

**THE EFFECTS OF FOREIGN AID ON NATIONAL  
DEVELOPMENT: A CASE STUDY OF AUSTRALIAN  
AID THROUGH THE PROVISION OF SCHOLARSHIPS  
TO LAOS**

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## **ABSTRACT**

This research investigated the scholarship program offered by the Government of Australia to assist students from Laos to gain advanced skills through study in Australia. The research focused on (1) the strengths, benefits and challenges of the Australian Scholarships Program (ASP) from the perspectives of the scholarship recipients and the employers, (2) the labour mobility trends of alumni, and (3) the policy structures supporting the ASP and whether there is a need for further policy development. Empirical data were derived from an online survey, semi-structured interviews, and document analysis.

A total of 72 scholarship recipient participants took part in the online survey using SurveyGizmo. In addition four public employers, four AusAID staff, and 17 scholarship recipients were interviewed. Three out of 17 alumni participants were scholarship recipients who moved from public organisations to work in private/NGOs after finishing study in Australia. Data from the interviews were supplemented by an analysis of the online survey and Lao and Australian government policy documents to gather rich data on the strengths, benefits and challenges of the ASP, the labour mobility trends, and the policy structures supporting the ASP.

Findings indicated that the strengths and benefits of the ASP were generally highly positive and included improved English language competency, greater promotion opportunities, the acquisition of skills and knowledge for Lao national and human resource development, financial benefits, an effective pre-departure program, good

cooperation between the two countries, retention of scholarship completers by public employers, and social and personal development of alumni.

Findings also revealed some challenges that require further attention. These included inadequate English language skills on the part of some participants, resistance to knowledge transfer into Lao public sector workplaces, the loss of some staff from public organisations and a greater propensity for international migration by recipients in the open category. The data also pointed to a range of academic, social and personal challenges, occasional poor planning in selecting levels and fields of studies and some inadequacies in the selection process of the ASP.

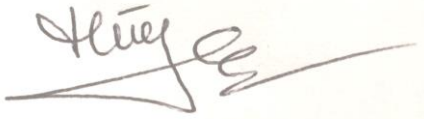
Findings relating to labour mobility revealed that career transition occurred in low, medium and high-level positions in public and private/NGOs. In addition, labour mobility occurred from public to private sector employment, to self-employment, and to further study. Labour mobility also occurred between private/NGOs and unemployment, and between students and self-employment. No evidence was found of labour mobility from private/NGOs to public organisations. Findings overall reported that the majority of scholarship recipients from both public and private/NGOs were promoted to hold higher or more senior positions after returning from study in Australia under the ASP.

In terms of policy structure, findings reported that there was a need for further policy development by Lao public employers, AusAID, and joint development by both Lao and Australian governments.

## **DECLARATION**

I certify that this thesis does not incorporate without acknowledgment any material previously submitted for a degree or diploma in any university; and that to the best of my knowledge and belief it does not contain any material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made in the text.

Flinders University, 08 April 2016

A handwritten signature in dark ink on a light-colored background. The signature is stylized, with the first part resembling 'Than' and the second part resembling 'ongdala'. There is a long horizontal stroke extending to the right from the end of the signature.

**THANONGSACK DUANGDALA**

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## GLOSSARY

ADS	: Australian Development Scholarships
AI	: Appreciative Inquiry
ALASA	: Association of Lao Australian Scholarship Alumni
ASEAN	: The Association of Southeast Asian Nations
ASP	: Australian Scholarships Program
AusAID	: Australian Agency for International Development
BD	: A bachelor degree
DFAT	: Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade
GDP	: Gross Domestic Product
HEIs	: Higher education institutes
HLAC	: A High Level Advisory Council
HRTD	: Human resource training and development
IAP	: Introductory Academic Program
IELTS	: International English Language Testing System
JICA	: Japan International Cooperation Agency
JSP	: Joint Selection Panel
Lao PDR	: Lao People's Democratic Republic
LASP	: Lao-Australian Scholarships
LDC	: Least Developed Country
MDGs	: Millennium Development Goals
MES	: Ministry of Education and Sports
NGOs	: Nongovernment organisations
NUOL	: National University of Laos



OECD	: The Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development
PSC	: A Program Steering Committee
SPSS	: Statistical Package for the Social Science
TAFE	: Technical and further education
UN	: The United Nations
UNDP	: The United Nations Development Programme
UNESCO	: The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation
UNICEF	: The United Nations Children's Emergency Fund
UXO	: Unexploded ordnance
WTO	: World Trade Organisation

# **CHAPTER 1 : INTRODUCTION**

## **Introduction**

The Lao People's Democratic Republic (Lao PDR) or Laos is located in the heart of the Indochina Peninsula in Southeast Asia. It is a landlocked country which encompasses a total of 236,800 square kilometers with the terrain characterized by three distinct geographical features: mountains, plateaus, and plains. The mountains and plateaus make up three-quarters of the total area. The population of Lao PDR is 6.2 million. Laos shares borders with China, Myanmar, Thailand, Cambodia and Vietnam. Laos consists of 49 ethnic groups, and four main languages. The Kip is the official currency. According to the 2005 Census, 67 per cent of Lao people are Buddhist, less than one per cent are followers of Islam or Bahai, 1.5 per cent are Christian, and 30.9 per cent are animists who worship animals and others. The country is made up of 16 provinces (Lao National Tourism Administration, 2011).

The Lao PDR is one of the Least Developed Countries (LDC) in the world, ranking 133<sup>rd</sup> of the 182 countries, according to the UNDP's Global Human Development Index (HDI) of 2008 (United Nations Human Right Council, 2010). The per capita average annual income was around US\$1,355 in 2012 (Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, 2013a). Since Laos is one of least developed countries in the world, many countries provide aid to support Lao development, and Australia is one of those countries. Australia is currently the second largest bilateral donor to Laos and total aid to Laos is about six per cent of Laos' Gross National Income (Commonwealth of Australia, 2010). The stated objectives of the Australian aid program are to assist

developing countries to decrease poverty and achieve sustainable development (Giving One Percent, 2010). Provision of scholarships to Lao students to study in Australian tertiary education institutions are important parts of the Australian aid program.

## **Background to the study**

According to the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (2013a) and AusAID (n.d.), Laos and Australia established formal diplomatic relations in 1952, and each year the Australian Development Scholarships (ADS) program provides between 40 and 50 scholarships to Laos. These scholarships are designed to develop a core of tertiary trained Lao nationals who are able to contribute to Laos' development in the longer term (AusAID, n.d.; Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, 2013a; Laos Australia Institute, 2013). There are currently more than 1000 Lao alumni of the program, many of whom are now in positions where they can actively contribute to development in Laos (AusAID, n.d.; Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, 2013b). According to Laos Australia Institute (2013) Australian scholarships have been provided to both public and private sectors, and the goal of Australian Scholarships Program is to support the effectiveness of Lao Human Resource Development and encourage Lao future leaders in order to promote national poverty eradication and sustaining development.

Since 2005, the annual expenditure of Australian aid to Laos on education has averaged A\$7.2 million, of which A\$4.1 million (57 per cent) has been on scholarships (Packer, Emmott, & Hinchliffe, 2009). According to the Vientiane Times (2014) the Australian government will provide AU\$86 million in aid to support basic education

programs in Laos over the following four years and will provide further aid amounting to AU\$55.6 million to Laos for 2014-2015, an increase from the AU\$52.9 million given for 2013-2014. To date Australian aid has mainly focused on human resource development, education, support for growth in trade and sustainable investment, clearance of unexploded ordnance (UXO), rural development, and infrastructure development.

### **Statement of the problem**

According to Riddell (2014) there is evidence to suggest that aid has made a positive contribution to both growth and the wider development of recipient countries, although some studies show aid has had little or no impact. Easterly (2006) is a leading critic of Aid and argues that it does more harm than good. Sachs (2005), an architect of the UN Millennium Development Goals, presents evidence of strong benefits; while Collier (2007) sees both sides but supports only certain kinds of development assistance. Some recent studies show that there are systemic problems resulting from aid (Riddell, 2014). Riddell (2014) argues that most critical debate about the pros and cons of aid has been concerned with the assessment of whether the immediate, short-term and extensive benefits that aid undoubtedly brings are outweighed by the indirect and direct systemic problems. In the context of giving Australian aid to Laos through the provision of scholarships, there is little evidence of recent studies pointing out the strengths, benefits and challenges of the scholarship program to Laos.

This study has investigated these strengths, benefits and challenges from the perspective of Lao recipients of Australian scholarships and their employers as well as AusAID staff.

In addition, in the past there is no evidence to suggest that any studies have been conducted focusing on labour mobility from public to private organisations in the Lao context as a result of sending people to studies in Australia under the scholarship program. However, in neighbouring countries there has been some evidence of such transfers; for example, from the public hospital system especially in rural areas in Thailand to private hospitals, which has led to the inequitable distribution of health professionals (Wibulpolprasert & Pachanee, 2008).

Gaining an understanding of the factors that underpin labour outflows to private sectors would be beneficial in the Lao context, so this study examined the experience of public to private labour mobility and the appropriateness of the policy settings of Australian Agency for International Development (AusAID), National University of Laos (NUOL) and the Lao Ministry of Education and Sports in this regard.

### **Aims of the study**

The aims of this study are:

1. To investigate the benefits, strengths and challenges of the scholarship scheme from the perspectives of employers and scholarship recipients.
2. To examine from the perspectives of employers and scholarship recipients whether there is a labour market mobility trend from public to private sector employment of scholarship recipients.
3. To explore what policy structures have been developed to optimise outcomes for the benefit of the Lao PDR, employers and alumni and whether there is a need for further policy development.

## **Research Questions**

Based on the perspectives of employers and scholarship holders:

1. What are the benefits, strengths and challenges of the scholarship scheme both for employers and recipients?
2. What is the nature of labour mobility trends?
3. What policy structures have been developed to optimise outcomes for the benefit of the Lao PDR, employers and alumni and is there a need for further policy development?

## **Rationale for the Study**

The Lao government has set a target for the graduation of Laos from Least Developed Country (LDC) status to occur by 2020 (UNDP, 2012) and the World Bank believes this is achievable because Laos has made good progress on a number of Millennium Development Goals, including reducing hunger, halving poverty, and improving education and health outcomes (World Bank, 2016). This research can support these developments because of the crucial role played by education: as UNESCO notes, “education, or the transmission, acquisition, creation and adaptation of information, knowledge, skills and values is a key lever of sustainable development” (UNESCO, 2012b, p3). In fact, UNESCO has affirmed that education is a catalyst for achieving all of the Millennium Development Goals because of its interconnectedness with poverty reduction, health and gender equality (UNESCO, 2011).

Second, although “the goal of the [current] Lao-Australian Scholarships Program (LASP) is to promote effective Human Resource Development and foster future leaders in order to enhance sustainable development and poverty reduction in Lao

PDR” (Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, 2013b, p. 3), and around 1000 recipients have successfully gained tertiary qualifications in Australia under LASP (Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, 2013b), there is no evidence that studies have been carried out to investigate the strengths, benefits and the challenges of the ASP from the perspectives of the scholarship recipients and Lao public employers. The results from this study should benefit Lao government and AusAID in managing the ASP in order to maximize the outcome of the program.

Finally, findings from the investigation will contribute to knowledge and understanding in an area of research in the contested field of foreign aid, in particular the Australian aid through provision of the Australian Scholarships Program (ASP) to Laos.

## **Overview of the research design**

Since this research utilised statistical and survey data as well as interviews and policy analysis, a mixed method approach was applied. Structured and semi structured interviews were used to gather data. Seventeen alumni of the ASP (three of whom had moved from public to private/NGOs), four public employers, and four AusAID staff were interviewed. In addition, in order to investigate labour mobility trends under the ASP, an online survey (SurveyGizmo) was employed. The online survey was sent out to 247 email addresses of alumni of the ASP by Laos Australia Institute which is the third party. Seventy-two (29.14%) participants (39 males & 33 females) completed and submitted the survey. In addition, the policies and regulations of both the Lao government and AusAID related to the ASP were examined and the use of semi-

structured interviews supplemented by documentary analysis related to policies and regulation was selected in order to get rich data to help answer research questions.

### **Significance of the study**

In the past, the Lao and Australian governments have mainly focused on the positive impacts that Australian scholarships have had on the national development of Laos. No evidence exists that any research studies have been conducted to investigate the negative impact that Australian Scholarships have or on the extent to which they have contributed to the loss of public employees and Lao government officials. This research was designed to fill the gap in the research literature by investigating the key factors that underlie these issues. The research findings should add to the body of knowledge relating to the impact of the Australian Scholarships Program on sustainable development of Lao PDR, how these scholarships change the lives of scholarship holders/alumni, and any loss of public sector graduate employees after returning home. In addition, the results should increase understanding of both positive and negative sides of foreign aid and could be used to help the leaders of the two countries to make policy and decisions that maximize the benefit of the scholarships. The findings may also assist leaders and policy makers in Laos to apply the most appropriate human resource management strategies to retain their qualified staff. The results may also be used to assist both Lao and Australian leaders and policy makers to make informed decisions in terms of cooperation in receiving and providing scholarships thus strengthening relations between the two countries in the area of Lao human resource development.



## **Limitations and Delimitations**

Alumni of the Australian Scholarship Program work and live in different areas within or outside Laos. Location of the target population may limit sample size and hinder data collection. In addition, access to Lao government documents in relation to policies may be limited.

The researcher will recruited only participants who live and work in the capital city Vientiane where the majority of alumni live. Alumni from other provinces were not recruited because of access difficulties. Alumni who are currently studying in Adelaide, Australia under the second Australian scholarship program were invited for interview, but those who were studying in other states could not be invited. The study's data should provide information on the lived experiences of Lao alumni and their employers but does not constitute a full multidisciplinary analysis of the benefits and challenges of the scholarship scheme or of aid programs generally.

## **Organisation of the study**

This thesis has been divided into 8 chapters as the following:

Chapter 1 *Introduction*, the subject area and research questions are presented. The study is placed into context by providing a justification for the study to be conducted and then the literature that has influenced this research is summarised.

Chapter 2 *Literature Review* begins by indicating how the literature search was conducted. The literature and conceptual frameworks which underpin this study are

discussed and presented, and the gaps in knowledge and linking between the gaps and the need for this study to be carried out are identified.

Chapter 3 *Methodology* explains and demonstrates the research design of this study to justify and locate the research approach that was chosen. This chapter presents a rationale for the research methods and methodology applied in the study and data collection and analysis procedures are discussed. The ethical issues underpinning the study are also presented.

Chapter 4 *Findings from Survey* presents findings from the survey which are divided into sections and themes related to the research questions 1, and 2 underpinning this study. The presentation of findings is also supported by tables, figures, and statistical data obtained from the survey.

Chapter 5 *Findings from Interviews* presents and reports findings from interviews. Findings are broken down into themes and subthemes which are related to research question 1. Figures and quotations from the respondents are used to support the findings which are presented in sequent sections. The key findings are, then, summarised at the end of each section.

Chapter 6 *Document Analysis and Findings from Interviews* presents results of policy and regulation analysis as well as themes and subthemes from interviews that are related to research question 3. The figures and quotations from the respondents, and direct quotations from related policies and regulations are used to support the findings.

Chapter 7 *Discussion of Findings* discusses the themes developed through the study. The key findings from survey, interviews, and document analysis are integrated and discussed to answer research question 1, 2, and 3, and literature review has also been presented to support the findings. The key findings are made linked to both the research questions and literature reviewed.

Chapter 8 *Summary and Conclusion* - summarises the key findings and outcomes of the research and draws conclusions in regard to the research questions. The key findings are linked with previous research in the related field. This chapter also indicates the implications of the research. Finally, it provides recommendations for further study that could be conducted to advance the research agenda in this area.

## **Summary**

Foreign aid covers a wide range of aspects and the rationale underpinning the provision of foreign aid has not been agreed among scholars. Australia is one of the generous developed countries that have had a long history of giving aid to developing countries. Laos is among Australian aid recipient countries and each year the Australian government provides a large amount of aid to support health, economy, and education sectors which is crucial for Lao poverty eradication and long term sustainable development. Although Australia has given aid to Laos, especially aid on education through the provision of scholarships for years, its impact on sustainable development and contributions to Lao human resource development have not been well investigated. Thus, this research aims to investigate (1) the benefits, strengths and challenges of the scholarship scheme both for employers and recipients, (2) the nature of the mobility trend as the result of Australian aid on education/scholarships, and (3) the current

policy structures, and whether there is a need for further policy development. The findings from this study should lead to better understanding of how Australian aid impacts Lao development.

### **Definition of Key Terms**

***Foreign Aid*** is the amount of money, material, food or other assistances that other countries or organizations offer to developing countries such as Laos.

***Globalisation*** has an elastic and broad meaning, denoting the process in which financial, economic, technical and cultural transactions between different communities and countries throughout the world are increasingly interconnected, and embody common elements of understanding, practice, and experience (Pearson, 2000).

***Human Resource Development*** is the process or an activity including training and other ongoing career development which aims to improve required skill, attitude, knowledge and the purpose is to maximize capability of people in organization for better performance.

***Labour mobility*** refers to “the movement of people between jobs” (Commonwealth of Australia, 2014, p. 3).

***Neoliberalism*** “broadly means the agenda of economic and social transformation under the sign of the free market. It also means the institutional arrangements to implement this project that have been installed, step by step, in every society under neoliberal control” (Connell, 2010; Harvey, 2005 as cited in Connell, 2013, p. 100).

***Open category*** refers to applicants who do not need to be nominated by their government or employer. Anyone who meets the selection criteria may apply under this category (Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, 2013b).

***Public category*** refers to applicants from public sector or public employees who are nominated by their Lao government for an Australia Award (Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, 2013b).

***Scholarship*** is an amount of money given by a college, university, school or other organization to pay for the studies of a person with little money but with great ability (Cambridge Dictionary, 2003).

## **CHAPTER 2 : LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **Introduction**

During the twenty-first century, economic development and advancement of science and technology were of enormous scale, especially in developed countries. However, developing countries, in particular the poorer countries, continue to struggle to keep up with the change that globalisation had brought. According to Walsh (2010), 1.5 billion people still live on less than \$1.25 a day and an additional one billion on less than \$2.50 a day within the world's population of seven billion. A third of the world population is living in extreme economic impoverishment (Khavul & Bruton, 2013). Over the last three and a half decades, millions of Indian and Chinese people have moved out of poverty (Deaton, 2006), but this has not been the universal experience of least developed countries. As a result the gap between rich and poor countries is widening (UN-OHRLLS, 2014). In order to close the gap foreign aid has emerged. The principles and ethos that underpin and drive foreign aid include a mix of political, economic and humanitarian motivations but, at least at one level, aim to help people to help themselves (Carr, McAuliffe, & MacLachlan, 1998).

The provision of educational scholarships to developing countries has become a common form of foreign aid in recent years. To date foreign aid in Laos has focused on infrastructure, health care, education and human resource development which are crucial for sustainable development. "Educational aid has covered the issues of high returns compared with investment in other areas, and there is very positive effect on poverty alleviation and basic needs satisfaction" (OECD, 1998, pp. 27-28). Each year

people from developing countries such as Laos have been given scholarships to pursue further tertiary studies in developed countries such as Australia, with a view to their making a significant contribution to their national development when they return home (Laos Australia Institute, 2013).

## **Foreign Aid and National Development**

Riddell (2007) defined the principle that drives and underpins support for foreign aid as the proposition that assistance should be provided to those in extreme need, and in return, the belief that aid is ‘a good thing’ is sustained by the assumption that the skills or resources that aid delivers do indeed make a difference to those being helped.

Despite the widespread provision of foreign aid by most advanced countries, its merits and especially its impact on recipient countries remain highly contentious. For example, the 2015 Nobel Laureate in Economics, Angus Deaton, is one who has questioned the value and effectiveness of aid from the developed world to developing nations. Deaton’s argument in a nutshell is that where the conditions for development exist, aid is not required; where they do not exist, aid is not useful and probably damaging. Moreover, aid is antidemocratic in so far as it frees leaders from local accountability or distorts decision-making by imposing external accountabilities and priorities (Deaton, 2013).

Evidence of both failure and success of aid initiatives remains unclear and contradictory, although there are a wealth of academic studies and reports from donors and international bodies, (Bourgiunon & Sundberg, 2007; Riddell, 2014). There are two sides of the academic debate which have fallen largely into broad polarities. There

are those who argue for and against the aid, as well as those who focus on the forms of aid with the best track record.

A significant proponent of aid has been Jeffrey Sachs who presented the positive view, that aid was beneficial to recipient countries (Sachs, 2005, 2006). Jeffrey Sachs has made the strongest economic argument for development aid and was instrumental in establishing the Millennium Development Goals. Sachs utilized the concept of a 'poverty trap', which itself comprises a range of traps: poverty itself, with negative implications for saving; physical geography; public fiscal incapacity; governance failure; cultural barriers; geopolitics; lack of innovation; and a demographic trap where necessity causes poor families to have high birth rates (Sachs, 2006). Sachs' empirical work was based on the Swan-Solow model of economic growth which emphasised capital accumulation as a basis for 'take-off' to self-sustaining growth (Sachs & Warner, 1997).

In contrast, there were some writers who believed that development aid was harmful. William Easterly was one of the opponents who represented the negative view (Easterly, 2006, 2007). Easterly (2006) argued that while market incentives delivered the services to those who needed them, bureaucratic incentives motivated in different direction, including the production of more bureaucracy. Easterly summarised three great deficiencies in development assistance: we do not know what actions achieve development, our aid does not make those actions happen, and it is not clear who should be taking action anyway (Easterly, 2007).



Beside both sides of argument there were some other writers such as Paul Collier and Roger Riddell who sought to steer a middle course or concentrated on the issue of which aid forms have the best track records (Collier, 2007; Riddell, 2007, 2014). Collier adapted Sachs' concept of poverty traps, emphasising civil conflict, unfortunate geography especially adverse effects from neighbouring countries, the 'resources curse', and bad governance as barriers to economic development (Collier, 2007). Aid cannot overcome these traps in itself and is no panacea, but certain types of aid, delivered in certain ways, can help.

Bannerjee (2006) argued against excessive pessimism: that although there was lack of correlation between aid and growth, there were undoubted dramatic successes especially in health and agriculture, which suggested possibilities for refining policy for more effective results.

Although Balogun did not detect a transparent relationship between foreign aid and GDP growth in a quantitative analysis of aid policy in Africa, he found that there was evidence of a correlation between GDP growth and public expenditure on education, and thus aid would be best focused on the development of human capital (Balogun, 2011). Heyneman (2005) also argued that one reason for poor results from foreign aid has been a consequence of donor countries and organisations preferencing physical infrastructure priorities over the development of human capital.

A consensus has emerged from various writers that aid for human resource development, especially education, has a strong chance of successful outcomes.

For example, according to Michaelowa and Weber (2008, p. 3) “on average, an increase in aid for education by 1 per cent of recipient country’s GDP implies an increase in primary completion rates by 1.6 percentage points per year”. Based on this figure, increases in aid for education have played a very positive effect on poverty eradication in the long term because “it is internationally agreed that education is not only a relevant objective in itself, but also a potentially highly important factor driving overall economic development” (Michaelowa & Weber, 2008, p. 1). According to Dreher, Nunnenkamp, and Thiele (2008, p. 1) “one variable where aid might be expected to make a measurable difference is educational attainment”. As a result this has encouraged AusAID and other scholarship providers to offer aid for education for developing countries in order to assist their economic development and poverty eradication and suggest a need to develop a body of knowledge to assist in refining policy and practice in these programs.

### **Further Critiques of International Aid**

As well as these economically focused critiques of development aid, analysts have also discussed the pursuit of a neo-liberal agenda by aid giving nations, the effects of globalization, and the risks arising from mobility of skilled labour.

### **Neoliberalism**

“We live in the age of neoliberalism” according to Saad-Filho and Johnston (2005, p. 1) and globalization (Guttal, 2007).

Today, national and transnational corporations are the main drivers of neo-liberal, economic globalisation. They are the principal beneficiaries of international trade, finance, and investment agreements, and the most powerful advocates of liberalisation, deregulation, and privatisation in every area of commerce and production (Guttal, 2007, p. 526).

“Neoliberalism broadly means the agenda of economic and social transformation under the aegis of the free market. It also means the institutional arrangements to implement this project that have been installed, step by step, in every society under neoliberal control” (Connell, 2010; Harvey, 2005 as cited in Connell, 2013, p. 100). It is claimed that neoliberalism became dominant during the era of Margaret Thatcher and Ronald Reagan and it has become an important component of the Washington Consensus, the ‘standard’ set of economic policies promoted for developing countries by the US Treasury Department, International Monetary Fund (IMF), and World Bank (Kumi, Arhin, & Yeboah, 2014).

“Neoliberalism was launched in the late 1970s as a response by political elites to the threat posed by the growing strength of organised labour in developed countries and the drive for a more autonomous post-colonial development path in the developing countries” (Siddiqui, 2012, p. 13). It has been argued that “the advocates of the neoliberal way now occupy positions of considerable influence in education (the universities and many ‘think tanks’)” (Harvey, 2005, p. 3). In the last three decades, education systems around the world have been influenced by the rise of neoliberal practices and ideology of government. Connell (2013) argues that education is particularly troubled by this impact. In the Lao education system, especially higher education, the way of teaching and learning has been impacted by neoliberal ideology, for instance, the grade point average or GPA has been introduced in Laos in 1995 when the National University of Laos (NUOL) was established. According to Nouansavanh (n.d., p. 376) “Since the establishment of NUOL in 1995, the examination system is replaced by the credit system. This is an important component of the higher education

reform in order [to] align the studying system of Laos with...other countries in the region”

While this research does not adopt a neoliberal lens as its analytic framework, it is important that the potential effects of the ideology be kept in mind in evaluating the strengths and challenges of the aid program under study.

## **Globalisation**

Globalisation and mobility of people are interrelated. According to Pritchett (2006) migration is an effect of the globalization process. Nawab and Shafi (2011) agree, claiming that the Globalization process is underpinning the migration of people across national boundaries.

The term “globalisation” has a wide range and elastic meaning, denoting the process in which financial, technical, cultural, and economic transactions between different communities and nations around the world are increasingly interconnected, and share common elements of understanding, experience, and practice (Pearson, 2000). Technological innovation, and by the falling costs and increasing speed of transportation and communication drive globalization (Weede, 2000).

“Globalisation is both a result and a force of modernisation and capitalist expansion, entailing the integration of all economic activity (local, national, and regional) into a ‘global’ market place: that is, a market place that transcends geo-political borders and is not subject to regulation by nation states” (Guttal, 2007, p. 524). It is not only economy, society and culture that have been influenced by globalisation, but it has

also influenced the education sector. According to Wadham, Pudsey, and Boyd (2007) globalisation, which implies the notion of interdependence in which everything affects everything else, means that education practices have also been affected by globalisation. Neoliberal ideas and Globalisation have been argued to have influenced AusAID and other scholarship providers' policies on distributing foreign aid to education sectors.

### **Trends in labour market mobility**

“Labour mobility refers to the movement of people between jobs” (Commonwealth of Australia, 2014, p. 3). Ugarte and Verardi (2010) identify a link between the migration of skilled workers and foreign aid and claim there is evidence that "on average, aid is linked with the migration of the more educated", in other words the increase in aid has resulted in an increase in skilled migration. While the requirements of the AusAID scholarship scheme restrict short-term international migration as it is obligatory for scholarship completers to return home upon completion of their study (AusAID, n.d.), there may be longer-term issues of international migration of high-skill workers and, more immediately, there may be a loss of public sector capability through domestic intersectoral labour mobility.

Labour mobility has occurred around the world. Both developed and developing countries are experiencing the movement of labour across borders. In the developed world, for instance, there are movements of labour among European and other industrialised countries. According to van Dalen and Henkens (2010, p. 31) “free movement of labour is a key objective of the European Union”. In addition, in the OECD between 1985 and 2005 the percentage of people living outside their home

countries are more than doubled and they move from one industrialised country to other (Drechsler, 2008).

The movement of labour has not only occurred within the developed countries, but also from developing to the developed countries. According to Drechsler (2008, p. 1)

the migration from developing to developed countries has also increased markedly. Reasons for this trend are manifold. Apart from political reasons (e.g. persecution in the home country) economic factors are important drivers for this development as well. Migrants hope for better jobs, higher salaries and improved living conditions.

Some researchers from developing countries cite a range of reasons for not going back after training which include poor intellectual stimulation, poor facilities, limited career structures, threats of violence, research funding shortages and lack of good education for children in their home country (Dodani & LaPorte, 2005).

