

A Convergence Comparative Study on Perception toward Technical Vocational Education Training (TVET) and General Higher Education in Cambodia

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캄보디아의 일반고등교육 (GHE)과 직업기술교육훈련 (TVET)에 대한 인식차이 비교 융복합 연구

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Abstract The purpose of this study is to explore the perception to Technical Vocational Education and Training (TVET) and General Higher Education (GHE) of students, teachers and TVET institutes' directors in Cambodia. As a research method, the study conducted the focus group discussions at Regional Technical Centers in the five representative regions from May to June in 2019. The result was TVET graduates have better chance with linkage in the labour market than GHE graduates through skill-focused curriculum and public private partnership between institutions and enterprises in Cambodia. The study recommend to implement a national strategy to improve the status and awareness of technical skills related jobs and the career pathways for the technical skill level courses.

Key Words : Technical Vocational Education Training, General Higher Education, Regional Study, Labor Market, Employment Rate

요약 이 연구의 목적은 캄보디아의 학생, 교사 및 TVET 기관장들의 직업기술 교육훈련 (TVET)과 일반 고등교육 (GHE)에 대한 인식을 비교 분석하는 것이다. 연구 방법으로는 캄보디아 5개 대표 지역의 TVET 교육기관 등에서 15명의 직업기술 교육훈련 학생, 교사, 기관장들을 대상으로 포커스 그룹 토론을 진행하였다. 그 결과 TVET 졸업생은 캄보디아의 기관과 기업 간의 공공 민간 파트너십과 기술 중심의 커리큘럼을 통해 GHE 졸업생보다 노동 시장에서 더 나은 기회를 얻고 있음을 확인할 수 있었다. 이러한 연구 결과는 캄보디아 직업기술 교육훈련 과정을 담당하고 있는 캄보디아 고용노동부가 국가 차원에서 직업기술훈련 분야로 유인할 수 있는 정책과 직업기술훈련 분야 취업과 진로를 확산하고 개선하기 위한 국가전략을 세워 추진해야 함을 권장한다.

주제어 : 직업기술 교육훈련, 일반고등교육, 지역연구, 노동시장, 취업률

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1. Introduction

Technical Vocational Education and Training (TVET) issues have received much attention this past decade and TVET topics have been the focus at global forums organized by the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), the Organization for Economic and Cultural Development (OECD), and the International Labor Organization (ILO). Major world reports related to TVET have been released to document these discussions on the future direction of the vocational education sector. While TVET discussions in OECD countries have covered various topics ranging from shortages of skilled workers (Australia, Portugal, Spain), retention and completion rates at the secondary level (U.S. England, Denmark), to regional imbalances in development (Germany and Korea), in emerging and less-developed countries TVET discussions have focused on improving economic growth and competitiveness and addressing issues around social exclusion and equity[1], [2,3].

TVET plays a crucial role in social-economic development of any nation [4]. Educated and skilled people spur the economic growth and development. Scholars agreed that TVET deliver core skills (i.e. entrepreneurial, communication, financial and leadership) and increased employment opportunities (including wage employment and self-employment).

Woodhall (2004) describes rate of return as a systematic comparison of the magnitude of the costs and benefits in any form of investment. In fact, it is one of the methods used in Cost Benefit Analysis (CBA) to determine the viability of an investment. It is agreed that education is an investment in human capital. CBA tends to consider investment alternatives that can be valued in monetary terms [5]. In this case, the current study sought to find out the degree of profitability in investing in different levels of

technical education (TE) in Cambodia by systematically comparing the extent of costs and benefits of technical skilled workers.

Rate of return analysis has been a basis to assess the economic profitability in education sector internationally[5] but with limited attention to the technical sub-sector of education. It was observed that most studies tend to focus on the rate of return to general academic education (primary, secondary and university), with very little attention being paid to the Private Rates of Return (PRR) to various levels of TE. Equally, it is underscored that both scientists and practitioners have so far neglected the economics of TVET while the need for rigorous studies on the economic returns to vocational education to guide on policies in Southeast Asia. However, the area has been under-researched in Cambodia. This study gave focus to the monetary returns to technical skilled workers who are the TVET graduates[6,7].

