

**Youth, Education, and Employment in Asia:
A Comparative Study of Japan's Social Challenges and Vietnam's Modernization**

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1. Introduction and objectives

This Experience-Based Learning (EBL) project aims to study the transition of young people from education to work, and selects Vietnam and Japan as two cases for comparative research. The fieldwork was conducted in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam, but it was not carried out in isolation. This research has also developed through a reflective process influenced by my position as a student living and studying in Japan.

In Japan, the move from school into employment follows a highly organized pattern. The job-hunting process for young people (commonly referred to as “shukatsu” in Japanese) is widely seen as one of the most institutionalized school-to-work systems globally. This arrangement developed during the period of postwar economic expansion and is supported by long-standing mutual expectations between employers and employees. By contrast, students in Vietnam face a labor market that is fast-evolving and offers far fewer formalized support mechanisms. Instead of following clearly defined institutional routes, many Vietnamese students depend on personal initiative, informal networks, and the acquisition of practical skills to access opportunities.

Examining these two contexts provides valuable analytical insight. Vietnam offers a perspective through which Japan's system can be reconsidered. The adaptability and energy displayed by Vietnamese youth draw attention not only to the strengths of Japan's institutional framework, but also to its enduring limitations and the need for reform. While Japan benefits from stability and predictability, it also struggles with inflexibility in a changing economic environment.

Building on this comparison, this research tries to go beyond descriptive analysis. It employs perspectives from youth transition studies, human capital theory, and institutional path dependence to interpret narratives gathered from a range of educational contexts in Vietnam, including universities and their affiliated projects, international schools, and vocational institutions. These findings are considered in relation to Japan's long-established employment model. Although this model continues to shape young people's expectations, signs of strain have become increasingly visible. Comparing Vietnam's open and opportunity-driven environment with Japan's tightly structured but slowing system helps illuminate how historical legacies, cultural norms, and socioeconomic conditions influence young people's aspirations across different Asian societies. Vietnam demonstrates ways of managing uncertainty through flexibility and entrepreneurship, while Japan reveals the social and emotional pressures that can emerge when routes into adulthood are overly fixed.

Finally, this report also emphasizes that youth transitions cannot be adequately explained through employment statistics or educational outcomes alone. Such transitions are cultural and relational processes that are deeply rooted in institutional histories. Experience-based learning and direct engagement therefore played a central role in shaping the analysis. Conversations with Vietnamese students not only clarified the contrasts with Japan's system, but also prompted reflection on the researcher's own stance and dilemmas.

2. Theoretical Orientation

To deepen the basis of analysis, this report adopts an interdisciplinary theoretical orientation and integrates cultural sociology, labor market research and comparative institutionalism. First of all, Pierre Bourdieu's capital theory - economic capital, social capital and cultural capital - provides an explanatory perspective for understanding how students' educational trajectory reproduces or transforms their social status (Bourdieu, 1986). Cultural capital, especially the language ability and international literacy of students in Vietnamese international schools, is not only a symbol of domestic social status, but also a symbol of global mobility.

Secondly, Ulrich Baker's theory of "risk society" provides us with a conceptual framework to understand how people's life trajectory shifts from collective regulation to individual responsibility in the context of neoliberal globalization (Beck, 1992). For Vietnamese youth, the rapid economic development has brought opportunities, but it has also spread the risks downwards, forcing them to deal with the skill gap and the turbulent market alone. In contrast, Japanese youth have fallen into the so-called "reflectional modernity trap" by scholars. Various systems constantly promise security but fail to fulfill it, thus causing their inner anxiety (Allison, 2013).

Third, Mary Blinton's institutional analysis of Japan's transformation system is crucial to understanding the historical logic of "survival". Brinton (2011) conceptualized Japan's employment system as "certificate collectivism". In this system, college education replaces practical ability and embeds universities in the enterprise matching network. This mechanism has stabilized the predictability of life trajectory in the past few decades, but now it is facing serious challenges under the impact of the population crisis and the fragmentation of the labor market.

