

## **THE ROLE OF INTERCULTURAL EDUCATION IN DEVELOPING HIGH-QUALITY HUMAN RESOURCES IN CONTEMPORARY VIETNAM**

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### **ABSTRACT**

In the context of globalization and the Fourth Industrial Revolution, developing high-quality human resources with intercultural competence is crucial for Vietnam's goal of becoming a developed nation by 2045. This study examines intercultural education's role in enhancing Vietnam's human resource competitiveness, addressing the gap between current workforce capabilities and international integration demands. Through qualitative analysis of policy documents, international frameworks, the study reveals significant fragmentation in Vietnam's intercultural education across all levels. While policy documents aspire to develop "global citizens," implementation lacks systematic frameworks, resources, and trained educators. Vietnamese students demonstrate positive intercultural attitudes but weak knowledge and skills, particularly in multicultural work environments. The research establishes that intercultural education directly develops cognitive flexibility, communication skills, and innovative capacity essential for high tech industries. Drawing from Singapore and South Korea's successful models, the study proposes four integrated solutions: establishing a National Intercultural Competence Framework aligned with Byram's model; embedding intercultural learning across curricula using UNESCO's STEAM approach; implementing blended teacher development combining international exposure with online learning; and creating collaborative environments through industry and community partnerships. The research concludes that intercultural education represents a strategic imperative, not a peripheral concern, for Vietnam's human resource development.

**Keywords:** Fourth Industrial Revolution, high-quality human resources, intercultural communicative competence, intercultural education, international integration

### **1. INTRODUCTION**

Globalization and the Fourth Industrial Revolution have fundamentally transformed workforce requirements, demanding human resources capable of navigating complex multicultural environments while driving innovation and economic growth. For Vietnam, aspiring to become a developed nation by 2045 (Communist Party of Vietnam, 2021), developing high-quality human resources with intercultural competence has become critical. The expansion of foreign direct investment and integration into global value chains requires professionals who possess not only technical expertise but also sophisticated intercultural capabilities for effective international collaboration.

Despite these demands, Vietnam faces a significant competency gap threatening its developmental aspirations. Research identifies Vietnamese workers' "ability to work in multicultural environments" as a persistent weakness (Nguyen, n.d.), even as the economy

increasingly requires such capabilities. While educational access has expanded substantially, quality and relevance remain problematic, with graduates demonstrating competencies mismatched with market requirements. This gap is particularly concerning given Vietnam's strategic focus on developing high tech industries requiring sophisticated intercultural collaboration.

Current approaches to developing intercultural competence remain fragmented and inadequate. While policy documents acknowledge the need for "global citizens" (Ministry of Education and Training, 2018), implementation lacks systematic frameworks. The contrast with regional leaders like Singapore and South Korea, who have successfully integrated intercultural education into their human resource strategies (Wu et al., 2023), underscores Vietnam's need for comprehensive reform.

This study examines the role of intercultural education in developing high-quality human resources in contemporary Vietnam. The research aims to: (1) clarify concepts and implications of intercultural education within Vietnam's context; (2) analyze how intercultural education contributes to developing high-quality human resources; and (3) propose solutions for strengthening intercultural education.

## 2. CONTENT

### 2.1. Theoretical foundation

UNESCO (2006) distinguishes intercultural education as aiming "to go beyond passive coexistence, to achieve a developing and sustainable way of living together in multicultural societies through the creation of understanding" (p. 18). In Vietnam's context, high-quality human resources require both technical expertise and intercultural competence to meet the demands of global integration and the Fourth Industrial Revolution, aligning with the Party's vision of developing "global citizens" with "creative thinking and international integration" capabilities (Communist Party of Vietnam, 2021, pp. 232-233).

