THE PERCEPTION ON CULTURE AND ITS INTEGRATION PROCESS INTO THE EDUCATIONAL ENVIRONMENT OF DALAT UNIVERSITY

Nguyen Do Thien Vu
Da Lat University

ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
	The present paper aims to explore the conception of culture within higher education settings in Vietnam. On the one hand, the study investigates the perception on culture of administration, faculty, staff, and students of Dalat University. On the other hand, the integration process of culture into their educational environment has also been studied. The results of synthesizing and analyzing recent official reports in this field, along with data from a survey conducted during the academic year 2017-2018 at Dalat University, indicate that the university has been endeavoring to foster an academic culture to enhance their cultural profile. Indeed, both tangible and intangible values constitute essential components of the university's identity. Tangible values encompass material aspects or various activities visible on campus, while intangible values pertain to the humanistic and professional aspects of the university's community. However, it appears that academic culture is primarily confined to institutional principles, often interpreted simply as "Do's" and "Don'ts", without fully considering its multidimensional aspects. The author concludes by providing some insights into this matter as well as raising some concerns related to the concept in question.

QUAN ĐIỂM VỀ VĂN HÓA VÀ TIẾN TRÌNH TÍCH HỢP VĂN HÓA VÀO MÔI TRƯỜNG GIÁO DỤC CỦA TRƯỜNG ĐẠI HỌC ĐÀ LẠT

Nguyễn Đỗ Thiên Vũ
Trường Đại học Đà Lạt

THÔNG TIN BÀI BÁO	TÓM TẮT
	Bài báo nghiên cứu quan niệm về văn hóa trong bối cảnh giáo dục ở bậc đại học Việt Nam. Một mặt, tác giả tập trung tìm hiểu quan điểm về văn hóa của đội ngũ quản lý, giảng viên, nhân viên và sinh viên tại trường Đại học Đà Lạt. Mặt khác, tác giả xem xét tiến trình tích hợp khái niệm này vào môi trường giáo dục đại học. Kết quả tổng hợp và phân tích một số báo cáo chính thức liên quan lĩnh vực này, cùng với dữ liệu khảo sát thu thập được trong năm học 2017-2018 tại Trường Đại học Đà Lạt cho thấy nhà trường đang hết sức nỗ lực xây dựng văn hóa học đường nhằm mục đích tôn tạo diện mạo văn hóa của họ. Thật vậy, cả giá trị vật thể và phi vật thể đều góp phần cấu thành những yếu tố cốt yếu tạo nên bản sắc của trường đại học. Giá trị vật thể bao gồm các khía cạnh vật chất hoặc các hoạt động khác nhau có thể nhìn thấy được trong khuôn viên trường, trong khi giá trị phi vật thể liên quan đến các khía cạnh nhân văn và chuyên môn của cộng đồng trường đại học. Tuy nhiên, có vẻ như văn hóa học thuật chủ yếu chỉ giới hạn ở các nguyên tắc thiết chế, thường được hiểu đơn giản là những gì "Nên làm" và "Không nên làm" mặc dù nó hàm chứa nhiều khía cạnh. Cuối cùng, tác giả đưa ra một số nhận định cũng như nêu lên một vài suy nghĩ về vấn đề nghiên cứu.

Email: vundt@dlu.edu.vn

1. Introduction

One of the biggest concerns of human beings is culture. This key concept has been defined by UNESCO as follows: "Culture should be regarded as the set of distinctive spiritual, material, intellectual and emotional features of society or a social group, and that it encompasses, in addition to art and literature, lifestyles, ways of living together, value systems, traditions and beliefs" [1].

Culture therefore constitutes an essential part of human life and an inherent part of all educational systems. In a broad sense, the concept of culture can be grasped as "the patterns shaped by ethnicity, religion, socio-economic status, geography, profession, ideology, gender, and lifestyle" [2]. For their part, anthropologists argue that culture encompasses abstract elements such as shared beliefs, values and ideologies; whereas, partisans of cognitive development theory offer their own definitions. Saville-Troike [3] considers culture as what the individual needs to know to be a functional member of the community. Thus, human behaviors can reflect people's culture. Alternatively, culture can also be seen as a means of the preserving and spreading human knowledge and achievements.

