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**Graduates in the New World of Work in Vietnam: a study of the
experiences of young graduates working in INGOs**

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Abstract

Using inductive qualitative research methods this thesis explores how young Vietnamese university graduates experience their work in the context of intercultural work environments characteristic of International Non-Government Organisations (INGOs) which have been established as a central aspect of globalisation in post Doi Moi Vietnam. Theoretically the thesis engages with the literature on graduate attributes but also seeks to extend the prevailing research agenda in this literature by drawing on theoretical perspectives on intercultural communication and agency as found in the work of scholars such as Bochner and Bourdieu. Data were obtained from indepth interviews, conducted in two phases, with 19 young graduates working in INGOs in Vietnam. In addition interviews were carried out with 8 INGO senior managers and a similar number of University teachers.

The labour market for graduates in Vietnam, as elsewhere, requires high level cognitive skills (Barrie, 2006), ‘far transferable’ skills (Bennett et al., 2000) that enable graduates to develop new knowledge and skills for new contexts of work. The application and extension of knowledge, skills and competences in unfamiliar, intercultural development contexts contrasts with the more tightly bounded, traditional cultural contexts of learning at universities in Vietnam. The current research suggests that the university education system in Vietnam is not focused upon developing these skills. However, through their own agency young Vietnamese graduates (as students and workers) are becoming more strategic and flexible. The contemporary labour market, which is characterized by being temporary and unstable under the pressure of the shift from a centrally planned economy to a market oriented one, has forced graduates to prepare for uncertainty, and to gain ‘far transfer’ skills (Bennett et al., 2000) that enable them to apply their discipline knowledge and skills reflexively, and to learn new knowledge and skills for the new world of work. Young graduates are preparing for future work, and applying their knowledge and skills in the new world of work.

INGOs, global organisations connecting Vietnam to complex networks of international development, are a significant part of the changing world of work in contemporary Vietnam. INGOs, by the nature of the work they undertake, are workplaces that require young graduates to become interculturally competent (Byram, 1997; Deardorff, 2006). This process

can be observed when graduates take necessary action to understand the meaning of organisational norms and values, such as exploring organisational documents on regulations, rules and reasoning for the practices of the organisation, and when they act as mediators or intermediaries between people from different cultures within and beyond the organisations.

INGO projects typically do not use any fixed models of development since each project is a new combination of theoretical orientation, best practices and local situations. This has meant that graduates working in INGOs need to be flexible, to work in between different structures, resources and models, and to develop new models for specific projects. This research has shown how such environments not only require and enable early career graduates to develop ‘far transfer’ skills but further, require and provide opportunities for graduates to act as cultural intermediaries contributing to developing new structures for their work at INGO projects.

The relatively loosely ‘bounded’ (*cf* Evans, 2007) structures and intercultural practice environments of INGOs provide effective contexts for young graduates to reflect upon their discipline knowledge and skills, and to develop new knowledge and skills (Barrie, 2006). This research highlights the importance of the intercultural dimension of the new type of workplace, which has mostly been overlooked in previous research on graduate attributes. It points to the need for further research into the acquisition of graduate attributes in Vietnamese universities, in order to determine which existing practices enable and constrain the development of high level transferable skills and graduate attributes, particularly those relating to intercultural competency. It suggests that providing greater opportunity for students to participate in more open, intercultural contexts of learning whilst they are at university is important preparation for the world of work in contemporary Vietnam.

Declaration

This thesis is composed of my original work, and contains no material previously published or written by another person except where due reference has been made in the text. I have clearly stated the contribution by others to jointly-authored works that I have included in my thesis.

I have clearly stated the contribution of others to my thesis as a whole, including statistical assistance, survey design, data analysis, significant technical procedures, professional editorial advice, and any other original research work used or reported in my thesis. The content of my thesis is the result of work I have carried out since the commencement of my research higher degree candidature and does not include a substantial part of work that has been submitted to qualify for the award of any other degree or diploma in any university or other tertiary institution. I have clearly stated which parts of my thesis, if any, have been submitted to qualify for another award.

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Publications during candidature

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Keywords

University graduates, work experiences, international non-government organisation, intercultural workplace, intercultural competence, cultural mediation, cultural intermediary.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS USED IN THE THESIS

CMC	Child-Centered Methodology
CSOs	Civil society organisations
GB	Great Britain
HIV/AIDS	Human immunodeficiency virus infection/acquired immunodeficiency syndrome
INGO	International non-government organisation
MOET	Ministry of Education and Training
MPH	Master of Public Health
MSc	Master of Science
NGO	Non-government organisation
OECD	The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
PA	Project Assistant
PhD	Doctor of Philosophy
PM	Project Manager
PO	Project officer
RA	Research Assistant
UK	United Kingdom
UNDP	United Nations Development Program
USA	the United State of America
VUFO	Vietnam Union of Friendship Organisations

CHAPTER I. NATIONAL ECONOMIC REFORM, GLOBALISATION AND THE EMERGENCE OF INGOS IN POST DOI MOI VIETNAM

1.1. Introduction

Globalisation in Vietnam has occurred under specific political and economic conditions, marked by the economic renovation (Doi Moi) reform policy proclaimed by the Communist Party of Vietnam at its 6th Congress in 1986. The policy has replaced the centrally planned economy with a regulated market economy which allows private business to operate along with state enterprises. The higher education system also has changed in line with these economic changes, however at a slower pace. Historically, universities were set up as specialised institutions, which trained students to be state cadres¹. In Vietnam today, there is less central control of curriculum design, teacher allocation and more limited allocation of graduates to workplaces by the Ministry of Education and Training (MOET). As a result, graduates now have more job choices, but they also have less certainty in the job market and fewer opportunities for permanent positions.

At the same time, many workplaces in Vietnam have become increasingly culturally diverse and interdisciplinary, with graduate employees now expected to work with others of different linguistic, cultural backgrounds and disciplinary training, in companies or organisations linked to international or global partners. Examples of such workplaces in Vietnam are international non-government organizations (INGOs), which are characterised by their intercultural work environment. While many Vietnamese graduates find it hard to get a job or have to settle for work in professions other than the one for which they were trained, as shown in a survey conducted by MOET during 2005-2006², a number of new graduates from different disciplines seek to start their career at INGOs which are at the forefront of the changes in Vietnamese society. The merit-based recruitment process used by INGOs is a great challenge for new graduates; however, it opens up opportunities for those who are well-qualified. Since most INGOs have only recently set up their offices and activities in Vietnam, they do not have in place a pool of experienced staff to run their organizations. Thus, they need to bring in many international staff and recruit Vietnamese staff to work alongside them. Vietnamese staff members typically include both a small group of senior and professionally experienced former state employees, who often do not speak English, and a large

¹ State cadres are those permanent staff for different state organizations

² <http://vietbao.vn/Giao-duc/Thoi-co-vang-va-nguon-nhan-luc/40228191/202/>, accessed on 12/3/2008.

group of young graduates whose first requirement is to possess English language skills. At a time when Vietnam is becoming part of a global social and political economy, it is of primary importance to understand how the country's tertiary education system is preparing its graduates for these new intercultural workplaces, of which INGOs are an example. Of particular interest is the specific attributes required for working in an intercultural workplace, and how the young graduates who work in such environments have attained them.

This exploratory research aims to explore and understand Vietnamese graduates' work experiences in the intercultural environment of INGOs in Vietnam, and to provide insights into the factors contributing towards graduates' effectiveness in their workplaces. The findings are of particular interest because they are expected to have important implications for higher education institutions and employers. The significance of the research is that it is the first attempt to articulate the specific attributes required in ethnically diverse, intercultural workplaces, such as INGOs, in Vietnam and to understand how young graduates develop them.

To provide the background for this research, this chapter discusses important policy changes associated with the economic reconstruction in Vietnamese society, from both the global and national contexts, and the role of the higher education system and INGOs in this reconstruction. The research questions are drawn out from the discussion of this context. A detailed outline of the thesis will conclude this chapter.

1.2. Vietnam Economic reform (Doi Moi) in the context of the modern globalisation era

This section outlines the radical change in the Vietnamese economy which has influenced all aspects of the society. This change began with the introduction of Doi Moi policy in 1986, a key manifestation of the globalisation process. Globalisation, in the context of this thesis, is defined as the diffusion of ideas, practices and technologies, and intensified worldwide social relations, which now link once disconnected, distant localities (Giddens, 1990, pp. 17-19). Globalisation also facilitates and forces several global flows which have visible effects, for example: the flows of people (students, administrators, academic faculty); flows of media and messages, information and knowledge; flows of norms, ideas and policies; and flows of technologies, financial capital and economic resources (Altbach, 2010; Marginson, 2008). However, globalisation also facilitates flows with less visible effects, such as the diversification of languages, cultures, pedagogies and scholarship, and competitive differentiation (Marginson, 2008, p. 304).

Globalisation is a phenomenon that has been occurring in the world since ancient times and has been present in all aspects of human society. Amartya Sen (2002), the Economic Nobel Laureate, claims that ‘over thousands of years, globalisation has contributed to the progress of the world through travel, trade, migration, spread of cultural influences, and dissemination of knowledge and understanding (including that of science and technology)’. Marginson and van der Wende (2009) clarify that globalisation widens, deepens and speeds up worldwide interconnectedness in terms of geo-spatial relations. From their perspective, globalisation enhances growing inter-dependence and convergence among nations throughout the world or within a region (Marginson & van der Wende, 2009).

There is considerable debate, however, about the influences and impact of globalisation on education. Marginson and van der Wende (2009, p. 18) argue that higher education is ‘being transformed by globalisation’, in both economic and cultural terms; as information and knowledge become highly mobile across borders. Economically, Marginson (2008) argues, globalisation creates problems and inequalities for higher education among different countries. Factors such as the diversity in language, pedagogies and scholarship, and the differences in organisational systems and cultures, have hindered the cross-border flows of human resources (Marginson, 2008, p. 304).

The impact of globalisation on Vietnamese society was first felt when the Vietnamese government conducted a significant renovation of its economy (Doi Moi) to change from a planned economy to a market orientated economy in 1986. Vietnam is a poor country in South East Asia, only coming out of the group of poorest countries in the world in 2010. The changes to socio-economic conditions during the period from 1986 to the present marked a significant improvement in Vietnam. Before the Doi Moi policy, Vietnam had only one gateway to the world through the Soviet Union. The direction of the Vietnamese government’s policy was then largely inwards (World Bank, 1990) and very limited sources of information and technology were available to Vietnam. This gateway was destroyed with the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1990, and thus restricted even more tightly Vietnam’s international access.

Furuta Motoo (2012) has characterised Vietnamese society before Doi Moi as ‘under siege’ and isolated from the outside world. The socio-economic changes around Doi Moi reform are now fundamental to Vietnam society. During the 1980s, Vietnam suffered an economic crisis when the post-war hardship together with natural disasters struck the country with severe hunger and malnutrition. Inflation increased at a three digit rate, and production outputs decreased dramatically (Porter, 1990). There were shortages of all kinds of goods, including foodstuffs, in the market. The

population increased at a very high rate (around 1.1 million per annum) from 48 million in 1975 to 59 million in 1985 (or around 1.7% growth rate annually; source: World Bank data), which intensified the food shortage problem facing the country. The strictly planned economy at that time did not encourage production output improvement. Under this system, the Central Planning Commission imposed detailed production plans and provided all input materials to the state-owned enterprises, with all the profits becoming state interest, the central government controlled the subsidized prices for consumer goods such as foodstuffs, grains, fuel, iron and clothes, to name a few (Porter, 1990; Riedel & Turley, 1999; World Bank, 1990). This central plan thus discouraged farmers and enterprises to produce a large output because any surplus went unrewarded. Riedel and Turley (1999), in their research report to the OECD, and Motoo (2012) report that, by the early 1980s, the Vietnamese state controlled economy was no longer able to ensure its economic plan would be achieved (Motoo, 2012; Riedel & Turley, 1999). Serious problems resulted from the stagnation of production with marked deficiencies in both the quality and coverage of social services (World Bank, 1990). The system of centralized planning had stifled the economy to such an extent that inadequate resources had been accumulated to expand the education and health systems to keep up with the growing population and respond to pressing social needs. Consequently, poverty was widespread, bringing with it extensive malnutrition, and inadequate resources to respond to basic human needs and development of skills for economic development (World Bank, 1990, pp. 83-85).

In 1986, the Sixth Congress of the Communist Party of Vietnam proclaimed the policy of Doi Moi, which allowed different economic sectors to operate in addition to state enterprise. The achievements from the 1986 economic reform created great improvements in Vietnamese society, increasing living standards, production yields, health care, and education services. Agriculture was privatized, property rights were introduced, government budget deficits were cut, price controls and controls on foreign trade were eased and Vietnam progressively reengaged with the international economy (World Bank, 2008), and instigated reforms to the education system. As the Doi Moi policy facilitated new aspects of Vietnamese society namely multilateralization and diversification, there was an influx of INGOs to Vietnam to provide humanitarian services such as hunger alleviation for poor communities, or natural disaster relief to which state organizations lacked the resources to respond.

1.3. INGOs in Vietnam

This section discusses the operation of INGOs in Vietnam in a broader context of INGOs worldwide. Throughout the world, the missions of non-government organizations (NGOs) are to provide either humanitarian support to emergency spots or to implement development projects. The World Bank defines NGOs as ‘private organizations that pursue activities to relieve the suffering, promote the interests of the poor, protect the environment, provide basic social services, or undertake community development’ (World Bank, 2002, p. 1). NGOs can be local NGOs which operate in only one region or country, or international NGOs (INGOs) which can be very large organizations, such as Oxfam, Save the Children Fund, Plan International, World Vision, or Action Aid, that have partner organizations in many countries (Willis, 2011, p. 108). Under the legal framework of Article 71 of the UN Charter, Non-governmental organizations take a consultative role for the United Nations through the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC). The traditional humanitarian values and principles of NGOs are to help the disadvantaged and people in difficult circumstances, and to assist local people to have a greater say in what activities are carried out, be more involved in such activities, and thus develop stronger civil society and contribute to processes of democratization (Willis, 2011, pp. 108-110). NGOs have some fundamental features, such as: being independent from the direct control of any government; not constituted as a political party; non-profit-making; non-violent and with no links to criminal group (Willetts, 2009).

In the history of INGOs, their roles have changed according to the social, economic and political circumstances at certain times. In the aftermath of World War II, modernisation theory proposed that the main causes of international poverty was that poor countries lagged behind economically because they were agriculturally dominated and lacked financial investment (Brohman, 1996; Lewis & Kanji, 2009; Willis, 2011). This theory, which became popular during the middle of the 20th century, assumed that traditional countries could be developed in the same manner as more developed countries if they were given assistance (Brohman, 1996; Lewis & Kanji, 2009; Willis, 2011). As a result, the development policy at that time involved providing international aid in terms of capital, technology and expertise (Willis, 2011, pp. 50-55). This ‘top-down’ development policy was rooted in the belief of policy makers that the development approach which had worked in the Northern hemisphere could work elsewhere (Willis, 2011, p. 51). A major limitation of modernization theory is the assumption that many forms of cultural practice were obstacles to development since those cultural practices were ‘non-rational, collective, traditional ways of life, unsuited to individualistic capitalist development’ (Willis, 2011. p. 133).

However, more recently INGOs have advocated using participatory approaches for generating sustainable development for communities in difficulties. Research has demonstrated that integrating cultural practices in development projects can enhance such sustainable results. For example, Ghosh (2009) and Shin (2003) have focused extensively on the influence INGOs have had on democratizing civil societies. Ghosh (2009) argues that through the work of redefining participation in terms of their relationship with state and society, INGOs can contribute to improving the quality of participation. INGOs perform like some political institutions in the way they compete or cooperate with political actors to 'mediate between the State, society and citizens' (Ghosh, 2009, p. 491).

Nonetheless, the work of INGOs is still subject to critique. For example, the ideas of 'development' are imposed by outsiders (Fernando, 2003), and the projects developed by INGOs are heavily dependent on outside experts (Salemink, 2006). Fernando (2003) contends that instead of being an instrument of sustainable development, the perspective of INGOs 'has become a means through which the diversity of knowledge systems and the embedded cultures in which they exist are disciplined and managed according to capital's need to expand'. From this perspective, the collaborative role played by INGOs in this process is against the interests of the people they claim to serve (Fernando, 2003).

In contrast, Richard (2009) applies an anthropological cultural intermediary theory to explore the positive impact NGOs have had in incorporating local communities into a national-wide project in Mexico. One of the relatively few researchers who have focused on NGO's contribution to social change Richard (2009) argues that they took on intermediary roles in Mexico, 'building up structural linkages for redistribution of resources and power, as well as facilitating translation of cultural forms between distinct social groups' (Richard, 2009, p. 188). They have reworked cultural idioms of mediation to position themselves as 'legitimate intermediaries linking rural cooperatives, state officials, international donors and the global activist network' (Richard, 2009, p. 166). Political reforms in Mexico in recent years that aimed at institutionalizing multiparty democracy had removed NGOs from the category of opposition activists. As the result, NGOs in Mexico struggled to redefine their role as legitimate intermediaries so that they could negotiate with the state on behalf of particular groups, such as the poor farmers. The intermediary role of the NGOs in Mexico, therefore, has changed from the traditional 'buffer' role, to that of key mediators of the remaking of forms of social organization and government towards democratizing civil societies (Richard, 2009). NGOs play an intermediary role by building up structural linkages for the

redistribution of resources and power, as well as facilitating the transmission of cultural forms between different social groups (Richard, 2009).

Nevertheless, INGOs in Vietnam operate in a particular socio-political context that distinguishes their work from NGOs in some other countries. Gray (1999) in his research about INGOs in Vietnam demonstrated that in many respects INGOs in Vietnam remained ‘a *construct* of the state’ (Gray, 1999, p. 3), meaning that they performed in a state-led context. The state created the framework of INGO operations and it still controls the political space available to them (Ghosh, 2009, p. 483; Gray, 1999). In Vietnam, INGOs even have the special role of ‘facilitating and inspiring the other organisations’, ‘supporting the CSOs [Civil society organisations] and government institutions’ (Norlund, 2007, p. 11).

The operation of INGOs in Vietnam can be dated back as early as 1948 when they provided assistance for war affected groups of people (Dang Linh, 2009; Nguyen Kim Ha, 2001). During the American war, an embargo on the North of Vietnam was imposed in 1964, and many INGOs with head offices in Geneva and Paris provided support for the war victims in Vietnam. However, at the end of the war, most INGOs closed offices and foreign staff left (Nguyen Kim Ha, 2001). In the years after the 1986 Doi Moi, Vietnam’s relationship with the external world had achieved some major improvements. On the 3rd February 1994, the US president lifted the 19 years embargo on Vietnam, and on 28 July 1995, the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) admitted Vietnam as a member in a ceremony in Brunei. This change created new possibilities for INGOs wishing to support Vietnam and many INGOs have since tried to have representatives in the country.

In this context, many INGOs sought permission from the Vietnamese government to provide their human services to the poor and to natural disaster affected areas. In October 1988, Coopération Internationale pour le Développement et la Solidarité (CIDSE) became the first INGO with a representative in Hanoi. Following this, the number of INGOs increased rapidly, responding to immediate needs which the government and its agencies did not have enough resources to handle (Dang Linh, 2009, pp. 51-52; Salemin, 2006). From such *ad hoc* provision, INGOs introduced development projects to disadvantaged communities in order to have a more lasting impact. These projects adapted new and modern models effective in other parts of the world to the local context; for example, the Grameen Bank (Bank for the Poor) in Bangladesh was replicated in Vietnam through the model of Credit-Savings projects by INGOs such as Action Aid, Save the Children UK, and OXFAM, and were then institutionalized by the Vietnamese government into the Vietnam Bank

for Social Policies. Today, INGO programs are active in all 61 provinces and centrally-administered cities of Vietnam, supporting activities from the national level to the hamlet and even household level, and at every level in between. At present, there are about 300 INGOs with offices in Vietnam, covering key areas of need, namely health, education, natural resources, income generation, human services, y social development, and natural disaster prevention.

The ethnic diversity of the target groups of INGOs projects, together with a similar diversity of the human resources at INGOs, all make the work context at INGO projects culturally complex. In Vietnam there are 54 different ethnic groups living together, of which, according to a report of Central Population and Housing Census Steering Committee (2010), the majority Viet ethnic group (Kinh group) accounted for nearly 73,600,000 (85.6%). Fifty-three other ethnic groups counted for less than 15% of the population, among which, the eight largest groups (Tay, Thai, Muong, Hoa (Chinese), Khmer, Nung, H'Mong, Dao) H' counted from 0.8% to 2% each. Most of these minority ethnic groups live in rural or remote areas in difficult geographical and social conditions and are often the primary targets of development projects. Many ethnic groups have their own languages and cultures. Hence, it requires graduates working on INGO projects in these communities to have high levels of intercultural competence in dealing with the local people.

Despite such challenges, the current political context in Vietnam, which is shifting towards strengthening participatory governance with more involvement from the wider population, is providing favourable conditions for the operation of INGO development projects (Norlund, 2007). From the first 'Law of Right to set up Associations' promulgated in 1957, there was little legal change until Doi Moi in 1986. The report by Norlund (2007) on the emerging civil society in Vietnam highlighted the change in political context of Vietnam through the public administration reforms, marked by the issuance of the Grassroots Democracy Decree in 1998 (updated in 2003). This policy emphasized the people's right to be informed about, to discuss, to carry out, and to monitor government activities. The first framework for INGOs was introduced in 1989 providing them with more independent management (Norlund, 2007). A government body - the People's Aid Coordinating Committee of the Vietnam Union of Friendship Organisations (VUFO), later renamed the Committee for Foreign NGO Affairs - was established to cooperate with, facilitate and regulate INGOs. However, within the Vietnamese context, 'the boundaries are very fuzzy between the state and civil society' (Norlund, 2007, p. 22). VUFO brought together key government ministries and other bodies to assist the Prime Minister in guiding and addressing issues relating to foreign NGOs in Vietnam (VUFO-NGO, 2012). INGOs in Vietnam collaborate with ministries,

provincial and district authorities and also form partnerships with mass organisations at grassroots levels (such as the Women's Union or the Farmers' Association), to facilitate them to 'carry out campaigns initiated by the state' and to implement 'thousands of projects and credit program for poor people' (Norlund, 2007, p. 22). As employers, INGOs function as an important gateway for their Vietnamese staff into other careers³. They offer new graduates the opportunity to work in fast-changing, multi-disciplinary, intercultural work contexts – the kind of work contexts which are becoming increasingly common in post Doi Moi Vietnam. As the Managing Co-Director of VUFO-NGO Resource Centre reported, the statistic of the centre showed a good mixture of nations among INGOs operating in Vietnam, of which 40% of INGOs currently operating in Vietnam come from the US and Canada, 40% from Europe, 8% from Australia and New Zealand, 6% from Asia and the remaining 6% are multi-national or INGOs from other parts of the world (Lovrekovic, 2010).

The staff, therefore also showed a mixture of people from different cultures. For example, in the top management positions, 67% are international expatriates and 33% Vietnamese; of the staff composition, 93% are Vietnamese, including senior management staff, the rest 7% are international expatriates (Lovrekovic, 2010). This data demonstrated a typical feature of INGO workplace where the small number of international expatriates often held positions to advise the large number of Vietnamese staff, including junior and senior ones. This intercultural work environment at INGOs consequently becomes a challenge for universities in Vietnam to prepare their graduates with relevant knowledge and skills for this kind of workplace.

1.4. The university in a changing economy

Education reform in Vietnam officially only started some years after the introduction of the Doi Moi policy in 1986. In 1993 the government allowed private universities to be established as a way of addressing the shortage of university places. This is the first significant shift from elitism to 'massification', meaning that in line with worldwide trends, university enrolments expanded rapidly to allow far greater numbers of student to enroll (Trow, 2000, 2010). Before the renovation, the university system was centrally controlled in a planned economy, and even the distribution of graduates was planned ahead by the government (Nguyen Phuong An, 2002). Only public universities were allowed to operate and they could only enroll a very small ratio of high school leavers.

³ In 2007, VUFO-NGO Resource Centre recorded up to 2,200 Vietnamese staff working at INGOs.

Since 1986, the work market has changed significantly, with more employment opportunities for higher education graduates within traditional occupational sectors (education and training, public administration, services, SOEs), as well as in developing sectors (manufacturing, electricity, gas and water, foreign enterprises and, to a minor extent, privately owned domestic enterprises, and export oriented sectors) (Di Gropello, 2011. pp 9-15; World Bank, 2008). Improvement in higher education was seen as a 'key driver' of this economic reform (Harman & Nguyen Thi Ngoc Bich, 2010).

At policy level, universities have been set tasks in training their graduates for the current society. For example the Vietnam Education Law No: 38/2005/QH11 of June 14, 2005 states that the objective of higher education is to facilitate learners in acquiring certain political and moral qualities. University education must guarantee students basic scientific and professional knowledge, a grasp of scientific methodology and the ability to apply theory in professional activities. University education must also advance self-consciousness in study, self-study, creative thinking, practical skills and research works (Vietnam Education Law No: 38/2005/QH11 of June 14, 2005). However, with the teaching programs being regulated by MOET, without significant changes for a long period of time, as well as with the traditional teaching-learning style embedded in universities, it is difficult for the universities to train their graduates to become flexible and creative in applying their knowledge in an ever changing society.

Nonetheless, in the recent years, higher education programs become more diversified when public universities such as Vietnam National University, HoChiMinh city and Vietnam National University, Hanoi cooperate with universities abroad to use their curriculums in several degree programs. 'Through joint training programs, Vietnamese education institutions are able to access training methodologies initiated by developed countries that can be used to renew content, programs, and instructional methods' (Nguyen Quang Kinh & Nguyen Quoc Chi, 2008, p.146).

Although Vietnam has made significant progress in increasing the size and diversity of its higher education system since the *doi moi* reform, the system is still not up to international standards, significantly in the areas of governance, programmes, curricula, teaching methods, academic staff qualifications and physical infrastructure (Pham, 2010, p.51). To induce radical reform of the system, the government promulgated Resolution 14 on the 'Fundamental and Comprehensive Reform of Higher Education in Vietnam 2006–2020' (also known as the Higher Education Reform Agenda, or HERA). HERA indicates general challenges of the higher education system (MOET, 2005), which was linked to the 'system's inability to develop human resource capacity to meet the

needs of industrialisation and modernisation' and particularly 'subjects being too theoretically focused and not linking with market needs' (Harman & Nguyen Thi Ngoc Bich, 2010, p.73). The Agenda required the higher education system to enroll 2,200,000 higher education and tertiary education students by 2020 (MOET, 2005).

The Strategy for Education Development 2011-2020 (Prime Minister, 2012) was then formed to implement these goals. The Strategy emphasized on building a systematic and well-rounded education system with knowledge, innovation, equity and applicability to embrace a fast-paced growing economy. The guiding principle of the Strategy said that the learner is placed at the center of the learning process to comprehensively develop the learners' capacities. However, researchers demonstrate that this process is hardly realized due to both cultural and contextual issues. Le Xuan Quynh (2013) shows for example that in the specific context of language learning, the exam-oriented educational context does not promote autonomous learning. Time constraints and a stringent syllabus are two other significant obstacles. As the result of the large power difference between teachers and students in Vietnamese culture, teachers rely on and hold to an authoritarian view of their roles in the language classroom (p. ii). Dang Tan Tin (2010) also demonstrates the influence of traditional teaching approach upon the application of new methods in the context of foreign language classes as:

Communicative language teaching method and student-centered approach in second language training have not consistently been reported to be effective, given various situational problems such as big-size class, rigorous test-oriented system, and heavy learning workload. Therefore, several teaching practices derived from these "new" methods have not been widely accepted or appropriately implemented (Dang Tan Tin, 2010, p.5).

In similar research about language learning, from the perspective of translation profession, Pham Hoa Hiep and Tran Thi Ly (2010) show that a learner-centered process was not applied in training translators in Vietnam, for example, 'within the traditional model, students receive unsystematic translation training based on trial-and-error methods, arbitrary teaching points and hand-on experience' (p.11).

World Bank (2008, p.xv) reported that 'higher education systems need to be drivers of R&D [research and development] and providers of high quality skills to all talented students to address the increasing needs of growing economies'. In response, the government aimed to increase the higher education enrolment rate at both public and private universities. Since the approval of the establishment of semi-public and non-public higher education institutions in 1993, greater access to

higher education has been achieved (World Bank, 2008), and the number of universities has risen remarkably, doubling within 10 years. As the result the number of enrolled higher education students increased steadily every year. World Bank (2008) reported that in 1992, there were approximately 162,000 enrolled higher education students, equal to a 2% gross enrolment rate (the number of students enrolled as a proportion of the relevant age group in the population) (World Bank 2008). Online statistical data of MOET in 2013 showed that the figure had increased from 1,180,547 enrolled higher education students in 2007 to 1,453,067 in 2013⁴.

Economic reform and the massification of universities means that graduates are no longer provided jobs after graduation, but rather they have to compete in an open job market (Nguyen Phuong An, 2002). Radical changes to Vietnamese cultural values and society under the influence of Doi Moi policy and wider globalisation processes also have transformed the traditional work experience of a life-long career, most likely in the state sector, into one of flexible, shorter term employment (Nguyen Phuong An, 2002). Moreover, under the influence of Doi Moi, the state stopped subsidizing the creation of jobs and ‘gradually adopted institutional reforms designed to ensure freedom for individuals to engage in production and businesses in all economic sectors’ (Boothroyd & Pham, 2000; Nguyen Phuong An, 2002, p. 228). Nguyen Kim Dung and McInnis (2002) state that many graduates seek work in international companies. Similarly, Nguyen Phuong An (2002) demonstrates that there has been a shift in the concept of jobs and a career in the minds of young Vietnamese graduates in the Doi Moi era. As life-long careers with the state are no longer the sole job choice, more graduates are opting for market driven careers when seeking employment. Job-seeking behaviour became common as ‘the young have come to realize that they have to strive and be competent if they want a job in a competitive market, especially in the larger cities’ (Nguyen Phuong An, 2002, p. 228). However, while the market economy developed competitiveness among graduates, it also created a comparatively unstable labour market. In such changing circumstances, ITO Miho (2012, p. 17) claims, ‘most young people with a tertiary academic background worried about their future in the changing socio-economic conditions’. Immediately after Doi Moi, during the late 1980s and early 1990s, ‘there was an exodus of employees from the state sector’, partly as a result of the state’s ‘managerial apparatus streamlining’, and partly because of their hope to get away from the ‘inefficient bureaucracy’ and look for ‘new entrepreneurial opportunities opened up by the reforms’ (Nguyen Phuong An, 2002, p. 231). However, there was movement in both directions in terms of career pathways, including some moving out of foreign/ joint-venture sectors

⁴ Ministry of Education and Training. Statistic data. Online resource.
<http://www.moet.gov.vn/?page=11.11&view=5251>. Accessed on 28 August 2014.

for state jobs, and some leaving the state sectors for work in international companies, foreign-joint ventures or INGOs (Nguyen Phuong An, 2002). For those who left the state sector, the foreign/joint-venture sector was viewed as providing a ‘challenging work environment in which young workers can obtain material rewards and assume real responsibility as long as they are capable and committed’ (Nguyen Phuong An, 2002, p. 235).

This context of the emerging open market place challenged the traditional style of university education in Vietnam, influenced for a long time by the French education system, which operated throughout the French colonial rule from early 17th century until independence in 1945 (Welch, 2010, 2011). Following this, the former Soviet Union had a great influence upon the Vietnamese system of higher education. One proof of this influence is the structure of specialized universities that are subject to substantial central control in Vietnam (World Bank, 2007). Under this Soviet model, higher education institutions are established to meet the human resource demands of particular ministries and state-owned enterprises, thus, they were highly specialized and lacked the academic flexibility found in multi-disciplinary institutions (World Bank, 2008, p. 11). Within this arrangement, MOET managed the establishment of universities and oversaw their management. For specialized universities, the management structure was dual, with relevant ministries managing specialized training and MOET handling overall management. ‘This created a degree of inertia amongst universities and resulted in poorly equipped campuses with outdated practices in teaching and research’ (World Bank, 2007, pp. 87-88).

The traditional view of university education as training for life-long work within one profession is no longer appropriate for all graduates, and thus, the traditional profession-focused training structure at universities lags behind a changing job market as it continues to produce graduates who specialize in a certain number of traditional professions, despite the fact that the job market is changing, with many old jobs fading away. This context is intensified where Vietnamese workplaces are becoming more internationalized and intercultural, as the society becomes more internationally connected. However, the centrally controlled system in higher education in Vietnam does not facilitate the flexibility of universities to respond to the changing demands of the society.

The delay in education reform in Vietnam is also seen, in part, as linked to a traditional educational philosophy influenced by the teachings of Confucianism (Kim, 2009; Nguyen Phuong Mai, Terlouw, & Pilot, 2005; 2006). The ‘first principle of Confucianism’ emphasizes the value of education. Hence East Asian people tend to be highly motivated to acquire education, and to have and eagerness for learning and a strong desire to obtain higher degrees and diplomas. This first

principle of Confucianism is remarkably influential in Vietnam where the veneration of learning still prevails (Nguyen Phuong Mai et al., 2005, 2006; Nguyen Trong Chuan, 2005; Pham & Fry, 2004). The second principle focuses on the hierarchical family system, emphasizing family loyalty and obedience to elders. And the third principle relates to hierarchical social relationships, where age is valued more than youth, males are valued more than females, and teachers are perceived to be of higher status than students (Kim, 2009; Nguyen Phuong Mai et al., 2005, 2006). The influence of the third principle can be seen in the way that learners in Asian cultures accept information from teachers readily and rarely express their opinions or ask questions (Kim, 2009). And the last principle is benevolence, which includes, but is not limited to, traits such as self-restraint, self-discipline, filial piety, loyalty, personal duty, and positive interpersonal behaviour (Kim, 2009). According to Kim (2009), these principles, when accepted by students, may impede creative thinking, and result in students passively accepting information from teachers and rarely express their opinions or ask questions (Kim, 2009). A Vietnamese 'form of politeness' may well be perceived and have the same effects as 'passivity' in a classroom (Phan Le Ha, 2001). Thus, reforms that encourage flexibility and independent learning among students may be perceived as threatening traditional values and be met with a degree of reticence. In addition, the marked influence of political ideology in Vietnamese higher education in addition to the influence of Confucianism also makes the reform in higher education slow in responding to the free-market orientation of the economic renovation (Harman & Nguyen Thi Ngoc Bich, 2010).

At the same time, like elsewhere in the world (e.g. Hernández-March et al., 2009; Yorke & Harvey, 2005), employers in Vietnam desire graduate attributes that match the contemporary workplace, such as 'learning, communication, information processing, problem solving, and interpersonal skills' (Tran Quang Trung & Swierczek, 2009). In a similar survey conducted among graduates of Ho Chi Minh City University of Economics and some employers in Vietnam, Tran Quang Trung and Swierczek demonstrate that graduates lack work-related competencies and that there has been a mismatch between employer needs and university responsiveness. These authors argue that the main reason is that university curricula objectives neglect employers' needs; while universities focus on problem solving skills such as 'decision-making, learning, and information processing' employers would also like them to focus on the development of 'interpersonal skills' such as negotiation skills, coaching skills and conflict management skills (Tran Quang Trung & Swierczek, 2009, pp. 571-581). Such concern goes beyond the academic literature. According to a survey of 200 leading enterprises in Vietnam conducted by the United Nation Development Program (UNDP, 2007), many Vietnamese enterprise owners believe that they have to re-train most of their staff on

all levels regardless of their educational background, tertiary or post graduate, as the result of the survey conducted by MOET in 2006 demonstrates.

This concern about universities not preparing graduates for a rapidly changing globalized world is also a concern in many countries as a large body of research undertaken elsewhere demonstrates (e.g. Hernández-March, Martín del Peso, & Leguey, 2009; Yorke & Harvey, 2005). In Vietnam, however, a survey conducted by Nguyen Thi Thanh Hong (2008), among a sample of 400 education students, demonstrates that the learning methods used by these students at university were frequently characterized by ‘notetaking, combined with reading textbooks and reference material’, ‘learning by memorising the lecture notes given in class’, and ‘learning according to what has been set out by the course outline and syllabus’. There is increasing concern that the limited scope, content and approaches to learning that students obtain from such university courses are inadequate to meet the demands of both education and other professional practices, that traditional teaching and learning in universities in Vietnam cannot provide students with necessary skills for the era of globalisation (Nguyen Thi Thanh Hong, 2008; Tran Quang Trung & Swierczek, 2009; Tran Thi Tuyet, 2013).

However, work outside the state sector requires skills which new graduates may not have attained. Young employees found that foreign/joint-venture sector organisations challenged their skills and abilities, and required them to learn new ones. They viewed the ‘pragmatic skills and knowledge acquired on the job’ as ‘indispensable and... increasingly in demand by businesses’, yet they did not feel that these were being taught at universities (Nguyen Phuong An, 2002, pp. 236-237). A World Bank survey on higher education and skills in Vietnam revealed that new employers were most often concerned about soft skills or attitudes and generic skills. These demands seem consistent, even when there are structural changes, and labour demand fluctuates (World Bank, 2008). These skills are also essential for the intercultural work settings at INGO projects in Vietnam, which still function, to a large extent, as a component state structure (Plipat, 2005) with staff needing to have skills to work between structures. As discussed earlier, the development of such interpersonal skills is increasingly urgent in the kind of intercultural workplaces emerging in the post Doi Moi economy of Vietnam, where there are possible cultural differences among people from different cultures that need to be negotiated, and managed.

1.5 Intercultural workplaces in the era of globalisation

INGOs in Vietnam are one form of such intercultural workplaces where members must seek to understand each other's cultures, and try to share and find common ground (Meer & Modood, 2012). A particular set of cultural competencies is needed for working in such intercultural contexts (Byram, 1997; Ting-Toomey & Kurogi, 1998). Gow and McDonald (2000) found that 'cross-cultural skill' was weighted relatively low in importance as a graduate attribute by employers and educators participating in their research.. The volume of literature on the influence of intercultural competencies upon performance of employees in culturally diverse work settings is modest. However, it highlights the importance of this competence in increasingly intercultural work settings. In a survey conducted by Lloyd and Härtel (2010) among all 1,200 employees of one organization in Australia, the researchers demonstrate that the relationship between individual and team in cultural diverse work teams was significantly improved through three facets of intercultural competence. These include cognitive competencies, that is, the ability to accurately process information regarding culturally different others and culturally different practices; affective competencies, that is, positive emotional responses toward culturally different others and when faced with culturally different practices; behavioural competencies, that is, acting in a positive and appropriate manner when interacting with culturally diverse others such as cognitive, affective (Lloyd & Härtel, 2010, p. 869).

Similarly, the importance of intercultural competence in multicultural teams is reconfirmed in cross-cultural research in several European countries (Reid, 2012). Reid demonstrates in his Spain component of the research that 'cooperation, collaboration and mediation' of the global work contexts are intensified through four stages of intercultural learning of 'never-ending learning', 'constant' learning, 'unlearning' and 'relearning' process (Reid, 2012, p. 159). Importantly, Reid points out that 'fostering mutual respect and establishing personal links with the members of one's multicultural team are acknowledged to be exceptionally useful for relationship-building in this particular work context' (Reid, 2012, p. 158).

INGOs in Vietnam have many of the characteristics of other contemporary workplaces but, at the same time, they are characterized by the short-term nature of their projects that require multi-disciplinary knowledge, and the fact that their projects, and hence the organisations themselves, are embedded in traditional contexts of Vietnamese culture and society. As there has not been a university degree in the development studies field in Vietnam, and social work, a cognate discipline, only began to enroll students around 2006, most of the Vietnamese staff employed in

INGOs have not been trained in community development or development studies at university. In such circumstances, the challenges of working in an INGO most likely would be intensified, especially in the early stages of employment or career, and raise questions about how universities and employers can assist new graduates to make the transition from formal education to such a workplace. These questions, which drive the current research will now be outlined.

1.6 Rationale for the research, research questions

INGOs can be seen as an example of the intercultural work environments which are emerging in the context of the social and economic changes in Vietnam. In such workplaces in Vietnam, graduates need high levels of intercultural competence, as well as skills such as teamwork, negotiation, and communication. In view of the requirements for performing in intercultural INGOs, on the one hand, and the education current students gain from Vietnamese universities on the other, it is likely that many graduates will find the transition to working in INGOs challenging. It would therefore be of value to explore how graduates use their attributes in new workplace settings - how they 'translate' knowledge and skills from the 'tightly bounded' university context to the 'loosely-bounded' INGO environment, in order to inform universities and employers how best to prepare graduates for a changing, intercultural world of work. Moreover, by focusing upon young graduates' perspectives on the attributes they gain from university study, and how they experience and respond to the challenges of working in non-traditional, intercultural settings, the research results contribute significantly to understanding how graduates apply their knowledge and skills in the new world of work in Vietnam.

The goal of the research is to *explore the ways in which Vietnamese graduates experience and engage in the intercultural work settings of INGOs in Vietnam.*

Using inductive qualitative research methods this thesis explores how young Vietnamese university graduates experience their work in the context of the intercultural work environments characteristic of the INGOs which have been established as a central aspect of globalisation in post Doi Moi Vietnam. The labour market for graduates in Vietnam, as elsewhere, requires high level cognitive skills (Barrie, 2006), 'far transferable' skills (Bennett et al., 2000) that enable graduates to develop new knowledge and skills for new contexts of work. The contemporary labour market in Vietnam, characterised by large-scale historical change, from a centrally planned economy to a market oriented one can be seen as such an instance of structure 'crisis' in Bourdieu's terms. INGOs, global organisations connecting Vietnam to complex networks of international development, are a

significant part of the changing world of work in contemporary Vietnam. This period is typically seen as being temporary and unstable under the pressure of the shift from a centrally planned economy to a market oriented one, forcing graduates to prepare for uncertainty, and, as I will argue, particularly to gain such ‘far transfer’ skills (Bennett et al., 2000) to apply their discipline knowledge and skills reflexively, and to learn necessary new knowledge and skills. INGOs, by the nature of the work they undertake, need graduates working there to work in between different structures, resources and models, and to develop new models for specific projects. The investigation is informed by the literature on graduate attributes but also seeks to extend the prevailing research agenda in this literature by drawing on theoretical perspectives on intercultural communication and agency as found in the work of scholars such as Bochner and Bourdieu, with a particular focus upon concepts of intercultural competence, agency, strategy and structure. To these ends, the research questions for this research are as follow:

Research questions

1. What attributes are expected of young Vietnamese graduates by senior Vietnamese INGO managers, and by international employers in the INGO sector?
2. To what extent do graduate attributes contribute to their competence in the intercultural INGO workplaces?
3. In what ways do young Vietnamese graduates experience the intercultural work setting of INGOs, and what do they see as their roles in the intercultural workplace of INGOs?
4. What strategies do graduates employ in achieving and enacting competence in the contexts of their work in the intercultural workplace at INGOs?
5. How does the agency of graduates come into play in achieving competence in the intercultural workplace at INGOs?

In a time of radical change in a society when many conventional norms, values, regulations or rules become invalid, the dispositions underpinning individual agentic actions become less applicable (Evans, 2007). Although agency is constrained by social structure, Evans (2007) argues that when a society experiences radical changes, individual agency also changes modes of behaviour to accommodate the changes. This argument is rooted in Bourdieu’s (1990a) view that individuals’ dispositions are generative and recursive. These dispositions are the capacities to estimate and seize opportunities, to ‘anticipate the future by a kind of practical induction’ (Bourdieu, 1990a, p.64). In the intercultural workplace at INGOs, the agency of the graduates comes into play in achieving

competence. These are terms which are central to the thesis and that I will be developing them later in chapter 2.

Contribution of the research

This research engages with the literature on graduate attributes (Bennett et al., 2000; Barrie, 2006), and even seeks to extend the prevailing research agenda in this literature by drawing on theoretical perspectives on intercultural communication and agency as found in the work of scholars such as Bochner (1984) and Bourdieu (in Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992). This research will offer original insights into how Vietnamese graduates could work more effectively when they are required to take on demanding ‘intermediate’ roles in the contexts of change in which intercultural work environments are emerging in Vietnam. It will provide some insights into the way university education in Vietnam is currently preparing graduates to enter the intercultural work environment. From the research findings, the study will comment on the implications this emerging intercultural workforce has for universities in Vietnam and contribute to the theorization of internationalization of education in the age of globalisation when cultural diversity is now the norm. The study also offers suggestions for improving the quality and effectiveness of recruitment and training practices in INGOs. Therefore this research will contribute to the capacity to construct the new intercultural workforce that is rapidly growing with the influx of international investments and expatriates working alongside Vietnamese graduates in contemporary, post-Doi Moi Vietnam.

