

Northern Vietnamese Students' Perceptions of Joint-training Programs

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Abstract : This research is conducted on 177 full-time students of joint-training programs offered in English in Vietnam. Five key factors have been recognized as important for a joint – training program in the field of economics - management, namely: the participation of foreign lecturers; learners must be regarded as "customers", and the training institutions in Vietnam must have appropriate customer care; the foreign university that awards degrees must have high reputation, and high training quality;; the foreign university that awards degrees must be widely known in Vietnam. Other factors as the teaching and assessment must be serious and hard enough; the program must be taught entirely in a foreign language; 100% of textbooks and learning materials are in a foreign language and there must have the participation of foreign students in the program in Vietnam; and the curriculum imported 100% from overseas is less appealing to students. The research results also show that the assessment of participants has a high level of consensus and is not influenced by such personal factors as gender, study experience in joint-training programs and hometown background of learners.

Keywords: In-country international join-training program; attractiveness of the program; Vietnamese students.

1. Introduction

1.1. Rationale

Currently, together with the deeper and wider integration into the world and regional economic communities, Vietnam's higher education has carried out a comprehensive reform. International joint-training programs (IJTP) are one of the areas that have grown at a rapid speed and attracted the attention of students as well as that of the whole society. A large number of higher education institutions of Vietnam have participated in the education market, and constantly opened new joint-

training programs to meet the learners' needs. It is not difficult to open a new program, but difficult to attract learners, develop it sustainably and satisfy learner's expectations of quality. The recognition of the key factors of an appealing IJTP to learners from the learner's perspective will help institutions to resolve this difficulty.

Through this study, the author wishes to study what the learners think about an appropriate and attractive in-country joint-training program from their own perspective.

1.2. The research objectives and scope

The study aimed to find out the important criteria of in-country IJTPs in the field of

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economics-management that attract learners from their perspective [1]. The study only focuses on such criteria as the reputation of degrees and awarding institutions, training curriculum and materials, lecturers and language of instruction.

In terms of scope, the study only focuses on the learners' perception and assessment of the in-country IJTPs. In this model, students complete the whole foreign training programs in Vietnam without traveling overseas. This is the most preferable and dominant type of joint-training programs currently in Vietnam (Tuan, Luong, Thuy and Thuy, 2012). Two among the advantages of this model are: learners do not have to travel far away from their family and avoid the difficulty in adapting to the new environment; and the study expenses are not too high, suitable to the financial conditions of Vietnamese. The study just focuses on students of in-country IJTPs in Hanoi.

2. Literature review

2.1. The current situation of IJTPs in Vietnam in recent years

According to a recent report about the situation of IJTPs in Vietnam (Tuan, Luong, Thuy and Thuy, 2012), this training model has strongly developed, mainly in two major cities of Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh. These IJTPs are mostly offered by foreign universities from the US, UK, Australia, France, Belgium and Canada in cooperation with Vietnamese partners. Most of the programs major in the field of economics and management, while there are fewer programs in technical areas and others.

Regarding training model, the joint-training programs are conducted in two main forms: partial study abroad (which means students study a part of the curriculum in Vietnam, and finish the rest overseas to receive the degrees, known as 2 + 2 or 3 + 1), and in-country study (which means students complete the whole

curriculum and receive the degrees in Vietnam, known as 4 + 0).

2.2. The typical characteristics of joint-training programs in Vietnam

Compared with the domestic training programs, the joint-training programs conducted in Vietnam have three typical characteristics as follows.

Firstly, the entry requirements are easier than domestic programs. To enroll local programs, students must graduate from high school with a score that satisfies the Ministry of Education & Training's requirements - MOET (namely MOET floor-score), while IJTPs just require high-school graduation [1]. This, on one hand, offers a greater opportunity to students to pursue the programs, but on the other hand, creates a negative image for IJTPs.

Secondly, in IJTPs, students must study in a foreign language under the instructions of foreign lecturers. This is one of the barriers for students to study effectively and complete the curriculum.