In addition, the "capitalist diversity" framework proposed by Hall and Soskice (2001) helps to explain why Japan maintains coordinated institutional complementarity - long-term employment, corporate trade unions and seniority wages - while Vietnam, as a mixed transition economy, is increasingly close to rapid recruitment and entrepreneurial labor. The logic of the free market. Finally, the report draws on the youth transition literature that emphasizes the "waiting period", transition state and identity construction (Honwana, 2013; Furlong & Cartmel, 2007), and puts students' narratives in a broader issue of delaying adulthood and self-shaping.

Together, these theoretical foundations jointly promote the report to go beyond descriptive comparison and turn to relational interpretation. They clarify how institutional structure,

cultural norms and the subjectivity of life are intertwined, thus shaping the meaning of "becoming an adult" in different modern contexts.

3. “Shukatsu” in Japan: Historical Roots and Present Contradictions

Before inspecting Vietnam, it is necessary to refer to the case of Japan, as the intensity of its system provides an important reference for comparative research. My understanding of "shukatsu" is not only based on academic literature, but also on communication with my Japanese friends, informal observation on campus, and my own experience as a student under similar pressure. This mixed perspective reveals that Japan's employment transition system is both deep-rooted and increasingly fragile.

The origin of "entry" can be traced back to the post-World War II period, when economic reconstruction required large enterprises to train inexperienced graduates, while universities mainly played the role of selecting talents. During the rapid growth period in the 1960s and 1980s, the synchronous recruitment cycle, the alumni network and the corporate patriarchal style together built one of the most standardized and carefully designed paths from school to work in the world. In that era, the famous university printed on the resume was more important than the actual ability, and entering a large enterprise was regarded as a sign of entering adulthood. Anthropologists once compared the company to a quasi-family institution and regarded the entry as a bar mitzvah that connects education, identity and citizenship.

After the bubble economy burst, this model began to collapse. Long-term economic stagnation, deregulation of the labor market and the aging of the population have weakened the ability of companies to ensure stable careers for employees. The proportion of informal employees is expanding, and the younger generation is pouring into the market full of uncertainty. However, paradoxically, the cultural form of entry is basically intact. The university still arranges student life around employment preparation in the junior and senior stages. Employers continue to recruit on a large scale, while students invest a lot of energy in self-packaging, such as modifying behavior, adjusting speech, and suppressing personality, to meet their imagination of corporate expectations. Even if the employment discourse shifts to personalization, global competence and creativity, recruitment norms still reward obedience, organizational loyalty, and the ability to erase personal voices.

What's more, the communication with Japanese students made me further realize that this paradox has been deeply rooted. Several students told me that failure to complete the "shukatsu" was not only regarded as an economic disadvantage, but also as a social rupture - a loss of legitimacy relative to their peers. A graduate student concluded incisively: "Sometimes I feel that the real competition is recognition, not work." Scholars describe this as normative instability: insecurity does not come from a weak labor market, but from the emotional pressure brought about by satisfying institutionalized norms. The commitment of stability continues to give this ceremony legitimacy, even though its actual reliability is declining.

Living and studying in Japan allows me to observe how this system penetrates into all aspects of daily life. The university's schedule is cleverly synchronized with the recruitment cycle. For

example, my lab's first seminar this semester was on October 1st, but that day was also the scheduled date (Job Offer Ceremony, “naitei-shiki” in Japanese) for most companies. A large portion of the lab's students missed the seminar because they had to attend the job event, and everyone felt that there was "no way around it". In the everyday chat, people always ask repeatedly, "Have you decided on your job?" - this implies that the future identity will be fixed in a short time window. The personal experience of this environment has made me deeply realize that the career transformation here is not only administrative, but also about the meaning of life: timeline, friendship, self-worth and rhythm of life are all closely related to the employment schedule.

The recent changes, such as online interviews, the government's encouragement of middle-aged recruitment, and enterprises' attempts at artificial intelligence evaluation, all show that there are some loopholes in this system. However, according to peer narratives and campus observations, students still develop their emotional and social life around this ceremony. Even if its economic outlook is getting bleak day by day, its symbolic meaning still exists.