Some authors approached this concept through three organizational perspectives: i) an integrated perspective examining beliefs and values that are common to all organizational members; ii) a differentiated perspective considering beliefs and values of the existing subcultures which may contrast or conflict with those of other subcultures or with the general organizational culture; iii) a fragmented perspective considering organizational members' views to be ever changing with few shared understandings [4].

Hence, culture generally plays an important part in education, particularly in higher education. Studying academic culture of universities, Shen and Tian [5] argued that culture consists of four main components including academic outlooks, academic spirits, academic ethics and academic environments. These authors contended that academic culture is reflected in common values, spirits, and behavior norms of teachers and learners. University is indeed an existing form of culture on campus where material culture, institutional culture and spiritual culture constitute three major factors contributing to raising the university's profile at large. They also advocated the idea that "campus culture in a university is characterized by individuality, academic feature, opening, leading, variety and creativity" [5].

Additionally, Chavez has divided the notion 'culture' into three main components: "practices, products, and perspectives" and "what we understand by culture has important implications for subsequent pedagogical decisions" [6]. She considered the formula of foreign language culture as a combination of custom and history, and language. However, the importance of culture has been differently perceived by teachers and learners. In general, the definitions of culture may vary by nation.

In Vietnam, some authors have pointed out that Confucianism still has an important influence on the education of our country. In fact, Confucian principles are manifested in social order and the self-improvement [7]; and the educational system is characterized by a system of virtues and values rooted in traditions [8]. Vietnam is a typical Confucian heritage culture country where the respect of the elderly and high-rank persons and the obedience of children still value. Rooted in Confucianism, Vietnamese culture may not easily or entirely incorporate foreign culture into its own. So far, Vietnam has actually undergone significant transformations in the realms of education, economics, politics, and society. These changes undeniably play a crucial role in shaping cultural dynamics [9].

Other Vietnamese researchers have stressed on cultural values that should be placed on par with economy, politics and society [10]. In their opinion, culture should be transformed into the soft power of our country, especially within the context of globalization and international integration. Cultural promoters, including authorities in charge of culture as well as educators, are supposed to maintain traditional cultural values and help enhance cultural identity amongst the

Vietnamese people. At the same time, they should help our culture absorb new beliefs and values emanating from democracy, modernity, humanity, liberalization, tolerance, and broadness. As a matter of fact, these values are becoming apparent in higher education. Besides, the study related to academic culture of Pham [11] only highlighted a dozen offenses which are committed at a high average rate due to both subjective causes and objective causes. The subjective causes refer to students' consciousness, and input quality, whereas the objective causes pertain to limited effectiveness of family education and previous middle school education, current insufficient effectiveness of education at universities, and impact of the external environment, as well as the influence of international cultures, as mentioned in [12].

In this regard, our research aims to explore additional dimensions of the concept of culture, specifically focusing on Dalat University's perception of this concept and its integration into our educational environment. In the context of competition within higher education institutions, we hope that this paper provides insight into the importance of integrating the concept of culture in shaping our university's profile.

2. Methodology

To address these issues, the current research first aims to shed light on the subject by synthesizing and analyzing recent official reports on the overall evaluation of the educational environment at Dalat University (DLU) using a quantitative approach. Second, a questionnaire containing 36 close-ended questions and two open-ended questions was administered to gather the feedback from 496 faculty and staff members, along with all 775 senior students from the K38 classes (academic year 2017-2018) of DLU, prior to their graduation. Taking into account the distinctive features of its setting, the questionnaire was custom-tailored for DLU, recognized as one of the prestigious higher education institutions in the Central Highlands of Vietnam and celebrated for its unique identity and culture.

