

## CAMBODIA'S POSTGRADUATE STUDENTS: EMERGING PATTERNS AND TRENDS

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### Abstract

A study was conducted to fill gaps in the description of the features of Cambodia's postgraduate student population. Using an online survey of a master's programme at a Cambodian government university, the profile that emerged showed that most postgraduate students were male, married, and urban. Postgraduate students reported investing up to a third of their annual income on study and study-related costs, and little use was made of institutional resources like libraries, computers, and the Internet. A strong belief was held amongst respondents that attainment of a postgraduate qualification would be materially beneficial for their career prospects. It was widely believed that universities needed to establish clear links between the programmes of study they offered and the future skilled labour needs of the country.

**Keywords:** higher education Cambodia, post-graduate students

### INTRODUCTION

A recent survey of Cambodian high school students reported that 50 percent wanted to continue to university and 17 percent wanted to continue to technical education programmes after completing their schooling (YEP Project, 2008). Nearly one-third of the employed youth in the survey indicated that pursuing further education (either in Cambodia or internationally) was part of their five-year professional development plan (YEP Project, 2008). With its youthful population—70 percent are under 25 years of age (National Institute of Statistics, 2006)—the hunger for personal material success as well as national progress is tangible. The number of young Cambodians aspiring to university undergraduate and postgraduate programmes is escalating, as the population surge that developed during the years immediately after the fall of the Khmer Rouge moves through the lower levels of Cambodia's formal education system. Young Cambodians greatly value a university qualification, and many view it as a pathway to gain access to well-paying jobs.

With growing numbers of young Cambodians aspiring to university qualifications, the immature structures and limited resources of Cambodia's higher education sector face considerable strain. International focus, which for the last two decades has been on developing Cambodia's basic education sector, has begun to expand and include a focus on Cambodia's university and technical training sectors. Issues of quality of teaching and learning, academic staff qualification levels, governance, policy and systems development, and academic research output have begun to appear in international as well as national literature and reports.

Little is known about the profile of Cambodia's undergraduate students and less is known about Cambodia's postgraduate student population. Data available on enrolments of undergraduate and postgraduate students are sketchy and of variable quality and reliability.

Figures available from the government provide some insights into the growth of the first-year undergraduate portion of Cambodia's higher education sector (see Table 1).

Table 1 *National statistics of first year enrolment in the academic years 2006–2010*

ACADEMIC YEAR	YEAR 1 TOTAL ENROLMENTS	
	Total	Female (percent of total annual enrolment)
2006–2007	42,483	15,307 (36 percent)
2007–2008	44,184	16,483 (37 percent)
2008–2009	46,553	18,181 (39 percent)
2009–2010	42,711	17,393 (41 percent)

*Note.* Figures have been collated from Statistics of Undergraduate Students for the Years 2006–2007, 2007–2008, 2008–2009, and 2009–2010 published by the Cambodian Department of Higher Education.

In the academic year 2008–2009, the total enrolment in Cambodian higher education institutions (HEIs) was reportedly 136,156 (Mak Ngoy Eng, 2010). Limitations in the interpretation of the available data include the inability to distinguish individuals who have commenced more than one programme of study, study at more than one institution, or who may already have completed an undergraduate programme of study and have commenced another one. It is not an uncommon practice in Cambodia for students to enrol in a second undergraduate programme. Reliability of the figures must also be questioned due to an absence of external monitoring or verification of figures provided by the individual institutions.

The research reported here was undertaken to provide a preliminary and largely descriptive profile of postgraduate students in a Cambodian public university. It aims to fill gaps in the description of the features of Cambodia's postgraduate student population, identify areas for further enquiry, and contribute to the dialogues currently occurring within government, industry, and higher education sectors concerning higher education purpose, quality, and development. The findings provide information to all involved in the planning and development of postgraduate programmes in Cambodian universities. For example, knowing the gender imbalance in postgraduate enrolments can result in developing programmes designed to increase the number of female students; these might include establishing mentoring programmes, creation of 'safe spaces for female students', and female-only scholarships. For example, acknowledging the significant financial commitment made by postgraduate students could lead to government policy changes that may include types of taxation relief for those paying for education or the development of some form of deferred payment scheme.

