

Exploration of the Gap between Business Management Curriculum and Employability Requirements: A Study of Curriculum Designers and Recruiters' Perceptions

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ABSTRACT

This paper explores the perceptions of curriculum designers and recruiters toward factors creating the gap between business management curriculum at university and employability requirements of banking industry in Cambodia. Qualitative paradigm with a specific design of exploratory case study was employed. Documents, observations and structure interviews with 6 respondents (2 curriculum designers, 4 recruiters) were used, and a direct analysis was applied. Data analysis was classified into categories (1) perception of curriculum designers and (2) perception of recruiters. Based on the case data, the study identified four main factors (1) loose enforcement of educational policy and law on nurturing relationship between university and industry in developing curriculum, (2) misperception among university and industry toward skills development in the curriculum, (3) scarcity of resources in implementing business management curriculum, and (4) information gap between university and industry to develop and update business management curriculum. With these evidences, several implications and suggestions have been made to government, line ministries, universities, industries and students for further study of business management curriculum and its challenges to design compatible curriculum that meet national, regional and global skill standards.

Key Words: Gap, Business Management Curriculum, Employability Requirement, Industry

INTRODUCTION

Skills development and employability become a recent challenge in higher education curriculum (Atlay, 2006). Current studies highlighted that the issue has occurred worldwide, for example, in the OCED developed countries (McIntosh, 2008), the United States and Europe (Scherer et al. 2005), and East Asian countries (the World Bank, 2012). The World Bank (2012) further stressed out that graduates 'employability skills in East Asian countries such as Vietnam, Thailand, Mongolia, and Philippine, and especially in Cambodia have been comparatively poor. In Cambodia, CAMBFEB (2008) gave obvious evidence that only small number of Cambodian graduate employees have "skills or almost skills".

The common skill shortages of business graduates, especially in the field of business management were poor work attitude and foreign language, lacked work experience, inadequate technical skill, communication skill, decision-making, analytical skill, and specialized skills (Sandra D'Amico, 2009; UNDP (2011). With such a problem, employers find difficulties to recruit graduates for positions of management, marketing, sales and

service, human resources, accounting and finance (Sandra D'Amico, 2009, UNDP, 2011, CAMFEBA, 2008).

Consequently, the skill gap has hindered Cambodian graduates in entering employment market (ILO, 2011). As emphasized by Sophal (2008), graduates take several months to get job, and only 50% of them regardless the field of studies have not been employed (the Ministry of Vocational Labor and Training, in the report of ADB, 2011). Annually, 300,000 Cambodian youth enter employment market, and the numbers steadily increase over 400,000 the following years (ILO, 2011). Even worse, numbers of graduates will reach 220,000, while market can absorb only 86,000.

With this reference, skill gap has become a barrier to improve socioeconomic and national wealth (Sopahl, 2008; Meng, 2010; Economic Intelligent Unit, 2010). Recently, Cambodia faces a lot of challenges in boosting the growth of economy (Sophal, 2008). To deal with the issue, it has been suggested reflecting on the application of higher education curriculum, specifically business management. Therefore, this paper intends to explore perceptions of curriculum designers as well as recruiters about how university develop and practice business management curriculum, and how industry create employability requirements.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Business Management Curriculum and Skills Development in Professionalism

Given corporations by European sociologists such as Tocqueville, Max Weber, Durkheim, Tocott Parson, and Robert Merton, business education in professionalism model has become a powerful tool in producing graduates' employability skills for industries (Khurana, 2007) through articulating excellent knowledge and skills with quality business program (AIM 2006). This model has been applied to promote economic and cultural knowledge to students so that they can secure the highest position for career (Khurana, 2007). Hence, business universities have to transform the curriculum into professionalism called "knowledge-co-production model (AIM, 2006)" or "knowledge economy model (Nordberg, 2008)". The knowledge economic model concerns with political and global economy developing four competences: (1) analytical skills, (2) business knowledge and skills, (3) technical/ICT skills (technical and innovative knowledge), and (4) communication skills (service sector, business network, and strategic alliance) (Fragidis et al. 2008).