Today, with the impact of globalization, the increased demand for technological and scientific skills in international markets is much more than in earlier years, which makes the question even more critical for the poor countries (Nawab & Shafi, 2011). It has been a major dilemma for employers in developing countries that they are continuously facing labour mobility (Nawab & Shafi, 2011).

### **Intersectoral labour market mobility**

Beside labour market mobility between developed countries, and from developing to developed countries, labour mobility also happens between public and non-government organisations as well as between firms and non-government sectors within an individual country. However, “the literature so far still lacks in-depth of understanding about how labour mobility (unevenly) distributes across firms. In

particular, very little is known about the role of firms' strategies in guiding employees' inflows and outflows." (Angeli, Grandi, & Grimaldi, 2014, p. 1897).

When employees move from one organisation to another, the organisations have not only lost the individual employee, but also technical and organisational knowledge. From a human capital perspective organizational and technical knowledge are embedded in employees (Becker, 1962). Knowledge may be profitably obtained through labour inflows and irremediably lost through labour outflows (Combes & Duranton, 2006). Therefore, from the human capital point of view, the loss of employees (outflows) to other companies entails negative outcomes for the company losing the employees (Phillips, 2002). Based on this argument, labour mobility is connected to shaping the distribution of knowledge across companies (Boschma, Eriksson, & Lindgren, 2009), because most tacit and non-standardised forms of organizational knowledge is embedded in employees (Power & Lundmark, 2004). As a result, employee mobility across firms has been increasingly recognised as a main channels of knowledge transfer (Breschi & Lissoni, 2009).

Gaining an understanding of the factors that underpin labour mobility is crucial for human resource management, especially in the Lao context where public employers have experienced labour outflows to private sectors. "Most migration theories are based on the assumption that people behave in ways that yield welfare improvements" (van Dalen & Henkens, 2010, pp. 32-33). Political reasons such as threats and persecution and economic factors such as better salary were underpinning the migration (Dodani & LaPorte, 2005; Drechsler, 2008).

This study aims to be a contribution to filling the gap in the literature on labour mobility in Laos, especially from public to private sectors. In the Lao context, there is no evidence that labour mobility has been studied, but in neighboring countries, for instance Thailand between 1988-1997, internal labour mobility was found to occur in health care sectors from rural districts and provincial hospitals to the rapidly growing urban private hospitals as a result of investment policy of Thai government to support investment of private hospital with a free flow of low-interest foreign loans (Wibulpolprasert & Pengpaibon, 2003). According to Wibulpolprasert and Pachanee (2008) in 2004-2005 more than 350 highly qualified doctors left Thai public hospitals to work for private hospital and this has led to inequitable distribution of health professions.

### **Strengths, benefits and challenges of the Scholarship scheme for employers in Laos**

The Australia Scholarship Scheme has become important in providing quality graduates to fill the needs of highly skilled employees for employers in Laos. It is acknowledged that the quality of education of Laos has not met the requirements of the labour market, especially as skilled workers continue to be imported and unskilled workers exported (UNESCO, 2012a). The reasons underpinning inadequate quality of Lao education are of a lack of financial support in the education sectors and a poor planning system. Laos relies heavily on external funding for the education budget and financing still remains a major concern (UNESCO, 2012a). In addition, the institutional and human resource capacity for management, planning, and educational delivery is weak, especially at the local level (UNESCO, 2012a).



Since the quality of education is low, Lao educational institutes are struggling to provide graduates with high skills and knowledge and this makes it hard for employers to recruit skilled workers within Laos. However,

Australia is supporting skills development within the private sector and Lao Government by offering in-Australia and in-country tertiary education opportunities, training and by improving the competencies and capabilities of organisations that play a major role in skills development in Laos (Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, 2014, para. 4)

According to Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (2007) Lao applicants who apply for Australian Development Scholarships (ADS) will be required to demonstrate how they will address the priority training needs of their employer, not just their country, and weight will be given to this during the interview process.

In contrast to the advantages and benefits that Australian Scholarships have made, there are various challenges facing employers when sending their employees to study in Australia under the scholarship scheme. When employees leave organisations for study abroad, employers need to recruit new employees to fill the vacant positions since studying under Australian scholarship scheme takes a long time to complete studies. For instance, it normally takes one and a half or two years to complete TAFE and master's degrees while it takes four years to complete doctoral degrees (AusAID, n.d.). In this regard there are costs related to recruitment and training of new staff as well as interruption of the work processes (Abbasi & Hollman, 2000).

### **Strengths, benefits and challenges of the Scholarship scheme for scholarship recipients in Laos**

The objectives of the Laos Australian Development Scholarships is to provide scholarship recipients (more than 97% of whom graduate) with the capabilities and

competencies which will enable them to contribute to the development of Laos by applying their new knowledge effectively as well as to raise the skills and knowledge of scholarship recipients through the acquisition of professional development opportunities and higher degrees which will empower them to play prominent roles in Laos (Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, 2007).

The strengths of ASP's objectives were that it enabled scholarship recipients to continue their further education in Australia so that they could play key roles in development upon their return because "education, or the transmission, acquisition, creation and adaptation of information, knowledge, skills and values, is a key lever of sustainable development" (UNESCO, 2012b, p. 3). In addition, UNESCO (2011) clearly reaffirmed the key role of education as a catalyst for achieving all Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and there was an interconnectedness of all development goals with key inter-linkages between poverty reduction, health, gender equality, and education, where improvement in one area had a positive effect on the others.

Providing Laos with Australia Scholarships has enabled scholarship recipients to have access to a quality education in Australia and acquire new skills, knowledge and expertise because "the quality of Australian courses at both undergraduate and postgraduate levels is recognised as world-class and graduates have achieved high academic and professional distinction" (Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, 2007, p. 17).

### **Policies related to the Australian Scholarships Program**

According to Australia Award (n.d.) there are policies related to the Australian Scholarship Program which are detailed in the Australia Awards Scholarships Policy

Handbook February 2014. The Australia Awards Scholarships Policy Handbook covers areas ranging from eligibility criteria, and selection process to return home of awardees after finishing their studies. Separate policies for Laos, state that Lao public employees must have a minimum of three-year work experience before they are eligible to apply for the scholarships (Department of Students Affairs, 2014).

In order to maximise the outcome of aid there should be good cooperation between donors and recipients in managing and distributing aid as well as in forming policy. There should also be clearly defined responsibility for each party involved. In forming policy related to giving aid, King and McGrath (2004) advise that there must be clear and accepted channels of advice, consultation, and persuasion between donors and recipients, and an equally clear distinction between the responsibilities and roles of the partners. According to Australia Award (n.d.) Laos and Australia have formed a high level advisory council which is co-chaired between Laos (Minister, Ministry of Planning and Investment), and Australia (Head of Mission, Australian Embassy). The council meets annually to provide advice related to policy and cross-sectorial issues at a strategic level and to review the overall progress of the program (Australia Award, n.d.). In addition, there is a program steering committee formed by both Laos and Australia to manage the Australian Scholarships Program (Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, 2013b).

## **Conceptual framework**

Conceptual and theoretical frameworks are a group of concepts or ideas which are connected in some way, such as the population problem (Melnik & Fineout-Overholt, 2015). Miles and Huberman (1984, p. 33) define a conceptual framework as “the

current version of the researcher's map of the territory being investigated". The conceptual framework fulfils two roles: "firstly, providing a theoretical clarification of what researchers intend to investigate, and, secondly, enabling readers to be clear what the research seeks to achieve, and how that will be achieved" (Leshem & Trafford, 2007, p. 97).

The conceptual framework of this study needed to cover aspects of the foreign aid in particular the provision of Australian Scholarships Program (ASP) to Laos which research intended to investigate. When investigating foreign aid in the twenty-first century context, neoliberalism and globalisation were found relevant to the topic, because "the advocates of the neoliberal way now occupy positions of considerable influence in education (the universities and many 'think tanks')" (Harvey, 2005, p. 3); similarly, globalisation, with the notion of interdependence in which everything affects everything else, which inevitably affects education. (Wadham et al., 2007).

Since investigating the relationship between the key players and how ASP had made positive impacts on Lao national development were the aims of the study, it is useful for the research to look through the lens of appreciative inquiry to see what has worked well and what could be improved to maximize the outcome of the ASP. The flow chart below outlined the conceptual framework for this study.

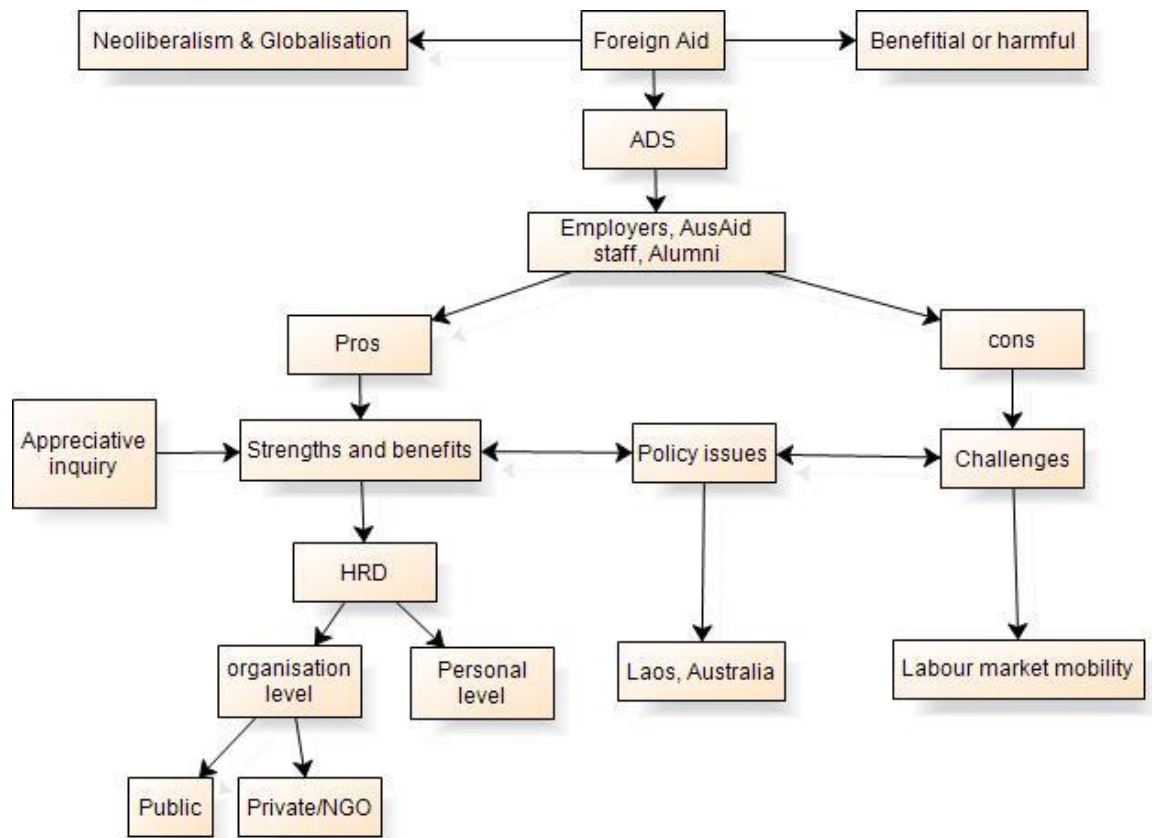


Figure 2.1 : Conceptual framework: The effects of foreign aid on national development.

## Appreciative Inquiry (AI)

David Cooperrider developed appreciative inquiry (AI) in the late 1980s as an alternative approach to traditional organizational development models by utilising a strengths-based research approach (Kung, Giles, & Hagan, 2013). Based on Cooperrider and Srivastva (1987) appreciative inquiry is a qualitative and interpretive research approach which is underpinned by a social constructionist philosophy. The theories of social constructionism and the power of image for organizational change were applied by Cooperrider and others to develop five core principles for the practice of Appreciative inquiry, namely the Constructivist Principle, the Principle of

Simultaneity, the Poetic Principle, the Anticipatory Principle, and the Positive Principle (Cooperrider & Whitney, 2000). “In developing Appreciative Inquiry, Cooperrider was also influenced by numerous research studies from the fields of medicine, sports, behavioral sciences, and anthropology that demonstrated the power of positive images” (Coghlan, Preskill, & Catsambas, 2003, p. 9).

Since the 1980s AI has been applied in different contexts in the business world as well as in education; for instance, Giles and Alderson (2008) utilized an AI process as the basis for an “appreciative appraisal” of an individual’s professional performance. Although Appreciative Inquiry has been applied in a variety of environments, the best known applications are in organizational settings (Robinson, Priede, Farrall, Shapland, & McNeill, 2012b).

According to Coghlan et al. (2003, p. 5)

Appreciative Inquiry is a relatively new asset-based approach from the field of organizational development that has been garnering attention for its successful application in facilitating organizational change. Appreciative Inquiry is a process that inquires into, identifies, and further develops the best of what is in organizations in order to create a better future.

Appreciative Inquiry is “a philosophy and orientation to change that can fundamentally reshape the practice of organizational learning, design and development” (Watkins & Mohr, 2001, p. 21). “The AI research approach seeks to identify positive elements of the immediate social world in terms of what is working or what appears to be causing a sense of life” (Kung et al., 2013, p. 29).

From the AI perspective, organizations improve more effectively through “discovery and valuing, envisioning, dialogue and coconstructing the future”(Ashford & Patkar, 2001, p. 4).

Despite the fact that appreciative enquiry focused on the strengths and what worked well for organisations, there were criticisms that AI ignored or turn a blind eye to problems. However, this was not true according to (Coghlan et al., 2003) and other proponents.

Coghlan et al. (2003, p. 6) noted that:

A common criticism of Appreciative Inquiry is that it ignores or even denies problems. While at first blush this view may seem understandable, it is nevertheless untrue. Appreciative Inquiry does address issues and problems, but from a different and often more constructive perspective: it reframes problem statements into a focus on strengths and successes.

Whitney and Trosten-Bloom (2003, p. 18) added that “We do not dismiss accounts of conflict, problems, or stress. We simply do not use them as the basis of analysis or action”.

Banaga (1998, p. 263) supported that:

More broadly, Appreciative Inquiry does not turn a blind eye on ‘negative’ situations or ‘deficit-oriented’ realities in organizations...It accepts these realities for what they are—areas in need of conversations and transformation. . . . But [AI] intentionally shifts the focus of the inquiry and intervention to those realities that are sources of vitality.

According to Coghlan et al. (2003, pp. 5-6)

Appreciative Inquiry looks at organizational issues, challenges, and concerns in a significantly different way. Instead of focusing on problems, organizational members first discover what is working particularly well in their organization. Then, instead of analyzing possible causes and solutions, they envision what it might be like if “the best of what is” occurred more frequently.

Based on Cooperrider and Srivastva (1987) there were four basic principles that underpin appreciative enquiry. These covered the notion of (1) beginning the research with appreciation, (2) having it be applicable, (3) stimulating fresh thinking (provocation), and that processing that should be collaborative (Reed, Pearson, Douglas, Swinburne, & Wilding, 2002)

## **Conclusion**

The Australian government has provided aid through the provision of scholarships to Laos in order to help support Lao human resource development. The program has offered scholarship awardees opportunities to study in Australia to acquire new skills, knowledge and expertise. Upon completion of studies under the program it is highly expected that the graduates would utilise what they have gained from study in Australia to help develop Laos. The program aims to provide highly skilled workers to both Lao public and private sectors which are crucial for national development and poverty eradication. The program has empowered scholarship completers to meet a wide range of labour markets demand which enable them to freely move from one sector to another. This has, somehow, become both opportunities and challenges for employers, especially in public sectors to retrain its employees who have been awarded the scholarships since the awardees have more options to access to a wide range of labour markets.

Given the critiques of foreign aid from economic, neoliberal and globalization theoretical perspectives, to optimise outcomes of the scholarship program it is crucial for Laos and Australia to have the right policies in place to maximize benefits, minimize disadvantages and prevent the loss of key employees who have participated in the program. This research has potential to provide findings which can usefully contribute to ongoing debates by investigating the perspectives of employers and scholarship holders on the strengths, benefits and challenges of the scholarship scheme, on what evidence exists of labour market mobility among scholarship completers, especially from public to private sector employment, and on what policy



structures have been developed to ensure that outcomes benefit the Lao PDR, employers and alumni and whether there is a need for further policy development.

There is little evidence that there has been systematic study of these issues in the past, so a gap exists in the literature on the effects of foreign aid on Lao national development as a result of the provision of Australian scholarships to Laos. This research is designed to investigate this impact from the perspectives of employers and scholarship recipients, by looking through the lens of appreciative inquiry which has a strengths-based research approach.

## **CHAPTER 3 : METHODOLOGY**

### **Introduction**

This chapter presents the research methodology employed in this study which consists of five key sections. The first section is methodology which presents social research methodology as well as outlines research design, research strategy and research method. The second section describes the setting, participants and recruitment of participants as well as data collection techniques and procedures which divides into two phases such as Phase 1 and 2. The Third section details data analysis. The fourth section describes validity and reliability, and outlines ethical considerations, as well as limitations of study. The final section presents a summary of the chapter.

The research design and conceptual framework which underpinned and governed this study was critically justified and evaluated. This research has been located within an epistemological context and based on social constructionism paradigm as outlined earlier. Then, the application and justification of a research strategy based on a mixed method approach to data collection, as applied in this study was demonstrated. Finally, the research method which covered how this research was managed such as accessing participants, sampling, data analysis, ethics, validity and reliability, will be explained.

### **Methodology**

Methodology defines how the researcher “will go about studying any phenomenon” (Silverman, 2006, p. 107). It is the systematic set of procedures that researchers use to solve a problem. It is a “thinking tool” that guides how researchers formulate their research questions and how they determine the specific methods and data analysis

procedure they are going to choose in their studies (Giddings & Grant, 2007). Method on the other hand identifies the “specific research techniques” that will assist in the collection of data that will best provide answers to the research questions (Silverman, 2006, p. 107).

## **Social Research Methodology**

Social research methodologies have been adopted by researchers in various fields and each methodology and theory has its unique characteristics that suit particular research contexts. According to Bryman (2012, p. 8) “the relationship between theory and research is often depicted as involving a choice between theories driving the research process in all its phases and theories as a product of research process”.

## **Research design**

The theoretical framework for this study based on a social constructionism paradigm. The term social constructionism and constructionism may have different meanings to different scholars and writers while other may use the term interchangeably. In this research the term social constructionism and constructionism were used interchangeably. In addition, the term constructivist researchers, constructionist stance, and social constructionist, which have been used by Creswell (2009), and the term “constructivism” which Bryman (2012, p. 33) refers to, all have the same meaning in this context.

“Constructionism is the view that society is to be seen as socially constructed on the basis of how its members make sense of it”(Walsh, 1998, p. 218). From a constructionism point of view meaning is constructed, not discovered and in this

understanding of knowledge different people may construct meaning in different ways, even in the same phenomenon (Crotty, 1998). “Constructionism essentially invites the researcher to consider the ways in which social reality is an ongoing accomplishment of social actors rather than something external to them and that totally constrains them” (Bryman, 2012, p. 34).

Constructionism is the most appropriate paradigm for this research. “ Social constructionism regards individuals as integral with cultural, political and historical evolution, in specific times and places, and so resituates psychological processes cross-culturally, in social and temporal contexts” (Owen, 1995, p. 161). I chose the constructionism paradigm because I intend to study the participants (alumni) who live and work in the Lao context. In addition, I am not only a researcher, but I am also a member of alumni association whose members I intend to study. Thus, my background and past experience will shape my interpretation. The practice of social constructionism, according to (Creswell, 2009, p. 21)

... the questions become broad and general so that the participants can construct the meaning of a situation, a meaning typically forged in discussions or interactions with other persons. The more open-ended the questioning, the better, as the research listens carefully to what people say or do in their life setting. Thus, constructivist researchers often address the “processes” of interaction among individuals. They also focus on the specific contexts in which people live and work in order to understand the historical and cultural settings of the participants. Researchers recognize that their own background shapes their interpretation, and they “position themselves” in the research to acknowledge how their interpretation flows from their own personal, cultural, and historical experience. Thus, the researchers make an interpretation of what they find, and interpretation shaped by their own experiences and background. The researcher’s intent, then, is to make sense (or interpret) the meaning others have about the world...

“There are several versions of social constructionism with different writers making different emphases. Two distinguishing marks of social constructionism include the rejection of assumptions about the nature of mind and theories of causality, and placing an emphasis on the complexity and interrelatedness of the many facets of individuals

within their communities” (Owen, 1995, p. 161). According to Bryman (2012) constructionism has two meanings. “The first meaning might be thought of usefully as constructionism in relation to the social world; and second as constructionism in relation to the nature of knowledge of social world (and indeed the natural world)” (Bryman, 2012, p. 33). However, the term constructionism in this context refers to the first meaning which presents constructionism in relation to the nature of knowledge of social world.

Based on Bryman (2012, p. 33) “constructionism is an ontological position (often also referred to as constructivism)”. However, according to Crotty (1998) constructionism is associated with epistemology.

One or other form of constructionism is the epistemology found, or at least claimed, in most perspectives other than those representing positivist and post-positivist paradigm. As we have just noted, the epistemology generally found embedded in symbolic interactionism is thoroughly constructionist in character (Crotty, 1998, p. 4).

Epistemology is “a way of looking at the world and making sense of it” (Crotty, 1998, p. 8), and in this research I intend to look at the world of Lao graduates and their employers to explore their world, make sense of it in terms of the effect foreign aid has on the National development of Laos. The participants are immersed in Lao culture and society. Owen (1995, p. 161) states “ social constructionism regards individuals as integral with cultural, political and historical evolution, in specific times and places, and so resituates psychological processes cross-culturally, in social and temporal contexts”.

“Social phenomena and their meanings are continually being accomplished by social actors. This implies that social phenomena and categories are not only produced through social interaction but that they are in a constant state of revision” (Bryman,

2012, p. 33). According to this constructionism theory, Bryman (2012) who refers to Becker (1982, p. 521), explains that culture has been created continuously by people, so

...no set of culture understanding...offers a perfectly applicable solution to any problem people have to solve in the course of their day, and they therefore must make those solutions, adapt their understandings to the new situation in the light of what is different about it (Bryman, 2012, p. 34).

#### From a constructionist stance

researchers recognize that their own backgrounds shape their interpretation, and they position themselves in the research to acknowledge how their interpretation flows from their personal, cultural, and historical experience. The researcher's intent is to make sense of (or interpret) the meaning others have about the world (Creswell, 2009, p. 8).

By looking at the world of graduates of ASP and their employers in Lao society through the lens of constructionism, I believe I can develop a deeper understanding of the world of ASP graduates and employers and can answer my research questions.

### **Research strategy**

A mixed method approach to data collection was used for this study. Mixed methods research is defined as research that uses both qualitative and quantitative research methods in a single study (Bryman, 2012; Creswell, 2014; Creswell & Clark, 2011). In mixed methods research researchers combine elements of quantitative and qualitative research approaches for the purposes of breadth and depth of understanding and corroboration (Johnson, Onwuegbuzie, & Turner, 2007).

There are four basic mixed methods designs in mixed methods research, namely convergent parallel design, the explanatory sequential design, the exploratory sequential design, and the embedded design (Creswell & Clark, 2011). Convergent parallel design is employed when the researchers want to triangulate the methods by

directly comparing and contrasting qualitative findings with quantitative statistical results for corroboration and validation purposes (Creswell & Clark, 2011).

In this study, qualitative and quantitative data were collected simultaneously, the data sets were analysed separately, and the two results were used to compare, corroborate and validate the findings. The convergent parallel design is the most appropriate approach as it will bring together the differing strengths of both quantitative and qualitative methods (Creswell, 2008; Creswell & Clark, 2011). This design enables the researcher to collect and analyse qualitative and quantitative data simultaneously and then merge the two set of results into an overall interpretation (Creswell, 2008; Creswell & Clark, 2011).

### **Approach to the research**

A phased, mixed methods, research design which incorporates a survey and structured and semi-structured interviews were chosen for data collection. In phase 1, a survey was employed because survey research is a credible approach (Kelley, Clark, Brown, & Sitzia, 2003) although the self-report format can result in a possible lack of objectivity. The survey, which was designed to explore the benefits, strengths and challenges of the scholarship scheme from the perspectives of scholarship recipients was distributed to alumni to collect data related to research question 1.

In phase 2, structured and semi-structured interviews were conducted. Structured interviews enabled the researcher to address the research questions and control the interview while semi-structured interviews offered participants opportunities to

express their feelings and life experiences without placing any restrictions or limitations on what they might wish to express (Bryman, 2012; Creswell, 2008).

## **Setting**

Data collection took place in Laos and Australia through online survey, interview, and document analysis. While interviews were carried in Laos and Australia, gathering policies and regulation of Lao government and AusAID to support document analysis were conducted in Laos.

## **Participants and recruitment of participants**

The participants of this study were Lao people who undertook Australia tertiary education under the Australian Scholarships Programs (ASP), namely Australian Development Scholarships, Endeavour Award, Colombo Plan, and Australian Leadership Awards. At the time of interview the participants were working in both Lao public and private/NGOs. Some of the participants were alumni of the ASP who resigned from public jobs to work with private/NGOs, and those who were given a second ASP to undertake a higher degree in South Australian tertiary institutions. In addition, AusAID staff in Laos and Lao public employers from the Ministry of Education & Sports (MES), and National University of Laos (NUOL) who employed alumni of the ASP were also interviewed.

The recruitment of participants was arranged through the AusAID office and its sub-alumni network in Vientiane, Laos as well as through the Lao student association network in South Australia. The online survey using SurveyGizmo was sent to 247 alumni by AusAID staff via their email addresses. Seventeen alumni/scholarship



recipients were recruited for interview and three of them were those who moved from Lao public to private/NGO sectors. In addition, four AusAID staff in Laos and four Lao public employers from MES and NUOL were invited for semi-structured interviews.

The recruitment of participants for semi-structured interview who resigned from public jobs to work with private organisations was conducted using a snowball sampling approach. “With this approach to sampling, the researcher makes initial contact with a small group of people who are relevant to the research topic and then uses these to establish contacts with others” (Bryman, 2012, p. 202). Snowball sampling was suitable for this research in terms of tracking alumni who finished their studies and returned to live and work in different parts of Laos as well as those who were in Australia. “This procedure is appropriate when the members of a special population are difficult to locate” (Babbie, 2013, p. 191). The researcher contacted alumni association network to introduce an alumnus who resigned from public job to work with private sectors. After that this alumnus introduced other alumni who they have known to participate in the interview. Snowball sampling enabled the researcher to contact a wider group of participants through the alumni network and friends.

## **Data collection techniques and procedures**

### **Phase 1**

A quantitative approach using survey method was used in phase 1 of this study. Survey research designs are procedures in quantitative research in which researchers administer a survey to a target population to describe their attitudes, opinions, behaviors, or characteristics, and surveys help identify important attitudes and beliefs

of individuals (Creswell, 2008). “Survey research is probably the best method available to the social researcher who is interested in collecting original data for describing a population too large to observe directly” (Babbie, 2013, p. 253).

There are currently more than 1,000 Lao alumni involved in the Australian Scholarships Program (AusAID, n.d.; Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, 2013a), so the survey enabled the researcher to collect the views of a large number of participants. Cross-sectional survey designs was the only type of survey used in this research. “In a cross-sectional survey design, the researcher collects data at one point in time” (Creswell, 2008, p. 389). In practice an online survey was sent out to 247 alumni by Association of Lao Australian Scholarship Alumni (ALASA) which were part of AusAID Office in Laos.

## **Phase 2**

Structured and semi structured interviews were employed in phase two of this study after responses from the survey have been received. According to Walsh (1998, p. 2247) “interviewing may be the only way of collecting certain data”. In this research structured interviews was undertaken in order to gather the rich data that did not emerge from surveys. It is structured because “the researcher has a clearly specified set of research questions that are to be investigated” (Bryman, 2012, p. 470). The semi-structured interviews was undertaken to help gather qualitative data through open-ended questions which allowed the participant to create the options for responding (Creswell, 2008). In the semi-structured interviews the researchers have “a list of questions or fairly specific topics to be covered, often referred to as an interview guide,

but the interviewee has a great deal of leeway in how to reply. Questions may not follow on exactly in the way outlined on the schedule” (Bryman, 2012, p. 471).

The structured and semi-structured interview were one-on-one interviews. Although one-on-one interviews are the most time-consuming and costly approach to collect data since a researcher needs to interview and record one participant in the study at a time (Creswell, 2008), it was the best way to collect rich data, especially from alumni who resigned from public to work in private/NGOs and their employers.

