

# Student Mobility in Southeast Asia

## The Case of Cambodia

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**By**

**You Virak**

Deputy Director  
Department of Higher Education  
Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport  
Kingdom of Cambodia  
virakyou@gmail.com

# The Regional Seminar on Student Mobility in Southeast Asia: Country Paper on Student Mobility in Cambodia

You Virak

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## 1. Introduction

For nearly a hundred years, Cambodia was colonized by France (1863-1953). After the colonial period, Cambodia, as other colonial countries, established its own independent education system for the needs of society. Specifically, in order to meet the needs of social and economic growth, a higher education system in this country was formed in the 1940s and developed remarkably in the 1960s.

Tragically, the development of Cambodian education had declined since 1970 when the civil war started. All schools and universities were closed during the Khmer Rouge regime (1975-1979). However, schools and higher education institutions (HEIs) were opened to serve the needs of the country after the genocidal regime. The Royal Government of Cambodia (RGC) has been trying to develop its human resources in order to accelerate the social and economic development, reconstruct the country and integrate it into the regional and global community. The current stage of development of education is still an early stage compared with its neighbors, Southeast Asian countries. On one hand, the RGC and international community are working together to achieve the Education For All goals by 2015. On the other, the Government are doing reform and developing higher education to improve the quality of higher education, because Cambodia needs its young generation - the graduates from higher education institutions - to be equipped with new skills, knowledge, but also good attitude and ideal. In the late 1990s, the *privatization in higher education* sub-sector has arisen. A number of the *private higher education institutions* has grown rapidly since 2000. Consequently, the 3 policies in education – equitable access, quality and efficiency, institutional development - has been adopted in the educational strategic plan in 2006-2010. Starting from this, over the past 5 years there has been considerable change in exchange practices for both the faculty member and student exchange programmes between HEIs within the country and HEIs outside the country through academic development and cooperation, agreement or memorandum of understanding. This exchange is actually, not only a reflection of strengthening higher education management and quality improvement, but also a reflection of massification in higher education, investment in higher education and greater mobility of students in higher education.

## 2- Cambodian Educational System in Brief

Cambodian educational system has been continuously reformed due to the changes of political regimes as well as socio-economy. Since the academic year 1996 – 1997, it has required the duration of 12 years to complete primary and secondary educational programs - 6 years for primary educational program and another 6 years for secondary educational program. For those who hold secondary school certificates (Bac II) or equivalent certificates can submit their application forms in order to take an entrance examination to study at higher educational institutions.

**Primary education** - the first level (1st Phumaseksar) is the first educational program of the educational system in Cambodia. Children who are 6 years old up are eligible for this type of education. The duration of primary education is 6 years – starting from the first grade until the sixth grade.

**Secondary Education** - the second level (2nd Phumaseksar) lasts 6 years divided into lower secondary (first cycle of Grades 7 – 9) and upper secondary (Second cycle of grade 10 – 12). At the end of Grade 9 pupils take a national examination leading to a Diploma of lower secondary education; and at the end of Grade 12 students take a national examination leading to a Diploma of upper secondary education.

**Higher Education** - the third level (3rd Phumaseksar) of education is the education following the secondary education in higher educational institutions. Learners in higher education shall be taught to have complete personality and characteristic; and higher education shall promote the scientific, technical, cultural and social researches in order to achieve capacity, knowledge, skill, morality, inventive and creative ideas and enterprise spirit to the development of the country.

**Technical and vocational education and training** cover all professions and skills provided by public and private technical and vocational education and training institutions, enterprises, communities, family or in co-operation between technical and vocational education and training institutions and enterprises and/or communities and family (Law on Education, 2007).

### 3. Current Higher Education System

At present, there are 70 HEIs (in category as institute and university) in Cambodia. They are located in 19 provinces/city (of a total of 24 provinces/city). Thirty of them are public HEIs. By international comparison, most HEIs are small, with narrow academic and resource bases, highlighting issues of efficiency, quality, and coherent system development. These universities and institutes are supervised by ten different Ministries (Statistics of HEIs, August, 2009).

