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## Outbound Mobility and Transnational Education Linked to Ho Chi Minh City (2002–2025): A Bibliometric and Policy Analysis

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**Abstract.** This paper examines outbound student mobility and transnational education (TNE) linked to Ho Chi Minh City (HCMC), Vietnam’s largest higher-education hub. The revised manuscript adopts a mixed-method design that combines a bibliometric mapping of Web of Science records (n = 6,455; 2002–2025) with a focused documentary review of Vietnam/HCMC-relevant studies (n = 12) and a policy-institutional corpus (n = 8 documents, comprising two Ministry of Education and Training sources and six university disclosures). Following a PRISMA-informed screening logic, the study clarifies its search scope, inclusion and exclusion criteria, and document quality checks. The results show four durable knowledge clusters—student mobility, cross-border provision, quality assurance, and graduate outcomes—with a marked post-2020 shift toward educational quality and employability. At the local level, HCMC’s outbound mobility rose to 35,000 students by 2023, although the city’s share of the national total declined as outbound growth dispersed across Vietnam. HCMC also hosts a diverse TNE portfolio of approximately 89 programs, accounting for about 23% of the national total. Synthesizing the global and local evidence, the paper proposes a localized quality-assurance framework centered on transparent partner accreditation, clear credit recognition, assessment integrity, work-integrated learning, and responsible public reporting.

**Keywords:** International student mobility; transnational education; bibliometric analysis; Ho Chi Minh City; Vietnam

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## 1. Introduction

In recent decades, international education has emerged as a critical pathway for young people to pursue academic excellence, global exposure, and enhanced career prospects. As globalization accelerates, studying abroad is no longer a privilege reserved for a select few but has become a strategic choice for many students, especially in developing countries. Vietnam, a dynamic economy in Southeast Asia, has witnessed a significant surge in the number of students studying overseas over the past 15 years. According to UNESCO (2022), the number of Vietnamese students abroad increased by more than 68% between 2010 and 2020, placing Vietnam among the top 10 Asian countries with the highest outbound student mobility.

Ho Chi Minh City (HCMC), the largest urban area and economic engine of Vietnam, has played a vital role in this trend. The city is home to a rapidly expanding middle class, an increasing number of international schools, and a growing ecosystem of education consultancy centers that actively promote overseas study as a desirable trajectory. Despite the government's efforts to internationalize domestic education, the prevailing perception that foreign universities offer superior academic quality and broader future opportunities continues to drive the demand for studying abroad.

Few studies examine the intersection of city-level dynamics, outbound mobility, and transnational education (TNE) models in emerging Southeast Asian contexts (Mok, 2012; Palit et al., 2021; Mok and Sawn Khai, 2024; ASEAN Secretariat, 2025; Acumen, 2024). While international research has examined factors influencing student mobility, such as push-pull models (Maringe & Carter, 2007; Maringe & Gibbs, 2009), cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1986), and economic motivations, there is limited research focused on Vietnam and even less on HCMC. Existing literature often treats Vietnam as a peripheral case in broader regional analyses, overlooking the city's unique socioeconomic dynamics, educational aspirations, and decision-making behaviors.

This study addresses that gap by conducting a bibliometric and thematic analysis of the global and local discourse on international student mobility, with a specific focus on HCMC. Through bibliometric techniques applied to publications indexed in the Web of Science (2002–2025), the study aims to (i) map global trends in study abroad research; (ii) analyze Vietnam's positioning within this landscape; and (iii) evaluate the future outlook for outbound mobility and in-country international programs in HCMC. This study contributes new bibliometric evidence and case insights from HCMC. We provide the first HCMC-oriented synthesis connecting global bibliometric trends with a typology of local joint/Transnational Education (TNE) programs and policy actions. TNE is higher education delivered by an institution in one country to learners located in another country—i.e., the cross-border mobility of programs and providers—such that teaching, assessment or awarding of the qualification occurs outside the provider's home country (UNESCO 2022; Yang, 2022).

In doing so, this research contributes both empirically and conceptually to the literature on international education by offering city-level evidence that is useful for policymakers, university leaders, and researchers in Southeast Asia. The study addresses three research questions: RQ1: How have global themes in student mobility and transnational education evolved since 2002? RQ2: What are the main patterns and modalities of HCMC-based joint and TNE programs? RQ3: Which policy levers are most likely to align quality, access, and graduate outcomes in HCMC?

## 2. Methodology

### 2.1 Bibliometric Analysis

To examine global research trends on study abroad and international education, the bibliometric component used the Web of Science (WoS) Core Collection as the principal source because it provides standardized citation metadata suitable for co-citation and keyword-network analysis. To strengthen conceptual coverage for the narrative review component, the revised protocol also recognizes complementary educational and interdisciplinary databases commonly used in review studies, particularly Scopus, PubMed, and ERIC. The network maps reported in this paper, however, remain WoS-based to preserve database consistency in citation analysis.

The review protocol followed a PRISMA-informed logic of identification, screening, eligibility assessment, and inclusion. The bibliometric dataset consisted of 6,455 WoS-indexed records published between 2002 and 2025 using topic-search combinations related to “study abroad,” “international students,” “student mobility,” and “transnational education.” For the focused qualitative layer, 12 peer-reviewed studies specifically addressing Vietnamese students, Vietnam, or closely related Southeast Asian TNE dynamics were retained for close reading (Table 1). In addition, eight policy and institutional documents were analyzed: two Ministry of Education and Training (MOET) sources and six university disclosures from major HCMC institutions.