Enquiry into postgraduate student profiles will yield valuable information on the future constituency of Cambodian university staff as well as government ministry staff. The burgeoning demand for a university degree has placed great demands on the institutions to identify and employ suitably qualified staff. The need for graduates with a master's degree (the sole requirement for employment as a university teacher) has had a dramatic effect on

the demand for a postgraduate qualification. For example, enrolments in postgraduate degrees more than doubled between 2006 and 2007 (Mak Ngoy Eng, 2010) as 'HEI teaching is now one of the surest and best paid employment prospects in the country' (Mak Ngoy Eng, 2010: 18).

The current dominance of male enrolments in postgraduate studies must be viewed as predictive of future university academic staff profiles. The muted presence of females in postgraduate studies presents a challenge to planners and policy makers with an interest in ensuring that the future of Cambodia and her people is informed by the interests of all members of society, at all levels and within all sectors. Teachers in HEIs are, theoretically at least, the country's future researchers and innovators. With the dominance of one gender or socioeconomic background amongst university staff, there lies a danger that areas of teaching and research enquiry and foci will be limited due to a muted presence or possibly even silence of alternative views and ways of seeing the world. For an education system that is attempting to 'modernise' the country (Ayres, 2000), the absence of any group of voices impoverishes the country and possibly reinforces traditional ways of 'seeing' and 'doing'.

Many of Cambodia's current postgraduate students received their basic (years 1–9), high school (years 10–12), and undergraduate education during a period of great educational change within the country. They either had an education that was interrupted in the mid-1970s due to the policies and activities of the Khmer Rouge or commenced schooling in the tumultuous post-Khmer Rouge era when trained teachers were largely absent and school infrastructure was basic. They have successfully negotiated a pathway through their years of formal education as well as their personal and working lives to become postgraduate students in a country with a university sector missing 'a long tradition of higher learning or a community of intellectuals containing a reservoir of academic values' (Chamnan & Ford in Altbach & Umokoshi, 2004: 345). What has motivated them to pursue further study? What are some of the tensions in their multiple roles as student, worker, and family member in a country with a higher education system in such early stages of development? In a predominantly user-paying higher-education environment, what level of personal monetary commitment is being made by individuals in their pursuit of formal study with its promise of high returns?

The Cambodian HEI is a relatively recent development. The oldest HEI, the Royal University of Phnom Penh (RUPP), was established in 1960, and recent government policy changes have allowed the entry of private fee-charging universities into the public Cambodian higher education sector (Chet, 2006). The number of private universities and university students has exploded in recent years, and by 2009, there were 76 HEIs in Cambodia with 114 campuses (Kwok, Chan, Heng, Kim, Neth & Thon, 2010). 'With the public HEIs accepting fee-paying students and with the privatisation of the HEI sector, the total number of students enrolled in HEIs increased tenfold within a decade' (Kwok, Chan, Heng, Kim, Neth & Thon, 2010: 26).

Increasing stability within the country over the past decade has resulted in significant rebuilding and expansion of the Cambodian basic education sector, that is, years 1–9. During that time, government and international funding has been directed at the resourcing and development of the basic education system including primary teacher training, classroom building programmes, and other infrastructure developments such as financial management systems. These efforts, coupled with the large numbers of young people born in the years immediately after the expulsion of the Khmer Rouge regime, have resulted in exceptional increases in the number of students who are currently able to progress to the university and technical training sectors.

The dramatic rise in primary education enrolments since 1997 has led to greatly increased Grade 12 examination registration numbers – from 11,743 Grade 12 candidates in 1997 to over 78,000 in 2008...the number of students with a Grade 12 pass, qualified for selection to enter a Higher Education Institution, has grown 8 times in the past 12 years. In the same period, the intake of Grade 12 pass students to first year HEI programs has multiplied ten times. (Ministry of Youth, Education & Sport, 2009: 3)

In 1996, there was a year-12 pass rate of 30 percent, of which 53 percent entered HEIs; in 2007, the year-12 pass rate was 72 percent, of which 90 percent entered HEIs (Mak Ngoy Eng, 2010). Clearly, the demand for places in post-secondary education has exploded and has begun to move from a demand for undergraduate qualifications to a growing demand for postgraduate degrees.