Compared with Vietnam, Japan's job search model is completely different. In Vietnam, job hunting is more adaptable, iterative, and the sense of ritual is weaker; failure is regarded as temporary, not a threat to identity; skill improvement is scattered in informal interpersonal networks, digital platforms and dynamic market experiments. From this perspective, Japan's commitment to synchronized transformation, consistency, and identity-oriented employment appears to be a product of historical contingency and deep-rooted factors, and importantly, it is changeable rather than predetermined.

4. Vietnamese Youth Transition: Findings from Fieldwork

This study was conducted for three days at the University of Economics and Finance (UEF) in Ho Chi Minh City and its related student sites. Semi-structured interviews are core activities, supplemented by observation of students' interactions in canteens, campus streets, public places and cafes frequented by young people. I interviewed three types of students: students who participate in the UEF International Exchange Program (IEF); students studying at the French International School, many of whom are from foreign families or Vietnamese elites; and students who are receiving vocational training in dessert making and hotel management.

Before the field trip, my interview and comparative analysis ability was average. The field trip greatly deepened my understanding of social signals, silence and interview ethics. I realized that building a harmonious relationship is very important and much more complicated than expected. A student at a French school said to me easily while drinking coffee, "You look nervous; just talk like a friend, or we will answer you formally." This shows the importance of informal relationships.

One of the most obvious features of the interview is the high pragmatic attitude of Vietnamese college students towards education. For many of them, a bachelor's degree is totally enough, and continuing to pursue a postgraduate degree is often considered “waste of time or money”. A student from UEF in Vietnam explained that she needed to start working as soon as possible

because her parents wanted her to earn money to support her family. Another interviewee pointed out that a master's degree is usually considered valuable only to those who plan to engage in academic research or students whose family financial conditions allow. This emphasis on the “returns” of education shows that learning is generally regarded as a short-term investment, which reflects Vietnam's rapid but unbalanced economic transformation.

The very pragmatic pursuit is also closely related to Vietnam's educational architecture. According one interviewee from vocational institution, I learned that, in public universities, students usually study general knowledge courses in the first year, followed by three years of professional training. Vocational colleges and universities go further, minimize or cancel general education, and focus almost entirely on the cultivation of specific professional skills, usually completing their studies in three years. Therefore, Vietnam's educational path is highly streamlined, focusing on practical ability rather than extensive academic knowledge. So, this student explained that he chose vocational education instead of college because he thought it was meaningless to spend four years studying theory. His main goal is to quickly master practical skills in order to open his own store. This example highlights how Vietnam's labor market attaches great importance to skills that can be applied immediately and supports small-scale start-up projects.

However, students in international schools display very different orientations. Many of them described education as a form of long-term investment and expressed aspirations that extend beyond Vietnam. One student noted that while English is widely spoken, French distinguishes her as part of an elite group. Language, in this sense, becomes a marker of social status rather than simply a communication tool. These students also connect education closely with mobility across borders. Several described Ho Chi Minh City as a temporary stage in their lives, useful mainly as preparation for future study or work in Europe or other parts of Southeast Asia. For them, Vietnam is not imagined as a final destination. Taken together, these accounts show how global forces shape educational choices and reproduce class distinctions through different visions of the future.

5. Comparative Discussion

The comparison between Japan and Vietnam highlights two completely different development paths, which also shape the self-awareness of young people in completely different ways. This difference is not a simple contrast between mobility and rigidity, but reflects the growth of young people in different social environments, thus forming different expectations for time and the future. In Vietnam, young people grow up in an open and possible environment, and they are also full of uncertainty about the future. Career is usually regarded as a project that individuals must actively build. Uncertainty itself is not regarded as a problem, but should be accepted willingly. In contrast, in Japan, the future is rarely regarded as unknown. The future is usually pre-built through institutionalized paths, and education, employment and the transition to adulthood are expected to follow an orderly and synchronized order. However, this highly arranged view of time may no longer consistent with the economic reality, resulting in a structural tension between ideals and reality.