In addition, policies and regulation related to the Australian Scholarship Program from the MES, NUOL, and the AusAID agency in Laos were used as part of data collection process to support document analysis. Creswell (2008) mentions that documents can be a valuable source of information in qualitative research. The policies on human research development by the Lao government, and policies relating to scholarships for Lao public employees to study in Australia under Australian Scholarships Programs, and AusAID policy handbook were analysed to triangulate findings in order to answer research question 3.

## **Data analysis**

Statistical Package for the Social Science (SPSS) was employed to analyse data from the online survey. The software programme SPSS was used to enter the data from the survey and enabled statistical analysis to occur (Creswell, 2008). In addition, Excel and Word documents were used to enter data from documents and reports relating to human resource development policies of Lao government employees. Finally, NVivo was employed to enter transcribed interview data and to analyse it.

## **Validity and reliability**

The results from survey, interviews, and document analysis were triangulated to validate findings.

External validity is the extent to which the investigator can conclude that the results apply to a larger population, which is usually of highest concern in survey designs. This means that correct inferences can only be drawn to other persons, settings, and past and future situation if the investigator has used procedures such as selecting a representative sample (Creswell & Clark, 2011, p. 211).

In order to ensure that the survey was administered to a representative sample, it was sent out to cover 247 alumni which was a large number of participants. Having a large number of participants allowed the researcher to have the representation of sampling groups which in this case it included all genders, age groups, level of study (qualification), and different occupations.

“Reliability is fundamentally concerned with issues of consistency of measures” (Bryman, 2012, p. 168). Researchers need to check for the reliability of scores through any test-retest comparisons and statistical procedures of internal consistency while exploring the data (Creswell & Clark, 2011). The consistency of survey results was carried out using SPSS software. The test and re-test of the survey instrument was carried out twice to ensure consistency of the scores.

“Overall, checking for qualitative validity means assessing whether the information obtained through the qualitative data collection is accurate” (Creswell & Clark, 2011, p. 211). To ensure the accuracy of collected data, the researcher summarised the findings from the interviews and verified with interviewees to make sure that the summary of the finding is an accurate reflection of their experiences (Creswell, 2008).

In addition, at the end of the convergent parallel design, the results of both the quantitative data and qualitative data were compared and corroborated. In mixed methods research both quantitative and qualitative data provide a better understanding of the research findings than a single type of data (Creswell, 2008). Findings from the survey, interviews, and document analysis also informed the validity and reliability of this study.

### **Ethical considerations**

As humans were involved in this study, ethical considerations were applied. “Research that is likely to harm participants is regarded by most people as unacceptable” (Bryman, 2012, p. 135). This research avoided both direct and indirect burdens or risk to participants by informing them about the intent of the research, as well as the purpose of the interviews and the survey. “The principle of informed consent also entails the implication that, even when people know they are being asked to participate in research, they should be fully informed about the research process” (Bryman, 2012, p. 138), so the researcher informed participants about the research process. In addition, the participation in the interviews was voluntary.

During data collection, researchers need to respect the site and participants as well as obtain the permission from individuals in authority to offer access to study participants at research sites (Creswell, 2014). In order to comply with this code of conduct the researcher wrote a letter to relevant authority where participants worked or lived to get their permission to conduct interviews and informing them. Confidentiality and anonymity were strictly maintained at all times and participants’ privacy was respected. The researcher also acknowledged that deception was not acceptable.

## **Limitations of research**

This study focused on the strengths, benefits and the challenges of the ASP which based on the perspectives of the scholarship recipients/alumni, Lao public employers, and AusAID staff. The Lao public employers were only selected from education sectors such as Ministry of Education and Sports (MES) and National University of Laos (NUOL). Although answers from these employers provided rich data to research questions and could provide an understanding to research questions, this research was limited to this group of public employers, whereas perspectives of employers in private/NGOs were not investigated. However, this study could provide good understanding of how public employers thought about the strengths, benefits and the challenges of the ASP, and could potentially pave a way for future investigations involving employers from private/NGOs.

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## **Summary**

In this chapter the theoretical framework which was based on a social constructionism paradigm and the epistemological assumptions that underpinned this research have been presented and clarified. The philosophical reasons and the research strategy behind the mixed method approach which was chosen for this study were explained and justified. The research methods and data collection technique as well as data analysis used in this study were justified and indicated. Finally, the management issues of this study such as access to participants, ethical considerations, as well as validity and reliability were also presented and explained.

## CHAPTER 4 : ONLINE SURVEY RESULTS

### Introduction

Chapter 3 presented the key aspects related to the research methodology used in this study. The mixed method approach incorporating an online survey using SurveyGizmo and structured and semi-structured interviews were outlined.

This chapter discusses the findings from the online survey. The online survey was sent out to 247 email addresses of alumni of the Australian Scholarship Program by the Laos Australia Institute. Seventy-two (29.14%) participants completed and submitted the survey. The participants included alumni who worked in public, private and NGOs, and who were students, self-employed, and unemployed. Thirty-nine of the respondents were male and thirty-three were female. The percentages of male and female participants were 54.2 per cent and 45.8 per cent respectively. The participants had all finished different levels of education from Australian tertiary organisations. The education levels that participants completed in Australia ranged from technical and further education (TAFE) (eleven=15.3%), undergraduate degrees (sixteen=22.2%), graduate certificate (one=1.4%), masters degrees (forty-two=58.3%) and doctoral degrees (two=2.8%). The detail about gender and level of education of the respondents is shown in Tables 4.1 and Table 4.2 below respectively.

**Table 4.1: Gender of the respondents**

List	Gender	Frequency	Per cent
1	Male	39	54.2
2	Female	33	45.8
	Total	72	100.0

**Table 4.2: The highest education level of the respondents**

List	Level of education	Frequency	Per cent
1	TAFE	11	15.3
2	Undergraduate	16	22.2
3	Graduate certificate	1	1.4
4	Masters degree	42	58.3
5	Doctoral degree	2	2.8
	Total	72	100.0

The results of the analysis of the online survey are presented in four sections.

Section 1 presents the descriptive statistics, comparing jobs of the scholarship recipients before and after study in Australia under the Australian scholarship scheme. The descriptive statistics have been used to portray any labour mobility trends that have occurred. In this section labour mobility has been presented in precise descriptive statistics and figures.

Section 2 presents the descriptive statistics, summarising the background information about the strengths and benefits of the scholarship scheme based on the perspectives of the scholarship recipients.

Section 3 presents the descriptive statistics, summarising the background information about the challenges of the scholarship scheme based on the perspectives of the scholarship recipients as well as what they believe causes public employees to leave public organisations which have been seen as the challenges of the scholarship scheme.

Section 4 presents a description of qualitative data in response to two open-ended questions, namely; What are the strengths and benefits of Australian Scholarships



Program? and What are the challenges of Australian Scholarship Program? The responses have been categorised within themes and depicted in table formats and figures. Themes have been described and some direct quotations have been used to support key points.

## **Section 1: Analysis of labour mobility before and after studying in Australia**

Question 3 of the survey asked respondents to indicate their type of employment before studying in Australia and Question 4 explored their current employment. The purpose of this section is to compare scholarship recipients' employment before (Table 4.3) and after (Table 4.4) studying in Australia. Table 4.5 combines the data presented in Tables 3 and 4 to compare labour mobility trends. Tables 4.2 and 4.3 present labour mobility in greater detail.

**Table 4.3: Occupation before studying in Australia (n=72)**

List	Items	Frequency	Per cent
1	Unemployed	0	00.0
2	Student	15	20.8
3	Running business/self-employed	1	1.4
4	High position in public organisations	0	0.0
5	Middle position in public organisations	10	13.9
6	Low position in public organisations	29	40.3
7	High position in private/NGOs	0	0.0
8	Middle position in private/NGOs	11	15.3
9	Low position in private/NGOs	6	8.3
	Total	72	100.0

**Table 4.4: Jobs after studying in Australia (current occupations) (n=72)**

List	Items	Frequency	Per cent
1	Unemployed	3	4.2
2	Student	2	2.8
3	Running business/self-employed	3	4.2
4	High position in public organisations	3	4.2
5	Middle position in public organisations	21	29.2
6	Low position in public organisations	15	20.8
7	High position in private/NGOs	6	8.3
8	Middle position in private/NGOs	19	26.4
9	Low position in private/NGOs	0	0.0
	Total	72	100.0

**Table 4.5: Comparison between Table 4.3 and 4.4 (n=72)**

List	Names of occupations	Jobs before study		VS	Current Jobs	
		Frequ-ency	Per cent		Frequ-ency	Per cent
1	Unemployed	0	00.0		3	4.2
2	Students	15	20.8		2	2.8
3	Running business/self-employed	1	1.4		3	4.2
4	High position in public organisations	0	0.0		3	4.2
5	Middle position in public organisations	10	13.9		21	29.2
6	Low position in public organisations	29	40.3		15	20.8
7	High position in private/NGOs	0	0.0		6	8.3
8	Middle position in private/NGOs	11	15.3		19	26.4
9	Low position in private/NGOs	6	8.3		0	0.0
	Total	72	100.0		72	100.0

Table 4.5 shows labour movement before and after studying in Australia. No participants reported unemployment before studying in Australia, however, three (4.2%) reported unemployment after studying in Australia. Before study in Australia

15 (20.8%) respondents were students in Laos, but after studying in Australia only two (2.8%) remained as students upon their return home. This indicates that two (2.8%) alumni returned to Laos to pursue further study. Before studying in Australia one (1.4%) of the respondents was self-employed and these numbers increased to three (4.2%) after returning to Laos.

Table 4.5 shows that whereas no respondents reported holding a high position in a public organisation before studying in Australia, three (4.2 %) had moved into these positions after their return. Ten (13.9%) and twenty-nine (40.3%) of the respondents were holding middle and low positions in public organisations respectively before studying in Australia. The findings show that the number of people working in middle positions in public organisations has increased from ten (13.9%) to twenty-one (29.2%) while the number of respondents who held low positions in public organisations declined from Twenty-nine (40.3%) to fifteen (20.8%).

Table 4.5 also depicts that no respondents held high positions in private/NGO organizations before studying in Australia, but that six (8.3%) held high positions after their return from Australia. In contrast, six (8.3%) of respondents held low positions in private/NGO organizations before studying in Australia, but none worked in a low position in a private/NGO upon their return. Before studying in Australia eleven (15.3%) respondents held middle positions in private/NGO organizations, and nineteen (26.4%) after studying in Australia.

Data in Table 4.6 was analysed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). The Custom Tables from SPSS demonstrate labour mobility in detail among

five groups of alumni from public organisations, private/NGOs, self-employed, students and unemployed.

**Table 4.6: (Custom Tables from SPSS) Labour mobility across four occupations and being unemployed shown in numbers and percentages**

			Current jobs								
			Unemployed	Student	Running business/self-employed	High position in public organization	Middle position in public organization	Low position in public organization	High position in private/NGOs	Middle position in private/NGOs	Low position in private/NGOs
Jobs before studying in Australia	Unemployed	Count	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
		Per cent	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
	Student	Count	0	1	2	0	0	5	1	6	0
		Per cent	0.0	1.4	2.8	0.0	0.0	6.9	1.4	8.3	0.0
	Running business/self-employed	Count	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0
		Per cent	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	1.4	0.0	0.0	0.0
	High position in public organization	Count	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
		Per cent	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
	Middle position in public Org-	Count	0	0	0	2	7	0	1	0	0
		Per cent	0.0	0.0	0.0	2.8	9.7	0.0	1.4	0.0	0.0
	Low position in public organization	Count	0	1	1	1	14	9	0	3	0
		Per cent	0.0	1.4	1.4	1.4	19.4	12.5	0.0	4.2	0.0
	High position in private/NGOs	Count	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
		Per cent	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
	Middle position in private/NGOs	Count	3	0	0	0	0	0	4	4	0
		Per cent	4.2	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	5.6	5.6	0.0
	Low position in private/NGOs	Count	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	6	0
		Per cent	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	8.3	0.0

Table 4.6 above compares the labour mobility of the participants before and after study in Australia under the ASP. The table shows both numbers of participants in the “Count” row, followed by percentages in the “Per cent” row below. Table 4.7 below is a summary of Table 4.6

**Table 4.7: Summary of the key findings from Table 4.6 (n=72)**

			Current jobs (jobs after study)								
			Unemp loyed	Stude nts	Self- empl oyed	Public sectors			Private/NGO		
						Hi	Mid	Low	Hi	Mid	Low
Jobs before study	Unemployed		Count								
			Per cent								
	Students		Count	1	2			5	1	6	
			Per cent	1.4	2.8			6.9	1.4	8.3	
	Self-employed		Count					1			
			Per cent					1.4			
	Public sectors	Hi	Count								
			Per cent								
		Mid	Count			2	7		1		
			Per cent			2.8	9.7		1.4		
		Low	Count	1	1	1	14	9		3	
			Per cent	1.4	1.4	1.4	19.4	12.5		4.2	
	Private / NGO	Hi	Count								
			Per cent								
		Mid	Count	3					4	4	
			Per cent	4.2					5.6	5.6	
		Low	Count							6	
			Per cent							8.3	

Table 4.7 summarises the Custom Tables in SPSS which were illustrated in Table 4.6. Table 4.7 signifies the labour movement of the respondents before and after studying in Australia in detail. The table shows that before studying in Australia nobody was unemployed. The findings also revealed that the majority of students chose to work in private/NGOs (One=1.4% in a high position, and six= 8.3% in middle positions) and public organisations (Five=6.9%) after finishing their studies in Australia. Seven=9.7% (1.4+8.3) of the respondents who were students have worked in

private/NGOs after their studies in Australia while five=6.9% have moved to work in public organisations. Two respondents (2.8%) chose to run their own business and one (1.4%) studied further. One (1.4%) was self-employed before studying in Australia, and after finishing studies in Australia, this person moved to work with public sector.

The data from the survey also revealed a high movement of public employees between low, middle and high positions after finishing studies in Australia. Table 4.7 shows that one (1.4%) of the respondents who worked in a low position in a public organisation has been promoted to hold a high position, while fourteen (19.4%) of them have moved to middle positions. Of note is that nine (12.5%) still remained in the same low position. Two (2.8%) of the respondents who held middle position in public organisations have been promoted to hold higher positions after finishing their studies in Australia while seven (9.7%) of them remained in the same middle positions.

Table 4.7 also reveals that one (1.4%) of the respondents who was employed in the public sector left public organisation to run his/her own business after returning to Laos from studies in Australia. One (1.4%) of the respondents continued studying upon his/her return to Laos as Table 4.7 shows that he/she became a student by the time of completing the survey.

Table 4.7 also presents the percentage of public employees who moved from the public sector to work in private/NGOs after finishing their studies in Australia. Four (5.6% , 4 out of 72, one in high position, and three in middle position, 1.4%+4.2%) of the respondents who worked with a public organisation have left their public jobs to work with private/NGOs. In short the Table 4.7 shows that five=7.0% (1.4+5.6) of the

respondents who were public employees have moved to run their own business or work in the private/NGOs respectively.

In contrast, nobody moved from private/NGOs to work in public organisations. However, Table 4.7 shows that there was labour movement within private/NGOs. 5.6 per cent of the respondents who worked in a middle position in a private/NGO have moved to hold a high position in a private/NGO. It is notable that the same percentage (5.6%) remained in the same middle position. 8.3 per cent of the respondents who worked in low positions in private/NGOs have moved to middle positions in private/NGOs.

Apart from mobility between and within the above occupations there have been some cases where respondents experienced unemployment. 4.2 per cent of the respondents who worked in middle positions in private/NGOs became unemployed after finishing their studies in Australia.

## **Section 2: Analysis of the strengths and benefits of the scholarship scheme based on the perspectives of the scholarship recipients**

This section presents the findings of Question 5 through eight sub-questions from the online survey which aimed to investigate the strengths and the benefits of the scholarship scheme from the perspectives of the scholarship recipients. Question 5 asked the respondents to indicate whether finishing studying in Australia helped them in areas such as finding good jobs, being promoted, being respected, earning more, knowing more people and networking, having the ability to work as a team and independently, having the ability to solve problems and working more effectively, and

overall benefiting from studying in Australia. The results from Question 5 have been depicted in Table 4.8 below.

**Table 4.8: The strengths and benefits of the scholarship scheme (n=72)**

List	Questionnaire items	Responses	Frequency	Per cent
1	I find good jobs after finishing study in Australia	1. Yes 2. No 3. Not sure/applicable <b>Total</b>	50 3 19 <b>72</b>	69.4 4.2 26.4 <b>100.0</b>
2	I have been offered better position in my workplace after finishing study in Australia	1. Yes 2. No 3. Not sure/applicable <b>Total</b>	41 11 20 <b>72</b>	56.9 15.3 27.8 <b>100.0</b>
3	I feel that people respect me more after finishing study in Australia	1. Yes 2. No 3. Not sure/applicable <b>Total</b>	53 1 18 <b>72</b>	73.6 1.4 25.0 <b>100.0</b>
4	I earn more after finishing study in Australia	1. Yes 2. No 3. Not sure/applicable <b>Total</b>	46 4 22 <b>72</b>	63.9 5.6 30.6 <b>100.0</b>
5	I know more people and have more networking after finishing study in Australia	1. Yes 2. No 3. Not sure/applicable <b>Total</b>	66 1 5 <b>72</b>	91.7 1.4 6.9 <b>100.0</b>
6	I have the ability to work as a team and independently after finishing study in Australia	1. Yes 2. No 3. Not sure/applicable <b>Total</b>	66 0 6 <b>72</b>	91.7 0.0 8.3 <b>100.0</b>
7	I have the ability to solve problems and work more effectively after finishing study in Australia	1. Yes 2. No 3. Not sure/applicable <b>Total</b>	67 0 5 <b>72</b>	93.1 0.0 6.9 <b>100.0</b>
8	Overall I have benefited from studying in Australia after finishing study in Australia	1. Yes 2. No 3. Not sure/applicable <b>Total</b>	68 0 4 <b>72</b>	94.4 00.0 5.6 <b>100.0</b>

Table 4.8 shows that 69.4 per cent of the scholarship recipients found good jobs after finishing study in Australia. 56.9 per cent of them indicated that they had been offered a better position in their workplace, 73.6 per cent felt that people respected them more and 63.9 per cent agreed that they earned more. It is interesting to note that 91.7 per



cent of them reported that they knew more people and had more networking opportunities as well as having the ability to work as a team and independently. 93.1 per cent also testified that they had the ability to solve problems and worked more effectively upon their return. The most significant point to mention is that almost all (94.4%) of scholarship recipients agreed that they have benefited from studying in Australia.

### **Section 3: Analysis of the challenges of public employees studying under the scholarship scheme**

This section presents the findings from Question 6 and the nine sub-questions that aimed to investigate what the participants believed caused public employees to leave public organisations to work with private and NGOs. The questions covered issues such as income, incentive, fairness, promotion, work placement, respect, boring job, conflict, and work obligations. The results have been depicted in Table 4.9.

**Table 4.9: Causes of the labour market mobility of scholarship completers, from the perspectives of the scholarship recipients (n=72).**

List	Questionnaire items	Responses	Frequency	Per cent
1	income issues	1. Yes 2. No 3. Not sure/applicable <b>Total</b>	49 6 17 <b>72</b>	68.1 8.3 23.6 <b>100.0</b>
2	lack of incentives	1. Yes 2. No 3. Not sure/applicable <b>Total</b>	41 8 23 <b>72</b>	56.9 11.1 31.9 <b>100.0</b>
3	being treated unfairly	1. Yes 2. No 3. Not sure/applicable <b>Total</b>	34 9 29 <b>72</b>	47.2 12.5 40.3 <b>100.0</b>
4	not being promoted	1. Yes 2. No 3. Not sure/applicable <b>Total</b>	43 10 19 <b>72</b>	59.7 13.9 26.4 <b>100.0</b>
5	no proper system in placing new arrival staff	1. Yes 2. No 3. Not sure/applicable <b>Total</b>	42 9 21 <b>72</b>	58.3 12.5 29.2 <b>100.0</b>
6	not being respected	1. Yes 2. No 3. Not sure/applicable <b>Total</b>	16 23 33 <b>72</b>	22.2 31.9 45.8 <b>100.0</b>
7	boring/not challenging job	1. Yes 2. No 3. Not sure/applicable <b>Total</b>	36 12 24 <b>72</b>	50.0 16.7 33.3 <b>100.0</b>
8	having conflict with boss/colleagues	1. Yes 2. No 3. Not sure/applicable <b>Total</b>	22 10 40 <b>72</b>	30.6 13.9 55.6 <b>100.0</b>
9	no obligation to return back to their old organisation	1. Yes 2. No 3. Not sure/applicable <b>Total</b>	11 30 31 <b>72</b>	15.3 41.7 43.1 <b>100.0</b>

Table 4.9 presents the findings from the perspectives of the scholarship recipients on the causes of labour market mobility from public to private organisations of scholarship completers after finishing study in Australia. The respondents agreed that income issues had a significant influence on labour market mobility. Table 4.9 shows that 68.1 per cent of the respondents believed that people quit their public jobs to work with private/NGOs because of income issues. Over half of the respondents believed that people quit their public jobs to work with private/NGOs because of the lack of incentives (56.9%), not being promoted (59.7%), no proper system in placing new arrival staff (58.3%), and boring/not challenging jobs (50%). Slightly less than half of the respondents (47.2%) thought that people leave public organisations because of being treated unfairly. Of note, the findings also revealed that less than 30 per cent of the respondents thought that people left their jobs in public organisations to work with private/NGOs because of conflict with their line manager or colleagues (30.6%), being respected (22.2%), and having no obligation to return to their old organisation (15.3%).

#### **Section 4: Strengths, benefits and challenges: data from two open ended questions**

This section presents the findings from the qualitative data in response to two open-ended questions, namely: *What are the strengths and benefits of Australian Scholarships Program?* and *What are the challenges of the Australian Scholarship Program?* The responses have been categorised within themes and depicted in two figures namely Figure 4.1 and 4.2. The figures have been used to illustrate themes and key points.

## Strengths and Benefits of the Australian Scholarships Program

Apart from closed questions which consists of three categories of answer: “Yes”, “No”, and “Not applicable/sure” the online survey provided the opportunity for participants to express their opinions and perspectives about what they perceived as the strengths and benefits of the Australian Scholarship Program (ASP). From their own experience of studying under ASP the participants identified some key points/areas that they found significant, and the key points were categorised into themes. Nine themes and subthemes emerged from the survey data which are presented in Figure 4.1 below.

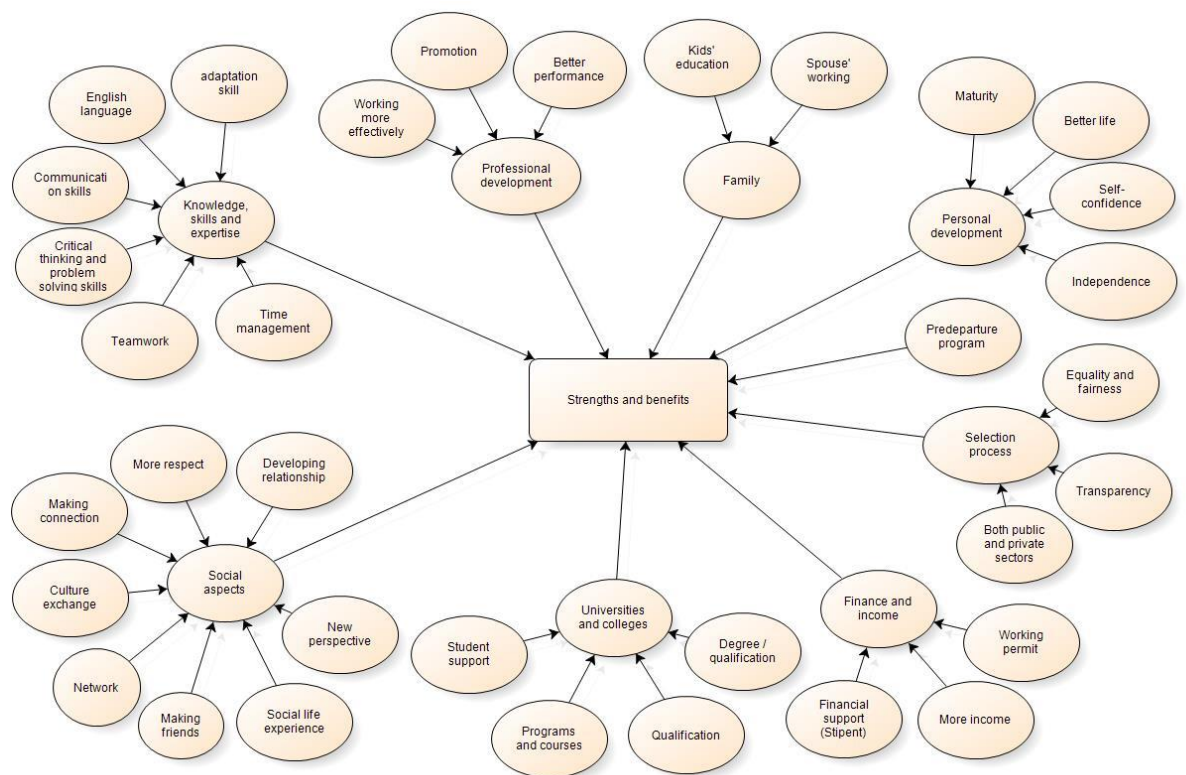


Figure 4.1: The strengths and benefits of Australian Scholarships Program from the perspective of the scholarship recipients.

Figure 4.1 shows the strengths and the benefits of the scholarship scheme from the perspectives of the scholarship recipients. The nine themes are (1) social aspects, (2) knowledge, skill and expertise, (3) professional development, (4) family, (5) personal development, (6) selection process, (7) finance and income, (8) universities and colleges, and (9) pre-departure program.

### **Social aspects**

Eight subthemes emerged from the participants' comments about the social benefits of the Australian Scholarship Program, namely new perspectives about the Australian way of life, social life experiences, making friends, networking, exchanging of cultures, making connections, gaining respect, and developing relationships. After finishing studies in Australia six out of 72 respondents reported that they had gained new perspectives about the Australian way of life as well as engaging in social life experiences that they would not be able to experience in Laos. One respondent also mentioned that he made some new friends with both local and international students. While two respondents were studying and socialising in Australia they interacted with Australian and other international students and learned about each others' cultures. A respondent noted that he built good relationships with his classmates while they were in Australia. Eleven respondents noted that they continued connecting and networking with these people upon their return to Laos.

### **Increased skills knowledge and expertise**

Skills, knowledge and expertise in their fields of study were also identified as one of the key themes found from the survey. Under this theme there were six subthemes: adaptation skills, English language, communication skills, critical thinking and

problem solving skills, teamwork, and time management. Twenty (27.7%) respondents out of 72 mentioned that the most important things that they obtained from studying in Australia were skills, knowledge and expertise in their fields of study. One (1.3%) respondent reported that his adaptation skills had improved. Thirteen (18.05%) respondents mentioned that their English competency and communication skills improved significantly. The respondents' English proficiency and accuracy improved as they had to use it in their daily life to communicate and interact with their peers, teachers/supervisors, and locals. Seven respondents also indicated that their critical thinking increased. The ability to solve problems of four (5.5%) respondents as well as the ability to work in teams of two (2.7%) respondents also increased. Time management skills of two respondents were also reported to have improved after finishing studying in Australia.

### **Professional development/Promotion**

Apart from skills, knowledge and expertise in their fields of study, professional development was also identified as a benefit of the Australian Scholarship Program. The survey revealed that one (1.3%) of the respondents was promoted to a higher position to be in charge of more important jobs and two (2.7%) respondents claimed that they could work more effectively and their job performance had increased since returning from studying in Australia.

### **Personal development and opportunities**

Beside professional development, personal development also emerged as one of the themes. The results from the survey show that the respondents benefited greatly from studying in Australia. Three (4.1%) respondents indicated that their quality of life

improved greatly and they have enjoyed a better life style since returning to Laos because they earned more money. Thirteen (18.05%) respondents reported they have become more confident than before and one (1.3%) respondent indicated that she become more mature. Four (5.5%) respondents also noted that they have become more independent.

## **Qualifications**

The respondents agreed that studying and graduating from their Australian tertiary organisations benefited them in many ways. Eight (11.1%) respondents mentioned that the programs and courses of their Australian universities/colleges were well known and accepted worldwide. Their degrees and qualifications have been sought after by both public and private/NGO employers within Laos and internationally which made it easy for them to find good jobs. They also reported that while they were studying in Australia their universities/colleges had provided them with good academic support and their well-being had been looked after well.