The female share of tertiary education enrolments in Cambodia in 2007 was estimated to be 35.2 percent (UNESCO Institute of Statistics) and enrolments in postgraduate education in Cambodia more than doubled between 2006 and 2007. Of the 11,681 master's students enrolled in the academic year 2008–2009, 16 percent were female, which included 5 percent of 862 doctoral students (Mak Ngoy Eng, 2010). Considerable research in Cambodia in the previous decade on female students' retention in basic and high school education sectors has identified features of the system as well as wider societal structures that have a negative impact on girls completing their formal schooling. Some of the elements found to influence a girl's continuing education have included shame at family circumstances (Velasco, 2001), teaching quality (Velasco, 2001), bullying and sexual harassment (Pascoe, 2005), and the absence of female teachers (World Bank, 2005). Gains have been made in improving female-student retention rates in Cambodian primary and high schools. Differences also still exist in the retention rates between genders across provinces, with female retention rates lower in the more remote provinces (Bredenberg, Lon & Ma, 2003). There is an obvious link between lower numbers of females successfully completing their year 12 and being able to pursue higher education at the undergraduate level, which is the feeder into postgraduate programmes. It is anticipated that initiatives successful at retaining girls at the lower levels of education will have a long-term effect of opening opportunities to more females to pursue higher education at the undergraduate and postgraduate level.

In contrast to the 'big picture' canvas of educational development and reform in the Cambodian higher education sector, the figure of the individual student is indistinct and lacking in detail. Current university students are the direct recipients of the changes and developments within the country's basic educational system in the past 20 years, but information regarding these students has been primarily reported as broad statistical data for use in national and international reports and for planning future projects.

As issues of quality of learning, teaching, and research are more clearly coming into focus for Cambodian HEIs, an understanding of the postgraduate student profile is a valuable data source that will contribute needed detail to the planning of effective, student-focused, quality postgraduate university services and programmes. Postgraduate students are a vague, little-known group of education consumers in the Cambodian higher-education sector. As the group most likely to contribute directly to Cambodia's ongoing development through future research contributions and wider societal leadership roles, they warrant focused enquiry as part of any process designed to improve the country's universities as well as human resource development.

## **METHOD**

The Royal University of Phnom Penh (RUPP) handbook for 2007–2011 reported 258 postgraduate enrolments, of which 60 (23 percent) were female. Using a convenience sample, students enrolled in a master's programme at the RUPP were invited through a group email to participate in the research project and complete an anonymous online questionnaire. The online questionnaire consisted of twenty-eight questions written in English. Using mainly check boxes, the questions were designed to collect demographic details of age, gender, and stage of study as well as information about education expenditure, student income, previous degrees, hours attending classes and hours of private study, frequency of use of the university library, and resources accessible to students that assisted them in their study. Two questions invited extended written responses that provided qualitative material, the analysis of which is included in the discussion section.

The use of an Internet-based questionnaire may have confined participation to students with regular Internet access and reliable electricity supply. Students living in the provinces of Cambodia can encounter difficulties with the supply of electricity and access to the Internet, making their participation more difficult. To reduce this effect, the questionnaire was available online for two weeks, including two weekends, allowing province-based students to participate if interested during their weekend trip to Phnom Penh for classes. Sixteen percent of the respondents reported not living in Phnom Penh during the week.

The master's programme requires students to have competent written and spoken English skills, and while many subjects are taught in English, there is also some teaching in Khmer. The use of English as the language for the online questionnaire may also have been a limitation to the participation of students. The researcher's personal involvement with many of the students in the programme and anecdotal evidence from other teaching staff highlights an uneven spread in written and spoken English competency amongst the enrolled students, as can be evidenced from student quotes included later in this paper.

