



บทความวิชาการ (Academic Article)

## Academic and Student Affairs Collaboration for Enhancing Students' Future Work Skills in Cambodian Higher Education

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### Abstract

Literature highlights the crucial roles of academic affairs and student affairs in an educational institution in enhancing student learning. Cambodian higher education institutions mainly focus on academic affairs and neglect student affairs—lack of collaboration. Skills mismatch has profoundly been a radical challenge for Cambodian higher education, requiring students to have future work skills to compete in the job market. This paper aims to propose an academic and student affairs collaboration framework that enhances students' future work skills by reviewing extensive literature. The framework consists of three elements: collaboration outcomes, collaboration implementation, and collaboration supports. The collaboration outcomes are the desired outcomes of ten future work skills. Collaboration is implemented in terms of criteria or characteristics of successful collaboration under eight principles of good practices of higher education. Collaboration implementation cannot be effective

unless there is support from leadership at both institutional and ministry levels and structure and resources for reorganization and support in collaboration.

**Keywords:** Academic and student affairs collaboration, Future work skills, Higher education, Cambodia

## Introduction

Higher education in Cambodia struggled in its historical time about different eras of political changes. Before independence in 1953, there were few higher education institutions (HEIs) (Rany, Zain, & Jamil, 2012; Un & Sok, 2018b), and until the 1960s, eight HEIs were established (Un & Sok, 2018b). From 1975 to 1979, Cambodia fell into genocide, leading Cambodian higher education back to zero (Un & Sok, 2018a). Universities were also forced to shut down (Rany et al., 2012; Un & Sok, 2018b). However, there were seven, five for urban and two for provincial areas, to open (Tan, 1974 as cited in Un & Sok, 2018b). After the wars, it strived to resurrect and recognize its reform in 1997.

Currently, 125 Cambodian HEIs are operating under the jurisdiction of 16 ministries/government institutions in 20 provinces, of which 76 (13 for public and 63 for private) are under the supervision of the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport (MoEYS) (MoEYS, 2019). The content of the present paper primarily focuses on the nature of HEIs under the supervision of MoEYS.

A significant challenge for Cambodian higher education is skills mismatch (Madhur, 2014). According to UNDP (2011), formal sector jobs in Cambodia remain very low, and paid workers account for just 23.3 percent of the labor force. This situation suggests that the education system is not delivering sufficient graduates capable of contributing to the overall workforce (Rana & Ardichvili, 2014). HR Inc (2010) reported

that higher education costs were not consistent with the return the graduates earned – costs of about \$600 per year with a starting monthly salary between \$120 and \$180. These issues address the suggestions for Cambodian HEIs to develop students with the necessary skills demanded from employers. It requires students to have future work skills that can be enhanced through academic and student affairs collaboration.

In the Cambodian context, both public and private universities seem to neglect student affairs' roles and have a lack of collaboration between academic and student affairs. HEIs lack student services and activities to support their learning from the beginning of their first year until graduation. Some do not have orientation for new students and other services such as career advising and student organizations. These two functional areas do not have a typical relationship. For instance, they lack activities on discussing and exchanging information on student matters.

This paper aims to propose an effective collaboration framework between academic and student affairs through a literature review. Firstly, it highlights the importance of future work skills for Cambodian undergraduate students. Then it overviews general concepts of academic and student affairs, specifically in Cambodian HEIs. Next, it presents barriers/benefits and characteristics of successful collaboration. Finally, an effective collaboration framework is proposed.

### **Future Work Skills**

Davies, Fidler, and Gorbis (2011) identified ten future skills for the workforce in the digital disruption era. Sensemaking can be merely meant as “the making of sense” (Weick, 1995, p. 4). It is the ability to assess the deeper or essential significance of what is being conveyed (Davies et al., 2011) in the complexity (Weick, Sutcliffe, & Obstfeld, 2005); in turn, it can turn the simple into the complex (Ancona, 2011). Social intelligence

is the ability to connect deeply and directly to others, sense and induce the responses and intended interactions (Davies et al., 2011) and get them to collaborate with you (Albrecht, 2006). Novel and adaptive thinking is proficiency in thought and finding ideas and answers outside rotary or rule-based thought (Davies et al., 2011), seeking more creative approaches and concepts (Weng, 2015). However, it cannot be recognized without design mindset and virtual collaboration (Kapenieks, 2016). Cross-cultural competency is the ability to work in diverse cultural settings (Davies et al., 2011). A multicultural society needs to provide various ethnic groups with ample opportunities to share their different ideas and highlight their distinctive culture, which makes urban life culturally diverse (Parekh, 2009). Computational thinking can translate vast volumes of data into abstract ideas and grasp reasoning based on data (Davies et al., 2011). It is technically a cardinal skill for all, involving processes, programs, and software design and using and recognizing data to communicate objectives and effectively solve problems (Wing, 2006).