Cambodia faces unique challenges in building the skills capacity of the Cambodian people to participate in the twenty first century labor market. Because there is a short history of development, starting after the restoration of complete peace in 1998, a great deal of effort is needed to catch up with fast-developing world. A review of the Royal Government of Cambodia's social and economic long-term policy indicates a commitment for skills development to support the national economic development framework. This is detailed in the Rectangular Strategy (RS) Phase III and the five-year National Strategic Development Plan 2014-2018. In broad terms, the socio-economic goal of the RGC is to transition Cambodia from its current Least Developed Country (LDC) status to a lower-middle income country status by 2018 and then progress to an upper-middle income country by 2030 and a developed country by 2050. In order to achieve this goal, the RGC understands the importance of the development

of high-quality, skilled and capable human resources in order to meet the immediate and long-term needs of economic growth and socio-economic development.

In the light of the current expansions envisioned for TVET in Cambodia, some critical questions have been raised:

- Does participation in TVET in secondary school improve future educational and labor market outcomes?

There has been no published research from Cambodia that has adequately addressed the above questions. Further, the evidence from other developing countries has been largely missing in the case of determinants of participation or ambiguous in the case of TVET returns and impact of secondary TVET. This study addresses some of the gaps in TVET research in Cambodia using primary data collected in the form of key informant interviews among teachers in the selected regions of the country.

2. Literature Review

There are two strands to the argument on the benefits of TVET school enrolment relative to those of GHE: optimism and pessimism. Krueger and Kumar (2004a, 2004b) explain the differential growth between the US and the EU in their policies that focus on enhancing general and vocational education, respectively. They find that economic growth in the EU is slower than that in the US due to the focus of EU policy on vocational education and training. They also find that vocational policies might have been beneficial for Europe in the 1960s and 1970s when technological changes were slow and not common. The policies are thus less beneficial in an era of fast-changing technological progress. [8,9]

In Indonesia's case, Chen (2009) finds no

statistically significant differences on labor market outcomes of TVET students compared to GHE ones. The author moreover demonstrates that attendance levels in TVET schools resulted in lower academic achievement as measured by national test scores. Using a panel Dataset of 10,000 TVET students majoring in computer science in two Chinese provinces, Loyalka et al. (2016) find that: (1) students in vocational high schools and training programs perform poorer in mathematics as well as computing skills compared to those in general (academic-focused) high schools; and (2) students in vocational high schools have a higher probability of dropping out, particularly among disadvantaged students from low income backgrounds and/or with low ability. The authors conclude that the rapid expansion of TVETs at the expense of general high schools might have negative impacts on human capital development in developing countries such as China.

Vocational education and training go by various names, such as career and technical education, technical education, vocational education/training, skill development, and technical and vocational education and training. Across advanced and developing economies, vocational education and/or training programs are offered at various types of institutions, including schools, colleges, public and private vocational institutions, on the job, and at informal settings like the home or community [10,11].

Moreover, they are offered at various levels within the education system. The United Nations Institute of Statistics (UN-UIS; 2006) has identified students at four different levels of the International Standard Classification of Education – from level 2, which corresponds to lower secondary education, up to level 5, which corresponds to the first cycle of higher education [12,13].

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Generally, Cambodia has a strong institutional and policy environment for business. This has been, and remains, an important driver of the economy's sustained growth. The government's most recent and most important policy is the Industrial Development Policy 2015-2025 (IDP). This is the government's "new economic growth strategy." The policy aims for a structural transformation of the economy, from low-skilled to a skill-based and technology and knowledge-based economy. The policy is broad and ambitious but important if Cambodia's private sector is to continue growing. The IDP also changes the role of some government agencies, with the Council for the Development of Cambodia being strengthened and expanded. The IDP's success depends on appropriate implementation of its most important actions, some of which are discussed below[17].

In 2015, the government launched a National Policy on Technical and Vocational Education and Training (2015- 2030) with four pillars—two of which focus on addressing the need to increase skilled labor and to tackle persistent skills mismatch. The government has also designated June of the year as the National TVET's Day to celebrate its importance and relevance to the national education strategy. Development partners are also supportive in

providing technical and financial assistance to beef up skills development[18].

TVET is even more relevant in achieving the targets set out in the Industrial Development Plan (2015-2025). Specifically, the government aims to increase the share of the industrial sector to 30 percent by 2025 from 24.1 percent in 2013, with the manufacturing sector growing from 15.5 percent in 2013 to 20 percent in 2025. This expansion would require a stable supply of medium and high skilled labor. Other targets include (1) increasing exports of non-textile goods to 15 percent of total exports by 2025 while still promoting exports of processed agricultural products to reach 12 percent of total exports by the same year (2) encouraging the formal registration of 80 percent of small enterprises and 95 percent of medium enterprises and to ensure that 50 percent of small enterprises and 70 percent of medium enterprises have proper accounts and balance sheets.