In the scope of this paper, the author endeavors to comprehend DLU's perception of culture by examining the institutional and cultural framework outlined by the Ministry of Education and Training of Vietnam (MOET). The focus of this paper is also directed towards the integration of this concept into the DLU environment with the aim of shaping their cultural profile. To achieve this goal, the current paper addresses the following questions:

    1. What is DLU's perception of the concept of culture?
    2. How is this concept integrated into their educational environment?

3. Findings and discussion

3.1. The perception on culture in educational settings

In this section, the thoughts on the perception and integration of culture into educational settings are presented. Here, the elements related to both material and spiritual aspects of culture are brought together for a discussion. On one hand, the concept of 'culture' involves compliance with institutional principles, while on the other hand, its integration into educational settings undeniably contributes to the overall development of institutions and the construction of their cultural profile.

Shen and Tian [5] revealed that, on the one hand, the academic culture is able to enhance the construction of campus culture; on the other, the campus culture conditions and restricts the academic culture development. It is suggested that the cause-and-effect relationship does exist between academic culture and campus culture.

Based upon the *Constitution of Vietnam*, the Law on education primarily stresses on people's morality and intellectuality. Precisely, Article 35 of the Constitution of Vietnam states that "education's objective is to foster and nurture the personality, human qualities and imbue with …. good virtues…" [8]. In other words, the educational goals are to form good citizens having virtues, knowledge, and skills so that they will be able to contribute to the overall development of

the country. Indeed, the education of moral values has precisely been stipulated and set by law. Precisely, the 2019 Law on education prescribes the goals of education in Article 2 as follows:

The goals of education are to develop the Vietnamese in a comprehensive manner into cultured persons who have good moral qualities, knowledge, good health, aesthetic sense, and occupational skills; civic virtues, competencies and consciousness; and patriotism, sense of national spirit and loyalty to the ideology of national independence and socialism; to promote potential and creativity of each individual; and to raise people's intellectual standards, develop human resources, nurture talents and meet requirements of the cause of national construction and defense and international integration.

In addition to this, the requirements of instructional content and methodologies are clearly stated in Article 7 implying that the teaching and learning content needs to inherit and promote tradition, cultural identity as well as absorb the cultural quintessence of mankind; whereas teaching methods should focus intensively on learner's autonomy and capability of cooperation and practice. Besides, a number of acts prohibited in educational institutions are stipulated in Article 22. Another important point is that the State is determined to help foster research and technology activities to establish institutions of higher education as centres for culture, science and technology at different levels.

Given the above information found in legal texts, culture plays a key role in developing the national education. Graduates should be professionally qualified and, to some extent, culturally evaluated. It is likely that cultured people make life better. To be more precise, an experienced teacher ought to have a good moral that is often manifested in his devotion to his students. A competent learner also needs to have good attitudes towards his or her learning and show respect to the others. In brief, the cultural aspects have been considered a goal to reach in the educational system of the country.

Pham Minh Hac [11] defined school culture as a system of standards and values that help school administrators, teachers, parents and students have a good way of thinking, feeling and behaving. The cultural behavior within educational institutions is basically associated with moral and aesthetic standards that regulate people's behavior manifested in attitudes, utterances, gestures and acts, and so forth [13].