New media literacy can objectively analyze and create content using digital media types and use them for persuasive communication (Davies et al., 2011). Both Computational thinking and new media literacy help function efficiently and create social networks (Weng, 2015). Transdisciplinarity is literacy in many fields and the capacity to grasp concepts in multidisciplinary (Davies et al., 2011). It is more than a disciplinary skill since it creates continually connected beings, capable of adapting to the evolving demands of professional life and endowed with an endless versatility that is often geared towards realizing their inner potentialities (Nicolescu, 2012). The design mindset has immense power to help people creatively and quickly solve problems (Tempore, 2013 as cited in Weng, 2015). It is defined as the ability to reflect and improve tasks and work processes to achieve optimal results (Davies et al., 2011). Thus it needs the flexibility to improve work processes that produce the desired outcome (Bamel,

Rangnekar, Rastogi, & Kumar, 2013). It generally focuses on creativity, logic, and empathy to obtain the best solution to a problem and making the solution workable (Tempore, 2013 as cited in Weng, 2015). Cognitive load management is the ability to identify and filter information for value and understand how cognitive performance can be maximized using various methods and techniques (Davies et al., 2011). Cognitive load indicates the amount of pressure that may be imposed on the working memory regarding a person's capacity to process, store, and retrieve stimuli-related information (Senter & McClelland, 2015). Virtual collaboration is the ability to work efficiently, increase interaction, and display presence as a virtual team member (Davies et al., 2011). The virtual collaboration stems from the need to jointly address an issue, create or define something in a virtual world, and require mutual participation in decision-making and accountability for outcomes (Linda & Charles, 2007).

These skills result from three significant changes: the technological world, brain function, and multicultural society (Weng, 2015). To equip these skills, Davies et al. (2011) suggest educational institutions to place more emphasis on critical thinking, insight, and analysis capabilities; integrate new media literacy into academic programs; apply experiential learning that allows students to collaborate, work in groups, read social cues; and respond adaptively; integrate interdisciplinary training in a range of subjects. As future work skills mainly involve social skills, students need out-classroom learning experience in a real-world setting (experiential learning); and this is the responsibility of student affairs. Both academic and student affairs thus focus on the same desired outcomes in their collaboration.

### **Academic and Student Affairs in Higher Education**

A simple concept of academic affairs is a division or administration within a higher education institution that involves the faculty and is liable for its curricular aspects

(O'Halloran, 2005 as cited in Jungblut, Bruni, & Maust, 2017). While academic affairs are generally concerned with the learning taking place in the classroom, student affairs are responsible for learning outside the formal classroom (Creamer, Winston, Miller, & Associates, 2001). They are considered the division or administrative area of a college or university responsible for the out-of-class life and learning of students, along with the institution's co-curricular aspects (Jungblut et al., 2017). Creamer et al. (2001) additionally explained that student affairs could be viewed as both formal and informal in terms of educational missions and provide learning opportunities for students and support their academic, personal, and social development. Most research and studies consider both academic affairs and student affairs as a thin line of distinction.

The scope of academic affairs includes an academic program with credit, teaching and learning, and support services. The support services include degree, certificate programs, and numerous professional accreditations (Bristol Community College, n.a). Student affairs include functional areas of admissions, orientation, financial aid, testing and counseling, placement, discipline, summer employment, and recreational activities (Sandeem, 2001, as cited in Hogan, 2016; UNESCO, 2002), cultural activities, sports, and disability services (UNESCO, 2002). All of these roles are to achieve goals.

### **Academic and Student Affairs in Cambodian Higher Education**

Most Cambodian HEIs usually consider academic affairs into the faculties and/or academic departments, and some involve the office of academic affairs in the process. The office personnel must hold bachelor's degrees, while the teaching staff in the faculties are required to have at least a master's degree for teaching undergraduate programs. In few cases, they also recruit bachelor's degree holders for teaching associate degrees though it is not preferred. According to the regulations

related to higher education, the teaching staff must have higher education level than the level they teach. Besides teaching and learning, curriculum development is another task in academic affairs. For Kampong Speu Institute of Technology (KIT), the curriculum development process consists of five phases: needs assessment, program drafting, expert review, group discussion with stakeholders, and program finalization and approval. These phases involve both office of academic and student affairs and subject matter departments. However, most institutions do not implement the fourth phase – focus group with stakeholders, and even expert review. Program specifications must comply with Cambodian National Qualification Framework (CQF).

