative elements or perspectives into the course contents, 60.71% of them partly knew and the rest (21.43%) had no ideas about these while only 8.22% of the students conducted admitted being able to integrate multicultural and global education into their self-study regularly.

In addition to the main programs, multicultural education can be found in a variety of extra-curricular or co-curricular activities at USSH, VNU-HCM such as in workshops, siminars, conferences, talks and short training courses or lectures given by international scholars, experts, lecturers as well as a series of cultural exchange programs and research projects with multicultural and comparative topics. In the year 2013 and 2014, there was an average of three co-curricular sessions per week officially announced on the University website with different topics related to culture, history, economies and societies in the globalization era. Nevertheless, due to budget and infrastructure constraints (lack of seminar rooms,...) as well as inadequate competence in foreign languages of some staff and students in addition to time limit, these activities have not been comprehensively carried out in all faculties and departments. 79% of the staff in the survey conducted agreed with these shortcomings.

3.2. Developing multicultural personnel

Like some other big universities in Vietnam in the integration era, USSH, VNU-HCM has formulated the policies to attract foreign lecturers and students or send staff and students abroad for further academic, cultural studies and experiences. The number of foreign lecturers and scholars at USSH, VNU-HCM (for both short-term and long-term lectures and workshops) has been increasing in the past few years[1]: from 54 international lecturers in 2010 to 75 in 2011, 89 in 2012 and nearly a hundred international lecturers coming from around 20 different countries in 2014. The diversity of foreign students at USSH, VNU-HCM is also quite great: foreign students coming from 73 different countries in the world up to now.

However, as mentioned above, financial and competence problems are two main challenges. Especially, the University cannot afford to pay higher salaries to long-term international lecturers. Therefore, most of the foreign lecturers at USSH, VNU-HCM are volunteer lecturers or scholars who usually receive financial support from diplomatic organizations or NGOs. The difficulties related to the development of multicultural staff at USSH, VNU-HCM are expressed by the staff surveyed as in the following table:

The difficulties in the development of multicultural staff	*Totally agree*	*Agree*
Lack of staff with good knowledge of multicultural education methodologies	28.3%	43.3%
Lack of foreign lecturers, especially in the faculties of foreign languages	32.3%	35.5%
Lack of time invested on improving multicultural education methodologies due to part-time jobs for extra incomes as a result of low salaries	37.7%	37.7%
Lack of experts, consultants who can help formulate and implement the strategies of developing multicultural education programs in the tendency of integration and globalization	33.9%	45.2%
Lack of foreign language competence of some staff and students	27.4%	33.9%

These barriers and challenges are facing many faculties and departments which should be dealt with by a variety of reforms and measures including training courses, tuition reforms, salary reforms and rewarding system, cooperation projects, staff development plans as well as program and staff evaluation, improvement of foreign language teaching...

3.3. Organizing multicultural contexts

Socially-oriented programs are those that seek to reform both schooling and the cultural and political contexts of schooling to have the much broader impact of increasing cultural tolerance, according to Banks (1994), and to increase all kinds of contact among the races: programs to encourage minority teachers, anti-bias programs, and cooperative learning programs.

Multicultural libraries, resource centers and learning materials at USSH, VNU-HCM are very important in developing multicultural competence for both staff and students. Multicultural education requires a representation of books and materials from different countries and cultures to avoid bias programs. Though the number of learning materials in a variety of languages have increased recently at this institution due to the donation and investment sources, they are still poor and they have not been

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[1] Statistics from the Office of International Relations, USSH, VNU-HCM

effectively used. Only 32.4% of students surveyed are satisfied with the quantity and quality of the library. The lack of foreign language proficiency is among the challenges at many non-foreign language faculties, not mentioning the inadequate condition of the libraries. The number of textbooks and reference books in the Vietnamese language is limited since Vietnamese lecturers have little incentive and time to write books for publishing which requires a lot of efforts and time investment but bring them little money while books in foreign languages are quite expensive to many Vietnamese lecturers and students. Moreover, although ethnic museums, films, art galleries, paintings, pictures, posters,... in the two campuses make contribution to the multicultural context of the University, more investment and policies are required for increasing, upgrading, maintenance and improvement each year.

The multicultural context can also be perceived on the days or occasions when cultural festivals, quiz shows, music and dance performances, dramas and other cultural events take place regularly every year in the campus held by many faculties, departments such as the Faculty of Vietnamese Studies, the Faculty of Oriental Studies, the Faculty of Cultural Studies, the Faculty of International Relations, the Faculty of Anthropology and many faculties of foreign langues. These faculties have to ask for financial support, contribution from various sources (especially from NGOs or foreign diplomatic and cultural organizations in some cases of foreign language faculties) to maintain and improve these activities. Many other faculties are still unable to look for these financial resources.

4. Conclusion

The overview picture of multicultural education at USSH, VNU-HCM can represent that of higher education in Vietnam with many socio-cultural, multidisciplinary and foreign languages programs, a diversity of international staff and students as well as a long history of contacts with western cultures from the colonial times up to the open-door and ASEAN integration era. Inspite of quick development in the awareness of multicultural education, the real implementation of these programs is still rather superficial and spontaneous in the Vietnamese higher education institutions for various reasons.

Multicultural, intercultural and comparative approaches in all disciplines, comprehensive strategies for the development of multicultural personnel and adequate investment of resources for the improvement of cultural, language competence, evaluation and training programs should be taken into consideration which will help ensure the success of students and improve the quality, prestige of the university. Evaluation criteria or indicators and national qualifications framework in Vietnamese higher education should include multicultural education and the UNESCO's important pillar "learn to live together" in the intergration and globalization era full of competition and cooperative opportunities.

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