Therefore, Japan embodies a paradox of late modernity: its success in designing the transformation system has now caused social evils. The "weekly activity", which once symbolized a sense of security, is now increasingly becoming a mechanism of screening and obedience. Students have internalized this pressure long before entering the workplace. Interviews and existing research show that this emotional burden is not just a fear of unemployment, but a fear of deviating from the mainstream - fear of anxiety that is out of line with peer personality. This is essentially different from the uncertainty of Vietnamese students. The uncertainty of Vietnamese students mainly comes from the fluctuations of the external environment, rather than the normative nature of internalization. Therefore, Vietnamese students cultivate resilience in dealing with the unpredictable market, while Japanese students cultivate resilience in the process of adapting to institutional norms.

The comparative structure can be summarized as:

Vietnam	Japan
Rapid change, low stability	Slow change, high structural stability
Open mobility imagination	Narrow pathways and conformity pressure
Weak institutional support	Excessive institutional regulation
External uncertainty	Internalized insecurity

These different dynamics contain policy inspiration. The challenge facing Vietnam is to strengthen the institutional framework - to establish a mechanism to link education with labor demand while preventing exploitative informal employment. However, the challenge facing Japan lies in the reflection of the system: making room for a diversified development path, rather than improving the existing path. Attempts such as mid-term recruitment, decentralized recruitment cycle or greater emphasis on vocational skills indicate that the system is gradually being adjusted, but cultural change lags behind procedural reform. If Vietnam must learn how to build a system, then Japan must learn how to deconstruct and diversify existing systems.

Comparing the two youth regimes side by side shows their different expressions of commitment and dissatisfaction in interpreting modernity. Vietnam emphasizes opportunities and ignores structure; Japan emphasizes structure and ignores renewal. The comparison between the two shows that mobility is neither guaranteed by institutional intensity nor liberated by institutional lack. On the contrary, the comparative perspective reveals that effective transformation depends on how the system empowers rather than stipulates a diversified future.

6. Competence Development, Self-Assessment, and reflections on EBL

In the process of preparation, field investigation and post-reflection, my ability has been continuously improved, far surpassing the traditional classroom learning. At first, although I had a curiosity about analysis, I lacked confidence in methodology - especially in interviews, dealing with silence, and building comparative insights. Field investigation broke these limitations. Through repeated attempts, I gradually realized that interviews are not simple questions and answers, but relationship interactions shaped by atmosphere, rhythm and mutual vulnerability.

What's more, the stage after fieldwork further expanded my thinking. After returning to Japan and analyzing the interview records, I was able to link the fragmented experience with the conceptual framework. More importantly, all the hands-on experience not only shaped my research abilities but also deepened my self-understanding. As a second-year master student, I faced numerous uncertainties just like my research subjects. Observing how young people in Vietnam cope with an uncertain future and how young people in Japan cope with stringent societal expectations made this project a mirror for myself. Their anxieties resonated with my own, so, in this whole process, fieldwork became a space where methodological training and deeper personal reflection intersected. This research helped me to re-examine my views on academic prestige, career security, and how to choose a value system based on my own thoughts and expectations rather than externally imposed ones.

This experience-based learning has changed the way I produce knowledge. Field experience has made me understand that insight comes not only from oral answers, but also from gestures, spatial layout, language conversion and hesitation. Research has become a dialogue, and the dialogue takes place between the story of my research object and my own unfinished journey - an iterative process that allows me to put myself in the phenomenon I have analyzed. In the end, EBL not only taught me how to study the transitional period of youth, but also made me realize that I myself am a young man who is going through a transition period and needs to cope with the institutionalized established model, structural uncertainty and vision for the future.