The postgraduate programme conducted its coursework programme exclusively on weekends and was intentionally designed this way to attract students who worked fulltime as well as students living in the provinces who were able to travel to Phnom Penh for weekend study. The programme was taught in both English and Khmer by one national fulltime RUPP academic staff member and several national and expatriate casual and volunteer academics. At the time of the survey, there were two cohorts of students progressing through the programme. One cohort was in the final year of their study programme and was actively engaged in research for a thesis or research report, having completed the majority of their coursework subjects. The second cohort was half-way through the programme and just entering the research proposal phase.

## **FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION**

### **Demographic Details**

Female students accounted for 16 percent of the master's student population under study and were marginally over-represented in the questionnaire results, where they accounted for 20 percent of respondents (see Table 2).

Table 2 Respondent gender profile

	Gender as percent of total enrolments in master's programme (n = 70)	Gender as percent of survey respondents (n = 25)
Male	84 percent	80 percent
Female	16 percent	20 percent

The majority of respondents were male (84 percent) and single (52 percent). Sixty-four percent (n = 16) of respondents were aged 26–30 years. Most students lived in Phnom Penh (84 percent) during the week and on the weekends (88 percent), indicating that very small numbers of respondents were travelling from outside the city to pursue study on weekends. Sixty-eight percent reported being in paid employment 36 or more hours a week, and 84 percent reported working 21 plus hours a week.

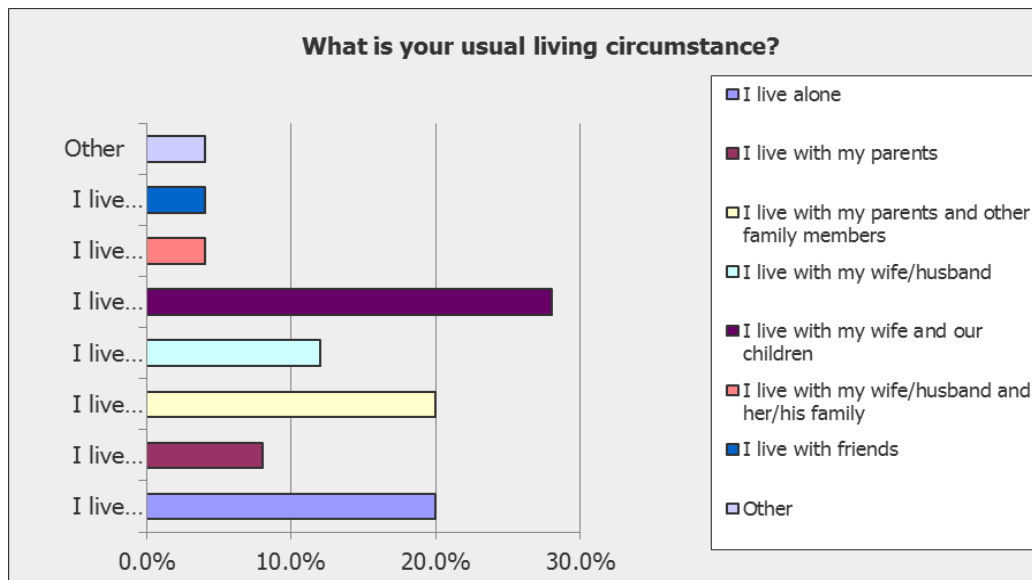


Figure 1 Usual living circumstances

The living arrangements of students were diverse and reflective of the various life stages of people between ages of 20 and 50 years of age. Most (80 percent) reported living in some type of shared accommodation with other family members (partner, children, parents, siblings, etc.).