Total enrolment (undergraduate students) in both public and private HEIs has increased dramatically from 25,080 in 2000-2001 to 75,523 in 2004-2005. The total enrolment (including degrees of Associate, Bachelor, Master and PhD) is 131,639 in 2007-2008 academic year; while females make up 33.68% of all students. In addition in 2007-2008 academic year, there are 15,744 of Associate degree students; 105,931 of Bachelor degree students; 10,365 of Master degree students and 844 of PhD degree students, (DoHE, 2007-2008).

In particular, in this academic year 2008-2009 the total enrolment (including degrees of Associate, Bachelor, Master and PhD) is 131.843, while females make up around 35% of all students. In addition in 2008-2009 academic year, there are 16.991 of Associate degree students; 122.011 of Bachelor degree students; 11.977 of Master degree students and 864 of PhD degree students, (DoHE, 2008-2009).

Comparing the total enrolment in academic year 2003-2004 with the year 2008-2009 is summarized in the table below:

Degree	2003-2004		2008-2009	
	Total	Female	Total	Female
<b>Doctoral</b>	8	13%	864	6%
<b>Master</b>	1,448	12%	11.977	16%

<b>Bachelor</b>	44,855	31.3%	122.011	33%
<b>Associate</b>	11,517	25.3%	16.991	30%
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>57,828</b>	<b>29.6%</b>	<b>131.843</b>	<b>35%</b>

#### **4- Background of Student Mobility Activity in Higher Education**

Student mobility activity in higher education in Cambodia has been concerning with the many historical aspects of its establishment, reforming, restructuring, rehabilitation and development in higher education. The student mobility activities have been observed in the following 3 stages:

- (1)- student mobility activity in years 1979 – 1989 in the period of establishment and rehabilitation in higher education
- (2)- student mobility activity in years 1989 – 1999 in the period of reforming, restructuring and development in higher education
- (3)- student mobility activity in years 1999- 2009 in the period of development and quality improvement in higher education

##### **4-1- Student mobility activity in years 1979 – 1989 in the period of establishment and rehabilitation in higher education**

It was aware that the development of Cambodian higher education subsequently declined since 1970 when the civil war started. All schools and universities were closed during the Khmer Rouge (1975-1979). Cambodian higher education institutions (HEIs) were either reestablished or established after the Khmer Rouge regime. Seven public higher education institutions were reestablished throughout the 1980s and one provincial Maharishi Vedic University (at present, the Chear-Sim-Kamchaymear university) was founded in the early 1990s. These higher education institutions have provided for instruction in the fields of agriculture, medicine, economics, business, engineering, sciences, social sciences, arts and culture.

The 7 public HEIs are as follows:

- 1- The Royal University of Phnom Penh
- 2- The Royal University of Agriculture
- 3- The Royal University of Fine Arts
- 4- The Institute of Technology of Cambodia
- 5- The Faculty of Medicine, Pharmacy and Dentistry (at present namely University of Health Sciences)
- 6- The Faculty of Business (at present, the National University of Management)
- 7- The Faculty of Law and Economics (at present, the Royal University of Law and Economics).

The student enrollment to the above HEIs at that time was very limited by HEIs; and the number of student recruitment set by the parent ministries through mechanism of national entrance university examination. It was recognized that the country was lack of recourses in both human and financial. The RGC, as well as the Ministry of Education was trying to send its students (ss)