Student affairs profoundly involve enrollment management tasks associated with students from the day they step into the institution and student activities. The enrollment management is considered a general task within an educational institution and is usually the office of academic affairs, not its faculty. It includes admission, entrance examination, certification, and financial aid processes. However, orientation is not used for most institutions, except for KSIT, which adopts it. For Royal University of Phnom Penh (RUPP), student activities consist of the Cambodian Red Cross, youth club, student association, career advising, and bright and noble group (RUPP, 2018), and additionally academic workshops, academic competitions such as debate and public speaking, sport, national celebration, and main activities of the campus.

As the faculties and/or departments are mainly responsible for curriculum and instruction and faculty members usually teach more than one institution, they lack collaborative efforts with student affairs. In other words, both functions hardly plan together for specific goals regarding student development.

## **Academic and Student Affairs Collaboration**

This section presents collaboration barriers and benefits, areas and characteristics and leadership, and successful collaboration.

### **Barriers to and Benefits of Collaboration**

In higher education literature, most academics and practitioners recognize the crucial roles of academic and student affairs collaboration; however, several barriers can be identified. Hogan (2016) believed that cultural difference is a significant barrier in academic and student affairs connection and argued for the necessity and value for collaboration. Similarly, regarding institutional factors, academic and student affairs partnership obstacles can be summarized as fragmentation of the organization and labor division, faculty specialization, lack of shared goal, values, and language, separation history, different expectations and priorities, cultural difference regarding personality styles, opposing assumption about what constructs effective learning (Kezar, 2003), and professional identities in terms of student affairs professionals perceiving themselves as an active contributor to student learning, not just service providers (Hogan, 2016).

Partnering both functions contributes to student learning, retention (Hogan, 2016; Kezar, 2016), resource leverage and cost savings, organizational learning, and improved service and program for students (Kezar, 2016). It is crucial to understand the collaboration barriers and their benefits. The two mentioned functions can work together to avoid and overcome the barriers and use the collaboration benefits for shaping students' future work skills. Besides, in what areas do they collaborate? It is an important question.

### **Areas of Collaboration and Leadership**

There are two critical areas that academic and student affairs can collaborate – programs and problems (Kezar, 2016). The program area includes first-year programs

and learning communities, learning and living environment, citizenship learning, intergroup conversations, social media, and leadership (Kezar, 2016). The first-year experience programs involve orientation, academic advising, time management, social involvement, and learning skills and aim at understanding human skills and incorporated content from sociology, psychology, and anthropology as well as psychological development (Kezar, 2016). Learning communities, as an additional-curricular innovation built jointly by academic and student affairs, happen in various forms and intentionally get students together in terms of matched schedules, learning environment and residential life, and shared-content courses to promote informal conversation and engagement (Kezar, 2016). More specifically, collaboration types are academic support, cocurricular activities, orientation, service, residential groups and colleges, and policy and planning (O'Halloran, 2019). Concerning the problem area, Hirsch and Burack (2001) noted that the problem area is concerned with retention, general education results, completion rates, regulations from accrediting agencies, civic leadership, the specific populations, and technology that influences college student life (Kezar, 2016). To make collaboration work in these areas needs support from leadership. Leadership can support collaboration by prioritizing collaboration, modeling collaboration, exploiting external messages, promoting networks, allocating resources, encouraging rewards, recruiting new people, and reorganizing (Kezar & Lester, 2009). Hogan (2016) agreed with Kezar (2003) that leadership could have other consequences and result from existing situations, from joint activities rather than new hires or new budget lines.

### **Successful Collaboration**

General characteristics of collaboration are identified as initiation point, budgeting, point of leadership and responsibility, and scope and degree of collaboration (O'Halloran, 2019). Guidelines for leaders to implement collaboration are also useful. They are culturally competent programs and classes, leadership

representation, community involvement, financial support, student and guardian induction, and other pathways, including offering flexible class time and information on curriculum and student affairs in a digital manner (Allen, Thompson, & Calderón Galdeano, 2019).

Besides leadership support, successful collaboration needs additional engagements for collaboration sustainability. First, seeing collaboration as a developmental process is associated with commitment and consists of three sequential steps, including building commitment, having the commitment to action, and sustaining commitment (Kezar & Lester, 2009). Second, watching group dynamics concerns facilitators or chairs of partnerships to mediate intergroup dynamics and conflict. Culture collisions between academic and student affairs are avoided. Personalities are controlled. One major problem is the creation of dysfunctional group dynamics (Kezar & Lester, 2009). O'Halloran (2019) emphasized this point by elaborating the common understanding of collaborators' educational experience and responsibilities. Third, evaluating is to evaluate the effort (Schuh, 1999), not only the process but also the outcomes (Kezar, 2016).