1.7 Structure of the research

The research will be presented in seven chapters. This chapter has provided an overview of the research context and introduced the research topic. Chapter 2 reviews literature on graduate attributes, intercultural competence, and the relationship between individual agency and structural change, to identify gaps in the literature on how graduates apply their attributes in the workplace, and draws together a critical analysis of concepts of graduate attributes and sociological perspectives on agency into a sensitizing framework to explore the experiences of the graduates working in INGOs in Vietnam. Chapter 3 discusses the inductive qualitative methodology applied in this research. Other issues discussed here include the usage of in-depth interview techniques, ethical issues, selection of informants, data collection and thematic data analysis. Chapter 4 begins by analysing the perspectives of eight university teachers, six international employers and two Vietnamese managers on the attributes expected from the graduates, then compares the expectations of the teachers with the university study experiences of the graduates. Finally, it discusses the gap

between the expectations of the employers and the actual requirements for working at intercultural workplaces. In Chapter 5, the journey of the young Vietnamese graduates into work at INGOs in Vietnam will be presented. Chapter 6 explores how the young graduates are positioned as ‘persons-in-between’ while undertaking cultural mediation and performing cultural intermediary roles. This chapter focuses on the necessary attributes for engaging in such roles, the linkage between their achieved university and work attributes, and their strategies to gain necessary attributes for the roles of cultural mediator and cultural intermediary. Chapter 7 discusses the way graduates strategically draw on what they study at the universities, and how graduates continue to use their strategies to meet the requirements of the intercultural workplace. Chapter 7 concludes with a discussion of the implications for university education and INGOs as employers and for future research.

CHAPTER II. AFTER UNIVERSITY: GRADUATE ATTRIBUTES AND AGENCY IN THE TRANSITION TO THE WORKPLACE

2.1. Introduction

Positioned in between the state and the local communities (Gray, 1999), and involving international expatriates, national policy makers, local authorities, local staff and community people, INGOs in Vietnam represent an extremely challenging workplace for new graduates. Particularly challenging are the intercultural interactions (Meer & Modood, 2012) in the implementation process of projects in this context. As argued in chapter 1, this setting is of interest to researchers because it is representative of a new type of intercultural workplace in Vietnamese society.

The term ‘intercultural’ here refers to the increasing interaction and participation in a common society of members from diverse cultural backgrounds. The intercultural dimension is ‘something greater than coexistence’, ‘more geared toward interaction and dialogue’ (Meer & Modood, 2012, p. 177). It is posited here, that graduates working at INGOs in Vietnam will need attitudes and traits to deal with intercultural interactions, or what is recognised as ‘intercultural competence’ (Byram, 1997; Deardorff, 2006; Wilson, Ward & Fischer, 2013). Intercultural competence can include such skills as flexibility, self-confidence, self-efficacy, openness, motivation, orientation to knowledge, cultural empathy, openness to information and optimism (Mamman, 1995). Ideally, these skills and dispositions might be acquired, as graduate attributes, in university settings, to be applied in the workplace. Graduate attributes (Barrie, 2006) are the qualities, skills and understanding that a university community agrees its students should develop during their time with the institution, and a significant and growing volume of work has been focused upon describing the range and forms of graduate attributes continues; however, there is a lack of empirical evidence that explores the application of these attributes in the workplace (Barrie, 2006; Bennett, Dunne, & Carré, 2000). This is true even in the concentrated field of literature on intercultural competence as a particular attribute or set of attributes (Gow & McDonald, 2000).

Understanding young graduates’ experiences of working in this new type of intercultural workplace in Vietnam would be of great interest to universities and employers. The persistence and influence of traditional approaches to teaching and learning in universities in Vietnam (Nguyen Phuong Mai et al., 2006; Tran Thi Tuyet, 2013) upon the ways graduates apply attributes acquired at university in contexts such as INGOs in Vietnam is of particular interest in contemporary Vietnam. The rapid

changes in society since the introduction of Doi Moi policy should be accounted for in their effects upon graduates' transition from university to work place, particularly to non-traditional, intercultural work environments such as those at INGOs. To this end, this chapter reviews the literature about graduates' university preparation for the workplace, and particularly how graduates use their university knowledge and skills in multicultural/intercultural work contexts, such as those that are common in Vietnam today.

The chapter starts with a discussion about recent understandings of graduate attributes, identifying gaps in the existing literature about graduates' transition to the workplace. In that body of literature little attention is given to understanding how new graduates apply and develop their knowledge and skills at work. This part of the chapter also reviews literature on intercultural competence as it is the key factor for working in an intercultural setting like INGOs in Vietnam (Wilson et al., 2013).

Next, the chapter reviews the sociological literature on agency and argues for the usefulness of an 'agency' perspective on graduates' transition to work, before considering the significance of agency in the particular context of 'development' in contemporary Vietnam. The chapter concludes by suggesting an approach that combines perspectives on graduate attributes and individual agency to understand the way university graduates apply their knowledge and attributes in the work setting.

2.2. Graduate attributes

In recent decades, universities in many countries have been under considerable pressure to clarify the nature of the education they offer to their students. An extensive body of research has developed to address these new demands, reinterpreting the university's purpose and role, in an effort to explain graduates' potential contribution to society (Barnett, 1990). Throughout the world, there is increasing interest in measuring the 'learning outcomes' of university graduates (Douglass, Thomson, & Zhao, 2012). However, there is no consensus on a definition of graduate attributes (e.g. Andrews & Higson, 2008; Crebert, Bates, Bell, Patrick, & Cragolini, 2004; Gilbert, Balatti, Turner, & Whitehouse, 2004; Gow & McDonald, 2000; Harvey, 2005; Wiata, 2006). This lack of agreement may have deterred efforts to focus, beyond the university, upon the application of graduate attributes in varied work contexts.

In 2004, Barrie argued that previous research on higher education systems, processes and graduate outcomes had been predominantly descriptive; that is there had been a lack of a conceptual framework or theoretical underpinning (Barrie, 2004; also Bennett et al., 2000). There is little evidence to support assertions that so-called core or transferable skills are necessarily outcomes of

all higher education programs, or to underpin the identification of good practice in skill development in higher education or employment settings. Bennett et al.'s work is an exception to the general lack of attention to conceptualisation, and it provides a foundation for more research. The mixed methods research conducted by Bennett, Dunne and Carré (2000) provides a conceptualisation of core generic skills, and models of good practice in their delivery, derived from initiatives by employers and staff in higher education. Their research also explores the perspectives of students and graduate employees on acquiring skills and putting skills into practice, in order to have a clearer understanding of the influence of contexts upon skill definition and usage in workplace settings. In their model of generic skills, the main skills used were thought to be those associated with 'management of information', particularly communication. The use of skills of 'management of self' and 'management of task' varied according to the demands of the jobs.

The results of Bennett et al.'s (2000) research provides evidence that the skills that individual graduates developed are constrained and enabled by work circumstances. For example, where the culture of the organisation was described as rigidly hierarchical, skill training was restricted to following procedures to execute a particular task, in an organisation with higher degrees of employee autonomy, decision making was left to the discretion of the graduates and they were required to organise their own way to develop skills (Bennett et al., 2000). Many had opportunities to develop skills of negotiation, managing others and communication through working as part of management teams or dealing with the public (Bennett et al., 2000, p. 145). It was clear from the interviews in their research that the graduates' job demands and their work environments lead to very different practices, which in turn, together with their personalities, or personal dispositions, shaped their perceptions of the skills they were using and developing (Bennett et al., 2000).

Bennett and his colleagues began to recognise the influence of particular circumstances upon the way graduates use their knowledge, from directly applying specific skills to strategically thinking about application of more abstract knowledge. They refer to 'transfer of learning' as that which 'occurs when a person applies knowledge or skills acquired in one context in a new context' (Bennett et al., 2000, p. 16). These researchers classify attributes into near transfer and far transfer attributes, depending on the context of transfer. Near transfer attributes involve 'fast automatization' for 'skills that are identical in different task situations'; they are the attributes that enable graduates to transfer knowledge and skills to contexts similar to educational contexts (p. 17). Alternatively, far transfer attributes are those that infuse and enable all scholarly learning and knowledge; transcend disciplinary boundaries; enable students to reshape and transform knowledge

to meet new challenges in contexts far from the original discipline; vary over task situations; and require more conditional, and deeper, disciplinary content knowledge (p. 17). These authors also argue that transfer can be distinguished according to the mechanisms of the transfer, into 'low road' and 'high road' transfer, as suggested earlier by Salomon and Perkins (1989, p. 115). The key difference between low-road and high road transfer is the process that yields the transfer. 'Low road' transfer is characterised by automatic, stimulus-controlled, and extensively practiced behaviours or cognitions', meanwhile the core element of the high-road transfer is the 'mindful abstraction' it involves (Salomon & Perkins, 1989, p. 124).

Comparing these two kinds of transfer, Bennett et al. (2000) argue that low road transfer is when near transfer happens in contexts similar to the learning context. It results in 'well learned automatic responses' without much reflective thinking (Bennett et al. 2000, p. 17). High road transfer is far transfer, and requires abstract comparing and contrasting the knowledge from the context of learning and the application context, seeking 'common patterns', 'abstractions' and 'general principles or procedures' (Bennett et al. 2000, p. 17). In the intercultural contexts of INGOs in Vietnam today, there is likely to be considerable distance between university knowledge and skills and the nature of the work there. Therefore, the form of transfer of knowledge and skills is likely to be high road, far transfer of such abstract cognitive skills (Bennett et al., 2000). From this perspective, 'high-road', far transfer skills might be the most useful skills for such a context.

While researchers such as Bennett et al. (2000) have understood graduate attributes to be generic for all disciplines, others such as Barrie (2006, p. 218) suggest that universities need to interpret them within disciplinary contexts in order to develop them. According to Barrie (2006), there does not appear to be any model of graduate skills implicit in the research literature that accommodates the diverse views and policies of different staff and institutions (Barrie, 2006, p. 219). Barrie (2006) conducted qualitative research using a phenomenographic approach to explore what academics understand about the concept of graduate attributes, and how they teach these attributes. Academics' understandings of graduates attributes were categorised into a four level framework, in which the higher levels are understood to encompass attributes from the lower levels. These four levels, arranged according to their increasing complexities are: 1 - precursory; 2 - complementary; 3 - translational; 4 - enabling attributes (Barrie, 2006, pp. 223-224).

In level one, the precursory attributes are the learning outcomes that should pre-exist in university students, hence, understood as essential foundation to university study but not expected to be taught there and essentially ignored in thinking about learning outcomes at university level (Barrie, 2006).

In level two, the complementary attributes are useful additional skills that complement or round out graduates' discipline knowledge. These attributes are acquired as the result of a university education, but are separate and secondary to the learning of disciplinary knowledge. They are functional, atomistic, personal skills that are quite discrete from other university learning outcomes (Barrie, 2006).

Of significant interest in the current study on graduate experiences of the workplace are the two higher levels of attributes in Barrie's framework. In level three, the translation conception includes the generic attributes as abilities that let graduates make use of, or apply, disciplinary knowledge, thus potentially changing and transforming disciplinary knowledge through its application. Included in this level are clusters of linked personal attributes, cognitive abilities and skills of application, which are the learning outcomes that graduates possess in partnership with discipline knowledge (Barrie, 2006).

In level four, the highest level of Barrie's hierarchical framework, and perhaps of most relevance for the current study on graduates' experiences of the workplace, are the enabling generic attributes that are integrated in the learning outcomes. These are abilities that infuse and enable all scholarly learning and knowledge. They are interwoven abilities and aptitudes for learning. These attributes are of significant importance as they provide the building blocks for discipline knowledge but are more long lasting and important than the discipline knowledge they support. Once developed, these graduate attributes are perceived to provide a reusable framework that enables students/graduates to acquire and shape new knowledge as required – even in the context of other disciplines. These generic attributes are seen as transcending disciplinary boundaries even though they are initially developed within disciplinary contexts (Barrie, 2006, pp. 229-230).

Elements of both Bennett et al.'s (2000) and Barrie's (2006) schemas can be seen also in Eraut's (2004) classification of graduate attributes. Similar to the classification of Bennett et al. (2000) that categorises graduate attributes according to the similarity of the contexts of application (near and far; or low road and high road), Eraut (2004) also classifies the knowledge transfer process into five levels, depending on the context where it is applied. Eraut (2004) differentiates between the levels of transfer, as either being easy and short in a similar situation, to being long and challenging in quite an unfamiliar and complex context. The latter involves: (i) the extraction of potentially relevant knowledge from the context(s) of its acquisition and previous use; (ii) understanding the new situation, a process that often depends on informal social learning; (iii) recognising what knowledge and skills are relevant; (iv) transforming them to fit the new situation; (v) integrating

them with other knowledge and skills in order to think/act/communicate in the new situation (Eraut, 2004, p. 212). Eraut identifies four important influences on the transfer process - 'the nature of what is being transferred, differences between the contexts, the dispositions of the transferees, the time and effort devoting to facilitating the transfer process' (Eraut, 2004, p. 212). Transfer is not seen as a discrete event but a process of learning (Eraut, 1994).

In general, among models of graduate attributes, both Eraut's categorisation and Barrie's (2006) classification link graduates attributes with the processes of acquiring discipline knowledge. In addition, Eraut conceptualises the processes by which graduates use the knowledge in work contexts, post graduation. Notably, most of the existing research on graduate attributes targets academics and/or employers (e.g. Andrew & Higson, 2008; Barrie, 2006; Deardorff, 2006; Harvey, 2005; Hernández-March et al., 2009). As the result, the listed graduate attributes are the expectations of the academics and employers towards the graduates. In contrast, my research focuses on young graduates' perspectives on the attributes they gain from university study. It can, thus, make an important contribution to our understanding of the way new graduates apply their knowledge and skills in the work settings.

It is also necessary to highlight that what is emphasised at university/by universities, and what is emphasised by employers are not always the same (Eraut, 2004). A large body of research on employers' perspectives about graduate attributes throughout the United Kingdom (UK), the United States of America (USA), Australia and Europe demonstrates that employers value high level skills. For example, Yorke & Harvey's (2005) research around the employability of the graduates in the UK demonstrates that in the context of social change and massification of higher education, employers are looking for graduates with generic attributes in addition to degree or program knowledge. Employers highly value the attributes which assist the graduates to adapt to the workplace, to be flexible in moving between different jobs, and to move 'one's repertoire of knowledge' onward (Yorke & Harvey, 2005). These desirable attributes are often independent of the degree subject, and consist of interactive attributes, including communication skills, interpersonal skills and team working, as well as personal attributes, including intellect and problem solving, analytic, critical and reflective ability, willingness to learn and continue learning, flexibility and adaptability, risk-taking and self-skills (Harvey in Yorke & Harvey, 2005).

Hernández-March et al. (2009) found that companies seek graduates who have the ability to work in a team and relate with co-workers, clients, and collaborators - skills that, in many cases, 'prove to be just as important as, if not more important than, the graduate's technical knowledge'

(Hernández-March et al., 2009, p. 7). Further, the results of the survey of Andrew and Higson (2008) conducted in four European countries (UK, Austria, Slovenia and Romania), demonstrated that in the perceptions and experiences of business graduates and employers, there is ‘a synergetic compilation of tangible and intangible skills, termed ‘ideal’ generic skills and competencies’ required of graduates in the workplace. Employers expect ‘hard’ business skills – discipline focused knowledge and know-how, and ‘soft’ interpersonal competencies - graduates’ problem-solving abilities, and specifically, high level discipline specific skills, generic interpersonal and communication competencies. Interestingly, the majority of graduates also identified ‘hard’ core business skills as important; however, they perceived themselves as lacking the necessary level of presentation skills for communication (Andrews & Higson, 2008, pp. 419-420).

In Australia, Gow and McDonald (2000) demonstrated that both employers and academics highly valued four essential graduates attributes for the modern workplace, namely ‘adaptability to changing work environments’, ‘business management skills’, ‘accountability’ and ‘cross-cultural competence’, although they argue that ‘cross-cultural competence’ has not received much attention in empirical research on graduate attributes. It has, however, been investigated theoretically in several research studies and models of intercultural competencies have been developed (Byram, 1997; Deardorff, 2006), in recognition that intercultural interaction in the contemporary globalised workforce is of increasing importance. According to Hunter et al (2006, p. 283) intercultural competence, defined as the ability to identify cultural differences, collaborate across cultures, and effectively participate in both social and business settings in other countries is essential in a globalised workplace

Intercultural competence has been conceptualised in Byram’s (1997) work as the attributes a person needs to become interculturally, communicatively competent, to be able to see relationships between different cultures, both internal and external. Of particular importance, an interculturally, communicatively competent person needs to have a critical or analytical understanding of (parts of) their own and other cultures - ‘someone who is conscious of their own perspective, of the way in which their thinking is culturally determined, rather than believing that their understanding and perspective is natural’ (Byram, 1997, p. 9). In the communication process, ‘the exchange of information is dependent upon understanding how what one says or writes will be perceived and interpreted in another cultural context’, in other words, communication effectiveness depends on ‘the ability to decentre and take up the perspective of the listener or reader’ (Byram, 1997, p. 3).

Hence, an interculturally, communicatively competent person is able to mediate, to 'interpret each in terms of the other', either for themselves or for other people (Byram, 1997, p. 9).

The intercultural communicative competence model developed by Byram and colleagues (Byram, 1997; 2003; Byram, Nichols, & Stevens, 2001) centres around learners' attitudes, knowledge, skills, and critical cultural awareness (Byram, 1997, pp. 51-53). For Byram, the interculturally communicative speaker is more of 'a mediator between cultures', who is able to negotiate in both, and able to be reflexive in combining aspects of multiple cultures in performance. The most competent 'intercultural mediators' are those who 'have an understanding of the relationship between their own language and language varieties and their own culture and cultures of different social groups in their society, on the one hand, and the language (varieties) and culture(s) of others, between (inter) which they find themselves acting as mediators,' (Byram, 2003, p. 61). A similar definition of the cultural mediator can be also seen much earlier in the work of Bochner (1981) and Taft (1981). Bochner argues that cultural mediators do more than disseminate information; they also promote mutual understanding, form culturally relativistic attitudes, produce cross-cultural empathy, spread international goodwill and reconcile disparate cultural practices (Bochner, 1981, p. 306), while Taft agrees that cultural mediators facilitate communication, understanding, and action between persons or groups of different cultures (Taft, 1981, p. 53).

Deardorff (2006), in turn, situates intercultural competence in a process model. Using a mixed methods approach in capturing the views of communications experts and academics, Deardorff generated a list of highly agreed specific skills for being interculturally competent, including skills to analyze, interpret, and relate, skills to listen and observe; cognitive skills, comparative thinking skills and cognitive flexibility. These components are interlinked in a non-recursive model (Deardorff, 2006), in which motivation is enhanced by knowledge (for example, cultural self-awareness, deep cultural knowledge, sociolinguistic awareness) and skills (listening, observing, evaluating, analysing, interpreting, relating) components. These aspects of motivation, knowledge and skills also facilitate shifts of internal frames that enhance empathy, ethnorelativity, and adaptability. These shifts of internal frames then also lead to appropriate and effective outcomes (Deardorff, 2006).

Spitzberg and Changnon (2009), Van de Vijver and Leung (2009), however, point to limitations in the existing body of literature on intercultural competence, namely the lack of empirical evidence that goes beyond the threshold of competence to explore the application of these attributes in practice. There are few studies that have made any effort to seek out employers in international

companies, or employers, academics or students from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds. The relative lack of emphasis upon intercultural competence in much of the graduate attributes literature, leads to uncertainty about which theories are well supported by empirical data, which frameworks should be modified, and which ones should be abandoned altogether (Van de Vijver & Leung, 2009, p. 405) in contexts outside the Anglo-European, first world contexts in which most studies have been conducted.

The importance of the intercultural dimension of graduate attributes is increasing in global workplaces in which intercultural interactions and relations are central (Hunter et al., 2006), and this is particularly pertinent in the case of INGOs in contemporary Vietnam. However, caution should be exercised in considering use of the conceptual frameworks on graduate attributes of Bennett et al. (2000), Barrie (2006) and Eraut (2004), or the work on intercultural competence (Byram, 1997; Deardorff, 2006; Ting-Toomey & Kuragi, 1998) in the specific context in Vietnam today. Three aspects should be taken into consideration: first, the traditional teaching and learning approach that may hinder the development of high level cognitive skills, including intercultural competence; second the rapid social changes in Vietnam today that pose particular challenges for graduates, demanding reflexive agency; third, the potential for graduates to change the structure and operations of the workplace and traditional ways of learning through their, reflexive use of cultural resources available to them once they enter the workforce.

For the first consideration, in the existing graduate attributes frameworks, the individual learner is emphasised; for example, Barrie's (2006) model focuses on explaining how high level cognitive skills such as strategic and critical thinking are developed during the discipline knowledge learning process and potentially influence the future learning aptitude of graduates. However, as outlined in chapter 1, teaching and learning in Vietnam is influenced by the Confucian principle of hierarchical social relationships (Kim, 2009; Nguyen Phuong Mai et al., 2005, 2006), and this principle is manifested in the way that learners accept information from teachers readily and rarely express their opinions or ask questions (Kim, 2009). Because the university system in Vietnam has been, for so long, centrally controlled in a planned economy, the regulated syllabus has remained virtually unchanged, as has the traditional, Confucian-influenced approaches to teaching and learning (Tran Thi Tuyet, 2013). As the result, learning relies on memorising and imitating instructions (Nguyen Thi Thanh Hong, 2008; Tran Nga, 2012) with less focus on attributes such as critical analysis. This mismatch between the models of higher education implicit in the graduate attributes literature and educational practice in higher education settings in Vietnam makes it difficult to apply models such

as those developed by Bennett et al. (2000), Barrie (2006) and Eraut (2004) to the reality of new graduates' experience as they enter the workplace in Vietnam today.

The second consideration is that the radical changes within Vietnamese society in combination with the changes wrought by globalisation present particular challenges to new graduates as they enter the workforce. Many new professions are emerging due to technological and social changes. World Bank (2008) and Di Gropello (2011) report that since the introduction of Doi Moi, the labour market has been creating more employment opportunities in both traditional occupational sectors (education and training, public administration, services, SOEs), and developing sectors (manufacturing, electricity, gas and water, foreign enterprises and, to a minor extent, privately owned domestic enterprises, and export oriented sectors). There is high possibility that learnt knowledge and skills for traditional professions will become non-applicable in newly emerged professions. For example, as outlined in chapter 1, research by Tran Quang Trung and Swierczek (2009, p. 581) leads the authors to conclude that universities' curriculum objectives neglect employers' needs, particularly in relation to the development of 'interpersonal skills' for negotiation, coaching and conflict management (Tran Quang Trung & Swierczek, 2009, p. 581). Tran Thi Tuyet (2013) confirms, in her study of 12 universities in Vietnam, that the labour market highly values skills such as team work, communication skills, independent working skills, presentation skills, social understanding and decision making skills. Graduates' shortage of such skills also has been demonstrated in previous research among Vietnamese journalism graduates conducted by Nguyen An (2006, p. 53), who found this group had a 'lack of general knowledge as well as the capacity for critical enquiry'. As employees leave the state sector for the jobs in the foreign/joint-venture sector, they are finding that it is the work related skills and abilities acquired in the latter sector are 'indispensable and are increasingly in demand by businesses' (Nguyen Phuong An 2002, p. 231). They agreed that these new jobs were challenging for their own skills and abilities, and required 'pragmatic skills and knowledge', which they had not been trained at the universities (Nguyen Phuong An, 2002, pp. 236-237). In this context, high level cognitive skills are necessary to facilitate graduates gaining new knowledge and skills in these new future jobs.

The third aspect to take into consideration is individual agency (Bourdieu, 1990b) in a changing society. Bourdieu argues that agents respond to the structure according to their dispositions, however, in in crises and times of social change, agents act purposefully and strategically for calculated immediate and future benefits (Bourdieu, 1990b). This is what Bourdieu and other sociologists mean by 'reflexivity' (Maton, 2003; Schirato & Webb, 2003). Reflexivity has been

conceptualised as ‘the systematic exploration of the unthought categories of thought that delimit the thinkable and predetermine the thought’ (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p. 40). Bourdieu argues that reflexivity emerges ‘in situations of crisis which disrupt the immediate adjustment of habitus to field’. Habitus is conceptualised by Bourdieu (1977, p. 72) as a ‘system of durable, *transformable* dispositions’, which is internalised by the individual and become the basis of his/her behavior, such as the routine, everyday adjustment of the individual’s typical position in a more or less familiar social space (Bourdieu, 1990b). A field is a system of social positions structured internally in terms of power relationships (Bourdieu, 1993). Bourdieu divides society into several fields that operate with each of their own set of rules and assess. Bourdieu argues that the way we act and make use of the rules in a given field strengthen our position in that field (Bourdieu, 1993). The rapid, radical socio-economic changes occurring in Vietnam would seem to present that kind of conditions which are likely, thus, to promote individual agency and reflexivity. A more thorough consideration of these concepts is warranted.

Jenkins develops Bourdieu’s work on reflexivity, agreeing that it is in fact ‘part of the repertoire of the habitus, not, in any sense, an autonomous or chosen process’ (Jenkins, 1992, p. 77), while Sweetman (2003, p. 541) argues that reflexivity can become a part of habitus, or reflexive habitus in specific contexts. Specifically, Sweetman argues that in late-, high-, or reflexive-modernity, when endemic crises can lead to a ‘permanent disruption of social position’, or ‘constant disjunction between habitus and field’, reflexivity does not reflect a temporary un-matching between habitus and field but becomes a part of the habitual, and is thus ‘incorporated into the habitus in the form of the flexible or *reflexive* habitus’; certain forms of habitus may be ‘*inherently* reflexive’ (Sweetman, 2003, p. 541). In other words, when the social structure changes so rapidly or radically that the agency of habitus fails to respond, reflexive agents develop strategies referring to new norms, regulations and rules to adapt to the changes in the society (Evans, 2007; Sweetman, 2003; Titma, Tuma, & Roots, 2007).

Of particular relevance to this thesis, Titma et al.’s (2007, p. 103) work emphasises the crucial role played by human agency during a transition involving major institutional change. Under normal conditions, institutional and cultural discourses and practices are internalised by individuals (Bourdieu, 1990a). When there are major historical shifts, such as the transformation from a state-socialist society to a market-based society, new norms, regulations and laws emerge that challenge ‘the institutional and sociocultural underpinnings of people’s beliefs and behaviours’ (Titma et al., 2007, p. 103).

The changing society in Vietnam presents graduates with such a context. It is reasonable to suppose that the pressures of transition from university study to work are intensified in this context since the higher education system in Vietnam is still structured around centrally regulated, traditional curricula and traditional teaching and learning approaches based upon a model of teaching in which learners will follow teachers' instructions. To understand how Vietnamese graduates apply their university knowledge and skills, acquired in such a traditional setting, in the modern workplace, it is important to take account of the limits of applicability of existing models of graduate attributes. It is also necessary to position the graduate as a potentially reflexive agent in relationship with the changing structure of the Vietnamese society to understand the changes in their agency in the contemporary socio-economic context. Understanding the experiences of graduates in intercultural workplaces like INGOs demands a conceptual framework that can provide insights into how graduates apply the knowledge and skills that they learn from traditional Vietnamese universities in a new type of workplace. The following section discusses the value of theoretical understandings and empirical evidence around the agency/structure relationship in developing such a framework for inquiry.

2.3 Agency and structure

Sociologists (e.g. Evans, 2007; Lareau & Weininger, 2003; Sweetman, 2003; Titma et al., 2007) have explored how individual agents are constrained by material and discursive structures and how they respond to the requirements of such social conditions. For example, Evans (2007) has applied an agentic approach to understand the transition from university to work in a time of radical social change in post-Soviet Europe. Evans argues that agency and structure are interrelated; agency is constrained by the social structure, however, when a society experiences radical changes, individual agency also changes modes of behaviour to accommodate the changes (Evans, 2007). Titma et al.'s (2007) research similarly confirms the profound influence of social changes upon the agency of young people during this time in Europe. In Evans' (2007) longitudinal research into the experiences of 640 young people aged between 16 and 25 in comparable labour markets in England and Germany (Bremen and Paderborn in Germany, Swindon and Liverpool in England), she explores their work 'transition' experiences, and compares the 'accelerated' transitions of England to the 'extended' transitions experienced by young people in West Germany. Evans argues that the political changes in Germany that have interrupted career pathways of young people have encouraged their personal agency. Some young people have been quick to pick up the 'signals' of these changes and develop active transition behaviours such as 'going for it' (Evans, 2007).

Drawing upon the work on agency by other sociologists, Evans identifies three dimensions of 'bounded agency' in the relationship between structure and agency: the first dimension is that of social determinism versus individualisation and reflexivity in social biographies. People are agents actively and individually engaged in the construction of their own biographies. The second dimension emphasises internal versus external control processes. There are limitations to personal control in all domains of life (Evans, 2007); some aspects of environment and personal circumstances are extremely difficult to change; others can be overcome by the exercise of initiative and learning. The third dimension focuses on social reproduction/conversion and explores 'the degree to which social mobility and transformation can be attributed to individual and collective ... action' (Evans, 2007, p. 92).

Evans' empirically grounded concept of bounded agency sees the actors as having a past as well as imagined future possibilities, which guide and shape actions in the present, together with subjective perceptions of the structures they have to negotiate, and the social landscapes that affect how they act (Evans, 2007, p. 92). Evans' research on 'bounded agency' leads her to identify four transition behaviours - 'strategic', 'step-by-step', 'taking chances' and 'wait and see', according to activity patterns that young people have adopted when moving along trajectories into labour markets. If a young person is independent in making decisions about his/her qualifications, he/she tends to bring stability to the unfolding life course; if he/she adopts a 'taking chances' form of behaviour, that includes short-term sequence of activities to react to immediate job demands and upheavals, he/she is likely to take higher risks (Evans, 2007, p. 86). Specifically, Evans conceptualizes 'strategic' and 'taking chances' approaches to be the expressions of active individualization. It is the extent to which 'young people have succeeded in developing longer-term occupational goals depends not only on their past socialization in family and school, but also to a large degree on the way their identity formation is linked to challenge and rewarding experience in the passage to employment itself' (Evans, 2007, p. 86). Meanwhile 'step by step' or a 'wait and see' transition behaviour pattern is linked to passive individualization. That is when 'the young person is carried along in socially accepted transition patterns, without a sense of ultimate goal or overall direction' (Evans, 2007, p. 86). These are four typical types of transition behaviours Evans observed among young people in Germany and UK in a politically and economically changing post-Soviet period.

Stetsenko (2007, p. 111) argues that the notion of bounded agency captures the overwhelming impact of social forces on individuals. This notion is also in line with the recently emerging trend of viewing agency as individuals' 'real-time' engagement with (or activity in) their social world in all

of its constantly changing dynamics (Emirbayer & Mische, 1998). Social structures, and the contexts within which these are located, give rise to particular actions and behaviours. Agency can help shape structures, or at least people's relationships to them, by generating new contexts which may carry particular forms of experiences and outcomes (Evans, 2007).

Usually, social structure constrains the activities of agency along with the regulations, norms, rules and values that are accepted by the structure (Titman et al., 2007). However, according to Evans (2007), Bourdieu's (1990a) conceptualisation of individuals' dispositions - capacities to estimate and seize opportunities, to 'anticipate the future by a kind of practical induction' (p. 64), is viewed to be generative and recursive, meaning that they both reflect and reproduce the structural arrangements that shape them. In a time of radical change in a society, when many conventional norms, values, regulations or rules become invalid, the dispositions underpinning individual agentic actions also become less applicable (Evans, 2007; Titman et al., 2007). Bourdieu argues that reflexive agency in such critical contexts is what enables individuals to respond to new changes in the society (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992). Agents reflexively take into account the external structures in a critical situation; the time in which 'the routine adjustment of subjective and objective structures is brutally disrupted [it] constitutes a class of circumstances' when there is a mismatch of adaptation to the immediate situation (Bourdieu, 1990b, p. 11), and 'rational choice' may take over' (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p. 131). Such critical situations can be radical changes in the field or unexpected movement between fields, or a result of increased individual mobility or institutional reflexivity (McNay, 1999, pp. 106–107). Large-scale historical change as in Vietnam, from a centrally planned economy to a market oriented one can be seen as such an instance of 'crisis' in Bourdieu's terms (Titma et al., 2007). Reflexive agency can be realised in such contexts through the strategies that the individual develops in considering the benefits of the activities he/she is carrying on, and counting on the dispositional skills to respond to the constraints of the context (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992).

Similar to the strategies that Evans' (2007) research has identified, young people in Vietnam appear to have adopted more active behaviour in their job seeking habits, being more 'strategic' 'taking chances', and planning their moves 'step by step'. Nguyen Phuong An (2000) demonstrates that many young employees actively seek jobs in the new part of the job market in international companies and organisations where they assume there is a potential for acquiring new skills and accumulating cultural and social capital for future work.

At the same time, Vietnamese researchers also find that the current higher education system is slow in changing long held traditions of teaching and learning (Nguyen Thi Thanh Hong, 2008; Tran Nga, 2012; Tran Thi Tuyet, 2013). In relation to the demands of the fast changing society, such practices may hinder graduates in meeting the new challenges in the society. The reflexive agency of young people described in Nguyen Phuong An's (2002) research suggests their awareness of their need to acquire necessary 'new' knowledge and skills to cover the gap between their university education and the demands of the workplace. In the current research, Bourdieu's notions of agency, structure, dispositions and reflexivity provide useful conceptual and analytical tools for investigating young graduates' experiences and their strategies of transition from university to work in the changing society in Vietnam today. These concepts might also help to explain how graduates choose to develop certain skills for specific jobs when the job market is going through radical changes, as observed by Bennett et al. (2000). Of particular interest, in the present context, is the way young graduates manage to work in an intercultural INGO context, in spite of their unrelated prior knowledge and skills.

2.4. A framework of concepts to understand how graduates use knowledge and skills in the intercultural workplace at INGOs in Vietnam

As the research problems are framed by readings gathered from the disciplines of education and sociology, this research is interdisciplinary. In my research, the ontological perspective provides a focus on the experiences of the graduates at work, and views experiences as an important constitutive element of the social world. In Vietnamese society today, the predominant pattern of a life-long career in the state sector is diminishing and less secure, and shorter-term employment is on the rise (Nguyen Phuong An, 2002), and the agency of Vietnamese graduates seem to be crucially important in responding to these changes. With major historical changes, there emerges 'a new institutional and sociocultural framework, including new norms, new rules, and new laws' that demand individual agency in response (Titma et al., 2007, p. 103). The way graduates experience these changes shows how their agency has led them to respond to these social contexts.

For the purposes of the current research, the move from university to the workplace can productively be seen as a critical change (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p. 234) in terms of both social and cultural contexts. The concept of agency, as developed by Bourdieu and Wacquant, explains how individuals respond to the requirements of the context through strategies they develop from their dispositional skills (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992) generated from their cultures, society

and education, and also from their acquired knowledge. A focus on the concept of agency appears to be relevant for understanding how graduates gain necessary knowledge and skills, and how they use these resources in the intercultural work settings emerging in the context of rapid and radical change in Vietnamese society. By using this concept, this research can address the limitations in the graduate attributes literature discussed in this chapter.

The present research explored the way Vietnamese graduates apply high level cognitive skills (Bennett et al., 2000; Barrier, 2006) in a specific context of intercultural workplace at INGOs. As Evans (2007) and Titma et al. (2007) argue, times of radical change, such as we are witnessing in Vietnam today, can impose constraints upon individual agency, but can also make reflexive agency more likely. When the young graduates finish university and start work in the intercultural workplace in INGOs, they are prepared with discipline knowledge and skills, and some generic skills. However, they need to become competent in intercultural communication; specifically, this means being able to understand relationships between different cultures (both internal and external to one's society), and to have a critical or analytical understanding of (parts of) one's own and other cultures (Byram, 1997, p. 9).

Moreover, intercultural communicative competence underpins the competence of 'intercultural mediators', who must, according to Byram (2003, p. 61) 'have an understanding of the relationship between their own language and language varieties and their own culture and cultures of different social groups in their society, on the one hand, and the language (varieties) and culture(s) of others' (*cf* Bochner, 1981). Intercultural competence is also necessary for solving potential intercultural conflicts in intercultural interactions, which includes culture sensitive knowledge and mindful reflexivity, the latter meaning the ability to take multiple perspectives, analytical empathy, and intentional creativity; and listening, observation, trust building, dialogic collaboration (Ting-Toomey & Kurogi, 1998, pp. 201-204). This becomes a challenge for young graduates working at INGOs since this group of abilities, as with other high level skills, generally appears not to be encouraged through the traditional teaching and learning at the university education system (Nguyen An, 2006; Nguyen Thi Thanh Hong, 2008; Tran Quang Trung & Swierczek, 2009). Nguyen Phuong Mai et al. (2006), Harman and Nguyen Thi Ngoc Bich (2010) and Tran Thi Tuyet (2013) posit that the cultural influence of Confucian principles upon the higher education system in Vietnam, appears to be discouraging the development of these high level skills (Bennett et al., 2000; Barrier, 2006). Specifically, the traditional teaching-learning approach is still 'too theoretically focused' (Harman & Nguyen Thi Ngoc Bich, 2010, p.73). In the recent years, the education policy

makers at MOET already have acknowledged the importance of education as the key to the success of economic reform (Harman & Nguyen Thi Ngoc Bich, 2010), and they are making improvement in the management system by re-organising the entrance exam, allowing universities to have autonomy in deciding their way of recruiting students. Many universities are having joint-program with universities abroad to improve the existing curriculum. In this context of social change and particularly the changes in education system to meet up the demands of the society, the above framework, particularly the concept of bounded agency (Evans, 2007) is of high relevance to understand how the agency of Vietnamese graduates while bounded by the traditional teaching-learning approach, yet still respond adequately to the unmet between the university education and the new demands of the society.

As discussed earlier, Barrie (2006) and Bennett et al. (2000) posit that for a university graduate, the university provides discipline knowledge and skills adding to necessary precursory skills held before beginning higher education (Barrie, 2006). However, these current models of graduate attributes developed predominantly in Anglo-European contexts emphasise the development of high level cognitive skills, which allow and encourage individualisation of knowledge and skills. Bennett et al., (2000) share the view of Perkin and Salomon (1994) that ‘transfer of learning occurs when a person applies knowledge or skills acquired in one context in a new context’ (Bennett et al., 2000, p.16). Bennett and his colleagues further classify generic skills into ‘near transfer’ and ‘far transfer’ ones. This is similar to how Salomon and Perkins (1989) classify ‘low road’ and ‘high road’ according to when the transfer happens (Bennet et al., 2000, p.17). Low road transfer is when near transfer happens in context similar to the learning context, in other words, in ‘well learned automatic responses’ without much reflective thinking, meanwhile, high road transfer is the far transfer, and requires abstract comparing and contrasting the knowledge from the context of learning and the application context, seeking for ‘common patterns’, ‘abstractions’ and ‘general principles or procedures’ (Bennett et al. 2000, p.17).

However, there are dangers in trying to fit Anglo-European models to such a different cultural setting as Vietnam. While these Anglo-European models mainly explore the gap to transfer university attributes into work competencies, the current rapid changes in Vietnam society creates its unique cultural issues. When the Vietnam society is getting more open to other cultures around the world through the globalisation process, the Vietnamese norms, values and customs might contradict those from other cultures during the intercultural interactions.

An approach that draws on three bodies of literature - graduate attributes (Bennett et al., 2000), intercultural competence (Byram, 1997) and agency, structure, dispositions and reflexivity (Bourdieu, 1990b; Evans, 2007) promises to shed light on how graduates apply their knowledge and skills, and their experience, and respond to the workplace at INGOs. Previously, these three conceptual fields have tended to be considered separately. Nonetheless when pulling together into intercultural context at INGOs in Vietnam, these concepts provide an useful framework for investigating how through their own agency, graduates respond to the changes in structure or context, foreseeing the gaps between the university study and the real world of work, planning and acting to develop their desired attributes for future work while at universities. Importantly, this framework offers a way of explaining how graduates strategically and reflexively apply their learnt attributes in a specific intercultural context at INGOs and the way they learn the appropriate attributes for this intercultural context. By focusing upon the agency of young graduates, the research addresses some of the limitations in the graduate attributes literature by giving insights into how early career graduates apply their attributes at the intercultural workplace.

Specifically, since the purpose of the current research is to explore the experiences of young Vietnamese graduates in the working context, it will be useful to apply models of graduate attributes particularly those derived from Barrie (2006), Bennett et al. (2000), Eraut (2004), and sociological understandings of agency (after Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992), Evans (2007) and others) within the context of radical social changes in Vietnam today. In this framework, the inter-relationships between graduates attributes, graduate agency, and intercultural competent will be uncovered to give insights into the transition from university to a particular intercultural work environment. This approach is a strength of the current research, as it offers a useful, framework to explore whether and how graduates develop their reflexive agency in responding to social constraints and challenges that have emerged as the traditional norms of lifelong career pathways disappear, and the concept of temporary and flexible jobs has become more prominent; and how graduates, through their reflexive agency (Bourdieu in Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992), strategically organise their acquisition of necessary knowledge and skills (Barrie, 2006, Bennett et al., 2000), and use their learnt knowledge and skills in newly emerged work settings (Evans, 2007).

Chapters four, five and six of this thesis discuss these three key aspects of the graduate experiences. Specifically, these chapters explore the young graduates' preparation for the future work, their experiences of working at the intercultural work setting at INGOs, and particularly, how they enact intercultural competence in their daily work. In exploring graduates' preparation for the future

work, this research includes the accounts of university teachers. For understanding graduates' experiences of INGOs, the research also takes the accounts of the employers at INGOs. The methodology and methods for such an exploratory nature of the research will be discussed in the following chapter.

CHAPTER III. METHODOLOGY AND METHODS

3.1. Introduction

The previous chapters have outlined the research problem relating to graduates' transition from university to work in the INGOs, and proposed a sensitizing framework informed by research on graduate attributes and the concept of agency as a lens for examining the experience of graduates during this transition. Many existing studies about university students focus on the expected attributes of graduates as the immediate output of the higher education institutions. These studies have explored the perspectives of academia, university students, alumni and employers on the attributes they expect graduates to achieve by the completion of their university study (Barrie, 2009; Bennett et al., 2000; Douglass et al., 2012). Since there is little research on the experiences of graduates once they enter the workforce, particularly in complex, international, intercultural, interdisciplinary work environments, such as INGOs in Vietnam my research is exploratory in nature. As explained in the following, inductive, qualitative methods were deemed the most appropriate way to explore my research questions.

To understand the experiences of graduates at the workplace at INGOs, my research was designed to gather rich descriptions of young graduates' experience once they were in the intercultural work environment of an INGO, and their accounts on their university study to gain insights of their transition from university to the work setting. This chapter presents the methodology and methods that have been used to frame and to conduct the research. The chapter starts with a description of my research strategies, and the reasons for using an inductive, qualitative research approach and in-depth interviewing techniques, then explains the methods and process for data collection and data analysis, the way to assure ethical issue in the interview process. A discussion of the limitations of the inductive qualitative research approach and of in-depth interviewing techniques concludes the chapter.

3.2. Research strategy

Within the exploratory framework of the current research of young graduates' experiences, inductive qualitative research is a relevant inquiry paradigm. Ellis and Ellingson (2001, p. 2288) posit that 'qualitative researchers may be placed along a broad continuum ranging from an orientation akin to positivist science to one more akin to art and literature'. The researcher can be as those 'who see social life as something out there to be discovered independently of the researcher',

those ‘who view social life as something constructed through interaction and engagement with the world’, and those ‘who focus more closely on the person describing social life and the modes and practices of description’ (Ellis & Ellingson, 2001, p. 2288). Across this continuum, the focus changes from ‘studying others who are assumed to be uniquely separate from the researcher’, to ‘examining interactions between the researcher and others’, to ‘including the positionality, politics, and story of the researcher who interacts with others’ (Ellis & Ellingson, 2001, p. 2288). In accordance with the inductive nature of the current research, it sits towards the latter end of this continuum. It involves the researcher attempting to discover, understand, and interpret what is happening in the research context as described by participants (Blaikie, 2009). This approach facilitates an understanding of the social world through the views of informants as well as of the researchers (Ellis & Ellingson, 2001; Minichiello, 1995).