to study further through the agreement and/or cooperation between the countries by scholarship programmes, especially to the block of former socialist countries such as Bulgaria (159ss), Cuba (60ss), Czech Republic (300ss), East Germany (1,179ss), Hungary (191ss), Laos (25ss), Mongolia (30ss), Poland (80ss), Russia (3,730ss) and Vietnam (751ss). Students, who hold the lower secondary school certificate, could study further leading to diploma in technical / professional education; while students, who hold the upper secondary school certificate, could study further leading to diploma in higher education. The total number of sent students during 10 years (1979-1989) is 6,509ss (Female=1,426ss). It was rarely to see Cambodian students sent to other western countries or even fee-paying privately. The students, who had not received the scholarship to study abroad, had to take the national entrance university examination to study at the 7 HEIs. If they were failed in this examination, consequently, they had to take the national entrance technical education and vocational training (TVET) institutions examination; if they were failed this opportunity, they had no schools to study and would go into the work world without any skills and qualifications. It was emphasized that the graduates, holding the diploma in higher education in the country (approximately around 1,000ss in every promotion) and outside the country at that time till 1994, were expected to work automatically in the government organizations.

The student mobility was not dynamic, because of no transfer credit system. The curricula in higher education were not flexible and diversified. It was developed in module, block or/and semester system, not the credit one. For instance, students could not move or change their specialization from one school/department to the other school/department in the same field of social science faculty from the same institution. If students in year 2 failed one or two or three subjects, they could not go to year 3, but had to repeat year 2 and had to study and took the examination on all subjects, that they already passed in year 2. If students were excluded from the university list, for example, in year 2, they had no opportunity to save credits that they studied before or earned credits for further education; on the contrary, they had to study again from year 1.

#### **4-2- Student mobility activity in years 1989 – 1999 in the period of reforming, restructuring and development in higher education**

The changing and evolution in social-economy development reflect the changing and reforming in higher education. The development and reforming in higher education system promote the greater mobility of students in order to produce qualified human resources. As since 1989 Cambodia has transferred its central planned economy to a market-oriented economy, responding to the economic growth, the reform higher education plays a very important role in producing qualified human resources. On the other, rebuilding the country and developing a national economy have been seriously drawn attention since 1998 when Cambodia became a ASEAN Member. Therefore, promoting student mobility through many aspects of academic development in HEIs is no exception. To improve HE quality and effectiveness, national and institutional decision-makers should pay attention to academic administration, programme exchange and cooperation in both institutional and ministerial levels, in particular, institutional management becoming autonomy generating incomes, curriculum development into the credit system and relevancy, faculty development, student development, as well as promoting student mobility activity by introducing fee education (1995), privatization in higher education (1996) and private HEIs (1997). Especially, the RGC has not been able to assure the work place in the government sectors anymore. All of these factors could mobilize and diversify different sources to promote student activity and student mobility in Cambodian massification context of higher education.

According to these changes, the enrolment in higher education dramatically increased in the country; but the number of Cambodian students in the framework of cooperation or agreement was dramatically reduced. During these 10 years, there has been many countries providing

scholarship to Cambodian students in such as Australia (112ss), Canada (24ss), Czech Republic (22ss), France (32ss), Germany (148ss), Hungary (4ss), Indonesia (20ss), Japan (142ss), Laos (10ss), Poland (12ss), Russia (769ss), Thailand (34ss) and USA (30ss) and Vietnam (797ss). Some of these students also have been able go to study abroad through counseling or advisement office in HEIs by paying tuition fee and other fee by themselves. Therefore, the total number of sent students during 10 years (1989-1999) is 2,170ss (Female=187ss). Together with sending students to study abroad, there have been not many foreign students studying in Cambodia, and in particular, most of them had come in program exchange or internship; while some foreign faculty came for volunteer to teach or to have experiences in teaching in some academic programmes in HEIs.

#### **4-3- Student mobility activity in years 1999- 2009 in the period of development and quality improvement in higher education**

Higher education development in Cambodia has undergone many stages and many aspects of the reform in order to create more greater mobility of learners, widening and equity access and choices, academic and research collaboration to develop capacity of staff and institutions as well as to improve the quality and efficiency in higher education system as a whole.

It is aware that the number of HEIs in Cambodia has been increased significantly since 2002 due to massification of higher education and the market needs. However, the educational system and service quality provision in higher education sectors are still limited to promote student mobility activity. On the other, there is no comprehensive qualification framework/s and standards, being consistent with each other among HEIs, which are under the supervision of the ten different ministries, their parent. That is why, it needs to strengthen and assure the education quality by developing the qualification framework and consistent minimum standards and other necessary mechanisms.

