

## ASEAN's Free Mobility of Professional Labor: Benefits and Challenges for Cambodia

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### ABSTRACT

ASEAN's flow of professionals has been carried out since 2015; understanding the outcomes regarding the participation of Cambodia has been observed. Thus, this study used a qualitative approach with experts in international relations, the labour market, and economics. The participants were selected through purposeful and snowballing techniques; in-depth semi-structured interviews were employed, each taking 30-45 minutes. The researchers recorded, coded, and analyzed all interview responses via thematic analysis. The research findings highlighted the opportunities for Cambodia, such as gaining a larger labour market with higher wages and helping skilled workers be recognized across ASEAN. However, Cambodia faced challenges due to the shortage of skilled workers and the mismatch between the local workforce's skills and the labour market's demands. The research recommended that ASEAN should enhance the Mutual Recognition Arrangements and expand more professions, for these days, it covers only a few fields, such as engineering, architecture, and healthcare, and the government should widely spread the ASEAN free of skilled labour agreement to the students so that they can understand and be prepared to compete for job opportunities; Cambodia should improve its quality of education, students should study majors that match the labour market needs, and local jobs should be further created by attracting local and international investors to decrease brain-drain.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

The ASEAN was established in Bangkok on August 8, 1967, by the five founding countries: Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore, and Thailand. Brunei Darussalam joined in 1984, Vietnam in 1995, Laos and Myanmar in 1997, and Cambodia in 1999. The ASEAN's main objectives are to promote regional peace, stability, and cooperation by accelerating economic growth, social progress, and cultural development in

a spirit of equality and partnership. In 1976, ASEAN held its first summit, declaring mutual respect for all nations' independence, sovereignty, equality, territorial integrity, and national identity; the free right of each state to be free of external interference or coercion; non-interference in internal affairs; peaceful resolution of disputes; and no use of threat or force [1], [2]. ASEAN also established the ASEAN Economic Community, which took effect at the end of 2015 and is seen as a significant pillar in the ASEAN regional economic integration drive, bringing up opportunities in a market worth US\$2.6 trillion with over 622 million people. The free migration of trained professionals is one of the ASEAN Economic Community's guiding principles. All ten ASEAN states have signed agreements allowing the free flow of professionals in engineering, architecture, land surveyors, nursing, medical practitioners, dentists, accounting, and tourism practitioners.

In November 2002, the Association Leaders of Presidency, in a discussion in Phnom Penh, planned for the region to consider making an ASEAN Economic Community by 2020. However, in 2007, the association agreed to fasten forward the date to 2015, and with this deadline, there are increasing discussions on the shape and results of the ASEAN Economic Community, and the ASEAN leaders have taken the Southeast Asian Association to a new level of economic development, which is expected to bring Southeast Asian people closer together and assist them flourish [3].

One of the most important aspects of the newly formed ASEAN Economic Community is the increased mobility of skilled workers, which is seen as one of the key causes of the AEC's progress [4], [5]. Showing further information related to the skilled workers movement, the International Labor Organization and the Asian Development Bank have also stated that ASEAN may generate approximately fourteen 14 million jobs within ASEAN to meet the needs of various types of skilled employees [6], [7].

ASEAN facilitates the free mobility of skilled professionals within the region; workers' mobility to different states has many advantages, and this topic is expansively discussed. Skilled employees from less developed nations with substantial unemployment are attracted to richer and more developed countries, and the good condition of the ASEAN economic improvement is due to the labour market and the relationship between supply and demand. Based on the World Bank's figure, some six-point eighty-nine million workers have been relocating within the ASEAN region of six hundred and forty million population; further, it has been suggested that workers should be ready to move across the countries and the whole region for jobs to get advantages of recent economic opportunities.