3.2.1. The selected INGOs

As the current research aimed to explore the experiences of young graduates working at INGOs, I purposefully looked for informants who met the requirements of graduating within five years before the date of interviews. For the first phase of interviews, all kinds of INGO offices were approached to find suitable participants. The final list of those who agreed to be interviewed also covered a wide range of projects at INGOs. Their projects included community development, public health issues, and education. Mostly, the young graduates recruited were working in public health and education fields as the following summary demonstrated. These were also two focal areas of INGO activities in Vietnam aligning with key areas of government policy and program.

At present, there are approximately 300 INGOs with offices in Vietnam. They work in six key areas as classified by the NGO resource center: Health, Education, Natural Resources, Income Generation, Human Welfare and Social development. Others include advocacy, communication and information, construction and infrastructure, natural disaster prevention, post-war affect, gender, children and old people. Depending on the scale of work, each INGO office often has around 10-15 staff among which 1 or 2 are foreigners who usually hold the highest positions as Director or Country Representative (Source: INGO Directory, <http://www.ngocentre.org.vn>, Accessed on 30 April 2012). A regulation issued by Vietnamese government requires the representative offices of INGOs to be located in Hanoi.

The following examples of the scope of work of three INGOs where three informants of first phase worked illustrate the kind of projects at INGOs in Vietnam. INGO (A) focuses on community

development. It is a non-governmental church-based organisation. The organization has been working in Vietnam since 1996 in the sectors of rural development, ethnic minorities, food security, overcoming violence and HIV/Aids. This INGO supports local Vietnamese partners to implement their projects with ethnic minorities in rural mountainous provinces and Mekong delta provinces. INGO (B) focuses on education, sustainable livelihoods, fair trade, gender equality, climate change, and disaster preparedness. The organization campaigns for changes, provide emergency responses, and implements development programs. INGO (B) works directly with communities and seeks specifically to advocate for the well-being of the poor, and ethnic minorities, and to have their voices heard in decision making process. Projects conducted by INGO (B) cover a wide scope and operate in many provinces. INGO (C) focuses on public health issues. It is currently operating in 3 provinces. However, this is much smaller than their scope of work before 2011. The development staff are responsible for the implementation of projects in Vietnam, but report to the head office abroad. Project activities in Vietnam focus on sex education for young people in order to reduce the incidence of unwanted pregnancy and STDs, including HIV/AIDS, and increase mothers' age.

3.2.2. Qualitative Research

Qualitative research facilitates an understanding of the informants' perceptions, and focuses upon discovering the nature of phenomena as humanly experienced' (Minichiello, 1995, p. 11). This method typically produces a wealth of detailed data about a small number of people and cases (Patton, 1990). The usage of qualitative research in current research enables the researcher to study selected issues in depth and detail, as Patton (1990, p.165) points out 'the fact that data collection is not constrained by predetermined categories of analysis contributes to the depth and detail of qualitative data'. This strength was reiterated by Minichiello (1995), who posits that in interpretive research, the underlying assumption is that:

we need to know what people think in order to understand why they behave in the ways that they do ... This, in turns, is predicated on the belief that people act in the ways that they do because of the way in which they define the situation as they see it or believe it to be. That is, they interpret the fact as they see them (Minichiello, 1995, p. 69).

Another point is that qualitative research method is flexible enough to explore the richness of the information. Six of the aspects of qualitative research identified by Patton (1990) were important for the design of the current research, including:

- *Inductive analysis*, which begins with specific observations and builds towards general patterns.

- *Qualitative data*, including detailed thick description, in-depth inquiry and direct quotations that capture people's personal perspectives and experiences.
- *A dynamic developmental perspective*. Describing and understanding dynamic and developing processes is important. It may be necessary to change priorities, direction and methods as the study or program progresses and as researchers and participants learn more about each other and the ever-changing phenomena itself.
- *Unique case orientation*. The unique and special nature of each case means that detailed information must be captured for the specific case under study. While cases may be selected because they are of particular interest given a study's purpose, they are not necessarily representative of a broader population.
- *Context sensitivity*. Findings must be placed in their social, environmental and temporal context. Making generalisations across different social and physical environments is either avoided, or undertaken only with very great caution.
- *Design flexibility*. The design of a qualitative inquiry can rarely be optimally prescribed in advance of fieldwork. Inquiry design unfolds as the fieldwork unfolds, being open to change as new insights and knowledge emerge (Patton, 1990, p. 51).

In the current research, the ontological position of the researcher is that the workplace of young graduates is constructed through their interaction and engagement with their work colleagues and counterparts (a constructionist perspective). Although this position suggests the value of observational methods, in-depth interview techniques also allow a researcher to understand the interactions of the informants through informants' accounts of the past events, when the researcher does not have the opportunity to observe participants in those events (Atkinson & Coffey, 2001).

The research strategy used for this inductive qualitative research consisted of two stages. Firstly, the context of the INGO workplace was explored via job advertisements. To gain background information for the interviews, I collected INGO job advertisements for positions such as project assistant, research assistant, internship, project secretary, project officer, and project manager on the official website of the VUFO-NGO resource centre. Twenty two job advertisements were collected and descriptively analysed during the period from 2009-2013 to check the range and consistency of the requirements of different INGO positions and to understand the criteria required for different positions at INGOs and the meaning of terms used in describing these positions. The scope of qualifications and duties in the job advertisements led to the selection of university disciplines to be

explored in the research, and, in particular, the university teachers to be approached for interviews. Also, understanding the job advertisements revealed the explicit requirements for staff working at INGOs, and raised questions to be checked and further explored in the interviews with the employers and the young graduates.

Secondly, based on the primary information of job advertisements, the context and experiences of INGO workplaces were explored intensively via in-depth interviews with three groups of informants comprising managers (the international employers and Vietnamese managers in INGOs), university teachers, and young graduates working at INGOs. I began this phase by interviewing the international employers and Vietnamese managers of INGOs to explore in depth their expectations towards the young graduates. Next, I interviewed five young Vietnamese graduates working at INGOs in the first round. These interviews aimed to clarify the young graduates' expectations of the employers, to explore further their views and experiences of work at INGOs, and to explore their understandings of the link between university study and work performance. During the interviews with young graduates, they talked about their work history (the different positions they had held in the same or in different organisations); how they got their jobs in the first place; the different problems they encountered at this initial stage of their career; and how they resolved those difficulties. Analysis of the young graduates' stories of their work experiences gradually clarified the strategies they had developed to respond to the requirements of their jobs. To gain a different perspective on the relationship between the young graduates' university study experiences and their work experience, I, then interviewed university teachers. Through the accounts of university teachers, I explored the common teaching-learning practices at Vietnamese universities as a background to understanding the university study experiences of young graduates. Fieldwork notes of the interviews' process were taken and used to clarify the interviews.

The interviews were arranged into two phases, of which the first one explored different perspectives of those involved in the training and employing graduates, and the perspective of the graduates about how they work in INGO setting; and the second phase explored graduates' experiences in more depth. An additional fourteen graduates were interviewed in this second phase. The first phase of interviewing lasted from December 2010 to January 2011, during which I interviewed the three groups (international employers/ more senior Vietnamese staff, young graduates working at INGOs, and university teachers). Analysis of the interviews in this first phase revealed various problems or challenges for the young graduates, rooted in their inexperience, their lack of knowledge and skills,

and a lack of high level intercultural communication skills which they found were necessary in an INGO intercultural workplace.

To develop a deeper understanding of the experiences of young graduates, the second phase of interviews with young graduates were conducted from September to November 2012, using an interview protocol based on a 'sense-making interview' strategy developed by Dervin (1992, 1994, 1999). One or two weeks before my face to face interview with each participant in the field, I engaged him/her in a pre-interview talk by Skype. The aims of these talks were to: exchange general information, get to know each other, and familiarize the informant with the requirements of the interview. The information of the pre-interview was transcribed and translated and analysed together with members of the advisory team, to identify potential words, concepts, sentences and themes to explore further in formal interviews (*cf* Minichiello, 1995, p. 253). The following sections present how I located the informants, and conducted the interviews and data analysis.

3.3. Informants

Young graduates were selected on the basis of whether they were working at INGOs or had left their positions there very recently. Because the multifaceted nature of development work at INGOs, which requires staff to work in multidisciplinary project teams, graduates from any university could be recruited. However, the focus was placed upon two major fields of INGO projects in Vietnam, as listed in the 2007 directory of INGOs in Vietnam (VUFO-NGO, 2007), such as education and public health. I began by seeking to locate information-rich key informants for the in-depth interviews (Patton, 1990, p. 176), by asking acquaintances and friends working at INGOs questions such as 'Who knows a lot about...?' and 'Who should I talk to?' I purposely looked for critical cases, 'those that can make a point quite dramatically or are, for some reason, particularly important in the scheme of things' (Patton, 1990, p. 174). The criteria for identifying young Vietnamese informants were those who had graduated from Vietnamese universities within last five years before the interview, and were either working at INGOs, or got promoted/or left within first three years of their work at INGOs. The results of interviews in the first phase showed that young graduates had problems during intercultural interactions, such as misunderstanding during the communication process with people from other cultures, confusing situations due to cultural differences. To give insights into these issues, I conducted the second phase interviews with more young graduates. Since all the young graduates in the first phase interviews were working in education programs, in the second phase, I purposely focused on the health projects which were

also within the primary focus of INGOs to support the public health services in Vietnam. As outlined in chapter one, the political and social changes in the Vietnamese society before and during ‘Doi Moi’ had led to the fact that government lacked of necessary resources to respond to social welfare issues. Particularly the health care system at the grassroots level was inadequate to meet the demand of the wider society. Many of INGOs projects came to operate in this area as the major support for the government.

The selection of all the informants was conducted in a culturally appropriate way, initially through previous contacts who acted as the brokers between the researcher and the informants, because this was consistent with the ways of operating in Asian cultures like Vietnam (Kim, 2006). The author worked for INGOs in Vietnam more than 10 years ago and had built and maintained personal contacts with many Vietnamese staff who are involved in a wide network among INGOs. These personal contacts became the key brokers to many young new staff at INGOs. Initial contacts through brokers gave positive result in a small number of young graduates who agreed to be interviewed.

Some contacts then were generated using a snowballing technique, where the informants introduced some other informants who met the criteria of the research. This snowballing technique had the advantage that these potential informants also were very likely to be information rich, even if they had left their position in an INGO. The interviews were guided to explore the interviewee’s daily tasks, the difficulties in completing the tasks, and personal strategies employed to overcome barriers to task accomplishment. Through their explanations of finding solutions to problems, I was particularly interested in their reflections on attributes they had developed at university and any new attributes that they gained at work.

As I did not know, prior to talking with the informants, how many would consent to be interviewed, the number of in-depth interviews depended on how effectively I could build rapport with the potential informants and on the latter’s volubility (Minichiello, 1990). Patton (1990, p. 184) explains that a researcher can study a specific set of experiences for a larger number of people (seeking breadth) or a more open range of experiences for a smaller number of people (seeking depth) because ‘in-depth information from a small number of people can be very valuable, especially if the cases are information-rich’. The total number of interviews was 35 (phase one: 21 informants, phase two: 14 informants), comprising 19 young graduates, eight university teachers, six international employers and two Vietnamese managers. The informants covered different age groups from 20-30 (all 19 young graduates), 30-40 (2 Vietnamese managers, 5 university teachers),

and 40-50 and above (6 international employers, and 3 university teachers) to explore their different views about the extended process of INGO operations in Vietnam (see table 1).

I contacted the located informants to ask for their consent and to advise them that the interviews might interfere in the participants' daily work and might cause discomfort. The participants were asked where and when they would like to be interviewed. Each interview was conducted in a quiet, private space, so that we were not interrupted or distracted by routine work or people passing by. The anonymity of respondents was ensured, by recording the names of participants, or any personal data identifying them separately from the interview transcripts. Pseudonyms are used throughout the thesis for all participants. The voluntary nature of the interview was also ensured and the interviewees retained the right not to be interviewed or to withdraw at any stage of the research. If any participant decided to withdraw during the interview, all data already collected from that participant was to be destroyed. In reality, all interviewees completed their interviews (see appendix 9 – ethical clearance).

The selection of three groups of informants help to answer the first research question '*what attributes are expected of young Vietnamese graduates by senior Vietnamese INGO managers, and by international employers in the INGO sector?*'

Table 1: The informants

Group of informants	Total	Female	Male	Age group	Years of experience
International Employers	6	2	4	40-65	15-40 years
Vietnamese managers	2	1	1	35-40	15-20 years
Vietnamese young graduates first phase (interviewed from December 2010 – January 2011; graduated from 2004 to 2009)	5	4	1	24-28	1-6 years
University teachers	8	3	5	35-45	5-20 years
Vietnamese young graduates second phase (interviewed from September –November 2012; graduated from 2006 to 2012)	14	11	3	22-26	6 months – 6 years

The international employers and Vietnamese managers

It was decided that a group of top managers working at INGOs which included both international employers and Vietnamese managers was the most suitable group of employer informants because they had the strongest impact on the decisions made in the organisation. In some cases, I also interviewed supervisors who were involved in the recruitment process, where these persons were experienced in selecting graduates, and could assess their qualities (De Weert, 2007). International informant selection criteria required those who were non-Vietnamese, and who held management positions in INGOs in Vietnam. Where possible, INGO employers were selected from different organisations than ones where the young and newly graduated informants worked, to avoid a conflict of interest within one organisation.

The group of international managers included six expatriates from the USA, Sweden, the Netherlands, and UK. They held top positions in the organisation they represented, such as Directors or Country Representatives. All of these interviews were conducted in English after the informants had read the research information and agreed to answer. Interviews lasted from 45 minutes to 60 minutes per interview. The group of Vietnamese managers included one woman and one man holding positions as Deputy Director and Program Coordinator. The interviews with Vietnamese managers were in Vietnamese.

The focus of the in-depth interviews with international employers and Vietnamese managers was to explore attributes and skills expected of young Vietnamese graduates in the INGO sector. Topics for the interviews covered their work experience outside Vietnam, their perception about Vietnamese staff and, wherever possible, comparison with non-Vietnamese staff they had previously worked with, their perception of working in an INGO, and their comments on any difference between Western values and values among the Vietnamese staff.

University teachers

In order to develop a broad understanding of the current educational context in which young graduates might have developed graduate attributes, I interviewed eight Vietnamese academics. These university teachers (five males, three females) agreed to participate in the research after reading the research objectives. Several others refused for personal reasons such as concerns about being interviewed, despite recruitment being conducted through personal contacts in accordance with the tradition of Asian cultures (Putnam, 2000).

The eight informants were teaching across seven different subject areas at eight universities; one specialized in teaching public health, one accounting, one international relations, one social work, one civil law, one publishing business, and two in political science. The selection of the lecturers was arranged so as to correspond closely to the types of project work at INGOs, as demonstrated through job advertisements, which ranged from English translation to the management of projects relating to education, health, safe water, welfare, and child rights. The selection of teacher informants was designed to provide a broad understanding of the likely educational experiences of young Vietnamese graduates working on INGO projects relating to education, health and child rights. The selection intentionally included an academic in social work because this discipline is closest to the work at INGO projects, and the future graduates from this discipline would be very likely to work for development projects. Among seven university disciplines that these eight teachers were teaching, four disciplines matched with those of eleven out of nineteen young graduates. Four universities (public health, economics, law, foreign languages) from which 11 of the 19 young graduates graduated, were also the universities where four of the eight teachers worked.

Table 2: Matching between university teachers' disciplines and young graduates' disciplines

University Field	Teacher	Graduates	Year of Graduation	Year of interview
University 1 – publishing	Mr H	Nil	NA	NA
University 2 – law	Mr Ng	Ms Kim	2012	2012
University 3 - social work	Ms Hg	Nil	NA	NA
University 4 - foreign languages and international relationship	Mr HN	Ms Mau; Ms Dao	2006, 2011	12/2010, 2012
University 5 – economics	Mr Dz	Ms Tran	2012	2012
University 6 - public health (1)	Ms BN	Ms Hong, Ms Dang, Mr Ta, Ms Lien, Ms Luu, Mr Xuan, Ms Le	2011, 2011, 2011, 2011, 2008, 2007, 2011	2012, 2012, 2012, 2012, 2012, 2012, 2012
University 7 & 8 – politics	Ms C Mr L	Nil	NA	NA
University 9 – Foreign Trade	Nil	Ms Vu, Ms Nguyen	2009, 2004	12/2010, 1/2011
University 10 – Hydrology	Nil	Ms My	2007	12/2010
University 11 – English language	Nil	Mr Vi	2009	2012
University 12 – Technology English	Nil	Ms Ba	2008	2012
University 13 – Public Health (2)	Nil	Ms Cuc	2012	2012
University 14 – English Teaching	Nil	Mr Pham, Ms Hoa	2005, 2006	12/2010, 2012

The interviews with teachers helped me to understand the teaching approach that these university teachers were using, which provided insights into young graduates' accounts of their university study experiences.

The young graduates

Nineteen young graduates (four male and 15 females) agreed to participate in the research. They came from six groups of university disciplines (Public health: 8; English language: 5; Economics: 3; Law: 1; Technology: 1; and International study: 1); and worked in eight groups of development projects, in four project positions (intern: 2; Project Assistant/ Research Assistant: 12; Project Officer: 4; Project Manager: 2), as shown in table 3. The group of young and recently graduated staff were 20-30 years old. The gender mix of the informants reflected the overwhelming number of

female staff at INGOs (about ¾ of the total staff) (appendix 2).. This is also a result of INGOs' mission to empower women. In recruiting staff, INGOs give priority to women than men.

Table 3: Type of universities young graduates graduated from and types of projects

University field	Number of graduates	Female	Male	Year of graduation	Type of project
Public Health	8	5	1	2007 (1 Male); 2008 (1 Female); 2011 (3 female) 2012 (1 female)	Reproductive health: HIV/AIDS; Health awareness raising; Child nutrition
		0	1	2011	Health awareness raising
		1	0	2011	Child sponsorship
Economics	1	1	0	2012	Reproductive health
Foreign Trade	2	2	0	2004; 2009	Education promotion for ethnic minority children
Law	1	1	0	2012	Monitoring & Evaluation
Hydrology	1	1	0	2007	Monitoring & Evaluation
Foreign languages and international relationship	2	2	0	2006	Education promotion for ethnic minority children
				2011	Life skills; Animal health
English language teaching	2	0	1	2005	Reproductive health;
		1	0	2006	Medical anthropology
Technology English	1	1	0	2008	Reproductive Health
Foreign languages	1	0	1	2009	Vocational training project

3.4. The interviews

To explore and obtain both retrospective and real-time accounts by those people experiencing the phenomenon of theoretical interest (Gioia et al., 2013), in-depth interviewing was used. This technique has the capacity to 'give voice to the informants' (Gioia et al., 2013, p. 16). The interviews provided opportunities for informants to reflect upon their performances and roles,

taking themselves as their objects of thinking (Kihlstrom, Beer, & Klein, 2003; Oyserman, Elmore, & Smith, 2012), and explaining what and why they were doing what they were doing.

In-depth interviewing is useful to ‘gain access to, and understanding of, activities and events which cannot be observed directly by the researcher’ (Minichiello, 1995, p. 70), because the researcher is not usually able to directly observe the informant in his or her everyday life (Minichiello, 1995, p. 72). Focused or semi-structured interviews can be used as part of the qualitatively-oriented in-depth interviewing model. This process ‘entails researchers using broad topic in which they are interested to guide the interview’. It is essential to have an interview guide or schedule developed around a list of topics *without* fixed wording or fixed ordering of questions (Minichiello, 1995, p. 65). As the intent is to discover the person’s view of an experience or phenomenon of study, the qualitative interview should be open-ended enough for the participant to provide a depth of knowledge on the research topic (deMarrais, 2004). It is helpful to use follow-up questions, or *probes*, ‘based on what the participant has already described’, the goal is to construct as complete a picture as possible from the words and experiences of the participant (deMarrais, 2004, p. 52) (see the interview guideline in appendix 4).

Interviews were conducted in either Vietnamese or English. International employers were interviewed in their working language – English. The rest of the interviews with the Vietnamese managers, university teachers, and young graduates were conducted in their mother tongue – Vietnamese - to encourage them to express their feelings, thoughts and emotion in a natural way. All the interviews were recorded with the consent of the informants, then transcribed, and translated into English.

Interviews were conducted in a conversational style with emphasis on listening and allowing the participant to account for their circumstances and the factors influencing them and shaping their experience and circumstances. A copy of the information sheet and consent form were prepared in English and translated into Vietnamese for presentation to the informants before all interviews were commenced. Informed consent was obtained from all interviewees. Those who agreed to be interviewed were presented with the interview guidelines before the interview began so they could feel free to talk about each issue as much as they wished.

All interviewees were informed that their information would be used only for the purpose of the research and would remain anonymous. All interviews were conducted after work, or during lunch breaks, so that their daily work was not interrupted. Prior to the commencement of the interview

each participant received a copy of the participant information sheet, consent form, and interview guide. Before starting the interviews, the informants were asked to sign consent forms which noted that their privacy and confidentiality were of utmost importance. The written consent of participants was recorded in code and kept on record. After the interviews, each informant was given a questionnaire to complete to indicate their demographic background, with their consent⁵. After all interviews had been conducted and initial analysis had been done, I followed up with the informants for clarification, as needed.

For interviews with INGO staff and employers, the interview guide (see appendix 4) was designed to draw out as much information as possible to address the overall goal of the research to *explore the ways in which Vietnamese graduates experience and engage in the intercultural work settings of INGOs in Vietnam.*

Interview guides used for both phases of interviews with young graduates (see appendix 4) consisted of three parts, each of which explored a stage of experience. The first stage was about the work history of the informants, the education background, the reason for working at INGOs, to help answer research question one ‘*What attributes are expected of young Vietnamese graduates by senior Vietnamese INGO managers, and by international employers in the INGO sector?*’. In this first stage, young employees were asked to recall their university education and to describe any relation between university education and their work at the INGO.

Guide for interviewing the Vietnamese staff at INGOs assists in tracing work history, from the discipline at university to job searching experience, and any past work experiences. Example questions are:

- Which discipline did you study at university?
- What is your job searching experience after graduation?

⁵ The raw data (field notes and interview transcriptions) was securely stored in my personal computer for the duration of the field work, then in researcher’s personal computer account at the School of Social Science, University of Queensland. At the completion of the project, all research notes, records and personal information will be destroyed immediately, except, as required by the university’s research policy, raw data on which the results of the project depend, which will be retained in secure storage and which will be destroyed five years after the completion of this study. Results of this project may be published but I will not include any data that might be linked to any particular participant. I will use pseudonyms in the final report to protect individuals’ privacy. I will not disclose other personal details that may identify the informants. No participant wished to receive a copy of the summary of findings of the interviews. Most of them, however, wished to be able to read any research papers based on data that they provided, therefore I will inform the participants with the relevant information about any research paper. Queries from participants in the research were answered in a discrete manner. For those who gave their names or personal contacts, their identity was protected and no individual name is used when reporting their views. Finally, informants had been provided the contact details of the ethics officer at the University of Queensland so that they could contact if they wished.

Each interview starts with an introduction section where the interviewer and interviewee conducted general information, and the interviewer asks for the permission to record the interview. Then the interview is recorded, and always begins with general information about the interviewee. For example:

Interviewer: Please tell me about how you started your work right after you finished your university? I will ask for further clarification when needed. For example, which year did you graduate? What did you study? From which university did you graduate? Did you work for NGOs right after that? (Interview Ms Nguyen).

The second stage explored personal experiences on the current job, through describing daily tasks, difficulties of the tasks and solutions to answer research question two '*To what extent do graduate attributes contribute to their competence in the intercultural INGO workplaces?*'.

For example, the following guide was used to explore further for the experiences in the current job:

- What was your previous job?
- What are work fulfilment requirements at your previous workplace?
- Why do you choose the current job?
- What are work fulfilment requirements at your current workplace?
- What do you do at work?
- How do you do those tasks?

To explore the gap between university study and the real work requirement the following guide was used:

- How do you prepare yourself for working in INGOs (taking training courses, internship, and volunteer)?
- What difficulties do you meet in fulfilling your task?
- How do you overcome these difficulties?
- How do you think university education prepared you for the current work at INGO?

The third stage was about the agency of young graduates in the intercultural workplace, was explored through asking them what they did on particular projects, in particular situations, and how informants thought others would view them in their positions in their organisations, to answer research question three '*in what ways do young Vietnamese graduates experience the intercultural work setting of INGOs, and what do they see as their roles in the intercultural workplace of INGOs?*'.

In the guideline, for exploring the agency of young graduates, the interviewer first focused on the respondents views about themselves, secondly, how they view others from the perspective of being staff at INGO:

- How do you see yourself as an INGO staff?
- How do you think outsiders see you as an INGO staff?
- How do the expatriates see you as an INGO staff?

To explore the role of graduate agency in responding to the requirements of the workplace, I asked how they responded to ‘critical moments’ when they needed to be creative/innovative in developing solutions, to answer research question four *‘How does the agency of graduates come into play in achieving competence in the intercultural workplace at INGOs?’*; and research question five *‘What strategies do graduates employ in achieving and enacting competence in the contexts of their work in the intercultural workplace at INGOs?’*

The interview guideline for the group of employers was structured in a similar way to explore their work experiences within and outside Vietnam, examples of the questions asked are:

- What is your discipline?
- Have you ever worked with non-Vietnamese before?

And to explore their evaluation of the Vietnamese staff:

- What are the differences between those non-Vietnamese and the Vietnamese staff at your current INGO?
- Do you find any different between western values and Vietnamese values?

The interview guideline for the group of university teachers focused particularly on their teaching experiences, to explore their perspectives on the skills they thought their subjects helped to develop for the students, and the teachers’ views on the real demand on the subject in the work market.

- How do you want your students to be when they graduate?
- What skills do you think your subject helps to develop for the students?

All the interviews were designed around a loose protocol to ‘avoid missing key aspects of the informants’ sense-making by imposing [my] preordained understandings on their experience’ (Gioia et al., 2013, p. 16). In interviews with young graduates lasting approximately an hour, the first 15 minutes or so were used to obtain background information about the work history of the

interviewee, including university discipline, any previous work experiences, the reason for choosing the current job, and the requirements of the current job. This part of the interview went on as a daily conversation between two acquaintances, in order to break down the distance between the interviewer and interviewee. Through the talk, the interviewee was given the right to decide what to tell on the topic of job experiences. The interviewer listened, noted the details relating to the interviewee's experiences of their current job, then asked for clarification in the second part of the interview. This second part explored the interviewee's experience of working in his/her current position, asking the interviewee to recall their feelings when they commenced their job, including the recruitment experiences, and the difficulties they encountered and how they solved them. Interviewees were also asked about how they viewed their position at the INGO, how they understand the view of his/her boss and outsiders about his/her position. Approximately the last quarter of an hour of the interview focussed on the interviewee's reflections on their university experiences and how working in an INGO might have improved his/her knowledge and skills.

Not all interviews followed this time structure since some interviewees were very forthcoming with information. Ms Nguyen, Mr Xuan, Ms Hong and Ms Kim had studied the guide and reflected beforehand, and imposed their own structure on the interviews. These participants had considered the interview guide in advance, and arrived at their interviews with key points they were keen to address. The interviewer did not have to use many probing questions to ask for clarification of information because their answers provided rich detail as they talked.

In contrast, many other interviewees had difficulty recalling their experiences at the first period at work, such as Ms My, Mr Van, Ms Mau, Mr Ta and Ms Le. To assist them in recalling past experience, I suggested they might recall a time that they found very difficult, or alternatively an incident which made a lasting impression on them. This technique worked well and allowed the interview to flow more fluently so that we were able to focus on the questions in the guideline.

In interviews with the teachers, it was the teachers who led the stories and tended not to give much extra clarification in response to the probing questions of the interviewer. This might reflect the way they view their positions within the constraints of university contexts which contrasted with the openness in interviews with young graduates.. The interviews with international bosses presented another type of problem. As the international bosses found it difficult to express their feelings to the interviewer due to language barriers, they mostly answered the research guidelines and did not give extra information to probing questions.

3.5. Data analysis

Data analysis began with a review of the literature on graduate attributes and agency, and graduates' transition to work, with the aim of finding relevant sensitizing concepts which could provide a lens for data analysis. This process revealed that the concepts of graduates' generic attributes (Barrie, 2006) and individual agency (Bourdieu, 1984) held potential for theory generation. Individual agency (Bourdieu, 1984) in particular provides a way to understand the intention, behaviours and actions of graduates when applying their resources at the workplace.

The data analysis is structured in terms of the framework to understand how graduates use knowledge and skills in the intercultural workplace at INGOs in Vietnam. As the framework aims to present the inter-relations between graduates' attributes, graduate agency at work, and the level of cultural intermediary work and cultural mediation performed by the young graduates working at intercultural environment at INGOs, the data analysis also looked for evidence of these three aspects – attributes, agency, and intercultural competencies. To shed light on how graduates apply their knowledge and skills, and experience, and respond to the workplace at INGOs, the results of the interviews of the graduates were analysed against the interviews of the teachers and the employers.

Graduates' university experiences and teachers' accounts on how they expect their students to be competent are compared against the models of graduate attributes derived from Barrie (2006), Bennett et al. (2000). The way graduates gained extra skills for their future work, and how they perform their skills at work were analysed against sociological understandings of agency (after Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992), and Evans (2007) to understand how graduates, through their reflexive agency (Bourdieu in Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992), strategically organise their acquisition of necessary knowledge and skills (Barrie, 2006, Bennett et al., 2000), and use their learnt knowledge and skills in newly emerged work settings (Evans, 2007).

In the current research, international employers used the notions of 'intangible qualities', 'team spirit', 'motivation' to describe their expectations towards the graduates. Young graduates used the notions of 'shock', 'confusion', 'anger', 'cultural differences', 'giving feedback', 'boss', and 'doers' to classify issues that demanded attention and action. The concepts that emerged from the interviews with the graduates were 'unawareness of cultural differences', 'inappropriateness of skills', 'shortage of appropriate knowledge', 'trials and errors', 'being cautious', 'in-between position', 'advocating', 'facilitating'. After full analysis of the interview transcripts, the concepts

led to sub-themes of ‘resources’ and ‘strategies’, which were linked to the two research issues of graduate attributes and graduate agency respectively. This open coding, as summarized in Table 4, was used to develop ‘generative and comparative questions’ as a guide to later coding, interpretation of data (*cf* Price, 2010, p. 157).

Table 4: Free codes – open coding

International employers	Vietnamese managers	University teachers	Young graduates’ university experiences	Young graduates’ work experiences (first phase interviews)	Young graduates’ work experiences (second phase interviews)
intangible quality, teamwork spirit, code of conduct, sharp comments, motivation, privacy, continue to learn	work-related skills, embarrassed, cultural differences sensitiveness, knowledge, experiences	follow the instruction, basic concept, continue learning, changing workplace	non-interactive learning, misunderstand	inexperience, lack of knowledge, anxiety, confuse, conflict, misunderstand, Western, Eastern, negotiate, convince, advocate, foreign model, traditional practices, customs, rules, cultural differences	inexperience, lack of knowledge, worry, share, advice, consult, interesting, proud, encourage, excited, thrill, adventure, young, dynamic

In table 4, the free codes/concepts were grouped into categories of ‘cultural differences’, ‘innovation’, ‘organisational regulation’, ‘local practices’, ‘cultural mediation’ and ‘cultural intermediary’. The final two concepts were used to distinguish between activities which were related to mediating conflicts during the implementation of the development projects, or acting as intermediaries for novel initiatives against traditional practices (Bowen, 2008, p. 13). Once novel categories such as ‘cultural intermediary’ and ‘cultural mediation’ emerged, it became easier to describe their properties and to break these down further into subcategories based on the particulars (when, where, why, and how) that were presented in the data (Wicks, 2010). I then gave those categories labels or descriptors (preferably retaining informant terms) (Gioia et al., 2013). At this point, I assumed the role of the researcher who treats herself as a knowledgeable agent who can (and must) think at multiple levels simultaneously – that is, at the level of the informant (terms and codes), and at the more abstract or theoretical level of themes, dimensions, and the larger narrative level, answering the important question “What’s going on here?” (Gioia et al., 2013, p. 20).

In a research project such as this one, as the research progresses, I starts seeking similarities and differences among the many categories (similar to Corbin and Strauss’ (2008) notion of axial

coding), relating categories derived from the open coding to their subcategories and testing these against the data (Price, 2010; Wicks, 2010). This process eventually reduces the enormous number of categories to a more manageable number of themes (Gioia et al., 2013, p. 20) which, in this instance included two central themes - 'mediation' and 'intermediary'. Often the theme does not immediately 'jump out' of the interview transcripts but may be more apparent if the researcher steps back and considers 'What are these folks trying to tell me?' (Bowen, 2008, p. 13). This was the case in this analysis. The initial coding led to concepts such as 'people in-between', 'confused', 'misunderstand', which were grouped into the sub-theme 'mediation' (Bochner, 1981); the concepts such as 'local practices', 'organisational regulations', 'national law', 'local people benefits' were grouped into a category of 'cultural intermediary'. The themes 'cultural mediation' and 'cultural intermediary' are concepts indicated by the data rather than concrete entities directly described by the participants. Once identified, the themes appeared as significant concepts that linked substantial portions of the interviews together (Morse & Field, 1995).

This analysis takes into account the context of radical social changes in Vietnam today as the wider social context for the strategies that these graduates employed at universities and at work. In relation to the specific intercultural environment at INGOs, the strategies of graduates are analysed to understand how they become interculturally competent and able to see relationships between different cultures (Byram, 1997; Deardorff, 2006), and to solve potential intercultural conflicts in intercultural interactions (Ting-Toomey & Kurogi, 1998). This strategy for data analysis gave insight to how the graduates' reflexive agency functions in their moving from the traditional university system, into the intercultural context at INGOs.

At this point, I came back to the raw data, to reconstruct and reconstitute categories and subcategories (Price, 2010). In turn, these two sub-themes emerged around the agency of the graduates in applying their knowledge and skills. One is to mediate between two (usually culturally different) parties in order to successfully implement a project, , and the other is to be intermediary in the process of socio-cultural change. These two sub-themes gradually emerged as a result of the combined process of the researcher becoming intimate with the data, making logical associations with the interview questions, and considering what was learned during the initial review of the literature (Bowen, 2008). At successive stages, these sub-themes move from a low level of abstraction of mediating change at work to become major, overarching themes of 'intercultural competence' (Byram, 1997) rooted in the concrete evidence provided by the data (Bowen, 2008, p.

16). As the themes clearly contribute to the theory, and additional data fails to uncover any new ideas about the developing theory, the coding process ends (Bowen, 2008, p. 16).

3.6. Limitations of qualitative research using in-depth interview method

In the in-depth interviewing process, there is a risk of a subjective bias of the researcher in response to the information provided by the informants. Moreover, the results of the research cannot be generalized, because of the small number of participants. To reduce the bias of the researcher, the structure, process, and practice of the interviewing are directed toward the goal of minimizing the effect the interviewer and the interviewing situation on how the participants reconstruct their experience (Seidman, 2012). The interviews were conducted as far as possible in a non-biased manner, by using open-ended questions which allowed respondents to ‘describe what is meaningful and salient without being pigeon-holed into standardized categories’ (Patton, 1990, p. 51). In other words, as the interviewer, I aimed not to show personal judgment on the story being told. Words indicating my point of view were avoided. Instead, neutral probing techniques were used to facilitate the conversation.

One possible limitation of the interview technique is the tendency that the interviewee tries to please the interviewer. However, in-depth interview, using an open ended and semi-structured interview guideline required the interviewees to recall their experiences and to explain them in their own way. They were encouraged to reflect on and explain why they behaved as they did in the past. In addition, they were asked to recount a long history of their journeys from university to their present position at work. Recording their experiences at different stages of their lives also helped clarify and validate their accounts.

This way of organizing the in-depth interviews increases the validity of participants’ comments (Seidman, 2012). De Vaus cautions that ‘the way in which the study is set up can eliminate alternative explanations for our findings’ (De Vaus, 2001, p. 29), and this has been taken seriously for the current research. Prior to the interviews, the participants were contacted and provided with the information about the research purpose and the process of the interviews. The informed participants were consulted about agreeing to be interviewed. Participants of the second round were interviewed briefly to exchange general information about the informants, the purpose of the research, and the process of the interview. Then the formal interview happened one to two weeks later. This way of organizing the interviews allowed time for participants to prepare for interview days and an opportunity to check for consistency of the information they repeated (Seidman, 2012).

Finally, the goal of the interview process is to understand how the participants understand and make meaning of their experience. The way the interviews were structured and conducted here allowed them to make sense for themselves as well as to the interviewer (Seidman, 2012, p. 27).

Another possible limitation of in-depth interviews is the risk of 'going native,' namely, being too close and essentially adopting the informant's view (Gioia et al., 2013, p. 15). To mitigate this limitation of interview technique, in their research, Gioia, Corley and Hamilton (2013) used other members of their research team to adopt an outsider perspective to critique interpretations. In the current research, I worked with the advisory team to review the interpretations of the interviews critically. Furthermore, during each interview, I paid attention to the initial interview protocol, to make sure that it was focused on the research question(s), tried to anticipate related issues about which I should ask, and to follow the informants' accounts in keeping with guidelines derived from the first phase of the research. Data from different sources and several groups of informants were compared to reduce the subjective bias of the researcher. The second phase used a sense-making protocol to check the themes that emerged in the first phase. This created a consistency over the course of the interviews. The data processing was conducted rigorously through open coding and axial coding systems to construct the data analysis framework. This data analysis framework became the foundation for writing up the findings and discussion of the research.

CHAPTER IV. THE CONTEXT OF THE TRANSITION FROM UNIVERSITY TO THE INTERCULTURAL WORKPLACE IN INGOS

4.1. Introduction

Making the transition from a Vietnamese university to the intercultural INGO workplace is likely to be a challenging step for young Vietnamese graduates. They must move from the education field, where the prevailing learning-teaching approach is highly traditional in that it requires students to listen to and follow their teachers, into a work field that requires not only independent, critical thinking, but also a different set of interpersonal skills and cultural sensitivity (e.g. Byram, 1997; Ting-Toomey & Kurogi, 1998), as outlined in chapter one and two. The main teaching method in Vietnam's universities has relied largely on lectures and tests, a result of the clear influence of Confucian principles (Kim, 2009), according to which teachers occupy a higher social position than students.

According to Vietnam Education Law No: 38/2005/QH11 of June 14, 2005, the objective of higher education is to educate learners to acquire political and moral qualities, and to provide them with basic scientific and professional knowledge, scientific working methodology and the ability to apply theory to professional activities (translated from the Vietnam Education Law No: 38/2005/QH11 of June 14, 2005). This Vietnam Education Law (2005) also states that university education must pay attention to the advancement of self-consciousness in study, independent study, creative thinking, practical skills and research activities. However, as discussed in chapter 1, the Vietnamese Minister of Education and Training (MOET) decides the core syllabus for each field, and the centrally planned system is too large to be flexible. Hence, there have been few changes to the traditional teaching-learning style that focuses on memorizing knowledge and practicing the learnt knowledge in a routine way (Nguyen Thi Thanh Hong, 2008). The pedagogical philosophy in Vietnam seem to work against the development of the self-reflective, independent, critical, and creative thinking required in the new type of workplace, such as INGOS, which are emerging in the era of globalisation (Tran & Swierczek, 2009).

This research aims to explore the transition of young graduates from university to the intercultural workplace of INGOS, and to investigate problems for which new graduates could be better prepared through their university study. The accounts of university teachers and the university experiences of the graduates can provide useful background information in addressing this. Adding employers'

perspectives on the young graduates commencing work in INGOs can help develop a comprehensive contextualized understanding of this transition. To this end, this chapter analyses data collected from INGO job advertisements sourced on the website of the NGO Resource Centre, and interviews with eight Vietnamese university teachers, six international employers and two Vietnamese managers at several INGOs in Vietnam to explore the expectations they placed upon their future staff. Also analysed are the aspects of the interviews with the key group of informants of this research – 19 young graduates from ten universities – which relate to their reflections on their university study. The purpose of comparing the views of the teachers, graduates and employers is to reveal any gaps that might cause difficulties for young graduates as they enter the workplace.

The views of the university teachers about university teaching and learning, the university experiences of the students, and the employers' expectations of the young graduates are analysed in that order. In addition, the requirements set in the job advertisements are also explored to give a picture of what the employers explicitly require from the graduates. Cultural dimensions of the intercultural workplace of INGOs in Vietnam are highlighted and discussed in a separate part of this chapter. These results will be further discussed in relation to the research findings about the experiences and roles of the young graduates working in INGOs in the following two chapters.

4.2. University lecturers' views on university teaching and learning

Eight university teachers (five males, three females) were teaching seven different subjects at eight universities; one specialized in teaching public health, one accounting, one on international relations, one social work, one civil law, one publishing business, and two were working in political sciences. These teachers agreed that their teaching had to follow the strictly regulated discipline framework approved by MOET.

A fixed framework for each discipline issued by MOET is a legal document that the universities are required to follow. The framework stipulates that there are two blocks of knowledge that the discipline should cover. The first block comprises general knowledge for undergraduate level and the second one is discipline-specific knowledge. The ratio between the first and second blocks could range from 25% + 75% to 35% + 65%. In this fixed framework, MOET states the expectations of knowledge, skills and attitudes to be achieved by the graduates at the end of the program. The objectives require the universities to provide graduates with discipline specific knowledge, including the basic concepts and skills to apply that knowledge. Tran Nga (2012) has observed that 'in Vietnam tertiary teaching was generally perceived as focusing on the teachers and

their teaching, in a “linked-chain” fashion, from MOET’s policy framework to university administrators, and to teachers’ (Tran Nga, 2012, p. xvi). Table 5, below, summarises MOET requirements of graduates attributes expected at the eight (discipline specific) universities of teacher informants in this research.

Table 5: Expected graduate attributes at eight universities (extracted from decisions on the requirements of the university degrees issued by the Ministry of Education and Training in Vietnam)

University/ or discipline	Expected graduate attributes
University 1 – Publishing	Knowledge: Have good knowledge of social science and humanities, market economy, publishing management Skills: professionally perform all stages of the editing – publishing process, to have skills for preparing the advertisement products, to manage the distribution channel, to prepare contracts and analyse business result.
University 2 – Civil Law	Knowledge expectation: understand the concepts, terms and conditions for apply different aspects of civil law; the measures to implement the civil rights and duties, to conduct the civil contracts. Skill expectation: capable to apply the civil laws, critical analyse the articles of the civil laws Other attributes: team work skill, science research inquiry skill.
University 3 – Social Work	Knowledge: have a good understanding about psychology, sociology, social work models, social work related knowledge; know how to make plan, support the implementation and evaluate the process; be capable to develop social work models to apply in real situation, participate in policy making process Skills: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To perform individual counselling, group consultation and community consultation to assist individuals, groups and households to solve problems. • To conduct need assessment, to seek for necessary resources for community development, to conduct community development work • To advocate, to contribute in policy making process • To be capable of conducting research inquiries
University 4 – Foreign languages Discipline: International relations	Expected graduate attributes: Provide students with the knowledge, confidence, and analytical abilities they need to make sense of an increasingly complex global and regional environment. Examines how individuals, communities, organisations and states interact and behave across local, regional and global levels.
University 5 – Economics	The university expects its graduates to be dynamic, be adaptive in a market economy and to have the abilities to use the new technology.
University 6 –Public Health	Expected knowledge: fundamental science and medical knowledge, basic concepts about public health, know how to identify and solve community health problem, understand the research methods for health preventive purpose, understand laws on health issue. Expected skills: to identify harmful environmental and social factors; be capable to prioritise community health issues, to identify suitable strategies and solution; to prepare plans and propose solutions, to organise public health activities, to monitor public health program at the community, to organise prevention activities at the community, to provide public health education for a healthy community
University 7 & 8 Discipline: Politic	Political sciences course to provide knowledge on ontology and epistemology concepts, and to create critical thinking skills for undergraduate students

Source: Decisions on higher education programs.