7. Conclusion

This report examines how youth mobility between Vietnam and Japan reveals two forms of instability in East Asia that appear similar on the surface but differ in nature. In Vietnam, uncertainty is dynamic and forward-looking. Many young people expect social change and respond by staying flexible, relying on informal connections, and pursuing opportunities that allow movement and adjustment. In contrast, Japan is characterized by long-term structural rigidity. Although institutions continue to offer stability and clear rules, this stability has gradually lost its substance. As a result, young people often internalize social expectations as pressure, and they usually experience anxiety more than security. Together, these cases suggest that instability cannot be understood only in economic or individual terms. It also operates at cultural and emotional levels, shaped by how societies define adulthood, evaluate achievement, and respond to those who fall outside accepted norms.

This project not only contributed to the research results, but also changed my academic attitude. Experience-based learning (EBL) requires understanding theory through personal experience, not just reading theoretical propositions. I realize that youth transition cannot be simply attributed to the labor market or education policy; it is a social situational practice in which young people negotiate the future in a social environment that they cannot design but must face. Field investigation taught me to pay attention to the level of silence, contradiction and emotion - hesitation, jokes and inadvertent comments often reveal the truth better than carefully packaged answers. Vietnam made me re-understand Japan's rigidity, and Japan's anxiety illuminates the possibilities contained in Vietnam's flexibility.

In addition to Vietnam and Japan, this study has also deepened my understanding of the governance of East Asian relations. Although the two systems are different, they are both influenced by Confucianism, with a common focus on obligations, family, hierarchy and seniority. Young people are socialized from an early age and indoctrinated with the responsibility of "becoming useful talents", even if structural conditions make this result uncertain. In Japan, this is manifested in compliance with synchronized recruitment schedules; in Vietnam, it is manifested in pressure from the family, which prompts them to climb up through mobility and skill improvement. Neither of these regimes blames failure entirely on individuals, but both have cultivated the ability to emotionally self-monitoring. From this comparative point of view, the instability of East Asia is manifested as relational instability - it is not caused by opposing relationships, but by intertwined care, obligations and governance.

These understandings closely connects to discussions of leadership education in Asia. The AFLSP framework highlights the development of leaders who are able to deal with complexity, communicate across cultural boundaries, and take ethical responsibility. My research helped me see that models of leadership based on individual disruption, often associated with Europe and the United States, cannot be directly applied to Asian contexts. Instead, leadership in Asia needs to account for relational obligations, institutional embeddedness, and the emotional work carried by young people who stand between inherited systems and uncertain futures. Looking at how Vietnamese students actively pursue emerging opportunities, and how Japanese students respond to structural pressure and anxiety, suggests that Asian leadership is frequently expressed through quiet adaptability, collective forms of resilience, and the capacity to imagine alternative futures from within existing systems rather than by rejecting them.

Therefore, comparative reflection does not end with predetermined certainty, but ends with inspirational exploration. Japan may eventually need to expand employment channels and decouple identity from synchronous recruitment; while Vietnam may benefit from strengthening institutional intermediaries to support employment matching, skill recognition and social security. From a broader perspective in East Asia, future research can explore whether Vietnam's mobility will stabilize, whether Japan's rigidity will gradually subside - and how China, South Korea and Taiwan can seek their own hybrid transformations between turbulence and excessive institutional design. It is obvious that the youth in the region are not passively restrained, but actively interpret and silently reform the ever-changing world. Through experiential learning, I learned to observe not only the instructions of the system, but also how young people can creatively reconstruct the meaning in the peripheral area. In this sense, this research journey is not only about Vietnam and Japan. It is also about becoming a kind of researcher, or a kind of Asian leader, who can understand how comparative research reveals both the vulnerabilities and the potential strengths of each society as they imagine their futures.