**Table 1: Selected documents included in the focused qualitative review**

Author/source	Year	Publisher university	Document type	Use in analysis
MOET	2024	Government Publishing House / MOET	Annual statistical report	National outbound and higher-education statistics
MOET	2024	MOET	Approved joint-program list	Program approvals and regulatory status
British Council Vietnam	2018	British Council	Market intelligence report	Background on TNE development in Vietnam
British Council Vietnam	2023	British Council	Policy report	Post-pandemic TNE development

Author/source	Year	Publisher university	/	Document type	Use in analysis
Ilieva et al.	2024	British Council		Analytical report	and policy direction Regional positioning of Vietnam as an education hub
FALMI	2024	HCMC labor-market agency		Survey/report	Student motivations and labor-market context
IU-VNU-HCM	2024/2025	International University - VNU-HCM	-	Institutional disclosure	Joint-program portfolio and model types
Hoa Sen University	2024/2025	Hoa Sen University		Institutional disclosure	In-country delivery model
UEH / TDTU / HUTECH / HCMCOU	2024/2025	Respective universities		Institutional disclosures	Validation of program modalities and degree structures

The inclusion criteria were as follows: (a) the document addressed higher-education internationalization, student mobility or TNE; (b) the document was relevant to Vietnam, HCMC, or a comparable Southeast Asian context; (c) the source provided empirical, policy, or institutional evidence; and (d) the full text or official disclosure was accessible for review. Exclusion criteria included duplicate records, non-higher-education materials, K-12-focused documents, news items without verifiable evidence, promotional pages lacking program details, and records without sufficient bibliographic or institutional information.

A quality-assurance mechanism was applied at the screening and extraction stages. Records were screened for topical fit and document completeness, official sources were prioritized for policy statistics, and university information was cross-checked against MOET-approved program lists wherever possible. A structured extraction matrix was used to record author/source, year, publisher or institution, document type, geographic scope, and substantive contribution to the three research questions. These procedures improved clarity, consistency, relevance, and transparency in the review process.

The analysis was conducted using VOSviewer (version 1.6.13), a software package for constructing and visualizing bibliometric networks (Van Eck & Waltman, 2010, 2019). Co-citation analysis was used to identify influential authors and the intellectual structure of the field, while co-word analysis was used to detect recurring themes and topic evolution. The bibliometric findings were then triangulated with the focused documentary review and institutional case evidence from HCMC.

## 2.2 Case Study Data Collection and Analysis

For the HCMC case study, quantitative time-series data on outbound student numbers and program approvals (2015–2023) were sourced from the MOET Annual Statistical Report on Higher Education and MOET's public lists of approved joint programs. These official records were supplemented by six university sources: International University–VNU-HCM, Hoa Sen University, the University of Economics HCMC, Ton Duc Thang University, HUTECH University, and HCMC Open University. These institutions were selected because they represent visible and diversified TNE portfolios in the city.

Bibliometric outputs and case-study evidence were synthesized descriptively and comparatively. In total, the study analyzed 6,455 bibliometric records for the mapping stage and 20 documents for the focused qualitative synthesis (12 peer-reviewed studies and eight policy/institutional sources). This combined design enabled the paper to connect macro-level scholarly trends with a city-level interpretation of policy and institutional practice.

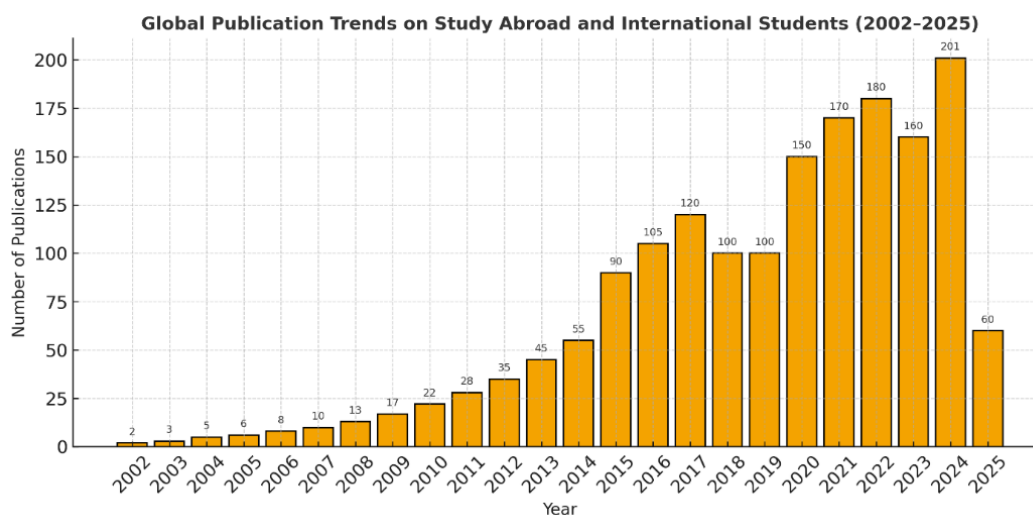
PRISMA-style screening summary: identification (bibliographic records and documentary sources gathered), screening (duplicates and non-relevant materials removed), eligibility (full-text and source-quality checks applied), and inclusion (final bibliometric, policy, and institutional corpora retained for analysis).

## 3. Results

This section reports the findings in relation to the three research questions. Three major findings emerged. First, the global literature has shifted from volume growth toward stronger concern with quality assurance, graduate outcomes, and employability. Second, HCMC demonstrates a diversified and expanding TNE ecosystem alongside resilient outbound mobility. Third, the most defensible policy levers are those that strengthen transparency, quality assurance, and labor-market relevance across international education pathways.