<http://www.moet.gov.vn/?page=6.11&type=documents>

It can be seen from the summary table that, for all but one university (University 5), the attributes that the universities expect their graduates to achieve focus on discipline knowledge, including the basic discipline concepts and skills to conduct the profession, and generic attributes. Teachers feel that the fixed syllabus does not allow them to be flexible in deciding the content of their teaching.

The system in the university sometimes limits the freedom of the teachers. We, the teachers, must teach the fixed syllabus. Of course, it is good. However, at times, I feel it is monotonous. There has been no change for a long time (Mr Ng, teacher).

The fixed content and time frame for a course requires teachers to try to cover all basic knowledge within a relatively short period. According to the teachers interviewed, this made the teaching monotonous as well as limiting their ability to explore new or strange concepts or knowledge outside the framework of the program. This condition unconsciously maintained the traditional teaching approach where the teacher lectured and the students took notes.

The teacher controlled the discussion, explained the unsolved issues. The teacher monitored the discussion, and controlled or gave explanation (Mr H, teacher).

To investigate the issue, I had to set a limit. I prepared the list of what to explore for the students. When I introduced the material, I had to guide the students how to read, so that students would not read unselected material (Mr H, teacher).

For Mr H, the teacher's knowledge of how to study a topic, what to read, what to explore was the goal that the students should achieve. The teacher's knowledge was gained through his understanding of which material was useful; hence, he transferred that understanding to his students, to avoid his students wasting time exploring useless material. As a result, the chance to make mistakes was limited; however, it also reduced chances to develop the ability to seek out relevant high quality scholarly literature to address problems. In such circumstances, students do not take the risk of exploring new ideas, to enhance creative thinking skills..

This view of the instructional role was also demonstrated through the accounts of other teachers. For example, Mr HN taught Vietnamese law, which required his students to read many legal documents. Mr HN thought there were so many such documents that his students might not be able to select relevant information; therefore he provided guidance to his students about which reference material to read.

The students had to read articles about Vietnamese law. It was difficult for the students. They would be overwhelmed by the available information, therefore I gave them instruction on what to read (Mr HN, teacher).

While this teaching and learning approach was common at Vietnam universities, some of these teachers were very skilful in combining the traditional teaching approaches and old philosophy with new approaches based upon individualised study, to respond to the challenges that globalisation has brought to contemporary Vietnam. The tight time framework of programs, and the traditional high status of the teaching job were combined in Mr Dz's teaching approach. Mr Dz – was a teacher at University 5, a long established, large university which is renowned for teaching economics, management and business in Vietnam. Mr Dz addressed the challenges posed by the time constraints of his program, by focussing his teaching on the basic concepts and relevant laws. He reasoned that, in any case, the students would have to update their knowledge when they went to work. As the country's legal regulations were changing quickly in reality, his teaching aimed to provide the foundational laws and regulations for his students. He explained that this was important, as members of the legal profession could easily violate laws if they did not understand and follow the regulations.

I usually told my students to be very careful, accurate, and obey the [economic] laws. If you break the law, you will have to pay (Mr Dz, teacher).

The university education cannot train graduates for a typical business. If you want to work at a company, you have to get to know that business company and its work approach. Not every business company is the same (Mr Dz, teacher).

I mainly explain the nature of the system. It is changing rapidly. It can even be quite different in the next month (Mr Dz, teacher).

Thus, the basic concepts provided by Mr Dz were designed to ensure graduates possessed a fundamental professional knowledge, upon which they needed to incorporate the actual requirements of their work to update their knowledge. This approach was seen in Ms BN's accounts as well. Ms BN lectured on occupational safety. She focused upon informing the students about how to use legal documents, rather than teaching every single law. Her explanation was similar to Mr Dz in that, as the system of legal documents were being updated and revised regularly, it would be not so helpful to remember exactly every existing law, since many could be out of date by the

time graduates entered the work place. The principles needed to use the legal system in order to solve a difficult situation would be the key competent for graduates in their future work. When asked about this approach of teaching, Ms BN said:

In my course, there is a part on the system of the legal documents. I taught the methods of using the law, for example, the laws on occupational safety (Ms BN, teacher).

I taught by giving provisional contexts, for example, which legal document to refer to if there is an accident in a certain type of work position. Who cause the accident, how much compensation there would be for the damage (Ms BN, teacher).

Similarly, Mr HN said that his teaching aimed to provide students with sound discipline specific knowledge. He also said that his graduates would need to train themselves at work before they could become competent professionals. Since he taught International Relations, he required his students to know both the discipline knowledge and foreign language skills.

We cannot expect a newly graduated student to be as competent as an experienced employee. Therefore, I focus on two aspects, including sound disciplinary knowledge and understanding, and good foreign language skills (Mr HN, teacher).

The accounts of the teachers demonstrate that they still focus on transferring discipline knowledge to the students, although some are clearly thinking about the competencies needed by graduates in the workplace.

Ms BN, who taught public health, applied a different teaching approach that combined theory and actual application through practicum trips. Her students had to complete many practicums during their three years of study. Generally, Ms BN thought these practicums enabled her students to understand how a particular theory could be applied in practice, which theory worked in which context, and how to find reasonable solutions to real life problems.

The first field placement happened in year two. The students spent two weeks in a district, investigated the health system and sent their feedback to the commune. The second field placement lasted for two weeks. In this second placement, the students needed to identify any health problem in the locality. The students could choose one issue to investigate by collecting data, conducting household surveys, or school surveys. The graduates then prepared a plan of action for the local authority (Ms BN, teacher).

This teaching-learning approach, backed up by a well-prepared practicum schedule throughout all the university years, had enhanced Ms BN's students' understanding of theory through application, by testing their knowledge and providing practical lessons. Her students learnt not only set theory in class, but also learnt how to make mistakes and how to correct mistakes when applying the theory in practice. Their successful experiences would be repeated in the similar future contexts, but their mistakes would be avoided or corrected in unfamiliar contexts at their future workplaces.

Teacher Ng also tried to encourage creativeness among his students. He was teaching law and encouraged his students to explore debates about progressive legal reforms that had not yet been legalized in Vietnam. Since the issues were still under debate in the national forum, his students had chances to build up their arguments and practice their research skills.

Last year, I supervised four students to do research on a very interesting topic - 'rights for homosexual marriage'. Vietnam has not approved that right yet. However, 13 countries in the world have approved that right. I wanted my students to approach new ideas, which might not be suitable for Vietnam today, but should be in the future (Mr Ng, teacher).

I raised the issues and the students developed the research outline, and research methodology (Mr Ng, teacher).

To a large extent, the accounts of the teachers emphasized the authority of the teacher. This was seen in the way the teachers decided for the students which issues to explore, which books to read, which information sources to use, and what limits should be applied to the research, as in the words of teacher H about how he guides his students to choose research topics or information to read:

I asked students to focus on actual requirements for this discipline in reality. For example, what the media says about this field, what is state management in this field, how organisations and enterprises operate in that field in reality (Mr H, teacher)

I directed students what to read, in order that students did not read unselected materials. ...Usually, students were able to retrieve information in the internet, but they must know how to select the information. ...I guided them to focus on the key perspective, to justify which perspective follows the official view... (Mr H, teacher).

The leading role of the teachers in students' doing research can be demonstrated through the accounts of other teachers:

Last year, I supervised four students doing research on an interesting topic about the right to marriage of the homosexual people. At present this right was not approved in Vietnam. However, 13 countries around the world have ratified this right. Therefore, I wanted students to explore that topic although it might not be applicable for Vietnam at present; it will be in the future (Mr Ng, teacher).

In my subject [on Vietnam laws], when I lectured about an issue, I asked students to explore the issue in reality by carrying out small research projects on actual situations (Mr HN, teacher).

Such an approach is unlikely to encourage their students to explore new knowledge or independently solve problems. However, the teachers' accounts suggest that this attitude is shifting, and that their approaches are a mix of old and new approaches to teaching. It was noticeable that some of the university teachers referred to the rapid changes in the job market and the fact that the graduates would need to continue learning after they completed their university study. They told how they responded to this by focussing on foundational disciplinary concepts and skills which they hoped their students would continue to build on once they commenced work. This perspective of the teachers gives some insight into the way Vietnamese graduates have been prepared for their future work. Interestingly, skills, such as teamwork, negotiation, communication, creative and critical thinking were not mentioned in these interviews. The young graduate interviewees' reflections on their university experience give another perspective on the preparation of the graduates for the university-work transition.

4.3. University experiences of the graduates

In the main, the accounts of young graduates about their university study accord with the university teachers' accounts in that the focus was on didactic teaching and relatively passive learning. However, all of the young graduates indicated that they were aware of the demands of the changing job market while at university, and they had sought out opportunities to learn knowledge and skills they thought would be useful of their future work. This was generally through different ways of informal learning. Graduates who graduated between 2004 and 2008 appeared to try to gain as many work skills as possible through different kinds of opportunity, including part time jobs, while those graduated more recently, from 2009 onwards, appeared to be strategically selecting types of skills that were more closely linked to their expected future careers.

4.3.1. Traditional teaching and learning

The graduates reflected that traditional Vietnamese teaching – learning approaches prevailed in their universities. This meant that their teachers generally lectured and they, as students, took notes and memorized the instructions of the teachers, as in the words of Mr Vi:

In the course on Vietnamese culture, the teaching method was that the teacher lectured and students noted down, like the literature subject at the high school but at higher level (Mr Vi, Project Assistant).

Ms Vu's account expands on the experience of being a student in this context:

If the teacher asked us to write 20 pages long assignment, we wrote up 20 pages, then submitted to the teachers; and that was all. There was no sharing between students and teachers. Meanwhile, what we wanted was the feedback from the teachers (Ms Vu, Project Officer).

For the majority of subjects, the teachers lectured, and the students took notes thoroughly, so as to memorize those notes for the final exam (Ms Vu, Project officer).

The teacher came to each desk to show every single student how to do (Ms Vu, Project officer).

Ms Hoa gave another example of being a student in a class where there is little opportunity for active learning:

I studied a course on teaching and presentation methods. However, the teachers did not teach us how to present. No, they did, but just the theory in the textbook. Everyday they introduced the theory of the methods then asked us to explore those methods. But they did not perform any role presentation, nor did they provide the steps to do in a presentation, such as what to talk, how to interact with the audience (Ms Hoa, Project Assistant).

Ms Hoa's accounts suggest that the students were the passive receivers of what the teacher thought necessary to study, and which skills to acquire. The students followed the teachers with little argument or opportunities for critical thinking about whether the knowledge was updated, or if it could be applicable in all contexts, or which skills were useful for which situations. As a result, Ms Hoa felt she had few opportunities to develop a capacity for life-long, independent learning:

My teachers only asked us to search through internet, but did not explain how to search, how to use the keywords for searching what we were looking for (Ms Hoa, Project Assistant).

Ms Hoa graduated in 2006 as a teacher of language. Though her professional knowledge was pedagogy, the teaching-learning method she experienced was that the teachers gave instructions on what to learn.

Even when the students were given chances to develop their reasoning in group work, opportunities for the students to exercise their agency were limited. The group work was very much influenced by the benevolent principle in the Vietnamese culture (Kim, 2009) where the group members listen to the group leader.

For a group presentation, a group of a dozen [students] sent [work to] one person to present, mostly the group leader or deputy. Many other members still did not dare to come up (Ms My, Project Assistant).

This comment suggests that the attitude of students towards their teachers carries over to group work among peers. However, there were also indications in the interviews with young graduates that several had been exposed to newer approaches to teaching and learning.

4.3.2. Non-traditional learning approach

Although traditional teaching-learning approach prevailed, where teachers lectured, and students took notes, some of the young graduates had had different experiences at university. These young graduates spoke of becoming independent learners while at university. For example, Ms Dao had opportunities to study with several international teachers in some subjects. Their non-traditional teaching approach was that the teachers discussed the background of the issue, expanding beyond the textbook content. This kind of teaching encouraged her to explore information relating to the lesson content.

If I did not conduct independent study I could not understand the lessons. It is difficult to explain why, but the international teachers helped me to become interested in study. For example, I had to read a thick English book on micro economics, because the teachers taught knowledge beyond the textbook. This helped me to be independent, to have critical thinking skill and to know how to raise questions (Ms Dao, interpreter/Project Assistant).

Doing research projects was another kind of new learning approach that encouraged teamwork spirit as well as personal responsibility for Ms My, who graduated in 2007 with qualifications in environment and hydrology. Ms My reflected that the common mode of learning at her university was similar to the findings of the Vietnamese researchers mentioned in chapter 1 (Nguyen Thi Thanh Hong, 2008). This traditional teaching–learning method lacked interactive communication between teachers and students; as commented by Ms My:

In the course on mathematical models, the teacher divided students into groups and assigned each group a task; for example, task 1 to group 1, task 2 to group 2, and task 3 to group 3. Then each group sent a person to present what they had prepared. It was just prepared by us and presented by one; the teacher did not give any advice (Ms My, Project Assistant).

However, Ms My was really impressed and excited with some new teaching methods applied by one of her teachers. In his course, she and her classmates were assigned one essay topic for investigating the pollution situation of craft villages in Vietnam. This assignment required them to conduct a wide and in-depth investigation of environmental information from all the sources they could access. Through this, Ms My developed her skills for searching for information, analysing situations, and information about the polluted environment at villages.

We searched for information on the internet, journal articles, and books. Then we gathered all information to provide an overview of the pollution situation in these villages. Then, we worked together to prepare the slides and the presentation. We presented to the whole class to make sure the teacher and others understood (Ms My, Project Assistant).

This teacher, instead of using traditional lecturing and paper exam-based methods, introduced an open learning opportunity for the students to explore information on a certain topic. The students had to decide which information was important, which was relevant, how to analyse the information and how to disseminate the information to others students. Ms My's account suggests that this teaching approach had generated not only knowledge but the skills to generate further knowledge, a kind of transferable attributes (Barrie, 2006) or far transfer attributes (Bennett, 2000). These skills were general enough to allow her to investigate future pollution issues as well as other issues, using information searching, analysis and comprehension skills.

Ms Dao is another graduate who encountered a new teaching approach while studying international relations at the university. She had a chance to conduct an agricultural co-research project with a Swedish student in a mountainous district in Vietnam.

We spent a month living and conducting the research in Ha Giang. There was a group of Swedish students conducting a research in Ha Giang. Each Swedish student was accompanied by a student in my class. Each pair worked in one research topic (Ms Dao, interpreter/ Project Assistant).

Although she did not study agriculture at the university, Ms Dao had developed her strategy of searching on the internet sources for the relevant knowledge about pesticide and its harmfulness to teach the farmers in the project area.

I only knew the basic concept that pesticide could have bad impact upon the water source and the polluted the air which was inhaled by the human being. However, when I worked in the field, I knew more about the knowledge (Ms Dao, interpreter/ Project Assistant).

When we saw that the local people did not know some knowledge, we Googled to find the suitable knowledge for the local people (Ms Dao, interpreter/ Project Assistant).

Another graduate, Ms Vu was involved in a project that she initiated - to teach English for children in difficulties. Ms Vu, who graduated in 2009 in international trade, had participated in a project with an INGO outside her university and was then selected for their study tour. Ms Vu had an exchange trip to the UK during her university period. When she came back, she developed her idea into a summer language camp for children in difficulties.

One informant, Ms Kim who graduated in 2012 in civil law described how she had developed her own approach to learning. She did not follow any fixed requirements of what to learn, what to do, or how to do it but developed her own learning strategies to achieve the objectives of her courses. She decided that what she needed to learn thoroughly was the fundamental discipline knowledge, the principles of law and the state. Then she applied those principles in all other law courses. Her strategy worked quite well as she did not have to spend much time in studying, she could do a part time job during her study, yet excelled at the final exam.

We had a course on the fundamental principles of state and law. If you know only that course very well it will be OK to learn all other law courses because the former formed the thinking method on law for all other courses (Ms Kim, Project Officer).

During my study, I did not focus on learning the law knowledge but on the thinking method, particularly because the Law knowledge was changing very fast. I did not focus on the law. But I focused on learning how the law-makers think. If I understood their thinking patterns, and I followed that approach, I would surely be successful (Ms Kim, Project Officer).

Others reflected on how they developed research skills at the university. While students, Ms Hong and Mr Ta became confident in applying research methods into exploring real problems, to know the purpose of a research, and to know how to conduct a research in reality.

I learned most of these [facilitating] skills from the university. During three years at the university, I participated in several research activities where I learned how to organise the training (Ms Hong, Research Assistant).

In year two, I had a practicum at the commune health centre. In year four we had two months practicum at the commune health centre when we had to prepare a year plan of public health activities for the centre. We identified the problem and activity to solve. In one commune, we identified that the priority to solve was waste processing (Mr Ta, Project Officer).

All graduates also participated in different extra-curricular activities during their university time, such as part time jobs, research projects, volunteering.-. At a time of significant changes in the society, the dynamic political and economic contexts of the Vietnamese society, as outlined in chapter 1, have changed the social constraints upon graduates, and graduates have changed from adopting a 'wait and see' passive approach (Evans, 2007) for job allocations given by the state to actively seeking jobs (Nguyen Phuong An, 2002).

The interviewed graduates showed clear ambitions for extra attributes that they thought necessary for future jobs. They made efforts to obtain suitable knowledge, and skills to equip them for future work activities. Graduates demonstrated that although their agency was bounded (Evans, 2007) by the traditional approaches to pedagogy and prescribed syllabus at the universities, they could change their circumstances by preparation in the skills they thought necessary for the requirements

of future work. In other words, through their individual agency, they were proactive in their response to the labour market.

In summary, the university teaching and learning in the accounts of the university teachers and graduates demonstrate the influence of traditional teaching approach in Vietnam. However, the accounts also demonstrate that both the teachers and graduates were aware of such dramatic societal changes that their university learning could not keep up. A proportion of teachers were trying to develop graduate attributes such as teamwork, or independent and critical thinking, as these attributes would allow their students to continue expanding their knowledge once they left university. In turn, graduates tried to go beyond the theoretical knowledge in their textbooks. They participated in extra activities or part time jobs, which, enabled them to develop important attributes. However, unlike the employers interviewed in this study, neither teachers nor students seemed to be aware, within the context of the university, of the complex intercultural dimensions of many workplaces in the era of globalisation. This lack of awareness meant the young graduates encountered unexpected difficulties when entering such an intercultural workplace at INGOs, as will be discussed in the following chapter.

4.4. Employers' perspectives on attributes required for the intercultural workplaces at INGOs

As discussed in chapter 2, researchers (Barnett, 1990; Konstam, 2007; Maclean & Ordonez, 2007) have demonstrated that employers around the world are looking not only for discipline knowledge but also attributes such as teamwork, life-long learning, critical and independent thinking from graduates. Researchers have shown that employers' expectations of new employees differ markedly from university teachers' expectations of their students. Employers expect new employees to deploy generic employability skills (Maclean & Ordonez, 2007, p. 136), to be flexible (Konstam, 2007), and to satisfy the specific requirements of their jobs. The following exploration of the perspectives of employers at INGOs in Vietnam can inform the expectations of the employers at INGOs towards the Vietnamese graduates.

As explained in chapter 1, NGOs worldwide are 'high profile actors in the field of international development, both as providers of services to vulnerable individuals and communities and as campaigning policy advocates' (Lewis & Kanzi, 2009). They have also been described as 'private organisations that pursue activities to relieve the suffering, promote the interests of the poor, protect the environment, provide basic social services, or undertake community development' (World Bank

2002, p. 1). Summarizing the shared vision of NGOs around the world, Willis (2011) states that the value of NGOs is to help disadvantaged people and people in difficult circumstances, to facilitate common people to have their voices heard, to develop stronger civil society and democratization (Willis, 2011).

The contemporary Vietnamese political and social context has meant that INGOs in Vietnam are intercultural workplaces. Each INGO usually had one or more international expatriates working as technical consultants together with project teams, most of whom were Vietnamese. Moreover, INGOs operating in different countries around the world, could implement cross-national development ideas. These characteristics made INGOs different from local NGOs which operated within the country boundary.

The perspectives of employers at INGOs in Vietnam provide one way for understanding the expectations of employers within a specific intercultural context. These employers had sets of requirements for graduates that they explicitly announced in job advertisements, as well as implicit expectations for their recruitment interviews. The following sections present the research findings about the recruitment for any new staff to INGO projects.

4.4.1. The recruitment process

The recruitment process often started with the human resource manager/officer or the person in charge preparing a list of job requirements and duties and posting it through different channels such as websites or newspapers. After the applicants were short listed, they were interviewed and selected. Then the successful applicant was required to go through a probation period to confirm their employment.

Mr B, a senior Vietnamese manager who had worked for INGOs for nearly 20 years since his graduation, was the person responsible in his INGO for conducting the recruitment process, from preparing the list of requirements to interviewing the new graduates and mentoring the newly recruited during the probation period.

Before the recruitment process, we listed down the prioritized criteria, decided the most important criteria and most necessary experience (Mr B, Vietnamese manager).

The list of expectations was tailored according to the requirements of the position.

Normally when we recruit a new person, we would have some kind of criteria, the expectation is of course depending on what the job is and what they are here to do, right?
(Mrs A., international employer).

The website of the VUFO-NGO Resource Centre has been a reliable address for INGO job seekers since it was created. This is a common website that networks the INGO community and links it with the wider society⁶. The explicit requirements in the job advertisements were the first milestones that the future candidates needed to reach in order to complete the recruitment process. Those successful at the job interviews were given an induction and a probation period before they could receive an official job offer. During this period the new staff members were closely mentored, monitored and evaluated.

They [the new staff] will spend some time with me, so you know, I will talk about our INGO's experience, more, our strategy and so on, and then spend some time with each of the program coordinators the livelihood, government, humanitarian, and so on, learn about the program, they spend some time with the finance, HR people, learn about financial regulation, so on (Mr S., international employer).

Because you just graduate from university, we have to teach you step by step (Mr S., international employer).

And then there are objectives for their induction periods. So that is about things that they have to achieve and it is also about how they work. And if they don't meet the objectives then sometimes we won't confirm them in post (Mr S., international director).

More details of the recruitment process will be discussed in the following sections, from advertising to the interview process, and then to work performance.

4.4.2. Explicit expectations in the job advertisements for future staff

Twenty-two job advertisements for positions such as project assistant (PA), project secretary, project officer (PO), project manager (PM) and internship for education and health projects were selected from the official website of NGO resource centre during the period from 2009-2013. As not many positions such as PO, and PA were advertised, the researcher collected all the job

⁶Member INGOs can have other benefits from the website beside job advertisements. Different forums of the INGOs community share their discussion and concerns; updated information about country issues such as hunger, disaster or disease or emergency relief can be quickly transferred among the community.

advertisements explicitly advertising positions of PO and PA in these fields, and several job advertisements on internships or PM at health or education projects. The job advertisements were taken as a form of expression of the expectations that employers had towards future staff. An analysis of the job advertisements revealed that the primary requirement in terms of qualifications for all job advertisements was a specific university degree (Medical Doctor, Epidemiology, or Health Policy); or degree qualification in a relevant subject (rural development/agro-forestry, natural resource management, foreign language, social science, social work, community development). English language skills were compulsory in all job advertisements. Work-related experience was also mentioned in all job advertisements, even for intern positions (as a preferred point). In more senior positions and specialized jobs (for example medical doctor), the number of years of experience required could be from two up to five years. This requirement was very challenging for graduates who had just finished three or four-year university programs.

Table 6: Types of positions advertised for INGO projects

Position	Number of Job advertisements
Project Officer	8
Intern	5
Project Assistant/ Project Secretary	4
Development Manager/ Information Manager	2
Human Resource Officer	1
Finance Officer	1
Public Health Medical Doctor	1

Only a small number of the job advertisements listed requirements in relation to generic attributes such as critical thinking, problem solving and communication. Among the 22 INGO job advertisements, four of them required attributes such as interpersonal skills, cultural sensitiveness, team work and self-directed learning skills. The remaining 18 did not mention skills such as teamwork, creativity and independent thinking, or interpersonal skills to interact with local partners, or cross-cultural sensitivity skills in their requirements. The work experience requirement in the job advertisements was always very short and brief, and mainly required the young graduates to have

skills relating to the specific job knowledge, such as liaising with partners in agricultural state offices (requirement for agricultural project), or skills to manage community development project.

In summary, all job advertisements reviewed had requirements for a University degree, and work experiences relating to the specific job being advertised. Only a small proportion mentioned attributes such as interpersonal skills, cross-cultural sensitivity, team work and self-directed learning skills. In these brief requirements for jobs at INGOs, it is not possible to know which specific criterion, if any, was used to select a candidate from a group of similar ones. The interviews with the employers who conducted the recruitment interviews and chose the candidate would reveal how employers give meaning to the advertised criteria and qualifications. In addition, interviewers could clarify the implicit expectations to decide which candidate would be successful in the recruitment process.

4.4.3. The weight of work experience at the job interviews

As stated in many job advertisements, interviews with international directors and Vietnamese managers also demonstrated that job-related experiences were very important for the future staff. However, discipline knowledge was appeared less important in the context of the interviews. This is interesting, given that a university degree was a compulsory requirement in all job advertisements. Talking about the value of the degree, Mrs N., a senior employer thought that a degree was only the start of a new learning process, a benchmark of the learning achievement, not the end of the learning pathway. Having earned a degree does not mean the holder knows everything:

For us it is a beginning. But, the next step. You know we get this degree but we don't expect that we have learnt everything, or that we know everything and that we don't need more training; and that we don't come back from a master degree as an expert(Mrs N., international employer).

This views on the value of a degree is similar to the findings of De Weert's (2007, p. 231) research which demonstrate that 'degrees provided information about what candidates had learned'; a degree is 'a demonstration of application and discipline and having reached a certain standard of verbal and written reasoning. It is evidence of hard work and commitment and we take it as a sort of a base level of potential that people have' (De Weert, 2007, p. 231).

All six international employers (four male and two female) and two Vietnamese managers (one male and one female) were very senior in their organisations. Five international expatriates and two

Vietnamese managers had been working for INGOs in Vietnam for about 20 years. From their many years of experience, employers understood that experience could shorten the length of time necessary to get to know the job, and could ensure that the work will be done to the expected requirements, at least as the result of the past experience, as Mr S. and Mr Th. explained:

The job advertisement is posted. We looked for four years of experience, something like that, ideally with another NGO or also past experiences working with USAID funded project, or, particularly for the admin staff ... because that would be helpful since there are a lot specific kinds of work requirements and so on (Mr Th., international director).

For any job, any full time job, we require minimum two years of experience and often more (Mr S., international employer).

Another Vietnamese senior manager, Mr B reconfirmed this requirement for work experience in his accounts of several recruitment processed he was in charge of at his INGO. However, he added that job skills were very significant to do the job, therefore, he preferred someone of good skills.

The selected candidate should be the most suitable person, not necessary the best one (Mr B, Vietnamese manager).

He went on to clarify that ‘the best one’ would be the most highly qualified one, while ‘the most suitable person’ meant the person with relevant skills.

My point is that the candidate does not need to be the best, but she/he must have rich experiences and skills. [However], experience cannot be the only requirement. For example, there is a position for marketing management, which should be suitable for someone who is very good at oral communication. As a result, I would prefer the candidate with undergraduate degree (rather than candidate having postgraduate degree) if she/he can communicate effectively, because communication skills are most important in contacting business companies (Mr B, Vietnamese manager).

Confirming the importance of work-related experiences, Mr T., a senior international employer said that right experiences were important, not just any job experience. Mr T. was a medical doctor and had worked for INGOs in several developing countries before moving to Vietnam for an INGO in reproductive health. Before working in Vietnam, he had worked in Cambodia, Egypt, Kyrgyzstan, and Kazakhstan and some countries in Africa. He had different kinds of experiences, from hospital

doctor, to consultant for health projects at INGOs. Through his own career pathway, he realized that for each job, the relevant experiences would be more useful than just any job experience.

Does the experience fit? The job experience? It is of course important. But, more important I think, if somebody has the right experiences (Mr T., international employer).

This requirement of work-related experiences is really a challenge for new graduates who often have theory knowledge but lack of real experience.

It depends on the person we have recruited. Sometimes we have had people applying for the job, but not the people we wanted to apply, right, so some lack of background, maybe lack of experience, so on, which we have to make sure that we can provide them from inside (Mrs A., international employer).

All these employers agreed that work related experiences were the most concern in recruiting the new staff. This was unified from the explicit formal statement of job requirements during the advertising for the jobs, or in the implicit expectation of the employers at the job interviews.

4.4.4. Expectations regarding the collaboration and communication skills of future staff

The way in which project work is organised in INGO environments relies on teamwork and close collaboration among team members. Such teamwork requires contributions from everyone, no matter the position one holds. As the development projects are all tailored according to the needs of the benefit communities and target groups, the objective of each project is unique. In pursuit of this process, the employers expect young staff to be open in raising their ideas, to be prepared to accept direct feedback, and to acknowledge and reflect on their own weak points.

However, communication styles of the employers and the Vietnamese staff were not the same in all contexts. The international employers were used to a direct and straight forward style in giving feedback, and continued that communication style at their INGOs in Vietnam. They came from European countries and the US, which Triandis (2000) argues to be low-context cultures. Anderson, Foster-Kuehn, & McKinney (1996) and Barkai (2008) conceptualize low-context culture as the culture where, during the communication process, the listener is assumed to know very little and must be told practically everything (Anderson et al., 1996; Triandis, 2000). As a result, people from

low-context cultures are more willing to make enquiries - and challenge the authority (Barkai, 2008).

They [the staff] found that maybe they couldn't, they did not, they were not given the opportunity to do the type of work that they thought they would become able to do. Sometimes it is a little bit disappointing, sometimes they did not have a clear counterpart with whom to share, to learn from, so on, which is important, and that was not sustainable to continue the job, for instance (Mrs A., international employer).

The difference of communication styles sometimes prevented the information sharing between the international expatriates and the Vietnamese staff.

Actually for international organisations, you can more freely express your ideas..., Usually, for the Vietnamese, I was sure that the young people could not always be confident in sharing all their thinking (Ms. KD, Vietnamese manager).

Sharing information is difficult. People [the Vietnamese staff] tend to keep their information to themselves; or least to share between one department and other.... , I think, you want to keep to your own (Mrs A., international director).

However, in Mr S.'s INGO, this problem was mitigated by the democracy principle that no idea was wrong:

I mean [my INGO] is democratic, so, they would, you know, staff will challenge me, if I said 'Can we do this', they said 'No. Don't think we should, we should do that'. Ninety percent of the time they are right, and I am wrong (Mr S., international employer).

At the time of the interview, Mr S. was the country director of a leading INGO which focuses on education, sustainable livelihoods, fair trade, gender equality, and disaster preparedness. The organisation conducts campaigns for change; provides emergency response; implements development work around issues such as climate change, conflict and natural disasters, health, education, debt and aid, gender equality, the right to be heard, trade, private sector, and global economic crisis. Mr S.'s INGO worked with communities and advocated for the well-being of the poor, to have their voices heard in the decision making process. This value of democracy had been campaigned for by his organisation over time, and was applied within the organisational operation.

This democratic principle of ‘right to be heard’ was ensured by a strict organisational rule so that everyone would not violate others’ rights, and that everyone could communicate their ideas freely.

This freedom to voice opinions, however, is not familiar in a culture like Vietnam, influenced by Confucianism, where seniority is respected, and people are encouraged not to hurt others’ feelings (Kim, 2008). The Vietnamese culture is also classified in the group of high-context cultures (Triandis, 2000) where people keep the meaning hidden in their ways of communication. The obvious contrast between low-context and high-context cultures is that in high-context culture, the listener is already ‘contexted’, so does not need to be given much background information, thus people from high-context cultures are less likely to question and challenge the authority, especially the more senior or higher status positions (Barkai, 2008; Triandis, 2000). Moreover, high-context cultures interpret messages in terms of the broader context of shared social and cultural assumptions, and rely on the inferred meaning rather the literal meanings, thus, the meaning of a message comes primarily from the implicit understanding of the social context and of relationships surrounding the parties involved (Triandis, 2000). In other words, for members of high-context cultures, what is not said is often as important as what is said (Anderson et al., 1996; Triandis, 2000, p. 146).

There are certain things that are typical Vietnamese after all, you know, like hierarchy in work, right, like age, position, and so on. So you, sometimes it is difficult to tell a younger person to tell an older person to do something, right. But, sometimes you forget that because in Europe that is normal (Mrs A., international director).

You never, never want people to lose face or to be embarrassed in front of other people, I think it is the really important thing, but that is very important anywhere, I mean US or wherever, you don’t want that but even more so problem in Asia, it is very important (Mrs N., international manager).

As all the international employers come from European countries or the US, they practised straight up feedback and expect that the Vietnamese partners and colleagues are familiar with the direct feedback. However, the Vietnamese staff might take offence in the international boss’ direct comments, and loss of temper. These different communication styles have been difficulties for both the international expatriates and the Vietnamese.

I think Vietnamese people have very different culture about if you get angry. I think in the US people don't get as upset if you get angry as the Vietnamese people who get very upset if you get so angry towards them. When I first come, I mean, I don't think I have bad temper, I don't get angry very much, but I got one time, soon after I came, I spoke very sharply to one of our Vietnamese staff, I didn't mean to offend her, or anything, but she got very upset (Mr Th., international director).

You must not lose your temper, for instance, because that will absolutely stop you, you won't get anywhere at all if you get angry or lose your temper because nothing will happen, you have to choose to be kind and smiling, try to make people understand what you want (Mrs A., international director).

The indirect communication style of the Vietnamese is influenced by the Confucianism principle of benevolence, which includes traits such as self-restraint, self-discipline, filial piety, loyalty, personal duty, and positive interpersonal behaviour, and the social hierarchical system of respect for age (Kim, 2009). It is necessary to restrain one's emotions to keep face for the communication partner in order to preserve a good relationship for the future, and to show your respect to seniors, as in the words of Mr S.:

[a state official advised an INGO international employer] when the new person [new international director] comes to the village, she should go to see the village chief.... not to think that just because something works in some other countries, doesn't mean it works in Vietnam (Mr S., international employer).

This was also seen through the way local people communicated with international consultants whose roles were to give advice to local communities, as observed by Mr T.:

Sometimes they find it difficult to speak in meetings, especially if they are not sure what they have to say, what the boss wants to hear. Ah, that can be a little bit difficult sometimes. Not just for me but also for our partners for the kind of work that we do with themI think that comes for the regard for the hierarchy and for the positions that people hold, that the Vietnamese tend to have those things in higher regards than people in the West, for example (Mr T., international employer).

The two types of cultural contexts have their own customs, practices or norms. Problems can arise if the international expatriates expect the Vietnamese staff to understand and practice similar norms of their culture. This is illustrated in relation to the concept of 'privacy' in the following account:

The Vietnamese colleagues felt sad if the international volunteer was sitting alone at home, you know, so they came, maybe at 6 o'clock in the morning and wanted to take them out [to a cafeteria]. While the [international] volunteer, you know, in Europe we need our private space. For the volunteer it was a little early. So this kind of thing. You know, the Vietnamese, they wanted to be kind; they wanted to help the volunteer, while the volunteer may prefer to sleep in the morning (Mrs A., international director).

Or in the account of Mrs N. when she explained that she had the habit of saying 'thank you' to her staff, however, they were not expecting to receive 'thanks' from their senior managers. Mrs N. felt difficult to change her practice and expected her staff to get used to that way.

I have to keep my staff motivated by saying thank you... But for many Vietnamese people who worked with me, yeah, that's they get quite annoyed. Yeah, because they take it more as a bit of an insult that I shouldn't acknowledge they do the right thing, that's their job, they are supposed to do that, and it is nothing special But I want them to understand, I still want to do it, even if I try not to, because for many years, it had been nature to me. So I could accept OK they can react that way but they also have to learn to accept that I was not always able to stop myself when I did something like that (Mrs N., international director).

As mentioned, the employers demonstrated that they preferred to recruit somebody with three to four years of experience. Nonetheless, the number of years of experience was not necessarily the primary criterion. Explaining the factors that decide the selection of a candidate among others, Mr Th. said he chose staff who did not necessarily have the right work-experiences, but had the personal characteristics that he thought could enhance the teamwork.

But with Ng., she did not have that [work-related] experience, but her, we just felt so strongly that she would fit in well here, and she, and we just like her attitude, you know the way she conducted herself in the interview and her intelligence... we just like her [staff Ng.] very much, we like her personality, we like her enthusiasm. So, I mean, I think that a lot of time the decision that we made are really more for the intangible, you know, quality (Mr Th., international director).

Mr Th. emphasized the importance of compatibility and teamwork. His previous long work history in the US taught him that the most significant qualities for a staff are initiative, independence and collaboration. When he moved to work in Vietnam, he appreciated it if he found the same qualities in the Vietnamese staff.

The most important thing for us is having a team that works very well together, and gets along very well together, and enjoys working togetherWe both felt very strongly that is the most important thing, you know, compatibility with the team, and you know, willingness together to work as the team, and, because if you don't have that you can have a lot of problems (Mr Th., international director).

The general profile of good staff member described by Mr Th., and evident in the accounts of the international employers, would be unfamiliar for graduates of most Vietnamese universities, where students are expected to take instruction from teachers and engage in 'note taking, combined with reading textbooks and reference material', 'learning by memorising the lecture notes given in class' and 'learning according to what has been set out by the course outline and syllabus' (Nguyen Thi Thanh Hong, 2008). Employers, however, highly value creativeness, independence, and particularly teamwork.

I just cannot speak positively enough about the staff we have here, they work very hard; they are very dedicated to the work. They have a lot of initiatives and able to work independently as well as, you know, in a team concept and they get along extremely well (Mr Th., international director).

The significance of team spirit is confirmed by other employers, for example Mr J. and Ms KD.

I think I would say I have to pick one general thing, maybe it's ability of people to work in team and resolve conflict (Mr J., international director).

When recruiting people, teamwork is compulsory. It is unavoidable, and teamwork here means, this is a multi-culture organisation, so that everyone is required to have open attitude. Yeah, it is the requirement; however it depends on the capacity of each person. However, it is not voluntary, everyone must understand that it is the compulsory of the organisation, thus one becomes more comfortable (Ms KD, Vietnamese manager).

Team spirit is particularly important in a small INGO with a small number of staff; each staff member not only does multiple tasks but also needs to be ready to take over the duties of other staff in their absence, so as to maintain the smooth running of the office.

Our responsibility is that, sometimes, especially in a small organisation, you need to be quite flexible; you need to take on maybe someone else's duty, sometimes if that person is away, something. But here it is not easy, because you have your job description, and you follow that one. Yeah, because you don't want to be blamed for having done something that is not really your job. But it is understandable in some way, sometimes it still requires on you because even if one is absent from work, the job still has to be done, right, so you might ask someone else to do it then, I know that it is really not very popular, because it means you take risk responsibility of someone else (Mrs A., international director).

Teamwork is 'not just about taking a specific role on a team but to be able to take different roles according to circumstances, and to work in several overlapping teams simultaneously' (Yorke & Harvey, 2005, p. 42), to have 'a certain amount of commitment to the company' (Henandez-March et al., 2007, p. 7). Teamwork is understood as a means to enhance the organisational culture. A close knit team is 'a team that works very well together', 'get along well together', and 'enjoy working together', that create the harmonious spirit in the organisation.

The culture of our INGO always encourages fair participation. There is no hierarchy. Everyone's opinion is respected, and the 360o feedback rule. ... for the new comers, or people moving from other smaller INGOs, they might have organisational cultural shock, particularly the teamwork rule, which is influenced by the individual team manager... to absorb the organisational culture, the role of the director of the organisation is very important (Ms KD, Vietnamese manager).

For development projects at INGOs, the internal relationships between the team members are significant for the success of the project. Projects are implemented by a project team in partnership with local partners. The project team size varies depending on the scale of the projects, but it often ranges from some to around ten staff. Typically, project teams are fairly small groups that have to cover a wide range of project activities. The collaboration within the team is the essential to run the synchronized activities harmoniously and effectively. Mr Th. believed that the qualities required to work in a team would be reflected more generally in the attitudes and behaviours of the staff towards work and other colleagues:

We felt very strongly that is the most important thing, you know, compatibility with the team, and you know, willingness together to work as the team, and, because if you don't have that you can have a lot of problems (Mr Th., international director).

The idea of working in a close knit team, those qualities are the most important things that I think even more important than some specific academic qualifications, or specific types of the work spirit (Mr Th., international director).

In summary, both international employers and Vietnamese managers value collaboration but that they might go about developing it in different ways due to cultural differences. The Vietnamese culture values harmony, which can only be maintained by good collaboration among members. Key factors influencing good collaboration in Vietnamese culture include good communication skills that obey the rule of keeping face, and gaining trust, and particularly the teamwork spirit. For effective teamwork, both intangible qualities and interpersonal skills are significant to establish and maintain good relationships between members. Therefore collaboration was valued as the most important factor in the accounts of the employers, though it was not so explicitly expressed in the job advertisements. Actually, in the accounts of the employers, collaboration was prioritized over disciplinary knowledge and skills, since it was believed that good team would achieve the organisational goal.

4.4.5. Expectation on life-long learner attributes

When a young graduate commences work at an INGO, there is an essential change from a learner into a doer to implement activities that could lead to the visible or measurable impacts upon people or nature. However, from the perspective of employers, like Mrs N., the new employee is only at the beginning of their learning process, where knowledge and skills are continuously built up.

You know, you are still a learner. You got to be a learner for a long time. And you need to be able to step back, even though you have number of years [of experience] (Mrs N., international program representative).

Mrs N. is a senior American woman who has been working in Vietnam since 1999 through different INGOs which focus on health and HIV/AIDS issues. Besides Vietnam, Mrs N. has worked in many countries, including Sweden, Thailand, Hawaii, some Pacific islands, and some other countries. Mrs N. specializes in social science research. For Mrs N., when an employee enters an INGO, she/he needs to continue learning new knowledge throughout the whole work process.

Having watched it happened many times in different organisations, particularly now a lot of people who get their advanced training and they are very good and very smart, and they have good degrees, but they don't understand that they are not finished. Yeah, they don't know everything (Mrs N., international employer).

I know some people who just said we expect you to come ready, you are already trained, we hire you as finished product, you know, which is silly. I don't agree at all (Mrs N., international employer).

Mrs N.'s view was similar to the one shared by Mr T., Mr S., and Mrs A. To have the life-long learning ability, the staff is expected to be proactive, curious and creative.

So when we recruit people, we tend to recruit people who, of course, they have to be, they have the general level of intelligence, they have to have good English, as well as Vietnamese, of course, and they have to have general willingness to learn and to be open to learn (Mr J., international director).

They [the staff] are a little bit passive, in that they wait to see what the assignment is, rather than go out and research something or collect knowledge. They haven't really learnt, I think for example medical school students still don't want to check the research, check the literature, and know where to find high quality medical papers, so for example. And that maybe because English language is a little barrier; I think English is a barrier. But I think another barrier is that schools are not teaching people to be inquisitive, to be curious and to find the origin of the problem (Mr T., international employer).

The learning process continues through everyday activities, learning from the experiences of other staff, or engaging in informal learning opportunities, or in rare cases through formal training:

We do professional training sometimes for groups. For example last year we did the management training for six people who are program managers. We've also done training in qualitative research for other staff members, for example, things like that; but not for individuals. And we have a facility that if people want to do more formal training at university, for example they can apply for funding and we can help that education (Mr T., international employer).

I think may be all Vietnamese, work to learn and learn and learn, and that is so important
(Mrs N., international director).

Mrs N. meant here that her Vietnamese considered work as place to learn from new experiences, but also as a step to move up to a higher degree, such as a master degree. Many of her staff had the opportunities to go abroad to study a postgraduate degree.

Many Vietnamese people come back with the master [degree] (Mrs N., international director).

Some staff at Mr Th.'s INGO had also left to pursue postgraduate degrees after some successful years of work.

We hired her as a regular staff on this project and she did her great job, and actually was promoted, and now, and she's worked for us for two years, and now she is off, she is actually studying in the US for the Master of Public Health (Mr Th., international director).

Employers' perspectives of 'life-long learning', attitudes and skills are grounded in work experience. Employers at INGOs expect graduates to continue learning through daily work performance. Consistent with the perspectives of university teachers, employers expect graduates to continue learning after formal university study. However, while the teachers interviewed seemed very aware of the changing society and changing workplace requirements, none spoke about specific qualifications or attributes demanded of graduates to start work in the contemporary workplace. How graduates make the transition from the traditional formal educational places to the workplace in Vietnam, today, seemed unknown to the teachers interviewed in this study. From the employers' perspectives, it is the challenges arising from the intercultural nature of INGOs that present the greatest barrier to effective collaboration, a key aspect of work in INGOs. In this context, young graduates in their transition from university to the workplace might experience difficulties since they are inexperienced in handling the cultural dimension of the intercultural environment and it does not seem that they are prepared for this at the university.