Thirdly, the Vietnamese governmental authority's recognition of the diplomas (legally-recognized diplomas in Vietnam territory) is another challenge for this training model.

2.3. The learners' behaviors in evaluation and selection of an IJTP

One of the popular case studies of reasons for choosing international training programs by David & Anne (2007) has shown the reasons that motivate students as acquiring international education; the opportunity to work with multinational and multicultural lecturers; the chance to live and work with multicultural, multilingual foreign students; studying English effectively; international thinking; global citizen, the chance to work in multinational companies.

¹ Joint-training programs licensed and conducted by Vietnam National University, Hanoi do not count. To enroll these programs, students must graduate from high school with a score that satisfy the MOET's requirements from year to year.

Related to the learners' satisfaction, Georgo, Aspa and George (2011) has identified five factors, namely Program Study, Academic Staff, Tangibles/Equipment, Administrative Services and Image-Frame. The first factor, Program Study, is evaluated on six areas as: Adequacy, Organization, Workload, Profession - Contiguity, Course update and Module variety.

3. Research Methodology

3.1. The study questionnaire

Based on previous local and overseas studies of IJTPs and Vietnamese context as well as Vietnamese learners of this program, the questionnaire with 12 questions (items) was developed (Appendix 1). The Question 5 and 9 have the opposite content with Question 4 and 8 respectively, aiming to evaluate the reliability of interviewees (Ebesutani and al, 2012). These two variables are not used in the research data analysis.

For the purpose of assessing the attractiveness of each of the criteria for the study, the interviewees (students) were asked to indicate their level of agreement with each of

the given items (12 items were given in Appendix 1) to make the training program highly relevant, attractive to learners. The Likert scale was used from low (1) to high (5) level of agreement, corresponding to Totally disagree, Disagree, No opinion, Agree, Totally agree. The interviewees were asked to circle the appropriate level for each item from their own perspective.

To make the item easy to understand, clear for the precise answers, the questionnaire was tested by 5 students of VNU-IS. On the basis of their feedbacks, the questionnaire was improved.

3.2. The research sample and method of data analysis

To assess the learners' perception objectively of an undergraduate IJTP, the research team selected five IJTPs in the fields of finance, accounting, economics and management offered at major universities in Hanoi. Details of the program name, description, Vietnamese training institutions are stated in Table 1 below.

Table 1. Description of investigated IJTPs and Vietnamese training institutions

No	Program Name	Vietnamese training institution	Some basic features of the training program
1	Bachelor of International Finance, Finance, and Economics, London Metropolitan University, UK (LMET)	Foreign Trade University, Hanoi (FTU)	The program is fully offered in Vietnam (at Foreign Trade University) in 4 years of 8 semesters. The language of instruction is only English. Lecturers are from Vietnamese universities as well as from LMET. Students of this program have the opportunity to study abroad at London Metropolitan University, and its partners. Entry requirements: high school graduation with score equal to MOET floor score or above; English proficiency equivalent to IELTS 5.0
2.	Bachelor of Science in Management, Keuka College, USA; and Bachelor of Accounting, HELP University, Malaysia.	International school, Vietnam National University Hanoi (IS-VNU)	Bachelor of Science in Management by Keuka College: the program is conducted entirely in English with 50% of modules delivered by Keuka College. Students study full-time in Vietnam in 4 years of 8 semesters. Bachelor of Accounting, Help University, Malaysia: students must study in 4 years or 8 semesters to finish the program; The language of instruction is only English. In every module, Vietnamese faculty covers 70% of the course and Malaysian faculty of 30%.