Three theoretical frameworks underpin this study. First, Byram's (1997, 2021) Intercultural Communicative Competence model identifies five essential components: knowledge (savoirs), attitudes (savoir être), skills of interpreting/relating (savoir comprendre), skills of discovery/interaction (savoir apprendre/faire), and critical cultural awareness (savoir s'engager). Critical cultural awareness, the apex of intercultural competence, enables evaluation of cultural perspectives through explicit criteria. Second, Bennett's (2017) Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity outlines progression from ethnocentric to ethnorelative worldviews through six stages, providing a developmental pathway for educational interventions. At the adaptation stage, individuals can "look at the world through different eyes and intentionally change behavior to communicate effectively in another culture" (IDR Institute, 2021). Third, Bourdieu's (1986) cultural capital theory explains how intercultural education creates embodied capital through "a process of embodiment, incorporation, which... costs time, time which must be invested personally" (p. 244), generating resources convertible into professional opportunities.

### 2.2. Literature review

International research reveals both the importance and challenges of intercultural education implementation. DeJaeghere and Cao (2009) found that "overseas immersion exerts a larger

effect on intercultural competence improvement than other types of intervention" (para. 2), while Lantz-Deaton (2017) challenges assumptions about automatic development, demonstrating that exposure alone does not guarantee competence enhancement.

Comparative Asian studies provide relevant insights. Wu et al. (2023) reveal Singapore's successful integration of "Human Relations, Single-Group Studies, and Multicultural Education" throughout policy architecture, contrasting with South Korea's evolution "from a conservative perspective rooted in Teaching the Exceptional and Culturally Different to a more liberal stance" (p. 888). These trajectories demonstrate that systematic policy frameworks and sustained commitment are essential for success.

Vietnamese research exposes significant implementation gaps. Nguyen et al. (2024) found students demonstrate strong intercultural attitudes but weak knowledge and skills, while Vu et al. (2025) revealed that English medium instruction programs prioritize language over genuine intercultural competence development. This paradox positive attitudes without corresponding capabilities reflects broader systemic issues.

The literature reveals a critical gap regarding systematic integration of intercultural education into human resource development strategies in developing countries. While substantial Western research exists, limited attention addresses how nations with ambitious development goals but constrained resources can effectively implement intercultural education. This study addresses this gap by examining strategic deployment of intercultural education aligned with Vietnam's 2030-2045 objectives, contributing theoretical insights and practical recommendations for enhancing workforce competitiveness through intercultural competence development.

### **2.3. Research methodology**

This study employs a qualitative research design based on systematic analysis of secondary data to examine the role of intercultural education in developing high-quality human resources in Vietnam. The qualitative approach is appropriate for this exploratory research as it enables deep examination of complex relationships between educational policies, intercultural competence development, and human resource outcomes. Content analysis serves as the primary analytical method, allowing systematic examination of policy documents, research literature, and institutional reports to identify patterns, themes, and gaps in Vietnam's approach to intercultural education. Additionally, comparative analysis is utilized to examine international best practices and their potential applicability to the Vietnamese context, particularly drawing lessons from other Asian nations that have successfully integrated intercultural education into their human resource development strategies.

### **2.4. Research findings and discussion**

#### **2.4.1. Current status of intercultural education in Vietnam**

The current landscape of intercultural education in Vietnam reveals significant fragmentation and underdevelopment across all educational levels, despite policy aspirations for developing global citizens.

In general education, the 2018 General Education Program (Circular 32/2018/TT-BGDDT) explicitly aims to develop students for "the era of globalization and new industrial revolution" (Ministry of Education and Training, 2018, Section I, para. 2). However, implementation remains superficial. While foreign language education has been prioritized, the focus remains

on linguistic competence rather than intercultural communicative competence. Cultural content in textbooks presents stereotypical representations focusing on surface-level customs rather than developing critical cultural awareness. Extracurricular cultural exchanges exist primarily in urban centers, leaving rural students particularly those from Vietnam's 54 ethnic minorities with limited intercultural learning opportunities. The absence of explicit intercultural competence frameworks means teachers lack guidance for developing students' intercultural capabilities systematically.

At the higher education level, research by Nguyen et al. (2024) reveals a troubling paradox: Vietnamese university students demonstrate "high perceived levels of IC" with strong attitudes but "knowledge and skills equally stood at the lowest level" (p. 8). This disconnect between positive attitudes and weak competencies suggests structural deficiencies in educational provision. English medium instruction (EMI) programs, intended to internationalize higher education, focus primarily on content delivery in English rather than developing genuine intercultural competence (Vu et al., 2025). International cooperation programs benefit mainly affluent students, creating an "intercultural divide" reinforcing socioeconomic inequalities. Most universities lack dedicated intercultural communication courses, with intercultural learning occurring incidentally rather than through deliberate pedagogical design. Faculty shortages in international experience and intercultural training further constrain program development.