### 3.1 Global Publication Trends

Data collected from the WoS indicates a sharp upward trend in the number of publications related to study abroad and international students from 2002 to 2025, with a significant surge in recent years (Figure 1). Specifically, the year 2024 recorded the highest number of publications, reaching 201 articles, reflecting growing academic interest in cross-border student mobility and the internationalization of higher education.



**Figure 1: The number of relevant publications from 2002 to 2025**

The geographic distribution of publications (Table 2) reveals that leading contributors to the literature include China (1,671 publications), the United Kingdom (1,221), Australia (913), Canada (678), and Japan (379). These countries not only have advanced higher-education systems but also serve as top destinations for international students. Vietnam, with 204 publications, is becoming more visible in academic discussions, reflecting its growing role in global education and its position as both a sender and emerging participant in TNE, especially in urban centres like HCMC.

**Table 2: Number of Relevant Research Publications by Country/Territory**

No	Country/Territory	Number of Publications
1	China	1671
2	United Kingdom	1221
3	Australia	913
4	Canada	678
5	Japan	379
6	Germany	303
7	Malaysia	277
8	United States	259
9	Republic of Korea	212
10	Vietnam	204
11	France	171
12	Russia	167

In terms of publication platforms, the most influential and frequently cited academic journals (Table 3) include the *Journal of International Students* (80 articles), *Journal of Studies in International Education* (65 articles), and *Higher Education* (64 articles). These are reputable, peer-reviewed journals that regularly

publish research on study abroad experiences, internationalization policies, global employability skills and cross-border academic mobility.

**Table 3: Top journals by number of articles in the dataset (2002–2025)**

No	Journal Name	Number of Articles
1	Journal of International Students	80
2	Journal of Studies in International Education	65
3	Higher Education	64
4	Globalization Societies and Education	54
5	Population Space and Place	37
6	Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies	19
7	Research in Comparative and International Education	17
8	Studies in Higher Education	17
9	Higher Education Research & Development	17
10	Sustainability	16

In Vietnam particularly in HCMC, the country's leading hub of economy, education, and international exchange the study abroad landscape is undergoing significant transformation in both form and purpose. Beyond traditional outbound mobility, a growing number of learners and parents are showing interest in international academic programs delivered domestically through models such as joint-degree partnerships, in-country study abroad, and franchised education programs. Rapid urbanization, the rise of the middle class, and increasing demand for global competitiveness have collectively fueled the pursuit of international learning environments, especially among younger generations.

However, in the post-COVID-19 context, economic uncertainties and tightened visa policies in major destination countries have introduced notable constraints to conventional study abroad pathways. As a result, alternative trends such as "internationalization at home," dual-degree program development, and the expansion of international university campuses in HCMC are gaining traction as more flexible and accessible strategies. This changing context requires a clear and systematic view to understand HCMC's role and potential in study abroad, and to guide policies that reflect both local needs and global trends.

### **3.2 Thematic Clusters from Keyword Analysis**

Major Finding 1 (RQ1): Global themes in student mobility and TNE have evolved from broad internationalization concerns toward a stronger post-2020 emphasis on quality assurance, employability, and graduate outcomes.

Keyword analysis based on data from the WoS reveals that research on study abroad and international education concentrates around several core thematic clusters, reflecting key subjects and emerging trends in the field. Specifically, the most frequently used keywords (Figure 2) include "international students" (167



research while also pointing to promising directions for localized educational development in Vietnam and HCMC.

### 3.3 Intellectual Structure from Co-Citation Analysis

Co-citation analysis of the collected data reveals several key authors and scholarly works that play a central role in the field of study abroad and the internationalization of higher education. Among these, the works of De Wit (2011), Knight (2003), Kehm and Teichler (2007) are frequently co-cited across numerous academic publications, underscoring their foundational contributions to the development of theoretical frameworks related to international student mobility and TNE (Figure 3). Notably, the contributions of Altbach and Knight (2007) stand out for their focus on cross-border education policy trends, while the writings of Simon (2023) emphasize the institutional and market impacts on international students.