3.	Professional Bachelor University of Toulon, France, majoring in Human Resources Management, Banking and Finance, Insurance.	Vietnam by Commercial University, Hanoi (VCU)	<p>Entry requirements for both programs: high school graduation with score equal to MOET floor score or above; English proficiency equivalent to IELTS 5.0 or completion of 5 levels of English foundation program organized by VNU-IS.</p> <p>With these two programs, students study full-time in Vietnam and receive degrees from the University of Toulon, France. The program duration is 3 years of 6 semesters. In the first two years, students study enhanced foreign languages (English) and some specialized modules in Vietnamese. In the third year, they study specialized modules in English delivered by lecturers from the University of Toulon.</p> <p>Unlike other international joint-training programs, these two programs do not require students' English proficiency from year 1, as they don't study in English until Year 3. In other words, students study 50% of the curriculum in Vietnamese and 50% in English.</p>
4.	BA in Accounting, International Finance from the York St John University, UK	National Economics University, Hanoi (NEU)	<p>Entry requirements are the same as other programs, including high school graduation with MOET floor score or above.</p> <p>Students study full-time in Vietnam in 4 years of 8 semesters in English only. No Vietnamese is allowed.</p> <p>Entry requirement: the program admission does not require conditions of MOET floor score, but based on the results of high school graduation; the combined results of Math, Literature, Foreign Language; and results of the essay in Vietnamese.</p>
5.	Bachelor of Economics Finance and Accounting from Southern Hampshire University (US)	University of Foreign Languages and International Studies, VNU Hanoi (ULIS-VNU)	<p>Students study full-time in Vietnam in 4 years of 8 semesters in English only. Lecturers include Vietnamese and foreign faculty from Southern New Hampshire University (US).</p> <p>Entry requirements: high school graduation with floor score or above as regulated by MOET.</p>

The questionnaire was delivered to students of one of the training programs above, from Year 1 to Year 4. Students in different years were selected in order to ensure the objective evaluation of factors determining the attractiveness of an IJTP, as students may have different experience in studying in an IJTP. The sampling method is the convenient one used for selection of students for research.

To ensure the authenticity, objectivity, the research team directly distributed the questionnaire to each interviewee and explains the typical characteristics of the study. The questionnaire was given at the end of the lecture, and collected upon completion. Data

collection lasted from 5 October 2015 to 30 October 2015.

3.3. The method of data analysis

To achieve the main objective of evaluation of learners' perception of the attractiveness of an in-country IJTP through 12 main questions, the descriptive statistical methods (frequency and mean value) has been used to analyze data. In addition, to see how personal variables (such as Gender, Experience in the program), and Program variable affect students' evaluation, T-test student and One-way Anova have also been used.

4. Research results

4.1. Research sample description

The questionnaire was given to 200 students of six IJTPs at five universities in Hanoi, 177

valid responses (with complete information) were collected and analyzed.

The following charts provide detailed information about the sample:

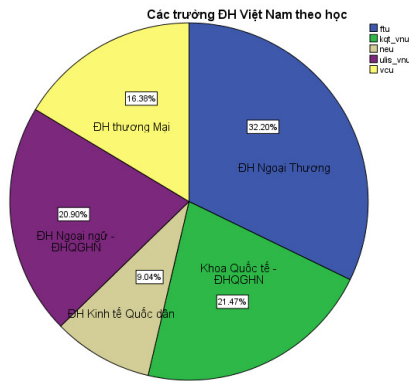


Chart 1. Sample structure by investigated IJTPs.

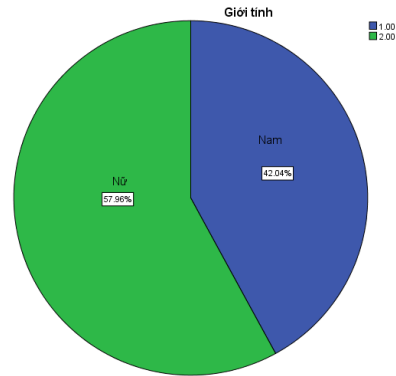


Chart 2. Sample structure by gender.