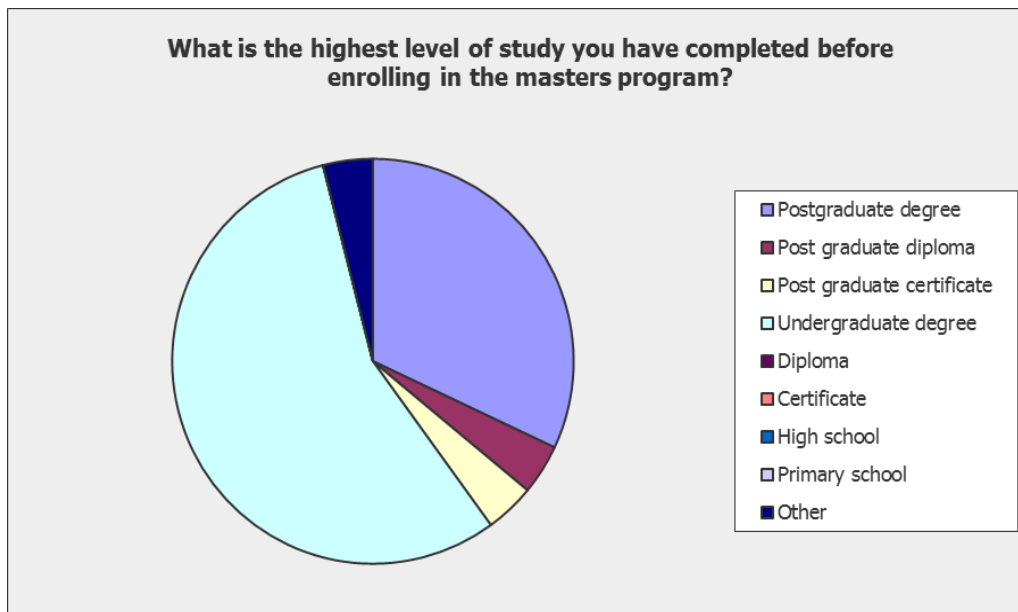


Figure 2 Highest level of prior study

The majority of students (58 percent) reported their highest level of university study prior to commencing their current master's-level study was their undergraduate degree, and 16 percent of these reported having completed more than one undergraduate degree. Forty-two percent reported having completed some type of postgraduate studies prior to enrolment in their current master's programme. The majority of students had completed their previous higher education studies since 2000, with 13 percent reporting that they completed their undergraduate university studies in the mid-1990s.

### Costs of Study

The postgraduate student respondents in this study reported using almost a third of their annual income on their education. With the average annual income of respondents being US \$4,452, and full-time annual course fee costs of US \$930, plus the students estimated an average study-related expenditure of US \$500 per annum, students were committing a substantial proportion of their income to study.

In their report on the education sector in Cambodia, the National Institute of Statistics (NIS, 2009) provided details of education-related expenditure across all levels of education. The figure for higher-education students failed to discriminate between undergraduate and postgraduate student study costs and can therefore be considered only a guide. The NIS reported the annual educational costs (which included fees, books, extra tuition, transport costs, etc.) for higher-education students in 2007 to be US \$463, a figure substantially below that found in the study.

The expenditure figure from this study is an important indicator of the value placed on gaining a postgraduate qualification, which was further supported by comments provided later in the report in which many students stressed a belief in their improved employment opportunities with a master's degree. Holding a postgraduate degree in Cambodia places an individual into a small, select group of people, and for some it allows professional and career development opportunities otherwise unattainable.

## Time Use

The time given to study, both in class and for private study, is one indicator of the quality of student learning and ultimately the quality of the degree conferred. The programme was structured with only weekend coursework classes, and to align with government assessment policy, class attendance was one of the assessment criteria. Students understood that failure to attend classes regularly would have a direct impact on their final result. The enrolment sequence of the programme for full-time students was three subjects a semester, each 3-credit subject consisting of a weekly three-hour workshop/lecture. Two subjects were taught on Saturday and one on Sunday morning.

Most students (60 percent) reported that they attended university classes 7–9 hours a week. This finding for the majority of respondents reflects what would be ‘normal’ class attendance for a student enrolled full time in the programme. While theoretically, a student can enrol part time (i.e. enrol in less than 9 credits a term), the reality of the RUPP progression policy requirements and programme staffing challenges meant all students were enrolled in a full-time load (i.e. 9 hours a week in class) of study.