For this reason, business management curriculum must be carried out in accordance with the model to broaden knowledge and skills beyond business dimension promoting skill pool to cope with multifaceted problems in business environment. Therefore, strengthening business education and skills development becomes the fundamental strategy to grow individual, social and national wealth worldwide, especially in the emerging economic countries like Cambodia.

Business Management Curriculum and Skills Development in Cambodia

After the end of genocide in 1979, all levels of Cambodia's education were restored and developed. Higher education institutions were reemerged to provide educational services to Cambodian youth. Two faculties at Royal University of Phnom Penh were opened to provide educational services to students (Duggan, 1997). Later, other institutions were operated, for example, Khmer-Soviet Friendship Higher Technical Institute in 1981, the Economics Institute in 1984, and the Agricultural Institute in 1985 (Clayton, 1999). A few year

afterward, there were 977 doctors, dentists, or pharmacists, 2,196 senior secondary teachers, 1,481 foreign language specialists, 474 technical engineers, 400 economists, and 184 agricultural engineers (Clayton, 1999). Although educational philosophies and curricula contents were overwhelmed by political ideologies, it was acknowledged in general that Cambodia's higher education played important role to enhance knowledge and skills to Cambodian students. Since then, business-related subjects have been offered in some institutions due to growing demand of labour market.

In 1993, new government of Cambodia was established, and peace, security, stability was secured. Along with the light and hope, Cambodia and its people came to new page of human era called "Globalization". Globalization has pulled Cambodia into the global economy which demanded high knowledge and skills for the growth of industry and economy. Therefore, the Government of Cambodia establishes National Development Plans, and one strategy is to improve quality of higher education. Hence, on the one hand, the government resumes greater efforts to develop human capital through public universities. On the other hand, the government through the line Ministries has privatized higher education to private sector. Then, first private university, Norton University, was opened in 1997. As a result, Cambodia's higher education, faculties, curriculums and subject matters have been significantly developed to produce graduates for labour market (Duggan, 1997). In this regard, Cambodian higher education institutions have changed educational policies, management structure, academic program and quality standard.

Education Policies

As accorded by the fourth National Assembly in 2008, the Royal Government of Cambodia formulated National Education Policies as one element in a Rectangular Strategy. The policies are (1) to promote accessibility, (2) to strengthen quality and efficiency, and (3) to develop institutional capacity and management in order to develop human resource and capacity-building, private sector and job growth (ESP, 2010) which is one angle in the National Strategic Development Plan (NSDP, 2006). To achieve these policies, the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport (MoEYS) set up four strategies: (1) developing the existing policies and strategies for HEIs, (2) giving academic freedom and autonomy to HEIs, (3) supporting HEIs to develop study programs and administrations, and (4) strengthening quality and efficiency of HEIs. To this end, the management system has been revised and restructured.

Management Structure

The government creates national and sub-national committees to direct and manage higher education institutions (HEIs). For example, Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport (MoEYS) and Ministry of Labour and Vocation Training (MoLVT) are in charge of monitoring, auditing, and evaluating HEIs. The MoEYS is in charge of academics, while the MoEYS supervises vocational stream. Moreover, the two ministries have to cooperate with the line ministries such as Ministry of Health, Ministry of Culture and Fine Arts, Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries, Ministry of Economy and Finance etc. Supported the (MoEYS), agencies were established (1) the Department of Higher Education (DHE) and (2) the Accreditation Committee of Cambodia (ACC). The DHE directly works with the MoEYS while the ACC was established on 31 March, 2003, as an independent agency to ensure the quality standard for higher education. To reach this end, the ACC has to monitor, assess and evaluate 9 minimum standards of HEIs: 1. Mission, 2. Governing Structure, Management and

Planning, 3. Academic Program, 4. Academic Staff, 5. Students and Student Services, 6. Learning Services, 7. Physical Plant, 8. Financial Plan and Management, and 9. Information Dissemination (Accreditation Committee of Cambodia, 2009).

