Presentation by Dr Huan Tuong VO, Deputy Director, International Office, International University (Viet Nam National University Ho Chi Minh City)

Huan was asked to make a 10-minute presentation focusing on the following 3 questions to provide food for thought for the expert group:

1. What is your take, how inclusive are higher education internationalisation policies and practices currently, what is the status quo?
2. What potential risks do you foresee that could jeopardize greater inclusion in HE internationalisation in the next 10 years?
3. What opportunities, leverage points do you see to promote in HE internationalisation in the next 10 years?

Huan began the presentation by first posing the question: how inclusive are internationalization policies? This question was used as a springboard to discuss the status quo of practices and policies in Asia. The presentation prepared came from the standpoint of Viet Nam in relation to internationalization.
1. Need and Expectation

Huan explained that there is a need and expectation to improve internationalization in higher education in Viet Nam. The need and expectation to improve internationalization is pushed by two main factors.

- The first, an external force: The labour force requires graduates that are educated and acquire the necessary skills. For example, in Vietnam, the workforce includes different nationalities e.g. Singaporean and Thai nationals, among others. This was not the case to 10 to 20 years ago. The job market now is more international and more competitive.

- The second, an internal force: the political system of the country. According to Huan, the internal political system is essential to advance the teaching, resources, and capacity to update curricula for regional and international standards. Additionally, the internal political system impacts diplomatic relations and international integration. Thus the significant impact of political structures on education.

2. Policies

According to Huan, government support for education is growing. In case of Vietnam however, universities supported by the government may not have the autonomy to decide on what to teach and what courses to offer. On flipside, those universities that have autonomy, specifically financial autonomy, are struggling to survive - financially speaking.


It is observed that there is an increase in the mobility of students, lecturers and scholars. Additionally, curricula in the region is being internationalized in two ways. First, the number of programs available for international students in has increased. Second, the number of programs taught in English has increased. In continuation of this train of thought, Huan raises the need for quality assurance, international accreditation assessment and quality assurance is needed to determine whether an academic program is of international standard. In this regard, the connection between international standards and international rankings is established to be of importance, as well international networks and international collaboration.

The current practices described are perceived as positive competition, according to Huan. First, as presented in the diagram below, out of all the universities in Vietnam, 73% are public, which means the university receives an annual budget from the state. Only 27% are private, which is also referred to in Vietnam as non-profit and non-public university. In other words, there are an estimate of 1.2 million students in public universities, and only 265,000 enrolled in non-public universities. In light of the significant portion of public higher education institutions, changing these to be autonomous is going to be a problem, according to Huan.
Second, Vietnamese universities have pushed towards internationalizations by establishing 500 international collaborative training programs with over 200 university-level institutions in 30 countries and territories. Huan explains that the duration of these programs are 2 + 2 years, the first two years of the program are conducted in a university in Vietnam, and the next two years are conducted in the partner university abroad. Now, there is a hybrid element, with a significant portion of the studies conducted online due to the pandemic.

Third, with regard to AUN-QA, only seven institutions were assessed out of an estimate of 7,000 higher education institutions in the region.

The following visual supported Huan’s points on potential risks and challenges, that could jeopardise greater inclusion in internationalization in HE in the next decade:

**Universities’ slow adaptability:**
- In terms of international standards recognizing the different contexts, standards, expectations of universities in Asia.
- In terms of adapting financial autonomy of universities and financial schemes for programs and students.
- In terms of universities in Asia adapting to teaching and learning methods and models. While hybrid education and distance learning are present there is still plenty of room for improvement.
- The main element when discussing mobility, according to Dr Huan, is English language proficiency.

This was followed by presenting points on opportunities, leverage points to promote inclusion in HE internationalisation in the next 10 years.

After listing the point on the slide on the left, Huan introduced the concept of ‘reverse mobility’, wherein scholarships are provided for students from developing countries to study in developing countries.

Lastly, Huan reemphasized the importance of promoting English language proficiency.

After Huan’s presentation, members of the expert group shared their inputs, reflections related to the risks and opportunities presented.

**Comments on Opportunities:**
- Comments on the “recognition of differences” as an opportunity:
Experts note that the presentation was straightforward, especially on the topic of the impact of funding. Specifically, that funding for inclusion may be more probable in Europe than in Asia, despite funding being a concern across the world.