Plan and Schedule of this EBL

<p>Preparation Stage (October to November)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Literature Review: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Academic articles on youth transition, higher education, and employment in Vietnam and East Asia. ○ Reports from UNESCO, World Bank, and Vietnam’s Ministry of Education and Training on youth employment statistics. • Media & Case Study Review: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Vietnamese media coverage of graduate unemployment and career expectations. ○ Comparative materials on Japan’s youth employment crisis for contextual contrast. • Interview Guide Preparation: Refining semi-structured questionnaires for university students. 	
<p>Field Work in Vietnam (end of November)</p>	(D0) 11/25	Depart from Kyoto and arrive in Vietnam
	(D1) 11/28	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interview with Participant A from UEF (see Appendix 1) • Focus Group with FGI Group 01 from IEF (see Appendix 2) • Reflection and note consolidation. Identification of key themes to refine questions for Day 2
	(D2) 11/29	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interview with Participant B from UEF (see Appendix 3) • Interview with Participant C from French International School (see Appendix 4) • Reflection and note consolidation. Outline emerging comparative insights with Japanese youth employment and identity formation
	(D3) 11/30	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interview with Participant D from Vocational School in pastry program (see Appendix 5) • Interview with Participant E from Vocational School in hotel

		<p>management program (see Appendix 6)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focus Group with FGI Group 02 from Japanese major (see Appendix 7) • Final reflection and organization of field notes
Post-program (December)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Transcription and analysis of interviews. • Comparative reflection on Vietnam’s flexible yet uncertain labor market and Japan’s stable but rigid employment pathways. • Writing of the AFLSP EBL research report, integrating fieldwork findings with literature. 	

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Appendix

1. Interview Record 01

ID: Participant A

Type: Vietnamese undergraduate, Business Logistics major from UEF

Date: Day 1

Location: UEF conference room

Key notes

Researcher: Why did you choose logistics?

Participant A: Vietnam is developing logistics quickly. Ports, warehousing, Amazon-like delivery, etc. It is practical. My parents also encouraged this major because companies recruit.

Researcher: What about postgraduate study?

Participant A: No time. My family expects income soon. Master's study is for rich kids or those who want academic careers. For us, work now.

Researcher: Do you feel university training matches job requirements?

Participant A: Maybe not so much...We learn theory and business management, but the industry demands Excel skills, supply chain software, negotiation skills, etc. Sometimes I think I learn more from TikTok and YouTube. Sometimes for job-hunting, my friends even teach better than teachers.

Researcher: How do students around you talk about job searching?

Participant A: We often say, "Act quickly." Try internships, change jobs. If it's not a good fit, leave. Vietnam is flexible; there's nothing to be ashamed of in failure, just keep trying.

2. Interview Record 02 — Focus Group with International Exchange Friends (IEF)

ID: FGI Group 01 (8 students: 01A, 01B, 01C, 01D, 01E, 01F, 01G, 01H)

Participants: students affiliated with IEF (International Exchange Friends) program at UEF

Date: Day 1

Location: UEF conference room

Key notes

Topic 1: Value of international exchange identity

Researcher: What does being part of IEF mean to you?

Student 01A: For me, it feels more like a kind of social capital. We get to meet international students, join activities, and we really have lots of chances to use English in real situations. IEF gives us a place to build confidence.

Student 01C: Many companies value leadership or exchange-related experience. When we talk about hosting international guests or supporting exchange programs, employers like these

experiences.

Student 01B: But actually...at the same time, IEF can sometimes turn into a “photo culture”. As you know, sometimes people take pictures with foreigners only to put on their resume. It becomes a way of performing being global.

Student 01E: Even so, it’s still useful. Some people may start just for the photos, but they end up learning soft skills along the way.

Student 01F: I agree. I used to be very shy. Now I can show exchange students around the city on my own.

Student 01G: IEF feels like a training space. It’s not perfect, but it teaches us more than what we learn in class.

Student 01H: And it builds a sense of community. We support and depend on each other.

Topic 2: Imagining careers and skills

Researcher: How do you view employment after graduation?

Student 01D: There are opportunities, especially as Vietnam’s economy continues to grow. The real challenge is finding a position that truly fits.

Student 01A: Employers often ask for prior experience, but it’s hard to know where we are supposed to gain it. Many internships already expect specific skills, so it becomes a cycle that’s difficult to break.

Student 01C: Support from senior students helps a lot. They share information about internships and give advice on CV writing and interview preparation.