Some confusion arose for respondents on a question about their enrolment status that asked whether they were part time (less than 9 credits) or full time (9 or more credits). Most surveyed students indicated they were part time. However, researcher knowledge of the enrolments in the master’s programme contradicted the responses. Further enquiry revealed that for many respondents ‘full-time study’ equated with studying on weekdays, whereas weekend study was considered ‘part time’. That the actual number of credits in which an individual was enrolled determined their part- or full-time status was not understood by many. Even with such confusion about terms, 85 percent of respondents reported a desire to reduce their academic load, revealing that most found the study load of each term greater than was desirable.

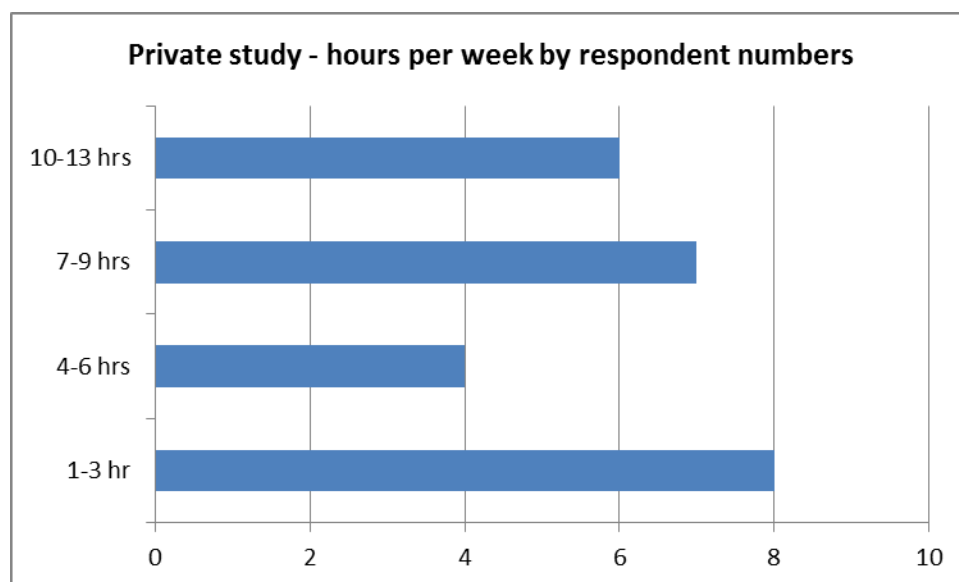


Figure 3 Private study hours per week—self estimate

Asked for a self-estimate of the number of hours a week spent in private study, 32 percent of respondents indicated allocating between 1 and 3 hours a week in private study, 28 percent reported giving between 7 and 9 hours, and 24 percent between 9 and 13 hours.



## Study Resources

The majority of students indicated that they did the greater part of their private study at home. Use of libraries and other similar resource centres for locating and using study material was reported infrequently. Half of the respondents reported that they had not used the Hun Sen library (the university library) for their study in the past year, and 30 percent reported using the library 1–3 times in the same timeframe. Half the students reported having a current university library card. The table below (Table 2) illustrates the sources students reported using for locating resources and references to assist them in their study.

Table 3 Sources of reference and resources used for assignments

Sources	Response Percent (multiple responses made) (n = 24)
Internet	95.8 percent
Hun Sen library	25 percent
Books in the graduate office	20.8 percent
My lecturers	54.2 percent
Other students	37.5 percent
Resources at place of work	4 percent

Evident from the figures is the significant role of the Internet as a study tool for the postgraduate students. Also of note is a significant reliance on lecturing staff for materials and other resources. Use of the university's library resources, including library Internet and computer access, is restricted to Saturday as the library is closed on Sundays. With master's students only being on campus on weekends, of which six plus hours include compulsory class attendance, access to the resources within the university library was obviously severely constrained.