### **Statement of the Problem**

The free flow of skilled labour in the ASEAN region has been approved and signed by all countries since the end of 2015, and skilled workers throughout the region can move legally and find work in any country in the ASEAN. Before and during the implementation of the ASEAN Community's free flow of skilled labour, the benefits and challenges for Cambodia have been discussed and debated among Cambodians, students, employees, job seekers, and experts whose work was relevant to skilled labour, and this was seen providing both, the opportunities and challenges for Cambodia. Cambodia was claimed to get opportunities, such as having a larger job market and well-paid work in the ASEAN,

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helping skilled workers be recognized across ASEAN; in contrast, it faces challenges, such as the skills mismatch and shortages to challenge the ASEAN's professionals.

Are the above opportunities and challenges true?

Seeking to know the above challenges for Cambodia is the problem that this research was conducted. Then, it would try to find out the solutions, for it is one of the research's purposes, and exploring the above benefits for Cambodia is also the research's other statement of problems because then the study would discuss it in detail and suggest Cambodia to continue to cooperate with the ASEAN in the long term on the free flow of skilled labour in the region.

### **Research Objectives**

The key objectives of the study are as follows.

- a. To explore the benefits for Cambodia regarding the flow of professional labour in ASEAN.
- b. To investigate the challenges that Cambodia faces in the flow of professional labour in ASEAN
- c. To examine the solutions to narrow down the problems and to strengthen the opportunities for Cambodia.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **Larger Job Markets in ASEAN**

Since establishing the ASEAN Economic Community in 2015, cross-border migration has increased rapidly, and industry insiders claim it has positively affected Cambodia by reducing unemployment [8]. Cambodia was expected to benefit from the ASEAN Community by gaining access to jobs in the ASEAN region, as Chan Sophal, head of the Cambodian Center for Policy Studies, shared that "A fully integrated ASEAN will present the opportunity to Cambodians" [4]. The international labour market and the agreement on the free movement of skilled labourers would provide good benefits for Cambodians, particularly professionals, to find work outside their country; hopefully, and legally, Cambodian professionals and skilled employees would be able to find better employment opportunities, and the service industry's workforce will reap the benefits of greater job opportunities [9]. As a result, Cambodian professionals would have more opportunities to work in broader job markets in countries with skills shortages.

Interviewers and authors voiced their optimism for Cambodia, predicting that the country will benefit from the flow of its professionals into the ASEAN. The developed ASEAN countries, such as Thailand, Cambodia's neighbour, are experiencing a shortage of young human resources, necessitating hiring additional young, educated workers to supplement their production forces; young and smart people are their desired personnel [10], [11]. According to Rush [12], the top ASEAN hosting nations for workers are Brunei Darussalam, Malaysia, Singapore, and Thailand, which may provide opportunities for Cambodians to work in those countries; human resource shortages in developed countries may provide employment prospects for Cambodia's young potential labour population.

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### **Well-Paid Jobs in the Region**

The income difference between work destination countries and sending countries for skilled workers has continued [13], and one of the factors fueling intra-ASEAN migration is the large income and pay disparity between international locations [14]. The pay gap between Cambodia and Singapore remains large [15]; earnings in Thailand are three times greater than in Cambodia, while salaries in Malaysia are over three and a half times higher than in Indonesia [16]. Talented employees from across ASEAN go to Singapore, Malaysia, Thailand, and Brunei Darussalam to look for jobs because of the high salaries [12]. Furthermore, economists researched and anticipated that job seekers from less developed countries would migrate to more developed countries for higher compensation [4]; Kevin Britten, managing director of Top Recruitment, a local human resources agency, claims that rural workers typically increase their knowledge in order to gain better earnings. Highly skilled domestic workers in Cambodia can still travel outside the nation for better pay [13]; an accounting student at Cam-Ed Business School claimed that after graduation, she would consider seeking a job overseas to get a greater wage [17].