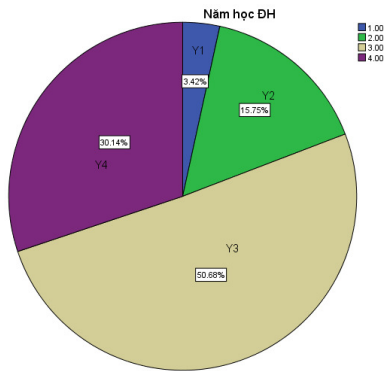


Chart 3. Sample structure by year of studying in program (from year 1 to year 4).

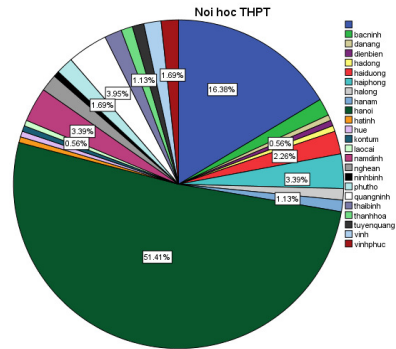


Chart 4. Sample structure by student's location of high schools.

The above charts show that:

Regarding the structure by investigated IJTPs in Hanoi, the research sample includes 177 students from six IJTPs at five universities in Hanoi. It can be seen in Chart 1 that there is the relative balance in number of students at different universities with lowest rate of 9.04%

(16 students) at NEU and highest of 32.2% (57 students) at FTU.

In terms of gender, 157 out of 177 valid responses provide information of Gender, accounting for 88.7%. From Chart 2, we can see that 42.04% of interviewees (66 students) are male, and 57.96% (91 students) are female.

About the year of studying in one IJTP, 82.5% (146 responses) of the collected responses give this information. As can be shown in the chart, the majority is third-year students (with 74 students, accounting for nearly 51%), followed by the 4th year students (with 44 students, representing about 30%), and 1st and 2nd year students accounting for 20% (28 students). The ratio shows the number of participating students in research is distributed relatively evenly by years of studying in the program.

Finally, Chart 4 shows that about 52% of participating students study in high schools in Hanoi. The rest are from nearby provinces in the North.

With the parameters above, we can see that the study sample (with the involvement of 177 students) ensures the representation and the rational distribution in the sample structure by IJTP, years of study and gender of learners.

4.2. Research results

4.2.1. Assessment of the reliability of data through two paired variables

As specified in the questionnaire design section, this study actively uses two paired questions, including one positive question and reverse question of similar units. This aims to

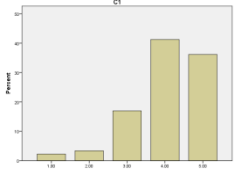
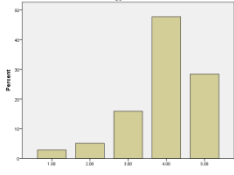
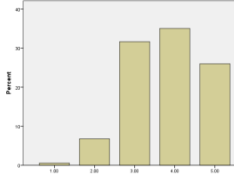
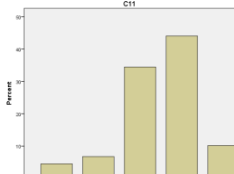
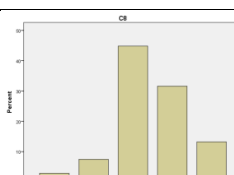
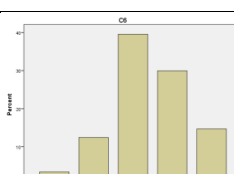
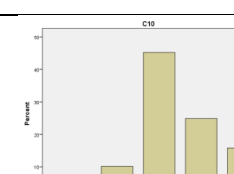
test the seriousness of interviewees in answering questions. Specifically, if the results show a significant and negative correlation between two variables, this means the high seriousness and reliability of the interviewees (Jeff Sauro and James R. Lewis, 2011). The two paired questions are used for this purpose in the study are: Question 4 and 5 (about the criterion of 100% import or modification of the program); and Question 8 and 9 (about the criterion of 100% use of English as the main language of instruction or use of both English and Vietnamese). The results show that C4 and C5 have a Pearson coefficient of -1.88, with p value of 0.013 (< 0.05); the Pearson coefficient of C8 and C9 is -0.211, with p value of 0.005 (<0.05). That means the satisfactory data reliability.