Library cards are issued to students in each year of their enrolment and incur a small cost. Similarly, Internet access in the university library is not free for students and requires payment on an hourly rate similar to that charged at Internet cafes and other establishments. The suspension of Internet access for all university computers over weekends (other than Saturday in the library) means the limited number of on-campus computers available for postgraduate students' Internet-based research is negligible during their time of weekend campus access.

Students' access to professional journals and databases through the university library is confined to three free journal portals made available to developing nation universities, two of which can be accessed through the Internet off campus and one requiring students' presence at a university library computer. These resource limitations are a challenge for postgraduate students who are expected to produce work demonstrating 'a knowledge and skill in the use of, well-developed research methods, critical analysis and application and, demonstrate independence of thought in their area of specialization' (RUPP Regulations for Master's degree programs, 2009: 1).

Students' responses to two open-ended questions were analysed for emergent themes and patterns. Students were asked to describe the advice they would give to someone who was thinking of enrolling in the same master's programme they were studying. The question was designed to draw out students' thoughts on the challenges they may have faced during their study that might shape their advice to a prospective student. The second question asked the students to outline the information they would give to university staff who were thinking of planning a new master's programme. This question was also used to draw out students' thoughts about their own experiences and how that knowledge could be used to inform future postgraduate course design. A limitation to asking such questions in a cultural context

where direct criticism of someone or something is not a socially sanctioned practice is the possibility that respondents will give only responses that are considered socially desirable, that is, the Hawthorne effect. The anonymous nature of the questionnaire and the absence of the researcher during the time used to complete the instrument were two strategies intended to reduce such an effect.

### **Theme 1 Student Preparation for Success**

The two major themes that emerged from the students' written responses are described and illustrated below. One theme focused on course demands and student preparation for academic success. Students made numerous comments about the need for prospective students to consider the level of commitment the course demanded and to be prepared to make adjustments to their lives. For example, 'I'll ask him to give up some work because if you have too much things to and you don't read have (sic) to read so your study is useless'. Another respondent was more detailed in his advice to prospective students. He wrote,

Because this is not an easy course and you need to make sure of yourselves. ... it is also difficult course that you need to put a lot of time and strength on this course. And I don't want you to stop or drop it half way when you face difficulties. I would say, it is easy to start something but it is not easy to finish it...And most people also love to start but they have difficult to finish the task, even myself. Therefore I urge you to think clearly. After you do it and you are ready. So you can go for it and I am sure you can reach your goal as well. Remember the course is expensive and you need to work hard on your study and it worth (sic).

Several students included in their advice the need for a prospective student to have good skills in English and a willingness to give time to read and research for their assignments.

### **Theme 2 Career Prospects**

A second major pattern that emerged from the students' responses was a strong and widely held belief in the positive career outcomes and opportunities their postgraduate study will offer. Repeated references were made to the master's programme being a 'good course' to do because of the strong likelihood of improving their current employment situation with the qualification; for example, 'I would advise him/her that it will be a good choice to further study in this field because there are not many people who got the degree of this major and the career opportunities will be great'.

Linked to the idea of career opportunities was the belief that their master's programme was considered a quality programme of study, and one with national and international recognition. One student wrote,

For me, this programme is good; if that opportunity comes, I will advise them the potential of the programme (knowledge among master students from different backgrounds and experience). Other is the accreditation accepted among national and international agencies.

Another student wrote, 'I advice him/her to attend Masters program at RUPP is going on the right way I mean the degree is mostly recognized in the region, the programme provides the students with quality.'

The importance of career outcomes for graduates emerged also in responses to the question about advice to give to faculty developing a new master's programme. The

relevance of a programme of study to current and emerging employment opportunities in Cambodia was unambiguously emphasised by many students, as described below.

They should know the specific skills that the society needs in the specific period in the future after they will have produced their potential graduates so that it can guarantee them good employment.

I would like them to know the circumstance of Cambodian students, situation in Cambodia, and the demand of the labour market in the future.

The job opportunities and own interesting (sic).

You should design the programme that the country need (sic).

Think about work market and subjects in the course.