### **Skills Recognition in ASEAN**

ASEAN has been putting much effort into increasing skilled workers' mobility among member countries. In order to provide citizens with access to the job markets to all members under the same conditions and diplomas from every member, each country has to be commonly recognized by other member countries. This allows workers to access the same professions in other member countries as they are qualified for in their home states and pursue their professional careers across the whole region under the same conditions as host country professionals. Cambodia may obtain regional respect as its skilled workers and professionals will be treated equally to other ASEAN intellectuals, according to the Mutual Recognition Arrangement signed by all ASEAN states in 2007. The recognition of education and skills through certification will also be necessary for receiving the full benefits of ASEAN integration because it has established skills mobility in each ASEAN member state to accept education, experience, and licenses or certificates gained in another ASEAN member state [18]. According to the agreement established to smooth skills mobility in ASEAN, local graduates will be recognized equally by developed countries in ASEAN nations, and professionals will be accepted equally in the entire region of ASEAN among fields signed by all members on majors such as engineering, nursing, architecture, accountancy, surveying qualifications, medical practitioners, dental practitioners, and tourism professionals [19], [20].

### **Skill Mismatches**

For the ten ASEAN countries, unemployment, skill mismatches, and labour shortages are issues; some employers have complained about missing skills and lacking labour. Skills inequality challenges ASEAN's education and training system; skills mismatch leads to less workers' supply, while sometimes it also provides more than needed skills. Firms cannot seek workers with the skills they need due to high unemployment, especially among recently graduated students. Even among graduates with higher degrees

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of education or training, employers normally say that young people lack the required skills in the workplace. The unemployment rate among university degree-holders in Cambodia is larger than the average. This may result from skills mismatch due to the imbalance of workers' supply and needs and the low capacities of those graduates in the majors they have selected. "In a recent study of employers towards the education and skills of their staff and the workforce overall, seventy-six per cent of Cambodian employers complained that new graduates are not enough fulfilled with the correct set of skills," the report claims [21], [22]. The officials at the National Employment Agency of the Ministry of Labor and Vocational Training and the Labor Market Information Department showed that "the most important labour market problems in Cambodia include the mismatch between labour needed and supply; education and skill improvement is not well attached to the real demand for labour and professionals, for instance, there were less numbers who enrolled in schools of technical skills," [12].

### **Skills Shortages**

According to a recent survey in Cambodia, more than seventy-five per cent of businesspeople believed they were experiencing skill shortages, and based on Filipino nationals with experience in a range of tourism-related fields, Cambodia lacks qualified, skilled workers that can work for the industry's related work [23]. According to Todd [24], Cambodia's tiny skilled labour pools continue to alarm business owners. "In the context of ASEAN integration, Cambodia needs skills," Companies are coming to Cambodia, according to the Vice President of Minebea Company Limited in Cambodia, Yasuyuki Inoue, but they are having difficulty finding skilled staff. The most significant impediment to Cambodia's development is a scarcity of qualified experts [25]. Large firms in Cambodia may experience future issues in recruiting talented staff, according to a new quarterly Cambodian business confidence poll released by the Australian and New Zealand Royal Bank on the same day as the World Bank's research, and a total of forty CEOs and finance executives from the country's service were interviewed; ANZ Royal Bank CEO Grant Knuckey expressed concern about the lack of experienced people needed to complete future projects, and Kevin Britten, managing director of local HR firm New Recruitment, agreed [26].

Human Resource Broker Incorporated's managing director, Sandra Amico, stated, "There has always been a shortage of workforces, as we have seen for years" [27]. Cambodia has a deficit of skilled professionals, and its economies lack the technical education necessary for industrial development [28]. Try CHHIV, deputy director-general of the Ministry of Tourism, and Luu Meng, co-chair of the Government-Private Sector Working Group on Tourism, said, "Currently, we still have a shortage of skilled labour and resources related to tourism." [29]. Similarly, Minister of Labor and Vocational Training, ITH SAMHENG, stated, "Our country, we have much labour in terms of the labour force, but we still lack high-skilled labour to fulfil the needs of employers" [30].