## **Financial benefit**

Seven (9.7%) respondents accepted that they benefited financially from studying in Australia. The scholarships covered tuition fees, travel expenses, an establishment allowances, overseas health cover, and a monthly stipend. Since scholarship holders were granted work permits some worked part-time while they were studying which brought them some income and real work experience. After returning to Laos four (5.5%) of them agreed that they earned more and now have more income than before.

## **Family benefits**

Six (8.3%) respondents found that allowing scholarship recipients to bring their family dependents with them to Australia while they were on the scholarship was a strong feature of Australian scholarships. The respondents mentioned that both their children and their spouses benefited from their studies in Australia. Children of Australian scholarship holders were offered free education at Australian public primary and high schools. Thus, most of the scholarship holders reported they brought their children and spouses with them. Their children, they explained, had access to high quality education and by the time they returned home their English language had improved dramatically. Some of the respondents' spouses worked full time or part time, and upon arriving back in Laos had saved some money.

## **Fair selection process**

The selection process of the Australian scholarship was reported to be transparent. Two (2.7%) respondents referred to the comprehensive screening test and selection process designed to pick good scholarship recipients. They stated that male and female applicants had equal rights in applying for the scholarship, and the selection process was carried out fairly for every candidate. They also noted that the scholarship program had been designed to allocate a certain number of scholarships to both public and private sectors.

## **Pre-departure program**

The Pre-departure program was also identified as one of the key strengths of the scholarship scheme. Five (6.9%) respondents observed that the program prepared them for both academic and social life in Australia. It also provided them with English



language training so that they could meet the English language requirements of their Australian universities/colleges. After attending the program for a year in Laos they believed they were equipped with a high level of English proficiency, an understanding of the teaching and learning system, and of social life in Australia before traveling there. The pre-departure program, they claimed, helped them to be ready to live and study in Australia.

### **The challenges of Australian Scholarships Program from the perspectives of the scholarship recipients**

Beside an open-ended question related to the strengths and benefits of ASP, the survey was also designed to include an open-ended question to investigate the challenges of ASP from the perspective of the participants. The responses from this open-ended question showed some challenges that participants experienced before going to study, during studying, and after returning from study. Seven themes and subthemes emerged from the responses which are presented in Figure 4.2 below.

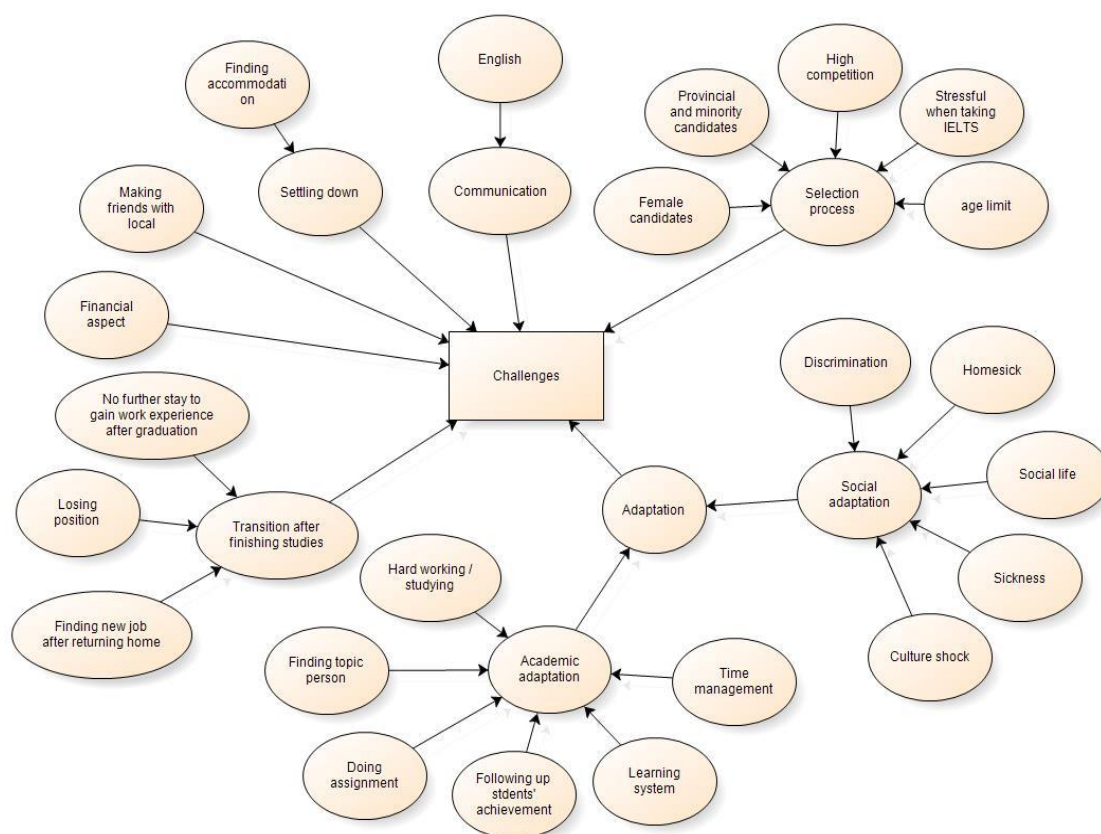


Figure 4.2: The challenges of Australia Scholarships Program from the perspective of the scholarship recipients.

Figure 4.2 presents the challenges of Australia Scholarships Program from the perspective of the scholarship recipients. The responses have been categorised into seven themes. They are (1) selection process, (2) communication and English, (3) settling down, (4) making friends with locals, (5) financial aspects, (6) transition after finishing studies, (7) adaptation into social and learning environment.

## The Selection Process

The scholarship selection process was identified as both a strength and one of the key challenges of the Australian Scholarship Program. Eight (11.1%) respondents mentioned that there were many processes to go through and there were a limited

number of the scholarships available. This led to very strong competition. Some of the respondents also noted that they were very stressed when undertaking the International English Language Testing System (IELTS). Older applicants found that having an age limit for scholarship applications was a barrier for them if they applied and had to re-apply for the scholarship a second time. They alleged this was particularly challenging for scholarship applicants from provincial and rural areas because their English and academic competency was far lower than that of applicants who lived in the city. They also recognised that it was not only provincial and ethnic minority candidates who struggled to win the scholarships, but also female applicants.

### **Communicating in English**

Apart from selection process the respondents also found communicating in English was very challenging. Twelve (16.6%) respondents experienced difficulty in communicating in English when they first arrived in Australia. Some of the respondents had difficulty understanding when communicating with people from different cultures. Two (2.7%) respondents also mentioned that they lacked negotiation skills. It was hard for them not only to communicate with their classmates, but also to complete assignments since English was their second language.

### **The Challenge of finding appropriate accommodation**

The response showed that some scholarship recipients had problems with their settlement and finding accommodation when they first arrived in Australia. Four (5.5%) respondents mentioned that when they first arrived in Australia they had no time to look for their accommodation since they were committed to attend a compulsory five-week orientation program called Introductory Academic Program

(IAP). They also found it hard to meet the agents' or landlords' requirement of 100 points before being granted permission to move in.

The response also showed that while the respondents were in Australia one (1.3%) of them had problems making friends with local Australian students. He reported that building relationships with local Australians was very challenging.

### **Financial constraints**

Although participants reported that the scholarships covered tuition fees, travel expenses, establishment allowance, overseas health cover, and provided them with a monthly stipend, some aspects relating to finances also posed challenges. Two (2.7%) respondents mentioned that the allowance or stipend was not enough to cover medical bills as some sickness related to teeth and eyes were not covered by their medical insurance. The last stipend that was paid to the scholarship recipients ended on the second week of December, but most of their renting contracts ended at the end of January under a six-month or one-year renting agreement. The respondents had to deal not only with longer renting contracts, but they also had to face other unexpected cost such as carpet cleaning after they move out. One of the respondents mentioned that information on this issue had not been provided before travelling to Australia.

### **Transition after finishing study**

Transition after studying in Australia has also been indicated as one of the challenges. Two (2.7%) respondents mentioned that they did not only have problems with their social life and studying when arriving in Australia, but they also experienced difficulty in adapting back into their former organisation when returning to their old workplace.

Besides, one (1.3%) of the respondents who used to hold a high position before coming to study had to resign from his position before travelling to study in Australia. While undertaking his degree in Australia his employer recruited new staff to fill the vacant position. Upon completion of his studies and returning home he found that he had lost his position. Finding a new job with a higher salary was challenging for one (1.3%) of the respondents in the private/NGO sector. In addition, one (1.3%) respondent found that applying the theory they learned into practice was very challenging. Another respondent (1.3%) noted that real work placement or an internship program was important, but the program had not been available while he was studying. Further respondent (1.3%) mentioned that the students under the Australian scholarships Program had to return to Laos after graduation. This limited the respondents' opportunity to obtain real work experience in Australia that could be applied in Laos later.

### **Adaptation into Australian society**

Adaptation to a new Australian social and cultural environment, as well as a new learning system upon arriving in Australia were key challenges to some of the scholarship recipients. Figure 4.2 presents two different aspects of scholarship recipients' adaptation that they found challenging when they first arrived in Australia. Eleven (15.2%) respondents reported adapting into a new social and culture environment challenging. Survey responses showed that one (1.3%) of them experienced a culture shock and another (1.3%) experienced discrimination, although discrimination and racism are against the Australian law. In addition, one (1.3%) of the respondents found it challenging when sick and meeting doctors as he needed to make an appointment and waited a long period of time.

## **Adaptation into the Australian education system**

Apart from having difficulty in adapting into the Australian social setting nine (12.5%) of the respondents also indicated that they had trouble in adapting into the Australian teaching and learning system. They reported that it was hard for them to adapt from teacher centred or passive learning into self-learning or independent learning. When having problems with assignments and studies some of the respondents claimed they did not know who and how to approach academics for assistance. Two (2.7%) respondents had problems with their time management and meeting deadlines which resulted in the late submission of assignments. One (1.3%) of the respondents found studying with native students and doing assignments challenging. Another (1.3%) respondent mentioned that she had to work hard and had to be self-disciplined in order to achieve her goals as the competition is high.

## **Conclusion**

The results from the survey provided rich data to help answer research questions 1 and 2 which investigated (1) the strengths and benefits, and the challenges; and (2) the labour market mobility trend from the perspectives of the scholarship recipients.

## **Strengths and benefits**

Findings from the survey revealed that from the perspectives of the scholarship recipients there were some strengths and benefits, and challenges of the scholarship scheme. In regard to closed-ended questions findings showed that the majority of the respondents (94.4%) accepted that overall they have benefited from studying in Australia. Over 90 per cent of the respondents agreed that after study in Australia they

(1) know more people and have more networking, (2) have the ability to work as a team and independently, and (3) have the ability to solve problems and work more effectively. In addition, after study in Australia more than half of the respondents agree that they (1) find good jobs, (2) have been offered better position in their workplace, (3) feel that people respect them more, and (4) earn more.

In addition, results from open-ended questions unveiled nine areas that have been classified as the strengths and benefits of the scholarship scheme namely (1) social aspects, (2) knowledge, skill and expertise, (3) professional development, (4) family, (5) personal development, (6) selection process, (7) finance and income, (8) universities and colleges, and (9) pre-departure program. The survey response reported that the respondents had benefited socially and financially from study in Australia. The respondents also gained new skills, knowledge and expertise from study in Australia which resulted to their promotion in their workplace and personal development. Besides, their family members also benefited from their study. The respondents found the strengths of the scholarship program in areas such as selection process, pre-departure program, and teaching and learning systems of Australian tertiary organisations. The respondents mentioned that the selection process was carried out fairly and the pre-departure program helped prepare them well for studying in Australia. They also acknowledged that the quality of teaching and learning of Australian universities and colleges was outstanding and accepted worldwide.

## **Challenges**

Results from closed-ended questions also revealed some challenging issues which underpinned leaving public jobs to work with private/NGOs by some scholarship

recipients. More than half of the respondents agreed that issues such as (1) lack of incentives (2) not being promoted, (3) no proper system in placing new arrival staff, and (4) boring/not challenging job played roles in contributing to people leaving their public jobs. Findings indicated that low income in public sectors played the most significant influence in making people leaving their public jobs.

In addition, results from open-ended question showed seven challenging issues namely (1) selection process, (2) communication and English, (3) settling down, (4) making friends with locals, (5) financial aspect, (6) transition after finishing studies, and (7) adaptation into social and learning environment. The results reported that although the selection process was carried out fairly and equally to everyone, the provincial and minority candidates were unable to compete with advantaged urban candidates. The response results showed that while undertaking pre-departure program the respondents faced high levels of uncertainty and stress when they undertook IELTS and when they first arrived in Australia they experienced problems in communicating with locals and finding accommodation to settle down. The respondents reported to also have problems in making friends with locals as well as struggling financially. The major challenges found from survey responses were that although the respondents were trained well in pre-departure program before traveling to Australia, some of them experienced difficulty in adapting into Australian teaching and learning systems which are totally different from Lao systems. Some respondents reported to experience culture shock and discrimination which was hard for them to adapt into Australian ways of life when they first arrived in Australia. Some of them reportedly had a transition-back-to-work problem as they lost their position after returning to their workplace.



## **Labour mobility trend**

Table 4.5 presented labour mobility among occupations by comparing the respondents' occupation before and after study in Australia. The key findings of labour mobility were that none of the participants reported unemployment, and none of them worked in (1) High position in public organisation, and (2) High position in private/NGOs before studying in Australia, but numbers of unemployed and respondents working in the latter jobs reported an increase after studying in Australia. In contrast, there were numbers of respondents who worked in (1) Low position in private/NGOs, but none of them reported working in this position after studying in Australia. Numbers of occupations such as (1) Students and (2) Low position in public organisation reported decreasing after studying in Australia. In contrast, jobs such as (1) Running business/self-employed, (2) Middle position in public organisation, and (3) Middle position in private/NGO organization reported increasing in numbers after studying in Australia.

The evidence from Table 4.7 also showed that there was labour movement from public to private sectors after study in Australia. However, the number was not significant. The table showed that only 5.6 per cent of the respondents moved from public organisations to work with private/NGOs. In addition, 1.4 per cent of them moved from public organisation to run their own business or self-employed. The number of the respondents moving away from public organisations was totally 7 per cent. In contrast, none of the respondents who worked in private/NGOs moved to work with public organisations after study in Australia.

## CHAPTER 5 : FINDINGS FROM THE INTERVIEWS

### Introduction

Chapter 4 presented and discussed the findings from the online survey. The results of the analysis of the online survey were presented in four sections which addressed the research questions (1) *What are the benefits, strengths and challenges of the scholarship scheme both for employers and recipients?* and (2) *What evidence exists of labour market mobility among scholarship completers, especially from public to private sector employment?* Descriptive statistics portrayed the labour mobility trends of alumni from both public and private/NGOs and compared the jobs of the scholarship recipients before and after study in Australia under the Australian scholarship scheme. Descriptive statistics were also used to quantify the strengths, benefits and challenges of the scholarship scheme based on the perspectives of the scholarship recipients while qualitative data in response to two open-ended questions about the strengths, benefits and challenges of the Australian Scholarships Program added depth to these findings.

This chapter reports the findings from the interviews with alumni, employers, and AusAID staff that expand on the quantitative findings and provide the rich data that filled the gap not afforded by the survey. The interviews allowed the researcher to explore the participants' views on the strengths, benefits, and the challenges of the scholarship program in some depth. Two research questions provide the framework for this chapter: (1) *What are the benefits, strengths and challenges of the scholarship scheme both for employers and recipients?* and research question (3) *What policy structures have been developed to optimise outcomes for the benefit of the Lao PDR, employers and alumni and is there a need for further policy development?*

The interviews were conducted in both Laos and Australia. Seventeen alumni took part in the interviews seven of whom were female. Eleven of the seventeen worked in public organisations and six in private/NGOs. Three of the alumni who worked in private/NGOs previously worked in public organisations one of whom was female. Four public employers (one female and three males) took part in the interviews. Four AusAID staff were also interviewed. Two were female. Information pertaining to the interviewees is presented in Table 5.1 below.

**Table 5.1: Interviewees' details**

	Interviewees	Male	Female	Total
1	Alumni	10	7	17
2	Public employers	3	1	4
3	AusAID staff/LAI	2	2	4
	Total	15	10	25

This chapter contains four sections: (1) The strengths, benefits and challenges of the scholarship program from the perspectives of the employers: (2) The strengths, benefits and challenges of the scholarship program from the perspectives of AusAID staff: (3) The strengths, benefits and the challenges of the scholarship program from the perspectives of the scholarship recipients (alumni), and (4) The perspectives of the employers, AusAID staff, and alumni on the existing policy related to the Australian Scholarships Program.

## **Section 1: The strengths, benefits and challenges of the Australian Scholarship program according to the employers.**

This section presents findings from four public employers' interviews which explored what they considered to be the strengths, benefits, and challenges of the scholarships program. Responses from the interviews were outlined in two parts Part 1: The strengths and benefits, and Part 2: The challenges.

### **Part 1: The strengths and benefits of the Australian Scholarship program**

Four employers were asked what they considered to be the strengths and benefits of the Australian Scholarship (ASP) program. These participants generally focused on how the scholarship program has benefited the scholarship recipients themselves, their workplaces, and the country especially in relation to Lao human resource development in public organisations. The strengths and benefits of the Australian Scholarship Program according to the employers are depicted in Figure 5.1 below

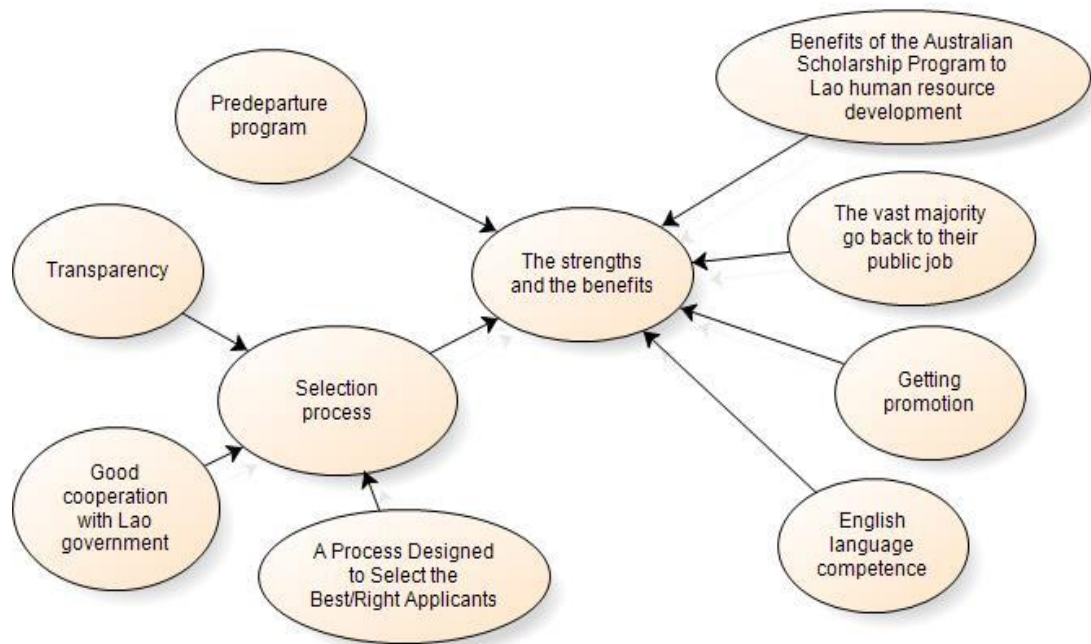


Figure 5.1: The strengths and benefits of the scholarship program according to the employers.

The strengths and benefits of Australia Scholarships Program from the perspective of the employers have been categorised into six main themes and subthemes. They are (1) selection process with its subthemes, (2) pre-departure program, (3) benefits to Lao human resource development, (4) The majority return to their public job, (5) getting promotion, (6) English language competence.

### **The Selection Process**

Three key strengths of the selection process of the Australian Scholarship Program were reported by employers; good cooperation with the Lao government in the process; transparency of the process; and a process designed to select the best/right applicants.

## **Good/sound cooperation with Lao government**

Of the four employers who were interviewed, Employer A was the only one who worked closely with AusAID in the selection process. Thus only Employer A has been quoted in the selection section. According to Employer A the selection process of the Australian scholarship was transparent and AusAID had good cooperation with Lao government. Employer A noted that:

I think the process they are doing now is on the right track for Australian scholarships. In addition, I would like to congratulate the Australian scholarships, compared to other scholarships Australian scholarships have had more cooperation with the Ministry of Education than other scholarships.

## **Transparency of selection process**

Findings show that the selection process of Australian scholarships was transparent.

Employer A explained:

In the selection process they have invited us to observe how they organize selection process or if we would like to attend the selection process they were willing to invite us too, but we do not have time. For example, we can sit to interview one or two people, but we can't sit to interview all day. This depicts the transparency and activeness and when we were involved, we could see and be the witness.

## **A Process Designed to Select the Best/Right Applicants**

A further strength of the ASP selection process was its recognition and acceptance by the Lao government and the acknowledgement that it was designed to ensure that the most appropriate applicants were given Scholarships to study in Australia.

Employer A stated:

Australia has organized screening and selection process which is better than other countries, and the second best selection process is, based on my own opinion, Japan. The selection process is to guarantee that they select the right people to study there by selecting quality people.

## **The Australian Scholarship Program Pre-departure Program**

The pre-departure program is another Strength of ASP according to the employers.

This program has benefited scholarship holders greatly by preparing them well in both English language and academic expectations for successful study in Australia.

Employer A noted that:

They have a one-year pre-departure program to prepare the awardees not only English language, but also preparing them to think and work fast, and make them to know how to search for information. Last year I went to Melbourne and I met some PhD students majoring in Forestry there. They mentioned that the pre-departure program in Laos taught them about Australian learning system and Australian culture so they did not have problem when coming to Australia. They also mentioned that if they didn't attend the pre-departure program in Laos before leaving they would have problems.

## **Benefits of the Australian Scholarship Program to Lao human resource development**

The ASP has benefited Laos in many ways according to the employer participants. The employers of Lao public organisations recognised that the ASP was crucial to Lao human resource development because the Lao government had limited funding to send its people to study in Australia. In addition, the ASP offered scholarships for Lao people to study in Australia in various fields and when they returned home they contributed to socioeconomic development by working in both public and private sectors.

Employer A declared:

Australian scholarships are especially important because Australian scholarships allow our people to go to study and make qualified graduates. The quality of graduates is suitable for the new working environment especially at the time that our country is open to outsiders...quality of thinking and working is important because Australia is one of the lead developed countries, and the education system is one of the best in the world. Australia allows our people to study in their country and on their returning home to Laos graduates have contributed to national development both working for public and private sectors.

Employer B commented similarly that:

Firstly, Australia has provided Laos with scholarships for human resource development for long time which make Lao human resource has new progress. In recent year we can see that many human resource in Lao sectors both public and private sectors have studied in Australia and upon completion of their studies they have returned back to serve national socio-economic development plan and this leads to better socio-economic development...secondly, the significance of Australian scholarship is marked because Lao government has limited funding to send human resources to study overseas at master, doctoral or postdoctoral degree so receiving Australian assistance in helping human resource development is crucial

Employer C noted that:

I think it really helps to develop human resources in Laos. As an example, I am also a returnee from Australia. I got Australian scholarships to do my postgraduate diploma and master, and not for my PhD because we got ADB loan from university to get PhD. In reality Australian aid helps develop human resources in different fields in Laos...

### **The majority return to their public job**

Results from the interviews revealed that the majority of the graduates who previously worked for public organisations had returned to work with their former public organisation. The interviewees accepted that in the past they noticed that there were Lao public employees leaving their public organisations after returning from studies in Australia, but that the trend had changed. Employer A mentioned that:

The trend of leaving the public organisation of the graduate after finishing studies has dramatically changed...In general Lao public employees always return to work with their previous public organisations if not 100 per cent I think 99 per cent of returnees go back to their previous public organisations.

Employer D, 'who did not give permission to be recorded during interview' mentioned that the majority of public employees returned to work with their previous public organisations because the Lao government always promoted them to hold better positions when they have a qualification from developed country like Australia and this made them stay.



## **Getting promotion**

Results from the interviews with employers also showed that most graduates were promoted to a better position after finishing their studies in Australia. Employer C stated:

many of our teachers here get a better chance for their academic performances I mean, and also they get a high position...many returnees have become important persons, they get the important positions in nine ministries in Laos.

Employer D also mentioned that public employees who finished studies from overseas especially from developed countries were promoted to hold key positions because they had proper skills and knowledge and they worked effectively.

## **English language competence**

Employers also reported that studying in Australia did not only benefit graduates in their field of studies, but in their English language competency which was important for Lao integration into the region and internationally. Employer A made the point that Laos had opened the country to outsiders and Laos was a member of the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) which adopts English as its common language.

According to Employer A

...we became a member of the ASEAN Community and our relation with neighbouring countries and international are important and using English is crucial.

Employer D mentioned that there was no doubt that staff who finished their studies from an English speaking country like Australia always had a good level of English language. Employer D stated that his public organisation valued staff who finished study from Australia not only their skills and knowledge that they gained from study in Australia, but their English competency as well.

## Part 2: Challenges of the scholarship program from the perspective of the employers.

Employers were asked some opened-ended questions about what they perceived to be the challenges of the scholarship program. Results from the interviews revealed challenges that Lao public employers had faced by sending their staff to study in Australia under ASP. The responses were categorised into themes which are depicted in Figure 2 below.

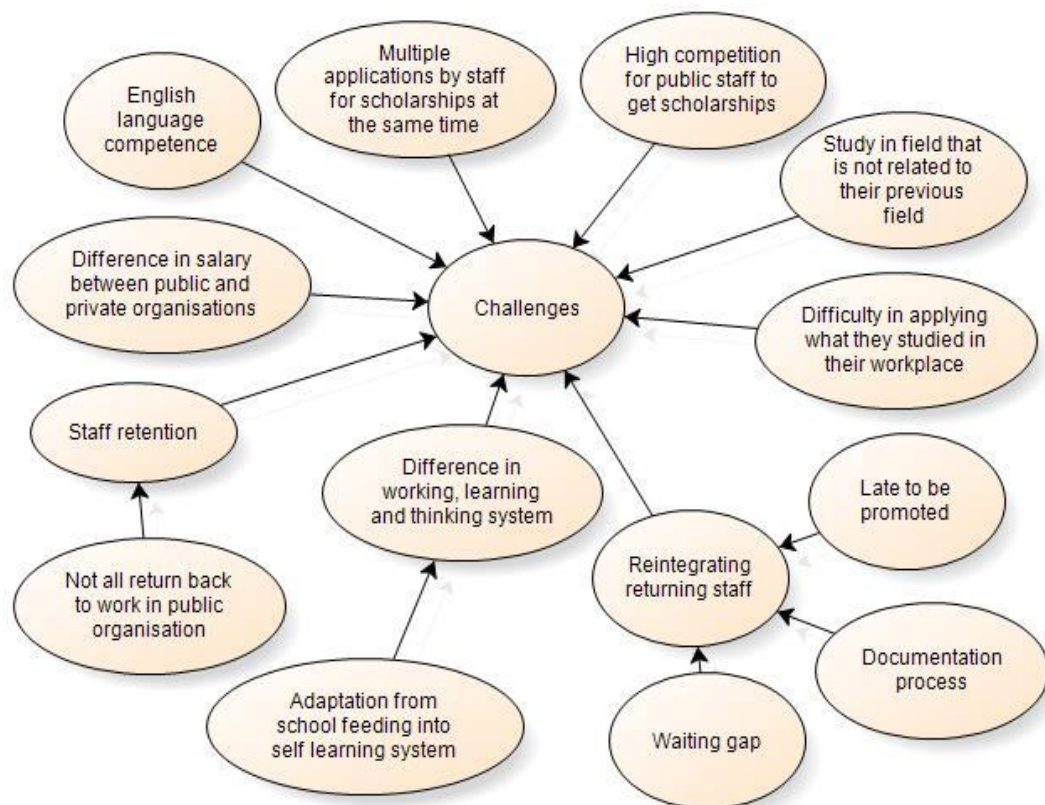


Figure 5.2: The challenges of the scholarship program from the perspective of the employers.