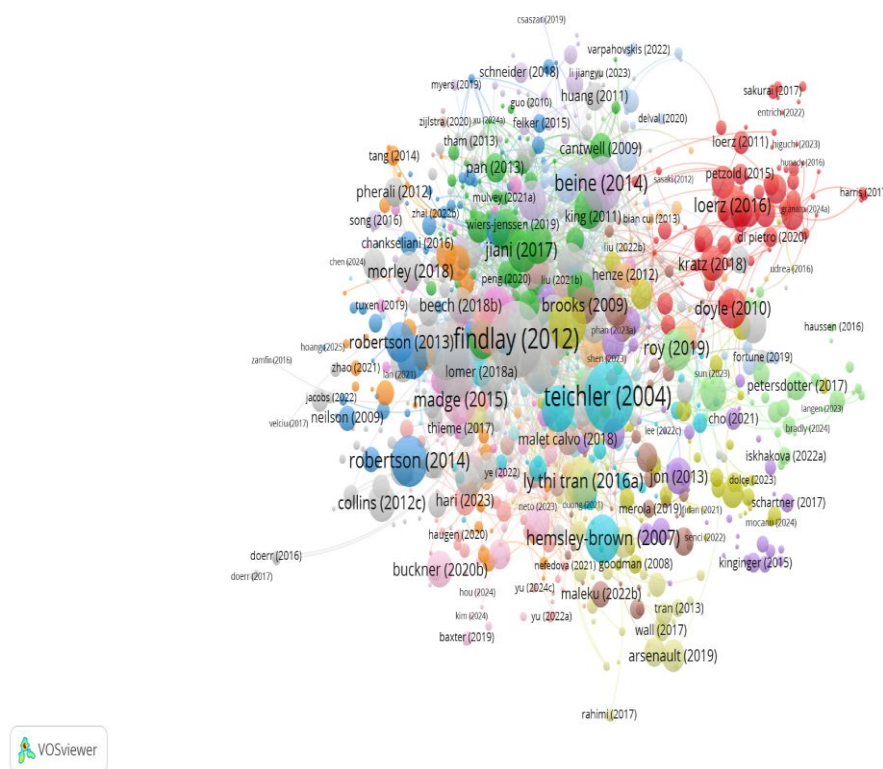


Figure 3: Co-citation analysis results on the study abroad topic

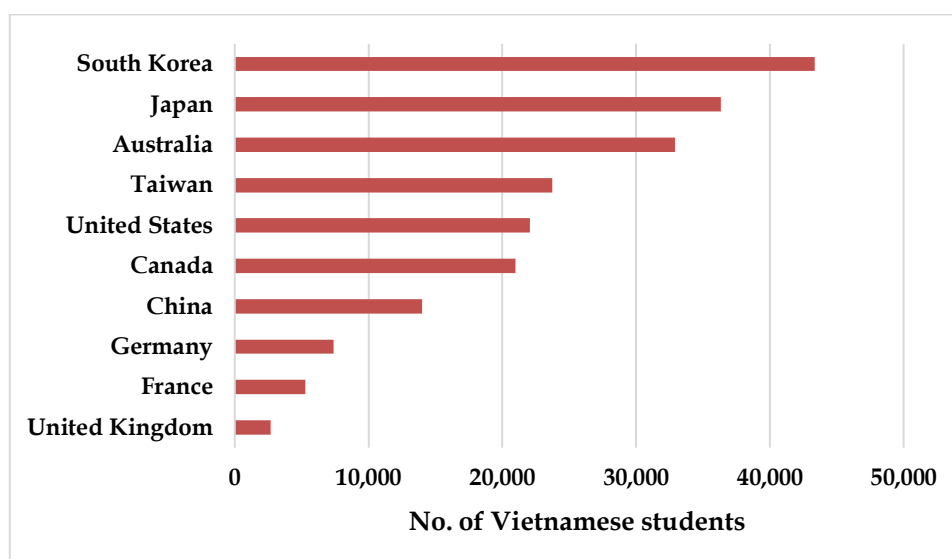
Major Finding 2 (RQ2): HCMC exhibits a dual internationalization pathway characterized by continued outbound growth and a diversified portfolio of in-country TNE arrangements.

Additionally, another prominent co-citation cluster centers around research on graduate employability and student outcomes post-study abroad. In this context, authors such as Potts (2015) and Hadis (2005) serve as intellectual bridges between educational theory and labor-market practice. The frequent co-citation of these

works suggests the emergence of a coherent scholarly network in which concepts such as global skills, academic mobility, and the career value of international education are explored in depth.

### 3.4 Trends in Studying Abroad and International Joint Program in Vietnam

In recent years, the number of Vietnamese students studying abroad has continued to grow, reflecting both the globalization of education and the increasing demand for high-quality training among Vietnamese youth.



**Figure 4: Top 10 destinations and number of Vietnamese students in study abroad (Source: MOET, 2024)**

According to data from 2023–2024 (Figure 4), Republic of Korea has emerged as the leading destination, hosting 43,361 Vietnamese students, representing a 14% increase compared to the previous year. Japan remains a popular choice with 36,339 students, although its growth rate is more modest at 2.8%. Notably, Australia recorded the highest growth rate among all destinations, with a 48% increase, reaching 32,897 students. This surge is attributed to favorable visa policies, high educational standards, and strong bilateral ties.

The United States accommodated 22,066 Vietnamese students, marking a 5.2% rise, while Canada hosted approximately 21,000 students, with an estimated growth rate of around 5%. Several Asian destinations, such as Taiwan (23,728 students, ~3% growth) and China (14,000 students, ~2% growth), continue to attract stable interest, supported by scholarship programs and relatively affordable tuition fees. In Europe, Germany (7,400 students), France (5,254 students), and the United Kingdom (2,660 students) all witnessed moderate increases, ranging from 2% to 3%.

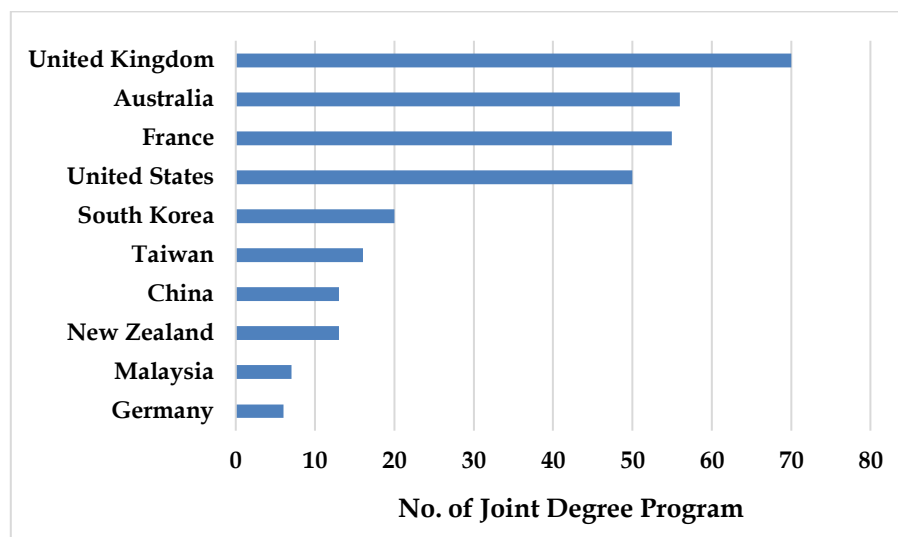


Figure 5: Top 10 countries with joint-degree programs (Source: MOET, 2024)

Figure 5 presents top 10 countries with joint-degree programs. Similar to the top 10 destinations in study abroad (Figure 4), United Kingdom, Australia, France, United States, Republic of Korea, Taiwan, and China are dominant in joint-degree programs development.