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## **2. METHOD**

### **Research Setting and Ethical Issues**

Phnom Penh was selected for the research area for several reasons. First, it is a core country centre that seeks experts' and scholars' participation in a research topic. Second, Phnom Penh is a convenient place for this research to be conducted, for it is near the researcher's workplace. Further, conducting a study where the researcher can save time and expense is very effective. To improve the study's reliability, experienced researchers and professors checked research questionnaires, and after receiving feedback, questionnaires were checked again to determine whether they could be easily understood to avoid possible misinterpretations. The author contacted research participants via letters and direct meetings, and after being accepted by all participants for the interviews, the author went to meet with them directly again for the interviews, and they were thanked and respected for further cooperation with the survey. All participants were also well-informed in advance that the study would not cause any negative consequences to them so that this study could be carried out without any ethical constraints.

### **Data Collection and Analysis**

The researcher has collected secondary and primary data at various search centres. Firstly and significantly, he looked for secondary data in a variety of libraries, including the National Library, the University of Cambodia's library, the Royal University of Phnom Penh's library, and the American Embassy's library; further, the author has been looking for detailed information from working papers, academic written documents, online articles about skilled workers in Cambodia, the ASEAN, the EU, and documents written by officers at the Council for the Development of Cambodia, Cambodia Development Resource Institute, the Asian Development Bank, the World Bank, the International Labor Organization, the ASEAN Secretariats. Secondly and necessarily, the researcher strived to collect primary data, which was crucial to the success of this study. He targeted experts in the government, non-government, and private sectors with higher education degrees of Master's and PhD and with long work experiences as professors, researchers, and analysts in international relations, in the area of the labour market, professors and analysts of economics, government officers with long experience about ASEAN, and the former Cambodian ambassador to the AEAN. In order to get respondents to engage in this study academically, the researcher went directly and wrote a formal letter of request for the interviews in advance to the participants before the surveys were directly conducted. The survey questionnaires asked about the potential benefits and difficulties relating to Cambodia's free skilled labour movement into ASEAN.

This qualitative research describes in detail the specific information of the study using the gathered information about experts' perceptions on the opportunities and challenges for Cambodia in the free flow of skilled labour in the ASEAN Community. The study was carried out with eight participants (Table 1).

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Table 1. Demographic Information of the Participants

Participants	Age, between	Married status	Education	Major (s)	Job	Position
Participant 1	48-53	married	PhD	International Relations/Politics	NGO/Private sector	Professor, analyst, and author
Participant 2	48-53	married	PhD Candidate	International Relations	Government/Private sector	Lecturer, civil servant
Participant 3	48-53	Married	Master	Diplomatic	Government	Former Cambodian ambassador to the ASEAN, professor
Participant 4	48-53	Married	PhD	Economics	NGO/Private sector	Professor, researcher, and author
Participant 5	63-68	Married	Master	Foreign Affairs and Business	Government	A former officer at the ASEAN Secretariat, ambassador, and professor.
Participant 6	30-35	Married	PhD Candidate	International Relations	Private sector	Lecturer, business coordinator
Participant 7	54-59	Married	Master		Government	Government officer
Participant 8	42-47	Married	Master	Public Administration	Government	Government officer

In qualitative research, sample sizes can be smaller than 10 participants as it aims to explore experiences and perspectives in depth rather than findings to a larger population. Sample size in qualitative research is reaching "data saturation," where no new themes or insights emerge from additional interviews or observations. In thematic analysis, saturation often occurs within less than 10 interviews; it is a qualitative research method used to identify and interpret themes within data, often used in social sciences. This group of respondents represents the population of scholars who play essential roles in sharing knowledge, experiences, and recommendations to develop the country. Semi-structured in-depth interviews were employed, and each one took 30-45 minutes. The researchers recorded, coded, and analyzed all responses to survey questionnaires via the thematic analysis method, allowing the researcher to identify themes from the interviews. This method is good to follow when a researcher wants to discover people's views, opinions, knowledge, or experience on a topic [31].