The challenges of Australia Scholarships Program from the perspective of the employers have been categorised into nine main themes and subthemes: (1)

Differences in working, learning and thinking systems, (2) Reintegrating returning staff, (3) Difficulty in applying what they studied in their workplace, (4) Study in a field unrelated to their previous field, (5) High competition for public staff to get scholarships, (6) Multiple applications by staff for scholarships at the same time, (7) English language competency, (8) Difference in salary between public and private organisations, and (9) staff retention.

### **Differences in working, learning and thinking systems**

The results from Lao public employers' interviews show that differences in working, learning and thinking systems between Laos and Australia posed challenges to scholarship recipients to accomplish their studies under ASP. Employer A explained that:

Based on my own opinion, the thinking and working of Lao people is quite slow because our culture's way of life is slow and we tend to enjoy our lives and not to take things seriously. So I am worried about them when they go study in Australia. It is not only studying in Australia, but also Europe and America, our people can't adapt well into their environment. This is the big challenging thing for Lao people, so we need to do and think faster than currently.

The response from Employer B reveal similarly that working and learning systems of Laos and Australia were different which could pose challenges to the scholarship recipients. Employer B mentioned that:

... even when they pass the selection process and get the scholarship to go to study, when studying in Australia they have faced challenges since they have to adapt from school feeding system into innovative learning system or a student centred system.

### **Reintegrating returning staff**

Findings from Lao public employers' interview show that losing public employees as a result of sending them to study in Australia under ASP was one of the challenges. The results reveal that it was not the scholarships program itself that caused the scholarship recipients to leave public organisations, but it was the public system in

sending and taking back their staff from study overseas that caused problems. There was a long waiting gap for what was called “Approval to come back to work Decree” or certified document. Without this decree of approval the returnees were not allowed to work in any public organisations. Employer C explained that:

That can be one challenge I think because when they come back in our system you have to have a document to show to your workplace even though you worked there for a long time, but when you come back because now you changed your position from let’s say the head of the department to become a student when you come back you have to ask for a permission to come back as an officer to go back to your workplace. This is our system. So to get permission to go back to your former workplace takes some times one month the fastest or even two or three months. So within this gap it may change, you know, the returnee’s mind because they really want to work, but this stops them and then they may change their mind to work for other agencies.

Employer A stated that:

At the same time when they come back before going back to work, especially with public organisations the Ministry of Education has to certify and if they do not have the certified documents from the Ministry of Education, Ministry of interior will not acknowledged them. In the future, the private sector may have the same system, but currently the private sectors still accept. For example, in Germany, if you studied overseas Ministry of Education has to certify which level the graduates have finished their studies before private sectors will accept new graduates to work with.

Not having available positions in public organisations for the returnees from study in Australia also contributed to scholarship recipients leaving public organisations. The results show that when sending public staff to study overseas for a long time the public organisations had to recruit new staff to fulfil vacant position. Employer A noted that:

When they come back from their studies to work, but there is no job for them and they have to wait until a year, for example, one guy finished his study from Germany and he had to wait for his turn to go back to work, and this makes people not certain about their future which makes them go to work with private organisations.

The findings also show that even when the scholarship recipients get the decree of approval to work, in some cases there was no position for them or there was a position that they did not want to work in. Employer C explained that:

Once they got the degree we required a position for them when they come back. To get promoted you cannot get it in one day...when you go back you got the degree and then you have to show...that you have really suitable or really significance to your work. In that case promotion would come after six months or after year or even two years. It depends on your

performances...some returnees they do accept what we provide. We do provide some area for them to wait to work and to wait for the agreement or decree what we call decree to work, but some people do not accept. They really want to get their position. That's the problem.

### **Difficulty in applying what they studied in their workplace**

Findings from the interviews indicate that it was challenging for scholarship recipients who were not able to apply the skills and knowledge that they gained from study in Australia under ASP in their workplace. This made scholarship recipients upset.

Employer C confirmed that:

There's something that makes them upset when they come back. One thing when they get the new things right you really want to apply what you learned to the real situation that means to your class or to your workplace, but in some cases we cannot apply that immediately.

Employer D explained that Lao and Australia had different governing systems which included political system. Some knowledge from the West needed to be adapted before it could be applied in Lao government workplace to suit local context, and in some cases sensitive knowledge/issues would not be allowed to be used in the workplace.

### **Study in field that is not related to their previous field**

Studying in a field that was not related to the previous field of the scholarship recipients was identified as one of the challenges by Employer B who noted that:

Some people who go to study have studied some fields that are not related to their previous degree. They have changed field of study, for instance, English teachers go to study management instead of studying English. Thus, this is not well planned.

### **High competition for public staff to get scholarships**

High competition in applying for Australian scholarships was a challenge recognised by Employer B who explained that:

...applying for Australian scholarships of our staff is highly competitive with outsiders like the private sector and other countries.

## **Multiple applications by staff for scholarships at the same time**

Applying for many scholarships at the same time by public employees causes problems to public organisations and the scholarships providers. Employer A stated:

Sometimes government employees apply for many scholarships which makes things more complicated. Sometime they apply for both Japanese and Australian scholarships and at the end they get both scholarships, but most people chose Australian scholarships and left Japanese scholarship vacant, and this is hard to find someone to replace. This makes things messy. So I think Department of personnel should have clear policy for government officials to apply for scholarships.

## **English language competence**

The low English language competency of public employees was one of the challenges, acknowledged by employers, in applying for scholarships and studying in Australia under ASP. The results revealed that public organisations have a problem in sending their staff to study in Australia as their English competency was low. Employer B mentioned that:

There are some problems of sending public employees to study in Australia. Firstly, when sending teachers from NUOL to study, the language barrier is the key issue which limits the ability to learn so most staff who will go to study will be prepared for English language.

Employer A noted that:

Going to study in Australia is the dream of Lao people not only the dream of public employees and students because Australia is a modern country and education is highly qualified so many people want to go there to study. The first challenging thing of Lao people to study in Australia is generally English language.

## **Difference in salary between public and private organisations**

Findings from the interviews indicate that differences in salary between public and private organisations posed challenges to public organisations in maintaining their staff who finished their studies under the ASP. Employer B noted that:

There are some staff when finishing their studies they do not want to go back to their previous work place since they compared incomes and this issue had widely occurred in the last ten years.

Employer C explained that:

While waiting for the decree to go back to work after returning from study in Australia, they may change their mind to work for other agencies that can [take] them immediately and provide them with higher salaries

## **Staff Retention**

Findings from the interviews show that losing public employees as the result of sending them to study in Australia under ASP was one of the challenges. Employer C claimed that:

...when they come back we cannot maintain them to continue to work here. They leave and work with private sectors or with international organisations.

Employer B noted similarly that:

There are some staff who when they finish their studies do not want to go back to their previous work place...

## **Summary of findings from public employers**

Public employers identified the strengths, and the benefits of ASP in six areas. Generally they acknowledged the selection processes of the ASP were transparent and they had good cooperation with Lao government. They reported the selection process was designed to ensure that the most appropriate applicants were given Scholarships and that the pre-departure program designed for the ASP benefited scholarship holders greatly by preparing them well in both the English language and the academic requirements of studying in Australia. The employers also recognised that the ASP was crucial to Lao human resource development. They acknowledge a changed trend whereby the majority of public employees returned to work with their previous public organisations after finishing their studies confirming that many were promoted to better positions. The English language competency of the returnees had also improved

and the returnees' English was important for Lao integration into the region and internationally.

The employers identified nine areas they viewed as challenges of the ASP. Differences in working, learning and thinking systems between Laos and Australia posed challenges to scholarship recipients to accomplish their studies under ASP. Public organisations had experienced losing their public employees as a result of sending them to study in Australia as not all graduates returned to work with their previous public organisations. The differences in salary between public and private organisations posed challenges to public organisations in retaining staff who finished their studies from Australia under ASP. In some cases scholarship recipients were unable to apply the skills, and knowledge they gained from study in Australia in their workplace particularly if they studied in a field that was not related to their previous field. According to the employers high competition in applying for the ASP was also identified as one of the challenges since it was hard for the public employees to compete. In some cases public employees applied for many scholarships at the same time which caused problems to public organisations and the scholarships providers when they were granted more than one scholarships at the same time. Low English competency of public employees was also identified as one of the challenges in applying for the ASP according to the employers.

## **Section 2: The strengths, benefits and the challenges of the scholarship program based on the perspectives of the AusAID staff**

This section presents results from the interviews with four AusAID staff: three from Laos Australia Institute, and one from the Australian embassy, in order to investigate



what they perceived as strengths, benefits, and challenges of the scholarships program. Responses from the interviews were outlined in two parts: Part 1 Strengths and Benefits; and Part 2 The Challenges.

### **Part 1: The strengths and benefits of the scholarship program based on the perspectives of the AusAID staff**

The strengths and benefits of the scholarship program that emerged from the open-ended interviews with AusAID staff have been categorised into eleven themes (1) alumni of the program made significant contribution to Laos, (2) Helping Laos in getting WTO membership, (3) having direct input into policy, (4) bringing back expertise, knowledge and skills, (5) English language competence, (6) having scholarships as part of a bigger program of human resource development, (7) steering committee, (8) getting promotion, (9) salary increase, (10) good cooperation at high level, (11) most graduates returned to their previous organisations. These are depicted in Figure 5.3 below.

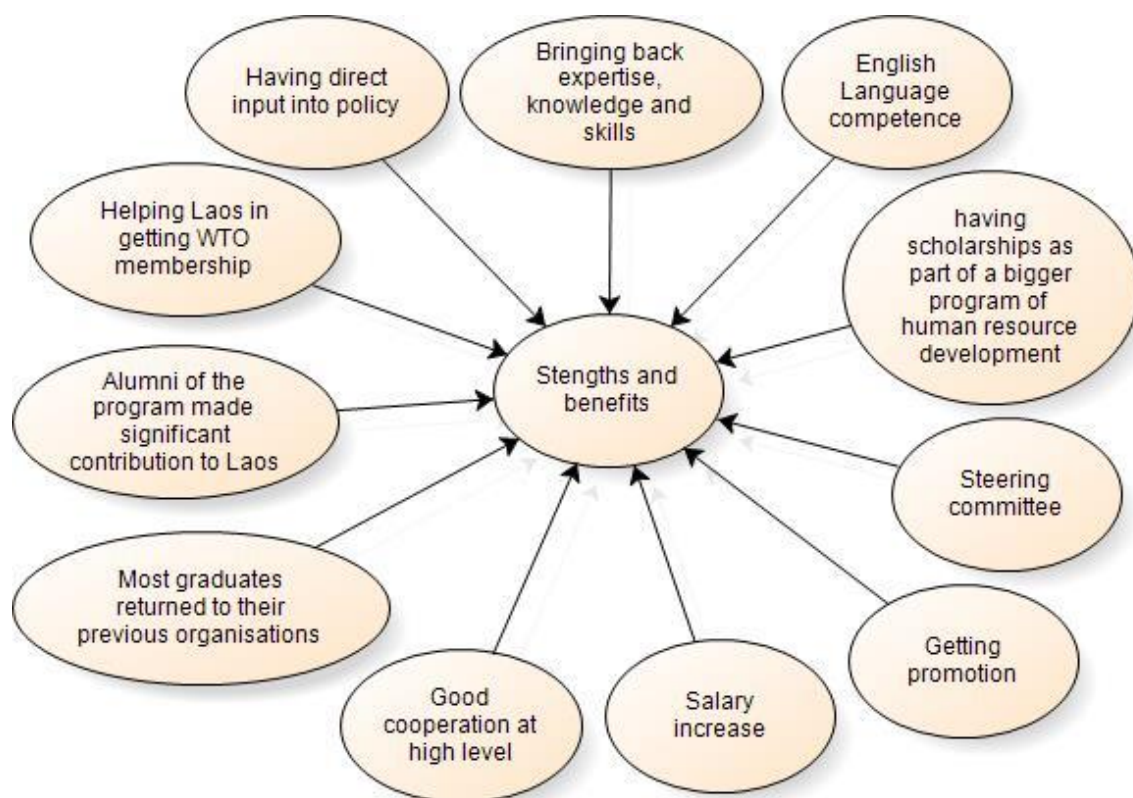


Figure 5.3: The strengths and the benefits of the scholarship program from the perspectives of AusAID staff.

### **Alumni of the program made significant contributions to Laos**

The Australian Scholarships Program (ASP) has benefited Laos in many ways.

Findings show that the alumni of the program have made significant contributions to

Lao development by bringing investment into Laos. AusAID staff A claimed that:

Managing this scholarship program well the scholarship program if you may already aware that has been ...operating here in Laos you know over 20 years ...and maybe now has more than a thousand alumni coming back and these alumni have made some significant contribution to Laos like just not their people to people link that they keep with Australia, but also in terms of investment of Australian people that coming to Laos bring those people coming to Laos and having that link, it's significant.

In addition, one AusAID staff member stated that some alumni of the program were in positions where they could make decisions. AusAID staff A reported:

Also in terms of the knowledge that they gained from Australia some of them have made it quite significant in their contribution here like they have an open mind and now that a lot of them have been in the position where they can make the decisions I think what I can see is that they have the balance of open thinking and also you know but also in the framework of Lao government Lao policy as well that's what I see.

Findings also show that the scholarships program made a positive impact on the alumni themselves. AusAID staff C noted that:

Over the six years over Australia award's involvement I've encountered a lot of alumni and I am on the board of Australian New Zealand Business Association as well which represents the industry of the Australian people and so from the alumni perspective we conducted the impact assessment in 2009 and over 600 alumni were interviewed out of probably at that time there were 900 returnees so it was a massive survey and the findings of that were that certainly from the perspective of the individual the impact of the scholarship had been positive for the majority of them.

## **Helping Laos in getting WTO membership**

Alumni of the program had made significant contributions to Laos on the international stage. The findings reveal that the alumni of the program played key roles in applying for the World Trade Organisation (WTO) membership of Laos. AusAID staff C noted that:

...those who study in international trade sector definitely have impact on the policy, definitely have an impact on the broader community and I can cite an example of someone now who is in Australia doing PhD and get master in Australia and it was that those skills, those international trade skills gained in Australia that enable him to facilitate world trade organisation agreement...there are people who...especially when they studied in international field to prepare themselves for as an international player that contributes to Laos' development as an international player and certainly was the case and was demonstrated right through the world trade organisation WTO negotiation...

## **Having direct input into policy**

Findings revealed that returnees were moving into more senior positions in the government sector which allowed them to have direct input into policy. In the private sector the alumni of the program were highly sought after by private and NGOs and they made an impact in entrepreneurial ways. AusAID staff C mentioned that:

We conducted the impact assessment in 2009 and over 600 alumni were interviewed out of probably at that time 900 returnees so it was a massive survey and the findings of that were that certainly from the perspective of individual the impact of the scholarship had been positive for the majority of them...they have recorded that they were holding more senior positions with their employers a lot of them 50 per cent of our scholarships go to the government of Laos. So they were moving into more senior positions in the government of Laos so the impact in terms of development is that these people hav[ing] direct input to policy which impact broader community. In the private sector the alumni were making an impact in entrepreneurial ways and certainly adding a lot of expertise to the INGO sector, the NGO sector.

## **Bringing back expertise, knowledge and skills**

The Australian scholarships program has been significant to Lao human resource development as it provides opportunities to Lao people to study in Australia. While the scholarship recipients were studying in Australia they gained skills, knowledge and expertise in their fields which were highly valued in the Lao context.

Two AusAID staff out of four commented on the skills and knowledge that scholarship recipients bring back which were of significant to Laos. AusAID staff A stated that:

Also in terms of the knowledge that they gained from Australia some of them have made quite significant contributions here.

AusAID staff C mentioned that:

From an industry perspective the alumni are highly sought after by employers because they bring with them not just the knowledge that they acquired in Australia, but also the skills that they acquired in Australia. A lot of them take up part time work so they learned customer relations, how to deal with people, but they also learned administrative skills, picked some management skills and they bring back and these are sought after by the employers.

## **English Language Competence**

Apart from gaining degrees and qualifications the English proficiency of the scholarship recipients had also been significant to Laos on the international stage. Some alumni were selected to work in the government sector not only because of their degree, but also because of their English proficiency. AusAID staff A noted that:

[The] Ministry of industry and commerce have a lot of our alumni who are working in international relations and a lot of our alumni work in international relations whether their degree relates to that or not they [are] put into international relations because, oh goodness you studied in Australia you've got the English, yeah, off you go you work with the French and also the ministry of foreign affairs where they value the degree as well to give them the capacity to be able to compete with that international level with their counterpart.

AusAID staff B added that:

...we know the individual benefit financially, career life, English skills and [a] whole lot of things.

## **Having scholarships as part of a bigger program of human resource development**

The Australian Scholarship Program helps fulfil the need of Lao human resource development. In this regard, having the scholarships as part of a bigger program of human resource development was important to Lao human resource development.

AusAID staff B mentioned that:

You take a historical perspective of the Australian aid program and how it used scholarships over the last twenty years it's been a move to rather have scholarships not having scholarships in by themselves as part of the aid program, but have it as part of bigger program around human resource development and in the Lao Australia Institute we incorporate the scholarships as one of the ways in which the Lao citizen has skills and capacity and experience and qualifications to do the jobs they are supposed to do. That's the aim.

## **Steering committee**

Cooperation between the Lao and Australian governments in operating the Australian scholarships program have been strengthened through a steering committee according to two members of AusAID Staff. The advantages of having the steering committee were that it enhanced better cooperation. AusAID staff C mentioned that:

...I think there's better cooperation now than there had been in the past and that's because of the steering committee. We haven't had a steering committee in the past, and because it comes out of the government of Laos at the high level and had more clout than the JSP.

Because of the steering committee more people listened to what came out from the committee. AusAID staff B mentioned that:

...this steering committee makes decisions and more people listen...

## **Getting promotion**

Results from the interviews show that most of the alumni of the program have been promoted to hold more senior positions. AusAID staff A stated that:

...a majority of those that have come back have gone to be promoted into more senior roles take on more responsibility in the government...

AusAID staff C noted similarly that:

...most of them tend to get promoted from what I read from the report...

Since the alumni of the program were promoted to hold more senior positions they had more power to make a positive impact on the Lao community. AusAID staff A explained:

They have recorded that they were holding more senior positions with their employers a lot of them, 50 per cent of our scholarships go to the government of Laos. So they were moving into more senior positions in the government of Laos so the impact in terms of development is that these people have direct input to policy which impacts to the broader community.

## **Salary increase**

Increased salary of the returnees in public organisations was reported as one of the benefits of Australian scholarship program from the perspectives of AusAID staff.

AusAID staff B acknowledged that:

It's not a complicated issue ... in the government your promotion and salary increase [is] based on that qualification. You have a master level you go up a grade so immediately somebody comes back from Australia with a master degree they get a salary increase.

## **Good cooperation at high level**

Managing and agreeing on organising Australian scholarships program to Laos has been acceptable to both Lao and Australian sides. The three AusAID staff members claimed that the reason is that there is good cooperation between Lao and Australian

governments at high levels. AusAID staff C reported that both sides agreed on a country program strategy and formed a number of committees to oversee all activities.

He noted that:

Ok, there is cooperation at high level when they agree on country program strategy so the government of Laos approves the Australian program how all will function in Laos and what will be delivered. Then each of those programs has their own committees so for us we have a steering committee and a high level advisory committee.

Findings also show that the committees had representatives from the government of Laos mainly from Department of Foreign Affairs, and the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs. In addition, there were two panels at the policy and implementation level. AusAID staff C noted that:

We have two panels one is the joint selection panel which makes decisions on the policy and how it will be interpreted and implemented in Laos so there's an overarching scholarships policy that comes from Canberra. And then that's interpreted in the Lao context and implemented and the joint selection panel sign off on that how we will promote how we will run selection process that's changing now it's going up again to a steering committee, but also in the scholarship program we have an interview panel which is an independent panel comprising the government of Laos the government of Australia and an independent person who assess each of the candidates. So there're those two panels at policy and implementation level, but then in the new model we now have the steering committee that oversees all of that.

AusAID staff C also noted that:

...so I think that at the implementation level I think there's very good cooperation...I think there's better cooperation now than there had been in the past and that's because of steering committee.

## **Most graduates returned to their previous organisations**

Results from the interview show that most of scholarship recipients returned to Laos after finishing their studies in Australia. AusAID staff A explained:

...this is based on the recent traced studies that we have traced impact study program so on the latest figure we had about 97 % of people this is both of public and open returning back home.

Findings further show that the majority of scholarship recipients from public sector returned to their workplace after finishing their studies. AusAID staff A noted that:

The majority of them return back to their workplace oh it could be more than 70 % now it's coming back to me now so most of them return back and most of them tend to get promoted from what I read from the report. There were some people like probably around 20 % that didn't return and the reason for that could be that you know their positions are not made available or that they might find that opportunities that's what I remember from the recent studies.

In addition, AusAID staff C confirmed that:

...the survey result found that the people that were in the government before they applied for the scholarships, a majority of them remained with the government when they returned which is in a way unique to Laos.

According to AusAID staff C the government organisations had a very high retention rate when sending their staff to study under ASP. AusAID staff C commented:

...I don't want to put a figure on it because I am not good at remembering what the figures are, but they have a very high retention rate.

## **Part 2: The challenges of the scholarship program based on the perspectives of the AusAID staff**

This part presents the challenges of the scholarship program from the perspectives of AusAID staff. The responses from the interviews were categorised into nine main themes and one subtheme and depicted in Figure 5.4 below.



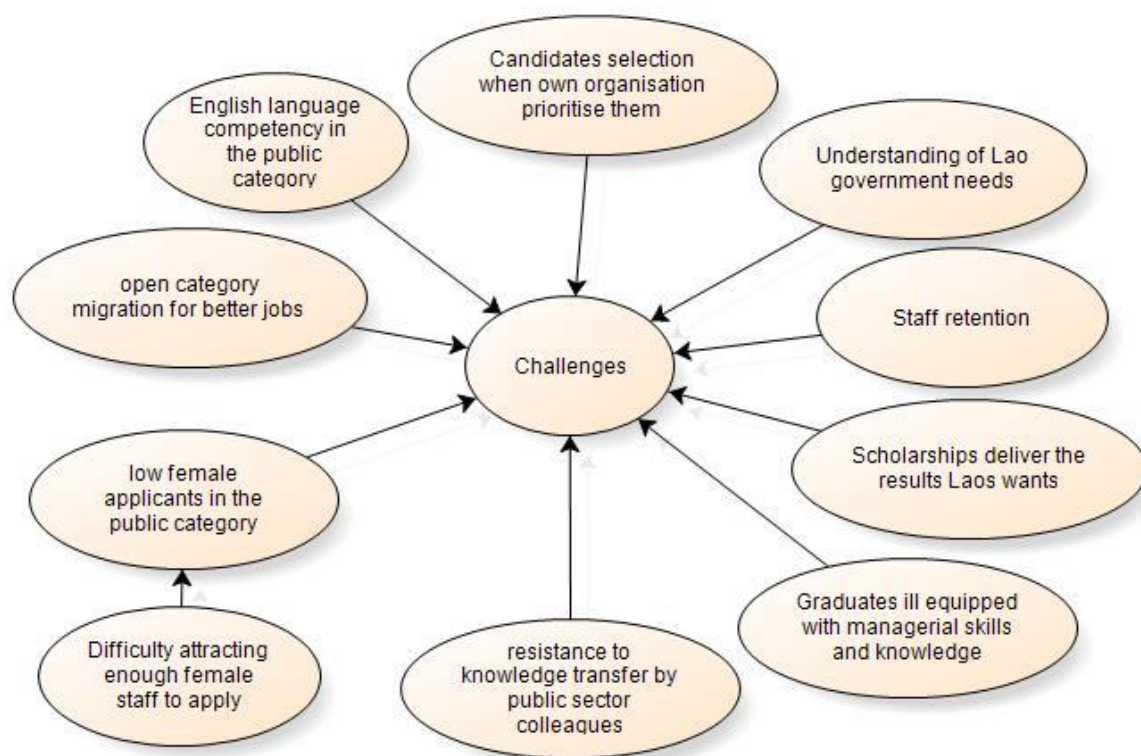


Figure 5.4: The challenges of the scholarship program from the perspectives of AusAID staff.

The nine main themes are: (1) resistance to knowledge transfer by public sector colleagues, (2) Graduates ill equipped with managerial skills and knowledge, (3) Scholarships deliver the results Laos wants, (4) Staff retention, (5) Understanding of Lao government needs, (6) Candidates selection when own organisation prioritise them, (7) English language competency in the public category, (8) open category migration for better jobs, and (9) low female applicants in the public category.

### **Resistance to knowledge transfer from public sector colleagues**

Findings from the interviews show that there was some resistance to the transferred of new skills and knowledge from the scholarship recipients to their work colleagues in

public organisations as their work colleagues were reluctant to listen to what scholarship recipients said. This had become a challenge for the scholarship recipients when they returned to work in their previous public organisations. This issue was raised by AusAID staff who reported about a survey result conducted by AusAID.

AusAID staff C commented:

...historically the survey used to indicate that there was a level of resentment for those that studied overseas...there is a bit of reluctance from their colleagues, work colleagues, to take on board the things that they were saying like learning they were trying to transfer their skills, there were a bit of resistance there.

## **Graduates ill equipped with managerial skills and knowledge**

The lack of managerial skills and knowledge among the graduates from the ASP was identified as one of the challenges for both the public and private sectors. AusAID staff C noted:

[A challenge] in the workplace for both categories is that while they've gone away and then study and then acquired a whole set of skills and a whole set of knowledge what they lacked when they come back is not just because they studied in Australia it doesn't mean that they are automatically a manager and frequently they're thrown into managerial positions they don't have managerial skills and that across both sectors, but probably more so in the open category where employers are expecting them to have high level management skills so we do get criticism for that.

## **Scholarships deliver the results Laos wants**

From the AusAID staff's perspective the biggest challenge is to keep ensuring that the scholarships deliver the results that Laos wants. AusAID staff B stated:

I think our biggest challenge is to keep ensuring that scholarships deliver the results that Laos wants ...is to actually try to calculate what the impacts of the scholarships are on the long run. It's very difficult thing to do because what the scholarships program is you're giving an individual a qualification or individual's gaining qualification and returning, and how much [of] what they do when they come back is the direct result of what they learned in Australia...So that's our biggest challenges for the credibility of the program and to deliver the results and [we want] to understand that more.

AusAID staff D agreed with B that:

We can't be sure the Australian award or scholarships that something you've got from Laos is the main reason why they may have strong...positive impact in Laos or elsewhere recently. That person might have succeeded and have a strong positive impact by going to university in

Laos, by going to university in China. So it's difficult to get definitive data that proves scholarships have that ... positive effect.

## **Staff retention**

Findings show that not all graduates from the program return to their previous workplace. This posed big challenges for public organisations to retain their staff who returned from their studies in Australia under ASP. AusAID staff A explained:

... there were some people like probably around 20 per cent that didn't return and the reason for that could be that you know their positions are not made available or that they might find that opportunities that's what I remember from the recent studies.

## **Understanding of Lao government needs**

From AusAID's points of view not having a good understanding of Lao government need posed challenges in providing the scholarship to Laos. AusAID staff A noted that:

...we provide scholarship, but we didn't really have a good understanding of the need of the Lao government in what area that they need...

AusAID staff B agreed, stating:

...what we like to see the scholarship is used for in the dialogue with the Lao government is do they have a plan for their workforce into the future? What skills do they need in this country? And how Australian scholarships program delivers that in particular ... so that dialogue's happening at the moment. In the public sector ... at the moment individuals apply for scholarships. We don't have the perspective on things like the health sector needs this kind of people or the education needs this kind of people. That's been developed and that will make I think scholarships a little bit more relevant to the employers and the government at the moment and hopefully they can make more use of people when they come back.

## **Candidates selection when own organisation prioritise them**

Another challenge from AusAID staff's points of view was that they were not certain whether the candidates that the public sector organisations prioritised were the ones who were sent overseas. AusAID staff A mentioned that:

We were not sure ... if they were the one that the organisations prioritise for them to go to overseas or not so that's the challenge.

## **English language in the public category**

Lack of English competency of public sector candidates was one of the challenges in providing scholarships to Laos. It was hard to get candidates with a good level of English competency from the public sector whereas English competency in the open category or private sectors was much better. AusAID staff A mentioned that:

...the level of English language that the government officials have ... tend[s] to be lower in comparing to the open category.

## **Open category migration for better jobs**

One AusAID Staff member indicated in the interview that brain drain was one of the challenges that emerged in the private sector from scholarship holders from the open category. AusAID staff C noted:

... we have even more mobility issues in the private sector where people from the open category are more inclined to leave the country to migrate. They are more inclined to change jobs chasing high level positions.