International joint programs in Vietnam operate through diverse partnership models, each with distinct characteristics and regulatory requirements (Tri et al., 2025). Table 4 presents a comprehensive typology of current programs in Vietnam.

Table 4: Typology of International Joint Programs in Vietnam

Model Type	Number	Description	Primary Partners
Dual Degree	152	Students receive degrees from both institutions	USA, France, Australia
Joint-Degree	67	Single degree jointly awarded	UK, Germany, Netherlands
Articulation (2+2, 3+1)	89	Split-site programs with credit transfer	Malaysia, Thailand, Singapore
Franchise	41	Foreign curriculum delivered in Vietnam	Australia, UK
Validation	36	Vietnamese program validated by foreign partner	USA, Canada

Source: MOET, 2024

Academic level distribution shows 61% undergraduate programs, 31% master's programs, and 8% doctoral programs. Notable growth occurs in professional master's programs, particularly MBA and specialized technology management degrees, which increased 85% between 2021-2024 (Hang and Trung, 2022).

**Table 5: Trends in in-country international education in Vietnam (2021–2024)**

Year	Number of Dual/Joint-degree programs	Growth rate of programs	Estimated number of enrolled students	Growth rate of student enrollment
2021	408	—	~35,000	—
2023	600+	+47% vs. 2021	~45,000	+28% vs. 2021
2024	423	-29.5% vs. 2023	~40,000	-11% vs. 2023

Source: MOET, 2024

Between 2021 and 2023, Vietnam witnessed a significant expansion in the number of dual and joint-degree programs, reflecting a growing interest in internationalized higher education accessible within the country. In 2021, there were 408 international joint programs, a figure that increased to over 600 by 2023, marking an impressive 47% growth over two years (Table 5). This rapid expansion was driven by strong demand from students for globally recognized degrees, the development of institutional partnerships between Vietnamese and foreign universities, and the temporary limitations on outbound mobility during the COVID-19 pandemic. However, as of 2024, the number of such programs had declined to 423, representing a sharp 29.5% decrease compared to 2023. This contraction is primarily attributed to enhanced regulatory scrutiny by the Ministry of Education and Training, which has emphasized accreditation, program transparency, and quality assurance (MOET, 2024).

### 3.5 HCMC As a Case of Outbound Mobility and Transnational Education

HCMC is Vietnam's largest and most internationally connected higher-education hub, concentrating partner networks, English-medium capacity, and strong links to industry. As a result, HCMC functions as a pivotal case where traditional outbound degree mobility intersects with TNE models such as joint/double degrees, franchised and validated programs, and articulated 2+2/3+1 pathways. Examining HCMC therefore offers a clear window into how national policy, institutional strategy, and student demand co-produce internationalization outcomes on the ground.

HCMC has experienced substantial growth in outbound student mobility, with annual increases averaging 12% between 2015 and 2023 (Table 6). Current reports indicate approximately 18,500–35,000 HCMC students pursue overseas education annually, sharing 20–38% of Vietnam's total outbound students (MOET, 2024), underscoring its robust and sustained demand for international education opportunities. During the COVID-19 period (2020–2021), HCMC's outbound numbers fell from a pre-pandemic peak of 27,500 in 2019 to 23,200 in 2020 (-15.6% y/y) and only partially recovered to 25,100 in 2021 (+8.2% y/y), remaining below 2019 levels; over the same interval, the city's share of the national total declined from 27% (2019) to 20% (2021), and the top destination shifted from the USA (pre-2020) to Australia (2020–2021).

In the post-COVID period, outbound study rebounded strongly, rising to 30,400 in 2022 (+21.1%) and 35,000 in 2023 (+15.1%), surpassing pre-pandemic volumes; the national share stabilized at 20%, while the top destination pivoted to the