Vocational training represents the most underdeveloped sector, despite its critical importance for workforce competitiveness. Programs focus almost exclusively on technical skills, neglecting the soft skills required for multicultural work environments. This gap is particularly problematic given that workers' "ability to work in multicultural environments" is identified as a significant weakness (Nguyen, n.d., para. 15). Some multinational corporations provide intercultural training, but these reach only a small workforce fraction. The mismatch is stark: "81.1% of college level workers perform jobs requiring lower qualifications than their training" (Nguyen, n.d., para. 14), suggesting the education system fails to develop comprehensive competencies employers value.

In summary, Vietnam's approach to intercultural education lacks systematic frameworks, resources, and expertise despite policy recognition of its importance. While Singapore has developed integrated multicultural education and South Korea has evolved toward genuinely multicultural policies (Wu et al., 2023), Vietnam remains in early recognition stages. This underdevelopment represents a critical bottleneck in human resource development strategy, potentially undermining competitiveness in the global knowledge economy. Urgent reform is needed to transform intercultural education from peripheral concern to central educational component.

#### **2.4.2. The role of intercultural education in developing high-quality human resources**

In the context of globalization and the Fourth Industrial Revolution, intercultural education plays a pivotal role in shaping high-quality human resources capable of competing in the international arena. This multifaceted role encompasses cognitive development, skill enhancement, value formation, and competitive advantage creation, all of which are essential for Vietnam's aspiration to become a developed nation by 2045.

Intercultural education fundamentally enhances cognitive capabilities and critical thinking skills, which constitute the intellectual foundation of high-quality human resources. According to Byram's (1997, 2021) model of intercultural communicative competence, "critical cultural awareness" (*savoir s'engager*) represents the pinnacle of intercultural competence, enabling individuals not merely to understand cultural differences but to "evaluate critically and on the basis of explicit criteria perspectives, practices and products in one's own and other cultures and countries" (Byram, 2021, p. 92). This cognitive sophistication is particularly crucial for Vietnam, where the 13th Party Congress has identified the need to develop citizens with "creative thinking and international integration capabilities (global citizens)" (Communist Party of Vietnam, 2021, pp. 232-233). The ability to analyze problems through multiple cultural lenses enables high-skilled workers to generate innovative solutions appropriate for diverse global market contexts. Research by Dobos (2024) in European universities demonstrates that students educated in culturally diverse environments develop superior "cognitive flexibility" the capacity to switch between concepts and adapt to new situations an essential requirement for workers in the digital era. Furthermore, exposure to diverse cultural perspectives stimulates what The Nest Schools (2024) identify as enhanced creativity, where "children are more likely to think outside the box, develop innovative ideas, and have a broader perspective on problem-solving" (para. 8). This creative capacity directly addresses Vietnam's strategic priority of developing human resources for "digital technology, prioritizing artificial intelligence, big data, blockchain" (Le, 2023, para. 14), fields that demand both technical expertise and innovative thinking.

Moreover, intercultural education significantly enhances communication and international cooperation skills, which are indispensable competencies for high-quality human resources in the globalized economy. Bennett's (2017) Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity (DMIS) illustrates how individuals progress from ethnocentric to ethnorelative worldviews, ultimately reaching the Adaptation stage where they can "look at the world 'through different eyes' and may intentionally change their behavior to communicate more effectively in another culture" (IDR Institute, 2021). This adaptive capability becomes critical as Vietnam implements major projects requiring international collaboration, including Long Thanh Airport, high speed railways, and national digital transformation initiatives (Phung, 2025, para. 17). The UNESCO Framework for Culture and Arts Education (2024) emphasizes that intercultural learning develops "a broad range of cognitive, social and emotional, and behavioural skills" while fostering "intercultural dialogue, cooperation and understanding, which are critical to sustainably address global challenges" (Introduction, para. 2). These skills directly address a significant weakness in Vietnam's current workforce, as Nguyen (n.d.) notes that graduates are "weak in foreign languages and soft skills such as industrial working style, ability to work in teams and groups, entrepreneurship skills" (para. 12). The development of what Deardorff (2004) defines as "the ability to communicate effectively and appropriately in intercultural situations based on one's intercultural knowledge, skills, and attitudes" (p. 194) transforms Vietnamese workers from mere technical specialists into global professionals capable of navigating complex multicultural business environments.