## **Low female applicants in the public category**

Findings reveal that it was hard to get enough female candidates from public sector to apply for the scholarships. AusAID staff A explained:

The first and foremost challenge that we found with the government people is the number of women ... is very low...because in our program we need to have 50/50 men and women composition so it's really hard to get the number of females from the government to participate in this program and it could be that the majority of the government official are males we don't know, but that's an external evidence that we heard and that's why we got smaller number of female applicants...it's very difficult for getting enough government official particularly females.

## **Summary of findings from AusAID staff**

Findings unveiled some strengths and benefits of ASP. Alumni of the program had made significant contributions to Lao development. The scholarship recipients also helped Laos in getting WTO membership, and they had direct input into policy because some of them were in the positions where they could make decisions. The scholarship

recipients brought back expertise, knowledge and skills. After returning from study their English language competency had improved. The ASP also helped develop Lao human resource. In addition, having steering committee combining of Australian and Lao government helped enhance better cooperation between the two countries. Most of the alumni of the program have been promoted to hold more senior positions after returning from study, and their salary increased. Laos and Australia had good cooperation in managing the ASP. The majority of public employers returned to work with previous public organisation upon their return.

Apart from the strengths and benefits some challenges were identified such as resistance to knowledge transfer by public sector colleagues, and graduates were not equipped with managerial skills and knowledge. It was also challenging to keep ensuring that the scholarships deliver the results that Laos wants. Issues of staff retention such as brain drain and losing public employees under the ASP were also challenging. AusAID did not have good understanding of Lao government needs, and was not certain whether the candidates were the ones that Lao government want to prioritise for staff. English language competency of the candidates in the public category was low and having enough female candidates from public category was challenging.

### **Section 3: The strengths, benefits and challenges of the scholarship program based on the perspectives of the alumni**

This section presents results from interviews with 17 alumni. The questions focused on what they perceived as strengths, benefits, and challenges of the scholarships

program. Responses from the interviews are outlined in two parts: Part 1: The strengths and benefits, and Part 2: The challenges.

### **Part 1: The strengths and benefits of the scholarship program based on the perspectives of the alumni**

Findings from the interviews on the strengths and the benefits of the scholarship program from the perspectives of alumni responses were categorised into five main themes and twelve subthemes. The main themes are (1) professional development, (2) personal development, (3) financial benefit, (4) skills and knowledge, and (5) learning environment. The themes are presented in Figure 5.5 below.

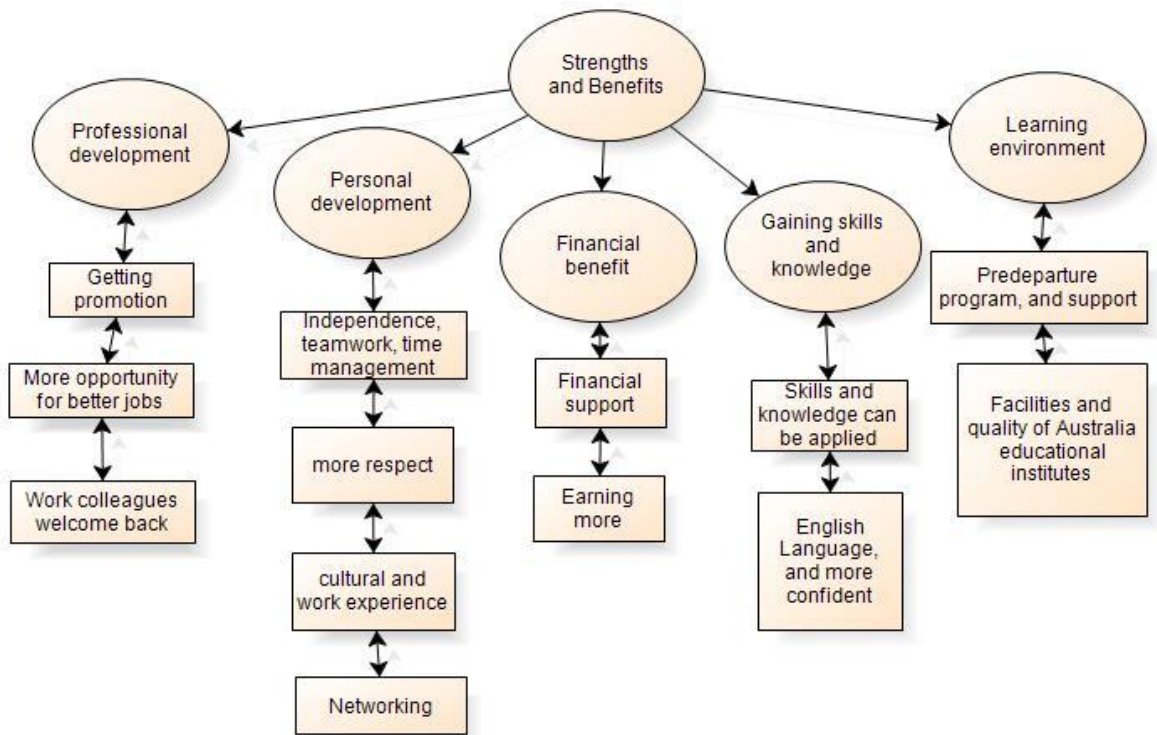


Figure 5.5: The strengths and the benefits of the scholarship program from the perspectives of alumni.

## Professional development

### Getting promotion

Findings from the interviews show that alumni from the program benefited from their studies in Australia in many ways. Results unveiled that twelve of the seventeen alumni were promoted in their former organisations after returning from study in Australia.

One of the respondents noted that:

Frankly speaking before I went to study in Australia I didn't have any position ...I graduated and returned to my workplace and now I have a new position.

Another respondent mentioned that:

...after I graduated and when I came back I've been promoted and worked in a higher position.

### **More opportunity for better jobs**

Fourteen out of the seventeen alumni respondents mentioned that they had more opportunities to choose a better job after finishing their studies in Australia as their employers valued qualifications from Australia more highly than local qualifications.

One of the alumni claimed:

I think it expanded my opportunities to get a better job ... one thing is the qualification. I think employers in Laos value the qualification that we get from abroad especially in Australia I learned a lot of skills also being abroad also expanded my variation so I think it provides better opportunities for career.

Another respondent noted:

...before I travelled to Australia to do my master's degree I used to work for department of personnel ... it is not related to tourism and at that time I was very keen to work in tourism field and I decided to travel to study in Australia and doing master of tourism and after I came back ... I thought I had more qualifications to request my boss to change my job and moved my job from personnel department to tourism marketing department.

### **Work colleagues/organisation welcome back**

Fourteen out of the seventeen respondents noted that their colleagues were happy to welcome them back to work when they finished studies in Australia. One of the respondents observed that:

...people tend to treat me better ... because of my previous studies in Australia.

Another respondent remarked:

When I first arrived from my studies I would be involved in every meeting of the faculty when I shared ideas they were very interested. I was given priority to what I presented and took into their consideration. The organisation has welcomed me back.



## **Personal development**

### **Independence**

Some alumni mentioned that personal development was one of other aspects that they benefited from in their study in Australia. One out of 17 respondents indicated that studying in Australia made him to become more independent. This respondent remarked:

The system over there is very different from Laos and in Australia students get more independence and they have to manage themselves more.

### **Teamwork**

In addition, one out of 17 respondents identified teamwork as one of the benefits that she gained from study under ASP in Australia. The respondent remarked:

The second thing that I find very helpful is personal development, for example how I work in [a] team because team work is very important...learn how to listen to people around ... listen to what they say not just me that direct people doing things but listen to them what they say what they think and then try to work together that is two things that I think of a great benefit of studying under Australian Scholarship.

### **Time management**

Time management was also identified by three out of 17 respondents as a benefit from study in Australia. One of the respondents reflected:

There are some areas that we learned from Australia let say study skills time management for example setting dateline.

### **More respect**

Six out of 17 alumni felt that people in their workplace respected them more when they returned from study in Australia. One of the respondents commented:

People tend to treat me better and people tend to respect me because of my previous studies in Australia.

Another respondent agreed, stating:

In terms of reputation I think that people in Laos tend to pay more respect to those who have graduated from overseas, especially from you know a developed country like Australia for example.

## **Cultural and work experience**

Three out of 17 respondents from the interviews stated that they gained not only academic knowledge, but also cultural and work experience from studying in Australia. One of the respondents explained:

What I guess [was good about] studying in Australia ...was gaining from that course...and also learning about Australian culture and how to work within different cultural context and ... not only the chance to study in Australia but also to learn about Australian culture, Australian context in order to work with, also I had a chance to go for field work placement as a course requirement which was a really great opportunity to gain some work experience from that Australian context.

## **Networking**

Findings from the interviews reveal that studying in Australia helps enlarge alumni networking and helps expand their contact with their friends. Seven out of 17 respondents accepted that they met new people and their networking was expanded.

One of the respondents stated:

...because they have [ASP] ... organising alumni [meeting] so once a year at least we...meet with new people we also communicate, keep contact with each other I think we have more friends, we met a lot of people, we learned and we shared experience with each other.

Another respondent affirmed:

...a second thing is ... friends with other people who get the same scholarships and also other people who take the same course in my class not only international students, but also local people as well.

## **Financial benefit**

### **Financial support, and earning more**

Six out of 17 alumni indicated that they benefited financially from study in Australia.

The alumni were given financial support while they were studying in Australia. One of the respondents explained:

... a stipend had been given to us fortnightly.

Another respondent acknowledged:

Apart from the knowledge the Australian Scholarships provided me with a lot of benefits like health care and I think training fee and I think tuition fee.

In addition, all 17 respondents noted that they earned more when they returned to work after finishing their study in Australia. One of the respondents remarked:

Yes I can say yes when we have higher position we have more work to do and then more salary, I can say that more earning.

Another respondent stated that:

...when we come back we have more chances to get a job to work with more organisations so we earn more after coming back ...

## **Gaining skills and knowledge**

Fifteen out of 17 alumni respondents acknowledged that skills and knowledge were the most valued aspect that alumni gained from studies in Australia. One of the respondents pointed out that:

The most beneficial areas from study under AusAID scholarship are that I had broader knowledge and I have obtained technical and analytical thinking [skills] ...I have quite good knowledge when I come back.

Another respondent remarked:

The most important thing for me I think gaining the new knowledge or skills and expertise that I have learned from Australia which can help improve my academic life, especially my job.

## **Skills and knowledge can be applied**

All 17 respondents noted that skills and knowledge from Australia can be applied in Lao context. One respondent explained that:

... for my own experience...my area of study...what I have learned is very useful for my job.

Another respondent claimed:

We have learned something new ...we focus on TESOL [Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages] to learn more theory and also practices here we apply a lot of theories of teaching English.

## **English language competence**

Responses from the interviews revealed that the level of English competency of the alumni had improved after studying in Australia. Five out of the seventeen alumni discussed their improved English Competency. One of the respondents declared:

Ah language! I think the confidence [in English] because ... here we studied quite a lot from the books but we have had no chance to use English, so when I went there ...I feel that my English had improved quite a lot, we learned from the real situation ... Language confidence is the main area that improved a lot.

Another respondent divulged:

I studied in an English speaking country so my English has also been improved and when I come back home with good English I have more jobs to do since other people can't. So it benefits [me] a lot

## **Learning environment**

### **Pre-departure program and support**

The pre-departure program in Laos and support in Australia was identified as a strength of the Australian Scholarship Program (ASP). Two out of 17 respondents mentioned that the program helped prepare them well for living and studying in Australia. One of the respondents related:

Before I went to Australia we did a preparation program ... so that gave me quite a lot of ideas about life in Australia.

Another respondent noted:

From my own experience I think the methodology of teaching and learning in Laos and in Australia are very different so Lao students have to adapt to the self-learning method in Australia like in my case I think the preparation course at Vientiane college was very useful as it gave me some expectation of how it might be like in Australia.

In addition, another two respondents out of 17 stated that Australian educational institutes provided support to the alumni when they first arrived in Australia. One of the respondents explained:

...we have some support from university and also some friends.

Another respondent reported:

...when I first arrived in Australia there were Lao student association. They picked me up at the airport...

## **Facilities and quality of Australia educational institutes**

The teaching and learning facilities as well as quality of education of Australian educational institutes were considered outstanding by six out of the 17 respondents.

One respondent claimed:

Learning facilities were outstanding compared to other two countries where I used to study, Australia was better, more convenient.

Another respondent agreed saying:

What I find very beneficial is the quality of the education system in Australia

## **Part 2: The challenges of the scholarship program based on the perspectives of the alumni**

Participants were asked about the challenges they faced when studying under the Australian Scholarships Program (ASP). Responses from the interviews were

categorised into three main themes, namely (1) academic challenges, (2) life in Australia, and (3) post studying. Sixteen subthemes emerged from these three themes. These themes and subthemes are presented in Figure 5.6 below.

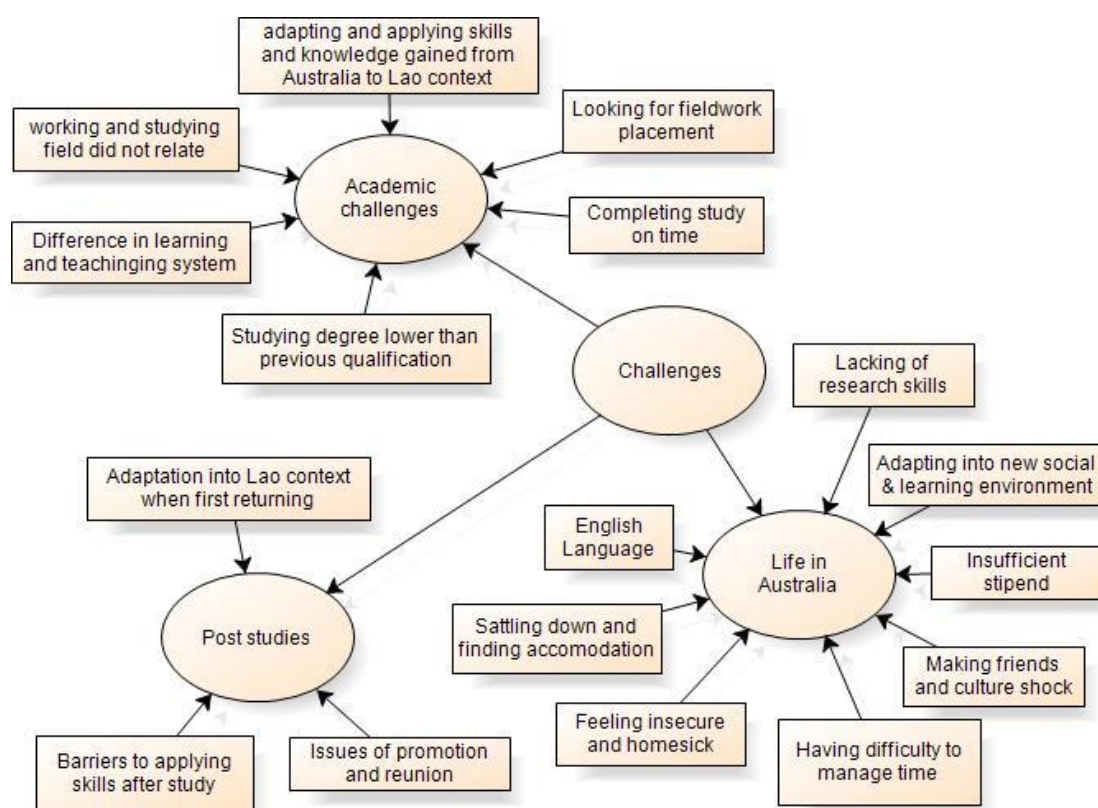


Figure 5.6: The challenges of the scholarship program from the perspectives of alumni.

## Academic challenges

Six subthemes were identified under academic challenges: (1) completing study on time, (2) looking for fieldwork placements, (3) adapting and applying skills and knowledge gained from Australia to Lao context, (4) the working and studying field did not relate, (5) differences in teaching and learning systems, and (6) studying a lower degree than previous qualification.

## **Completing study on time**

Alumni of the Australian Scholarships Program (ASP) experienced some challenges when undertaking their degree in Australia under the ASP. Findings from the interviews show that 12 out of 17 respondents mentioned that they extended their studies, knew some scholarship recipients who extended their studies, and knew some scholarship recipients who did not successfully complete their degrees.

Two out of 17 respondents got their study extended. One of the respondents commented:

... myself I had a three-month extension because it is a three-year course and then in fact I have difficulty in time management you know that why a three year course I can't complete my EdD on time.

Another respondent stated:

I couldn't complete my degree within three years you know I need to extend another one semester because [of] time management

In addition, seven out of 17 respondents mentioned that they knew some of the scholarship recipients who had their studies extended. One of these respondents observed:

Actually I knew one that she had to extend her study period for one more semester because she could not finished her final thesis...just need more time to complete the assignment.

Another respondent stated that

I know a few [cases] that [they] had to extend their studies, but eventually they did graduate, but they needed extra time.

Findings also revealed that some scholarship recipients failed to complete their degrees. Three out of 17 respondents knew that there were some scholarship recipients who did not successfully complete their studies. One of the respondents remarked:

By the time I was studying there were two students who did master degree under the scholarship, but didn't finish their degrees. They got only postgraduate diploma because their score didn't meet the requirement and another one was planning to do master degree, but failed so this student got only certificate upon completion of study. Not everyone finished, one person was doing bachelor degree, but got only higher diploma so there were four of them in Queensland at that time did achieve their goals.

Another respondent said:

I also knew a few cases where they were sent home even before completing their studies

## **Looking for fieldwork placements**

Findings show that looking for fieldwork placements also posed challenges to the scholarship recipients as some universities in Australia did not arrange work placement for their students. One out of 17 respondents had experienced this issue. He mentioned that:

Another challenge is looking for fieldwork placement because it is a course requirement as I mentioned earlier that I have to look for the field work placement myself first at the first place because the university didn't arrange for that they just want us to explore the opportunity on our own ... it's challenging ...

## **Adapting and applying skills and knowledge gained from Australia into the Lao context**

Findings from the interview revealed that applying what the scholarship recipients learnt from Australia into the Lao context became a challenge as new ideas needed to be selected, adapted and applied carefully. Seven out of 17 respondents found adapting what they learned in Australia into Lao context challenging. One of the respondents noted that:

I learned ... in the western way of education but here we have different way of system I need to be careful to be adaptive.

Another respondent explained:

When we studied there we learned quite a lot but it doesn't mean that we can apply all the skills and theories in their situation to our situation, some of the skills and the theories need to be adapted.



## **Working and studying field did not relate**

Some of the alumni found it difficult to apply their knowledge in their workplace since they studied in a field that did not relate to their work. Two out of 17 respondents reported that working and studying in a field that did not relate so the skills and knowledge from Australia could not be applied in their workplace. One of these respondents stated:

Some international students find it very difficult in terms of learning some subjects because some subjects are not relevant to the field that they do in their own countries and when they come back that based on my experience some knowledge I cannot apply in my area ...

The other respondent observed:

...why they cannot apply because their work did not relate to the skills that they have learned from Australia. For example, one person studied in education management, but they work in another field such as working in NGO.

## **Differences in the learning and teaching system**

Nine out of 17 respondents found adapting from Lao into the Australian education system very challenging because the learning and teaching systems between Laos and Australia were totally different. One of the respondents confirmed:

I think for me ...dealing with a new educational system and adjusting to a new learning environment is very challenging ...at first.

Another respondent asserted:

From my own experience I think the methodology of teaching and learning in Laos and in Australia are very different so Lao students have to adapt to the self-learning method in Australia like in my case.

Another respondent explained:

...and then learning style that overseas students like us need to adapt ourselves such as writing assignment for example so we need to then write in here you were dependent learner, but when you are there you are independent learner so we need to read a lot and we need to manage by yourself about the assignment, for example that the most challenging thing I think for most of the overseas students.

## **Studying a degree lower than previous qualification**

Results from the interviews reveal that one out of 17 respondents studied a lower degree than her previous qualification. She commented that:

People in my workplace are not interested in me and do not pay much attention to me because I already finished bachelor degree in Laos, but when I go to study in Australia I studied TAFE in which the degree is lower than my previous degree, so they do not really care about me much.

## **Life in Australia**

Under life in Australia there are seven subthemes namely (1) English language, (2) settling down and finding accommodation, (3) feeling insecure and homesick, (4) time management, (5) making friends and culture shock, (6) insufficient stipend, (7) adapting into a new social and learning environment, and (8) lack of research skills.

## **English language**

Respondents reported that when they first arrived in Australia they had trouble using English to communicate with local people. Eight out of 17 respondents experienced some difficulty in communicating with local Australian people. One of the respondents asserted:

I think the most challenging thing... in Australia may be ...the language ... [you] face many difficulties about the accent because the accent of Australians is different from English or American.

Another respondent noted that:

At that time we learned a lot from the books but we [had] no chance to use English so when we [went] to the real situation we were not confident to use English so we have problems ... communicating with people, for example native speakers.

Another respondent explained that:

Yes some more challenges include my English proficiency sometimes I need to make a good guess from English speakers sometimes I express my thinking in the way that not fully what I really want to express myself like that

## **Settling down and finding accommodation**

When the respondents first arrived in Australia settling down and finding accommodation was one of their biggest challenges. Ten out of 17 respondents accepted that they had problems in finding accommodation and settling down. One remarked:

... at the beginning it [was] very hard to find a place of living, facing different culture... everything [was] very challenging.

Another respondent affirmed:

...when we arrived not only the IAP [Introductory to Academic Program] course that we attended but we also try hard to find accommodation you know in other word finding accommodation that [was] very difficult...

## **Feeling insecure and homesick**

One out of 17 respondents experienced discrimination and felt insecure while he was studying in Australia. This respondent reported that:

Everything was well prepared. However, before I graduated, there was a group of anti-Asian people who went there to work and at that time we felt bad. When driving and stopping at traffic lights they shouted at us ...but we ignored them because there were more good people than bad ones. We had psychological sickness at that time.

In addition, the findings from interviews with the alumni revealed that only one scholarship recipient out of 17, experienced homesickness. This respondent revealed that:

...but for me I didn't go out that much and because university didn't have many social activities outside the curriculum so sometime I've got homesick, but it wasn't that bad...

## **Time Management**

Five out of 17 respondents struggled to manage their time while they were studying in Australia. Some of them had problems in meeting deadlines. One of the respondents stated:

What was most challenging for me was that you know sometime I didn't get used with the system of managing ourselves so sometimes you just tend to leave it until the end of the day or until the deadline is approaching.

In addition, some alumni revealed they could not balance their time between study and social activities. One asserted:

...there are many challenges that I faced during my study in Australia, one of the things is how to manage time, I couldn't balance between social activities and study time that I spent ... I found that time management is a great [problem] ...

## **Making friends and culture shock**

One out of 17 respondents had problems in settling down and making new friends, when she first arrived in Australia. She contended:

... it's been long time ago but [I] still remember we have difficulty with finding our accommodation ... and adapting ourselves to new situation both to make friends for example or adjust ourselves to the university's activities...

Results from the interviews also revealed that one out of 17 respondents experienced culture shock. This respondent found the way to make an appointment to see university staff in Australia was totally different from in Lao culture. In Laos people just approached a person who they wanted to meet without having to make an appointment, but here in Australia making an appointment was the common rule. The respondent explained that:

The second challenge is I found how to seek advice from academia ... from somebody that I think that I want to approach because in my culture way I don't need to make an appointment ... I approach their secretary or somebody and make a call ..... sometime I can't approach them as I expect to see them in the time that I want to see.

## **Insufficient stipend**

Studying in Australia with family can be challenging because the monthly stipend was not sufficient for the whole family. One out of 17 respondents who had family were experiencing financial shortages. The respondent reported that:

...the most challenging thing for me while studying in Australia is that because I have family ... I have to study and support my family as well. We're thinking about how to survive because the salary is not enough so my wife and I sometimes must go to work to make more money to pay for the bills and housing so this one is very challenging.

In addition, the findings show that one out of 17 respondents, who was single, had financial problems because the stipend was not enough for settling down. The respondent noted that:

Second thing is to adapt to new environment especially the payment is not enough for the first allowance to settling down.

## **Adapting into new social and learning environment**

Some respondents found adapting into a new learning environment was challenging. Two out of 17 respondents found the Australian multicultural situation challenging. One of the respondents found it hard to communicate with people from many different backgrounds and also to adapt to and use available technology. This respondent explained:

well it's adaptation ...because you need to communicate with the people from different culture background and also you probably adapt to new technology that you haven't seen in your country and then you come here and you have to use them in order to gain the knowledge ... adaptation is very challenging.

Another respondent also revealed that adapting into the Australian culture took time.

This respondent explained that:

... it was certainly difficult because Australian context is quite different from Laos where I grow up um so there is mode of adjustment to go there not only with the system of education but also the culture the environment ah friends so many things to adjust, so it took me a while to really integrate into the system, but I would say that I almost spent nearly two years in Australia by the time I begin to integrate into Australian culture that the time to leave already.

Eleven out of 17 respondents had problems adapting into a new learning environment in Australia. Many of them had problems in catching up with the lessons, and writing assignment. One of the respondents noted that:

... second one is the study. Study is very important as well because if we don't follow supervisor follow topic coordinator it's hard to catch up like assignment and so on...

Another respondent stated:

Ah I think the courses themselves because they were quite technical and also to be accepted by your classmates and also professors in Australia as well because Laos is known to be under developing country or developing country you know for you to push yourself to their level to their standard that is pretty challenging

Some of the respondents also had problems adapting into a self-learning system. One of the respondents noted that:

...overseas students like us need to adapt ourselves such as writing assignment for example ... you were a dependent learner but when you are here you are an independent learner so we need to read a lot and we need to manage by ourselves about assignments for example, that's the most challenging thing I think for most of the overseas students.

## **Insufficient research skills**

Lack of the research skills needed to succeed in his course challenged one of the 17 respondents. The respondent elaborated:

I think the most challenging thing studying in Australia is that I did not have sufficient research skills ... because when I did my master degree I did coursework project I did not involve in research I just studied methodology that I did not practically involve in research. Then when I go to the second time I study very hard sometime I struggle because I did not want to let my supervisor to see that I lack basic skills so I need to learn by myself when skill is basic when knowledge is basic I don't want to ask my supervisor I want to show that I am quite sufficient have sufficient knowledge to study PhD.

## **Post study**

Under post study there are three subthemes such as (1) barriers to applying skills after study, (2) issues of promotions and reunions, and (3) adaptation into Lao context when first returning.

## **Barriers to applying skills after study**

Some skills and knowledge gained in Australia cannot be fully applied in the workplace in Laos because of the differences in Lao and Australian systems. Three out of 17 respondents mentioned difficulty when applying the skills and knowledge that they gained from studying in Australia into their workplace. One of the respondents explained that they must be cautious and selective because some aspects involved sensitivity. The respondent noted that:

[when] I come back I need to be adaptive because we have different structures, educational, political... so I need to be selective...because they involve sensitivity...so I need to be careful.

Another respondent reported that some knowledge from Australia could not be applied as the system in Laos was different from Australia system. The respondent identified that:

Based on my experience some knowledge I cannot apply in my area for instance the way of changing teaching and learning, it's hard to do.

Apart from the different systems between Laos and Australia which prevented skills and knowledge being applied in workplace, Lao culture in respecting senior workers also prevented respondents from applying the skills and knowledge that they learnt from Australia into their workplace. One out of 17 respondents mentioned this issue during the interview. The respondent said:

...because like in our culture we need to respect seniority, respect authority so sometime ... when I really want to improve things because ...the education performance is quite low when I work hard it is like I am a competitor of my upper authorities ,sometimes I feel like that, although it is not apparently seen.

## **Issues of promotions and reunions**

Seniority in the Lao system was a barrier for the younger generation who graduated from Australia to be promoted in their public workplace. One out of 17 respondents

revealed that older or more senior staff were more likely to be promoted to hold higher position than younger staff who graduated from Australia. The respondent stated:

I am a government official and as you know the government official system, they tend to promote the elderly worker the senior worker rather than new generation.

According to the responses from the interview some returnees were not truly welcome back to work. Three out of 17 respondents found returning to their previous public workplace challenging as they felt that a small number of their work colleagues were jealous of the skills and knowledge they gained from studying in Australia. One respondent specified:

Some feel jealous because what I guess is they may think that ... return from Australia and he will be a better or more experience person or I will lose my job here and [he] will be promoted in a better position.

Findings also revealed that it took much effort and time before other work colleagues accepted new returnees from study in Australia. One of the respondents testified that:

I think it is not simply that when I come back other people accept immediately, I need to be moderate not to be assertive ... I need to be friendly to everyone to let them accept me and like colleagues like friends.