Currently, management structure of higher learning institutions has been categorized into three divisions: Royal Academy, University and Specialized School/Institute. Yet, the structures and functions of these institutions are hard to distinguish (Chealy 2009) as they are faced with several constraints, for example, human resources, budget, and management. A part the university is operated its educational provisions under the direction of the MoEYS (DHE) and the ACC. With massive development university has licensed to gain academic freedom and autonomous management. The top management of university is Rectorate Department to delegate tasks to academic affairs, faculty, and institute. Faculty and institute are entitled accordingly to academic discipline, for example, business management, humanities, social science, law, or language. Dean or director has to manage, organize and evaluate academic activities and program in faculty and institute.

Academic Program

Improving the quality of academic program is the 3rd standard of higher education institutions (HEIs) in Accreditation Committee of Cambodia's agenda. The quality of academic program must fine-tune with national development goal and be responsive to demands of labour market and students. Therefore, curriculum must encompass nine indicators:

1. HEI's curriculum must be created through the Curriculum Development Committee and Advisory Board
2. HEI's curricula contents and structure must be designed based on the (Circulation 04/04 ACC/SSR, dated 19 November 2004, on Credit System and Credit Transfer) in line with the mission of HEI that complies with the national development policies and employment market.
3. HEI's curriculum must encompass the system of credit system and credit transfer.
4. HEI's curriculum must comprise of teaching effectiveness.
5. HEI's curriculum must comprise of learning assessment.
6. HEI's curriculum must contain research skill.
7. HEI's curriculum must ensure internal quality assurance consistent to the policies and guideline of MoEYS and ACC.
8. HEI's curriculum must have an efficient filling management and maintaining system.
9. HEI's curriculum must be reviewed, assessed, evaluated and updated to articulate specialized skills in the needs of participants and employment market.

For curricula content and credits in first academic year (the Foundation Year) of a bachelor' degree must follow the ACC's regulations. Students must pass all subjects and credits; otherwise they are not permitted to study in the following years. The purpose of the foundation year is to provide flexible program for students. The curricula contents and credits for 2nd/3rd/4th years are designed by curriculum development committee and advisory board of each higher learning institutions.

Decades of efforts, higher education as well as industry has been greatly developed to grow Cambodia's economy. Recently, there are 91 higher education institutions including public and private providing educational services to 981 doctoral students, 12, 887 master students, 173, 274 bachelor's degree and 20,719 associate degree. In addition, 29,008

students already graduated. Recently, business-related subjects such as business management, marketing, accounting, finance, banking, entrepreneurship, and security market have become important field to promote knowledge and skills of business for national, regional and global market. Therefore, quality of workforce has been improved for industry, particularly banking and financial sector.

Banking Industry in Cambodia

According to In (2005), Cambodian financial institutions are divided into four types: (1) commercial banks; (2) specialized banks; (3) licensed micro-finance institutions; and (4) MFI NGOs registered with the National Bank of Cambodia. For this last decade, banking and financial sector has significantly contributed to the growth of national economy of Cambodia. The growth rate of Cambodian economy has been relatively high at 7% in 2011 if compared to previous year (ACLEDA Bank, 2011). The report further stressed out that banking and financial sector has given considerable growth in term of deposit, credit, profit and asset to generate Cambodia economy. Currently, banking sector has absorbed more foreign investments. In 2011, there were 35 commercial and specialized banks in Cambodia that provide more jobs to graduates, especially in the field of business management. With current expansion, banking industry has become the largest employment market for graduates. However, hindrances have remained due to the gap between business management curriculum and employability of industry.

Employability Requirements

Employability is not just a skill. It comprises of achievements, understandings and attributes developed by good learning under four dimensions: understanding, skillful practice, efficacy belief and meta-cognition (USEM) (Knight & Yorke, 2004). It covers all employment-related descriptors in broader scope and longer-term capacities (Curtis and McKenzie, 2001) to meet the demand of workplaces (Bates and Phelan, 2005) which encompasses key competencies, for example, technical skills, soft skills, transferable skills, enterprise skills and life skills (DEST, 2011). In short, employability requirements refer to all necessary quality, capacity and competency developed through learning experience to meet the demand of market. Same to elsewhere, Cambodia Education Law (200&) aims to enhance knowledge, skills, morality, innovative and creative ideas and enterprise spirit to students.