Equally important, intercultural education cultivates attitudes and values aligned with the demands of the global knowledge economy. Bourdieu's (1986) theory of cultural capital provides a theoretical framework for understanding how intercultural education creates embodied cultural capital "long lasting dispositions of the mind and body" (p. 243) that enable

individuals to operate effectively across cultural boundaries. The development of openness, respect for diversity, and global citizenship consciousness transcends moral imperatives to become core competencies for success in international business environments. Research by Nguyen et al. (2024) on Vietnamese university students reveals a positive correlation between intercultural competence and “entrepreneurial capabilities and employability,” confirming that IC enhances graduates’ potential in the 21st century job market. The UNESCO guidelines (2006) advocate for intercultural education that “aims to go beyond passive coexistence, to achieve a developing and sustainable way of living together in multicultural societies” (p. 18), a vision that aligns perfectly with Vietnam’s need to attract and retain international talent while preventing the “brain drain” that has seen 40,000 civil servants leave the public sector in just 2.5 years (Le, 2023, para. 13).

Furthermore, intercultural education substantially strengthens competitiveness in the global labor market, a critical factor for Vietnam’s economic development strategy. The comparative study by Wu et al. (2023) of Singapore and South Korea demonstrates how nations that systematically develop intercultural competence through education policy achieve stronger positions in the global economy. Singapore’s integrated approach combining “Human Relations, Single Group Studies, and Multicultural Education” (Wu et al., 2023, p. 888) has created a workforce renowned for its multicultural competence and global connectivity. For Vietnam, with its strategic goal to “become a developing country with modern industry and upper-middle income by 2030” (Communist Party of Vietnam, 2021, p. 206), developing human resources with intercultural competence is not optional but essential. The ability to lead in multicultural contexts, manage diverse teams, and build international partnerships determines success in attracting FDI and developing high-tech industries. As The Nest Schools (2024) emphasize, “Businesses and organizations seek employees with strong intercultural skills. A diverse early education experience can give children a competitive edge in the future job market” (para. 9).

In synthesis, intercultural education serves as a catalyst for transforming Vietnam’s human resources from technically competent workers into globally competitive professionals. By developing critical thinking, communication skills, appropriate values, and market competitiveness, intercultural education directly addresses the gap between Vietnam’s current workforce capabilities and the demands of international integration. The evidence from both theoretical frameworks and empirical studies confirms that intercultural competence is not merely an additional skill but a fundamental capability that multiplies the value of technical expertise, enabling Vietnamese professionals to contribute meaningfully to the global knowledge economy while maintaining their cultural identity and values.

#### **2.4.3. Proposed solutions for enhancing intercultural education**

Addressing the critical gaps in Vietnam’s intercultural education requires comprehensive, multi-level interventions aligned with national development goals while learning from international best practices.

First, at the policy and strategic level, Vietnam must establish a National Intercultural Competence Framework defining specific competencies, learning outcomes, and assessment criteria for each educational level. Drawing from Singapore’s successful integration of multicultural education (Wu et al., 2023), this framework should adapt Byram’s (2021) five savoires model to Vietnamese contexts while aligning with the Party’s vision of developing

“global citizens” (Communist Party of Vietnam, 2021). Intercultural education must be explicitly integrated into the National Strategy for Education Development 2021-2030, with dedicated funding and implementation timelines. An Inter ministerial Committee coordinating across education, labor, and planning ministries should ensure alignment with workforce demands, particularly in priority sectors like “digital technology, artificial intelligence, big data” (Le, 2023, para. 14). Incentive structures should reward institutions successfully developing students’ intercultural competence beyond traditional academic metrics.