4.5. Intercultural interactions at the workplace at INGOs

The aims and vision of NGOs are to improve the life of disadvantaged people thus to make all groups of people equal through financial and technical support. In the specific context of Vietnam, INGO project implementation is intercultural in the sense that it emphasises interaction and

participation of multiple cultural or ethnic groups in a common society; members must strive to understand each other's cultures, and to share and find common ground (Meer & Modood, 2012).

In Vietnam, most of the ethnic minority groups who were the key targets of development projects live in rural or remote areas in difficult geographical and social conditions and unique cultural settings. When implementing development projects with local communities, it is a condition for success that the project ideas need to account for, and integrate, the local communities' customs, traditions and practices. In this context, the Vietnamese project staff, who mostly are from the Viet (Kinh) ethnic group, had to be the mediators between international expertise and local experiences. The staff in INGO were sharing their experiences and expertise as well as learning from other cultures, together forming the culture of the organisation.

The first problems of this kind of workplace were the languages spoken by staff from different cultures. To share knowledge and skills, people need to understand each other through language. When people who speak different languages work together, the language barrier can be very challenging when sharing and exchanging ideas. In such contexts, each individual has to mediate to make content in different languages understood. The role of the young graduate participants was similar to what Bochner (1984) conceptualizes as a 'language mediator', as they needed to mediate between people speaking different languages. The intercultural communication competence of the mediator, as conceptualized by Byram (1997) (see chapter 2 for details), is significant for this role.

Language and behaviour might lead to misunderstanding in some cases. It also depended on the culture of the foreigner. It was not a single culture (Ms KD, Vietnamese manager).

The ethnic diversity of INGOs is not limited to inside the office but extends to the local partners of the project work. As mentioned above, each ethnic group in Vietnam has its own culture, customs and traditions. Some groups even have their own languages and/or even scripts. As INGO projects are implemented in different regions in the country, and often in partnership with ethnic groups, the potential for communication difficulties is ever present. Ms KD, a senior manager responsible for diversifying the ethnic background of her staff in order to develop the organisation's capacity to work with ethnic minority communities explained her plan:

Among the staff of our INGO, all are ethnic Vietnamese, all the local partners are ethnic Vietnamese, their staff are also Vietnamese (ethnic), meanwhile, one direction of our INGO is to diversify the labour force (Ms KD, Vietnamese manager).

About the issue of poverty among minority ethnic people. Yeah, when working about minority ethnic issue, why the recruitment for the program in Vietnam must choose the Vietnamese people? Why didn't the Vietnam program bring in the foreigner? Similarly, if you work on the issue of poverty of the ethnic minority people, but the background of your staff is from King group [the main group in Vietnam], it would be different. c my view on ethnic minority communities will be different, yes, different (Ms KD, Vietnamese manager).

Ms KD started to work as a volunteer in her INGO soon after her graduation in 1991, and has stayed in the same INGO since then. She had held different positions in her INGO, and was holding the interim country director in her INGO at the time of the interview. Ms KD's INGO expanded its project activities gradually to become a leading INGO in Vietnam. At the time of the interview, Ms KD was reforming the direction of her INGO. Though this INGO was a UK based organisation, it was opening in Vietnam; therefore, the management board of the organisation was trying to have Vietnamese staff in all senior positions. This direction was being discussed, along with the future trend of whether or not this INGO will become a Vietnamese NGO. In addition, since the project activities were being redirected towards benefiting ethnic minorities in Vietnam, this organisation was also trying to have ethnically diverse staff profile. The purpose of this direction is to have ethnic minority people solving poverty issues among their own minority community. However, if INGO recruit staff from minority ethnic groups, the problem could be reversed by their limited Vietnamese language knowledge that prevents them being able to communicate freely at work with other Vietnamese staff.

The difficulty was that only until lately, we just had some minority ethnic staff in program intern positions. Of course, in the job requirements [for a staff of majority ethnic origin], we did not require them to know English language, but they must speak Vietnamese language, so that they can communicate. Because the Vietnamese staff here did not know the minority ethnical language (Ms KD, Vietnamese manager).

In their accounts, the international employers also recalled their individual difficulties caused by cultural differences, particularly at the early stages of their work in Vietnam. Though they could reflect on their own problems, they seemed not to see similar problems for the new graduates when entering the intercultural workplace at INGOs.

I cannot say a lot about any sort of problems that would be related to sort of intercultural issue or anything like that (Mr Th., international employer).

As mentioned earlier in this chapter, Mr Th. had worked in the USA for quite a number of years and only moved to work in a long term-position in Vietnam in 2008. His experiences in Vietnam were relatively fewer than other international employers. However, due to his short experience, his first year in his office in Vietnam left a deep impression about the problem that cultural differences caused. Nonetheless, when asked whether he found his staff having any problems relating to cultural issues, he could not tell of any.

In addition to the differences in cultural norms, such as ‘privacy’, other difficulties experienced by the international expatriates being unaware of the customs and cultural practices of the Vietnamese people, as Mr T, pointed out:

I tend to find that it is true in Vietnam that it takes a while before people trust you. And it takes a couple of years. Now people say he is doing what he says he is going to do. Can we trust him? This is advisable. It takes a couple years (Mr T., international director).

Mr T’s observation of the ‘trust’ needed for building up a relationship in Vietnam is similar to Triandis’ (2000) argument about people from ‘collectivist’ cultures, whose communication process relies largely on the context set up around the topic. Mr T’s viewing the ‘trust building’ process was actually the required context of the work he was doing. When the context was in place, his communication process with local people ran on smoothly and saved time for explanation.

This requirement for contextualized communication process was also seen in the words of Mr S. when he pointed out the difference of work style in his INGO office in Vietnam against some other countries he knew. He realized that a ‘bossy’ management style was not effective in his office; instead, he should listen to his staff, make them understood the context as he did before they could effectively collaborate with him.

I think that in some countries, your position gives you power. So if you are the boss, then people will listen to you just because you are the boss. But in Vietnam I don’t think that is the case. I think in Vietnam you have to be a good boss. I think you have to earn the respect, and you know, you have to earn the respect of colleagues. And particularly at the beginning really listen to colleagues (Mr S., international director)

Another issue is the diverse norms and practices brought in by people from different cultures. These differences caused different cultural issues, arising from diversity in languages or cultural norms, for the international employers, particularly during their starting period in Vietnam. For example,

the international expatriates of INGO provided technical support for the Vietnamese project staff who implement the outsiders' ideas for community projects. Due to language and custom barriers these expatriates could not work directly with the community people to apply their expertise, or to transfer the outside ideas into the local context. These expatriates needed to implement their project ideas through the mediation of the Vietnamese staff. The expatriates were aware of the social problems in the world, the influences of the global context to the national situation, but they could not come to know the local context as well as the local people. The Vietnamese staff mediated between international expertise and the local people's experiences. More than that, the Vietnamese project staff gradually learnt from the expertise of the international expatriates and developed the localized expertise that incorporated the international knowledge and local experiences with knowledge and skills of the individual project staff .

4.6. Conclusion

The chapter has presented the views of university teachers about university study, and the reflection of the graduates on their university study, the expectation of the employers towards the new graduates, and the intercultural environment at INGOs from the perspective of the employers. Both teachers and students spoke of the prevailing traditions of teaching and learning in Vietnam universities in which, predominantly, the teachers instructed the students what to learn, and the principal goal appears to be the transfer of discipline knowledge, including the basic discipline concepts and skills (Dang Tan Tin, 2010; Le Xuan Quynh, 2013; Pham Hoa Hiep & Tran Thi Ly, 2010).

These findings need to be considered within the current Vietnamese higher education environment, where the fixed content and time frames for a course decreed by MOET, make it difficult for teachers to be flexible in their course content or pedagogy. As the result, the attributes that the universities expect their graduates to achieve focus on discipline knowledge, including the basic discipline concepts and skills to undertake the profession (Tran Thi Tuyet, 2012). Such an approach is unlikely to encourage students to explore new knowledge or independently solve problems.

However, the teachers' accounts suggest that this attitude is shifting, and that their approaches are a mix of old and new approaches to teaching. Both teachers and students were aware of the changing society and felt that the university learning was not able to keep up with it. It was noticeable that some of the university teachers referred to the rapid changes in the job market and the fact that the graduates would need to continue learning after they completed their university study. In their

responses, they focused on foundational disciplinary concepts and skills which they hoped their students would continue to build on once they commenced work. Barrie (2006) and Bennet et al. (2000) argue that these foundational knowledge and skills are those which might be applied in contexts with which the graduate is already familiar. However, the specific skills necessary to adapt to new contexts, such teamwork, negotiation, communication, creative and critical thinking, were barely mentioned in their interviews. The accounts of the graduates also indicate that attention to these attributes was lacking in their experience at university.

In the context of the job market, the job advertisements reviewed rarely mentioned attributes such as interpersonal skills, cross-cultural sensitivity, team work and self-directed learning skills either. Moreover, despite their awareness of the fast changing social milieu, during the interviews, the teachers seemed not to be aware of the complex (inter)cultural dimensions of the new workplaces. None spoke about specific qualifications or attributes demanded of graduates to start work in the contemporary workplace. Similarly, the young graduates also indicated that they had not been aware of this working environment before they commenced work at their INGO.

Neither university teachers nor employers spoke about the issues of transition of graduates from university to work in terms of intercultural challenges, though employers were conscious of the cultural dimensions of the workplace, not only from their personal perspectives (in working with their employees) based upon their own personal reflections, but also in terms of their understanding of the intercultural dimensions of the work of INGOs. In this respect, teacher and employer perspectives contrast with those of the graduates for whom, as we shall see in the following chapter, the cultural dimensions of their university-work transition are particularly salient. Despite this, the young graduates saw their discipline knowledge and skills as a foundation on which they could build by continuing to learn in the workplace. Consequently, all the graduates had taken part in extra-curricular activities or part time jobs while at university to gain knowledge and skills that would be useful in real work contexts.

Nonetheless, all job advertisements reviewed had requirements for a University degree, in addition to work experience relating to the specific job being advertised. The interviews with the employers who conducted the recruitment interviews and chose the candidates confirmed that, apart from qualifications, relevant work related experience was the most important selection criterion in recruiting the new staff. In the employers' accounts, each project drew upon the knowledge of different disciplines to generate comprehensive benefits for the target groups; each target group has different needs, hence, the staff of development projects needed know how to tailor their projects

accordingly. This expectation is very difficult for the inexperienced young graduate to meet at the moment they finish their study which, as noted earlier, mainly focuses on theoretical knowledge rather than practical application.

‘Life-long learning’, and work experience were attributes identified by employers as most important. Consistent with the perspectives of university teachers, employers expect graduates to continue learning after formal university study. This expectation of the employers at INGOs is similar to what Yorke and Harvey (2005) found in their study of employers in the United Kingdom; that is, they valued highly the attributes that assist the graduates to adapt to the workplace, to be flexible in moving between different jobs, and to move ‘one’s repertoire of knowledge’ onward particularly in a time of social change. These desirable attributes consist of interactive attributes, including communication skills, interpersonal skills and team working, as well as personal attributes such as problem solving, analytic, critical and reflective ability, willingness to learn and continue learning, flexibility and adaptability, risk-taking and self-skills (Harvey in Yorke & Harvey, 2005). These attributes are often independent of the discipline of study (Harvey in Yorke & Harvey, 2005), and may not be included in the preparation of Vietnamese graduates for their future work.

The findings of the current study also echo Hernández-March et al’s (2009) study which found that companies in Spain seek graduates who have the ability to work in a team and relate with co-workers, clients, and collaborators. In the accounts of the employers in the current study, collaboration was prioritized over disciplinary knowledge and skills, since it was believed that good teamwork would achieve the organisational goals. However, although both international employers and Vietnamese managers value collaboration, from their accounts, they appear to go about developing it in different ways due to cultural differences.

From the perspective of the employers, working in INGOs in Vietnam required not only the discipline knowledge and skills but also several other less tangible attributes, particularly intercultural communication skills. The Vietnamese interviewees valued harmony between team members above all, , and saw the communication style of the international employers as direct and straight forward in giving feedback. Key factors influencing good collaboration in Vietnamese culture include good communication skills that obey the rule of keeping face, and gaining trust, and particularly the teamwork spirit. For effective teamwork, both intangible qualities and interpersonal skills are significant to establish and maintain good relationships between members, though these were not so explicitly expressed in the job advertisements.

The Vietnamese staff are not familiar with the freedom to voice their opinions, as the influence of Confucianism and a high-context culture (Triandis, 2000). People from high-context cultures are less likely to question and challenge the authority, especially the more senior or higher status positions (Barkai, 2008; Triandis, 2000); people keep the meaning hidden in their ways of communication; the meaning of a message comes primarily from the implicit understanding of the social context and of relationships surrounding the parties involved (Triandis, 2000). Hence, people from high-context culture are more familiar with top-down hierarchical organizational structure.

CHAPTER V. YOUNG GRADUATES' EXPERIENCE OF WORKING AT INGOs

5.1. Introduction

As outlined in chapter 4, university study appears to provide only very limited opportunities to acquire the kind of knowledge and skills that young graduates need as they enter the workforce. When interviewed, both teachers and students showed that they were aware of the changes in Vietnamese society and spoke of the strategies they had developed to respond to these changes. The teachers focussed on teaching basic concepts and general skills, as a foundation for extended learning, while the students recounted how they had tried to develop skills that they thought would be required in the job market through extra-curricular activities and part-time work.

The accounts of young graduates about their employment and work tasks were in line with employers' expectations regarding new employees' interpersonal skills and learning aptitudes for new knowledge, as outlined in chapter 4. Since the projects at INGOs are mostly inter-disciplinary, none of young graduates in this study undertook tasks directly linked with their university disciplines. They all needed to learn new work related knowledge and skills in addition to their university discipline knowledge and skills. In particular, they needed to develop the capacity to work interculturally with international consultants and local communities. While ethnic diversity in a workplace makes the work culturally rich, it has the potential for conflicts or misunderstandings arising from cultural differences between people from different cultures.

Continuing from chapter 4, this chapter presents the results of the interviews with 19 young graduates about their experiences as they have moved through different positions at INGOs. Young graduates' experiences of working in the intercultural workplace at INGOs are unpacked to understand how they apply their knowledge and skills gained through both formal and informal learning during university to meet the requirements and challenges of this kind of work setting. The chapter starts by analysing the views of graduates about the non-traditional workplace at INGOs, then continues with an analysis of the difficulties or challenges they experienced while working in this intercultural workplace. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the specific role of 'being in-between' that young graduates experienced while interacting with the people of different cultures involved in INGO projects

5.2. View of INGO workplaces in the eyes of young graduates

The interviews with young graduates demonstrated that while some of them chose an INGO workplace by chance, others purposely sought employment in INGOs in order to help local communities. INGO projects, from the perspective these young graduates provide the type of workplace where they can help disadvantaged people, and where their ideas and opinions are valued and appreciated. Ms Vu explains:

...when working in my INGO, I feel that the environment encourages me right from the start (Ms Vu, Project Officer).

That [volunteer] project [of teaching English for the poor children during the university time] has shown me that there are many issues in the community unsolvable by business but solvable by development projects. I have more confidence that the development work is meaningful. I decided that after graduation I would find a job at NGOs (Ms. Vu, Project Officer).

This idealistic view was found among other young graduates as well. In their words, Mr Pham, and Ms Nguyen said they were devoting their efforts to producing benefits for the community, and this made them proud of the humanistic vision of their work:

Actually, I was contributing to improve the community, that's why I felt happy (Mr Pham, Project Assistant).

In Ms Nguyen's view, INGO projects work has provided the chance to collaborate with the target community to develop and implement activities that benefit local people:

I really loved the time there [at her first INGO work place] because it was a job where I worked directly with the grassroots level, visited each individual school, each household, each village and each hamlet. Then I thoroughly understood the difficulties in the communities and the difficulties of the schools (Ms Nguyen, Project Officer).

I can contribute my abilities to the development of the community, and I can bring benefits to the children of minority ethnic (Ms. Nguyen, Project Officer).

Similarly, improving the living conditions of the communities is the reason that Ms My chose to work at an INGO. She explained that her INGO was *'an organisation that ... improves the conditions of people's lives'* (Ms My, Project Assistant):

I am very happy when my work contributes to improving the living conditions of the communities (Ms My, Project Assistant).

How do I see myself as a staff of the non-government organisation? I work in an organisation that helps to develop and improve the conditions of people's lives. Sometimes I also feel somewhat that I might want to use the word 'proud' to describe (Ms My, Project Assistant).

In addition, INGO workplaces are viewed as places to learn new practical knowledge and skills in dynamic, challenging and progressive work environments, as Ms Nguyen explains:

I recognised that I learned so many things from practical experiences, which are most practical, most relevant for the local people (Ms Nguyen, Project Officer).

Ms My also acknowledged that the experience of working with local people had added to her knowledge.

I could visit villagers' houses, go to every household in the very far and remote areas, which widened my knowledge (Ms My, Project Assistant).

This finding accords with Nguyen Phuong An's (2002) study (as outlined in chapter 1), which found that people moving away from the state sector to work in international organisations commonly expected that the international organisations would give them skills and knowledge that they had not gained at university.

Interviewees explained that the project work at INGO was a good opportunity to learn new skills and knowledge for young graduates who needed to understand the philosophy and the methodology of development models proposed by international experts, and translate and apply this knowledge according to their own understanding. This process of learning also requires young graduates as development practitioners to apply their existing knowledge, experience and systems of values to understand the knowledge, experiences and the system of values of people from different cultures. They become the instructors in applying what they have understood to the local situations.

The key target was the minority ethnic people. I had to adjust my work approach and content to be suitable with the local context and people. It had to be the collaboration between me, the international expatriates and the local people (Ms Nguyen, Project Officer).

The most noticeable skills they need to use and enhance during the project process are interpersonal skills. The implementation process to introduce the alien project ideas into the local context is a complex one that needs the incorporation of local people's culture and experience, local partners' organisational rules and values into the projects models which are often initiated from successful projects elsewhere in the world. To make the project activities acceptable to the local people, young graduates have to mediate the miss-matches between their organisational rules, their own understanding and the local customs, traditions and culture. As Ms Vu describes:

Sometimes their [the Vietnamese local community] work culture is so different from ours [organisational rules]. First, in terms of time and working hours; Second, their work approach, and working atmosphere is also different from ours [organisational rules] (Ms Vu, Project Officer).

Clearly, the work of these young graduates involved integrating new knowledge and skills about project ideas with local culture and practices, ensuring the harmonious combination of two ends. This process required young graduates not only to have necessary discipline knowledge and skills, but also intercultural skills (Byram, 1997; Deardorff, 2006) to solve typical problems around intercultural interactions.

5.3. Experiencing the intercultural interactions at INGOs

For young graduates from universities in Vietnam, intercultural interactions were quite a new experience since most of the students and teachers come from the same culture and do not have many chances to interact with people from other cultures. As outlined in chapter 2, during intercultural interactions, problems mostly happen during the communication process, where people of different culture need to exchange ideas to come to agreement (Ting-Toomey & Kurogi, 1998). In their accounts, most of young graduates held junior positions such as intern, and project assistant. Only some were project officers or project managers who were responsible for managing the overall operation of a project. In all positions, one important task was to be the contact point for international expatriates and local people at different levels. The main task of the juniors was to

provide interpreting support for the expatriates and the local people. Those like Mr Pham, Ms Mau, and Ms Ba mainly acted as the language mediators (Bochner, 1981). However, Ms Mau, Ms My, Ms Vu, Ms Nguyen, Ms Dao, Mr Ta, Ms Hoa took opportunities to do more than translation; they also facilitated the communication process to mediate the expatriates' ideas and the local community culture. These different roles assumed by the young graduates are significant and will be explored further in this chapter and the following ones.

Much of the work of the young graduates concerns communication; either communication of content between two different languages as in the case of interpretation (Byram, 1997), or the clarification of the meaning of each side's practices and ideas as in the case of facilitation (Ting-Toomey & Kurogi, 1998), or the understanding of each side's cultural values, norms and customs as in the case of acting as a guide (Bochner, 1981). Facilitation skills are essential if project officers are to assist the local community to make project activities happen. In reality, the interpretation and facilitation do not only happen in formal settings inside the office or at meetings, but can occur on informal occasions, for example, outside work hours during field work trips, at socialization functions or during free time. The facilitation of information dissemination can be as simple as to chair an organisational meeting as in the cases of Ms My, or facilitate a meeting with the project target group as Mr Ta did: :

...there was a rule [in my organisation] that at each meeting one person must be appointed to be the facilitator (Ms My, Project Assistant).

I provided translation, interpretation. And I assisted in creating more open environment among the learners. If the learners kept silent when the consultants raised questions, I warmed them up, or clarified the questions so that the learners understood the questions and could answer. The most important thing was the learners' answers. That was what the consultants wanted to hear (Mr Ta, Project Officer).

However, information facilitation can be complicated in interactions with international expatriates, as for Ms Mau:

when the international consultants contacted Vietnamese people, I was their assistant. I was like the person in between. This meant that sometimes there was some expressions that were quite different from the culture of Vietnam that the Vietnamese people did not want to hear,

I had to find out whether the international consultant had said thing inappropriately., if that I had to find ways to explain, as a kind of trouble shooting (Ms Mau, Project Assistant).

Facilitation also involves negotiation skills, for example when young graduates introduce a new project idea to the local partner. This negotiation takes time and has to overcome great challenges. For a new idea is to be accepted, it is necessary to convince people about its applicability, importance and, significantly, it must be culturally appropriate. Young graduates, as one party of the negotiation process must discuss their views of the issue with international consultants and with local people, to find out the acceptable solutions.

In implementing project activities, young graduates even become instructors to guide local communities through the application of project ideas. This requires not only facilitation skills but also the skills to raise awareness of the issue in the local community, which is likely to have different life experiences, geographic and cultural differences. Awareness raising is a continuous process, intertwined in all project activities but also held as a separate activity. Through this activity, the development practitioners encourage the community at large to support their work. Thus the implementation process of these types of development work is performed by the development practitioners in many different ways.

A small proportion of the development work involves advocacy towards policy makers. One important purpose of advocacy is to maintain the impact of the project and to expand its effects. One method for achieving this is through awareness raising to enable the local community to understand the problem, possibly from a different perspective. This activity indirectly contributes to the life of the community but causes profound and long-lived effects since it can help to change the way that the local community view and conduct a certain practice.

Facilitating, instructing and advocating are tasks that require young graduates to be proactive in planning their work, negotiating ideas and making decisions. These tasks are very unfamiliar for the new graduates. Many appeared to assume that the workplace would be another kind of university, where they might continue to be taught what to do, as in the accounts of Ms My, Ms Hong, Ms Ba, and Ms Lien.

Everyone in my office was busy doing his/her tasks; nobody told me anything (Ms Hong, Research Assistant).

I did not know how to summarise [the materials]; [but] nobody assisted me (Ms Hong, Research Assistant).

In my first job as the project secretary, it was assumed that I would do what asked to do (Ms Ba, Project Assistant).

When I started my first job, I found that I had to learn skills such as time management, and work scheduling. Actually no specific person taught me that, and there was not any text book either (Ms Lien, Project Officer).

Ms Hong's recollections of her confusion when she commenced working at the INGO typified the experience of the young graduate interviewees. Ms Hong started her first job at a project for wild life protection, which was not related to public health, the discipline she studied at university. However, this work provided her with opportunities to practise the research methods for data collection and data analysis that she learnt at the university. She needed to understand the related regulations and law on wild life protection, so she spent weeks reading new documents, doing tests, making trials, and correcting mistakes.

I had learnt a lot during those six months. I had learnt how to work accurately. Everything had to be done perfectly. I also learnt to be extremely patient (Ms Hong, Research Assistant).

It was a shock for her to start a new job by exploring piles of rules and regulations as if she was still at the university.

I was shocked after those two weeks. Just learn and read (Ms Hong, Research Assistant).

It was not formal training. At the beginning of the week, my boss gave me a heap of documents, and tested me by the end of the week, or so (Ms Hong, Research Assistant).

In the next week, I had to read a lengthy guideline, oh my goodness, about what to do when you received an information, and how to report the case. Fortunately, after two first months, I got familiar with the work. But things were crazy in those first two months. For example, I dropped cases, lost one case. All of these made my boss mad (Ms Hong, Research Assistant).

Another young graduate, Ms Dao, experienced similar ‘shock’ at her lack of relevant knowledge when she started work. Ms Dao majored in international relations and was employed as a translator for a bear protection project. Despite her skills in translation, Ms Dao had to read a lot about bears and veterinary practices to understand the messages being transferred in the conversations between the international veterinarians and the local workers.

The veterinarians had to report to the headquarters weekly about each bear. I had to translate those reports. At meetings between offices of the centres, I was the interpreter; I had to understand all situations (Ms Dao, interpreter).

Ms Dao’s problem is very similar to what Ms Ba experiences. Ms Ba graduated as an interpreter, but finds that English language knowledge is not enough for her to do her interpretation in a secretary role. She needs to understand the content of technical material she is helping translate.

My background was foreign language. In the early days, when my supervisors asked me to comment [on the content of the draft of the training material], I felt I was not capable to give comments on this content (Ms Ba, Project Assistant).

In reality, the workplace appears to be a place for continuous learning in a different way than the formal university study. At the start many graduates do not have suitable disciplinary knowledge for the work. Young graduates had to learn the necessary skills and knowledge for the work through a variety of ways, including formal mentoring, detailed orientation and probation periods. Some however felt this wasn’t enough. In the words of Mr Xuan and Ms Tran:

I got a very short orientation. I thought it was not enough for me to become confident in doing the financial management role. I had to learn by doing. If a new staff who did not have any experience in INGO project was assigned to manage technical issue and financial management, it would be extremely hard (Mr Xuan, Project Manager).

On the first day I entered this INGO, Ms H who was in charge of human resource guided me to all offices to introduce me to everyone and informed me that I had three days of orientation to get to know everyone. I understood which activities was that INGO implementing, which staff was responsible for which task. Then I knew whom to approach for what issues (Ms Tran, intern).

Others sought out opportunities to develop new work-related knowledge, as Ms Luu explained. Ms Luu graduated in public health and got a position in an HIV/AIDS prevention project. As she did not learn about HIV/AIDS at her university, she had to learn about it on the job. This created real pressure for her since there were many medical terms and skills that required a long time to understand. Talking about her early time in her post, she said:

At the beginning, I got a lot of pressure. I had to learn medical knowledge, much more than what I learnt at the University (Ms Luu, Project Assistant).

To overcome this difficulty she attended seminars conducted by other senior staff who specialised in HIV/AIDS, and related courses outside her organisation.

Similarly, Mr Vi who graduated in English language, also had to learn about a new field of knowledge - running an agricultural vocational project - mostly through independently studying related materials:

....when I started my job, I had to learn more. It was very difficult to use the university knowledge then (Mr Vi, Project Assistant).

Even if the required skill is similar to the discipline skill, as for Ms Hoa who graduated as a teacher of foreign languages, she still had difficulties conducting a training workshop on learning skills for students from a medical university. These workshop facilitation skills are different from her theoretical knowledge of teaching from her education program at university. Ms Hoa learnt these work skills mostly by observing others doing the similar tasks, and through trial and error, she said:

I mainly learnt through practice. I had not attended any formal training. The skills I learnt through my work included project management, planning, group work, time management, research skills. I thought all were very useful. I had not learnt them at the university. I learnt all by myself, through my work (Ms Hoa, Project Associate).

I observed others, I practiced presenting at home. If I had to present in front of many people I would practice at home in advance. However, I mainly learnt through observing others' presentations. The senior staff also advised how to present (Ms Hoa, Project Associate).

I learned how to conduct the workshop. Then I became the trainer for the following small workshops for different groups of students (Ms Hoa, Project Associate).

In these ways, the young graduates demonstrated how they developed their own approach to learning new knowledge and skills. Mr Ta's story is another example. The way he learnt in the workplace included observing international expatriates conducting their jobs, critically analysing their work approaches, and applying the relevant parts to his own work.

The most important thing I learned from them [international donor group] was the logical thinking. They had logical analysis skills, they organised work in a well-ordered process, easy to understand. My feeling was that it was much more professional ... They could assess the problems well though they were not working here. For example, they made a lot of assumptions. That was the skill I learnt (Mr Ta, Project Officer).

For another young graduate, Ms Le, who had to conduct her work alone in a remote area, the learning process continued through her daily work performance.

I had to visit the houses of the children to complete special tasks, such as taking photos of the kids. Or if the sponsors wanted to give the kids some gifts, in that case, I had to visit the houses of the kids, getting to know about their needs then purchase the gifts, taking photos of kids receiving gifts to report to the sponsors (Ms Le, ex-Project Assistant).

In general, these young graduates are engaged in continuing professional learning in their workplaces. This learning is an important part in their daily performance at work. . They learn through formal courses, under supervision but mostly through their work experience. The learning process can include discussions with peers, and with international expatriates, or through negotiating project ideas with local communities. This kind of learning process is dissimilar to the formal learning process at the universities described in their accounts outlined in chapter 4. However, the ways they learn new work knowledge and skills are close to the ways they gain extra knowledge and skills through informal and extra-curricular activities during their university time. Their agency is still bounded by (albeit more open) structures (Evans, 2007), and they reflect upon their knowledge and skills to respond to the requirements of the structures.

The learning process that is typical at INGOs also means that young graduates learn local knowledge from local partners, and through new models introduced by international expatriates. In these ways they continuously expand their knowledge and skills, making them more competent in their work. As mentioned earlier, the nature of INGO projects is to foster changes in communities to the benefit of the local people. For the changes to happen, graduates would not only need to be able

to follow the instructions of international expatriates, whose expertise might not be completely applicable to the local context, but also to be proactive and creative in negotiating the application of these models with the target local communities. This process particularly develops interpersonal skills which do not appear to be learnt through formal lessons at universities, but must be honed in practice. Due to differences in the system of values, cultures, knowledge, and experiences between communities and INGO managers, it is a very challenging process to reach a consensus. Since each party has their own arguments for what they propose to do, they must understand each other to come to common solutions for the project. In troublesome situations, young graduates fall into in-between positions, mediating between internationally derived projects and local practices, international project managers and local communities.

5.4. Being in-between cultures

In the accounts of young graduates, the most difficult challenges they face concern various forms of intercultural communication, such as mediating the communication between international consultants and local communities, or the negotiation of the implementation of development models that they needed to apply with the target community. The mediation work might include translation, negotiating between the two parties, or transferring technical knowledge.

Mediation, for them, was not a simple transfer of language meaning between people who do not speak the same language. Rather, they had to act as person- in-between who needed to translate the actual meaning of the instructions or technical advice. To do that the development practitioners not only had to know the foreign language well, but also to have certain knowledge of the values, ideas being transferred. The development practitioners as the in-between persons were involved in a complicated process, in which they were learners, supporters, facilitators and teachers at the same time. Each different function might prevail at a certain point of time depending on the nature of the activity.

To implement project activities, it was necessary to transfer project ideas from the designers to the implementers - specifically, between the international experts and the local partners. Due to differences in the system of values, cultures, knowledge and experiences, it could be a very challenging process. Each party has their own arguments for what they propose to do. To work together, they must understand each other and come to common solutions for the project. In troublesome situations, the development practitioners often had to become a resource for both parties to understand each other. In this role, they could encounter difficulties in interpreting

differences between cultures. How well they negotiated this role depended on how well they understood these differences, and which values they attached to the activities. In other words, the mediation is subject to the knowledge and cultural norms of the individual in-between person, as the experience of Ms Mau:

...the international experts might have certain theories but do not have practical experiences. They do not know whether they can apply this theory in practice, especially how would it be applied in the context of Vietnam (Ms Mau, Project Assistant).

Ms Mau's project involved transferring a new pedagogical method to the school system in Vietnam. This kind of technical knowledge transfer needs a lot of involvement of international experts who must have mastery of that method in order to train Vietnamese teachers. Ms Mau had problems in conducting her tasks because she had to understand the system of values and the implications within the practices of both the international experts and the local partners before she could explain their meanings.

The proposed activity might be easy to implement in a foreign country [the international expert's country], but in Vietnam, there are many things that need to be taken into account, such as the living conditions of the teachers, and so on (Ms Mau, Project Assistant).

The communicators needed to understand the cultural meaning each attached to the process, as Ms Mau explained:

When you have a problem, the international experts give very direct feedback. At first I was unfamiliar with that way, I felt it tough.....The foreigners are very direct. Initially I felt unfamiliar with this; there are instances when I felt very stressful, the work is very stressful (Ms Mau, Project Assistant).

In language mediation, when the role of the in-between person is to be a supporter and liaison for both sides, this position provided the thread which linked all institutions to one project idea, by mediating between the different sides until one integrated process for implementing the project was achieved. The persons performing such roles are conceptualized by Byram (1997) as intercultural communication mediators, interpreting 'each in terms of the other, either for themselves or for other people' (Byram, 2000, p. 9). To perform this role, young graduates must not only know the foreign language of the international consultants but also have certain knowledge of the issues being transferred, and understand the culture and traditional practices of the local people who are the

target of the interaction. The activities can be the transfer of communication content between two different languages, as in the case of interpretation, or clarification of the meaning of each side's practices and ideas, as in the case of facilitation, or understanding each other's cultural values, norms or customs. In these contexts, the mediators mostly needed to use their English language skills to conduct the tasks. As outlined in chapter 4, when young graduates enter the recruitment process for INGO positions, they have to meet the requirements for English skills, therefore, in doing language mediation they did not expect to have many problems with their language skills. However, language mediation is only a part of the intercultural interactions that young graduates were actually involved in (Byram, 1997; Ting-Toomey & Kurogi, 1998); they also needed to transfer the cultural meanings of the practices and ideals, as in the words of Ms Mau and Ms Dao:

I think one of the roles of those who work with the foreigners in Vietnam is that, I usually find that I can help people understand the context of Vietnam, or I can harmonise their relationship with the Vietnamese. It helps the work to flow better. While working at that project, in the interpreter position, I am often placed into the in-between position (Ms Mau, Project Assistant).

As the interpreter, I was like a person in-between to solve the problem. In many instances, I had to please both sides. It was really difficult (Ms Dao, interpreter).

In addition to cultural meanings of activities, young graduates also need to get the local community to understand and apply the regulations of INGO projects. Characteristically, INGO projects must follow strict protocols and tight schedules to ensure all activities are done and the final goals are achieved. Therefore, the project activities must be well connected and influence each other in a cause and effect relationship. Project management requires an effective plan and schedule to be set up and followed. However, practice at the locality in Vietnam can be affected by many unpredictable happenings due to the complex countrywide context around the project. As a result, it is not always easy to follow a tight schedule. The young graduates found it difficult to understand the practices and regulations of local community, and try to tune INGO regulations to those local practices. To solve such problems, they had to read relevant documents, observe the practices at the locality, compare these with INGO regulations, and analyse all of this information to come to an acceptable solution, as the experience of Ms Vu:

My INGO highly appreciates completion by the deadline, because the progress of this work will determine the results of the next activity. But the local partner might not see the

importance of the proposed timeline and of following the objectives (Ms Vu, Project Officer).

Understanding practices of the local communities required the acquisition of ‘far transfer’ skills (Bennett et al., 2000), skills they achieved through searching for and gaining new knowledge through informal activities during university study time.

Sometimes, differences rooted in cultural values and customs prevented collaboration between two sides because of the different meanings given to the same concept or activity. For example, as discussed in chapter 5, giving feedback was a major cultural difference between local INGO staff and international expatriates. As the hierarchical order in Vietnam encourages junior staff to listen to their seniors, and people to try to ‘keep face’ for others, giving feedback in Vietnamese culture is very different from the international experts’ practice. Providing feedback in Vietnam mainly involves repeating good points and mentioning only very minor mistakes. It is not a custom to speak out about serious problems in front of everyone. It is difficult to develop and to practice the feedback skill in the way that this is understood by the international consultants, as the hierarchical order in Vietnam encourages juniors to listen to seniors, and people to keep face for the others (Nguyen Phuong Mai et al., 2005). Considering that giving feedback in Vietnamese culture is rare, it is understandable that the young graduates found it difficult to deal with the direct feedback of the international experts. The in-between person can feel compromised when they have to communicate the direct feedback from the international experts to the target of the feedback. If the in-between person tried to convey the feedback directly, local partners might not want to continue the communication, as Ms Mau and Ms Ba explain:

....when you had a problem, they [the international experts] gave very direct feedback, and they were very straight forward. At first I was unfamiliar with that way (Ms Mau, Project Assistant).

When my boss asked me [to give feedback] directly, I was really shocked because I thought I was a junior staff and was not supposed to comment. So I became embarrassed and could not tell anything but smiled. Right then, I saw that my supervisor was disappointed; they could not understand why I did not comment anything about the trip (Ms Ba, Project Assistant).

Giving feedback is one skill encouraged by the openness of the workplace at INGOs. This workplace emphasizes the principle of equality that appreciates the right to express one's opinion, as in the words of Ms Ba and Ms Dang:

Everyone was encouraged to share, not necessary the big idea, but what one feels, what one sees (Ms Ba, Project Assistant).

Once, when a big boss came, we did not dare to be open in communication. It was not because of language barrier. It might be because he was a very big boss so we were worried that we might say something unnecessary [that might annoy him] (Ms Dang, Project Assistant).

The young graduates recounted how differences in people's ways of thinking, analysing and understanding the activities and practices due to their cultural values hindered communications. People of the same culture can more easily understand each other because they share the same system of values. It was difficult for the person in the middle to understand the difference in the system of values of another culture, even if they had experienced that culture for a while. Those dealing with different ethnic groups had an even more challenging task, since they must understand the two different cultures while at the same time ensuring that they enable both sides to work together to come to a new understanding. Cultural differences even exist between the project staff and the local community, who had different practices than the project staff. For example, Ms Vu explained the differences in concepts of planning and scheduling:

My INGO very highly appreciates the completion at deadline, because the progress of this work will lead to the result of the next activity. But sometimes – they [local partners] do not see the importance of the proposed timeline, following the objectives. They might not even like doing this first, doing that latter, and they do not have prior discussion with us about those activities; sometimes they work rather subjectively, without complying with the original schedule (Ms Vu, Project Officer).

To sum up, implementation of project activities requires the transfer of project ideas from the designers to the implementers - specifically, from the international experts to the local partners. Due to differences in the system of values, cultures, knowledge, and experiences, it can be a very challenging process. Each party has their own reasons for what they propose to do. To work together, they must understand each other and come to common solutions for the project. Hence,

young graduates as development practitioners are not simply mediating between people from different cultures; the way they are fulfilling their roles is also creating a particular context for doing development projects at INGOs in Vietnam. This is akin to the role of cultural intermediaries, as described by Bourdieu (1990) and discussed in the following chapter.

5.5. Conclusion

An INGO workplace is typically an intercultural environment requiring collaboration in interdisciplinary, intercultural teams, to meet tight deadlines in time-bound projects. INGO projects cover a wide range of disciplines, from health and education to community development. The young graduates participated in different tasks including language mediating, information disseminating, and project model designing. They also work to influence decision makers at regional and national levels through advocating on behalf of communities to authorities. The complex, intercultural nature of this work presents many challenges for young graduates. Successfully facilitating the implementation of international models in local Vietnamese contexts requires highly developed skills in mediating between people of different cultures (Byram, 1997; Deardorff, 2006).

The work of these young graduates involved integrating new knowledge and skills about project ideas with local culture and practices, ensuring the harmonious combination of two ends. This process required young graduates not only to have necessary discipline knowledge and skills, but also intercultural skills (Byram, 1997; Deardorff, 2006) to solve typical problems around intercultural interactions. These young graduates are engaged in continuing professional learning in their daily performance at work. They learn through formal courses, under supervision but mostly through their work experience. Although this kind of learning process is dissimilar to the formal learning process at the universities described in their accounts, the ways they learn new work knowledge and skills are close to the ways they gain extra knowledge and skills through informal and extra-curricular activities during their university time (as outlined in chapter 4). Their agency is still bounded by (albeit more open) structures (Evans, 2007), but through their agency they reflect upon their knowledge and skills to respond to the requirements of the structures (Bourdieu in Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992).

The accounts of young graduates also demonstrate a necessity to ably transcend a range of knowledge and skill boundaries (Barrie, 2006), the need to have chances to interact with cultures (Ting-Toomey & Kurogi, 1998) other than just the Vietnamese ethnic minorities, the importance of

developing high level interpersonal and interpretive skills (Bennet et al., 2000) also were apparent. The implementation of project activities requires graduates to transfer project ideas from the international experts to the local partners. Hence, much of the work of the young graduates concerns communication. Due to differences in the system of values, cultures, knowledge, and experiences, it is a very challenging process. Young graduates as development practitioners are not simply mediating between people from different cultures (Byram, 1997); the way they are fulfilling their roles is also creating a particular context for doing development projects at INGOs in Vietnam. As the nature of INGO projects is to foster changes in communities to the benefit of the local people, graduates would not only need to be able to follow the instructions of international expatriates but also to negotiate the application of these models with the target local communities. In troublesome situations, young graduates fall into in-between positions, mediating between internationally derived projects and local practices, international project managers and local communities. This is akin to the role of cultural intermediaries, as described by Bourdieu (1990).

For young graduates from universities in Vietnam, intercultural interactions (Ting-Toomey & Kurogi, 1997) were quite a new experience since most of the students and teachers come from the same culture and do not have many chances to interact with people from other cultures. The in-between person needs to understand both the international development models proposed by the international experts, and the cultural traditions and practices of the local community. In carrying out their roles, young graduates also are integrating new work knowledge and skills with their existing knowledge and skills and transfer these into localized models. Their specific role of being in-between person will be discussed in detailed in the following chapter.

CHAPTER VI. THE PERSON-IN-BETWEEN

6.1 Introduction

The previous two chapters have discussed accounts of university teachers, employers of young graduates, and the experiences of young graduates who have transitioned from university to the workplace at INGOs. In the accounts of graduates analysed in chapter 4, they reflected on the traditional teaching and learning at the universities which generated the tendency among the graduates to follow the teachers' instructions. The graduates also indicated their awareness of the changes in the Vietnamese job market as well as more global changes, and how they developed different strategies to cope. They participated in extra curricula activities like research work, exchange studies, voluntary projects, or part time jobs to gain necessary skills and experiences for future work, as outlined in chapter 4. Employers' expectations of the young graduates confirmed the necessity of skills such as critical thinking, management, communication, and interpersonal skills in the workplace to help graduates to move through different contexts and to learn new knowledge and skills. However, the cultural dimension of the workplace at INGOs posed different types of problems beyond the expectations of the graduates, their university teachers or even their employers.

As discussed previously, the workplace at INGOs is intercultural. Challenges arise when INGOs try to introduce new, foreign ideas and models to local communities in order to improve the local conditions. Since these models or ideas often come from expatriates, who do not know, and might not be able to understand the local experiences, customs and practices of the target communities, the realisation of these foreign ideas or models depends significantly on the performance of the Vietnamese staff.

Vietnamese project staff need not only to understand the foreign models but also the local practices and customs; they need to act as mediators between the international expatriates and the local communities through different activities such as interpreting, translating, facilitating, and implementing project activities. The accounts of young graduates analysed in the last chapter demonstrated a particular position, that of the 'person-in-between' the ideas of the international expatriates and the experiences of local people. They found it extremely challenging to make sure both sides understood each other and collaborated to address problems.

This chapter provides insights into these difficult experiences of 'being in between' for the young graduates. Extending the concept of intercultural competence (Byram, 1997) as outlined in chapter

2, this chapter draws extensively on Bochner's (1981) concept of cultural mediation and Bourdieu's (1990) concept of the cultural intermediary to better understand this role. Experiences of individual graduates will be investigated through the lenses of these concepts to understand this in-between role.

6.2. Taking a closer look at the mediation role in INGOs

As presented in the previous chapter, the results of the interviews with the young graduates participating in my research showed how these young staff were involved in mediating the application of new models in local, often ethnic communities in a range of different fields, such as education policy, health practice, public health, and community development. Typically, as soon as they started working at INGOs, they were placed in internships or positions such as interpreters or project assistants. These positions, often described by them as being the 'in-between people' as mentioned in chapter 5, required them to mediate between cultural dispositions of international experts and practices and customs of local people. This chapter will develop a more complex understanding of this role, by demonstrating how the young graduates were not simply 'mediating' between different cultures but also introducing *new* ideas/models; they were 'mediating' in different ways.