Gap between Higher Education Curriculum and Employability Requirements of Industry

The gap between business management curriculum and skill requirements for industry is still a hot topic for researchers, policy makers and employers. Several studies were conducted to identify real scenarios. An obvious example was a doctoral dissertation of Buttermore (2010) used exploratory case study to investigate why the gap between business education at public university and skill demands by business organizations. The findings revealed that most universities used old paradigm curriculum which was less effectiveness to enhance skills to students. This concern was also examined by Saunder, et al. (2005) that skill gap existed because of misperception among students, lecturers and employers. Relatively, Scherer et al. (2011) asserted that institutional culture, financial issue, poor quality academic program, disparity enrolment and low quality of learning outcomes were also serious challenges to cause skill gap. Similar situation occurred in the United States where fresh graduates were

not able to work unless they were additionally trained (Mihm-Herold (2010). Same aspect happened in East Asia countries included Vietnam, Cambodia, Thailand, Malaysia, Philippine, Indonesia, Mongolia and China. The World Bank (2012) revealed that the highest unemployment rate was seen among university graduates in Philippine and Indonesia due to skill deficiencies, while the employment rate among university graduates in Vietnam and Thailand was relatively poor in outskirts areas. Comparing occupational distribution among graduates in the selected countries, graduates in Indonesia, Cambodia and some parts of Philippine were employed in clerical positions, rather than professional and technical posts (the World Bank, 2012).

The World Bank (2012) emphasized that the skill gap between graduates and employment market resulted from a mismatch between academic program and employability of market. This reference was specifically found in Cambodian context. According to UNDP (2011); Ford (2006); Chin & Dy (2009), and Sandra D'Amico (2009), education program of Cambodian universities still encounter several challenges to promote knowledge and skills to students. The skill shortages among Cambodia graduates, according to Sandra D'Amico, addressed in the Cambodia Outlook Conference 2012, were soft skills (communication, critical thinking, problem solving) and technical skills (computer). Consequently, the insufficient skills of graduates remained a barrier for investment slowing down individual, societal and national economy which needs aggressive remedial approach.

METHODOLOGY

Qualitative Design

Qualitative approach with a specific design of exploratory case study will be applied in this study. Unlike quantitative, qualitative approach is primarily descriptive and interpretive (Gillham, 1999) based on evidences from various sources (Hancock & Algozzine, 2006) such documents, observations, and interview (Yin, 2003; Miles & Huberman, 1994; Creswell, 2007) to examine a phenomenon with small sample in single or multiple cases of educational setting (Gerring, 2007). Qualitative case study is generally used to answer questions "How...?" or "Why...?" about real life phenomenon when little evidence was defined (Yin, 2003). Case study must be conducted with prominent site and respondents (Creswell, 2007).

Therefore, this study was carried out with one university and banking institution in Phnom Penh, Cambodia. The site was considered prominence in terms of economy, education, industry and number of population, while the university has been operated for over 30 years in providing business education to Cambodian students. Every year, university produces thousands of graduates for employment market, especially for banking sector. The same characteristic was considered to select the bank. The bank was opened in 1993 and expanded over 2000 branches in Cambodia and overseas. Data was collected through documents, observations, and interviews with 6 respondents. The 6 respondents were selected among key feature to ensure construct reliability and validity.

Table 1: Research Respondents

Organization	Respondents	Position/duties	Number
University X	Dean/Curriculum Designer	Design curriculum, research on career development , university-industry relationship	2 Respondents
Bank Y	Human Resource Division	Create job requirement, recruit, train and evaluate fresh graduate employees	4 Respondents
Total			6 Respondents

As displayed in the table, the researcher chose 6 respondents (2 curriculum designers at university X, 4 recruiters at human resource division of bank Y). The selection of respondents was purposefully made based on a belief and judgment that they (respondents) could provide informative and deeper data to answer research questions. Two types of interview questionnaires were designed in structure with open-ended questions. Each set of interview question consisted of 25 questions. Data was classified into categories: (1) perceptions of curriculum designers and (2) perceptions of recruiters. Direct analysis was applied, and result was displayed in narrative texts with tables.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Perceptions of Curriculum Designers