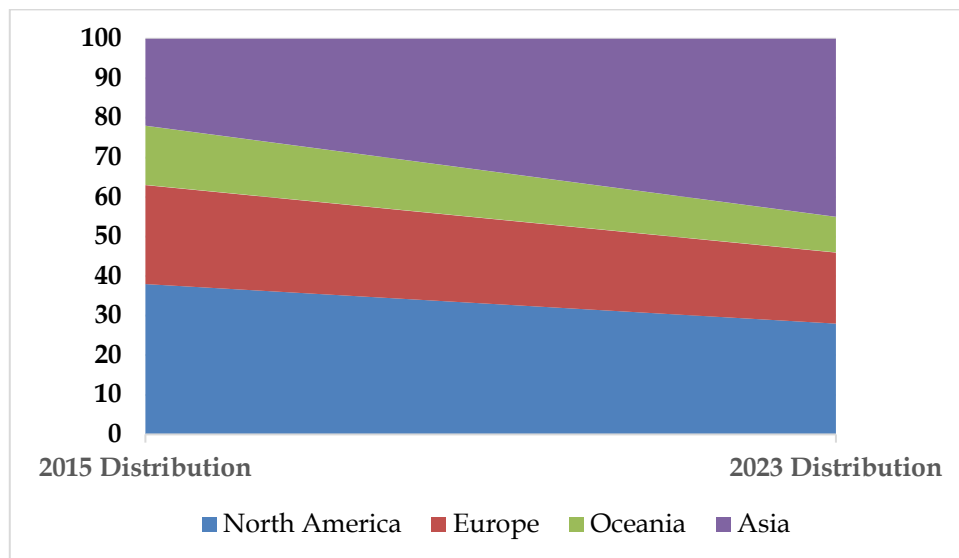
Republic of Korea (2022–2023). HCMC's share of Vietnam's outbound students has steadily fallen from 38% (2015) to 20% (2021–2023) even as its absolute numbers grew (from 18,500 to 35,000). This pattern indicates that national outbound growth outside HCMC has outpaced HCMC's own growth.

**Table 6: Outbound Student Mobility from HCMC (2015–2023)**

Year	Number of Students	Growth Rate (%)	Share of National Total	Top Destination
2015	18,500	-	38%	USA
2016	20,200	9.2	35%	USA
2017	22,100	9.4	32%	USA
2018	24,800	12.2	30%	USA
2019	27,500	10.9	27%	USA
2020	23,200	-15.6	21%	Australia
2021	25,100	8.2	20%	Australia
2022	30,400	21.1	20%	Republic of Korea
2023	35,000	15.1	20%	Republic of Korea

Traditional destination countries (USA, UK, Australia) remain popular but face increasing competition from Asian destinations. Republic of Korea, Japan, and Singapore collectively attracted 45% of HCMC students in 2023, compared to 22% in 2015 (Ilieva et al., 2024). This change to Asian destinations in HCMC is in line with the whole trend in Vietnam as moving from 31% (2015) to 45% (2024) (MOET, 2024). This shift reflects multiple factors: geographical proximity, cultural affinity, lower costs, and targeted recruitment strategies by Asian universities (Figure 6).

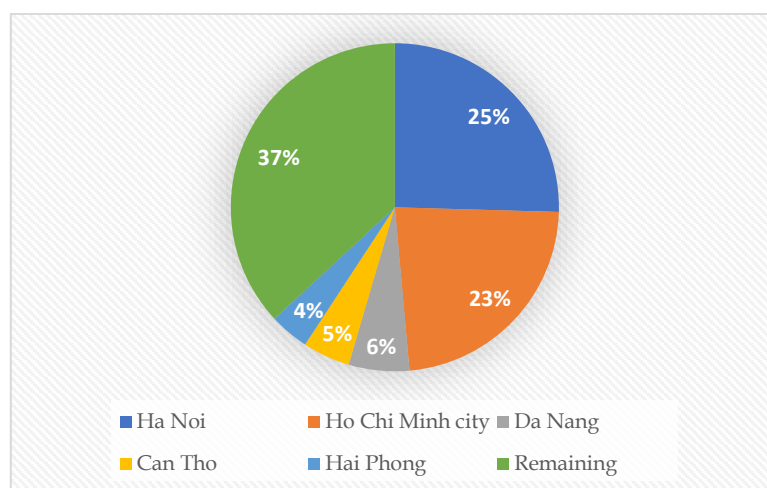
Republic of Korea's rise as a top destination is driven by a strong return on investment. Major Korean companies in Vietnam, like Samsung, offer clear career paths for graduates of Korean universities. This is amplified by targeted government scholarships and the cultural appeal of the "Korean Wave," which lowers the barrier for students choosing to study there (FALMI, 2024).



**Figure 6: Distribution of HCMC Students by Destination Region (2015 vs 2023)**

Student motivations for studying abroad in HCMC are influenced by a variety of factors, particularly the desire to access advanced educational systems, meet rising labor-market expectations, and respond to social influences. A 2024 survey by FALMI (with over 12,000 Vietnamese respondents) showed that 31% of students chose to study abroad to improve their academic and personal skills, 23.9% were influenced by peer trends and family expectations, while 17% pursued international education with the clear intention of improving future career opportunities. These figures reflect a shift from purely academic motivations to a more market-oriented approach to student decision-making.

Simultaneously, the city is at the forefront of local institutional innovation, reflected in the expansion of various “in-country international education” models. HCMC accounts for 23% of Vietnam’s international joint programs (89 programs), a proportion similar to Ha Noi (Figure 7).



**Figure 7: International joint programs hosted in HCMC**  
(Source: MOET, 2024)

Many universities in HCMC have established strong international partnerships that enable students to access globally recognized curricula without the need to study abroad. Additionally, English-medium instruction, internationalized learning environments, and globally benchmarked quality-assurance systems are increasingly prevalent, positioning HCMC as an emerging “regional destination for internationalized higher education” in Southeast Asia (British Council Vietnam, 2018; 2023).