Second, regarding curriculum and educational content, intercultural learning must be embedded across all subjects, not confined to foreign language classes. The UNESCO Framework (2024) STEAM approach provides a model for infusing cultural perspectives into technical disciplines. Digital learning resources should provide immersive intercultural experiences, particularly for remote students lacking direct cultural exposure. Virtual exchanges and online collaboration can connect Vietnamese students globally, fostering “intercultural dialogue” (UNESCO, 2006). Vietnam’s ethnic diversity should be transformed into an educational asset, with materials showcasing the knowledge systems of 54 ethnic groups, preparing students for both domestic multiculturalism and global engagement. Assessment methods must evolve beyond knowledge testing to evaluate intercultural competence holistically through portfolios and performance-based assessments.

Third, teacher development represents the linchpin of successful implementation. Research shows “overseas immersion exerts a larger effect on intercultural competence improvement” (DeJaeghere & Cao, 2009, para. 2), suggesting prioritization of teacher exchange programs. However, resource constraints necessitate blended approaches combining short term international experiences with online professional learning communities. Pre service teacher education must integrate intercultural pedagogy as a core component. Following Bennett’s (2017) DMIS model, training should help educators progress from ethnocentric to ethnorelative worldviews. A national network of master trainers should provide cascading professional development reaching all regions. Teaching effectiveness assessment should include intercultural competence indicators, incentivizing continuous capability development.

Fourth, creating supportive learning environments requires transforming institutions into “intercultural learning laboratories.” The UNESCO Framework (2024) emphasizes “broadening learning environments by establishing sustained cooperation with formal, non-formal and informal spaces” (para. 27). Partnerships with international organizations, embassies, and multinational corporations should provide authentic intercultural experiences. Student mobility programs must be democratized through scholarships enabling disadvantaged students’ participation. Inter-regional exchanges could connect students from different ethnic and socioeconomic backgrounds, building national cohesion while developing intercultural skills. Industry partnerships ensure intercultural education meets workforce needs through internships and real-world projects developing multicultural teamwork abilities. Parent and community engagement strategies must address resistance by emphasizing employment benefits and economic development contributions.

These integrated solutions offer a roadmap for transforming Vietnam’s intercultural education from fragmented initiatives to systematic development. Implementation requires sustained political commitment, resource allocation, and multi stakeholder coordination. However, investment in intercultural education will yield substantial returns, creating human resources

capable of driving Vietnam's transformation into a globally integrated nation while maintaining cultural identity.

### 3. CONCLUSION

This study examined the critical role of intercultural education in developing high-quality human resources for Vietnam's development aspirations. The analysis reveals that intercultural education represents a strategic imperative for transforming Vietnam's workforce to meet globalization and Fourth Industrial Revolution demands. Current implementation remains fragmented across educational levels, with policy aspirations for "global citizens" lacking systematic frameworks, resources, and trained educators. While Vietnamese students demonstrate positive intercultural attitudes, they exhibit weak knowledge and skills particularly the ability to work in multicultural environments constituting a significant bottleneck for national competitiveness. The research establishes that intercultural education directly develops cognitive flexibility, communication skills, and innovative capacity essential for high tech industries and knowledge economy participation.

The study contributes both theoretical and practical insights. Theoretically, it addresses gaps in understanding how developing nations can strategically deploy intercultural education, integrating Byram's ICC model, Bennett's DMIS, and Bourdieu's cultural capital theory to explain how intercultural competence creates economic value in transitional economies. Practically, the proposed National Intercultural Competence Framework provides an actionable roadmap, while recommendations for teacher development through blended approaches and democratized international experiences address resource constraints. The emphasis on leveraging Vietnam's 54 ethnic diversity as an educational asset offers fresh perspectives on domestic multiculturalism for global competence development.

Several limitations warrant acknowledgment. Reliance on secondary data limits insights into actual classroom practices. Future research should employ mixed methods including classroom observations and longitudinal studies tracking intercultural education's impact on career trajectories. Investigation is needed on assessment methodologies appropriate for Vietnamese contexts and optimal sequencing across educational levels. As Vietnam progresses toward its 2030-2045 goals, systematic evaluation of intercultural education initiatives will be essential for refining approaches and demonstrating return on investment, ensuring human resource development aligns with national ambitions in an increasingly interconnected world.

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