

Building Bridges Between Education and Industry: Transforming Cambodia's Technical Education Through Curriculum Design

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Abstract

Cambodia's upper secondary technical education system faces challenges in meeting evolving labor market demands, creating a skills gap among graduates. Considering these challenges, the Cambodian Ministry of Education, in collaboration with the EU delegation in Cambodia, has initiated a twinning project with the objective of reforming technical education at general higher technical schools. The project is being implemented by a consortium of French, Finnish, and German entities in collaboration with partners from Cambodia. Our paper takes up approaches from the project. We are focusing on the modernization of school curricula across five technical majors through a flexible, modular structure based on fields of learning, strengthening education-industry linkages while enhancing graduate employability. The project is theoretically grounded in human capital development (Becker, 1993) and comparative VET research (Pilz & Li, 2020) which emphasizes the importance of contextual adaptation in curriculum transfer. These complementary perspectives inform our approach to curriculum restructuring and stakeholder engagement throughout the reform process. Methodologically, we assessed the current educational landscape through teacher surveys and interviews with twelve human resource professionals. This mixed-methods approach provided insights into existing pedagogical practices, curriculum limitations, and industry expectations regarding technical graduate competencies. Based on our findings, we have proposed to our Cambodian counterparts a new modular curriculum structure that is based on the description of learning outcomes bundled in fields of learning and operating with processes and tasks from the workplace. The proposed framework emphasizes flexibility and openness to incorporating Work-Based Learning in companies when they are ready. In this way, the modernization of curricula can be understood as a starting point for a shift toward demand-driven technical education in Cambodia, with implications for educational policy and industry-education partnerships. The model offers a sustainable approach to curriculum modernization that responds dynamically to changing labor market needs while providing students with relevant skills for successful employment transitions. However, it is accompanied by many challenges, which we also want to address in our presentation (hierarchies, teacher training, understanding of TVET, etc).

Keywords: Areas of Learning; Flexibilization; TVET; Twinning; Reform