**Table 7: Major universities with international joint programs in HCMC**

Institution	Foreign partner(s)	Program model	Level	Degree awarding	Notes
International University - VNU-HCM (IU)	UK, US, Australia, New Zealand	2+2, 3+1, 4+0 (23 joint programs)	Undergraduate (plus others)	Partner university (transfer) / dual or joint, depending on program	Portfolio of joint programs; AUN-QA accredited institution
Hoa Sen University (HSU)	De Montfort University (UK)	4+0 in-country delivery; plus foundation, top-up, postgrad options	Undergrad & Postgrad	De Montfort University (UK)	‘Study-abroad-at-home’ TNE model
University of Economics HCMC (UEH)	University of Lincoln (UK)	Joint bachelor’s program (details per major)	Undergraduate	University of Lincoln (UK) (joint/validated)	UEH has multiple international joint-program tracks
Ton Duc Thang University (TDTU)	Australia, UK, Netherlands, Czech Republic, Malaysia, Taiwan	2+2, 3+1 transfer/articulation	Undergraduate	Partner university (final degree)	Phase 1 at TDTU, Phase 2 abroad
HUTECH University	Lincoln University (USA)	International MBA; BBA pathway	Undergrad & Postgrad	Lincoln University (USA)	Launched 2025; Institute of International Education
HCMUT - Bach Khoa (VNU-HCM)	Multiple partner universities	2+2 transfer programs; exchanges	Undergraduate (International Program)	Partner university (final degree)	OISP partner list; long-standing

Institution	Foreign partner(s)	Program model	Level	Degree awarding	Notes
	worldwide				cooperation
Ho Chi Minh Open University (HCMCOU)	Various partners (not listed on brief)	Six bachelor's, five master's, one doctoral joint; five doctoral double-degree	Undergrad, Master, Doctoral	Joint/double-degree depending on program	Programs accredited by FIBAA, AUN-QA, MOET

One of the most remarkable developments in HCMC's educational landscape is the rapid expansion of joint training programs with foreign institutions. Major universities in the city have actively developed diverse pathways for students to access international education (Table 7).

For example, the University of Economics HCMC (UEH) offers the Lincoln 1+2 program in partnership with the University of Lincoln (UK), allowing students to complete one year in Vietnam and two years in the UK. The International University under Vietnam National University (IU-VNU) runs 23 undergraduate programs, including 11 certified by AUN-QA, and maintains strong collaborations with universities across Europe, Australia, and Asia. Hoa Sen University, in partnership with De Montfort University (UK), offers a fully local "in-country study abroad" bachelor's degree, awarding a UK diploma without requiring students to study abroad. TDTU has established multiple transfer programs, enabling students to complete part of their academic training at international partner institutions. These TNE programs significantly contribute to Vietnam's international education ecosystem, offering students access to globally recognized qualifications without the financial and logistical burdens of full overseas mobility.

Major Finding 3 (RQ3): The literature and the HCMC case converge on a policy agenda that prioritizes transparent partner accreditation, credit-transfer clarity, assessment integrity, work-integrated learning, and public reporting of completion and graduate employment outcomes. HCMC exemplifies a dual pathway to internationalization—rapid post-pandemic growth in outbound study alongside an expanding portfolio of TNE programs—making it a pivotal node in Vietnam's higher-education system despite its declining share of the national total. Sustaining this momentum will require competing on quality and outcomes through transparent partner accreditation, clear credit-transfer maps, robust work-integrated learning, and city-level reporting of completion and graduate employment.

#### 4. Discussion

The discussion integrates the bibliometric findings with the HCMC case evidence and compares the present results with prior studies in the field. Taken together, the evidence suggests that HCMC is not merely following global internationalization trends; rather, it is selectively adapting them to local policy, labor-market, and affordability conditions.

First, the post-2020 shift toward quality assurance and graduate outcomes observed in the keyword and co-citation analyses resonates with broader regional and international studies that describe a move from expansion-focused internationalization toward value-focused internationalization (Altbach & Knight, 2007; Huang et al., 2023; Simon, 2023). The decline in approved TNE programs in Vietnam in 2024 is therefore not an isolated administrative event; it is consistent with this wider literature, which emphasizes accreditation, comparability, and public accountability.

Second, the changing destination preferences of HCMC students align with push-pull interpretations in earlier mobility studies, but the present findings extend that literature by showing a stronger employment-oriented logic in recent Vietnamese decision-making. Maringe and Carter (2007) and Mok (2012) highlighted prestige, language, and mobility aspirations as major pull factors. The current study confirms these drivers but also shows that return on investment, industry linkage, scholarship opportunities, and regional corporate presence—especially in the case of the Republic of Korea—now play a more visible role.

Third, the diversity of TNE models in HCMC supports recent work on Asian cross-border provision, which argues that transnational education is becoming more differentiated and strategically localized rather than uniformly export-driven (Huang et al., 2023; Reyes & De Leon, 2023). The mix of 2+2, 3+1, dual-degree, joint-degree, and franchise arrangements documented in HCMC demonstrates how institutions are responding to different combinations of affordability, student demand, and regulatory scrutiny.

Fourth, the finding that HCMC's absolute outbound numbers increased while its share of the national total declined adds a useful nuance to the existing literature. Much of the internationalization literature tends to privilege megacities as the main engines of outward mobility. In contrast, the present results suggest a broader diffusion of international educational aspiration across Vietnam, indicating that provincial and second-tier urban growth is now contributing more substantially to national outbound mobility.

Overall, the present findings are broadly consistent with related previous studies, but they also refine them by showing how quality assurance, destination diversification, and TNE localization interact at the city level. This city-level contribution is important because national aggregates alone cannot explain how institutional ecosystems such as HCMC assemble internationalization pathways in practice.