3.2. The integration of culture into DLU environment

3.2.1. With regard to administration, faculty, staff

The promulgation of the Regulations on DLU's campus culture dated August 16, 2021 takes on a significant importance of the cultural component within the university. In this regard, the administration, faculty, and staff are required to abide by the standards of conduct and behavior in compliance with the ministerial regulations. These latest Regulations stipulate in chapter I a number of "Do's" and "Don't", that shall be applied to all people on campus, pertaining to spirit, professional attitude, communication and behavior criteria, moral virtues, lifestyle, outfit, campus configuration. In this manner, the goals are to 1) raise the awareness of organizational discipline, and ensure the solemnity and effectiveness of all units on campus; 2) build standards of behavior among all people working on campus, and develop the good virtues amongst them; 3) serve to evaluate and rank administration, faculty, and staff on an annual basis, and reward or penalize according to their performance or offence in relation to professional achievement and community relationship. Also, people are also informed of six acts that are banned on and off campus such as smoking in the office; gambling and organizing gambling, and get involved in social problems; having alcoholic drinks during working hours and lunch break (except guest reception authorized by officials according to diplomatic protocol); performing personal business or disturbing the others; using earphones, watching movies, playing video games and having other leisure activities during working hours; being superstitious and having offensive behaviors attending traditional festivals and cultural events. In chapter II, the required professional spirit and attitudes

are described in details in Article 5; the communication and behavior norms in Article 6; the standards of communication and behavior with learners and professional visitors in Article 7; the standards of communication via telephone and other devices in Article 8; the standards of conduct in meetings and conferences in Article 9; the standards of lifestyles, moral and ethical conduct at workplace in Article 10; the requirements of outfit and dress uniform in Article 11. The chapter III is devoted to office decoration in which are stipulated the instructions on flag hanging (Article 12), institution's signboard (Article 13), working offices (Article 14), offices surroundings (Article 15), and vehicle management (Article 16).

Furthermore, within the scope of this paper, the author presents pertinent findings derived from recent reports based on surveys conducted at DLU. These surveys employed a 5-point Likert scale. The annual internal report of 2017-2018 revealed positive results provided by more than 400 faculty and staff members pertaining to "the overall evaluation of the educational environment". Below are the questionnaire results, which exclusively concentrate on pertinent questions regarding cultural aspects perceived within our educational settings and demonstrating a high level of agreement (levels 4 and 5: agree and totally agree):

● Question 1: 86.1% of faculty confirmed that they "love their job at DLU";
● Question 2: 82.4% of them felt "proud to work for DLU";
● Questions 1-4: over 80% of them found their "colleagues to be friendly, sociable, open-minded, professional, and helpful".

Similarly, a survey conducted amongst DLU graduates showed better results as follows:
● Question 22: 90.8% of the respondents agree or totally agree that "the learning settings and the environment are favorable for their studies";
● Question 38: 89.5% of them agree or totally agree with the "quality of living and studying environment".

In that same year, DLU undergraduates participated in another survey concerning the assessment of faculty provided satisfactory results:
● Question 20: 94.8% of the participants agree or totally agree that "faculty's outfit and styles are appropriate and polite";
● Question 23: 94.1% of them agree or totally agree with "faculty's proper behavior and respectful attitude towards students".

In addition to this, it is important to notice that DLU faculty has been found to be inspiring and devoted to their teaching career.

Despite these promising results, the reports repeatedly indicate that the collegial relationship needs to be tighten through various sportive and cultural events. The university should create more opportunities for faculties and staff to work together as well as to develop their friendship and colleagueship. Lecturers are also asked to stimulate students' motivation. Besides, they are encouraged and required to do research. Such a finding is quite more encouraging in comparison with that of [10], [11]. However, more thorough studies within a longer period from five to ten years should be conducted in order to provide a fuller, and especially more credible, picture in this matter.

Additionally, a number of drawbacks have been revealed related to teaching methodologies that need to be updated and concentrate on groupwork more in more intensively. It is requested that the university pay more attention to maintenance of on-campus facilities; cleanliness and tidiness; stability of the university's portal; rationality of course schedule, motorbike parking spaces, and classroom arrangement; reinforcement of dormitory security, and the like. It is important to notice that the Department of Student Affairs urges the university to implement strict measures on students who often play truant and those who have poor academic performance because, in their opinion, these affect negatively the university's profile. The inappropriate behavior manifested in lack of effective communicative skills, unprofessional attitude and rude words of some administrative staff has also been alerted.