### Thematic Analysis Process

To get familiarised with the data, after the interviews were completely done with the respondents, reading and rereading the data repeatedly to get a deep understanding of the information shared by the research participants is necessary. Transcribing the data and then noting the potential themes of the data by searching for the key and related information of the interviews and ensuring that the information is accurate and related before writing the report with concise and sufficient evidence [32].

## 3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### 3.1. Results

Throughout the interviews with research participants, it was found that the free flow of skilled labourers in the ASEAN community shares benefits for Cambodia in the larger job market in the region with high wages and the recognition of its skilled workers in the region; however, Cambodia still faced challenges for there was still a mismatch of

the country's skills with local and regional job market demands and the skills shortages to compete the regional professionals.

### **Benefits for Cambodia Regarding the Flow of Professional Labor in ASEAN**

Six out of eight respondents shared a similar opinion: "Participation in the ASEAN community empowers Cambodian professionals to better employment opportunities and well-paid jobs within the region." This opportunity provides access to a larger market and the potential for Cambodian skilled workers to pay higher wages than what might be available domestically. This means that skilled workers can find jobs in the region and are paid the same as those in ASEAN countries. For example, Cambodian nurses can find jobs in Thailand and get the same salary as Thai nurses. Cambodian tour guides who work in Malaysia are paid the same as Malaysian tour guides because ASEAN practices the free flow of skilled labour in its region.

Regarding skill labour recognition, Cambodia would benefit from professional services such as engineering, architecture, nursing, medical and dental practitioners, accountancy, and surveying. The agreement enables professionals in these fields to recognize their qualifications across ASEAN countries, facilitating more effortless movement and employment opportunities. In the past, there was a different standard of education recognition as the graduations and certificates in countries such as Singapore, Malaysia, and Thailand used to be more valued or were considered to have higher educational quality and recognition than those in other countries in the ASEAN. However, they are accepted equally, following the ASEAN skilled labour agreement. This means that Cambodian skilled workers' certificates, work opportunities, and treatments are the same among all workers in the region. One of the respondents said, "For example, Cambodian people who graduated with a major in tour guides are also accepted in Malaysia, and Malaysians who graduated from the tour guide course in their country are also accepted the same in Cambodia and other countries in the ASEAN. This is another benefit Cambodia can get from the free flow of skilled labour in the ASEAN regarding the same education quality recognition.

### **Challenges for Cambodia Regarding the Free Flow of Professional Labor in ASEAN**

The Mutual Recognition Arrangements (MRAs) in ASEAN, which are intended to recognize professional qualifications across member states, currently cover only a limited number of professions. This limited scope means that most professions do not benefit from the recognition processes, restricting the mobility of many skilled workers within ASEAN. The arrangement applied to only about 1.5% of the ASEAN workforce, leaving most skilled professionals outside the agreement. This means there is still little opportunity for skilled workers to find jobs in the ASEAN region, as it is a good option for them to work where they want.

The research participants shared their opinions on the challenges that Cambodia faced in order to develop the quality of education and vocational training with digitalization, technology, and TVET programs to narrow down the challenges for Cambodia, as mentioned by the first respondent, "Cambodia must strengthen his quality of

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education and training by investing in improving the quality of higher education and vocational training to match ASEAN standards. This involves upgrading curricula, improving faculty quality, and ensuring educational institutions meet regional standards. It also should enhance TVET programs to produce a workforce with skills in demand within ASEAN by collaborating with industry stakeholders to ensure that training programs are relevant and matched with labour market needs and encourage more regional cooperation to facilitate the exchange of skilled workers among ASEAN countries.”. Similarly, the third respondent stated “The government has strategic plans to build qualified human resources as the priority among, the road, water, electricity, and technology, to strengthen qualified Cambodian human resources with information technology and Artificial Intelligence to match the regional labour market needs, to build local workers' knowledge capacity with TVET to work for Small, Medium Enterprises in the country, strengthen the cooperation between government and private sectors to build human resources and create more jobs for local job seekers. Moreover, The Ministry of Education, Youth, and Sports should help to spread the ASEAN’s MRAs to students to make them know that their certificates are equal to all certificates in the ASEAN, like Singapore or Thailand, and help them to be ready for education and job competition in the region.”. Moreover, the fourth respondent suggested “Cambodia has the potential of young labour forces. However, we need to educate them with skills rather than working physically with less production, which will badly affect their future and the country as they age. Cambodian workforces will be highly educated, and ASEAN’s labour market will also be served with qualified skilled workers.” The fifth respondent also stated, "To compete with the ASEAN’s professionals for job opportunities, Cambodia needs to strengthen its skilled workers quality. The government should strengthen educational training with technology and STEM needed in the local and ASEAN labour market. Moreover, students should not study the skills that are not required for the job market but should learn skills that are needed locally in the region.”