It is very important to highlight the point on differences. There are plenty of differences between Asia and Europe, and within both regions. Now, the discussion around inclusion allows for more appreciation of these differences. This is why differences are recognized as an opportunity to appreciate rather than as a risk.

**Comments on “international collaboration in building curriculum” as an opportunity**

- Opportunities in Asian countries have been majorly dependent on the other organizations, be it the partner organizations or the government-led organizations, when it comes to creating opportunities for mobility. Additionally, UNESCO and UNICEF provided aid or knowledge support to universities. Their support also extended to students and research, specifically on issues such as human rights, peace, or cultural heritage.

**Comments on “internationalization in research”**

- The experts in this group interpreted this point as an opportunity for more international research groups, including less represented groups in more research activities.
- Additionally, the expert group introduced the concept of “internationalization at home” and that, in light of the pandemic, has advanced. People can have an international experience without the element of physical mobility. An example given was this very initiative: ARC8. Traditionally conducted with the element of mobility, ARC8 has adapted innovatively to provide the benefits of intercultural exchange and international dialogue.

**Comments on “promoting English language proficiency” as an opportunity**

- A number of experts concur, affirming the point raised by Huan with regard to the importance of English language proficiency for higher education institutions to internationalize.
- However, the perspective of a multilingual approach to internationalization and mobility was also introduced. Despite the recognition of the importance of English for internationalization, it is still important to note that there is a different multilingual approach to mobility and internationalization, particularly in Europe.
- Additionally, an over promotion of English as the primary mode of instruction can create another form of exclusion. At the same time, in terms of understanding cultural context, promoting English is not necessarily the best way to understand a culture. That is why experts referred to the promotion of English as a ‘double-edged sword.’

**Comments on Risks**

**Comments on “Capacity and roles of universities” as a risk for inclusion**

- Universities’ role in providing inclusive education and engage in inclusive internationalization is mitigated if these institutions are not given the autonomy to act on best practices based on good data.
- Governments and policymakers can promote inclusion and should continue to promote inclusion. However, execution of the government and policymakers vision for a more inclusive higher education falls on the shoulders of universities. In this regard, there is a risk of having a top-down approach, and of having limited or no autonomy on the part of the university.

**Comments on “Internationalization, Quality assurance and Ranking” as a risk for inclusion**
Experts emphasized the importance of quality assurance. Some experts emphasized that each country and, at times, institutions compete to improve internationalized programs. However, quality assurance runs the risk of forgetting the quality of the teaching and learning process appropriate for the needs and contexts of the university or country.

- Quality Assurance will remain to be an important concern in Asia and Europe in the coming decade and beyond.
- Experts warn of the risk of conflating internationalization and ranking. Global rankings do not necessarily equate to development in terms of internationalization. Focusing on ‘ranking, ranking, ranking’ is a great danger the higher education system.

- It seems that rankings are done ‘just because’. An expert suggests that the use of rankings resembles Maslov’s Hammer wherein, “if the only tool you have is a hammer, you treat everything like a nail”. The expert expressed that rankings are not meaningful indicators of how inclusive a university is. The idea of comparing institutions takes a competitive approach and a very private sector approach.
- Standardization is considered as a risk in the sense of what is coined as the ‘McDonaldization’ of higher education. McDonaldization is an extreme standardization of higher education comparable to a fast food chain.
- However, there is an important distinction between standardization and harmonization that must be drawn. To a certain extent, localized standardization is comparable to harmonization, juxtaposed to internationalized standardization that may be prone to ‘McDonalization’.

- In summary, quality frameworks and global conventions are not necessarily helping the cause of inclusion because they are too standardized and do not consider individual circumstances.

- Comments on “slow adaptability” as a risk
  - Experts pose to reframe the situation. Rather than perceiving universities to be slow in adapting to meet international standards, it can be seen that a cause for slow adaptation of universities is due to the international standards. For instance, the leading universities in Thailand, such as Mahidol University and Chulalongkorn, are assessed to a certain degree. But in reality, the quality of education offered by these universities are far better than what is assessed. In this regard, standards to which the assessment was conducted were not adjusted to the context and specifics of education in the country or region and, therefore, it is the standards that were slow to adjust to the contexts and the times.