



# Micro-Policy Intervention

CONTEMPORARY POLICY DISCUSSION IN CAMBODIA

# Chapter 12 | Addressing Educational Mismatch in Cambodia through a Digital Platform

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## Executive Summary

While the quality of education has somewhat improved over the last decades, Cambodia still faces many challenges, one of which is educational mismatch. Even though the number of university graduates is growing year by year, the skills and knowledge they obtain do not always match the growing market requirements. This issue arises because of the lack of information regarding jobs and market demands. As a result, students tend to choose the wrong major which is not compatible with their skills.

**Policy Recommendation:** It is recommended that an online digital platform be created where students can find information and advice on choosing an appropriate major at university to help mitigate the problem.

## Introduction

The darkest period of Cambodian history, from 1975-1979, completely destroyed whatever form of education the nation had. However, once peace was achieved, Cambodia saw its education sector improving alongside others. By 2013, there were 207,000 students enrolled in higher education (MoEYS, n.d.). While this achievement is encouraging, it is not perfect. The improvement in education brought unintended consequences, such as educational mismatch—an issue that already exists in the developed countries, and is becoming more evident in Cambodia (Sam, 2018). To prevent

further exacerbation of this problem, a solution needs to be adopted as soon as possible.

The term “educational mismatch” can be defined in many different ways. For instance, Sam (2018) distinguished between horizontal mismatch, which is the mismatch of an individual’s skills obtained through education and the skills needed by employers, and vertical mismatch, which refers to over-education. On the other hand, Allen and van der Valden (2001) identified the terms ‘educational mismatch’ and ‘skill mismatch’ as two different concepts. They stated in their findings that the two things are not necessarily related (Allen & van der Velden, 2001). Most other studies, however, focused more on over-education and its effect on the economy or individuals. Their definition of over-education is quite simple: it means individuals obtaining more education than needed to fulfill the job requirements (Chevalier, 2001; Dolton & Vignoles, 2000; Tsang, 1987). In this paper, the issue of educational mismatch is examined as both skills mismatch and over-education.

### **Background to the Problem: Educational Mismatch and its Consequences**

Educational mismatch is not widely regarded as an issue, especially among Cambodians. However, this problem is not something that should be neglected, as it can bring about various consequences. According to the OECD, the issue of mismatch is critical (OECD, 2009). Also, the assumptions that it is important to secure a match between the features of jobs and individual capital have already been supported (Allen & van der Velden, 2001). Correspondingly, it was found that the number of graduates in the United Kingdom who received too much education in comparison to their jobs was as much as 40% (Chevalier, 2001). Additionally, there is research showing that over-education occurs transnationally (Capsada-Munsech, 2017). These research studies illustrate that educational mismatch is indeed a problem needing attention in a timely manner. The problem exists not only in the United States, the United Kingdom and other developed nations, but also in developing countries such as Cambodia. According to Sam (2018), 35.43% of Cambodians are over-educated, and 33.25% are working in a different field from their education.

Educational mismatch, especially over-education, can impact an individual's status in a social context, produce job dissatisfaction, counterproductive behavior, lower wages, and lower work input, resulting in lower output for firms (Allen & van der Velden, 2001; Capsada-Munsech, 2017; Chevalier, 2001; Dolton & Vignoles, 2000; Sam, 2018; Tsang, 1987). Allen and van der Velden (2001) found that wages are greatly impacted by the educational mismatch; likewise, job satisfaction and on-the-job searches are affected by skill mismatches. Recent graduates may need to spend a lot of money to back to school because of educational mismatch (Dolton & Vignoles, 2000). In the same fashion, a research study by Chevalier (2001) claimed that over-educated graduates' earnings can be 5% to 26% less than well-suited graduates. This was confirmed by Dolton and Vignoles (2000), who demonstrated that vertically mismatched individuals receive less payment than their counterparts. Equally important, an 8.35% decline in production at businesses was found to have been influenced by just one year of excessive education (Tsang, 1987). We can see that educational mismatch impacts many aspects of individuals' performance, not to mention unavoidable effects on the productivity of firms and nations. Therefore, we can say that this problem must be given attention.