### **3.2. Discussion**

The main purpose of this chapter is to describe the analysis of the research's empirical findings concerning the opportunities and challenges for Cambodia in the free flow of skilled labour in the ASEAN community.

#### **Benefits for Cambodia**

According to the interviews, most participants supported that “the free movement of skilled labourers in the ASEAN region allows Cambodian skilled people to access wider employment markets in the ASEAN region.” The outcomes mean that Cambodians are optimistic about the free flow of skilled mobility in the ASEAN as they could gain the chance to get work in the region of ASEAN, and these results have been found supported mainly by a literature review as Euro Cham Cambodia [33] written that Cambodia is found gaining wonderful opportunities to benefit from skills movement and better access to ASEAN labour markets. Further, a joint publication released by the ADB and ILO at the end of the year 2017 expressed that Cambodia could be one of the countries that get

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advantages from the ASEAN in terms of employment by 2025 [34], [35], and according to ERIA [9] and Sophal and Strange [36], Cambodian skilled professionals would be able to find better occupational opportunities in the ASEAN Economic Community Integration; further, expressing optimism for Cambodia from free flow of skilled labour in the ASEAN Economic Community, Chantola [37] also stated that it could increase Cambodian professionals' opportunities in the larger employment market in countries where skilled shortages.

Having a similar opinion, CVEA [38] stated that “Cambodian professionals would be able to apply for positions throughout the region without restriction and can be paid with higher wages,”; further, according to Chan Sophal, head of Cambodia's Center for Policy Studies, a positive effect is found in the better salary that qualified Cambodian workers are likely to receive when they work in ASEAN's states rather than in their own country. Cambodia's highly skilled employees can still migrate outside the country for higher wages, which are now available in ASEAN. Literature reviews also backed up the skills recognition by all ASEAN members as it was observed that the Mutual Recognition Arrangement is a key mechanism for professional labour mobility within ASEAN. MRA helps ASEAN countries grasp the education or experience that other ASEAN countries have gained, as well as the license or certification that other ASEAN countries have issued; further, more mobility of specialists within ASEAN and action to put into an effective agreement on the free flow of professional labour includes enhancing cooperation most of the ASEAN university network and developing core capabilities and qualifications for jobs and trainer skills.

### **Challenges for Cambodia**

Toward the skills mismatch, a study was conducted, and it revealed that about 30 per cent of the students take their majors according to the market's need for employment, while a large percentage of 60 per cent of them enrolled in their majors according to their interests as interviewed over one hundred students from fifteen different Cambodian youth organizations and universities. “The results showed that Cambodian youth do not have a precise or accurate opinion about the work market or job availability.” This led to the country's skills shortages. Responding to the concern that “Cambodia lacks skilled workers to compete with ASEAN experts,” research respondents supported this idea. This outcome is backed up by the literature review: “Cambodia lacked highly educated people; most professionals and the well-trained skilled labourers were disqualified from competing with other skilled labourers in ASEAN. Cambodia may stand behind other countries in the region in terms of skills. Many cannot compete with countries like Singapore and Malaysia in the same labour market. ” Cambodia faced difficulty regarding skills shortages and mismatches when competing with the local and regional market needs. A literature review also supported the statement that “Cambodia lacked highly educated people; most professionals and the well-trained skilled labourers were disqualified from competing with other skilled labourers in ASEAN. Cambodia may stand behind some countries in the region in terms of skills. Many were not able to compete with other countries like Singapore and Malaysia in the same labour market,”