It is significant that the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport (MoEYS) always has taken into account reform and development of higher education, in particular, administering and improving higher education quality in the country (so called now as the internal quality assurance in higher education) before and after the period of privatization in Cambodian higher education and occurring private HEIs in Cambodia. However, the MoEYS has continued and done several main aspects of quiet reform in higher education without external support/loans. The system of higher education management in the university and ministry/national levels must be developed, such as:

- (1)- privatization in higher education by introducing fee education in public HEIs (1996);
- (2)- private HEIs as public and private partnership (1997);
- (3)- using grade 12 exam results to admit freshmen in HEIs instead of national university exams (2002),
- (4)- curriculum development, changing from semester and module/block system into the credit one (since 2000), including foundation year in year 1 of Bachelor Degree Programme (since 2005-2006 academic year);
- (5)- providing autonomy to universities as called Public Administration Institution to generate more income, transparency and accountability,
- (6)- facilitating for HEIs capacity development;

- (7)- setting norms/standards on criteria for university establishment;
- (8)- proposing to establish the accreditation institution, called the Accreditation Commission of Cambodia (ACC)
- (9)- create quality assurance unit (2004) in every HEIs to do self- assessment as a part in the internal quality assurance that can help in preparing them to obtain accreditation from the ACC,
- (10)- develop and achieve Mid-Term Review of Educational Strategic Plan (2006 - 2010), endorsed by the RGC, highlighting on ensuring equitable access to education; improving quality and efficiency of education service, and Institutional development and capacity building.
- (11)- propose to establish the Law on Education (2007) comes into forces and the educational institutions (including HEIs), which are permanently operating with violations of this law, shall prepare the necessary documents on adjustments for the Ministry in charge of Education within a period of 2 (two years), the MoEYS, therefore, has to prepare and develop such many legal norms/regulations, related to internal quality assurance in higher education.

According to the above reform and framework of higher education in Cambodia, there has been more cooperation at the national level and HEIs level in promoting research collaboration, staff development, staff exchange programmes and student mobility in HEIs are evident.

Over the past 10 years in the framework of cooperation or MoU and agreement with many countries, the MoEYS has been engaged in human resource development through sending Cambodian students (around 2,800ss, female=15,47%) to study in 24 countries (see in the separate table).

Through the other channel, the HEIs themselves have been able to do the cooperation or MoU within and among HEIs in and outside the country, especially in developing academic programmes, staff/students development/exchange, in sending their students to study abroad and opening the door to the foreign learners come to study, as well.

For instance, in 1999 the Royal University of Phnom Penh (RUPP) not only is member of the ASEAN University Network (AUN), but also joins with the international linkages. The RUPP has a strong international focus. It has signed MoU with many international universities. These MoU provide academic cooperation between universities, including staff and student exchange and curriculum development assistance (see more details in separate table of RUPP). Teaching staff of the RUPP has been sent to study abroad leading to Master or Ph. D programs in science and technology, social science and humanity, and applied languages; while the graduate from Bachelor degree programs might consult with the RUPP Academic Advising Center who can assist students to looking for information on further study or to apply for oversee. In this case, students might receive scholarship from the partner university/ies or students might pay the tuition fee by their own. In this cooperation channel, for example in year 2007-2008, there has been also 74 international students from Vietnam (47ss), Laos (22ss), Korea (4ss) and Japan (1s).

In the other case has been student mobility of the Institute of Technology of Cambodia (ITC). The ITC trains technicians and engineers for contribution to the development of Cambodia. Engineers follows a 5-years training program. Selection of students is based on the results of written examination. An international entrance examination has been designed for South-

Eastern Asian French-speaking applicants in order to be admitted into engineering studies. While a 3-years training program must be completed to obtain the degree of high level technician. The selection process is by written application and based on school records. Students with the highest score achievement will be selected to continue for the engineering program.