Within the context of INGOs, translation is not a simple transfer of meaning between people who do not speak the same language. Rather, the person in-between needs to transfer the actual meaning of the instructions or technical advices. To do this, the young graduates must not only know the foreign language well, but also have certain knowledge of the ideas, knowledge, skills and processes being transferred, mostly through doing various tasks and discussing issues with international experts and other colleagues. They even learn project-related knowledge from their local partners, whose knowledge and experience is very applicable to project implementation. In other words, they enrich their language vocabulary, knowledge and skills, and thus their embodied cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1986), forming strategies (Lareau & Weininger, 2004) to use their general knowledge, disciplinary knowledge, disciplinary skills and generic skills in their work (Barrie, 2006; Bennett et al., 2000; Eraut, 2004). In 2005, Plipat investigated how development NGOs interpreted and implemented a human rights-based approach (RBA) to development policy in the case of three agencies (ActionAid UK, Oxfam GB, and Save the Children Sweden) in Vietnam (Plipat, 2005). The research showed that the national culture was 'seeing and treating government officials as "the authorities," who have the legitimacy to tell people what to do' (Plipat, 2005, p. 281). The three INGOs, structurally positioned between the state and local communities

mediated to create a culture of participation in government policy and in the whole society (Plipat, 2005, p. 280).

The interviews were opportunities for the young graduates to look back reflexively at their performances and roles (Kihlstrom, Beer, & Klein, 2003; Oyserman, Elmore, & Smith, 2012). Speaking about themselves reflexively in the interviews, they described themselves as: 'dynamic', 'active', 'dreaming', 'always want to create', 'eager to learn new things', 'eager to help others', 'want to take action', 'like to travel', and 'socially inexperienced'.

Though the young graduates appeared to be eager and ready to encounter the dynamic workplace, for the most part, this did not mean that they were proactive in their actions at work. Of the interviewees, Ms Hoa, Mr Pham, Ms Mau, Ms Luu, Mr Ta and Ms Ba thought other staff and international experts or donors viewed them as junior, which meant being young and inexperienced, and in the role of 'supporter(s)'. Despite this, most of them described themselves as interpreting for international experts, co-facilitating workshops, or assisting with logistics issues. Other informants, Ms Vu and Mr Vi, Ms My, Ms Hong and Ms Dang viewed themselves as equal to other staff or international experts, who might have different expertise from their own.

Being 'dynamic' was the way almost all of the 19 young graduates described their workplace. They also referred to the 'dynamic' character of INGO project teams indirectly through their descriptions of their workplace as 'openness [to new ideas]', 'welcoming and facilitating new ideas', 'hub of updated information', 'well organised', 'tight schedule', and 'flexible work method', 'required independent and creative thinking'. In their accounts, the workplace of INGOs was conducted differently from the traditional style they were familiar with at the universities, where knowledge is taught as received wisdom, rather than open to interpretation and recreation. In contrast to their recollections of passive learning much of their time at university, in INGOs they needed to be proactive in deciding what to do, and to direct their own ongoing learning in the workplace.

The most challenging aspect of their learning in INGOs concerned their mediation role. In order for young graduates to implement project ideas in local communities, they needed to use their own knowledge and skills, and their understanding about local customs, traditions and practices to incorporate this into the project management. They helped to ensure the value of the development projects through these localised inventions. In this role, they were mediating between different cultures and different ideas as both cultural mediator (Bochner, 1981) and cultural intermediary (Bourdieu, 1990). The following sections will now explore the differences between these two forms of mediating in more depth.

6.3. Cultural mediation

Mediation is defined as ‘a process designed to manage and resolve conflicts between two or more parties’ (McKay, 2008). It is a facilitated negotiation process, in which both parties can identify their interests and needs, raise their ideas and opinions, and propose solutions for problems. The person who conducts the mediation process (the mediator) ‘guides the parties through the process without determining the outcome’ (McKay, 2008).

The classical sociologist Georg Simmel wrote specifically about different ‘social types’. His gallery of types includes both the ‘man-in-the-middle’ and the ‘mediator’ (Simmel, 1971; Simmel & Wolff, 1950). The former can moderate the tensions of the two other members in the group (Simmel, 1971; Simmel & Wolff, 1950), while the latter is conceptualised as a third element who is ‘non-partisan either [because] he stands above the contrasting interests and opinions and is actually not concerned with them, or [because] he is equally concerned with both’ (Simmel & Wolff, 1950, p. 150).

The non-partisan either produces the concord of two colliding parties, whereby he withdraws after making the effort of creating direct contact between the unconnected or quarrelling elements; or he functions as an arbiter who balances, as it were, their contradictory claims against one another and eliminates what is incompatible in them (Simmel & Wolff, 1950, p. 147).

Because young graduates have strong allegiances to both employers and clients, their mediation becomes complicated because they are the man in the middle ‘tied to the two parties, not by specific interests, but by his total personality’ (Simmel, 1950, p. 151). This points to the ways young graduates’ shape their roles of the ‘in-between’ person with their own understandings and values. While Simmel was not exclusively concerned with mediating between people of different cultures, his classification of the functions of ‘the-man-in-the-middle’ resembles the role undertaken by the young graduates in my research who feel pulled in conflicting directions by their allegiance to their employers and the local communities with whom they work.

Bochner’s (1981) broad concept of ‘cultural mediation’ also incorporates the idea of ‘man in the middle’, conceptualising wider scope of the mediation role as the person ‘in-between’ cultures. In 1981, the social psychologist Bochner proposed the term ‘cultural mediation’ to theorise mediation, specifically, as it occurs between people of different cultures. Bochner (1981) conceptualises cultural mediation as the work of ‘disseminating information, promoting mutual understanding,

forming culturally relativistic attitudes, producing cross-cultural empathy, spreading international goodwill and reconciling disparate cultural practices' (Bochner, 1981, p. 306). Although having differing theoretical/disciplinary backgrounds, Simmel's sociological perspective can be used in combination with Bochner's social psychological understanding to theorise the 'mediator' role played by the young graduates in the current research.

According to Bochner (1986), mediating persons operate at four levels simultaneously. At the structural level, the process of cultural mediation is placed at the interface between two or more cultural systems. At functional level, the mediating person can link between two or more cultural systems as a translator or a synthesiser (Bochner, 1986); for example, Bochner emphasises the particular importance of cultural understanding for the role of a translator, observing that 'the mediator-as-translator model breaks down if the material being translated is mutually inconsistent' (Bochner, 1986, p. 23). At the interpersonal level, mediation is a group process, which is performed by persons in mediating roles and supported by mediating institutions, traditions and norms. At the personal level, mediation is a descriptive category 'referring to the behaviors, feelings and attitudes that persons in the mediating role exhibit' (Bochner, 1986, p. 27). In general, the mediating persons are involved in the process of intercultural interactions, which Byram (1997), Dearsdorff (2006), Ting-Toomey and Kurogi (1998) argue require intercultural competence, as outlined in chapter 2.

Ting-Toomey (1999) also argues that the cognitive, affective and behavioural dimensions of cultural mediation are essential aspects of intercultural competence, and all require reflexivity. Firstly, the cognitive component - cultural awareness - refers to an individual's knowledge and understanding of his/her own culture and of others' cultures. Secondly, the affective component - cultural sensitivity - enables an individual to be sensitive enough during intercultural interactions to acknowledge and respect cultural differences. Lastly, the behavioural dimension corresponds to communication skills and interpersonal interaction (Ting-Toomey, 1999).

Cultural mediation is essential in work that requires agreement between people from different cultures or different ethnic groups (Bochner, 1981; Taft, 1981). The mediator's work can be simply reflection, someone who 'facilitates communication, understanding, and action between persons or groups of different cultures' (Taft 1981, p. 53). However, more recently, mediation has been conceptualised more being challenging, involving guiding the parties through the process 'without determining the outcome' (McKay, 2008). Bochner (1981) acknowledges the complication of the

cultural mediators' work in their two key roles of mediating information and mediating encounters. The first role means acting as the catalyst between, for example, visitors and local people, in interpretation and translation (Cohen, 1985), informing and facilitating cultural understanding (Smith, 2001; Yu, Weiler, & Ham, 2002). And the second role acts as go-between in cross-cultural encounters (Cohen, 1985), involving social mediation and cultural brokerage. The cultural brokerage role is a 'thought-provoking' one, to mediate not only encounters between cultures (Smith 2001), but also to provide insights into local ways of life and to facilitate communication (Yu et al., 2002). This points to ways for understanding the complexity in the mediation work of young graduates at INGOs.

Cronin (2004) found, in his research into cultural mediation performed by advertising practitioners in China, that while performing cultural mediation in commercial relationships, the advertising practitioners 'bring the relationships into being and constantly redefine those relationships' (Cronin, 2004). In this way, Cronin posits that the mediating practitioners' role should not only be understood as being mediators between one party and another (producer and consumer) but should be viewed as a negotiation between multiple 'regimes of mediation', including, in the case of Cronin's research, the commercial relationship between advertising agencies, as producers and their clients, as consumers (Cronin 2004, p. 349). Cronin's argument suggests that much of the 'in-between' work of young graduates at INGOs may be understood not merely as language mediator in the workplace, but should be viewed as intermediary between international experts and local communities.

Most of the young graduates in the current research often did more than translating or facilitating communication between two parties. At times, they were reconstructing foreign development models into Vietnamese ones, negotiating another 'regime of mediation', in Cronin's (2004) terms, in a way akin to the 'cultural intermediary' role described in the work of Bourdieu (1984) and others (Negus, 2002; Edwards, 2012). This role includes cultural mediation but also entails 'reshaping' cultural or symbolic goods (Bourdieu, 1984).

6.4. Cultural intermediaries

'Cultural intermediary' is the term originally given by Bourdieu (1984) to those involved in the circulation of culture to signify the way their dispositions shape the nature of their practices. Bourdieu drew this concept of the cultural intermediary out of his research of French society in the

1970s to denote a new type of worker – one who works between cultural production and cultural consumption (Bourdieu, 1984). According to Bourdieu:

...this new class faction implies a certain meeting or point of connection between the disaffected, educated, bohemian middle class and the upwardly mobile, newly educated working class (Negus, 2002, p. 503).

More recently, Negus has observed that Bourdieu's concept privileges a group of occupations that 'come *in-between* creative artists and consumers' (Negus, 2002, p. 503). Yet, there are now many other occupational groupings that are 'crucial to processes of cultural mediation' (Negus, 2002). Along with Bourdieu (1984), Negus argues that symbolic production is central to the work of such cultural intermediaries who:

... shape both use values and exchange values, and seek to manage how these values are connected with people's lives through the various techniques of persuasion and marketing and through the construction of markets (Negus, 2002, p. 504).

Negus applies the concept of cultural intermediary in his work on the music industry in the UK (Negus, 1992), and the USA (Negus, 1999). In the UK during the 1980s and early 1990s, the practices in the music industry:

...have emerged and been shaped historically, as a result of broader social divisions within Britain and as a consequence of how the beliefs, practices and aesthetic dispositions of those cultural intermediaries who constitute a 'rock genre culture' have contributed to the formation of a particular type of music industry (Negus, 2002, p. 513).

Negus (1992) argues that cultural intermediaries in the pop music industry are different from the usual mediators who mediate between producers and consumers, as they have used their access to the cultural industries to maintain a special market for pop music and have added value to this as a *cultural* product (Negus, 1992). With globalisation, cultural products may be produced in some countries while the consumers are spread throughout the world; the further the distance, the more complicated the role of cultural intermediaries (Negus, 1992).

Negus's analysis, although focused upon a market context, suggests particular differences between 'cultural intermediaries' and other cultural mediators that are useful for analysing the work experiences of young graduates in my research, who were involved in introducing new development

models to local communities in the way suitable and acceptable by the local communities. These were done through their ways of reflecting upon their knowledge, and mediating between international consultants' ideas and local communities' practices and customs, in order to develop the acceptable models. By doing this, young graduates contribute to adjusting the ways of carrying out development work in INGOs in Vietnam.

What Negus describes in his analysis of cultural intermediaries is akin to the role that Cronin (2004) asserts 'planners' play in the multiple regimes of mediation suggested by Cronin, 'imagining and constituting specific (ideal) "market segments" and incorporating them into advertising strategy and end-products' (Cronin, 2004, p. 357). Like the planners in Cronin's study, the development practitioners in my research needed to mediate between the ideas and activities proposed by the international expatriates and the desires and needs of local community, in a way that would produce new models applicable for the locality.

Edward's (2012) usage of the concept 'cultural intermediaries' also points to the intermediary role that the young graduates in the present study adopted to work between international expertise and local norms and practices, developing localised development models. Responding to other scholars' calls for a better understanding of the practice of cultural intermediaries (Cronin, 2004), Edwards (2012) drew on Bourdieu's concept of a cultural intermediary to understand public relations as a new form of cultural intermediary work 'providing symbolic goods and services' (Bourdieu, 1984, p. 365). He explores public relations as part of a society's information and communication structures, in the way it formulates and disseminates information designed to influence values and attitudes about social and cultural roles, identities and practices (Edwards, 2012). The case of Mr Xuan's disseminating the adjusted model on child nutrition was similar to what public relations practitioners in Edwards' research were doing, as illustrated in detail in the following section 6.5.2. Mr Xuan leads his project team to apply a Bangladesh successful model for promoting child nutrition. His team revise components of the project to make it suitable for Vietnamese culture. For example, the logo design, the clinic arrangement, and particularly the way they tailored their consultancy services according to the need of the mother and the child, which was new to the traditional overall consultancy service for both mother and child.

More pertinent still is Richard's (2009) research on the mediation work of NGOs in incorporating local communities into a nation-wide project in Mexico (Richard, 2009). Using anthropological cultural intermediary theory, Richard concluded that NGOs were mediators of change, developing theoretical insights into 'the processes by which neoliberalising projects become embedded in and

consequently transformed by specific settings' (Richard, 2009, p. 166). In his view, NGOs in the world have played an important role in 'mediating intertwined and often contradictory processes of political and economic liberalisation'. However, changes to the political context in Mexico have altered the nature of the interventions NGOs in Mexico make (Richard, 2009). NGOs in a locality in Mexico, according to Richard, were successful in 'reworking cultural idioms of mediation to position themselves as legitimate intermediaries linking rural cooperatives, state officials, international donors and the global activist network' (Richard, 2009, p. 166). Richard concludes that NGOs, internationally, 'have taken on intermediary roles, building up structural linkages for redistribution of resources and power, as well as facilitating translation of cultural forms between distinct social groups' (Richard, 2009, p. 188).

What Richard describes about the role of NGOs is applicable to Vietnam in spite of Plipat's conclusion that INGO projects in Vietnam resemble 'state constructs' (Plipat, 2005). The responsibilities of young graduates are not just to be 'structured' by the structure (Bourdieu, 1990b) though they must collaborate with state ministries and local authorities in order to lead social change at the community level and influence policy at the national level. The difficulties in their work are marked by the fact that INGO did not resemble state sector in many facets, for example, the organizational regulations at INGOs were more flexible while the national regulations and laws were fixed. As a consequence, the project staff can be placed in confusing situation to mediate between two different set of regulations. For example, Ms Nguyen had difficulty in dealing with financial management issues at her INGO when her project work had to synchronize with the financial management system of the local authority who followed the law of the government.

There were financial problems,... for example in Vietnam, the financial system had decrees or financial decisions issued by the government.... when I submitted the payment request [for food allowance for school staff participating in the workshop, which followed one regulation of the national financial system], the international boss did not agree to pay.... Such issue could become a fierce debate. The Vietnamese workshop participants said it followed the governmental regulation, but the international boss said it was not reasonable (Ms Nguyen, Project Officer).

However, INGO did not resemble private sector either, whose business were profit oriented. It was difficult for young graduate to identify the differences and similarities among these kinds of structure to guide their work. For example, Ms Vu recognised a noticeable difference between the

way her INGO and private business promoted their works, with INGO still resembled the rigid controlled way while private business was much more creative and effective in her view:

I tried to ask myself why the work in the development environment lacked of something very interesting... (Ms Vu, Project Officer).

I also wondered why a business had to hire outside companies to create marketing products for them. ...why here [at INGO] you also had to hire consultants to do those things ...but it still could not be creative nor provide the expected result (Ms Vu, Project Officer).

Despite these difficulties, young graduates choosing to work for INGOs displayed strong sense of responsibility to lead social change which was reflected through the ways they see the roles of the INGO, and their own roles, as outlined in chapter 5. For example, Mr Pham stated that in his role in the INGO he was *'actually, ... contributing to improve the community'* (Mr Pham, Project Assistant), Ms Nguyen, Ms My also confirmed this role in their positions as *'I can contribute my abilities to the development of the community'* (Ms Nguyen, Project Officer), *'my work contributes to improving the living conditions of the communities'* (Ms My, Project Assistant). The scope of their projects can go higher than community levels, to influence at national level, as in Ms Nguyen's second position, *'our project wanted to introduce applied pedagogical research into the education system in Vietnam'* (Ms Nguyen, Project Officer), and Mr Xuan's project on child nutrition improvement *'I understood that this model [child nutrition improvement] developed from the demand for improving child nutrition, particularly to reduce malnutrition and improve child growth ratios'* (Mr Xuan, Project Manager). Their sense of responsibilities to lead social changes made them similar to their peer at INGOs elsewhere as Richard (2009) demonstrated in Mexico.

In summary, the literature on cultural mediation and the cultural intermediary provides a useful framework for interpreting the roles of INGO development staff. Their roles generate new strategies and outcomes or products which embody the specific value of the intermediary's position and may create new patterns of practices (Edwards, 2012) in multiple regimes of mediation (Cronin, 2004). In the work experiences of the young graduates at INGO workplaces, as described in chapter 5, their roles required them to function as both cultural mediators and cultural intermediaries. How they interpreted, negotiated and enacted these roles will be explored in more depth in the next section.

6.5. Performing cultural mediation and cultural intermediary roles – different trajectories

INGO development project staff responsible for applying or introducing existing development models designed by outside experts to the local context must thoroughly understand the rationale for, and technical language of the project and the national and local context on the one hand, and on the other, the local traditions and customs that might contradict the project, in order to propose workable, acceptable solutions. The analysis of interviews with young graduate development offices demonstrated this complexity in their mediation and intermediary roles.

Cronin's (2004) notion of 'different regimes of mediation' highlights the different social (and political) relationships entailed in 'cultural mediation' and 'cultural intermediary' roles. Cronin's use of this terminology is situated within a particular view of the 'logics' of (capitalist) economic systems and the relationship between the commercial and cultural. The young graduates in my research were located in a particularly interesting global, political-economic context of contemporary Vietnam, in transition from a planned economy to market oriented one. The work of INGOs in Vietnam involves the transference of cultural/social and material resources, under the particular conditions of this transitional period, and interviewees commented on the fact that they are working in a mixed economy (from within the 'non-government', not-for-profit sector) in the context of continuing strong central state control at state sector, and a strong 'free-market' orientation dominating the private sector.

All of the young graduates' accounts of their positions at INGOs showed that they were engaged in mediating activities between the international expatriates and the local communities at different levels, for example, language interpreting, translating, or communication facilitation, and some of the young graduates' accounts indicated that they moved between the roles of cultural mediator and cultural intermediary, under different and sometimes varying conditions, in different contexts of work. The following examples of individual graduates help to clarify various mediating functions young graduates performed according to their tasks and their positions.

6.5.1. Examples of cultural mediation

All young graduates in my research performed cultural mediation functions in their daily work, most commonly through language mediation involving interpreting and translating. This was often a more or less straightforward process with the mediators trying to be as accurate as possible in the transfer the ideas between international expatriates and local people. However, most translation at INGOs is complex, involving deeper cultural mediation in which the mediators helped both sides to understand each other's practices, traditions or customs. Among the informants, Ms My, Ms Mau, Mr Pham and Ms Hoa provided typical examples of language mediation in their positions of interpreters or assistants, as the following summaries demonstrate.

a. Ms My

Ms My graduated from the Water Resource University in 2007, after studying in the Hydrology-Environment department. An interview with her was conducted in January 2011. She was trained to be an engineer in hydraulic works, hydro-power and water resources. After graduation, Ms My did some temporary work for two months before she found employment in a Vietnam office of a US water resource company, which provided outsourcing services for US companies. Her key task was to analyse the data that the company had collected for hydrology constructions in the US and prepare reports based on this. After seven months, she left to start working for a Singapore hospital representative office in Hanoi. In this second job, she liaised between the doctors of the Singapore hospital and the Vietnamese patients to arrange for their medical treatment in Singapore. This job required her to develop very good communication skills and skillful interpersonal skills to mediate between the patients and the international doctors. As she had always wanted to help the poor, she thought INGOs would be the right place to realise that wish. Therefore, after two years working with the doctors, she decided to move to an INGO to work in the community development area, in the position of project assistant in a monitoring and evaluation team. Her role was to support an international consultant while she worked in the office and conducted monitoring trips to the project sites. To do her task, Ms My had to learn about monitoring and evaluation methods under the guidance of the consultant.

I was her assistant on project impact monitoring task. She [the international consultant] instructed me what to do, which documents to explore, how to read a research paper, either thoroughly read through or just read the abstracts (Ms My, Project Assistant).

In her daily work, Ms My assisted the international consultant during her consultancy with local people by interpreting and explaining cultural traditions and practices in Vietnamese villages, and Vietnamese language terms and customs such as hierarchical norms for addressing people in Vietnam, according to age or family relationship or social relationship with the speaker. The international consultant really needed such kind of advice from the Vietnamese staff because incorrect forms of address can cause embarrassment in the communication process. In performing such activities, Ms My was mediating between the local minority culture, and the international culture (Bochner, 1986).

The consultant also asked about a lot of things; for example, when dealing with a new situation, she asked how it was called in Vietnamese; what she should say in a certain case; how to say thank you; which pronoun she should use to address the person in a certain situation (Ms My, Project Assistant).

Whenever we met a situation, or if I found something special, I also told her, for example,which Vietnamese custom was linked to it (Ms My, Project Assistant).

b. Ms Mau

Another young graduate, Ms Mau, also provided such support to international expatriate in communicating with local people. When interviewed Ms Mau was working as a Project Assistant at a long-established UK based INGO. She had been with the organization for two months at the time of the interview. This INGO serves impoverished, marginalised and vulnerable children and families in more than 120 nations. Their programs reach both children and those working to save and improve the children's lives. They help to save children's lives, protect them from exploitation and assist them in accessing education and health care. Through disaster risk reduction, emergency preparedness, rapid humanitarian relief and long-term recovery programs, the organisation also assists millions of girls and boys at risk of or affected by natural disasters, conflicts and ethnic violence. Their programs in Vietnam include Education, Health and Nutrition, Livelihoods and Food Security, Child Protection, Child Rights, HIV/AIDS, and Emergency Response.

Ms Mau graduated in 2006, having majored in English language. Her first work experience after her graduation was as an interpreter for the international experts in a small environmental education project for schools in Hanoi, the capital city of Vietnam. Her task was to support the communication process between the international expatriates and local schools.

...all the tasks, such as receptionist, meeting arrangement, and communication over the phone (Ms Mau, Project Assistant),

She worked there for a year until the project finished. The project provided training for school teachers. She was the assistant to the project coordinator who was an international expert. Her daily tasks included administrative work and interpretation. In addition she worked with schools to organize training courses, or together with the international experts to help the school to write up mini projects on environment education. Her translation skills were useful for her to translate the international expatriates' ideas for the local partners to understand.

I involved in organizing workshops, and mediating between expatriates and schools, for example to develop a mini project on environmental education (Ms Mau, Project Assistant).

When the two sides had problems understanding each other, she felt it was because the international consultants did not understand the meaning of the local terms, so she added her explanation to facilitate the communication process.

...in their country, they [the international expatriates] might find those tasks [introducing new activities to the communities] simple. But in Vietnam, it might be difficult, so I might need to help them understand the context of Vietnam (Ms Mau, Project Assistant).

Clearly, Ms Mau performed the roles of interpreter (transferring communication content between two different languages), facilitator (clarifying the meaning of each side's practices and ideas), and cultural mentor or guide (helping the two parties to understand each other's cultural values, norms or customs). Ms Mau's description of her interpretation role in her project is an example of language mediation.

I think one of the roles of those who work with the foreigners in Vietnam is that I usually find that I can help people understand the context of Vietnam, or I can harmonize their relationship with the Vietnamese. It helps the work to flow better (Ms Mau, Project Assistant).

c. Mr Pham

Mr Pham graduated in 2005 from the University of Languages and International studies. His background was English interpreting; therefore, he was able to get his first job as an English interpreter in an education project in a French INGO, where the international consultants came from

different nations but spoke English at work. In this job he felt that he was working to benefit the community.

Actually, I was contributing to improve the community; that's why I felt happy (Mr Pham, Project Assistant).

In this first job, he translated the international consultants' opinions for the local partners and vice versa. His competent translation skills allowed him to conduct his duties successfully. Both he and the international consultant were helpful to each other. As the result, he was satisfied with this first job.

When I graduated, I immediately worked for a French non-government organization. I was an interpreter for an adviser on education. Communication in English was not a matter because she was British. About speaking skill, the foreigners were aware that in foreign country where people didn't speak English, they needed to talk very slowly, and very clearly, so I could translate (Mr Pham, Project Assistant)

When he changed to an INGO on reproductive health, he worked in a project assistant position which required skills other than interpretation tasks. He had to mediate among other staff, but he explained that he did not feel competent in the additional interpersonal skills required for this work. For example, he felt confused in handling indirect feedback from other Vietnamese staff, which he found different from the way international consultant gave direct feedback:

...when I entered [the second INGO] I was confused by indirect feedback from other Vietnamese staff on my performance (Mr Pham, Project Assistant).

That confusion reduced the effectiveness of his communication with other staff. He had to rely on advices from some senior staff who experienced similar situation, as he described in both first and second INGO:

[in the first INGO] I had to ask other staff, who had worked there [for long] and got used to the working style there, and they advised that I really should not ask too much (Mr Pham, Project Assistant) ,

[in the second INGO] when I was confused like that, there was a man, a program officer there, who was very kind to me. He advised me very enthusiastically ((Mr Pham, Project Assistant)

After some years, he decided to move to a new development project which focuses on three key sectors: health; education, vocational training and job creation; and integrated local development, including water and sanitation and microfinance activities, which he found similar to his experience in the first INGO. Having gained experience from the second organisation, Mr Pham was more successful in his current job and wished to stay there. Language mediation appeared to be where Mr Pham felt most successful. In this function, he could use the knowledge and skills in which he had been trained thoroughly both in his formal university study and through the extra activities he engaged in as a university student.

d. Ms Hoa

Ms Hoa is a special example of a mediator moving towards performing cultural intermediary at certain level. She graduated with a major in English language teaching in 2006. She dreamed of becoming a teacher. However, it was not very easy to find a teaching job in the city where she lived. She agreed to become a translator at a business company after graduating so that she could develop her English language skills. Doing translation work for two years, she moved to work on a community development project in the Ministry of Health. In this second job, she worked in the position of project assistant, which required her to organize the implementation of project activities, to analyse project data and to evaluate the effectiveness of the activities. After two more years, she decided to move to an INGO to work as a project assistant and soon she was promoted to be a project associate in charge of project activities in one province.

Her university studies focused on English language skills and pedagogical theories, which were useful when she conducted and facilitated different training workshops at her INGO. In these training workshops, Ms Hoa mediated the knowledge transfer from international expatriates to the local learners. She provided translation and facilitation at training workshops to help the local learners understand the international trainers and vice versa. The training was about the methods used in medical anthropology to work with ethnic minority people in order to understand traditional health practices in some rural and mountainous areas of Vietnam. Australian trainers provided examples from Australian experiences, while the learners contributed their experiences about Vietnamese health practices. Ms Hoa encouraged learners to voice their opinions and to discuss their concerns, thus facilitating the training process. She helped translate the opinions of the learner so that the trainer and the learners understood each other. As a result, they overcome mismatching in their experiences to develop models applicable for Vietnamese context.

At that training workshop, there was a group work section to list down all native health care practices of the local ethnic communities. ... I joined one group discussion. ...I incorporated opinions of all groups into a report and translated into English so that the trainers and the learners could discuss together (Ms Hoa, Project Associate)

Even more, Ms Hoa contributed her own knowledge to the discussion with the learners. At this level, like Ms Vu, Ms Nguyen, and Mr Xuan whose experiences are documented in the following section, Ms Hoa had moved from mediator to intermediary role (Bourdieu, 1984; Cronin, 2004).

During group work discussion, I was involved as an observer. The groups assigned group heads to facilitate the discussions. During the discussion, if the facilitators only asked some members to speak, or if some group members dominated, I tried to interup and invited those who did not speak to voice their ideas. I also ensured that the group members were discussing the topic of the training workshop (Ms Hoa, Project Associate).

When the Australian experts introduced medical anthropology to the teachers at medical schools, they used case studies from Australia. These were unfamiliar to the cultures in Vietnam, particularly in the ethnic minority areas, and as a consequence, the learners did not find the case studies relevant to their work. Moreover, medical anthropology was a new concept in Vietnam, though it had long been used elsewhere, and therefore neither the project staff nor the medical teachers understood it. It was necessary to have case studies in the local context to disseminate this new knowledge to the local people.

It seemed that the Australian experts had been here in Vietnam for too short a time to understand the needs of the learners. My task was to bring the learners' needs to the notice of the trainer. The biggest gap, for example, was the fact that he provided too many examples from Australia; however, the Vietnamese learners wanted to know about the Vietnamese context, and about research methods. The Australian experts then revised their schedule (Ms Hoa, Project Associate).

Ms Hoa effectively performed a mediation role, which involves the mediating person forming links between two or more cultural systems (Bochner, 1981), when she mediated between the trainers and the learners to develop case studies from their own experiences. This localized the medical anthropology methods in the Vietnamese context.

As Bennett et al (2000) found, new graduates generally do not have many difficulties applying discipline knowledge and skills in similar contexts at work. In the present study, the informants who graduated as English interpreters (Mr Pham, Ms Mau) started their first jobs as interpreters and used their language skills to mediate the communication between the international expatriates and the local people. These tasks were close to their disciplines, and this partially explains why they were keen to remain in the cultural mediation role. The knowledge they acquired at the universities was helpful for them in their mediating role at work. Moreover, their disciplinary training gave them a particular frame for seeing that work as having value in itself, so they saw this as their profession, whereas others with different training had different ways of seeing their work. Though not all participants hold interpreter positions, their work required them to translate the ideas and comments of the international expatriates to the local partners and vice versa. As all young participants in our research had satisfied the requirement of English language skills for working at INGOs, they performed well in their cultural mediation roles through translating the English language and facilitating communication. When dealing with language mediation tasks, they felt confident because this was very closely linked with language skills such as translation or oral presentation they had learnt and practised beforehand.

However, in mediating cultural differences between different ethnic groups in Vietnam, proficiency in the English language was not enough; knowledge of local customs, cultural practices, norms and traditions was equally significant. Young graduates increasingly recognized the importance of local cultural knowledge over time. It was important to work with both sides to develop the project ideas into the localized ones applicable to the local contexts. These young graduates learnt to perform different mediation functions including language mediation, and cultural mediation (Bochner, 1981; Cronin, 2004; Simmel, 1950) in their daily tasks. However, the level of mediation they performed depended a lot on the ways they combine their knowledge and values and those of international experts and local community to implement project ideas. Hence, whilst most of the young graduates were occupied mainly in one or another form of mediating, some, such as Ms Hoa, engaged in both forms. Those whose accounts are recorded below, functioned more consistently as cultural intermediaries, using their knowledge to interpret the foreign models or ideas into the models suitable for, and accepted by, the local communities.

6.5.2. Example of cultural intermediaries

Young graduates assumed the role of cultural intermediaries mostly after they gained the necessary work knowledge and skills in very first jobs and then moved on to other positions closely linked to

their acquired work knowledge and skills. With their experience and practice knowledge and skills, they were able to addvalue to original (imported) project models or ideas (Cronin, 2004; Negus, 1992; 2002). The cases of Ms Vu, Mr Ta, Mr Xuan, Ms Nguyen, Ms Hong best demonstrate this role.

a. Ms Vu

Ms Vu graduated with an international trade major in July 2009 and gained an internship position at an INGO immediately after graduation. Her INGO focused on education and gender equality. The interview with her was conducted in December 2010. After three months in the internship position, when a Project Officer position in education project was available, she applied for it, and was offered the job. She was involved in the education program that apply the Child-Centered Methodology (CCM) model to improve the well-being of children, particularly girls at ethnic minority communities by raising the awareness of the value of schooling, building capacity for a core group of teacher on child-centered teaching methods, as well as implementing advocacy work with local and national authorities to replicate project ideas. At the time of the interview, Ms Vu had been in that role for a year, and she believed that she could manage her tasks effectively.

Ms Vu had encountered a traditional learning approach at her university, which she described similarly to the finding in Nguyen Thi Thanh Hong's (2008) research:

...the teacher asked us to write 20 pages long assignment, and we wrote up to 20 pages, then submitted to the teachers, and that was done; there was no sharing between students and teachers...for the majority of subjects, the teachers still lecture, and the students take notes thoroughly, so as to study those notes for the final exam (Ms Vu, Project Officer).

However, Ms Vu appeared to be proactive in searching for extra-curricular opportunities to expand her knowledge and skills about projects work, as outlined in chapter 4 and 5, and she explained that her competence and confidence at work was partly due to the management skills, gained through a voluntary project during her student time.

We [Ms Vu and international students from UK] held an English speaking summer camp for those students to come to teach. Then we used the cash income from that camp to fund the charity work...We used the money to open English classes for visually impaired students or students with parents in difficulties....Afterwards, the rest of the money was donated to that school to buy equipment. The project activity lasted for more than 2 years.At the final

year, we conducted a workshop to train a generation to continue the project [Ms Vu, Project Officer].

She applied her learning from this experience in her work at her INGO, where she supervised the implementation of a component of the education program for a Child-Centered Methodology (CCM) model to improve the accessibility of primary education for poor children in extremely disadvantaged areas, particularly ethnic minority children and girls. This work met her expectations about INGOs because, in her words, *'development work can benefit the society by giving direct support to people who need your help'* (Ms Vu, Project Officer).

I felt concern for the poor, the vulnerable people in the community and I understood the meaning of the work at INGO. I thought although I could become a very good business person, earn much money and create employment or jobs for a lot of others, there were other ways for me to benefit the society through direct help to the people in need. That was the reason I selected NGOs (Ms Vu, Project Officer).

In implementing her education project, Ms Vu started by trying to understand the practices and rules of the local community, to identify the differences between her organization's regulations and the local partner organization so that she could mediate between them.

In my organization, for example, firstly, when we had any problem, we usually went straight to the point; to directly solve that problem. However, while talking to partners, sometimes that way of doing things was not applicable, because they did not want to go directly to the problem immediately (Ms Vu, Project Officer).

To interpret the differences between cultures is common in the work of young graduates at INGOs. However, Ms Vu was very cautious in her way of interpreting the practices of local communities:

I compared and contrasted to learn from both sides (Ms Vu, Project Officer).

Her strategy was also to take account of everyone's idea, as she claimed that every idea might be developed into project activities. She compared her own ways, her organisational rules and regulations with those of the local communities, thinking critically about the differences, and reasoning the causes. By doing that she was moving towards articulating the hidden cultural values within the practices of the local community.

I might be very direct and go straight into solving the problem, however, at times there might be some kinds of conflicts that I will not care too much about. Nonetheless, while working with local partners, they are more serious on those things. And they don't like that kind of conflict. The problem could be unsolved but everything must have been very smooth and very harmonious, i.e. to keep peace (Ms Vu, Project Officer).

Ms Vu was able to point out that structural constraints were the major problems:

.... My difficulty happens when working with the Vietnamese authorities.... Sometimes their work culture is so different from ours [organizational rules]. First, in terms of time and working hours; Second, their work approach, and working atmosphere is also different from ours [organizational rules] (Ms Vu, Project Officer).

Reflecting on these experiences has enabled Ms Vu to develop effective strategies for future situations. More importantly, in the long term, her strategies gradually raised the awareness of the local community, influenced the practices of the local communities who she was dealing with, got them involved in designing development models, and understanding the benefits of these activities and the need to follow regulations and rules, and apply those principles. In her way, Ms Vu was acting as a cultural intermediary in 'multiple regimes' (Cronin, 2004).

b. Mr Ta

Mr Ta was the field project officer for a project of a leading INGO in the promotion of child rights. He graduated from a public health program in 2011. Immediately after graduation he started to look for a public health related job since this career pathway was inspired by his university teachers. Considering development work very challenging but rewarding, he decided to apply for a project officer position in a field office of the child rights INGO. In order to promote a better future for them, his project aimed to reduce early marriage among girls of ethnic minority identity living in a mountainous province.

Although the legal marriage age in Vietnam is set at 20 for men and 18 for women by marriage and family law, many ethnic groups maintain their customs of early marriage for young girls. The enforcement of the law is not very strictly followed among these groups which could possibly lead to health risks for children born to very young mothers; however, the baseline survey of Mr Ta's project proved that law enforcement may not be an effective intervention. As a result, Mr Ta's project applied a behaviour change approach and awareness-raising for local people, young girls and their parents, in order to change the custom of early marriage. Project activities involved

advocacy work and education with the community, the local authorities, the school and school children so that they could understand the harmfulness associated with early marriage, and the benefits of delayed marriage.

We did not approach the early marriage problem from a legal perspective but from a 'better' viewpoint, which meant [we assessed] which was better [early marriage or later marriage]. Actually, from the baseline survey, a legal approach was not so effective. We applied the 'better' view, for example [by promoting] the benefits that later marriage would bring about, what was better about later marriage compared with early marriage (Mr Ta – Project Officer).

Ensuring the right to get married at legal age is a part of UNICEF program to promote child rights enforcement for the betterment of children's health and civil rights. Joachim Theis, UNICEF Adolescent Development and Participation Specialist, and former program manager for Save the Children Alliance at Bangkok regional office explains:

... organizations like UNICEF and Plan International realized how important it is for children (and adults) to have a birth registration document in order to access education and health services, for children to be protected so they don't get recruited as child soldiers, they are not married early and to make sure they aren't tried as adults if they get into conflict with the law ⁷ (Joachim Theis, UNICEF).

One result of this effort was the enforcement by many governments of children's right for birth registration. This effort of UNICEF and the INGO community in the world is a success of the intermediary in enforcing the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child in the policy agenda of different governments.

... these agencies worked with civil registration systems in countries around the world to develop ways to register children and births and also to build up an effective civil registration system. They ran campaigns to ensure that all children are registered. This approach proved very successful. As a result, governments have greatly increased their investments in civil registration systems. Even countries like Cambodia and Papua New

⁷Q&A with Joachim Theis, Adolescent Development and Participation Specialist: Children's citizenship and civil rights. http://www.unicef.org/eapro/media_7381.html. Accessed on 1st April 2013

Guinea, with serious constraints in the capacities of public institutions, have made major headway (Joachim Theis, UNICEF).

In his work, Mr Ta performed roles both as cultural mediator and cultural intermediary. Through his interpretation support for the international experts, he facilitated the training courses in the way he thought the learners and international consultants needed. If the learners did not fully understand the questions of the international consultant, he rephrased and clarified the questions. He tried to encourage the learners to speak out about their opinions because he thought the international consultants wanted to know the local people's views.

I provided translation and interpretation. Even more, I assisted in creating a more open environment among the learners. If the learners kept silent when the consultants raised questions, I warmed them up, or clarified the questions so that the learners understood the questions and could answer. The most important thing was the learners' answers. That was what the consultants wanted to hear (Mr Ta, Project Officer).

During his mediation between the international consultant and the local people, Mr Ta contributed his understandings of the negative social and health impacts of early marriage among young girls. In doing that, he was involved in realising the goal of his project to change the behaviour pattern of the local community through their raised awareness. He, therefore, was acting as an intermediary promoting a new concept of marriage age in this locality.

c. Mr Xuan

In the accounts of Mr Xuan, the uptake of a model or idea designed by international experts in application by the local community depends on the ways development staff adjust the model to suit the local context. Their rationale embodies an accumulation of their own life course and work experiences. Mr Xuan graduated in 2009 and majored in public health, which was a fairly new major at Vietnamese universities, established in 2002. The major provided students with many research methods which Mr Xuan could apply immediately to his first job at a department of health in his home province. During the two years in this first job, he conducted an assessment of child nutrition in that province, analysing the result against the national nutrition context to propose necessary activities for reducing child malnutrition in his province. However, Mr Xuan wanted to have a work environment where he could actually apply his ideas in improving malnutrition in reality, and thus, he decided to move to work for an INGO.

At this INGO, his previous experience at the health department helped him to obtain a project officer (PO) position and he stayed in that position for six months before being promoted to programme manager. Both of these positions had different task requirements from Mr Xuan's previous job at the health department. As the manager of the program for promotion of child nutrition, Mr Xuan started his position with the task to supervise the implementation of a social franchise model called "*the sun of childhood*", which was an expansion of the initiative for infant and young child feeding (IYCF) developed in Bangladesh. Mr Xuan joined the project when it had already started; therefore, he had to understand the goals and objectives of the project by studying the project documents. However, in his project manager role, he was fully responsible for implementing all project activities. His own knowledge about child nutrition, about the Vietnamese values and culture in caring for children, was incorporated into his supervision of the construction of health clinics. The franchise model of the project required all clinics to meet the same standards, using the same logo, which he vividly described as follows: '*The pretty sun face represented happy children and good nutrition..... The slogan said nutrition today, healthy tomorrow*' (Mr Xuan, Program Manager).

I was not there when the idea started. I understood that this model developed from the demand for improving child nutrition, particularly to reduce malnutrition and improve child growth ratios. To conduct social franchise work, the model needed to have a very unique brand name. Now you can see our logo of the sun face and two leaves everywhere, on the bus, on television programs, in the supermarket (Mr Xuan, Program Manager).

This new social franchise model for child nutrition was the first of its type applied in Vietnam. The model created a unique brand name, logo and clinic design, and good quality services. Then the model was transferred to the local partners without taking any copyright fee. Even more, the program supported the local health clinics to follow the design of the model, and trained their staff to follow the requirements of the model. This particular model was different from other existing models because it aimed to change from a free service into a user-pays service. Mr Xuan reasoned that the users of the fee-paying service would appreciate the counselling service they received because they had to pay. To make the service user-friendly, Mr Xuan and his project team tailored the counselling services according to the clients' needs, which was a very different approach from the traditional generic nutrition counselling service being applied at most of state health clinics. This aimed to influence the counselling behaviour of the service providers as well as the counselling service usage practices of the clients.

This model of ‘*the sun of childhood*’ involved a great deal of collaboration with other teams in Mr Xuan’s INGO, other partner INGOs of the initiative, and international experts. Mr Xuan supervised the artists’ design of the logo to ensure the message of the model was conveyed correctly.

...the design of the communication materials and monitoring tool was developed by a hired company and based on our ideas. ... The coordination among teams was very good. For example, the communication team had to understand the communication message we wanted to provide. They had to ensure that the design of the message follow organizational regulations. Moreover, they had to ensure that the design was eye catching and understandable.... All these ideas were expressed in words and then a design company was hired to visualize them (Mr Xuan, Program Manager).

Mr Xuan’s functional mediation (Bochner, 1986) between different cultural issues in his project model led to his engagement as an intermediary in changing the model of a free and generic child nutrition service to a comprehensive, fee-paying, high-quality, individually-tailored service, which will more likely ensure the sustainability of the model as well as a good quality service for the user.

d. Ms Nguyen

Ms Nguyen graduated with a major in economics but wished to work for an INGO to help the poor directly in disadvantaged communities. The project work she conducted for her economic development course led her to an INGO development project. After graduation, she decided to work for an INGO and she worked for several development projects with the same focus on education for ethnic minority children. She obtained her first job as a project assistant with an education project for ethnic minority children in a mountainous district. In this job, she worked at the grassroots level. This project required her to have knowledge of education theory, an anthropological approach to working with ethnic minorities, and of development participation methods, as well as to be able to work well as a member of a team.

Ms Nguyen’s first job was in a mountainous district in the North of Vietnam, where most of the local people were from the H’Mong minority group. She was both cultural mediator in her support role to the international consultant, and cultural intermediary in developing the school education system in the area. Her first job at the INGO applied a grassroots level approach to inform and assist each local community to access better education conditions at their local schools.