For many respondents, the idea of graduate career opportunities was strongly linked to the notion of the university and its course planners knowing the future skill needs of the country and thereby making a close connection between study programmes offered and future work opportunities. The responses also indicate a desire amongst some respondents to be involved in the development of their country, their views expressing the idea that while improving their own employability was valued, so was meeting some of the needs of their own country for skilled professionals.

## **CONCLUSION**

The data presented in this initial exploratory study of postgraduate Cambodian students are, out of necessity, mainly descriptive. The picture that emerges is one of both diversity and sameness amongst the Cambodian postgraduate student population. Predominantly male, married, urban, and working full time, most students have made a significant financial commitment to their study in the belief that they are creating for themselves better employment opportunities. Many believe that they will be in a position to contribute to their own country's development with their improved skills and training.

The expenditure of up to one-third of their annual income for their study is an extraordinary figure, and it is difficult to envisage students in many other countries making a similar financial commitment, especially without any form of tax concession to offset the expenditure. There are no student loan systems within the Cambodia higher-education sector, and unless a student is successful in having their fees paid by their employer or in receiving a scholarship, they must assume the full financial burden for their studies. Students report that during their master's study, they may also forego extra income because of the time limitations imposed from attending classes and supervision meetings. For those already working in the higher-education sector as teachers, receiving payment only for the hours they teach or attend work-related meetings is another as-yet unexplored impact on the income-generation capacity of individuals engaging in postgraduate study.

The lack of student-focused resources and services within the university, including library access and services, academic study skills support, Internet access, or access to professional journals and databases, means that these postgraduate students face significant challenges in their pursuit of academic success. Personal resourcefulness is clearly required for any student, and the high level of reported dependence on teachers as sources for materials is not surprising in view of the challenges to independently accessing the Internet and journal and database collections.

The students' recommendation that university course planners need to align courses to reflect projected employment trends and skill needs within the country echoes the findings of the 'Education in Cambodia report' (NIS, 2008). Both employers and youth in the report also highlighted the need for better alignment between employment trends and education

offerings. Similarly, Mak Ngoy Eng (2010) argued that while HEIs are presently driven by quantity rather than quality and focus on meeting consumer demands for programmes of study rather than according to identified areas of national skill shortages, the situation of many graduates with degrees for which there is little or no demand will escalate within Cambodia.

There was a widely held view amongst respondents that their master's study would improve personal employment opportunities, and this finding reflects the views of the young people surveyed in the YEP Project (2008). Students are investing significant amounts of their personal income in study with a belief that the investment will be returned through improved employment and financial circumstances.

Although this is an initial descriptive and exploratory study, data that were collected point to further areas for enquiry as well as identifying area for action. Higher education is the third tier of education for any country. The increasing massification of higher education internationally is now widely acknowledged to bring with it a range of challenges. Within Cambodia, these challenges are exacerbated by limited infrastructure, inexperienced academic staff, and conflicting ideals—ideals associated with modernisation on one hand and reinforcing the country's existing power structures on the other (see Ayres, 2000, for an insightful discussion of these tensions and their resulting consequences for individuals as well as systems).

This study, limited by its sample size, use of a second language and an online survey to collect data, and informed only by use of a questionnaire, nonetheless points to useful directions for further enquiry. These include but are not limited to exploring the development and use of a graduate survey for determining career pathways of university graduates in Cambodia and examining the links between universities and employers and the type and scope of that relationship, which would help address the repeatedly expressed need for clear links between study programmes and required national skills.

Exploring the types of academic support services that would assist postgraduate students achieve their goal of graduating and the institution's goal of producing quality graduates has immediate value. The basis for higher education funding, staffing, and the extent of such academic support service provision are all important areas for further study.

An assessment of female students' experiences at university with particular reference to their experiences of studying under female academic staff would add to the small but growing body of literature on female academic achievement and retention in Cambodia. Finally, in the words of one of the respondents, '...Cambodia's higher education sector should be more relevant to the country's situation and the lecturers should be more active and good facilitators'.

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