There has been relatively little academic debate and research on TVET policy and practice, not only in Cambodia, but also in other developing countries. The research from developing countries is scant and what is available tends to be narrowly focused on employability of TVET graduates. Moreover, studies do not articulate an explicit theory of action that explains how a vocational program should work and the impact it should have. In developed and developing countries alike, the research has tended to ignore issues of who is served by TVET programs and whether reforms reach the target groups that they purport to serve.

3. Research Samples and Methods

The purpose of this study is to discover the opinions and perceptions of Cambodians (i.e. students, teachers, and school directors)

regarding the Cambodian government’s limited level of support to TVET schools and programs. The study was carried out in the selected TVET institutions within Cambodia. The listings below were list of study locations based on consultations with concerned institutions and authority to conduct the survey has been obtained from the municipalities concerned:

Study locations are presented in Fig. 1 where Five Regional Training Center Clustering (RTC Clustering) are located. Regional Polytechnic Institute Techno Battambang Province (RPITSB); Takeo – Regional Polytechnic Institute Techno Sen Takeo (RPITST); Kampot – Regional Polytechnic Institute Techno Sen Kampot (RPITSK), Svay Rieng – Regional Polytechnic Institute Sen Svay Rieng (RPITSSR), Siem Reap – Polytechnic Institute Techno Sen Siem Reap (RPITSSR).

It is important to know that representative of a particular area or industry where the RTCs are located in the region. Most of the large enterprises are foreign owned and relying on

international markets for the products and service with a detailed description of large enterprises by location.

Number of participants and the specific study location for the Focus Group Discussion is described in Table 1 and the FGDs have been conducted in five RTCs with the total of 15 students, teachers and directors

Table 1. Focus Group Discussions in the Region

Focus Group Discussions	
Technical Teachers at Battambang RTC	5
Technical Teachers at Siem Reap RTC	5
Technical Teachers at Takeo RTC	5
Technical Teachers at Kampot RTC	5
Technical Teachers at Svay Rieng RTC	5
Total	15

In the qualitative analysis, the study tried to answer the question: What is the position of technical, vocational, education, and training (TVET) graduates and their skills within the labor market? The result has been described in the next part of the paper.

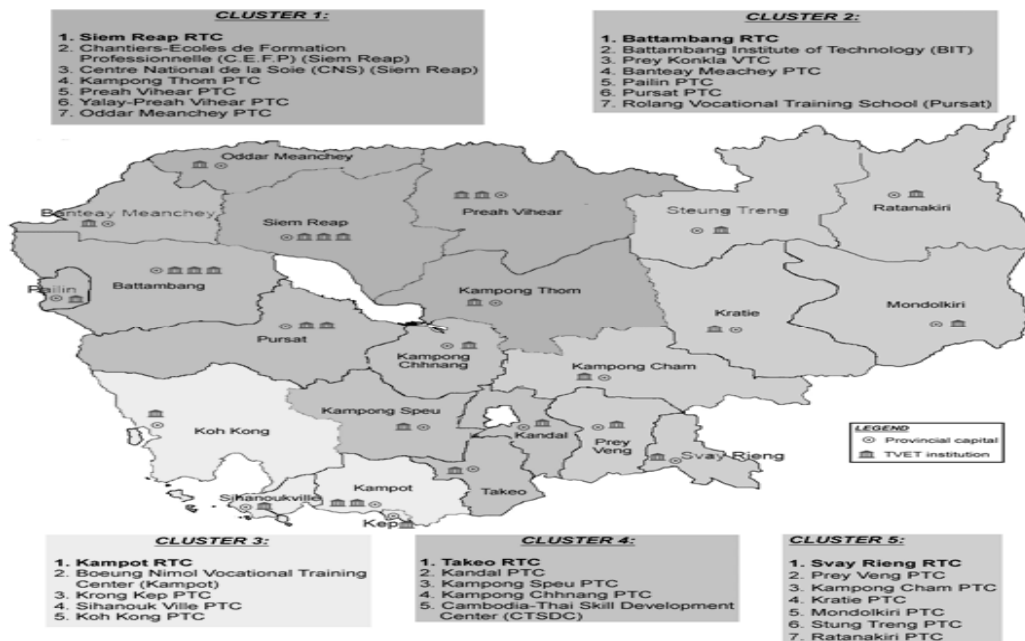


Fig. 1. Study Location of RTCs Clustering

4. Results and Discussion

4.1 Perception of TVET institution's Directors and Technical Teachers

The below are the main results and findings extracted from qualitative data gathered in focus group discussions with TVET Institution's Directors and technical teachers.