Student 01E: At university, we mainly learn theory, while companies look for practical abilities like using Excel, negotiating, or communicating with customers. We usually pick up these skills from seniors or online platforms.

Student 01F: I feel we are fortunate to have a strong community. Students at some public universities don’t always have access to the same kind of networks.

Student 01G: Job openings are not the main issue. What’s missing is clear guidance on which direction to take.

Student 01H: It often feels like we are learning how things work while already moving forward.

Topic 3: Agency and mobility

Researcher: Is movement, such as changing jobs, cities, or countries, important for you?

Student 01B: Well, just from my own perspective. Movement shows improvement. And staying still sometimes means you’re not trying.

Student 01D: I also believe ‘Go where opportunities are.’ Stability comes from trying.

Student 01E: Is it true Japanese students must follow one strict timeline?

Researcher briefly explains shukatsu.

Student 01F: That sounds stressful. I personally would hate that.

Student 01G: But maybe stability is good? If you know what to do, you don’t feel lost or feel less uncertain.

Topic 4: Education—supportive or insufficient?

Researcher: Does the university help students find a job?

Student 01C: Not really. Institutional support is weak. We mostly depend on ourselves.

Student 01A: There're some lecturers giving theory. But we need negotiation, Excel, email etiquette, teamwork.

Student 01B: IEF gives us practice. Hosting foreigners teaches communication and adaptability.

Student 01D: Universities don't connect us with companies.

Student 01E: We may learn professionalism from each other more than from class.

3. Interview Record 03

ID: Participant B

Type: Student from International Exchange Friends (IEF)

Date: Day 2

Location: Café near Ben Thanh Market, outdoor seating

Key notes

Researcher: How do you understand a successful career transition?

Participant B: For me, success lies in mobility. It can mean moving to another city or developing a career abroad. Many of my friends apply for internships in different places, including unpaid ones, simply to gain experience and broaden their horizons.

Researcher: Doesn't this mobility make you worry about instability?

Participant B: Not really. Most Vietnamese twenty-somethings were raised amid non-stop change. Our parents keep telling us that packing up and leaving often leads to something better, so adjusting has become second nature.

Interviewer: What kind of official help do students actually get?

Participant B: Very little. Professors seldom introduce us to employers, so we lean on classmates, alumni networks, and student clubs for leads and advice.

4. Interview Record 04 — French International School Student

ID: Participant C

Type: Upper-class; French schooling; Taiwanese parents working in Vietnam; Born in the United States (US passport holder)

Date: Day 3

Location: Cafe near school

Key notes

Background: Before the formal interview began, Respondent C proactively shared his background while ordering drinks. He explained that he was born in the United States, where his parents worked. Around the age of ten, his parents found work in Ho Chi Minh City, and the family moved to Vietnam. Although both his parents are Taiwanese, he stated that he had

never lived in Taiwan long-term. The initial plan for a short-term job gradually evolved into a long-term residence, mainly due to the abundant career development opportunities and international educational resources in Ho Chi Minh City.

Shortly after arriving in Vietnam, Respondent C enrolled in a French-language international school. He recalled that he didn't understand French at all at the time, but adapting to the new environment was considered a normal requirement at school. Because students came from different cultural backgrounds, language adaptation was considered part of daily life. This transnational upbringing is key to understanding his identity. Born in the United States, raised in Vietnam, educated in France, and closely connected to his family ties in Taiwan, these experiences shaped his identity.

Researcher: Do you think French has been an advantage for you?

Participant C: Yes, of course. English is important, but it's not as special anymore. Almost everyone speaks English now. French represents something different. It's inextricably linked to culture, social status, and diplomacy. At our school, French is almost seen as an aesthetic. It's not just a means of communication, but a form of self-expression. Among my classmates, French is a symbol of identity, especially in an Asian context. Many Vietnamese families choose French-language schools for this very reason. It represents a certain identity.

Researcher: How do you view Vietnam from your long-term perspective?