It is obvious that the administration, faculty and staff strive to build the university's culture so that they can raise its prestige. To this end, the university ought to not only concentrate greatly on its quality of faculty and staff, but also improve the quality of on-campus equipment and facilities. Only by doing this will the university's profile be gradually and steadily raised. Hence, the importance of organizational perspectives in constructing academic culture has been valued [4] and also emphasized by the MOET.

At this point, the author would also like to raise some concerns related to the process of cultural construction within universities in the Internet era: What could be the flexible and appropriate cultural rules for e-Learning and Teaching? What should be done to prevent plagiarism in an era of information explosion?

3.2.2. With regard to students

Pursuant to the Statute of university, college and vocational school students promulgated according to the Decision n°42/2007/QD-BGD-DT dated August 13, 2007 of the MOET, DLU issued in 2015 the Regulations on academic culture of DLU students. There are six provisions which directly involve students in relation with 1) outfit; 2) communication and behavior; 3) protection of property, and maintenance of hygiene and environmental landscape; 4) maintenance of university's order and security; 5) traffic safety; 6) rewards and penalties. These provisions literally indicate concrete actions that DLU students should or are not allowed to perform on and off campus. In essence, the university's regulations can be seen as the code of conduct that absolutely affects the university's culture as well as its prestige.

Moreover, the MOET's 2015 Statute of evaluation of students values the sense of consciousness regarding positive attitudes towards study participation, obedience of university's rules and regulations, social and political engagement, active involvement in cultural and sport events, prevention of social problems. Besides, students' assessment is also based on their awareness of community relationship and that of educational community. Nonetheless, it is not that simple to evaluate one's awareness since this dimension is apparently intangible.

In addition, the author presents pertinent findings derived from recent surveys conducted with DLU students during the academic year 2017-2018. The report revealed positive results from 685 participants (excluding 90 responses marked as N/A) regarding their overall evaluation of the educational environment. Similar to the previous section, this part only presents the relevant results concerning our students' perception of the concept at question with a high proportion of agreement (levels 4 and 5: agree and totally agree):

● Question 7: 92.4% of students affirmed that "the teaching staff, thanks to their positive cultural backgrounds, provides good examples";

● Question 10: 84.9% of them confirmed that "the curriculum undeniably contributes to the development of their ethics and personality";

● Questions 13-16: over 80% expressed confidence in "the strict examination regulations, emphasizing the impartiality and objectivity of assessment and evaluation".

● Question 25: 77.3% of the respondents unanimously agreed that they have "been treated well and warmly by the administrative staff";

● Questions 29-30: over 80% of them were in agreement that "the services related to cultural and sport events have been satisfactory".

● Questions 32-33: 90% affirmed "the university's well-maintained natural landscapes and the provision of a safe and socially conducive pedagogical environment".

● Question 35: 80% agreed or totally agreed with "the overall quality of living and studying environment".

● Question 36: 74.6% were "willing to recommend UDL to those seeking university education".

In addition to the closed questions in this questionnaire, two open-ended questions were included to gain a deeper understanding of the issue at hand. The responses emphasized 1) the

development of interaction skills, 2) the promotion of DLU's image, and 3) the improvement of professional attitudes in some administrative departments. For that reason, each educational institution formulates its unique code of conduct, delineating cultural norms applicable to all educational activities. This endeavor aims to foster an academic atmosphere characterized by both seriousness and openness, promoting amicable relationships and to enhance the university's profile, as discussed in [10, 11, 13, 14]. In other words, establishing a robust culture within educational institutions undeniably contributes to their overall development [15].

From the above section, it is suggested that culture is perceived as a legitimate requirement as well as an obligation in the process of building the university's profile. To some extent, culture has been regarded as standards and norms required by educational institutions for a better moral conduct and a construction of moral values. Hence, university culture can be seen as a multidimensional culture encompassing academic culture and campus culture. It is obvious that the academic culture is reflected in the overall values generated by the universities themselves that subsequently promote their own profile within not only the educational community but also in society. Building the university culture therefore requires a broad synergy of efforts among faculties, staff, administration and students.