The results indicated that the low level of satisfaction among TVET institution's directors and teachers towards the improvement of TVET institutions due to weaknesses in TVET educational curriculum and equipment to match latest technology and teachers' skills are still limited with no experience from big enterprises. And, through FGDs with the director and technical teacher raised that the number of

women's enrolment in TVET is still low compared to previous years. This implies that the demand of female students attending technical skills are still very flow. In this context, based on a TVET institutions directors and teachers perspectives, there are many obstacles acting as a deterrent to female student joining TVET schools which include public's negative stereotype and perception on TVET, lack of financial means, fear of parents towards sending their daughters to TVET institution especially to those who stay far away from TVET institution and TTIs also do not have dormitory.

Additionally, technical teacher and directors of TVET institutions have expressed their dissatisfaction with the link between their own TTIs and private sector as well as the labor market. Although the TTIs have established an industry liaison but the capacity of their staffs were limited in making relationship with private sector and the labor market. At the same time, TVET institutions are not adapting the labor market's latest rapid technology updates. This in result created gaps between TVET institutions and labor market needs.

Furthermore, technical teachers have different perceptions on the adequacy of study period; a number of them have indicated that two years of study period is adequate in the level of Diploma of Cambodia Qualification Framework (CQF) while others believed that the study period is inadequate for student who will go directly to labor market.

This study was noted that there was high interest among technical teachers to enhance their professional skills through participating in Return to Industry Program which will be supported in Skill for Competitiveness Program Under ADB Loan.

At the conclusion of the focus group discussion, the researchers noted that the directors of TVET institutions were dissatisfied with the budget allocation to support TVET institutions due to the funding provided by the Ministry of Economy and Finance remained limited. However, TVET has attempted to collect some funding through a number of projects from development partners. According to the results mentioned above, TVET institutions are currently facing financial challenges to promote TVET programs. Through the focus group discussion with directors raised that the encouraging students is playing an important role in attracting students to participate in TVET. These incentives include scholarships, providing free accommodation and other allowances.

4.2 School to Work Transition between TVET graduates and GHE students

TVET graduates have higher chance of landing a job immediately after graduation. The qualitative data gathered from the FGDs reveals that about 92 percent of TVET graduates majoring in civil engineering, electricity, and automobile were able to successfully land their first paid job as soon as they graduated, while the remaining obtained theirs in the last

semester of their senior year. For example, when asked when and how he obtained his first paid job, a TVET C1 graduate explains:

“My first paid job was with a company installing electrical and Internet distribution systems in buildings in Phnom Penh. I got the job right after I graduated through one of my trainers’ recommendation.”

The claims are different for GHE graduates majoring in Accounting and IT. GHE graduates need more time and more attempts in securing their first paid job. It is worth noting that, most TVET graduates indicate that they have had an internship placement of at least three months during their TVET studies. The internship placement is mandatory for students in some TVETs, especially in the provinces. Most compulsory internship placements are arranged for by the TVETs, however TVET students are also free to look for their own internship opportunities. On the contrary, undertaking an internship placement is not always the case for GHE graduates. Only around 20 percent of the interviewed GHE graduates claim to have looked for and/or undertaken internship placements during their studies at university.

The data further indicates that the modes of finding and securing jobs between these two groups are distinctive. GHE bachelor’s degree graduates have mention that during the FGD:

“I had applied for a few job openings before I got this first job. I learnt about this first job opening through a job website and submitted my CV and cover letter. I waited for three weeks before hearing from the company that I was shortlisted and invited to take a writing test. After the results of the test came out, I was again asked to come in for an interview,” (GHE bachelor’s degree graduate of FGD).

As highlighted in the quote, GHE graduates

normally go through common and formal channels and procedures for job hunting and recruitment. The participants in this group similarly report that the process includes surfing the web, social media, and/or newspapers for a job opening; submitting a curriculum vitae (CV) and cover letter; and going through interviews/tests. In contrast, TVET graduates generally obtain their jobs through less formal procedures. They look for jobs through their social connections: friends, classmates, alumni, and/or trainers, as illustrated in the following quote.

“One of my final- year trainers asked if I was interested in working with his friend’s company since I was about to graduate. I said ‘yes’ and then he put me in touch with the company’s manager,” said a TVET bachelor’s degree graduate during FGD.