### **Adaptation into Lao context when first returning**

Results from the interview revealed that adapting and adjusting from Australian working and socialising style into Lao context of the respondents when they first returned home to Laos is very challenging. Findings show that six out of 17 respondents had experienced these challenges. One of the respondents asserted:

Well the adjustment into the society at the initial stage that would be a little bit difficult.

Another respondent claimed:

I have experienced, like I mentioned before, that when I returned from Australia it is different from people returned from my closer neighbouring countries like Vietnam and China or from Russia. It is that different. It means that I studied in the West. It is good that if I worked for the NGO so that's why I moved from the government to the NGO.



## **Summary of findings from interviewing alumni**

Findings unveiled some strengths and benefits of the Australian Scholarships Program (ASP). Results showed that all scholarship recipients benefited financially as they earned more when they returned to work after finishing their study in Australia. They gained skills and knowledge from their studies and the skills and knowledge from Australia could be applied in Lao context. They also gained cultural and work experience. In addition, the majority of the scholarship recipients were promoted to hold more senior positions and they had more opportunities to choose a better job. They were welcomed back by their work colleagues. Their English language competency as well as teamwork and time management skills had improved. Their networking also expanded through the program. The scholarship recipients also became more independent, and people respected them more.

Pre-departure program in Laos was identified as one of the strengths. It helped prepare the scholarship recipients well for living and studying in Australia. Besides, Australian educational institutes provided them support when they first arrived in Australia. From the perspectives of the scholarship recipients teaching and learning facilities as well as quality of education of Australian educational institutes were considered outstanding.

Apart from the strengths and the benefits, results from the interviews also reveal some challenges from the perspectives of the scholarship recipients. Completing study on time, meeting deadlines, and completing degrees were found to be challenging. The scholarship recipients experienced difficulties in adapting from Lao into Australian education system, and they found adapting into the Australian multi-cultural environment challenging. In addition, the scholarship recipients had problems with

their English language, and they had difficulties in finding accommodation when they first arrived in Australia. They also experienced culture shock, and homesickness as well as feeling insecure. They struggled to manage their time while they were studying in Australia. Findings revealed further that finding work placement, making friends, and making appointments were challenging for a minority of the respondents. Studying in a new field that did not relate to previous qualification, and studying a lower degree than their previous qualification were also identified as challenges. Lack of research skills and insufficient stipend for the scholarship recipients with family also posed a big challenge.

Findings also revealed that the scholarship recipients faced some challenges after returning to Laos. The scholarship recipients found applying skills and knowledge gained in Australia into a Lao context challenging as they needed to adapt and adjust what they gained from Australia to suit Lao context. Some of them found having problems in reuniting with their previous organisations as their work colleagues were jealous of their skills and knowledge, and reuniting took time and effort.

## **Conclusion**

The strengths, benefits, and the challenges of the Australian Scholarship Program (ASP) from the perspectives of employers, AusAID staff, and alumni were elaborated in detail. These three groups of respondents viewed the strengths, benefits, and challenges of ASP differently, and some of their points of view overlapped. Key findings regarding the strengths, benefits, and the challenges of the ASP are summarised below.

The most common findings among three groups were depicted in Appendix 6. They were English language, promotion, contribution to national development of alumni of the program, pre-departure program, good cooperation, staff retention and minimising staff loss, resistance to skills and knowledge to be transferred to public workplaces, different system between Laos and Australia, working and studying field did not relate, high competition in public sector/not enough female candidates, financial benefits and shortages. Time management was discussed in the alumni group as it was found to be both a strength and a challenge.

The most significant finding that all three groups of respondents had in common was English language. Findings indicated that it was two sides of the same coin as English was found to be both a strength and benefit, and a challenge for all groups. Another interesting finding was promotion which all groups saw as the strength and the benefit of the program. Three groups of respondents shared exactly the same view that scholarship recipients were promoted when they returned to work with their previous public organisation after finishing study in Australia under ASP. Another similar finding was the skills and knowledge that the scholarship recipients gained from study in Australia were significant to Lao national development. Findings also revealed that Laos and Australia had good cooperation at a high level as both groups of respondents (the employers and AusAID staff) confirmed during their interviews. The employers and the alumni both saw the benefits of the Pre-departure program which prepared scholarship recipients well for studies in Australia. It was confirmed by both the employers and the AusAID staff that the majority of the scholarship recipients returned to work with their previous public organisations after finishing study in Australia. Findings from the two groups show that a very small proportion of the returnees left

public jobs which was unique to Laos.

Findings also revealed some common challenges of the ASP that all three groups of respondents shared in common. Resistance to skills and knowledge being transferred in public workplaces was found as a challenge for all groups. Findings show that not all skills and knowledge from Australia could be applied in the workplace. They needed to be adapted and adjustment made to suit local context. Findings also revealed that the employers and the alumni found different systems of teaching and learning between Laos and Australia very challenging. Thus, scholarship recipients were required to adapt into Australian educational system in order to cope with the challenges. The two groups of respondents also shared common views that where the work and study fields did not relate, the discrepancy posed a significant barrier to scholarship recipients' learning while they were in Australia as well as that skills and knowledge gained from study in Australia could not effectively be applied in the workplace when returning to work in their previous public organisations. Findings from the employers' and the AusAID staff's interviews show that the competition to apply for the scholarship was high for public staff and it was hard to get enough female candidates from public sectors to fulfil the application. Finance was also found to be both a strength and benefit and a challenge for the program. The AusAID staff and the alumni shared common views that the scholarship recipients benefited from studying under ASP as they received financial support such as tuition fee, stipend, and health cover, as well as their salary increased when they got a higher qualification. In contrast, some alumni indicated that the financial support was insufficient. Findings also show that the differences between Lao public and private salary contributed to leaving public organisations by returnees. Another key finding was the time management of the

alumni respondents. They found it to be both a challenge and a strength: alumni found it hard to manage their time when they first arrived in Australia, but their time management improved when they finished their study in Australia under ASP.

# CHAPTER 6 : FINDINGS FROM THE INTERVIEWS ON LAOS AND AUSAID ASP POLICY

## Introduction

Chapter 5 presented findings from the interviews of public employers, AusAID staff, and alumni which investigated research question (1): *What are the benefits, strengths and challenges of the scholarship scheme both for employers and recipients?*

This chapter presents a description of qualitative data in response to research question (3): *What policy structures have been developed to optimise outcomes for the benefit of the Lao PDR, employers and alumni and is there a need for further policy development?* The results from the interviews of four public employers, four AusAID staff, and three alumni who moved from public to private/NGO sectors, are reported.

In addition, qualitative data from the analysis of Lao public organisation documents related to staff study abroad and AusAID's procedures and criteria in selecting and sending scholarship recipients to study in Australia under ASP are also presented.

This chapter is divided into three sections: Section 1: The perspectives of employers on existing policy structures to optimise outcomes for the benefit of the Lao PDR, employers and alumni, Section 2: The perspectives of AusAID staff on existing policy structures to optimise outcomes for the benefit of the Lao PDR, employers and alumni, and Section 3: The perspectives of alumni who moved from public to private/NGO sectors on existing public policy structures to optimise outcomes for the benefit of the Lao PDR, employers and alumni.

## Section 1: The perspectives of employers on existing policy structures to optimise outcomes for the benefit of the Lao PDR, employers and alumni.

Four public employers were asked their views about the existing Laos policy structures designed to optimise outcomes for the benefit of the Lao PDR, and whether or not they believed is there a need for further policy development? Responses from the interviews were categorised into themes and subthemes which are depicted in Figure 6.1 below.

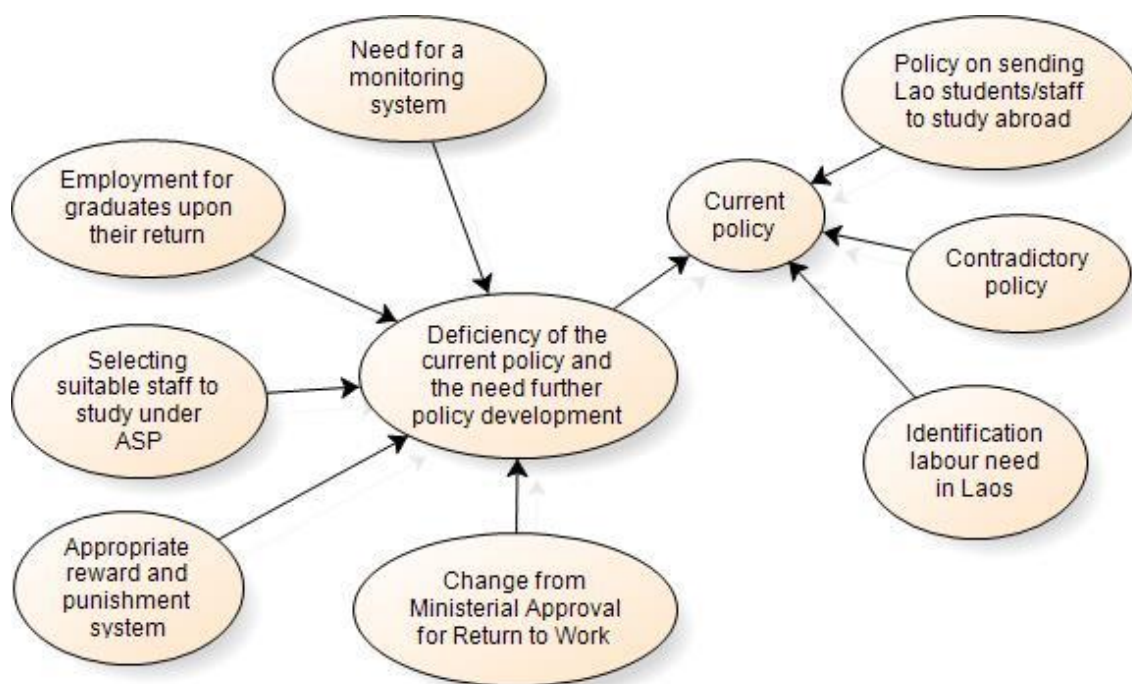


Figure 6.1: Themes and subthemes representing public employers' views on existing Lao policy.

The responses from the interviews were categorised into two main themes and eight subthemes. The main themes that emerged are (1) current policy, and (2) deficiency of

the current policy and the need for further policy development. The subthemes under the current policy are (1) policy on sending Lao students/staff to study abroad, (2) contradictory policy, and (3) identification of Labour needs in Laos.

Five subthemes emerged from Theme 2: deficiency of the policy and need for further policy development: These were the need for (1) a monitoring system, (2) employment for graduates upon their return, (3) selecting suitable staff to study under the ASP, (4) appropriate reward and sanction system, and (5) changing role from top down to bottom up in appointing position for the returnees

### **Current policy**

The Public Employers reported that the existing policy on selecting Lao students/staff to study overseas was not clear and conflicted with AusAID's policy and procedures, with the result that labour need was identified by scholarship providers rather than Lao government.

### **Policy on sending Lao students/staff to study abroad.**

An analysis of relevant documents revealed that the Ministry of Education had the general directive to manage Lao students overseas as part of the staff development policy number 3552/13 dated 28 August 2013. This policy contained five main part: (1) general statement, (2) Requirements for students to study overseas, (3) Monitoring and management of Lao students overseas, (4) Power, duty, and forbidden things to do abroad, and (5) Rewards and sanction systems. It did not go into detail. Employer A, explained that a strength of the existing policy on managing students' studying overseas was the limited amount of detail. He stated:



It is called the regulation for managing students to study overseas. I think it is very good because it does not go into too much detail. It covers big issues in relation to the Law for students to oblige. It is for the benefit of students themselves, it is not for the benefit of the ministry. If they are obliged to the regulation, they will be protected by the embassy and when students have problems when they go to the embassy they will be given assistance and support because they go to study there legally.

Apart from the policy at the ministerial level which governed broader practices, there was a more detailed policy at the level of universities, colleges, schools, offices, and departments. Employers B and C reported that their organisations had detailed policies and regulations which required staff to sign contracts which necessitated them to agree to return to work for their previous public organisation for at least twice the duration they studied in Asutralia. Employer B outlined his understanding of regulations at his public organisation. He specified:

The current regulation in sending staff to study overseas is as follows: The staff who is going to study must sign a contract with their organisation, for example if the staff is working at faculty they must sign the contract with the faculty and then all documents must come up to the personal office of university. If working in offices of NUOL they go straight to the personnel office. The key area of the contract covers some issues such as when they finish their studies they must return back to work for their previous organisations or go to work based on the organisations appointed based on their skills, knowledge and expertise.

Employer C also discussed her organisation's policy. She stated that her organisation had a clear policy regarding sending staff to study abroad. She mentioned one of the policy's sections as an example. She explained that staff who wanted to do a master degree must not exceed 35 years of age, and must have at least five-years of work experience.

Employer C detailed:

In our staff development we have policies not only for the Faculty of Letters through the university, also from the ministry.... I think that it's a good policy anyway...to go to master they have to be not more than 35 for example... if you teach...not less than five years you can get scholarship...I think it's good for everyone...

## **Contradictory policy**

The document analysis revealed that the regulation of Lao government regarding sending, protecting and monitoring Lao students in foreign countries; No: 3552/13 dated 28 August 2013, section 17 had content that contradicted with the procedures and regulations of the Australia Scholarship Program (ASP). The content of the section 17 indicated that, “Students, researchers, and trainers who get high distinctions/outstanding results and behave well will be considered for scholarships to study further” (Department of Students Affairs, 2014, p. 12).

Document analysis also divulged that in contrast, based on the Australia Awards Scholarships Policy Handbook all scholarship recipients must return to Laos by the end of their scholarships after finishing study in Australia. The content of the policy was:

To ensure the development impact of Australia Awards Scholarships, all awardees must return home on completion of their studies so they can contribute to development in their country. Awardees are required to leave Australia for a minimum of two years after completing their scholarship. Failure to do so will result in the awardee incurring a debt to the Commonwealth of Australia for the total accrued cost of their scholarship (Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, 2015, p. 12).

The document analysis clearly showed that current policies of the Lao and Australian governments were in conflict and this was confirmed by Employer A who was responsible for sending Lao students to study overseas. He explained that:

In addition, this new regulation has covered the excellent students who study well and the government support them for further studies after finishing studies...it is against other agencies' rules, for example, Australian scholarships when students finish their studies they must return to Laos. They are not allowed to continue further studies...but for the students with good result...best students...they should continue their further studies after the finish their current studies we would support them.

## **Identification of Labour need in Laos**

According to Employer A the working system to identify the labour needs of the Lao government was not clear since the system and the National Committee for Human Resource Development were newly established with the result that predicting labour needs lacked access to accurate data. Employer A noted that although everything was newly established, the Committee was moving in the right direction because, it was set up to give general advice and to predict the labour needs for the future. He believed that the Lao government should know and understand Lao labour needs. He added that when understanding the country's labour needs the government should encourage people to study in the essential areas so when they returned home they could fill gaps in the workforce.

Employer A reported that

The strategic plan that we do together is to build capacity building to serve the needs of our country. This means that Laos should know what areas are needed to send staff to study in and should encourage our people to study in those needed areas, and they can serve our country when they return home. However,...it is just the beginning process. The national committee to develop national human resource development has just been established... and these people will give general advice to predict the need of labour in the future like Australia did, and we should build our people based on the need of our country. It is hard to have accurate data, but it should go to the same direction.

In the past, before having the national committee on human resource development the Lao government did not have a system to identify labour needs. Thus, when scholarship sponsors such as Japan, New Zealand, and Australia provided scholarships to Laos, the government of Laos could not inform these scholarship sponsors about the areas of their own labour need. Employer A explained that when providing scholarships to Laos these scholarship sponsors, then, tried to understand the labour needs on the Lao government's behalf by allocating a certain number of scholarships for what they considered to be priority areas of study.

Employer A stated:

...the Japanese scholarships, New Zealand Scholarships and Australian Scholarships, they all have priority areas or fields of studies indicated clearly. These countries are trying to understand the need for us, but these needs should come from ourselves. Laos should know what we need and we should develop our people in the needed areas. This system is just beginning and it is not clear yet...

Employer B commented similarly to Employer A affirming that sending staff to study abroad and identifying areas of study to match labour need was a common issue. He stated that it was not only his organisation's problem. It was a nationwide problem. He said that the organisations must have a clear understanding of the areas of labour need before sending their staff to study abroad under foreign scholarship programs.

Employer B reported:

I think it is not only NUOL problems in sending staff to study overseas. Firstly, there must be good planning in sending staff to study. There need to be clear direction...the organisations must be clear of what areas that they need to focus on in sending staff to study...

## **Deficiency of the existing policy and the need further policy development**

Findings from the interviews show that the current policy in sending staff to study in Australia was deficient and the policy needed further development in five areas such as: (1) A reliable monitoring system, (2) Employment for graduates upon their return, (3), Selecting suitable staff to study under the ASP, (4) An Appropriate reward and sanction system, and (5) Change from Ministerial to employer approval for return to work. The section below expands on these five areas.

### **Need for a reliable monitoring system**

Laos did not have an electronic system to monitor Lao students overseas. Only basic paperwork existed in relation to sending scholarship recipients to study abroad and

their return to Laos upon completion of their study abroad. The system required the scholarship recipients to submit completed forms and documents to the Ministry of Education and Sports (MES). Then MES issued a letter of approval for studying overseas and the scholarship recipients brought the letter to the Embassy of Laos overseas. When the scholarship recipients finished their study, the embassy issued a letter of completion of study. Then the scholarship recipients brought the letter back to the MES when they returned. There was no official online system to track scholarship recipients' progress and wellbeing while they were abroad or to help maintain the scholarship recipients from public sectors when they returned home.

The employers argued that a system was needed to identify areas of study to support labour need in Laos and to monitor students' progress and wellbeing while overseas. They believed a monitoring system could help the government to have an effective human resource development plan as well as to give assistance to the scholarship recipients when they had problems. In addition, data and information from the system could be used by public employers to maintain their staff when they returned from study abroad.

Employer C emphasised the need to monitor students when overseas and to check whether they were having any difficulties, and upon their return to maintain them. He stated:

...what we need to do only for the monitoring of the staff who got the scholarship we need...to check whether they have problems...when they come back what we will do in order to maintain them so I think this monitoring is important for my personal view

Employer A commented similarly that a monitoring system was needed to track students' wellbeing and provide assistance, as well as to know their field of studies to support the country's human resource development plan. Employer A explained:

This is to support and provide assistance to students, and for our ministry what we get is only the statistics for future human resource development plan. Otherwise we do not know who study what and where. If the central government do not know it is hard to plan effectively.

Employer B agreed. He emphasised the importance of monitoring scholarship recipients who studied abroad as he believed it was crucial to track their study progress and wellbeing. He explained that the employers needed to follow up their study progress to make sure that the scholarship recipients finished study as plan. He stated that:

...when sending them to study organisations must monitor their studies...there needs to be a monitoring and follow up system...

### **Employment for graduates upon their return**

Chapter 5 reported that, according to AusAID staff, a small number of scholarship recipients moved from public to private/NGO sectors after finishing their studies in Australia. Findings from the employers' interviews revealed that in order to prevent losing public employers who studied in Australia under the ASP, public organisations needed to provide workplaces for them when they returned to work after finishing studies in Australia. Employer B stated:

...and upon completion of their studies the organisations must have workplace for them to work...

Employer D, who did not give permission to be recorded during interview, mentioned that it was important that Lao public organisations provided workplaces and positions for the returnees and put the right people into the right workplaces. He reported that in the past when the public organisations did not provide workplaces for the returnees when they came back they normally sought a new job and when they received a higher salary and position elsewhere they did not come back to public organisations. Thus, provision of workplaces for the returnees was crucial.

Employer A focused on the importance of sending students overseas with the aim of building capacity so that when they returned they should be offered jobs related to their field of study. However, if public organisation did not provide jobs for them upon their return the uncertainty about their future could lead to them leaving public organisations to work for private organisations. He reported:

It depends on their public organisations as well. When sending staff to study the organisations have their plans to build capacity building so on their returning to work they will be offering jobs that needed their skills and knowledge. However, If they come back to work, but there is no job for them to work and they have to wait until a year, for example, one guy finish his study from Germany and he had to wait for his turn to go back to work, and this make people not certain about their future which make them go to work with private organisations, but the case like this is very rare...

### **Selecting suitable staff to study under the ASP**

AusAID staff, as reported in Chapter 5 testified that a small number of scholarship recipients did not finish their study on time or did not successfully complete their degree as planned.

In order to prevent such occurrences the public employers recommended that selecting suitable staff, with a good level of English language competency and potential in their chosen field of studies under the ASP was important. One employer argued that the Department of Personnel needed a clear policy for government officials wishing to apply for scholarships. He (Employer A) said:

I think the Department of Personnel should have clear policy for government officials to apply for scholarships. Firstly they need to choose the right target. For those who will apply for Australia, they need to have [an] adequate level of English language. It does not mean that they will start from A B C level. This will not work. In addition, they need to find the talented person because each person has different capacity so when they go to study they can finish. But some can't finish in the past, for example, some students under Japanese scholarships; there are already a few cases, even if they offer one on one teachers for Lao students some are still struggle. So selection is important for quality.

Employer B commented likewise that in order to prevent these occurrences and to improve the outcomes of ASP it was important that suitable candidates from the public

sector who had potential in a relevant field of studies were chosen to study under the program. Employer B recommended:

... selecting only staff who are suitable and have potential in those field of studies to study in Australia under ASP is crucial...

### **Appropriate reward and sanction system**

According to the employers' the government needed an appropriate reward and sanction system to prevent the returnees from leaving their public organisations after finishing study in Australia under ASP as well as to promote those who returned to serve in their former public organisations. They claimed that although there was a policy that all scholarship recipients from public sectors must sign a contract to return to work for their public organisations before being granted a scholarship to study in Australia, some returnees from public organisations left, upon their return, to work in private/NGOs without penalty. In some cases there were some scholarship recipients who returned to work for their previous public organisations, but left these organisations later for the better jobs. Although the returnees brought back skills and knowledge to help improve the organisations, they were not always promoted or recognised for their qualifications which led to some of them leaving public organisations.

According to the Employer A, scholarship recipients signed a contract to return to work with their previous public organisation upon completion of their studies, however, if the returnees choose to leave the public organisation the employers could not force them to return to work.

Employer A revealed:

...the scholarship recipients from public organisations must sign contract before travelling to study in Australia. The contract is made with our department here and the length is that they



have to return to work with their previous public organisation twice the length of the duration of their studies in Australia. However, this contract is not effective if they do not return we can't arrest them, but there is tie in terms of feeling connection between them and their organisations.

In some cases some returnees went back to work for their former public organisations, but the understanding that they would bring the new skills and knowledge they gained from study in Australia under ASP to improve their public organisation was not recognised when later they left their public organisations. To prevent such cases and to promote those who were highly qualified from their studies in Australia Employer B believed that the government needed to recognise their achievements and to have reward system in place to guard against this happening. Employer B considered:

There needs to be other policies and regulations in place ...there needs to be some more recognition of the graduates and what they have gained from their studies because some times...when they come back they are not recognized.

## **Change from Ministerial Approval for Return to Work**

Chapter 5 presented the current situation where ASP returnees needed to wait for a decree from the central ministry and signed by the minister allowing them to go back to work in public organisations. This procedure sometimes took a long time. The findings showed that the returnees left public organisations while they were waiting for the decree.

In order to become more effective in taking back the returnees and to close the waiting gap for the decree to be issued, Employer C and D recommended changing from ministerial approval to local employer approval in assigning positions for the returnees to go back to work, and questioned whether, in fact, a decree was actually needed. From Employer C's point of view it would be faster if local levels of administration

were given power to issue decrees (position appointment documents) to allow the returnees to go back to work. Employer C stated:

Well in this we have to change from top down to the bottom or from the bottom to the top right into the system I think for the workplace work [we/local] can arrange somewhere for them to work to waiting for...

Employer D, who did not wish to be recorded during the interview, noted that there were many different hierarchical administration levels for document to go through before the decree or approval to return to work could be issued and he explained this took a longer time. He added that if the approval document could be issued at the local level where the returnees would return to work, it would take a shorter time to process the document.

## **Summary**

The document analysis revealed that Laos and AusAID had already formed a number of policies relating to sending Lao students and staff to study abroad, and managing the ASP. The management of Lao students overseas occurred at the Ministerial level in line with the Regulation to protect Lao students overseas No: 3552/13, dated 28 August 2013. This policy governed the broader practices and contained only general guidelines. Whereas at a lower level, such as universities, and colleges, the policies and regulations were more detailed.

Although the Lao and Australian policies were generally well aligned and had the same aims, there were some areas where Lao policy contradicted AusAID policy. The findings showed that the Lao government supported students with excellent results and approved them to continue further study, whereas AusAID policy stated clearly that

all graduates must return home to Laos after finishing study in Australia under the ASP.

Results from document analysis and interview also revealed no evidence that Lao government had a proper system to identify labour need. Findings showed that in fact the scholarship sponsors from Australia and other donor countries who provided scholarships to Laos tried to understand the labour needs on behalf of the Lao government.

Results from the interviews also showed the deficiency of the policy and the need for further policy development. The findings established that from the perspectives of the Employers, policy development was needed in relation to the monitoring system, the provision of employment for graduates upon their return, the selection of suitable staff to study under the ASP, the establishment of an appropriate reward and sanction system, and approval of the return to work for returnees.

## **Section 2: The perspectives of AusAID staff on existing policy**

This section presents results from interviews with four AusAID staff about the policy of selecting and sending scholarship recipients to study in Australia under ASP. The questions focused on research question (3); *What policy structures have been developed to optimise outcomes for the benefit of the Lao PDR, and is there a need for further policy development?* Responses from the interviews were categorised into themes and subthemes. The responses from the interviews were categorised into four themes, namely (1) Selection Process, (2) Human Resource Development, (3)

transparency (needing more open and honest communication), and (4) Unbalanced/one sided policy.

Two subthemes relating to the selection process surfaced from the interviews with AusAID staff. These were: (1) Reaching out to disadvantage and disability candidates, and (2) Recruitment of quality female candidates. There were three subthemes under human resource development. These were: (1) Lack of perspective on human resource development, (2) Need for incorporation of soft skills into ASP, and (3) Employment opportunities to gain real work experience in Australia. All themes and subtheme were depicted in Figure 6.2 below.

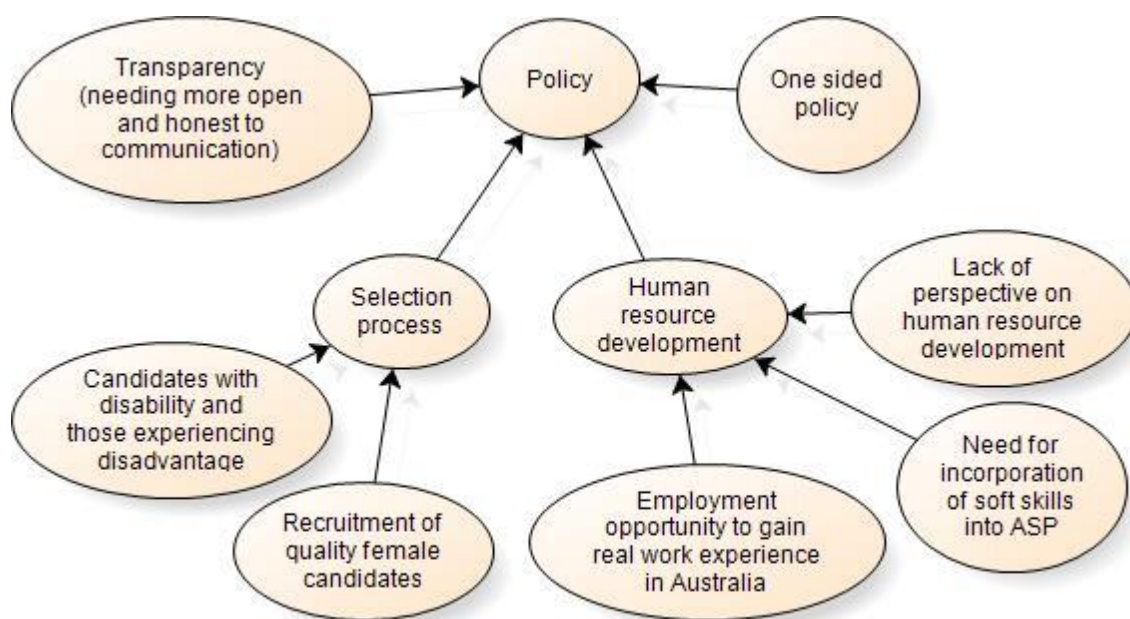


Figure 6.2: The perspectives of AusAID staff on existing policy.