Participant C: Only temporarily. Very temporarily. My family sees Vietnam as a preparatory phase. Life here is comfortable, and the expatriate community is small, making it easy to build connections. But it's not our envisioned long-term residence. Paris or Singapore are more important for our career development. Singapore is more pragmatic, but Paris is significant to us because it represents our education. Vietnam offers development opportunities, but we don't intend to live there long-term. We don't have the same deep emotional connection to it as the local students.

Researcher: Do you feel pressure?

Participant C: Yes, but the nature of the pressure is different. We don't compete for local employment opportunities like students in public schools. Our competition lies in integrating into the global elite circle. This concerns our ability to live comfortably in Europe or Singapore, our multilingualism, and our understanding of cultural norms. Local students worry about whether their majors align with the needs of local businesses. We, on the other hand, worry about whether we possess a global perspective and can integrate into international universities or companies. These pressures stem from a sense of privilege, not a need for survival. But that doesn't mean they don't exist.

5. Interview Record 05

ID: Participant D

Type: Vocational Student in pastry program

Date: Day 3

Location: café

Key notes

Researcher: What made you pick pastry school over a four-year degree?

Participant D: University just felt like four expensive years of sitting still. I wanted to be elbow-deep in dough, not essays. At pastry school I'm clocking real hours measuring sugar, piping roses, and figuring out what to charge so I don't lose my shirt. A customer never asks, "Did you minor in sociology?" They ask, "Is this slice worth the calories?"

Researcher: So once you're done, are you hunting for a job or charting your own course?

Participant D: Endgame is my own storefront. Give me three years: I'll start with Instagram orders from my kitchen table, stack regulars, then flip the lights on in a cozy café.

Researcher: How do your family think about this?

Participant D: Mom and Dad panicked about the paycheck first. Once they saw me pulling midnight shifts with a whisk in hand, they swapped worry for wedding-cake daydreams.

6. Interview Record 06

ID: Participant E

Type: Vocational Student in hotel management program

Date: Day 3

Location: café the interviewee chose

Key notes

Researcher: What drew you to the hotel business?

Participant E: Tourism is exploding here, and a front-line job pays well if you hustle. Sharpen my English and guest-handling chops, and I reckon I can step up to supervisor before long.

Researcher: Where do you see yourself heading?

Participant E: Vietnamese like steady work, but we don't sit around waiting for luck. Switching employers isn't frowned on—it's how we pick up new tricks and move ahead.

Researcher: Thinking about a master's later?

Participant E: For running a department, time on the floor beats time in lecture halls. Most of what I know I've picked up from guests, not textbooks.

7. Focus Group Interview — Six Vietnamese Students Majoring in Japanese

ID: FGI Group 02 (6 students: 02A, 02B, 02C, 02D, 02E, 02F)

Participants: Six third- and fourth-year Japanese language majors

Date: Day 3

Location: Phu An Bamboo Village Museum

The reason for conducting interviews with them is that Japanese language majors and researchers share some similar cultural backgrounds, which can contribute well to this

comparative study.

Key notes

Researcher: Why did you decide to study Japanese?

02A: At first it was just anime. Then I realized Japan actually hires foreigners, so the hobby turned into a plan.

02C: I liked how everything runs on time and people bow when they speak; it felt like a place where grown-ups take each other seriously.

02E (laughing): N1 drills are killing me, though.

Researcher: Think you'll stay there after graduation?

02B: Could happen. Hotels always need bilingual front-desk staff, and there's freelance translation.

02D: I'm 50-50. The visa clock ticks fast, the pay isn't great, and half the seniors fly home after a year anyway.

Researcher: Where do you see yourselves five years from now?

02F: Part pumped, part lost. We can read balance sheets in Japanese, but job ads want "three years of experience" we don't have.

02A: Freedom feels nice until you notice there's no map.

Researcher: What keeps you up at night?

02C: Relatives reminding me that "language degrees don't pay rent." Every dinner table is a courtroom.

02E: Teachers drill grammar but never mention résumés. We're told "internships matter" and then left to Google it ourselves.

02D: So we built our own safety net—group chats where seniors drop job leads and warn us which companies ghost applicants.