I could work directly at the grassroots levels. I visited each individual school, each household, each village, each hamlet. Thanks to that, I really, thoroughly understood which difficulties were in the communities and in the schools. Then I gave advice on which directions the schools and community should develop to improve the quality of life and the quality of education of the region (Ms Nguyen, Project Officer).

To realise the vision for a child-friendly community, the project proposed to apply a participatory approach, for which they needed all parents involved in all school processes, from planning, to implementation, monitoring and evaluation. This was a new method for not only Ms Nguyen but also her local partner organization. This method applied a bottom-up approach which allowed the people at the grassroots level to voice their opinions about activities relating to their community. In implementing the participatory method in the context of the schools at her project site, Ms Nguyen negotiated with the international consultant to revise the method according to what she thought was more appropriate to the local school parents' existing practices in their parents' association. Ms Nguyen reasoned that the existing parents' association was a kind of participatory approach; therefore, the new participatory method should be integrated harmoniously with that association's activities.

To translate the participatory method proposed by the international consultant to the local context of the mountainous schools for H'Mong children, Ms Nguyen advocated for the rights of parents to be informed about, and trained, with the necessary skills to be involved in the school management process. Through this functional mediation, Ms Nguyen realized her intermediary role in raising awareness of the value of the existing practices at the local schools. In her words, she describes the way she negotiates new ideas with the international expatriates:

The participation method required that parents needed to be involved in the school process. However, the international experts could not specify steps to get parents involved. They could only point out that, according to the theory, parents should be involved in the schools. But how could parents be involved? As the international experts did not know the reality, they could not point out the solution to involve the parents. Then we sat down to discuss this with each other (Ms Nguyen, Project Officer).

Here, Ms Nguyen developed a strategy to localize all new models to ensure their applicability. The new strategy she drew on was 'to avoid imposing completely new activities' and this was very applicable in her specific project context.

In theory, the child participation approach had its own principles; however, which activities should be done to ensure those principles? The international experts had to rely on my experiences about the available activities in the schools in Vietnam to organize relevant activities that ensure the principles of child participation. We should not create completely new activities (Ms Nguyen, Project Officer).

In her second job, Ms Nguyen was a project officer in a project to introduce a new educational method – applied pedagogical theory – into the educational context in Vietnam. Based upon her new awareness of the need to ‘avoid the introduction of completely new activities’, Ms Nguyen tried to identify the similarities and differences between the applied pedagogy method proposed by the international experts and the actual practices happening at schools and within the education system in Vietnam.

Our project wanted to introduce applied pedagogical research into the education system in Vietnam. However, when the Ministry officers heard about this, they inquired about its nature. Actually, in Vietnam, there existed a system for generating innovations in teaching method; however, the Vietnamese teachers did not have a unified method for writing up their innovations.... Fortunately, our project wanted to offer the methods on creating innovations based on teaching experiences... When we discussed with the ministry officers that we would like to provide training on skills for creating innovations from teaching experiences, they agreed (Ms Nguyen, Project Officer).

Also in her second job, Ms Nguyen worked with her team to develop a new model of user-friendly libraries at primary schools in ethnic minority areas to promote literacy among children. This initiative was derived from a global initiative, called ‘Room to read’, an educational approach which promoted literacy and gender equality in education in developing countries. The initiative set up libraries, built classrooms, published children’s books in local languages, and supported girls to access better educational opportunities. However, a user-friendly library was quite a new model in Vietnam in general, let alone in primary schools. This model allowed the children to have physical contact with library books, and to read and select what they wanted to read. Meanwhile, the traditional library model in Vietnam, whether at primary schools, universities, or state libraries, was not user friendly at all. The librarian was the only person to have physical contact with the books on the shelves while the actual readers passively depend on the library catalogue and the help of the librarian to get the chosen book. The readers could only know about the relevance of the book after

signing off the borrowing slip. Such procedures discouraged a lot of people from visiting the library to borrow books.

Ms Nguyen's rich experience working with individual schools made her an advisor for the international consultant on how to adjust the model to the Vietnamese school context in a mountainous area. Ms Nguyen successfully developed a new model based upon the knowledge of the international consultant, her knowledge and the local practices she observed from her interactions with local communities, and made her new model suitable to the local context and accepted by local community. She had contributed to the way of consulting local regulations and practices in forming up development models for local communities. Her role was similar to the role of cultural intermediary performed by the public relation practitioner in Edwards' (2012) research.

e. Ms Hong

Ms Hong graduated from a public health major and, soon after, secured a temporary job as a research assistant on a research project of an INGO. She assisted an international researcher to conduct interviews about the satisfaction of patients in hospitals.

I was a research assistant supporting a German intern to conduct a small survey about patients' satisfaction for three months. It was similar to my current job. I had to prepare the research tool, conduct the pilot test, then I had to conduct training for local research assistants and monitor their data collection in the field, then analyse the data (Ms Hong, Research Assistant).

In this job, Ms Hong had the first chance to practise the research skills she learnt from university; as a result, she encountered some embarrassment and confusion in applying those skills, particularly in her first day at work, when she was expected to practise her skills and knowledge immediately.

On the first day at work, my boss took me to Hanoi Tower to discuss the set of interview questions. She gave me the set of questions and asked me to comment on whether the questions were OK. Oh, my goodness, I could hardly understand any of the questions (Ms Hong, Research Assistant).

I did not think that I had to do that task on the first day of work. I thought they would train me first, give me some orientation first (Ms Hong, Research Assistant).

Although she had completed a public health degree, which meant she was specialized in carrying

out public health related surveys and research, Ms Hong still assumed that her future boss would provide training about what to do in the job. As a result, she had to struggle quite hard to gain the necessary skills for her real job. In this first job, as an assistant to a German consultant, her main task was to facilitate his interviews with patients in a hospital. Her English language skills were the key factors for her mediating role. During her performance, Ms Hong learnt how to conduct an actual survey on patient satisfaction.

Wishing to continue improving her research skills and to broaden her knowledge, when the first job finished, Ms Hong moved to a second job in a local NGO working to protect wildlife. She worked under the close supervision of an international expert. As a project officer, she had to follow up almost 900 cases of wild animal trafficking at the same time. She was required to check the authenticity of the cases through police, courts, and rangers. The huge amount of intensive work required a very tight schedule and very skilful handling of the interactions with all stakeholders, including courts, police and rangers. Not only good negotiation skills but also dedicated interpersonal skills and excellent personal attributes helped her in overcoming challenges when contacting the government bodies concerned. As an inexperienced staff member, Ms Hong caused several problems, such as dropping cases and omitting important information. These issues upset her boss so much that he decided to provide her with two weeks of intensive in-service training to familiarise her with all laws and organizational regulations concerning wild life protection. Ms Hong needed to remember all the wildlife laws, know how to organize the follow up of cases in a systematic way, how to validate the information of each case and how to check its reliability. Her role then was more than mediating between the legal authorities and the wild-life protection regulations; she was facilitating the process of realizing wild-life protection in Vietnam.

This second job trained her very well in investigation skills. Nonetheless, she could not use her public health knowledge so much in that job. Therefore, Ms Hong decided to move to a research project position in another INGO to study the impact of the introduction of television facilities to an ethnic minority area, with the aim of assessing how this modern means of communication affected the life and health of the ethnic people living in that project site. Ms Hong's research skills, which can be regarded as 'the aptitudes that lie at the heart of scholarly knowledge' that can 'both support the creation of new knowledge and transform the individual' (Barrie, 2006), assisted her to have insights into this new field of anthropology research.

After two months of in-service training on ethical codes and organizational rules, Ms Hong started to conduct a training course on interviewing techniques for the field research assistants who would

collect data for her anthropological research. The research methods from the university and research experiences she gained from her first two jobs were the key content for the training and the field work supervision.

Mostly I taught all the skills, [and] other staff assisted to facilitate the group discussion sections. I learned most of these skills from the university. During my three years at university, I participated in several research activities. I learned how to organize the training course (Ms Hong, Research Assistant).

The large scale longitudinal research that Ms Hong was involved in required more than 100 field research assistants to collect information from a sample of more than 4,000 households. Moreover, the local language in the research sites was Thai, which she and other team members did not know. She had to choose research assistants who could speak the Thai language and ask a senior researcher in her office who spoke the Thai language to accompany the team and supervise the data collection.

Interviewer: *Did you supervise the data collectors?*

Ms Hong: Yes. One of the staff knew Thai language. He helped to solve the problems that the data collectors met. I had to ensure the reliability of the collected data. As the sample was too large, I provided random checks daily. Travelling between hamlets was extremely difficult, particularly for rechecking the missing information; therefore the data collectors felt tired, but the data had to be accurate and checked up daily. Thus, the data collectors became even more tired. I had to assist them in solving the problems. At the end of each data collection period, we organized a food festival for everyone to relax (Ms Hong, Research Assistant).

When conducting the survey, Ms Hong applied international (American) research standards for conducting a longitudinal anthropology research project in a Vietnamese mountainous area of Thai ethnic people. From her past experiences in applying her research skills, she developed a research strategy to hire Thai language speaking students to be the language mediators for the research. This strategy was very effective, particularly in the context that her office had only four researchers, and only one could speak the Thai language. Her strategy contributed to make the survey possible in the local context. Meanwhile, the ethical and methodological requirements of the American University concerned were adhered to, thus facilitating the reliability and validity of the data. Ms Hong's way

of applying a new research approach into a Vietnamese local context had expanded her organisation's models for using these research methods and changed the way of applying these models in specific location. In this meaning, Ms Hong had implemented the role of cultural intermediary as conceptualised by Edwards (2012), generating new strategies and outcomes or products which embodied her perspective. This role can also be seen in the cases of Mr Xuan, Mr Ta and Ms Nguyen, as demonstrated in earlier sections.

The accounts of these five young graduates show different stories of cultural intermediary functions they performed through their daily tasks. The different ways they performed these roles were influenced by their tasks, their positions, but more importantly, their strategies to solve problems in different contexts. These strategies continue from the learning strategies they developed during university time to gain extra knowledge and skills that they assumed necessary for their future career, and respond to the mismatch between the constraints of traditional learning approaches at the universities and the demands of the changing society. At work, graduates reflected upon their past experiences, their skills, their existing knowledge, their new understanding of the local communities and the national context that they gained through their work. Their work reflected multiple 'regimes of mediation' (Cronin, 2004) and demonstrated the way that the mediating practitioner's role is not merely to mediate between one party and another. Much of the 'in-between' work of young graduates at INGOs can be understood not only as language mediation in the workplace, but also as cultural intermediary work among international experts, state authorities and local communities.

6.6. Conclusion

This chapter has explored young graduates' accounts of being an 'in-between-person' during their daily activities. While implementing project activities, they mediated between international experts or foreign project models and local customs, traditions and practices. All the young professionals here needed to provide language mediation through translating the international expatriates' views, ideas, and comments into Vietnamese to facilitate the communication between the international expatriates and the local partners. The role of cultural mediation required the graduates to apply good communication skills and language skills that they learnt from the university or other training courses. The communication contexts they had experienced during their study were replicated in real situations. Therefore when they applied these skills at the workplace, they encountered relatively few problems.

In addition to language interpretation support, some graduates were interpreting foreign ideas into the localized meanings. When the project staff implemented the project activities, the young graduates learnt about the project models and how to apply them from the international expatriates, but they needed to interpret the foreign development models into equivalent concepts and practices in the Vietnamese society. To do this, they needed to understand the Vietnamese national social and policy context, and the local regulations, customs and practices of target communities, and then incorporate the policies and practices into the project activities. With concepts or practices that did not resonate with communities in Vietnam, the project staff needed to decide what was applicable, what was not, then develop localized models, applicable for the project locality. Their activities created new meaning and value for INGOs' project activities in Vietnam. They were performing cultural intermediary functions as discussed in the work of Bourdieu (1984), Cronin (2004), Negus (1992; 2002) and Edwards (2012).

The trajectories of individual graduates from university study experiences to work performance at INGO projects show the complexities and challenges of transition from being a student to an independent actor and thinker in an INGO workplace. Their accounts demonstrated the role of their own agency in these trajectories, and the development of that agency through learning strategies developed from extra-curricular learning, to the reflexive implementation of different tasks at work, of which Ms Hong is a typical example. Ms Hong's strategy for specialising in research methods appeared to match well with her agentic approach of 'taking chances' (Evans, 2007). She had adapted research methods developed at university and elsewhere into ones she deemed appropriate for her anthropological research in the Vietnamese mountainous and minority ethnic area.

The experiences of the young graduates shows that they all develop a set of transferable skills (Bennett et al., 2000) such as making inquiries and negotiating when solving new problems, speaking out, initiating new ideas, taking risks, considering the differences in views and cultures of people as an existing feature that affects the work. These attributes were gained partially through training, but mostly through informal learning on the job, by making and reflecting on mistakes or observing others. Significantly, the learning at work seems to be reciprocal; their supervisors were open to new ideas suggested by these young graduates. It appeared that learning was taking place by their employers as well. This suggests that INGOs may be particularly fertile learning environments that facilitate the ongoing development of transferable skills and application.

In the final chapter of this thesis, the focus will turn to the agency of the young graduates in shaping their work and their careers, and, in particular, the strategic ways they applied the knowledge, skills

and attributes they had acquired as university graduates in the context of their work in INGOs, and will draw out lessons for higher education and recommendations for further research.

CHAPTER VII. STRATEGIC GRADUATES IN THE NEW WORLD OF WORK IN VIETNAM

7.1. Introduction

The findings of this research demonstrate that the Vietnamese university graduates working at INGOs have experienced a challenging transition from traditional learning contexts in universities into the non-traditional, intercultural work environments of international development organisations in Vietnams. Within the context of rapid and radical social and economic change in Vietnam after the introduction of the Doi Moi economic reform policy, the transition from university to work no longer means a step into a lifelong career for graduates (Nguyen Phuong An, 2002).

While university education is still under central management, and traditional teaching and learning practices that encourage students to follow the instruction of teachers are still common, the world of work has become increasingly intercultural, and linked to international policies and markets. This reality is challenging for young graduates, responding to the current demands of society. The move from university to the workplace is a critical change (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p. 234) in terms of both social and cultural contexts. Specifically, intercultural workplaces, such as in INGO require graduates to have the intercultural competence (Byram, 1997; Deardorff, 2006) to deal with intercultural interactions (Ting-Toomey & Kurogi, 1998), and also to reflect (after Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992), and extend upon their discipline knowledge and skills to acquire work related knowledge and skills. Young graduates may encounter difficulties in meeting the requirements of such work settings.

However, the research indicates that young graduates typically develop proactive learning strategies which serve as an important addition to the strictly bounded learning environment at universities. Though their agency is bounded (Evans, 2007) by the constraints of the formal education system, young graduates reflect and build upon their existing resources to develop appropriate strategies to gain the necessary knowledge and skills (Bennet et al., 2000; Barrie, 2006) for the future job market. Importantly, most continue to apply such strategies when they enter the workforce.

In this chapter, I revisit the arguments presented in chapters 4, 5 and 6 and seek to extend them to give insights into the influences of the changing society upon the individual agency of young graduates. I will examine the ways they strategically apply ‘transfer’ skills to develop new work knowledge and skills (Bennet et al., 2000; Barrie, 2006). The chapter highlights the role of reflexive

agency (after Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992) in adapting to the radical changes in society, and the significance of the INGO context for the application and development of ‘transfer’ skills in contemporary Vietnam. These discussions then lead to implications for future research and university education.

7.2. Graduates’ strategies bounded by traditional university education system

The accounts of young graduates and university teachers demonstrate that the traditional teaching and learning approach commonly found in Vietnamese universities focuses on providing theoretical knowledge and skills of the disciplines, with the goal of preparing graduates for similar contexts in future jobs. Exam-oriented educational contexts, time constraints and a stringent syllabus did not promote autonomous learning (Le Xuan Quynh, 2013). However, there also are indications in these findings that some Vietnamese universities (universities 5, 6) at least are changing in response to demands of the job market. Some universities created employment information channels, familiarizing their students with the future workplaces, in such ways as Ms Hong and Mr Ta reported.

The recollections of young graduates in my study position them, as students, predominantly in passive receiver roles with limited opportunities provided to explore extra knowledge and skills, and thus, limited opportunity to develop ‘far transfer’ skills (Bennett et al., 2000) or ‘enabling’ attributes (Barrie, 2006) to help them to work in new contexts. Development of far transfer skills, as with other high level skills generally, appears not to be encouraged through the more traditional teaching and learning in a university education system (Nguyen An, 2006; Nguyen Thi Thanh Hong, 2008; Tran Quang Trung & Swierczek, 2009), heavily influenced by the Confucian principles (Nguyen Phuong Mai et al., 2006; Tran Thi Tuyet, 2013). Le Xuan Quynh (2013p. ii) and Pham Hoa Hiep and Tran Thi Ly (2010), among others, show that teachers in Vietnam adopt an authoritarian view of the roles of teachers and students in the classroom (that results in a significant power differential between teachers and students. The result of the current research, however, suggests that this attitude is shifting, and that teachers’ approaches are a mix of old and new approaches to teaching. While teachers still place focus on foundational disciplinary concepts and skills, they hoped their students would continue to build on once they commenced work.

The accounts of the graduates indicate that they lacked specific skills necessary to adapt to new contexts, such teamwork, negotiation, communication, creative and critical thinking. The findings of the current research, that many young graduates commenced work expecting to be told what to

do, reflect this, as does the research of Kim (2009), Nguyen An (2006), Nguyen Phuong Mai et al. (2006) and Tran Thi Tuyet (2013). The persistence of traditional approaches in teaching and learning, and central control of education together make it even more difficult to prepare young graduates to respond to the challenges of the workplace at INGOs, where there is potential for miscommunication, tension or even conflict in intercultural interactions (Ting-Toomey & Kurogi, 1998). Ting-Toomey posits, that success in intercultural interactions, entails culture sensitive knowledge and mindful reflexivity, and requires the person involved to take multiple perspectives, be analytical, empathic, and intentionally creative, all of which entails listening, observation, trust building, and dialogic collaboration (Ting-Toomey & Kurogi, 1998, pp. 201-204). All these qualities require individual to give personal ideas, which is not familiar with the cultural aspects of Vietnamese culture, like other Asian cultures, where juniors are supposed to follow the instruction of the seniors (Kim, 2009; Nguyen Phuong Mai et al., 2006). Nonetheless, as the young graduates saw their discipline knowledge and skills as a foundation on which they could build by continuing to learn in the workplace, they all had taken part in extra-curricular activities or part time jobs while at university to gain knowledge and skills that would be useful in real work contexts. The findings of the current research confirm that the primary traits that the employers expect from young graduate include intercultural experience (through the experiences gained from other work environments), in other word, the 'life-long' learning skills.

7.2.1. What attributes are expected of young Vietnamese graduates by senior Vietnamese INGO managers, and by international employers in the INGO sector?

The kinds of INGOs chosen for the study, their main roles, their structure, their organization culture, size of the organization, nationalities amongst senior personnel, the kind of leadership exercised by the senior staff and the way INGOs were governed, have impacted noticeably on the work experiences of the new graduates. Specifically, the inter-disciplinary nature of INGO projects was particularly challenging for the young graduates, even if they had graduated from a discipline very closely related to the project, such as public health (for example Mr Ta, Ms Dang, Ms Hong). Even in situations where there appeared to be a more or less straightforward (near) transfer of specific knowledge and skills, the application of such specific knowledge, for example, in a public health project at INGOs, was far from similar to the context from which it was drawn at university,

namely, the state health system. Working in INGOs required the young graduates to develop a very different set of skills.

It is notable that the young graduates who were interviewed in the second round of interviews, and who had graduated more recently (from 2009 to 2012), vis-à-vis the first group of interviewees who graduated from 2004 to 2008, felt that their universities were starting to respond to the demands of the job market and they found it easy to illustrate this change with examples. Ms Hong and Ms Dao, who graduated in 2011, talked about their universities organising research activities to expose their students to new and real life problems, while Ms Dao also mentioned that her university had organised study exchanges for their students to team up with students from other countries (see chapter 6 for details). This second group of interviewees was also typically more strategic in selecting which skills to develop, and better able to give reasons for their selection than those in the first group. Other notable differences between these two groups in relation to agency will be elaborated below.

It is important to note that the symbolic value of a credentialed degree remains significant in the recruitment process; employers in the current research included one criterion in all job advertisements - that young graduates were required to have degree certificates. Although, in some countries, degrees are primarily considered a guarantee of knowledge and skills, providing information about what candidates have learned, demonstrating graduates' capabilities, evidence of hard work, commitment, and a base level of potential of the holder (De Weert, 2007, see chapter 4), in the current research, it became apparent that international employers at INGOs believed the value of the degree was primarily as an indication of a capacity to learn new skills and knowledge. Significantly, they did not require or expect the direct application of the discipline knowledge learnt at the university. Instead, they emphasised the importance of the need for employees to learn how to be independent learners. This is consistent also with the perspectives of university teachers, who highlighted the importance for graduates of continuing their learning after formal university study.

In this way, the employers at INGOs are little different from employers elsewhere, who highly value the (transferable) attributes (Barrie, 2006) which assist graduates to adapt to the workplace, to be flexible in moving between different jobs, and to move their 'repertoire of knowledge' onward (Yorke & Harvey, 2005). It is noticeable that such attributes are often independent of the degree subject (Harvey in Yorke & Harvey, 2005). This finding, evident through the analysis of job advertisements and the accounts of the international employers, is also similar to what de Weert (2007) and Hernández-March et al. (2009) found - that employers are less concerned about

discipline knowledge than about ‘transferable skills’. In the employers’ accounts, each project drew upon the knowledge of different disciplines to generate comprehensive benefits for the target groups; each target group has different needs. Hence, young graduates working there need to be flexible and adaptable. The interviews with employers at INGOs also demonstrated the impact of cultural norms and values, such as the influence of a low-context culture (Triandis, 2000). In low-contexts of communication, the listener is assumed to know very little about the context and background of the topic being discussed and must be told practically everything (Anderson et al., 1996; Triandis, 2000), people are more willing to make enquiries, and challenge the authority (Barkai, 2008). Vietnamese employees are not familiar with such freedom in voicing their opinions, due to the influence of Confucianism (Kim, 2009; Nguyen Phuong Mai et al., 2006) and a high-context culture (Triandis, 2000). People from high-context cultures are less likely to question and challenge the authority, especially the more senior or higher status positions (Barkai, 2008; Triandis, 2000); people keep the meaning hidden in their ways of communication; the meaning of a message comes primarily from the implicit understanding of the social context and of relationships surrounding the parties involved (Triandis, 2000). Hence, people from high-context culture are more familiar with top-down hierarchical organizational structure.

7.2.2. To what extent do far transfer skills contribute to their competence in the intercultural INGO workplaces?

Moreover, young graduates in the current research demonstrated new modes of work preparation. They were proactive in exploring different sources to discover the skills that would be useful in the job market, such as communication, facilitation or management and seeking activities or opportunities to improve those skills. In other words, they were seeking for ‘far transfer’ skills (Barrie, 2006) which help them to apply their knowledge in a wide range of future contexts (Bennet et al., 2000; Barrie, 2006). There is a clear change in their strategies in response to the current social challenges (Evans, 2007).

There was a noticeable difference among young graduates’ modes of behavior (Evans, 2007) included in the present study, if stratified by the study timeline. Among all interviewees during two phases of interviews, there was one cohort who graduated in the period from 2004 – 2008 and the other of more recent graduates, from 2009 to 2012. In the first cohort, Ms Nguyen, Mr Pham, Ms Mau, Ms My, Ms Hoa, and Mr Xuan came to know about INGO work accidentally through friends or acquaintances who were the source of that information. It was common among this cohort to gain as

many skills and as much knowledge as possible around their university discipline, as a reservoir of skills and knowledge for the future. As the future of the job market was unpredictable, graduates took any available chance to work.

Interviewees in the first cohort typically took jobs at INGOs to get work experience. They did not envisage what INGO work would be and which knowledge or skills would be needed in advance. They did not prepare for the jobs purposefully. The way the first cohort got their positions and performed their work could be compared to the ‘taking chances’ mode recognised in Evans’s (2007) research, the behaviour more commonly observed among graduates who do not determine their career pathway clearly.

As an exception, Ms Nguyen shows a mode of ‘strategic’ behavior as conceptualised by Evans (2007). While all others were not at all sure where they would work, Ms Nguyen was determined to follow her sister, to work for an INGO project. Because Ms Nguyen followed her sister into INGO work, she had the benefit of highly relevant inside knowledge about this kind of work, which appears to be a specific knowledge giving her advantage in applying for a job at INGO. She knew about INGO structures, and had become familiar with the regulations and rules or ways of working at INGOs. She was also aware of the expectations, the nature of the work, and the kinds of skills that would be helpful before she started work. Armed with this knowledge, when still a student, she chose an assignment on the history of an INGO, explored sources of information on INGO projects in Vietnam, thus, became even more familiar with this work setting well before entering it. This tacit knowledge would have eased her transition to work in an INGO. For example, she understood from the beginning how important it was to plan her projects with a thorough reference made to the existing legal system of the country, to ensure that the activities did not violate the law. In another example, she recounted how she planned to minimise the potential conflict between the project idea and the local practice, by taking into account the existing practices at local schools while designing and implementing project activities. This ‘strategic’ approach from the beginning led to an opportunity to work at the national policy making level and contributed to her success in integrating the new project idea into national policy on education. In these ways, Ms Nguyen behaved similarly to the majority of the second cohort.

Different from the first group of interviewees, the second group typically had set themselves a clear career goal to work in an INGO before they left university. Their reasons for doing so were mostly twofold - both to gain useful transferable skills for the non-traditional workplace and to improve the lives of the poor. The second cohort includes Ms Vu, Ms Dang, Ms Hong, Mr Ta, Mr Vi, Ms Ba,

Ms Dao, Ms Le, Ms Kim, and Ms Tran. Even before they graduated these young graduates were adopting ways to gain the skills and knowledge they thought were necessary for working at an INGO. They volunteered to work for INGOs (Ms Ba, Ms Le) or other projects to gain project related experiences (Ms Kim, Ms Vu, Ms Dao, Ms Le). They pursued their career goals by doing different jobs that are related to their desired goals. The purpose for each job was that it was seen as a stepping stone to improve the skills they wish to master. Even if the job failed to meet this purpose, as for Ms Le, they still continued to pursue their goals of gaining the necessary knowledge and skills for their chosen career pathway in INGOs.

With experience, training and substantial self-directed learning however, informants all seemed to develop an excellent set of transferable skills. One point of interest worth highlighting is the open and welcome reactions from some of the supervisors to ideas and queries generated by the graduates. It appeared that not only had the graduates learned to take some initiative but that, importantly, learning was taking place by both parties. In other word, the workplace is a ‘life long’ learning environment which require the employees to continue learning throughout their career course.

7.2.3. In what ways do young Vietnamese graduates experience the intercultural work setting of INGOs, and what do they see as their roles in the intercultural workplace of INGOs?

The importance of young graduates developing high level interpersonal and interpretive skills quickly within the workplace was apparent. In the current research, the process of becoming interculturally competent was observed when graduates reported how they had acted to understand the meaning of organisational norms and values, such as exploring organisational documentations on regulations, rules (as Ms Hong, see section 6.5.2), or learning through their observation of the practices of local people (as Ms Vu see section 6.5.2). The ways that young graduates explore the norms and values of the culture of the local people also enhance their intercultural competencies (as Ms Dao), and allow them to ‘have an understanding of the relationship between their own language and language varieties and their own culture and cultures of different social groups in their society, on the one hand, and the language (varieties) and culture(s) of others’ (Byram, 2003, p. 61; Bochner, 1981; Taft, 1981). Other aspects of the cultural mediating roles played by the young graduates, such as the ‘ability to interpret a document or event from another culture, to explain it

and relate it to documents from one's own [culture]' (Byram, 1997, p. 52), mean that a lack of relevant intercultural knowledge sometimes can impede young graduates' intercultural skills.

In accordance with the expectation of the employers, as outlined in chapter 4, much of the work of the young graduates concerns communication; either communication of content between two different languages as in the case of interpretation (Byram, 1997), or the clarification of the meaning of each side's practices and ideas as in the case of facilitation (Ting-Toomey & Kurogi, 1998), or the understanding of each side's cultural values, norms and customs as in the case of acting as a guide (Bochner, 1981). Also outlined in chapter 2, problems mostly happen during the communication process of intercultural interactions, where people of different cultures need to exchange ideas to come to agreement (Ting-Toomey & Kurogi, 1998). In all positions, one important task of the young graduates was to be the contact point for international expatriates and local people at different levels. For young graduates from universities in Vietnam, intercultural interactions were quite a new experience since most of the students and teachers come from the same culture and do not have many chances to interact with people from other cultures.

Young graduates developed their intercultural competencies using different strategies in different contexts, and became competent in different types of skills that supported two key areas of work performance - cultural mediation and cultural intermediary roles. As outlined in chapter 2, high level intercultural communicative skills are necessary for seeing relationships between different cultures, both internal and external to a society. Ms Dao is a particular case of an interculturally competent communicator who has developed a critical or analytical understanding of (parts of) her own and other cultures (Byram, 2000, p. 9; see chapter 2). Ms Dao was able to understand not only the cultural underpinnings of English, but also those of other languages such as Japanese or Swedish when she needed to orient students before they went to Japan to work, or when she herself went to Sweden for an exchange study. She appeared to be interculturally competent in that she recognised that her thinking was culturally determined, rather than believing that her understanding and perspective was natural (Byram, 1997). Ms Dao did not just apply theoretical knowledge learnt at university, but developed this strategically for specific contexts, to find solutions for problems in specific interactions. In a sense, Ms Dao developed this theoretical knowledge on her own, as she applied it to solve problems within particular contexts. As outlined in chapter 5, some young graduates who did not have sufficient experience in two cultures, as required for becoming bicultural speakers (Byram, 2003), struggled to convey the cultural meanings (e.g., Ms Mau, see section 5.4).

Cultural intermediary roles were not usually performed in the very first jobs after graduation. As young graduates strategically acquired 'on-the-job' work knowledge and skills through practice, they appeared to capitalise on these resources and move on to other positions where they could apply their newly acquired knowledge and skills, they became more active and effective as cultural intermediaries. Positions where they have had to make decisions on the models of development to be used for the local community, in particular, have demanded the knowledge and skills of the cultural intermediary. Examples can be found in the cases of Ms Nguyen, Ms Hong or Mr Xuan, as outlined in chapter 6. The strategies they developed, however bounded by the structure of the institutional and organisational settings in which they studied and worked, provided them with the human and cultural resources to find and perform the jobs where the knowledge and skills strategically accumulated continued to be effective. These young graduates, through their learning and work strategies, were able to move in to positions that provided more demands and opportunities for development that, as a result, led to further advantages for them. This was demonstrated in the accounts of Ms Nguyen and Ms Hong who experienced different trajectories achieved at different rates. Ms Hong graduated later and took much shorter time to move through her career pathway than Ms Nguyen who graduated much earlier and took a longer time to move ahead. Both, however, selectively developed skills and knowledge to prepare themselves for roles and tasks ahead, and through continuously improving these skills and knowledge through their work, their strategies proved to be effective for their career progression.

Due to differences in the system of values, cultures, knowledge, and experiences between the international experts who mostly come from individualistic cultures (Triandis, 2000) and the Vietnamese local partners whose culture is collectivist (Triandis, 2000), young graduates as development practitioners are not simply mediating between people from different cultures (Byram, 1997); they need to transfer project ideas from the international experts to the local partners. As the nature of INGO projects is to foster changes in communities to the benefit of the local people, the application of new models needs to be negotiated with the target local communities.

More importantly, it appeared that young graduates developed a set of intercultural competencies needed for working in the intercultural work settings at INGOs. As outlined in chapter 2, the work setting at INGOs requires intercultural competence to respond to requirements of intercultural interactions, including skills such as: identifying relationships between different cultures; the ability to negotiate in both cultures; being flexible in combining aspects of multiple cultures in performance (Bochner, 1981). Potentially, conflict might arise from the differences between

cultures in intercultural interactions (Ting-Toomey & Kurogi, 1998). To avoid or resolve such conflict, it is important to have culture-sensitive knowledge, mindful reflexivity to take multiple perspectives, and analytical empathy (Ting-Toomey & Kurogi, 1998, pp. 201-204).

The young graduates recounted how, to perform their mediation roles, they had to develop the ability to mediate between people from different cultures. The young graduates in this research, in their interviews, used words like 'liaise', 'convince', 'negotiate', 'compromise' to relate key aspects of their mediation roles. In the context of intercultural INGOs, cultural mediation requires a considerable level of agency even though requirements for mediation often seem to be close to the knowledge and skills the young graduates acquired at university, such as language interpretation skills. Most graduates learned English skills as an extra curricula learning activity while they were at university. The context for mediating the communication process between people from different cultures allowed the young graduates, as mediators, to use their English language skills for an immediate effect, as 'near transfer' skills, as conceptualised by Bennett et al., (2000). However, English language skills are only partially effective for the intercultural communicative process, as argued by Byram (1997) and Deardorff (2006). Initially, such language skills appeared to be effective enough for the language interpretation duties of young graduates. Nonetheless, as Bochner (1981, p. 306) argues, cultural mediators are expected to disseminate information, promote mutual understanding, form culturally relativistic attitudes, produce cross-cultural empathy, spread international goodwill and reconcile disparate cultural practices. Although English skills appeared to be the most immediate skills required by the young graduates for intercultural interactions, in the long term, they were not sufficient to meet specific requirements of intercultural interactions that demanded higher levels of intercultural competence (Byram, 1997).

Essentially, young graduates are placed in-between the international experts and the local people applying their own knowledge and practices. The in-between person (Bochner, 1981) needs to understand both the international development models proposed by the international experts, and the cultural traditions and practices of the local community. In carrying out their roles, young graduates also are integrating new work knowledge and skills with their existing knowledge and skills and transfer these into localized models, hence they are acting as cultural intermediary (Edwards, 2012).

It is noticeable that the cultural intermediary role was not an explicitly stated role or task of any young graduate. Because it is not a formally recognised aspect of their work, the young graduates had no language with which to discuss or name this aspect of their work, making it all the more

challenging for them. It is only realised through performing project tasks. Even their international employers do not imagine their staff play such a role because they often hold consultant or advisory positions, and are distanced from the implementation phase of projects. The young graduates performing this hidden role did not articulate it, as a 'role'. Rather, they described the range of activities and relationships involved, the solutions they devised, in particular circumstances, and the ways they applied their learning in other situations.

The loosely bounded, intercultural organisational context in INGOs particularly fosters the development of cultural intermediary capacity. INGO projects encourage the independent and creative work of young graduates who already have developed novel learning strategies within the constraints of the central controlled education approach at their universities (e.g. Ms Vu, Ms Hong), as outlined in chapter 4. The INGO projects in which the young graduates were involved, typically, did not use any fixed models of development since each project required a new combination of theories and best practices in local situations. This meant that graduates working at INGO projects needed to be flexible to work in between different organisational structures, resources and models, and to develop new models for specific projects. The cases of cultural intermediary work demonstrated that the young graduates had developed 'far transfer' skills that helped them to apply knowledge and skills in unfamiliar contexts through 'enabling' contexts. Those graduates who effectively performed cultural intermediary roles (e.g. Ms Nguyen, Ms Hong) had contributed to forming new structures for their work at INGO projects with new models and knowledge.

Excellent examples illustrate well the role of the graduate students as cultural intermediaries in many often stressful situations where there were significant cultural differences (manifested in super/subordinate relations, imposition of foreign ideas and models, interpreting rules and other documents and giving culturally sensitive feedback). Young graduates who did not graduate from disciplines that directly linked to development projects at INGOs had to abstract the aspects of their discipline knowledge which were applicable to their work in INGOs. For example, Ms Nguyen reflected upon her discipline knowledge on international trade to develop suitable strategies to learn necessary knowledge and skills for her educational projects. Ms Nguyen compared international consultants' theoretical models with her own views generated from her learning experiences and observations. She assessed the pros and cons of the models with the people concerned, adjusted the models by incorporating local customs and practices, to derive hybrid models suitable for the local context. Her 'far transfer' skills (Bennett et al., 2000) here lay in her abilities to draw on types of specific knowledge and to generalise the common features into a new model for her specific project

context. In this kind of way, while adjusting to INGO workplaces, graduates continued to develop their agency and gain necessary ‘far transfer’ skills (Bennett et al., 2000) or ‘enabling’ attributes (Barrie, 2006) that would be of benefit in any job they might choose as they progressed through their working life.

In either role of cultural mediator or cultural intermediary, young graduates in the current research demonstrated the effectiveness of their preparation for the work, through learning English skills or gaining skills relating to the work, such as negotiation, consultation or facilitation. The differences between the roles of cultural mediator and cultural intermediary, in the context of work in INGOs in Vietnam, appeared mostly to play out in the different ways young graduates strategically mediated between different norms and practices of people of different cultures in order to be effective in their work and implement project goals. As cultural mediators, they mostly relied on ‘near transfer’ (Bennett et al., 2000) skills such as language skills that were necessary for interpretation and translation tasks. However, many of the young graduates who participated in this research, particularly those who graduated more recently, purposely planned to gain certain types of knowledge and skills that they supposed would be useful for the work at INGOs. When they entered the INGO, they continued to apply their strategies for obtaining the necessary knowledge and skills for their work, immediately and in the future.

7.3. Strategies in the new world of work

While the research of Nguyen Phuong An (2002) shows a tendency of employees to direct their career pathways towards international organisations for job skills, the findings of the current research give empirical evidence of how employees realise this tendency. Young graduates’ reflexive agency guides them to gain experience in workplaces that would potentially generate skills likely to be in high demand in the market. This can give them comparative advantages in future job seeking.

7.3.1. What strategies do graduates employ in achieving and enacting competence in the contexts of their work in the intercultural workplace at INGOs?

As discussed earlier, all young graduates in the current research were strategic, at different levels, in diversifying their study strategies and in developing new knowledge and skills for their work. While young graduates do not necessarily choose their disciplines with specific future jobs in mind, they are aware that the current job market is challenging and competitive, and that a university degree is

a valuable asset. The strategies that they used as students to design the skills and knowledge that they determined were necessary for their future work contributed significantly to the success of young graduates in transitioning to work.

Young graduates' learning approaches showed new ways of thinking and new learning behaviors. Whilst at university, the young graduates strategically had acquired necessary knowledge and skills through informal learning opportunities, for example, doing part time work and volunteering for project work to gain job. Ms Vu (see section 6.5.2), and Ms Dao (see section 4.3.2) all recounted such experiences in some detail. Furthermore, young graduates described how they had gained knowledge about the requirements of future jobs by exploring different sources of information, e.g. family members, fellow students, alumni, friends, and the media. Individual views result in diversified definition of the required skills in the job market. As a result, each young graduate had developed a range of learning strategies.

The strategies the graduates developed and applied to meet such challenges in the workplace depended not only on the ways they reflected upon their knowledge and skills to address the specific task, but also on external contextual factors such as opportunities to learn. For example, some young graduates sought specific mentors in the workplace (Mr Pham, see section 6.5.1) or used the training opportunities during the formal induction period (Ms Hong, see section 5.3). Such strategies also involved comparing and contrasting norms and values of the organisation, of oneself, and of the international experts with those of local people in order to understand the commonalities and differences in the meanings of norms and values and identifying intermediary solutions to bridge the gap (as Ms Nguyen, see chapter 6.5.2). The strategic approaches reported included the experiences gained from one activity being used to inform the next activity. Such activities were performed successfully by some young graduates (as Ms Nguyen, Ms Vu, Ms Hong, see section 6.5.2) and facilitated their becoming cultural intermediaries (Bourdieu, 1984).

It is notable that the 'wait and see' mode of behaviour in Evans' model (2007) was not observed in any young graduate who participated in this study. This mode, as Evans explains, is available in a society which has set up a system to support young people looking for jobs. However, such a system does not currently exist in Vietnam, though it did in the planned economy where university education could only enrol a small number of students, the study was free and future jobs secured. Young Vietnamese, today, can hardly adopt the 'wait and see' mode in a radically changed context.

Such strategic behavior is also observed in the research of Nguyen Phuong An (2002) in the way young people changed from the traditional job sector at state organisations to that based in new international organisations. When the young graduates in this study started their jobs, they continued to exercise their agency, strategically. As the job market has become more open, competitive, and rewarding, it also has become very uncertain, and young graduates have had to prepare themselves to cope with this uncertainty in the job market.

The mode of behaviour of the second cohort is similar to what Evans (2007) categorises as ‘step by step’ and ‘strategic’ modes. As outlined in chapter 2, Evans (2007) and Titma et al. (2007) found that, in a similar way to what has been observed in this study in Vietnam, social changes in European countries influenced young people’s modes of behavior, classifying those behavior types as ‘strategic’, ‘taking chances’, ‘step by step’ and ‘wait and see’ in job seeking. The findings of the current research show some similar modes of behavior among young graduates in their jobs.

The case of Ms Hong demonstrates a combination of strategic agency and ‘taking chances’ as a mode of behavior (Evans, 2007). As explained in the previous chapter, Ms Hong, after graduation, decided to pursue a career pathway in research, having studied research methods at university. In line with this goal, she chose to work for a research project at an INGO. The task was close to her university skills so she could apply these skills immediately at work. At first, like many other young graduates, Ms Hong thought someone would tell her what to do in her position as if she was studying in the university. When it turned out that nobody was there to instruct her, she changed from being passive into being proactive in seeking relevant information about her job, and making decisions about what to do to fulfil her tasks. These research skills were her discipline skills and hence, could be categorised as ‘near transfer’ attributes in Bennett et al.’s (2000) model.

However, in Ms Hong’s case, these research skills would be more aptly categorised as ‘far transfer’ attributes (Bennett et al., 2000) because it was her high level cognitive skills including critical thinking and analyzing, that assisted Ms Hong to learn new knowledge or to apply her discipline knowledge in a different context (Bennett et al., 2000; Barrie, 2006). Ms Hong’s strategy for becoming specialised in research methods appeared to match well with her agentic approach of ‘taking chances’ since doing research work meant exploring the unknown. Ms Hong was able to generalise specific skills and experiences from a specific discipline context into anthropological research in the Vietnamese context. In doing so, she had to adapt research methods developed elsewhere to her situation in the Vietnamese mountainous locales of particular ethnic minority groups.

This study has demonstrated how young people in Vietnam develop strategies to help them gain the necessary knowledge and skills they assume to be applicable in the new world of work, in addition to the traditional ways of learning at university. Each graduate applied the skills they had acquired differently, depending on the work situations. The ways an individual student worked out their strategies to gain the knowledge and skills they desired differentiated him/her from others and also created an advantage, as each of them was able to contribute to the diversification of the pool of skills at work. Their reflexive agency meant they made choices and developed strategies to achieve their goals purposefully (Bourdieu, 1977).

7.3.2. How does the agency of graduates come into play in achieving competence in the intercultural workplace at INGOs?

The current research demonstrates that the changes in Vietnamese society can have positive impacts upon young graduates' agency in adapting to the demands of the new type of uncertain job market. The bounded agency of young graduates becomes geared towards strategies for gaining necessary knowledge and skills needed for the new world of work. The strategies might vary between individuals, but they allow individuals to adapt successfully to the demands of the contemporary workplace, of which INGOs are, in many ways, a typical example.

However, in line with Nguyen Phuong An's research (2002), my study demonstrates that in the contemporary Vietnamese context, young graduates have more opportunities to exercise their agency. In the current research graduates all seek for alternative opportunities, such as extra curriculum activities (Ms Vu, see section 6.5.1), to gain skills that they presumed the future work place would need. As a result, they become more proactive and flexible in the transition from universities to work. Responding to the requirements of the society, graduates strategically decide which knowledge and skills will be needed, and how to obtain these attributes and skills. The university experiences of young graduates in the current research demonstrate that they became strategic in deciding what knowledge and skills they needed to gain, and how they would do that. They were all very aware of the uncertainty of the future job markets, and they were very flexible in preparing themselves for work. Analysis of interview data revealed transferable key attributes such as 'making inquiries', 'comparing', 'contrasting', 'being creative' and 'being critical' that were linked to personal attributes, cognitive abilities and skills of application that enabled them to make use of, or apply, disciplinary knowledge, thus potentially change and transform disciplinary

knowledge (Barrie, 2006). The stories of Ms Nguyen and Ms Hong provide examples (see section 6.5.2).