4. Conclusion

While this paper aimed to provide insights, it reveals that DLU emphasizes discipline over other dimensions in shaping its cultural profile. The focus leans toward tangible aspects like facilities and service quality, with principles overshadowing academic culture. Recommendations from faculty, staff, and students are crucial for meeting legitimate needs and improving educational and cultural settings at DLU in particular and other Vietnamese higher education institutions in general. Also, educators should integrate 'culture' into the process of teaching and learning. Besides, the author raises concerns about rational measures to build academic culture and the behavior of cultured educators and learners, stressing the need for a cultural identity. Nevertheless, it is important to note that the results of our periodical survey collected during the academic year 2017-2018 have become outdated. Therefore, further research within the academic community is crucial for obtaining more updated data and achieving a comprehensive understanding of the pertinent concept.

REFERENCES

[1] J. Pessoa, L. Deloumeaux, and S. Ellis, *The 2009 Unesco Framework for Cultural Statistics (FCS).* UNESCO Institute for Statistics, 2009.

[2] N. P. Scheel and R. C. Branch, "The Role of Conversation and Culture in the Systematic Design of Instruction," *Educational Technology,* vol. 8, no. 33, pp. 7-18, 1993.

[3] M. Saville-Troike, *The Ethnography of Communication. An Introduction*. Oxford: Blackwell, 2003.

[4] M. W. Kramer and J. E. Berman, "Making sense of a university's culture: An examination of undergraduate students' stories," *Southern Journal of Communication,* vol. 66, no. 4, pp. 297-311, 2001.

[5] X. Shen and X. Tian, "Academic Culture and Campus Culture of Universities," *Higher education studies,* vol. 2, no. 2, pp. 61-65, 2012.

[6] M. Chavez, "We say" culture" and students ask" What?": University students' definitions of foreign language culture," *Die Unterrichtspraxis/Teaching German,* vol. 35, no. 2, pp. 129-140, 2002.

[7] D. H. Doan, "Moral education or political education in the Vietnamese educational system?" *Journal of Moral Education,* vol. 34, no. 4, pp. 451-463, 2005.

[8] N. T. Nguyen and L. T. Tran, *Reforming Vietnamese higher education: Global forces and local demands*. Springer Nature, 2019.

[9] L. H. Pham and G. W. Fry, "Education and economic, political, and social change in Vietnam," *Educational Research for Policy and Practice,* vol. 3, no. 3, pp. 199-222, 2004.

[10] S. T. Nguyen and H. V. Vu, "Vietnamese cultural identity in the process of international integration," *Journal of Advances in Education and Philosophy,* vol. 4, no. 6, pp. 220-225, 2020.

[11] K. T. Pham, "A survey on the current status of the students' behavioral culture in College of Information and Communication Technology-TNU," *TNU Journal of Science and Technology,* vol. 121, no. 07, pp. 181-186, 2014.

[12] T. B. L. Ngo, "Reception of Western civilization in Japanese Minh Tri: Solutions for cultural-educational change in Vietnam," *CTU Journal of Innovation and Sustainable Development,* vol. 44c, pp. 23-29, 2016.

[13] D. Q. Nguyen and T. N. H. Nguyen, "Researching school behavior culture and instruction of school behavior culture," *Vietnam Journal of Educational Sciences,* no. 2, pp. 13-17, 2018.

[14] C. H. Tran, "The role of school culture in brand building: A case study of Nha Trang National College of Pedagogy," *Journal of educational equipment: Applied research,* vol. 2, no. 289, pp. 103-105, 2023.

[15] A. D. F. C. Raeff, V. Reddy, and M. F. Mascolo, "The concept of culture: Introduction to spotlight series on conceptualizing culture," *Applied Developmental Science,* vol. 24, no. 4, pp. 295-298, 2020, doi: 10.1080/10888691.2020.1789344.