The diverse typology of TNE models present in HCMC directly mirrors the maturation and diversification of "cross-border provision" as a field of academic inquiry. The city's portfolio – spanning joint degrees, articulated pathways (e.g., 2+2), and franchise models – shows how global TNE strategies are operationalized on the ground. These different models represent tailored responses to varying levels of student demand, affordability, and institutional risk appetite. Articulated pathways, in particular, serve as a critical bridge between the in-country TNE landscape and outbound mobility trends, creating a fluid ecosystem where students can begin their international education at home. This local variety is a testament to HCMC's role as a competitive marketplace for international higher education, where a one-size-fits-all approach is no longer sufficient.

Finally, the finding that HCMC's share of national outbound mobility has decreased (from 38% to 20%) despite its own growth offers a vital counternarrative to global literature that often focuses exclusively on megacities as the sole engines of internationalization. This local data point suggests a broader, nationwide socioeconomic transformation is underway in Vietnam, with rising aspirations and household incomes in secondary cities driving a more distributed pattern of student mobility. This decentralization enriches the global understanding of internationalization, demonstrating that national growth trajectories can be fueled by increasing regional participation. It is precisely this type of granular, city-level insight that a purely bibliometric or national-level analysis would overlook, affirming the unique contribution of our integrated, mixed-method approach.

## **5. Conclusion and Recommendations**

### **5.1 Conclusion**

This study provides a city-focused synthesis of outbound mobility and TNE linked to HCMC, positioning the city within global bibliometric trends (2002–2025) while grounding the analysis in documented local program evidence. We found four enduring knowledge cluster-student mobility, cross-border provision, quality assurance, and graduate outcomes – with a clear post-2020 shift from volume expansion toward program quality and employability.

In HCMC, outbound numbers grew strongly over 2015–2023 (from roughly 18,500 to 35,000), even as the city's share of Vietnam's total declined from about 38% to 20%, indicating faster diffusion of international study across other provinces. Destination patterns also rebalanced, pivoting from the United States pre-2020 to Australia during COVID-19 and to the Republic of Korea in 2022–2023. In parallel, HCMC has consolidated a diversified TNE portfolio (e.g., ~89 international joint programs, ~23% of the national total), spanning joint/double degrees, franchised and validated delivery, articulated 2+2/3+1 pathways, and emerging online/blended models.

Beyond mapping trends, the paper contributes a quality-assurance policy framework tailored to HCMC's ecosystem. The framework focuses on clear partner accreditation and financial checks, defined credit transfer and recognition

rules, fair and reliable assessment, work-integrated learning linked to local industries, transparent recruitment practices and public reporting on completion and graduate employment. Implemented together, these measures would shift competition toward quality and outcomes rather than intake volume, protecting students while strengthening the city's international standing.

We are transparent about limitations: bibliometric evidence is constrained by database and language coverage; destination statistics differ by definition (visas vs. enrollments); and city-level microdata remain incomplete. Future research should (i) assemble HCMC-resolved administrative series for outbound and TNE cohorts, (ii) link program participation to matched graduate outcomes (employment, sector, earnings, time-to-job), and (iii) assess value-add using quasi-experimental designs and field-normalized impact metrics. Building an open HCMC registry of approved/active TNE programs and outcomes would enable these analyses and support continuous quality improvement.

In sum, HCMC is an instructive case of localized internationalization: outbound mobility has surpassed pre-pandemic levels while TNE provides “study-abroad-at-home” options under tightening quality expectations. By adopting the proposed QA framework and investing in transparent data, city institutions and policymakers can translate internationalization from expansion to durable, student-centered excellence.

## **5.2 Recommendations**

Drawing upon the findings of this study, several strategic recommendations are proposed for educational institutions seeking to enhance internationalization in the context of HCMC.

First, the development of in-country TNE programs in collaboration with foreign universities should be prioritized. These programs allow students to engage with international curricula and pedagogical standards without leaving the country, thereby making global education more financially accessible. By offering dual-degree options, English-medium instruction, and opportunities for partial study abroad, institutions can foster a learning experience that mirrors overseas education while remaining locally grounded.

Second, universities are encouraged to intensify academic partnerships with leading international institutions, particularly in high-demand disciplines such as technology, health sciences, and global business. These partnerships should extend beyond student mobility to include co-developed curricula, joint research projects, and reciprocal faculty exchange. Such collaborations not only elevate the academic profile of local institutions but also enhance the employability of graduates in both domestic and international labor markets.

Third, a strong emphasis should be placed on foreign language instruction and global skills training. English proficiency and intercultural competencies are essential for students navigating international education environments. Institutions should integrate language development into degree programs and

provide access to internationally recognized certifications such as IELTS or TOEFL. Alongside language skills, global competencies critical thinking, adaptability, and cross-cultural collaboration should be cultivated throughout the academic journey.

Fourth, educational institutions should establish career support systems for students completing international programs, whether abroad or domestically. These may include alumni mentorship schemes, partnerships with multinational employers, and internship programs tailored for globally trained graduates. Facilitating professional integration will ensure that the long-term value of international education is realized in meaningful career outcomes. Fifth, the adoption of innovative teaching methods and digital learning platforms is essential. Institutions must move toward learner-centered pedagogies that leverage technology to provide flexible, interactive, and globally relevant instruction. Curricula should be regularly updated to reflect advances in fields such as artificial intelligence, digital economy, and sustainability, thereby preparing students for future oriented careers.

Finally, to support a truly internationalized learning environment, universities in HCMC should actively promote cultural and academic exchange. Hosting international conferences, encouraging inbound and outbound student mobility, and facilitating multicultural activities on campus will strengthen the city's role as an emerging educational hub in Southeast Asia. Through these measures, educational institutions can play a transformative role in addressing the evolving needs of globally oriented learners and contribute meaningfully to the internationalization of higher education in Vietnam.

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