The trajectories of young Vietnamese graduates in their transition from universities to the workplace illustrate a particular kind of agency - 'bounded agency' (Evans, 2007) an aspect of learning and action not mentioned in the existing graduate attribute models (Bennett et al., 2000; Barrie, 2006). In conventional graduate' attribute models, educational researchers argue that discipline knowledge, 'near transfer' skills for applying discipline knowledge in similar contexts, and 'far transfer' skills for dealing with unfamiliar contexts (Bennett et al., 2000), or 'enabling' attributes in Barrie's model, are the key resources that graduates gain from university study. However, I argue in chapter 2 that in Vietnam, where there is radical social and economic change but a slow-to-change university system still influenced by Confucian principles and focussed almost exclusively on theoretical disciplinary knowledge it would seem unlikely that students will develop the skills and attributes they will need after graduation. The young graduates in the current research have demonstrated that while they hardly applied their discipline knowledge and skills at work, they all gained other skills through seeking out informal learning opportunities. These learning strategies demonstrate the way their agency was bounded by the constraints of the traditional learning approach at the university but not completely constrained.

Instances of 'bounded agency' (Evans, 2007), suggest that in the context of current Vietnamese society, the agency of young graduates becomes strategic in responding to the demands of the social changes, specifically the uncertain job market. Their bounded agency also encompassed the abilities to reflect upon existing knowledge and skills to develop strategies to apply in new and unfamiliar contexts. This suggests that when university education is not keeping up with radical social change, the social context generates conditions that require individual agency to adapt, and thus also produces individuals with abilities to respond in the future. The young graduates in this study were proactive and reflexive in spite of the predominance of the traditional ways of teaching and learning they found in their universities. Through their reflexive agency, (Bourdieu, 1992) they found ways to bridge the gap between real social demands and the knowledge and skills provided in traditional university programs under the slow-moving, centrally controlled system. The way young graduates use or gain the necessary knowledge and skills for fulfilling their tasks at work suggests the emergence of new modes of behavior (Evans, 2007) that will continue to be enhanced through different cohorts of graduates.

7.4. Conclusion, implications and further research

This inductive qualitative research has explored how young Vietnamese graduates experience the transition from university to work in the context of intercultural work environments characteristic of the INGOs that have been established as a central aspect of globalisation in post Doi Moi Vietnam. Theoretically the thesis has engaged with the literature on graduate attributes but has extended the prevailing research agenda in this literature by drawing on theoretical perspectives on intercultural communication and agency as found in the work of scholars such as Bochner (1981) and Bourdieu (1984). As discussed in chapter 2, there is a lack of empirical research on graduate attributes that explores the ways graduates apply their knowledge and skills at work. The existing graduate attribute research tends to focus on employers' and academics' perspectives on graduate attributes, with less focus on the perspectives of graduates. Most of this research has been conducted in US, UK, Australia and other 'western' contexts. And that it has in a sense been culture -blind because it has not interrogated the cultural assumptions which underlie western pedagogy and education systems. By exploring the way graduates use their knowledge and skills in the workplace in INGOs operating in Vietnam, this research adds empirical evidence to help address that shortfall in the literature.

Importantly, this research points to the role of graduates' agency in preparing them for the changing future. The labour market for graduates in Vietnam, as elsewhere, requires high level cognitive skills (Barrie, 2006), 'far transferable' skills (Bennett et al., 2000) that enable them to develop new knowledge and skills for new contexts at work, particularly for the changes in Vietnam society today. Such application and extension of knowledge, skills and competences contrasts with learning in the more tightly bounded, traditional cultural contexts of universities in Vietnam where education is generally not focused upon developing these skills.

The research has pointed to a clear change in the way young graduates prepare for future work, and apply their knowledge and skills in the new world of work. Although the majority of young graduates who participated in the research did not start university degrees with a clear vision of their future career direction, most began to develop their career pathways while studying at universities. Their accounts of their study and work experiences showed that, through their 'bounded agency' (Evans, 2007), they sought opportunities, either formal or informal, to train themselves in the skills and knowledge that they assumed would be useful in future jobs. The uncertain labour market in Vietnam, which is characterized by relatively temporary and unstable

employment under the pressure of the society changing from central planned economy into a market oriented one, has forced graduates to prepare for the uncertainty, and to gain 'far transfer' skills (Bennett et al., 2000) for future work. Nguyen Phuong An (2000) demonstrates that in the current post-Doi Moi context in Vietnam young people are tending to opt for jobs in international, private enterprises rather than government positions. The young graduates in this study were doing likewise - taking risks and actively establishing their own career directions away from traditional life-long state jobs. This re-routing of career direction occurs very strategically. Young graduates' job-seeking behaviours were akin to the strategic 'taking chances' or 'step by step' behaviours identified by Evans (2007). They continued these strategies in the ways they conducted the tasks of their work, reflecting upon their discipline knowledge and skills to progressively learn new ones when they entered the INGO.

A key insight of this research is the significance, and the nature of intercultural competence, as an attribute required for working in organisations like INGOs, where global agencies connect with national authorities and local communities in complex intercultural settings wherein multiple 'regimes of mediation' (Cronin, 2004) come into play. As outlined in chapter 2, there is not enough attention paid in research on graduate attributes to the study of intercultural competence although, in the era of globalisation, this competence continues to be increasingly important. This study has shown how when graduates enter the intercultural workplace of INGOs, they are forced to develop intercultural competence (Byram, 1997) to respond to the requirements of everyday, intercultural interactions. Moreover, as each project requires the application of differing theoretical perspectives and best practices in specific local situations, graduates need to mediate between structures, resources and models, to adapt international models for local context. Such environments require and provide opportunities for graduates to move beyond cultural mediation to act as cultural intermediaries and contribute to developing new structures for their work at INGO projects.

Implications for universities

This research suggests that providing greater opportunities for students to participate in more open, intercultural contexts of learning whilst they are at university is important preparation for the world of work in contemporary Vietnam. The emphasis on real work experience in the selection criteria for INGO jobs suggest, further, that there needs to be some provision for work integrated learning while at university, or at least more opportunities for practicums and project work built into the curriculum. In the relative absence of such opportunities in Vietnamese universities, the situated learning environment at INGO workplaces, where employees are required to discover new

knowledge and skills applicable for the purpose of work, has been shown to be an effective way for young graduates to develop their 'far transfer' skills through exploring and applying new knowledge and skills. Such 'far transferable' skills (Bennett et al., 2000) or 'enabling' attributes (Barrie, 2006) appear to equip graduates to respond to further uncertainty in the job market and opportunities for advancement in their careers.

There are signs of change in the Vietnamese higher education sector. Students can develop their 'far transferable' skills in different ways, for example, universities in Vietnam are introducing credit learning system which allows learners to be involved in individualizing their degree program by purposely choosing selective courses along with their future career perspective, the expertise they want to develop intensively, and the way they want to build up an integrated discipline knowledge from different courses they choose. In this way, students can develop reflexive agency in responding to the social changes. At universities, there are joint programs with foreign universities which familiarise students with different methods of teaching and learning. There are also programs that attract foreign students coming to study together with Vietnamese students. These are the opportunities for Vietnamese students to interact with perspectives from different cultures, and hence, develop their intercultural communicative competence. These opportunities can also create chances to collaborate with people having different discipline knowledge in inter-discipline project work. This allows students to develop their competencies to apply their discipline knowledge and skills in strange contexts, in other word, to develop their 'far transfer' skills (Bennet et al., 2000). In a context where improvement in higher education is seen as a 'key driver' of economic reform (Harman & Nguyen Thi Ngoc Bich, 2010) in contemporary Vietnam, greater focus upon including transferable skills and intercultural competency as key elements of curriculum design, pedagogical strategies and the student experience would seem warranted (cf World Bank, 2008). In reality, the education policy makers in Vietnam have acknowledge these shortfalls, and are bringing in new initiatives to reform the system, the recent years, for examples restructuring the entrance exam, allowing universities to have autonomy in deciding their ways of recruiting students, and to find partnering with advanced program abroad in deciding their curriculum.

Further research

This study also opens up several directions for further research. This research points to the value of reconsidering the current literature on graduate attributes from a more sociological perspective on individual agency to understand the process of how graduates apply their knowledge and skills in new worlds of work. This research highlights the importance of the intercultural dimension of the

'global' workplace, which has mostly been overlooked in previous research on graduate attributes. The relatively loosely 'bounded' (*cf* Evans, 2007) structures and intercultural practice environments of INGOs evidently provide effective contexts for young graduates to reflect upon their discipline knowledge and skills and to develop and accumulate new knowledge and skills (Barrie, 2006) that are needed in the course of their work. Importantly, this meant strengthening their intercultural competence. These findings point to the need for further research into the acquisition of graduate attributes, in different higher education contexts, including Vietnamese universities, in order to determine which existing practices enable and constrain the development of high level transferable skills and graduate attributes, particularly those relating to intercultural competency.

The limited scope of inductive qualitative research based upon in-depth interviews also suggests directions for future research. Since this research focuses on young graduates working at INGOs which, in Vietnam whose operations remain closely linked to state structure (Plipat, 2005) and whose projects are targeted specifically at vulnerable, local communities, it is difficult to generalise from the experience of the young graduates in this study. Future research about graduates' usage and development of their knowledge and skills at the workplace might explore other economic sectors such as private and state ones in which the number of international organisations are increasing. Future research on a much larger scale would also seem to be warranted, possibly using a survey method to cover a larger number of participants in a wider range of work sectors and work types.

Nonetheless, this research has added a body of empirical evidence on how young graduates use and develop their knowledge and skills in the work setting to the literature on graduate attributes. In doing so, it has highlighted the value of culturally contextualised research in this area. It also has expanded the knowledge on intercultural competencies by providing evidence on how these competencies are acquired and used for working in intercultural work environments. In particular, the research has explored intensively how cultural mediation and cultural intermediary roles, as two key positions in the intercultural workplace, are performed through young graduates strategically developing their intercultural competencies in different settings. Fundamentally, the research has highlighted the role of personal agency in the way young graduates have responded to and prepared for novel work futures in a society shaped by marked political and economic reform.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1: Background information about the employers

International Employer	Nationality	Duration and work in Vietnam
International employer 1: Mr Th.	American	Work in Vietnam since 2008, Health organization
International employer 2: Mr S.	British	Work in Vietnam since 1997, a large community development INGO
International employer 3: Mr J.	Dutch	Work in Vietnam since 2000, Health INGO
International employer 4: Mr T.	Dutch	Work in Vietnam since 2007, Health INGO
International employer 5: Mrs A.	Switzerland	Work in Vietnam since 1979, community development INGO, previous work in UK NGO
International employer 6: Mrs N.	American	Work in Vietnam since 1999, currently at INGO on research, previous experience at many other public health INGOs
Vietnamese manager 1: Ms KD	Vietnamese	Graduated in 1991 and started by working at a business company. Had worked in the same INGO since 1993, starting from volunteer position, moving to other positions. Now Deputy country director.
Vietnamese manager 2: Mr B	Vietnamese	Worked for INGOs since graduation in 1996. Moved through different INGOs. Now project coordinator.

International employers

International employer 1 – Mr Th.

Employer 1 – Mr Th. was an American senior manager who had worked for for a profit consulting and research organization based in the US for more than 30 years. He was not actually based outside the USA until when he moved to work in Vietnam in 2008 as a director for an HIV/AIDS policy project office. When asked to compare his comments on the staff’s performance in Vietnam when he first arrived and today, he confessed that since he had been to Vietnam for just two years, it was too short for him to identify any differences among the Vietnamese staff he worked with at his start in Vietnam and the current moment. His office is a medium-sized one which has 11 staff in

Hanoi and 4 in Ho Chi Minh City – the two biggest cities of Vietnam, and he is the only international expert in his office.

Organizational context

Mr Th.'s organization is running a health project funded from USAID in partnership with the government of Vietnam, civil organizations, and other stakeholders to advocate for the adoption of HIV/AIDS laws, policy and programs. Activities covered advocacy with policy makers and capacity building for people living with HIV/AIDS.

International employer 2 – Mr S.

Employer 2 – Mr S. is a British director. He started his work in Vietnam in 1997 as a director of an INGO. He had worked for different INGOs and UN agents since 1997 up to the interview time in 2011. Before working in Vietnam, Mr S. had work experiences in the UK and some Pacific Islands.

Organizational context

At the time of the interview, Mr S. was the country director of a leading INGO which focuses on education, sustainable livelihoods, fair trade, gender equality, and disaster preparedness. The organization: conducts campaigns for change; provides emergency response; implements development work around issues such as climate change, conflict and natural disasters, health, education, debt and aid, gender equality, the right to be heard, trade, private sector, and global economic crisis. His INGO works directly with communities and seeks to advocate for the well-being of the poor and to have their voices heard in decision making process. Democracy is valued by his organization; however, the organization also requires staff to follow strict regulations.

International employer 3 – Mr J.

Background information

Mr J. is a senior British manager who had worked in London for 13 or 14 years before he came to work in Vietnam. Before that, he was based in Nepal for about eight years. However, he had work experience in more than these three countries, because, when he was based in London, for ten years he was coordinating an international program so he used to travel a lot to other countries in Africa and Asia, including Peru, Nicaragua, Guatemala, Somalia, Kenya, Rwanda, China, Laos, Cambodia, India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Nepal and so on.

Organizational context

At the time of the interview, Mr J. was the country director of a Netherlands based INGO, working to improve reproductive and sexual health with the focus on youth and women in developing countries. To achieve this purpose, this INGO carried out advocacy towards policy makers in the Netherlands and Europe, supported the local authorities in developing countries in terms of training curriculum, technical advice and capacity building. To assist the youth in accessing information and service, this INGO implements a human rights-based approach to help young people protect their reproductive health, and to improve gender equality.

Mr J.'s INGO had operated in Vietnam since 1995. It focuses on education and reproductive health service provision. The work has been done in close partnership with different ministries in Vietnam, such as Ministry of Education and Training, Ministry of Police, the Youth Union.

International employer 4 – Mr T.

Background information

Boss 4 – Mr T. was a Dutch medical doctor. He was the Country Director of an INGO at the time of the interview. He had worked for that INGO since 1998 as a technical consultant. In 2006, he became the Country Representative for the organization. Before working in Vietnam, he had worked in Cambodia for eight years, Egyptian for four years, and he also had work experiences in Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan and some countries in Africa.

Organizational context

Mr T. was the director of an US-based INGO which focuses on health issues. This INGO started its operation in Vietnam in 1994, with the initial goal is to train a critical mass of doctors and midwives whose skills were not just upgraded, but excellent. Today, in addition to high standards and quality care, this INGO also desired to reach the most underserved people. To achieve this aim, this INGO worked to ensure at-risk groups have access to quality health services, be they youth, people living with HIV, or ethnic minority populations—who face a much higher maternal and newborn mortality rates than the national average. Project activities included strengthening the country's health care system, in close partnership with the government, private sector, and civil society, and building health providers' skills and knowledge in a growing range of technical areas, dedicating to building capacity and delivering innovative solutions in close collaboration with the

Ministry of Health to transmit health education messages through mobile phones. The overall approach to capacity-building was based on promoting a partnership between communities and the health systems, through joint assessments and goal setting, joint planning, implementation and evaluation. This INGO also partnered with the Viet Nam Ministry of Health to design and roll out new National guidelines on sexual and reproductive health for people living with HIV, and made sure that the voices of people living with HIV were heard to determine content of the guidelines. This INGO also partnered with public clinics and schools to ensure better sexual and reproductive health education for young people, conducted capacity building activities for medical universities and nursing schools.

Vietnamese culture is accounted for in the operation of Mr T.'s organization. In 2010, Mr T. had to terminate contracts of more than 10 staff due to the downsizing of the fund. He had to be very cautious for every individual staff member who must leave the organization. This practice, for him, was unfamiliar within the Western business culture that he was used to.

International employer 5 – Mrs A.

Background information

Mrs A. is a Swedish woman who came to live and work in the development area in Vietnam in 1979. At the time of the interview, Mrs A. was the country director of a church based INGO. She has been working in that INGO since 2007.

Organizational context

Mrs A.'s INGO began its work in Vietnam in 1954 in response to a refugee emergency. Since then, this INGO has supported Vietnam continuously with projects primarily focused on improving health services, access to water, nutrition for children, education for ethnic minorities and disaster relief.

Since the establishment of the office in Vietnam in 1990, this INGO has focused on areas that were underserved in health and education, especially those populated by ethnic minorities and prone to disasters. This INGO formed close relationships and has worked in support with district and provincial partners in the northern and southern parts of Vietnam. The projects implemented include water supply and latrine construction, school feeding, teacher training, small scale agriculture, health worker training, support to rural clinics, and disaster relief. Currently this INGO is working

with kindergartens, primary schools, boarding schools, communal clinics, district health centres and hospitals under partnership with provincial, district and communal partners.

International employer 6 – Mrs N.

Background information

Mrs N. is a senior American woman who has been working in Vietnam since 1999 through different INGOs which focus on health and HIV/AIDS issues. Mrs N. has worked in many countries, including Sweden, Thailand, Hawaii, some Pacific islands, and some countries in Asia. From 1996-2006, Mrs N. managed different HIV/AIDS prevention programs in Ha Noi, Vietnam. Mrs N. joined her current INGO in 2006. It specializes in social science research. Mrs N. worked as the Vietnam program representative of one program of this INGO.

Organizational context

This INGO has worked to build social science research capacity in Vietnam since the mid-1980s. This INGO has conducted studies and strategic assessments of poverty, urbanization, migration, health, youth, rapid social change, and related topics to advocate for evidence-based social policy. This INGO also helped to strengthen research capacity of Vietnamese researchers and research institutions through providing research grants and fellowships, organizing seminars, donating publications to Vietnamese research institutions, assisting with the publication of several major bilingual volumes; and developing a network among Vietnamese scholars.

The Vietnamese senior managers

Vietnamese senior manager 1 – Mr B

Background information

Vietnamese senior manager 1 – Mr B was a program coordinator. At the time of the interview, by the end of 2010, he had worked for his INGO for more than a year. He appeared to be a person eager for new knowledge, which could be proved through his continuous effort to study different degrees beginning in 1997 and up to 2007. He had several majors, including English language, foreign trade, and business administration. He started his work at an INGO in an emergency relief project to take aid to a storm-destroyed area. Through different projects in other INGOs, Mr B

gained rich experiences in working with street children and young people in difficult conditions, training them in enterprise skills.

Organizational context

At the time of the interview, Mr B was working at an INGO, which provides meaningful and sustainable improvements to the lives of children, families and communities regardless of nationality, ethnicity, gender, ability, social standing or religion. This INGO worked in partnership with children and their communities to create lasting and meaningful change by supporting long-term community development and promoting children's rights.

Previously, Mr B had worked for six years in an INGO that set its vision to work for the wellbeing of children in Vietnam – especially the most vulnerable and marginalized, so that their communities increasingly respect and promote their rights, enabling them to actively participate in society. That INGO collaborates closely with the civil society organisations (CSOs) in Vietnam through capacity building activities for the local non-governmental organizations and government institutions to help them set up linkages with communities and increase their accountability and legitimacy.

Vietnamese senior manager 2 – Ms KD

Background information

Ms KD – the interim country director of an INGO was introduced to me by her international employer. Ms KD started to work as a volunteer in this INGO soon after her graduation, and had stayed in the same INGO since her graduation in 1991. She had held different positions in her INGO. She started as a part-time volunteer. One important factor that helped her to get the job was her English skills. Her motivation in those first days was to have opportunities to practise English. She gradually learnt about development work, and when there was a vacant position, she applied and was offered the post. Her INGO was then a small one, therefore, there were a lot of chances for her to involve in project activities to improve her knowledge and skills on development work while working in administrative position.

Organizational context

Ms KD's INGO expanded its project activities gradually to become a leading INGO in Vietnam. At the time of the interview, Ms KD was reforming the direction of her INGO. The issue was how to improve the feeling of ownership of their organization by the staff. Though this INGO was a UK

based organization, it was opening a branch in Vietnam; therefore, the management board of the organization was trying to have Vietnamese staff in all senior positions. This direction was being discussed along with the future trend of whether or not this INGO will become a Vietnamese NGO. In addition, since the project activities were being redirected towards benefiting the minority ethnic groups of people in Vietnam, this organization was also trying to have ethnically diverse staffing. The purpose of this direction is to have minority ethnic people solving poverty issues in their own communities.

Appendix 2: Background information about the young graduates

	Name	Graduate Year	Age	Sex	Uni. major	Work history
First Phase: interviews conducted in December 2010 – January 2011						
1	PMH (Ms My)	2007	25	F	hydrology	2007-2008: international hospital representative office, held position of interpreter. 2008-2010: international business company on hydrology data process outsourcing, held position of project officer 2010-present: INGO, holds position of Project assistant in the monitoring and evaluation team
2	VHD (Ms Vu)	2009	23	F	Foreign Trade relation	2009-present: INGO, held different positions; intern for 6 months; 2010-present: Project officer for the education project
3	NTLH (Ms Nguyen)	2004	29	F	Foreign Trade relation	2004-2007: INGO on education for children, held position of project assistant; 2007-2010: curriculum development project at Ministry of Education and Training, held position of project officer on library development at primary schools. 2010-present: INGO, holds position of project officer in the education project
4	PHV (Mr Pham)	2005	27	M	English language interpreting	2005-2006: INGO, interpreter 2006-2011: reproductive health INGO, hold position of project assistant 2011-present: international development project, holds position of project assistant
5	MTLP (Ms Mau)	2006	26	F	English language.	2006-2007: INGO, interpreter 2007-2011: curriculum development project at Ministry of Education and Training, interpreter 2011-present: INGO, project assistant
Second phase: interviews conducted in October 2012						
6	DTNA (Ms Dang)	2011	23	F	Public Health	10/2011–2012: reproductive health INGO, old position of part time Project assistant; 2011-2012: part time training assistant at Medical University 6-10/2011: local NGO, held position of wildlife project officer
7	LTT (Ms Le)	2011	23	F	Public Health	2011-2012: casual work as hired interviewer for some marketing project; 2-6/2012: INGO, held position of Project

						Assistant. During university study: voluntary interviewer for an INGO
8	DTT (Ms Hong)	2011	23	F	Public Health	6-1/2012: local NGO, held position of wildlife project officer; 2/2012-present: INGO, holds position of research assistant for anthropology project
9	NTTA (Ms Hoa)	2006	29	F	English teaching	2006-2007: interpreter for a business company; 2007-2009: project officer at the Ministry of Health 2010-present: reproductive health INGO, holds position of Project Associate
10	TTT (Ms Tran)	2012	22	F	Investment	2012-present: INGO intern
11	TVD (Mr Ta)	2011	23	M	Public Health	2011 – present: INGO: field officer for Child protection project
12	NTV (Mr Vi)	2009	26	M	English language	2009-present: INGO for Health, Education and Development, holds position of project assistant
13	LTAS (Ms Ba)	2008	27	F	Technology English language	Volunteer for some INGOs during student time. 2008: Japanese development program, held position of Project secretary for a cow raising project. 2010-present: reproductive health INGO, holds position of Project Assistant;
14	PXT (Mr Xuan)	2007	28	M	Public Health	2007-2009: Health and Nutrition officer at State Provincial Health Department. 2009-present: INGO, holds different positions: project officer on health and nutrition for one year; Program manager for ‘Alive & Thive’ project for two years
15	LTH (Ms Luu)	2008	27	F	Public Health	2008-2010: INGO, worked in HIV and Reproductive Health education for school children through different positions: Intern - 6 months; Project Assistant - 6 months; Project Officer – 2 years; 2011-present: reproductive health INGO, hold position of Project Associate on HIV patient care
16	NTL (Ms Lien)	2011	23	F	Public Health	6-12/2011: reproductive health INGO Intern. 1/2012 – present: health INGO, holds position of project assistant
17	NTKN (Ms Kim)	2012	22	F	International Law	2010-present: a local NGO which was an affiliate of a INGO; held different positions: 2010-2012: part time human resource officer; 2012-present: full time project manager and

						Law consultant
18	LLA (Ms Cuc)	2012	22	F	Public Health	2012: INGO, Intern During university study time: part time surveyor for marketing companies
19	DTH (Ms Dao)	2011	23	F	International study	2010-2011: part-time at a university, held position of personal development staff 2011-2012: Exchanged student to Sweden Uni. 2012 - present: INGO on Animal protection, holds position of interpreter

Appendix 3: Examples of job advertisements for the project officer position and project interpreter positions

PROJECT OFFICER

Organization: FPSC

Location: Hoa Binh

Duties and responsibilities

To coordinate all elements of project implementation in relation to the CDP's (Commune Development Plans) activities between the stakeholders and staff of the project, to liaise among project team, local people, local authorities and Forest Protection Department officials participating in the project, and other relevant institutions and individuals to ensure and facilitate the effective and efficient implementation of project activities, especially everything related to the CDP's.

Requirements:

- Degree qualification in a relevant subject (rural development/agro-forestry, natural resource management, etc);
- More than 3 years relevant and practical field experience working with ethnic minority communities
- Dynamic and highly motivated, able to manage complex sets of tasks, and function independently;
- Good practical experience of Participatory Rural Appraisal and other local-level participatory methods of assessment and monitoring;
- Familiarity with agro-forestry management planning and forest policy in Vietnam especially in relation to protected area management and community-based forest management.
- Demonstrated appreciation of traditional systems of natural resource management;
- Strong communicators, understand and believe in participatory processes, and will work well with a range of stakeholders from farmers and community members to provincial officials and Forest Protection Department staff.
- Good spoken and written English and fluent Vietnamese;

Application Deadline: Wed, 2011-05-25

Project Officer

Duty station: one based in **Nghe An**, another one based in **Thai Binh** province

Main responsibilities:

Together with the international expert the employee will

- Coordinate all activities related to planning, implementation monitoring and evaluation of the program and its 4 components at province and district level
- Act as liaison officer between the office in the province and the Vietnamese project partners to facilitate the implementation of the programme.
- Assist the Technical Advisor in his/her duties, especially in supervision, monitoring and integration of the 4 programme components' activities.
- Integrate achieved results and experiences into a joint team product of all stakeholders involved
- Be responsible for a close and good working relation between the provincial and the central programme office as well as the partners at district and communal level
- Deputize the Technical Advisor during his/her absence from the provincial programme office

Qualifications required

- University degree in public health sector or health related sector
- At least 3 years of working experience in international technical cooperation and project implementation, including preferably familiarity with the EU supported projects in the health sector, or 03 years of working experience in preventive or curative health.
- Proficiency of spoken and written Vietnamese and English. Knowledge of the German language will be an advantage .
- Excellent leadership and managerial skills with proven track record as a successful team leader and cross-team/functional relationship skills;
- Very good understanding of the local health sector
- Proficiency in computer skills utilizing word processing, spreadsheet software programs and e-mail/internet (MS Office)

Application procedures

Interested applicants should send 2 complete sets of detailed curriculum vitae with current photo, application letter and 2-3 references in English to the following address before **8 November 2010**

Project Officer

Location: Ho Chi Minh City

Duration: starting June 2011

Overall Responsibilities

The Project Officer is responsible for coordinating activities of the program in collaboration with the [local partner] in Ho Chi Minh City and acting as liaison between the office, the [local partner] and other partner agencies.

Specific Responsibilities:

1. Coordinating program activities
 - a. Communicating regularly with the [local partner] and partners
 - b. Translation of project documents and data.
 - c. Assist with data collection and data entry as needed
2. Analysis and reporting of qualitative and quantitative data using statistics software.
3. Coordinate communication between the office and local partner agencies, and other NGO partners.
4. Assist Medical Director and administrative Assistant with the following tasks:
 - a. Photocopying and preparation of training materials
 - b. Translating, writing and editing letters and other documents
 - c. Translating at meetings between foreign staff and Vietnam government agencies
 - d. Other administrative activities as requested.

Reporting to

Medical Director (HCMC)

Director (Boston)

Qualifications

- MPH, PhD, or advanced medical or nursing degree
- Excellent English and Vietnamese verbal and writing skills
- Understanding of research methodology
- Familiarity with computer applications, including Word, PowerPoint, and Excel
- Experience using statistics software packages including EpiInfo, SPSS, and/or Stata.
- Experience in conducting field research in Vietnam preferred

Location: HoChiMinh City

Application Deadline: Monday, 2011-05-23

Public Health Medical Doctor

Incumbent's duties:

- He/She will develop and implement AMP projects in vaccinology and other health-related fields (applied research, training, organization of scientific and technical meetings...), primarily in Viet Nam and possibly in other Asia countries.

- Following the agreement between the Viet Nam MOH and the SIVAC initiative to collaborate on the development of a National Immunization Technical Advisory Group (NITAG - in charge of developing recommendations on immunization for the National Authorities), he/she will :
Support the NITAG and its executive secretariat in developing, implementing, and monitoring their work plans

Support the NITAG in developing its organization

Support the preparation of the scientific and technical background documents.

Qualifications:

- Medical Doctorate and MSc in Public Health, or Epidemiology, or Health Policy
- Good understanding / knowledge of the organization of the health systems (primarily in Viet Nam and also in Asia), and of the global immunization community (WHO, Unicef, Gavi).
- Completely fluent in both English and Vietnamese.
- Good skills in literature reviews and synthesis, and in medical article writing
- Good computer skills for Microsoft Office Package and for epidemiological/statistical tools (SAS, Stata...)

Required Experience:

- A minimum of at least 5 years of experience in the field of public health in an international environment and significant experience in Viet Nam. Experience in the area of Vaccine Preventable Diseases would be an asset.

Other requirements:

- Good organizational and interpersonal skills with ability to interact professionally and effectively with various players, including with senior positions at MOH and public health organizations (universities...)
- Capacity to both easily integrate into a team and to work autonomously.
- Being agile, flexible and logical thinking.
- Being self-motivated, self-disciplined, result-oriented and good time management skills.
- Tact, discretion and sensitivity to cultural differences.

Location: Ha Noi

Application Deadline: Mon, 2011-05-16

Project Interpreter/ Secretary (PIS)

Project title: Environmental Remediation of Dioxin Contaminated Hotspots in Viet Nam

Responsibilities

Provide necessary assistance in the operational management of the project

Providing interpretation services to the Project activities, including meetings, small-scale workshops, and relevant events

Qualifications:

University degree in English language, administration or related fields;

At least four (03) years of working experience in the positions of secretary or interpreter/ translator;

Good secretarial skills and good organizational capacity;

Knowledge in administrative procedures of the Government

Good computer skills

Knowledge and experience in working with UN agencies and international organizations is an advantage.

Deadline of application: 17h00, 13 May 2011.

Project Assistant

Main Responsibilities:

This position assists the Manager in management to the Health Project to achieve stipulated objectives in accordance with relevant sectoral strategies, policies (e.g. Finance and Child Protection policies etc.), and standards (sectoral standards, LEAP, etc.).

Requirements:

- University graduate in a relevant field (preferably social works, community development, public health, medicine, sitology...).
- Have 1 - 2 year relevant work experience. Experience of working in community development is preferred.
- Experience in program implementation and participatory approach.
- Understanding of monitoring and evaluation
- Basic English skills
- Well-developed written and oral communications skills in Vietnamese.
- Good computer skills (word processing, excel)
- Work at district level.

Applicants having working experience in a similar kind of organization will be an advantage.

Deadline for application: 20 August 2013

Junior Research Officer

Main responsibilities:

- Carry out research & surveys examining specific aspects of the wildlife trade.
- Provide the WCU team leader & manager with regular updates on all important aspects of research & surveys that are underway.
- Work and communicate closely with other relevant departments, especially the Wildlife Crime Unit.
- Other duties as assigned by specified by WCU Team Leader & Manager

Requirements

- Vietnamese national, Male preferred
- Research and survey skills required
- Law enforcement experience or training is beneficial
- Strong Vietnamese written language skills
- Fluent English written and verbal skills required
- Excellent communications skills and an ability to communicate and work with government partners
- Capable, dependable, confident, with excellent critical thinking and problem solving skills.
- Ability to work under high pressure and meet deadlines, willingness to travel

Location: Ha Noi. **Application Deadline:** Fri, 2013-08-23

PROGRAM OFFICER

The Program Officer will be based in Phu Yen district, Son La province and is required to monitor all program activities and report to the Senior Program Officer. In collaboration with all stakeholders and partners, the Program Officer will be involved in all provincial meetings related to EHFP as appropriate. This position will be required to collect and analyze data, and conduct regular M&E visits to the fields and provide recommendations needed to improve the EHFP program.

Report to: Program Coordinator

Collaborate with: Finance /Administrative Officer and Assistant

Duty station: Phu Yen district, Son La province

Key Responsibilities

- Help manage and supervise the implementation of the EHFP program in Son La province in collaboration with local partners;
- Develop and strengthen partnerships with local partner and key stakeholders, maintaining relationships with relevant authorities;
- Assist to develop, collect and analyze Surveys, and Pre/Post Test for trainings;
- Assist in the design of monitoring and evaluation protocol;
- Assist to improve and distribute EHFP communication materials;
- Monitor and track the progress of EHFP ensuring activities are carried out in appropriate timely manner;
- Report to Program Coordinator, liaise with Finance Administrator;
- Produce monthly reports consisting of observations and documentation of work in the field while making recommendations to improve the program;
- Assist with project budget forecast, disbursement and reporting.

Contract duration: 01 year with possible extension; 2 month probationary period

Requirements:

- Vietnamese citizen;
- At least 2 - 3 years working experience, preferably in agriculture
- Proficiency in Microsoft Office (Word, Excel, PowerPoint);
- University degree (degree in agriculture is an advantage);
- Working experience in development sector, especially NGOs and community groups;
- Background knowledge of agriculture in Vietnam is preferred;
- Has skills in project management, presentation and communication;
- Understanding of and sensitivity to poverty-related development and gender issues;
- Good knowledge of spoken and written Vietnamese and English;
- Ability to work in a team environment without direct formal hierarchy;
- Demonstrates flexibility, adaptability and initiative;
- Motivated team player who can manage his/her own project and provide support to team;
- Agree with the organization's mission and want to contribute to improving nutrition in Vietnam.

Expected starting date: Mid- September 2013.

Location: Son La. **Application Deadline:** Mon, 2013-08-19

Intern

Reports to: Chief of Party – Inclusion of Vietnamese with disabilities program

Location: Hanoi

Timeframe: Six months

Main Responsibilities

- Translate internal documents and emails from Vietnamese to English and vice versa
- Provide translation for non-Vietnamese office staff and international consultant at informal meetings and events
- Edit and organize English and Vietnamese documents under the supervision of other staff
- Participate in surveys and interviews if there is non-Vietnamese consultant participation under the supervision of office staff
- Support project team in organizing trainings, workshops and events under the supervision of office staff

Qualifications

- University degree in foreign language, social science, or related discipline
- Excellent written and spoken English skills required
- Computer skills (MS Word and Excel)
- Experience working with people with disabilities is preferred

Location: Ha Noi. **Application Deadline:** Mon, 2013-08-19

Source: NGO Resource center, <http://www.ngocentre.org.vn/>. Accessed on 15 May 2013

Appendix 4: The interview guideline for the first phase interviews

Interview guidelines

A. For interviewing the Vietnamese staff at INGOs

About previous work experiences:

- Which discipline did you study at university?
- Why did you choose the discipline?
- What is your job searching experience after graduation?
- What was your previous job?
- What are work fulfilment requirements at your previous workplace?

About INGOs:

- Why do you choose the current job?
- What are work fulfilment requirements at your current workplace?
- Which outstanding quality helped you compete with others (competitors) in applying for this job?
- How do you see yourself as an INGO staff?
- How do you think outsiders see you as an INGO staff?
- How do the expatriates see you as an INGO staff?

Work experiences of university graduates at INGOs:

- What do you do at work?
- How do you do those tasks?
- Which skills did you lack at first?
- Where do those skills come from, university or where?
- How do INGOs help you to develop those skills?

How do you prepare yourself for working in INGOs (taking training courses, internship, and volunteer)?

- What difficulties do you meet in fulfilling your task?
- How do you overcome these difficulties?
- How do you think university education prepared you for the current work at INGO?
- What do you suggest to improve this preparation?

B. For interviewing international expatriates working at INGOs

- What is your discipline?
- Have you ever worked with non-Vietnamese before?
- What are the differences between those non-Vietnamese and the Vietnamese staff at your current INGO?
- Do you find any different between western values and Vietnamese values?
- How do you feel working in an INGO?
- How do you socialize with other Vietnamese staff in your INGO?
- Do you learn anything from the Vietnamese staff?
- What does it mean as an expatriate in an INGO?
- Do you notice any changes among the young Vietnamese staff in your INGO?
- What are the similarities or differences of those changes compared with the young generation in your country?

C. For interviewing Academics

- Are you in contact with any alumni?
- Are you in contact with any group of employers?
- Do you know the criteria for recruiting staff of those employers?
- How do you want your students to be when they graduate?
- What skills do you think your subject helps to develop for the students?

Appendix 5: Protocol for interviewing young graduates in the second phase

<p>1. Biographical/ demographic details</p>	<p>Background information of the informants:</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is your full name? • In which year did you graduate? • What is your discipline at university? • From which University did you graduate? • How do you choose the discipline? At the university? • Which ethnic group do you identify yourself? • What are your previous work experiences? <p>Year of graduation, university graduated from, discipline at the university, current position and year of start, previous work experience.</p>
<p>2. Work experiences/ timeline</p>	<p>Transitions through different jobs</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Where are you working now ...? How long have you been there?</i> <i>and before that? ...How long were you there? What was the main reason you moved from there?</i> <i>and what about before you were working at ...? ...How long were you there? What was the main reason you moved from there?</i> <p>Interviewer Instruction: Start time-line and work transitions record. Record types and names of organizations, work duration, reason to move.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is your job searching experience after graduate? • What was your first job? • How did you get your first job? • How did you move to the next job(s)? • How did you get this current job? • What are work fulfillment requirements at your different workplaces? <p>Discipline at the university? Transition to first jobs, other jobs' transition, transition to current job</p>

Appendix 6: Participant Information Sheet

Participant Information Sheet

Negotiating work in a multicultural environment: the experience of graduates in international non-government organizations in Vietnam

Purpose of study: This project is being undertaken for a Doctor of Philosophy in Sociology at the University of Queensland, Australia.

University-work transition can be a challenging process for the worker and employers. In the era of globalization university-work transition is becoming increasingly complicated. The graduate must be ready to work different jobs or to change to different areas of work. This study will look specifically at the international non-government organizations where a number of new graduates from different disciplines seek to start their career. The research findings can come back to the Universities as suggestions of how the graduates are getting on at the INGOs.

Details of participation / procedures:

The informants will be given the participant information sheet, participant consent form and the list of issues to be interviewed prior to the commencing of the interview.

They will be interviewed in English and Vietnamese and they can offer their informed consent prior to their interview in either language.

Prior to the interview the informants will be asked to sign a consent form which notes that their privacy and confidentiality will be of utmost importance.

The interview will take place in private between the informant and the researcher so that the informant will not be interrupted or distracted.

After the interview, the informants will be given a questionnaire to complete and indicate their demographic background with their consent.

Duration of participation: each interview will run for about 1 hour, with possible follow-up interview in the future to provide feedback and further clarification on the information gathered through the previous interview.

Location for participation: Hanoi, Hue and Ho Chi Minh cities in Vietnam

Risks outlined and how managed: There is no foreseeable potential for harm, discomfort, or direct benefit as a result of participating in this study.

Expected outcomes of research / direct benefits to participants:

This research aims to contribute to the understanding of the emergence of a new cosmopolitan workforce in Vietnam given its rapid emergence and presence of international investments and expatriates working in development projects in Vietnam. It will provide insights into how university education in Vietnam is currently preparing graduates to enter a more cosmopolitan work environment.

The benefits of this research to various stakeholders include:

- a. For informants – reflection on practice and improvements of operation of INGOs
- b. Employers – better understanding and development of recruitment policy
- c. Universities – direction for training future graduates

Freedom to withdraw without penalty:

Participation in this research is voluntary. If the questions make you feel hesitant or uncomfortable, you have the right to refuse to answer them and you can withdraw from the study at any time without prejudice. All data collected from you will be destroyed.

Assurance of confidentiality:

Names or any personal data will not be recorded in the interviews. Personal data will be recorded and reported separately in order to protect the identity and confidentiality of informants. All raw data (including field notes and interview transcriptions) will be securely stored in the researcher's personal computer accessed only by PIN of the researcher during field work and at the School of Social Science, University of Queensland when the fieldwork is completed.

At the completion of the project, all research notes, records and personal information will be destroyed immediately, except, as required by the university's research policy, raw data in which the results of the project depend will be retained in secure storage for two years, after which they will be destroyed.

Results of this project may be published but they will not be linked to any particular participant. Pseudonyms will be used in the final report to protect the identity of individuals interviewed. Other personal details that may identify the informants will not be disclosed.

Access to results:

Participants in this study are most welcome to request a copy of the results. Please contact the researcher or her supervisors as indicated below.

Reimbursement to participants: there is no fiscal benefit for participation; however, small gifts will be given to participants as a gesture of appreciation of the efforts and time they have given to the study.

Who can I contact if I have further questions?

If you have any questions about the study, either now or in the future, feel free to contact:

In Vietnam

Ms MAI THI QUYNH LAN
Institute for Education Quality Assurance
Vietnam National University, Hanoi
Address: 144 Xuan Thuy street, Cau Giay district, Hanoi, Vietnam.
Cell phone: 0912523408

In Brisbane

Dr. Catherine Manathunga	Dr Wendy Green
University phone number (+617) 3365 6459	(+617) 3365 2814
Teaching & Educational Development Institute & UQ Graduate School	
The University of Queensland	
Brisbane Qld 4072	
Australia	

Support if something goes wrong:

This study adheres to the Guidelines of the ethical review process of The University of Queensland. Whilst you are free to discuss your participation in this study with project staff (Mrs Mai Thi Quynh Lan, contactable on mobile phone: 0912523408 in Vietnam or 0061 431183081 in Australia), if you would like to speak to an officer of the University not involved in the study, you may contact the Ethics Officer on 3365 3924.

Appendix 7: Participant's consent form

Participant's consent

Project title: **Negotiating the work in a multicultural environment: the experience of graduates in international non-government organizations in Vietnam**

Researcher: MAI THI QUYNH LAN
The School of Social Science at the University of Queensland
Brisbane, Queensland, Australia, 4072.

Participant's Name:

I have read the Participant Information Sheet and I fully understand the project. I hereby agree to be involved in the above research project as a participant. I understand the nature of the research and my role in it. I understand that I have freedom to withdraw without penalty from the interview/focus group at any time. I have been assured that the researcher, Ms MAI THI QUYNH LAN, will take steps to ensure my anonymity. I am aware that there is no fiscal benefit for participation.

Signature:

Date:

Appendix 8: Post interview questionnaire



School of Social Science
Anthropology, Archaeology, Criminology & Sociology

Post interview questionnaire

B. Background information of the informants: year of graduation, university graduated from, discipline at the university, current position and year of start, previous work experience.

- Name of respondent.
- Sex
- Discipline at university
- University graduated
- Year of graduation
- Nationality (for expatriates)/ or ethnic group (if applicable, for Vietnamese informants)
- Previous work experiences:

- Current organization:

- Year to start work at the current INGO/organization
- Position hold at current organization

Appendix 9: Ethical Clearance Approval



School of Social Science
Archaeology, Anthropology,
Criminology, Sociology
Professor Geoffrey Lawrence
Head of School
CRICOS PROVIDER NUMBER 000258

13th December, 2010

Ms Thi Quynh Lan Mai
C/- Dr Wendy Green, A/Prof. Michael Emmison &
A/Prof. David Ip
School of Social Science
The University of Queensland
St Lucia QLD 4072

Dear Lan,

Title: **Negotiating work in a multicultural environment: the experience of graduates in international non-government organizations in Vietnam .**

The School of Social Science Ethical Review Panel (SSERP) has considered your responses to your reviewed application for ethical clearance to conduct the above project, and I am pleased to advise you that approval has been granted under the clearance number [RHD8/2010].

Please remember to advise the committee if you wish to make an amendment to your approved proposal, by submitting an 'Amendments to Approved Proposals' form. Please also quote the above ethical clearance number in any future correspondence.

Best of luck with your research.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Janeen Baxter'.

Professor Janeen Baxter
Chair, Social Science Ethical Review Panel.