Table 2: Summary of Key Findings

Educational Goals	Contents	Practices	Problems
Produce qualified people with knowledge and skills	Core courses, major courses, elective courses	Four-Year Programs	Educational policy (MoEYS & ACC)
Take part in government policy to promote economy	40 courses/120 credits	Faculty recruit teachers/lecturers	Lacked experts for new subjects
Standardize into regional and global standard	Course work/ 108 credits	Teacher/student-centred	Lacked textbooks
	Thesis/ 12 credits	QA committee (50% of on-going assessment, 50% of final exam)	Lacked frequent dialogues
	Reforms (3/5 years)		Lacked industrial training
	Market research		Distant engagement between learning with work area

As highlighted in Table 2, educational goals/objectives of business management curriculum of university X must meet all stakeholders' needs; therefore, development and practice of curricula contents have to be consistent to national and international standards. In the national level, curricula contents must comprise of three courses (1) Business Core Courses, (2) Business Major Courses, and (3) Elective Courses to ensure the Nine Minimum Quality

Standard of the Accreditation Committee of Cambodia (ACC). The business management curriculum is a four-year undergraduate program containing 40 courses accounted for 120 credits (118 of course works, 12 of thesis and defence). Curriculum has been reformed and updated every 3 to 5 year with university board, government actors and industry. University also has Quality Assurance Committee to evaluate its curriculum and assessing teachers and their teachings, students' learning. However, the interview responses revealed several challenges such as influence of policy of government, scarcity of resources, lacked frequent dialogues with stakeholders, lacked innovative programs and industrial trainings, and loose integration of teaching and learning with work area. These problems have caused the gap between business management curriculum at university X and employability requirements in the labour market that resulted in skill gap among graduate employees.

The finding was consistent to a summary report of Sophal (2008). The report highlighted that quality of curriculum at some Cambodia universities was relatively poor. This happened due to unclear framework for curricula practice, mismatch course contents to market demand, lacked information sharing (Sophal 2008), low academic standard (Duggan, 1997), and distant collaboration among line ministries and agencies, and inadequate quality staff in management and leadership positions (Chet, 2009).

Perceptions of Recruiters

Table 3: Summary of Key Findings

Creation of Requirements	Recruitment Process	Skills Training	Problems
Follows Collective Labour in Cambodia Follows the bank policy and demand Consists of four steps: job analysis, drafting, revising and finalizing Focuses on knowledge, skills and work attitude	Consist of several process Testing, interview, medical checks, training and on-job training Work ethics and morality	3 weeks (two weeks for training general knowledge, skills, work culture, work system, one week for on-job training) Training modules designed by bank	Difficult to find suitable candidates poor work attitude work ready, lacked work ethics & low practical knowledge & skills

Based on key results in table 3, the data revealed that the process of creating employability standard at bank Y must follow policy of bank and collective labour of Ministry of Labour and Vocational Training (MoLVT). Started from creating requirements to final stage of skills training, there was absence of university involvement that plays active role in supplying skill labour to market. The problem has been resulted from unclear responsibilities between two line ministries in nurturing relationship between academics and industry although the two ministries have worked together in supporting government development policies. The poor engagement between university and industry has also seen as severe concern since they (university X and industry Y) have grounded different orientation (non-profit vs. profit). Then, a grey area exists between two streams causing misperceptions and distant cooperation to share information of employability skills.

The finding was paralleled to a concern of UNDP (2011) that there was loose linkage between line ministries due to a reason that Cambodian Educational Law (2007) did not state explicit responsibilities. Such problem has created difficulties to coordinate among

government agencies with relevant stakeholders in improving quality of education. Chen et al. (2006) commented that although banking industry has offered effective skill training to employees, tightening cooperation with higher education such as university is really necessary in developing human resources for business sector.