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#### 4. CONCLUSION

At the start of 2016, the ASEAN Economic Community built a single marketplace and production base inside the region. With the ASEAN overall workforce of more than three hundred million people, the ASEAN has good implications for labour migration, and the community demands skilled labour throughout all countries inside the region. Before and while the free flow of skilled professionals in the ASEAN Economic Community was being taken into real practice, the opportunities and challenges for Cambodia were raised and debated, and it was observed that there were different ideas regarding the benefits and challenges for Cambodia. Based on the findings resulting from the literature review, optimisms have been found among Cambodians, especially from the officers and the persons in charge of skilled labourers who stated that Cambodians would probably earn opportunities from the free flow of skilled labour in the ASEAN such as the chance of having larger job markets with high salary, and regional skills recognitions. However, challenges were also observed as the country faced skills mismatch and skills shortages to compete for local and regional job opportunities.

#### **Implication of the Study with International Relations Theories**

The implication of international relations theory can help us understand how different nations or countries in the community interact during cooperation to reach prosperity. It can also help us better understand how to negotiate and work toward a peaceful resolution and agreement. Some international relations theories were matched in this study: non-zero-sum game, interdependent, dependent, pluralism, endogenous growth theory, and multilateralism. First, non-zero-sum game and interdependent theories are found to be matched with this dissertation because the majority of the objectives of this study are not focused on full winning and losing among all members of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations; rather, it is focusing on friendly and fruitful cooperating and developing between Cambodian professionals and the entire ASEAN region toward prosperity for all participants. In a non-zero-sum game, according to the definitions of key phrases by Business Investopedia dictionaries, all parties can gain, and there are various degrees of collaboration. Non-zero-sum games are not strictly competitive, and as a result, each country benefits; it is a win-win situation for everyone, and immigrants have no negative impact on native workers' wages or jobs; it is discovered that immigrants typically help the receiving countries for manual skills, and there is little evidence that migrant workers harm native workers' wages, and the authors expressed the possibility that immigrants have a positive impact on native workers' demand. Second, interdependency theory is the theory of associating, exchanging, and linking relationships between people, states, and states; it is based on the belief that closeness and cooperation are the keys to all or any interactions.

Keohane and Nye stated, "We live in an era of interdependence, in the world without borders." We need multinational corporations extending or operating across national boundaries and social movements. They further define interdependence as the mutual effects of international affairs, such as the flow of money, goods, people, and information across international borders. Having a similar vision in terms of cooperation

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within the region of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, Sok SIPHANA explicitly stated, “Instead of overwhelming competition, the ASEAN members ought to begin to give some thought to cooperation, collaboration and teaming up.” Third, dependency theory is also considered relevant, for it is thought that there are disadvantages for less developed states regarding their human capital because professionals who play a significant role in building their nations are sent out to the developed countries as it is a brain drain. Dependency theory states that the opinions that resources flow of labour from underdeveloped countries to a wealthy state, enriching the host countries; the weaker states are impoverished, and the rich ones are enriched by how weaker states’ brain drain is integrated into the world [58]. Within this case, many workers from less developed states, including Cambodia, are working in Malaysia, Singapore, and Thailand, which is seen as part of brain loss for the countries of origin as their human resources are working in other states. Fourth, pluralism has also been consistent with this study, as ASEAN is seen as living in a peaceful community, even though it is a multicultural community with different cultures, traditions, languages, and social classes. Fifth, endogenous growth theory, which involves investing in human capital, innovation, and knowledge, contributes to economic growth. This theory concerns how education has been developed to push workers to depend on skills. Moreover, multilateralism, which is the theory of organizing relations between states to strengthen quality, as the countries of ASEAN try to build and strengthen the relations among states to reach prosperity and harmony in the region, also matches this study.

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