4.2.2. Results of descriptive statistics of investigated variables

With 12 questions (or variable, or item) given in the questionnaire to assess the learner's perception of the importance of each factor of an attractive training program, minus two paired questions (for the purpose of assessing the reliability of the answers), the descriptive statistics with studied variables are follows.

Table 2. Results of statistical analysis of research variables

No	code	Item/Variable	Mean value	Standard deviation	Frequency
1.	C7	The mandatory participation of foreign lecturers in the program	4.19	0.82	
2.	C12	Learners must be regarded as "customers", and the training institutions in Vietnam must have appropriate customer care.	4.11	0.89	

3.	C1	The foreign university that awards degrees must have high reputation, and good training quality	4.05	0.93	
4.	C3	Degrees awarded must be approved by relevant Vietnamese authorities.	3.94	0.95	
5.	C2	The foreign university that awards degrees must be widely known in Vietnam	3.79	0.93	
6.	C11	Teaching and assessment must be serious and hard enough to challenge learners and require them to make great efforts to graduate.	3.48	0.93	
7.	C8	The program must be taught entirely in a foreign language; no Vietnamese is allowed	3.44	0.92	
8.	C6	100% of textbooks and learning materials are in a foreign language, and used by major universities in the world, no Vietnamese materials allowed	3.40	0.99	
9.	C10	There must have the participation of foreign students in the program (in Vietnam) to create an international learning environment	3.38	0.99	

10.	C4	Curriculum must be “imported” 100% from overseas without any changes or adjustments to Vietnam	3.10	0.97	
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4.2.3. Assessing the impact of personal variables on research variables

To test if the interviewees’ evaluation of research questions in Table 2 has been affected by the variables of IJTP students currently

enroll in IJTPs and other personal factors as Gender, Year, High school location, the authors use methods of T-test Student and One-way ANOVA.

Table 3. Effects of the IJTPs - students currently enroll in IJTPs and other personal factors on students’ perception of an attractive IJTP.

No	Independent variable (X)	Measure value of X	Dependent variables (Y)	Data analysis methods	Effect statement
1.	The currently enrolled IJTP	Divided by 5 universities in Hanoi	10 research variables (C1 to C12, except for C5 and C9)	One-Way ANOVA	Variable C11 (seriousness and difficulty of the curriculum): There is significant difference between IS-VNU (38 students, mean of 3.07) and a group of ULIS-VNU (37 students, mean of 3.75) and NEU (16 students, mean of 3.87). The difference is significant at $p < 0.05$. Variable C12 (Considering students as customer with appropriate customer care): There is a significant difference between IS-VNU (38 students, mean of 4.53) and a group of ULIS-VNU (37 students, mean of 3.87) and FTU (57 students, mean of 3.96). The difference is significant at $p < 0.05$.
2.	Gender	Male, Female		T-test Student	No effect ($p > 0.05$)
3.	Year of studying in program	grouped according to the year 1 & 2 (group 1) and year 3 & 4 (group 2)		T-test Student	No effect ($p > 0.05$)
4.	Location of high schools	2 groups: Hanoi (group 1) and the northern provinces outside Hanoi (group 2)		T-test Student	No effect ($p > 0.05$)

From the results from Tables 2 and 3 above, we see that:

Five factors considered as the most important (with mean value from 3.79 to 4.2 out of 5 Likert scale points) are: the participation of foreign lecturers; learners must be regarded as "customers", and the Vietnamese training institutions must have appropriate customer care; the foreign university that awards degrees must have high reputation, and good training quality; degrees awarded must be approved by relevant Vietnamese authorities; the foreign university that awards degrees must be widely known in Vietnam. In addition, the frequency distribution value of these variables mainly focuses on two values 4 and 5 on the scale; and the result of the influence of such variables as gender, year, and location of high school has no effect on the above variables (or criteria). This shows the high uniformity and little differences in the students' perception in the study sample.