Matching Perceptions of Curriculum Designers and Recruiters

Table 4: Comparing respondents' perceptions

Themes	University X	Bank Y
Expectations	<i>Position:</i> all posts and level <i>Salary:</i> \$200-250 <i>Location:</i> everywhere <i>Industry:</i> all types <i>Skill supply:</i> knowledge and skill of specialization, English, computer <i>Reasons:</i> demand of industry <i>Problems:</i> misperception of skills development	<i>Position:</i> entry-level <i>Salary:</i> \$209 <i>University:</i> all types <i>Graduates:</i> all field <i>Location:</i> provincial branches <i>Skill demand:</i> work ethics, knowledge and skills <i>Reason:</i> business needs <i>Problems:</i> misperception of skill demand
Goals	Produces graduates to become entrepreneurs, leaders, manager Take part in government development policy Grow economy <i>Problems:</i> academic domain	Recruit graduates for business Equal job opportunity Generate socioeconomic Business and profits <i>Problems:</i> business oriented & privacy
Contents	Follows government policy, core/major/elective courses, External resources <i>Reason:</i> quality & efficiency <i>Problems:</i> influence of government policies	Follows industry standard Writing/English/general knowledge tests & interview No external resources or consultancies Follows collective labour Privacy & profits <i>Problems:</i> Business & profits
Practice	textbooks, classroom setting teacher-centred/ student centred 50% of on-going assessment, 50% of final exam) academic domain <i>Problems:</i> lacked teaching and learning material, disengaged between learning activities to work area	practical experience, teacher centred/ practice Trained by senior staff Quizzes, tests, training reports Work attitude (morality), work culture, work system Business domain <i>Problems:</i> irrelevant courses to training modules, no university involvement

Matching the data patterns, this study signified four major causes existing between business management curriculum and employability requirements. First was associated with ineffective enforcement of government policies on nurturing relationship between university and bank industry. Second was a result of misperceptions between university and bank

toward skills enhancement, skills development and skills demand. Third was concerned with scarcity of resources such as specialized lecturers, innovative programs, and facilities at university. Fourth was related with a distant cooperation between university and bank in sharing feedbacks of academic and employability issue.

The four major factors were similar to previous findings, such as Chet (2006); UNDP (2011); Walker (2012); UNESCO (2010); and Lall & Sakellariou (2010). They all asserted that the gap between curriculum at Cambodian university and employment market was the alarming issue. The gap especially exists among business-related fields such as management. Previous researchers further emphasized that recent expansion of business management in Cambodian university could be addressed in term of quantity rather than quality since there were oversupply of graduates to the demands of employment market.

Relatively, a cross-border study of higher education and skills for labour market among low and middle-economic countries in East Asia by the World Bank (2012) revealed similar situation that insufficient skills of graduates in many countries such as China, Vietnam, Indonesia and Cambodia were still a controversial issue due to five reasons (1) loose collaboration of university and employment market; (2) weak research capacity and technological applications between university and market; (3) distant engagement between classroom settings to research domain; (4) disconnection among educational providers themselves; and (5) misalignment of subject areas from the earlier education systems with subject areas at higher education level.

Similar hindrances to move upward Chinese business management education were also highlighted by Lu & Alon (2003) and Bai & Enderwick (2005). They presented three factors (1) management education practiced in tradition methods, (2) influence of politics and economic plan on curricula contents and practice, and (3) poor quality of institutional management at business universities.

The findings of the case were also partially related to a discussion of Peredo and Moore (2010) that business management education in Colombia, South African, and Vietnam and so on could help elevating poverty, but the practice must be attached to social and cultural contexts. Otherwise, it would become a damaging factor. Same problem goes to the OCED countries in Europe that universities cannot produce graduates with sufficient skills for labour market due to influence of computer and technology (McIntosh (2008). To deal with such shortcomings, the United States as well as Europe has tried to implant technological tools in management education pedagogy.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, based on perceptions of curriculum designers and recruiters, current study identifies four major factors creating the gap between business management curriculum at university X and bank Y in Cambodia. The four factors give diverse impacts on academic and business environment. In academic loop, educational providers cannot create compatible curriculum to enhance skills to students who would become expensive assets for industry. Without sufficient skills, graduates could not perform well that affects industry incomes. In turn, low incomes of industry can impact employees' likelihood and socioeconomic. Consequently, the gap gives several challenges to students, faculty of business management, industry and society. To bridge the gap, participatory actions and intensive interventions must take place among stakeholders such as government, line ministries, universities and industries. The government should strengthen educational and employment law to tighten strong corporation among university and industry. University should increase frequent dialogues with industry, and industry should open horizontal opportunities for researchers,

educators and students to study about employment issues so that all problems have been solved with ease.

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