## **Micro-Intervention**

### **A) Overview**

One of the addressable aspects of this issue is the lack of information about major selection among high school students. In today's context, the best way to approach youth is through the use of technology; therefore, a software application or website that provides thorough information about university majors should be created to ease the process. Students can then make decisions without exposure to the risks caused by a lack of data.

### **B) Justification**

If neglected, the issue of educational mismatch can lead to harm to individuals, firms, and even countries. Cambodia as a developing nation has begun to face this problem. Therefore, to address this issue in terms of easing the lack of information for high school students before making decisions about their academic journey, a software application should be created to give them a chance to find out more about choosing an appropriate university major.

## C) Implementation

### 1) Structure

The application will be divided into five different platforms: “home”, “search”, “discussion forum”, “profile”, and “setting.”

In the “home” timeline, users can browse to see such content as an article about the university, a video clip, or graph showing data related to a specific major. The content is posted only by the universities. Users can click on a specific University profile from the timeline to see more about each institution, or they can click on a selected major to learn more about it.

Alternatively, users can also search for universities or majors in the “search” platform. If they search for a specific school, they will be shown its profile, which includes the description of the university, and links to different information, such as majors, fees, location, requirements for enrollment, and so on. If searching for a specific major, they will be shown two different links. The first is about the history of the major, specifically how and when it was introduced to Cambodia’s higher education system, and its significance in contributing to the development of the nation. Also, the link will provide the possible career path for graduates who choose this major. It will also show the statistics on the number of students who took this major and their employment rate (if possible). A graph comparing this major to the overall enrollment and employment rates among all majors will be illustrated alongside the table. The second link will provide the users with all the schools that have that particular major in their curriculum, with direct links to the course description of the major, provided by each university.

The next platform is the “discussion forum,” which can only be accessed by students. On this platform, they can post questions about university majors or other concerns and engage with other users who will provide answers. Questions with many replies will be pinned, and a small “search questions” section can be used to enter specific keywords in order to search for questions that have already been asked. This platform allows students to interact with one another and help each other become a better part of society. Also, it lets students get realistic information from those who have already experienced

the university application process. It can also ease students' anxiety over application process for university enrollment or entrance exams because students can ask others about the requirements and where to go to apply for a specific major.

The fourth platform is the users' "profile." Here they can enter personal information, such as their name and schools they have attended. The confidentiality level of this information is set by the users themselves and they can choose whether or not to share it. In addition, their profile will consist of the items they have marked as "favorite," such as articles or videos posted by the universities or questions from the discussion forum. This material can be sorted into different folders, which only they can access, unless they elect to share the link with others. Also, students can access their "history" to find items they posted or searches made from their profiles.

Last is a "setting" icon, where users can adjust their privacy, block what they do not want to see, select themes for their application, choose whether or not to receive notifications, or even remove their accounts, and so on. The setting focuses on two aspects, the first being the application itself, and the second being the content profile of the students.

## 2) The Support

The application will compile the data from different universities in Cambodia. This data may include information such as the location, school facilities, available majors and their fees, statistics about the majors, including number of enrollments and number of graduates, and the possible career path for each major as recommended by the universities. The universities will be likely to provide the data for these reasons: (1) the data is not confidential as it is already available on the school website and other publicly available literature, (2) it is another opportunity to advertise directly to the students, (3) as a fair platform for different universities competing to attract students, they will not want to pass on the opportunity to present themselves among other schools.

In the first few months, universities will be provided their accounts free of charge, as part of an initial pilot program. However, in order to sustain the application financially, monthly fees will eventually be required in order to continue promoting themselves and engaging with students.

### 3) The Audience

The target users of this application are mainly high school students, specifically those in grade eleven or twelve or those who have recently graduated, as they are the largest group concerned with career decisions and prospects for the future. It also might be used by parents or teachers who take part in the decision of choosing a major with their children or students. University students are also partly targeted as they can share their experiences with the next generation of students. The application is of course free of charge for users.

### Conclusion

If neglected the issue of educational mismatch can harm individuals, firms, and even countries. Cambodia, as a developing nation, has begun to face this problem. To address this issue, this paper proposes the creation of a software application to provide essential information to high school students as they plan for the next steps in their academic journey. This will increase the likelihood that students will choose an appropriate university major, reducing the prevalence of educational mismatch.

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