Last but not least, the four following factors considered as less important, but still significant to the attractiveness of an IJTP are: teaching and assessment must be serious and hard enough (mean of 3.48); the program must be taught entirely in a foreign language (mean of 3.44); 100% of textbooks and learning materials are in foreign language (mean of 3.40); and there must be the participation of foreign students in the program in Vietnam (mean of 3.38). Compared to the above more important criteria, these four criteria have about 50% of students choosing Agree and Strongly agree answers. This means there is a big number of students have different viewpoints, most of which is No opinion answer. In other words, the level of consensus of this sample is not high.

The least important criterion among the 10 criteria given is Curriculum must be "imported" 100% from overseas (mean of 3.10) with the majority of answers is No opinion. This generally means students do not care much whether the curriculum remains unchanged or modified when they choose a training program to enroll.

Finally, with the results in Table 3, three personal variables namely Gender, Year of study and Location of high school have no effect on students' perception of an attractive IJTP. The variable: The currently enrolled IJTP (evaluating by Vietnamese institutions) have no impact on 8 out of 10 research variables, except for the variable: Learners must be regarded as "customers", and the training institutions in Vietnam must have appropriate customer care; and Teaching and assessment must be serious and hard enough. Specifically, the research results show the difference in the assessment of these two variables between students of IS-VNU and ULIS-VNU, FTU, NEU.

5. Conclusion

5.1. Discussions on research results

Based on the study of 177 students from six IJTps at five universities in Hanoi, the results show that:

First, learners pay attention to the five following criteria of an attractive in-country IJTP: the participation of foreign lecturers; learners must be regarded as "customers", and the Vietnamese training institutions must have appropriate customer care; the foreign university that awards degrees must have high reputation, and good training quality; degrees awarded must be approved by relevant Vietnamese authorities; the foreign university that awards degrees must be widely known in Vietnam.

According to the research team, this result is highly practical and represents the typical characteristics in the current context of IJTps market. In details, the criteria : learners must be regarded as "customers", and the training institutions in Vietnam must have appropriate customer care are new thinking in Vietnam higher education. So far, there has always been a big distance between teachers and students due to the cultural norms which have negatively affected the institutions' perception of considering students as customers and

education service buyers. This request from students was clearly shown in the study. In Table 3, this factor is highly appreciated by IS-VNU students (mean of 4.53) compared to other institutions as ULIS-VNU (mean of 3.87) and FTU (mean of 3.96). We believe that these results reflect the reality that IS-VNU has been highly recognized by students and the society for their new thinking in education, student-centered approach and providing best education services to achieve student satisfaction. Moreover, students show a big concern for the reputation of the foreign university that awards degrees reputation (The foreign university that awards degrees must have high reputation, and good training quality; and degrees awarded must be approved by relevant Vietnamese authorities). That also reflects the society's perception of IJTPs in Vietnam recently. To avoid risks, students look for an IJTP that is registered and approved by MOET while there are a great number of IJTPs in the market. In this group, the majority of the criteria is related to the value and reputation of the degree and the acceptance of the society.

Second, the criteria with moderate level according to the students' assessment are: teaching and assessment must be serious and hard enough (mean of 3.48); the program must be taught entirely in a foreign language (mean of 3.44); 100% of textbooks and learning materials are in a foreign language (mean of 3.40); and There must be the participation of foreign students in the program in Vietnam (mean of 3.38). These criteria are related to the curriculum and learning environment of an IJTP. According to some foreign researches, these factors are highly important and strictly required by learners (Georgo, Aspa and George, 2011; David and Anne 2007) while in Vietnam they are considered as less important. This shows that to some extent, Vietnamese students have not fully recognized the benefits of an IJTP, and they are approaching IJTPs from the Vietnamese higher education context, thus these criteria are not paid much attention to. For example, according to David and Anne (2007),

the criterion; there must be the participation of foreign students in the program is one of the key criteria to increase the "internationalization" of the program and brings about huge benefits to learners outside of the specialized knowledge, such as cultural exchange, developing international relationships, exploring the world, etc., while it appears to be not recognized and appreciated by Vietnamese students. Other criteria like: curriculum must be "imported" 100% from overseas; and 100% of textbooks and learning materials are in a foreign language receive most of the answers at the middle of the scale (No opinion).