Effective collaboration is initiated with support from leadership. It is implemented in the areas of programs and student problems. Non-credit courses and electives are the program area in collaboration as credit courses are already structured in the program and may be hard for implementation. Student activities are included in collaboration as Cambodian HEIs neglect them. Characteristics of collaboration are the administrative nature of Cambodian HEI practice. Importantly, collaboration must have the desired outcomes – the future work skills of the students. The effective framework includes these elements.

## Proposed Framework

The framework starts with the desired outcomes – future work skills, followed by collaborative mechanisms such as collaboration areas or types and characteristics, which show how collaboration is implemented to fulfill the students' desired work skills. Finally, at the bottom of the framework, leadership support from the ministry and institutional levels is needed to help initiate this collaborative framework and resources and organizational restructuring to transform it into reality and a more significant change (see figure 1).

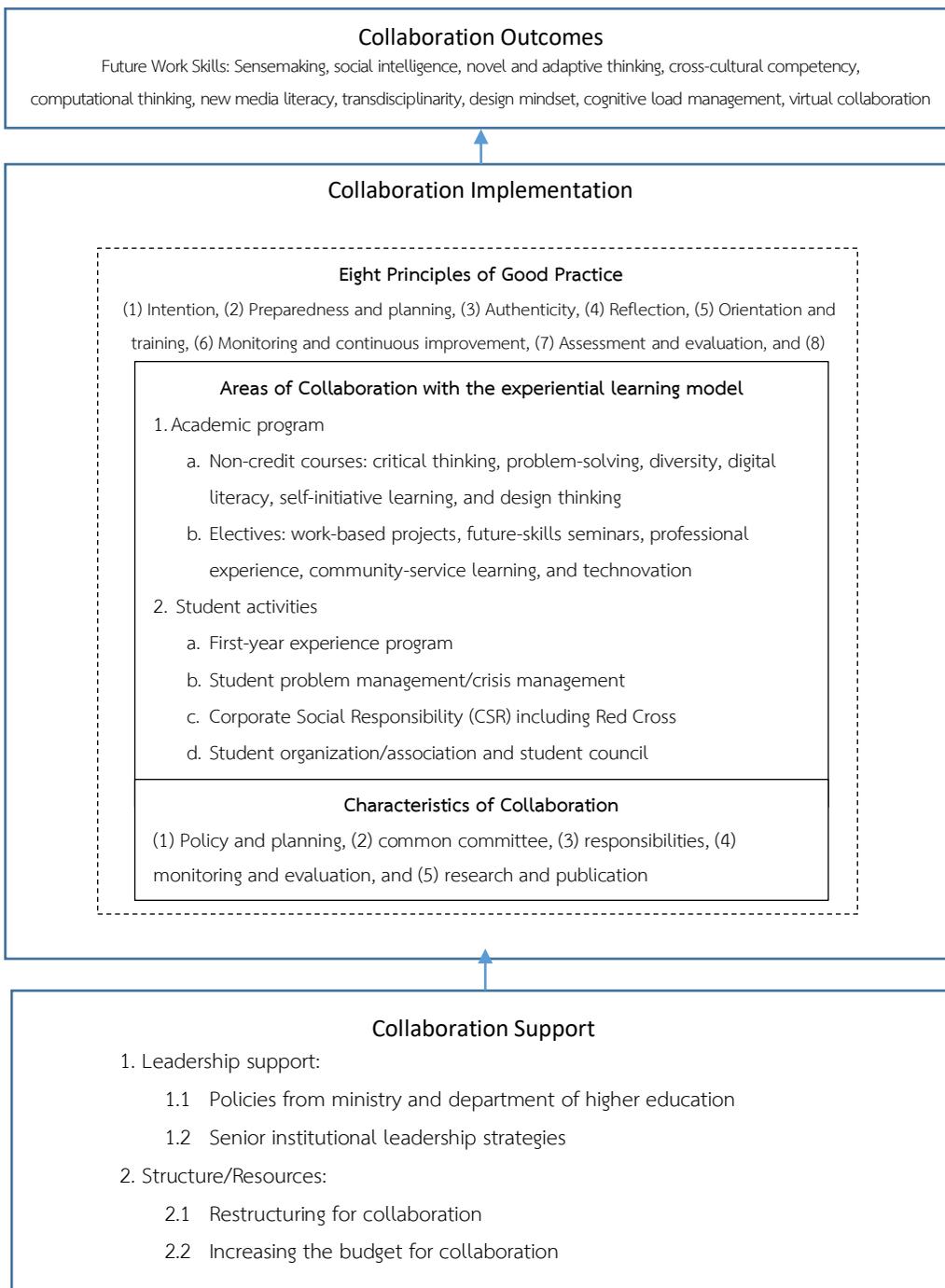
In figure 1, the ten future work skills are an ideal vision or desired collaboration outcome included in the policy and planning of collaboration characteristics in the collaboration implementation section. It is also included in the strategic plan of the institution to place its importance.