There are several training fields by following departments/schools in the ITC:

- (1)- Food Technology and Chemical Engineering
- (2)- Civil Engineering
- (3)- Electrical and Energy Engineering
- (4)- Information and Communication Engineering
- (5)- Industrial and Mechanical Engineering
- (6)- Rural Engineering.

The ITC has done cooperative agreements with European, regional and local universities, which help to improve the quality of the educational program, create new degrees, develop new knowledge, and enable collaboration in new research projects and mobility of teachers and students.

Nowadays, ITC is at the crossroads in South Eastern Asia Region where several partners meet:

- (1)- French cooperation,
- (2)- L'Agence Universitaire de Francophonie (AUF),
- (3)- La Communauté Française de Belgique (CUD),
- (4)- AUN/SEED-Net/JICA, and
- (5)- GSARN.

However, the enrollment of the freshmen year 1 is still small number around 70ss (the scholarship/non-fee-paying students = 20ss, and fee-paying students = 50ss ) per new academic year, divided for each 6 departments. So, it needs to increase the numbers, also resource.

According to the tracer study by the ITC in 2007-2008, it is recognized that most of the graduates around 70ss from the ITC have good jobs. Only 2% of them have no jobs, because the jobs are not matching their skills. 52% have jobs in Phnom Penh, 12% have jobs in provinces, while 34% have been continuing further study abroad, especially in the master degree in year2 by the AUF institutions in accordance with the already recognized program each other. However, they have to go into the master degree in year 1 by Anglophone institutions, as usual.

## **5- The Future Roadmap for Enhancing Student Flow and Mobility in Cambodia**

Recently, it is aware that there are many Cambodian students, who have diploma of upper secondary school certificate, go to study abroad in the region in Southeast Asian countries,

Australia and the United State, through receiving scholarship or by spending their own money. Many students try to obtain first degree at home country, and then go cross border to study to get post-graduate diploma. Students understand that foreign study is making big investment in their own careers. That is why, the government tries to promote and enhance its higher education system to be better with quality and to retain the students to study in country with a certain level of student population.

On one hand, increasing mobility of students might bring positive benefits to students and to the country, as well. Students might gain new knowledge, science, skills, practices and culture. When they come back to the country, they are valuable human resource of revenue and talent. On the other hand, it might bring negative consequences, too. Many Cambodian students studying abroad do not return to the home country. It has been happened not only in universities but also ministries. This brain drain might have devastating impact on local economies. However, it is aware that increasing mobility of students can help and bring positive benefits to the country and to investment of human capital of the country.

Another problem in student mobility is usually raised that students are not ready to the international programs, particularly students must be overcome the barriers to language and communication.

It is recommended to recognition of the academic programs, transfer credit system in the specific qualification framework within the country and among the region countries; therefore quality assurance is the important measure to adjust the programs to promote student mobility in Cambodia. It means that Cambodian students, for example in 4 years Bachelor Degree programs, can study in 2 years in Cambodia, while the other 2 years can finish in the other countries in the region.

It is the same in work world; it means that today Cambodian graduates are difficult to be recruited by employment institution in other country. So, it is suggested that in the future the graduates from Cambodia or another country can be recruited by employment institution in any country in the region.

Promoting student mobility might enhance the collaboration in staff development to strengthen institutional capacity in Cambodian HEIs, the functioning of university – teaching and learning, serving to communities, doing research through collaboration in creating or developing new knowledge.

## **6- Conclusion**

The system of higher education in Cambodia is 30 years old, because it was reborn in the 1980s and has expanded greatly since the 2000s and in the today fast changing global higher education of the 21st century. It is recognized that higher education in Cambodia cannot be far away from the change, evolution and development. It is required to be adopted in the system and to improve the quality of higher education. Cambodia needs its young generation - the graduates from higher education institutions - to be equipped with new skills, knowledge, but also good attitude and ideal, provided of cause by HEIs with more equitable access, quality and efficiency, more mobility and more collaboration to promote investment of human capital.

*Thank you*

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