This shows that students do not have comprehensive insights, and unclear requirements, resulting from the fact that students don't really care for the core benefits of an IJTP, but more on the degree they receive. One of the possible reasons to explain this is the learners do not have enough capacity to evaluate the curriculum and materials, and assume that this is the responsibility of higher education institutions and authorities.

5.2. Managerial application

With the results obtained from the study, some important recommendations were made as follows:

Vietnamese higher education institutions (universities) - the organizers of IJTPs – should to pay special attention to highly appreciated criteria as the participation of foreign lecturers; high reputation, and good training quality of degree awarding universities; the legality of degrees awarded to attract students. Regarding remaining criteria, although they are not fully recognized, they are very important to maintain the quality of the training programs after students' graduation. Thus, Vietnamese higher education institutions should be aware of and maintain these criteria to ensure the long term quality and a sustainable development for the program.

With the state accreditation bodies of IJTPs, a strict and regular management mechanism is

needed to ensure the quality of the training programs being implemented in Vietnam. As indicated above, quite a few students seem not to be interested in the core benefits of the training program, but the degree. This was reflected through the assessment of the two criteria: teaching and assessment must be serious and hard enough (mean of 3.48); and language of instruction is only in a foreign language (mean of 3.44). Academically, these are the core criteria to ensure the training quality, while they attract little attention from learners. Thus, relevant authorities must strictly monitor organizing institutions to ensure serious teaching and restrict opening too many new easy programs in which learners can easily receive degrees but the quality is low.

5.3. Limitations and suggestion for future research

Although the research has achieved some important results, with the sample of 177 students and f with a limited number of IJTPs at five universities in Hanoi, the results should be further examined with a bigger sample and a broader scope of research.

Besides, with the framework of a quantitative research, some results gained were only figures, and some statements must be clarified through a deeper qualitative research. For example, a qualitative research should be conducted to prove that students do not have

high requirements of program contents, learning materials, the difficulty of the program etc. (as the results obtained in this study) is due to their expectations of an easy-to-learn and easy-to-graduate program or their lack of ability to evaluate the quality of the program, or they are not interested in those criteria.

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APPENDIX

Evaluation criteria of one attractive IJTP

No	Code	Question/ Item
1.	C1	The foreign university that award degrees must have high reputation, and good training quality
2.	C2	The foreign university that award degrees must be widely known in Vietnam
3.	C3	Degrees awarded must be approved by relevant Vietnamese authorities.
4.	C4	Curriculum must be "imported" 100% from overseas without any changes or adjustments to Vietnam
5.	C5	The curriculum should be adjusted to Vietnam's business situations (The reverse question of Question 4; only used to assess the reliability of data)
6.	C6	100% of textbooks and learning materials are in foreign language, and used by major universities in the world, no Vietnamese materials allowed
7.	C7	The mandatory participation of foreign lecturers in the program
8.	C8	The program must be taught entirely in a foreign language; no Vietnamese is allowed
9.	C9	Foreign languages should only be used for specialized modules, and Vietnamese used for the rest (The reverse question of Question 8; only used to assess the reliability of data)
10.	C10	There must have the participation of foreign students in the program (in Vietnam) to create an international learning environment
11.	C11	Teaching and assessment must be serious and hard enough to challenge learners and require them to make great efforts to graduate
12.	C12	Learners must be regarded as "customers", and the Vietnamese training institutions must have appropriate customer care