A clear structure of the common committee is established to lead the collaboration. Members of the common committee are mainly from academic affairs and student affairs. Meanwhile, the common committee's key responsibilities are clearly defined so that the members perform their duties within a frame of standard performance. As O'Halloran (2019) suggested, one characteristic of collaboration is leadership and responsibility that may be from either academic or student affairs and claimed that student affairs should be the lead in collaboration.

Monitoring and evaluation ensure the accountability of collaboration. The evaluation focuses on both process and outcome of the collaboration as claimed by Chanpensri (2015) and Kezar (2016). Monitoring and evaluation are solely not adequate for best practice, and therefore research and publication are added for stimulating and creating empirical evidence for collaboration outcomes. Literature also highlights the importance of research in promoting student learning through collaboration between academic and student affairs, but there is a lack of research effort in Cambodian HEIs.

In the implementation section, some specific areas of collaboration are identified. The author categorized them into two major areas – program and student activities. For the program area, credit courses are hard to implement in collaboration as they are tied with unadaptable matter and hard to integrate with student affairs concepts. However, it is the first step to allow collaboration for non-credit courses and electives. The non-credit courses focus on deep and higher order thinking skills, including critical thinking, problem-solving, diversity, digital literacy, self-initiative learning, and design thinking. They are necessary for future work, as the literature suggested. Cambodian education is currently promoting digital literacy as well as 21<sup>st</sup> century skills at the forefront. They are 8Cs and 2Ls: critical and problem solving, creativity and innovation, cross-cultural understanding, collaboration, teamwork and leadership, communications, information and media literacy, computing and ICT literacy, career and learning skills, and change and learning skills and leadership (Anderson & Krathwohl, 2001; Chaemchoy, 2019). Elective courses include work-based projects, future-skills seminars, professional experience, community-service learning, and technovation for practical experience that students need to acquire before leaving for the job market. The employers require work experience in recruitment.

Another area of collaboration is student activities. The first-year experience program is essential for student retention, and thus it should be effectively organized between academic and student affairs under the common desired outcome. Orientation and academic advising are the two critical tasks in the first-year experience program. In addition to the first-year experience program, student problem management or crisis management ensure that collaboration leads to the best solution to student problems. Information sharing on student issues between academic and student affairs promotes student satisfaction and leads to student retention. It is better for student activities created for dealing with students' real problems and encouraging them. The student experience is enhanced when students engage themselves in the activities. Student organizations/associations and student councils have a clear structure and are clarified in terms of responsibilities.



**Figure 1.** Proposed Academic and Student Affairs Collaboration Framework for Enhancing Cambodian Higher Education Students' Future Work Skills

Along with academic and student affairs, they operate corporate social responsibility (CSR), including Red Cross and other social activities. In the institution, they can create thinking and design clubs that foster student learning for work. Both program and student activities are integrated with the experiential learning model in the learning process to fulfill practical experience for ready-for-work skills. Successful collaboration is implemented under the eight good practices of higher education.

Collaboration cannot be initiated unless there is support from institutional and ministry leadership. Policy on promoting collaboration between academic and student affairs is imposed from the department of higher education directly to HEIs. Chanpensri (2015) found that one of the success factors in collaboration was the policy of the university. In the proposed framework, policy and planning are referred to both the institution's policy and specific policies on collaboration. In practice, this mechanism is effective as HEIs are required to comply with the imposed policy. After imposing policy from the ministry, senior leaders at the institution must ensure collaboration through key strategies. The key strategies include prioritizing collaboration, modeling collaboration, exploiting external messages, promoting networks, allocating resources, encouraging rewards, recruiting new people, and reorganizing (Kezar & Lester, 2009). Within these strategies, resources are essential for enabling collaboration to come into reality.

## Conclusion

It is imperative to start from the ministry's policies, including the budget increase, as Cambodian HEIs are known to have limited capacity building and initiatives that hinder change. Collaboration is workable whenever leadership gives importance to it and builds a culture and climate around it. Successful collaboration needs commitment and communicates it to all stakeholders. Teamwork is essential in

collaboration. To collaborate effectively, all staff need teamwork skills. Building collaboration in a digital manner is recommended for this new digital era.

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