The results of the FGD also suggests that the available job opportunities for TVET graduates are less competitive compared to those for GHE graduates. This result reflects the findings of the National Employment Agency (2018a), that opportunities for technical skill positions are expected to increase while their competitiveness is predicted to be low. The current study also finds that the majority of TVET graduates obtained a job most suited to their graduated skills, whereas only about 60 percent of GHE graduates reported working in a profession most suited to their degree major.

The findings could be explained by the fact that the construction sector and automobile usage have grown rapidly in Cambodia. As a result, the demands for technical skilled workers in civil engineering, electricity, and automobile mechanics has also increased, and is expected to do so over the next five years. In contrast, the market demands for GHE graduates majoring in accounting and IT have not grown at the same pace. As earlier mentioned in the quantitative

section, the number of students graduating from TVETs is generally lower compared to those from graduating from GHE institutions due to their vast differences in enrolment intake. This low supply of TVET graduates creates even more room in the job market for the produced skilled workers. Another explanation could be the willingness of TVET graduates to accept perceived low offers without any negotiation due to their inexperience in job hunting and in interviewing. According to the data, all interviewed TVET graduates, when discussing job benefits, similarly recall accepting their first offers without any negotiation. This is not the case for most of the interviewed GHE graduates, most of whom negotiated for a better offer or rejected any offer lower than their expectations.

The current study also finds that, in fact, with these less- competitive job opportunities, TVETs and their graduates have overlooked the significance of other skills required for job hunting which could limit their career advancement opportunities and negotiations of benefits. According to TVET bachelor's degree graduate during FGD:

"No, we didn't have CV and cover letter writing sessions. [...] At that time, I was so naive as I was focused only on the subjects related to my major, so I found other subjects unrelated to my major boring." (TVET bachelor's degree graduate from FGD).

The data suggests that most TVET graduates have never had proper training on CV and cover letter writing and/or interviewing for various reasons. Firstly, these skills are not part of the training curriculum. Secondly, the graduates either consider these skills as low priority or irrelevant/ unnecessary, with both the interviewed TVET graduates and the TVETs seeming to overlook the need to request for and/or to provide such training. In contrast, there are proper training slots devoted to the

development of these skills at the interviewed GHEs. Although TVET graduates had been willing to accept their first offers, they have reported that they were nevertheless dissatisfied with the offers. Hence, 'job-hunting' and 'interviewing' training would have provided these fresh TVET graduates with knowledge about taboos surrounding the negotiation of benefits and equipped them with the proper skills to negotiate for a better offer.

5. Conclusion

This study is to provide TVET graduates with linkages in the labour market in order to enhance their employability rate through the activities described below.

Organize events which bridge the gap between employers and TVET graduates, especially in TVET's Day in various strategic locations and TVET Institutions across the country. These events bring together in one place the TVET graduates and their prospective employers.

Building partnerships and coordinate with National Employment Agency (NEA) to promote the value and job opportunity of TVET skills. The Job Advisory Centre offers advisory services which enhance the soft skills and technical skills of recent graduates and match them with potential employers.

The entire curriculum should be oriented to the outcomes which closely related to the working standards and education by ensuring that all graduates have the skills they need to compete in rapid changing societies. The development of the new curriculum based on the skills training system may be a good step to mitigate the problem.

The curriculum should be innovative by incorporating information and technology, developing new partnerships (with industry and community) and ensuring that this system is

acceptable and accountable to labour market needed for large industries.

In a nutshell, our findings contribute to the current discussion of the benefits of technical and vocational and training, either as an alternative or as a complementing education strategy in addition to general higher education. The findings of a lack of significant wage differences between TVET and GHE graduates, and a higher chance of landing a job after TVET graduation is encouraging, and somewhat countervailing, due to the perception that TVET is second-tier or second-rank education. Despite this, the challenge ahead for the government and the private sector is to encourage more students into the TVET sector—a tough battle that is worth the fight.

Finally, a more relevant thinking point for policymakers and practitioners is to provide education that allows students to adapt to the changing environment of the working world. This would demand a mixture of skill-specific subjects that equip students with the right skills needed by employers, as well as general skills that allow them to quickly adapt to changes in demand, should their existing skills become obsolete. The latter is even more relevant with the current speed of technological changes—which will affect the wages and employability of both fresh graduates and of the employed.

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Finally, this study has a limitation since it presented qualitative result only which is hard to generalize the result to describe the current context of TVET system in Cambodia as well as general perception toward the TVET from each target groups: institutions' directors, teachers, and students. Further study with the quantitative analysis with the larger samples should be conducted in order to describe the current landscape and issues of Cambodia TVET system.

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