Generally AusAID staff reported in their interviews that the policy was one-sided; further development was needed relating to the selection process; it lacked a

perspective on human resource development and needed more open and honest communication. They claimed that although the selection process of the ASP was considered to be very transparent and fair to every candidate as it had clear criteria for the selection process, people with disability and disadvantaged people were missed out since they did not meet the set criteria. AusAID staff also commented that it was hard to get enough female candidates from the public sector to meet the criteria as their English language competency was far lower than that of applicants from the open or private sectors. In addition, AusAID staff reported that the graduates from the ASP were highly equipped with skills, knowledge and expertise in their field of study which were highly sought after by employers in Laos. However, AusAID staff reported further that most of the new graduates lacked soft skills such as leadership and management skills, and time management which the ASP needed to improve in the future. They noted that having an internship program or allowing graduates to work in Australia to get real work experience before returning home would add more value to the program. They claimed it was a missed opportunity for the scholarship recipients not to gain real work experience. Finally AusAID staff accepted that the current policy did not reflect a perspective on human resource development but rather that the scholarship recipients from public organisations must return to work for their previous public organisation upon their return from study under the ASP.

### **Selection process**

The AusAID staff generally believed that the policy regarding the ASP selection process needed further development since there was a gap in providing equal opportunity to disadvantaged candidates. They claimed that candidates with a disability and those who lived and worked in provincial and rural areas were not

provided equal opportunity when compared with people who were in the urban and capital city areas. In addition, although females were highly encourage to apply for the scholarships it was hard to get enough quality females candidates to apply.

### **Candidates with disability and those experiencing disadvantage**

AusAID staff A and B were in positions that required them to administer the policy on the selection and appointment of scholarship recipients to study in Australia under ASP. Thus, most of the quotes regarding to policy came from AusAID staff A and B's interviews.

According to AusAID staff A most of the scholarship recipients who were given the scholarships were the ones who studied, lived, and worked in the city while a small number of provincial and rural candidates were selected to participate in the program each year. From AusAID staff's perspectives providing equal opportunities to marginalised candidates such as people in the provincial and rural areas was important and needed improvement. AusAID staff A explained that future planning needed to reach out to more provincial candidates. She said:

...[what we need to do is] reaching out to the provincial people ...because... most of the scholarship recipients seem to be the ones within, you know being or studying or living in cities and working in the capital city, so what we try to do is may be in terms of reaching out more to provincial people...

In addition, in the past people with disabilities were left out as they had less opportunities to apply for the scholarships. AusAID staff reported that it was important that these groups of people were given equal opportunities just like 'normal people', and in order to achieve that AusAID would try to reach out to this group of people in the future. AusAID staff A explained:

...what we try to do is may be in terms of reaching out more to provincial people and probably people in the disadvantage areas including disabilities you know people with disabilities we might, um, we at the moment look at more, you know look at, um, better promotion strategies to reach out to those people...

## **Recruitment of quality female candidates**

AusAID staff A, who was involved policy development, indicated her concern about the small number of female applicants in the public category who met scholarships' requirements. According to AusAID staff A there was a very small number of females from public organisations who applied for the scholarships which resulted in the low intake of quality female candidates in the public category. AusAID staff A reported that:

...selection like I said female public applicants we seem to have the lowest number comparing to any other categories so in terms of you know trying to get good quality females to get the scholarships I think that's one issue that we need to look at...

## **Human resource development**

Generally AusAID staff reported in their interviews that the policy does not get a perspective on human resource development and needed more skills such as leadership and management skills and employment opportunity to gain real work experience in Australia to be introduced into the program.

## **Lack of perspective on human resource development**

AusAID staff were questioned about their views on whether the policy of sending staff to study in Australia was adequate or needed further development. The question was:

Are you aware of any policies regarding sending staff to study in Australia? If yes, do you think current policies are adequate or need further development?

The respondents accepted that they were aware of the current policy. The policy did not cover the human resource development aspect. AusAID staff B did not consider

that the policy was adequate as it did not reflect human resource development. He reported that the policy focused on specific details such as the obligation of the returnees from public organisations to return to serve in their previous workplace and claimed that the policy lacked direction for human resource development to meet future work needs. AusAID staff B elaborated:

Not to get a perspective on human resource development not really. It doesn't give the direction for the future work or at the moment, but that's coming there's really discussion about it in government. The policy's doing things more like the policy around if you go away if you are a government employee you go on scholarship you come back and you have to return to your bounden for a certain period ...

### **Need for incorporation of soft skills into ASP**

Findings from the interviews with the employers and AusAID staff in Chapter 5 showed that the scholarship recipients who graduated from study in Australia under the ASP were highly qualified in their field of study. The graduates were also highly sought after by employers in both public and private/NGOs in Laos. Although graduates from the program were highly equipped with skills and knowledge in their field of studies, they lacked “soft skills” which participants referred to as time management, team leadership, and how to write reports which were not part of their field of studies. According to AusAID staff B and C most of the graduates from the ASP lacked soft skills, and believed if the skills were added into the ASP, it would add more value to the program. AusAID staff B claimed:

...probably just to reinforce what both ...and ...said because ...said often the most valuable skills they bring back [are] what we sometimes called soft skills, time management, team leadership, how to write reports and so on, but those only come about coincidentally... saying those sorts of skills should be built into it when that's done to a program leadership program or that's done through an exchange internship or something would certainly add the value to the program...

AusAID staff C said similarly that:

...a very important point about what [the] scholarship doesn't include and that is in [a] certain skills area, management...



## **Employment opportunity to gain real work experience in Australia**

Interviews with AusAID staff B and C revealed that opportunities for internships with local Australian employers to gain real work experience before returning to Laos would add more value to the ASP. AusAID staff B explained that:

...[AusAID staff C] makes a very important point about what scholarship doesn't include and that is in certain skills area, management and things. I would like to see our program and the Australian employers looking at ...Employment opportunities working in somebody from the ministry of finance here working for a few months in treasury in Australia, for example, somebody from National University of Laos working in university in Australia working rather than studying to get some of that other experience. It's a missed opportunity I think. There's some of other things that we like to look at more to do more...

## **Transparency (needing more open and honest communication)**

Document analysis revealed that Australia and Laos had formed a collaborative body to review Australian Aid to Laos. According to the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (2013b) or DFAT there was a High Level Advisory Council (HLAC) which met annually, and a Program Steering Committee (PSC) which met twice yearly. "Two consultative structures are proposed to support effective, collaborative and transparent management of the Lao HRD Program" (Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, 2013b, p. 66). Roles and responsibilities, and membership of HLAC and PSC, cited from DFAT are depicted in Table 6.1 below.

**Table 6.1: Collaborative governance arrangements with Lao government.**

	<b>Roles and responsibility</b>	<b>Membership</b>
<b>HLAC</b>	<p>(a) Review (overall) program progress</p> <p>(b) Provide advice related to addressing policy or cross-sectorial issues – at a strategic level</p> <p>(c) Award “Alumnus of the Year” (following advice from <i>Program Steering Committee</i>)</p> <p>(d) Sets strategic directions for AusAID’s Lao HRD Program</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Head of Mission, Australian Embassy, Vientiane (co-chair)</li> <li>▪ Minister, MPI (co-chair)</li> <li>▪ Counselor (AusAID), Australian Embassy, Vientiane</li> <li>▪ Vice Minister, Ministry of Education &amp; Sports</li> <li>▪ Vice Minister, Ministry of Home Affairs</li> <li>▪ President, Lao Chamber of Commerce and Industry</li> <li>▪ Representative of Lao National Assembly</li> </ul>
<b>PSC</b>	<p>(a) Provide policy guidance</p> <p>(b) Approve four-year rolling plan, budgets and reports</p> <p>(c) Review implementation progress and results</p> <p>(d) Recommend “Alumnus of the Year” to <i>High-level Advisory Council</i></p> <p>(e) Identifying membership of Joint Selection Panel (JSP)</p> <p>(f) Receiving (from FMC) financial reports</p> <p>(g) Coordination of program implementation across all program activities and functions</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ AusAID’s Counselor (co-chair)</li> <li>▪ Vice-Minister of MPI (co-chair)</li> <li>▪ Director General, Ministry of Education and Sports</li> <li>▪ Director General, Ministry of Home Affairs</li> <li>▪ Rector, National University of Laos</li> <li>▪ (As invited for specific purpose / meeting: representatives of specific GoL agencies or NPAs, representatives from other major HRD donors)</li> <li>▪ Facility Managing Contractor (as Secretariat)</li> </ul>

When the HLAC and PSC met, issues such as selecting the priority fields of study and other policies related to the program were discussed. From the AusAID staff’s

perspectives the Lao representatives needed engage in more open and honest to communication. Based on AusAID staff B' view, the government of Laos needed to listen more carefully when prioritising fields where skills are needed, and at the ministry level they needed to be more open and honest with their communication.

AusAID staff B asserted:

I think it's moving to the right direction and that's [a] more cooperative approach I think that the government of Laos need to be listening to more ah especially when it comes to selecting what are their priority fields where they need the skills what sectors do they need them in I think that need to be factor more in our program...I think that at the implementation level I think there's very good cooperation...It's the DFAT level that they need to be more open and honest to communication I think that filters down and impacts on some other things the way we interpret stuff and implement stuff.

## **One sided policy**

The HLAC and PSC played a significant role in forming policies related to the Australian Scholarship Program (ASP). One of the policies was the country program strategy which was agreed to by the Australian and Lao governments. Although the two sides agreed on the policy, only one side implemented the policy based on what had been agreed. AusAID staff B commented that the current policy formed by the counsel and the committee was a one-sided policy. He explained:

...at the moment that part of it's a real one-sided in that country program strategy although it agreed by both governments. That's what Australian government will work on, for example, at the moment the country program strategy excludes health, but we still offer training in some health related subjects like nutrition and community health, but other areas of health are not covered, but it's the government of Laos priority so it's obviously the Australian aid program can't cover every aspect and they have to work on the thing where they have strengths...

## **Summary**

It emerged from the findings that there were some areas in the AusAID policy that needed further policy development. The selection process was one of the most mentioned areas needing attention. A major gap that was highlighted was the provision

of equal opportunity to disadvantaged candidates such as candidates with a disability, female candidates and marginalised candidates who were in rural and provincial areas.

Results from the interviews depicted that the current policy was not adequate as it did not reflect human resource development. The policy only focused on specific areas such as candidates' bounden duty to serve in previous public organisations upon their return. Although graduates from the program were highly equipped with skills and knowledge in their field of studies, they lacked soft skills such as leadership and management skills. In addition, having an employment opportunity for scholarship recipients to have internship with local Australian employers to gain real work experience before returning to Laos was believed to add more value to the ASP.

Document analysis also revealed that Australia and Laos had formed a collaborative body to review Australian Aid to Laos. However, participants believed the members of the committee needed to be more open and honest in their communication when forming policy because the existing policy was viewed by AusAID staff as a one sided policy.

### **Section 3: The perspectives of alumni who moved from public to private/NGO sectors on exist policy**

This section presents results from the interviews of three alumni who moved from public to private/NGO sectors. The following questions guided the interviews with the alumni in order to investigate *What policy structures have been developed to optimise outcomes for the benefit of the Lao PDR, and is there a need for further policy development?* Responses from the interviews are presented in Figure 6.3 below.

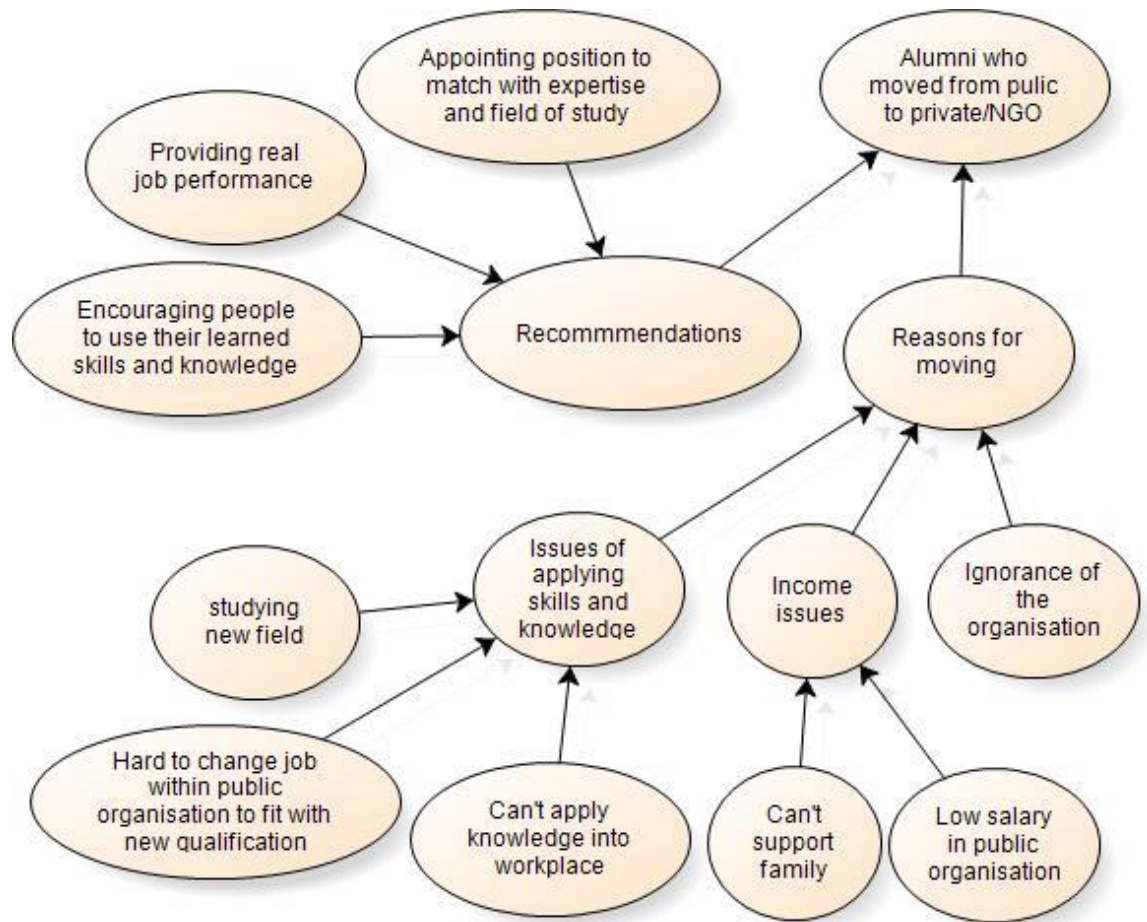


Figure 6.3: Policy based on perspectives of alumni who moved from public to private/NGOs.

Figure 6.3 showed results from the interviews which were categorised into two main themes, namely (1) reasons for moving and (2) recommendations. Under reasons for moving there are three main themes: (1) Issues of applying skills and knowledge, (2) Income issues, and (3) The ignorance of the organisation. Under the recommendation theme there are three subthemes: (1) appointing positions to match with expertise and field of study, (2) working collaboratively between principle and real job performance, and (3) encouraging people to use their learned skills and knowledge.

## **Reasons for moving from public to private/NGOs**

There were three key areas that underpinned labour movement from public to private/NGOs of the returnees. They were issues of applying skills and knowledge into workplace, income issues, and ignorance about the organisation.

## **Issues of applying skills and knowledge**

Studying in a new field, difficulty in changing jobs within public organisations to fit with the new qualification, and difficulty in applying new skills and knowledge into the workplace were issues reported by scholarship recipients.

Some of the scholarship recipients from public organisations undertook new fields of study in Australia under the ASP which were not related to their prior degrees. After returning to Laos the new skills and knowledge that they acquired from studying in Australia were no longer applicable to their previous jobs. Thus, some of the returnees moved from public organisations to work in private/NGOs because their new field of expertise was no longer relevant to their previous job. Alumnus A reported:

I just mentioned briefly then because first I studied new field. I changed from English teaching to business administration and after graduated from Australia I felt like I need to apply the knowledge that learned from Australia to different field to the field that I learned from Australia...

After studying in a new field of study alumnus A tried to move from one public organisation to a new workplace within the government to suit her new qualification. When processing an application form to move to a new workplace, she found it took long time for the documents to be processed. Alumnus A stated:

...I would like to change from [the] English department to [the] Economic[s] department within the university and it takes time I think I was told that it should take about one year to move from one faculty to the other faculty and that's why I tried to look for something else...

Being unable to apply what they learned in Australia under the ASP into their existing workplace was also one of the factors that contributed to returnees moving from public to private/NGOs. Another alumnus respondent mentioned that he left his previous public organisation because he could not apply the skills and knowledge that he gained from his study into his workplace. Alumnus B detailed:

...when I worked in my previous workplace I didn't use my skills that I learned from Australia. So I wanted to use it and I wanted to teach other people...my skills. After that I resigned from my workplace I [went] to work in organisation that could be practical...

## **Income issues**

Document analysis revealed that the monthly basic salary of public employees was less than USD 300. Issues of low income in public organisations also emerged from findings from the interviews. The data showed that the reason some alumni chose to leave their previous public organisation was because of insufficient income in the public sectors. Alumnus B mentioned that he could not support his family and cover household bills. He explained:

Ok the first thing is because of financial problem. Because I cannot support my family like I mentioned before that I cannot support my family, my kids and it's not enough for monthly payment bill.

Alumni A also claimed that low payment in the public sectors motivated her movement from public to private/NGO. She noted that:

Again this is my personal perspective I think maybe because basically it's [the] level of the salary because we don't have enough... to feed our own family and people often want to look for something better right. If the government can pay sufficient for living I think people will stay...I don't only mention about the public even within the UNICEF if we don't have sufficient to enough to cover living condition we will move again it's just the truth...

## **Ignorance of the organisation**

Apart from income and applying skills and knowledge issues, ignorance of work colleagues and the organisation also contributed to leaving public organisations by public employees who finished study in Australia under ASP. Alumnus C left his public organisation as he felt that people in his organisation did not recognise him as a member of the organisation. This made him feel different from others. He reported:

It is quite hard to say ok but I can say like the first thing the first reason that I resigned after I returned. I was ignored by my colleagues by my organisation or my colleagues something like that...I was also considered like a black sheep in the organisation so I feel what can I say, I feel different from others...

## **Recommendation**

The respondents from the interviews provided some recommendations in order to strengthen and improve how the employers could welcome back and assign positions to new graduates who returned from study in Australia under ASP to work in public organisations. They also discussed how the AusAID managed the ASP which covered three key areas: (1) appointing positions to match with expertise and field of study, and (2) working collaboratively between principle and real job performance, and (3) encouraging people to use their learned skills and knowledge.

### **Appointing positions to match with expertise and field of study**

During the interviews the respondents were asked for their recommendation regarding sending public employees to study in Australia under the ASP. Findings revealed that appointing returnees into positions to match with their qualifications was one of the most important aspects of the program in relation to the job satisfaction of the returnees. From Alumnus B's perspective appointing alumni into positions to suit returnees' qualification made the returnee happy. He stated:



...in my opinions if we work in public organisations personal management must be improved. For example, I studied in IT when I go back there should be IT job for me. When people don't use their skills in their workplace they will not be happy...

Findings also indicated that appointing returnees' into positions to suit their qualifications thus enabling them to utilise their skills and knowledge in their workplace was crucial for maintaining human resource development. Alumnus C recommended that public organisations should understand how to maintain their staff claiming it was crucial to encourage their staff to utilise their skills and knowledge in the workplace. Alumnus C claimed:

I think ... the public sector should consider about how to maintain human resource and how to encourage them to use their knowledge... their learnt knowledge in the workplace. For example, if...somebody learned the computer science the person should use learnt knowledge in the workplace ... it will be good if we could encourage them to use their knowledge in either ...the practical work or to share the knowledge by being a lecturer ...it would be good ...

Apart from putting the right people into the right job, from Alumnus C's perspective, returnees' willingness to work in their assigned position was also a significant aspect in maintaining the alumni of the program in public organisations. Alumnus C recommended that public employers should ask the returnees whether they were happy and willing to work in their assigned positions. Alumnus C reported:

It will be good if the organisation put the right people in the right job and in addition to that they have to ask that person if they volunteer...are willing to do the job that they like or to do the job that you assigned for them.

## **Providing real job performance**

One of the respondents provided a very important recommendation which reflected the AusAID staff's suggestion of how the Australian Scholarship Program (ASP) could be improved in order to benefit the scholarship recipients and Laos further. The respondent recommended that it was important that the program provided scholarship

recipients a chance to have internships or opportunities to apply what they learnt from theories into practice while studying in Australia. Alumnus A explained:

In Australia in my time so we worked at [the] university as well as we do practical at the language centre so both we do practical teaching as well as learning from university site well this is very practical programme I recommend that this kind of combination continue in the training not only in the teaching position, but also in other field like in business administration or in other technical areas so working collaboratively between principle and real job performance is the key to gain experience...

### **Encouraging people to use their learned skills and knowledge**

In order to prevent losing the skills and knowledge of the returnees in the long term it was important that they had chances to practice and use their skills and knowledge in their workplace, Alumnus C explained. According to the Alumnus C the public organisations needed to encourage the returnees to use their gained skills and knowledge in their workplace otherwise the skills and knowledge that they gained from study in Australia under ASP would be forgotten. Alumnus C noted:

If we can use people to the right job if [they] learn something you should encourage that person to use their knowledge to apply their knowledge in their workplace or they will lose their learnt knowledge automatically if they don't use it...

### **Summary**

Results from the online survey in Chapter 4 revealed that there was a small incidence of labour mobility from public to private/NGOs. Interviewing alumni who moved from public to private/NGOs uncovered some reasons underlying their mobility which reflected an inadequacy of the policy in taking back the returnees from ASP in the public sectors.

Findings showed that there were some issues of applying skills and knowledge into the workplaces of the returnees. Financial issues and ignorance about the organisation also contributed to the mobility trend.

The respondents provided recommendations which were of value and could be taken into account when forming and reviewing the ASP policy. Appointing positions to match with expertise and the field of study of the returnees was crucial, and practicing what they learnt from theories into real situation would add more value to the program. The importance of public employers providing opportunities for the returnees to use and encourage their learned skills and knowledge into workplace was also emphasised.

## **Conclusion**

An interesting range of perspectives emerged from the findings which indicated areas of agreement among different groups of interviewees and areas of differing sentiment. Three groups of respondents can be identified as sharing consensus on a range of issues: (1) employers and AusAID staff; (2) AusAID staff and alumni; and (3) employers and alumni. Findings from the interviews showed that these three groups of respondents shared some similar points of view in response to the same questions. In contrast, there were some issues where AusAID staff and employers had conflicting opinions.

The first consensus finding emerged from the analysis of the interviews with employers and AusAID staff. Three points of view that both groups had in common were (1) areas of policy conflict (2) one sided policy, and (3) labour need identification.

Findings from the interviews (on conflicting policy) were supported by document analysis such as evidences from policy documents of Lao (Regulation to protect Lao

students overseas No: 3552/13 dated 28 August 2013) and Australian governments (Australia Awards Scholarships Policy Handbook, DFAT 2015). The employers used the term “conflicting policy” in comparing the two policies. In particular, Lao government policy allowed graduates who had excellent results to continue further study while AusAID policy indicated clearly that all graduates of ASP must return home after finishing their studies.

Findings from AusAID staff interviews revealed that the policy guiding ASP that was purportedly jointly drafted by the two countries was a one sided policy. The respondents referred to the country program strategy which was agreed upon by both governments. The country program strategy excluded studies in health disciplines, but ASP still offered some health related subjects such as nutrition and community health.

In addition, findings from interviewing employers showed that labour needs were identified by the donors not by the Lao government. According to the employers, Laos did not have a plan on labour need identification. Thus, when coming to offer scholarships to Laos, AusAID staff argued that donors like Australia tried to understand labour needs on behalf of the Lao government.

These three findings showed inconsistency and possible contradiction between the policies of the two countries. They also illustrated that the two parties had not cooperated sufficiently closely, although both sides had formed steering and advisory committees composed of high level representatives. The findings also suggested that there lacked communication and willingness to inform each other when forming internal policy resulting in conflicting policy. The findings from AusAID staff’s

recommendation supported this claim when one of them mentioned that “It’s [at] the DFAT level that they need to be more open and honest to communication... I think that filters down and impacts on some other things the way we interpret stuff and implement stuff”.

Other consistent findings were from AusAID staff and alumni on (1) employment opportunity to gain real work experience and (2) working collaboratively between academic learning and real job performance. These two areas were recommended for attention by both groups of respondents. Acting on the AusAID staff view that allowing scholarship recipients to have an employment opportunity or internship with local Australian employers to gain real work experience before returning to Laos would add more value to the ASP. Findings from the alumni revealed similarly that it would be useful if ASP provided scholarship recipients a chance to work collaboratively between academic knowledge and real job performance while studying in Australia.

There was also a connection between the results from the employers’ interviews on needing to have workplace openings for graduates when returning and alumni’s interviews on appointing returnees to positions which matched with expertise and fields of study. Findings from the employers showed that in order to avoid losing human resources public organisations must have a suitable workplace for returnees and provide positions that suited their qualifications by putting the right people into the right workplaces. Findings from the alumni also revealed similarly that it was important for public employers to appoint alumni to jobs that fit with their qualification in order to prevent returning alumni from leaving public organisations.

Although there were some similar and related findings between the three groups of respondents, there were other findings that showed conflicting points of view. The most obvious was the results from the employers' interviews on selecting the right target – candidates most likely to succeed - against findings from AusAID staff on reaching out to disadvantage and disability candidates. Findings from the employers showed that it was important for ASP to select quality people to study in Australia in order to prevent failure at the end of study by the scholarship recipients. Findings from AusAID staff, however, suggested that there needed to be a greater allocation of scholarships to marginalised people such as people with a disability and people in provincial/rural areas. These two sets of findings presented conflicted perspectives. The quality of marginalised people in Laos was far lower than candidates in the urban areas and big cities, making it difficult to reconcile the two policy approaches.

## **CHAPTER 7 : DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS**

### **Introduction**

This study aimed to investigate the benefits, strengths and challenges of the scholarship scheme both for employers and recipients; the nature of the mobility trend; the policy structures that have been developed to optimise outcomes for the benefit of the Lao PDR, employers and alumni and whether or not there is a need for further policy development? This chapter presents a discussion of the findings which were identified in Chapters 4, 5, and 6 in response to the three research questions stated in Chapter 1. A discussion summary is presented at the end of each research question.

The findings of this investigation contribute to a deeper understanding of the benefits, strengths and challenges of the Australian Scholarships Program (ASP), and the policies that underpin it. These results, drawn from the experiences of the participants: employers, AusAID staff, scholarship recipients and alumni, who reported their views about the scholarship scheme, labour mobility trends, and the AusAID policies and regulations bring deeper knowledge and add to greater understanding of the contribution of the program to Lao economic growth and human resource development. These findings also reflect how the investment in education makes it possible to empower and enhance opportunities to increase capacity to create income and participate in economic growth, poverty eradication and Lao national development.

The present chapter discusses the major and minor findings of the study. The major findings that emerged from the survey and interviews were: (1) the strengths and

benefits of the ASP which covered English language competency, promotion opportunities, and skills and knowledge the scholarship recipients gained from study in Australia which were crucial for Lao national and human resource development, and (2) the challenges of the ASP which covered English language competency, resistance to knowledge transfer in Lao public organisations, issues of applying skills and knowledge into Lao public workplaces, causes of losing staff in public organisations and migration of alumni (from open category scholarship holders) who leave the country for better jobs. Apart from the major findings that came out from all three groups of the respondents, there were some minor findings that came out from two groups of the respondents. The minor findings discussed in this chapter were (1) the strengths and benefits of the ASP which covered financial benefits, pre-departure program, good cooperation between the two countries, returning to work for previous public employers of the scholarship recipients, and social and personal development, and (2) the challenges of the ASP which covered academic challenges, social and personal challenges, poor planning in selecting levels and fields of studies, and selection process of the ASP. Details of the findings from the survey and interviews are presented in Appendix 4, 5, and 6.

The conceptual framework for this study is based on appreciative inquiry (AI) which the researcher used to guide the discussion and interpretation of the findings. “Appreciative Inquiry is a methodology which has been applied in a variety of contexts, but which is best known for its applications in organizational settings” (Robinson, Priede, Farrall, Shapland, & McNeill, 2012a, p. 4). As “appreciative inquiry is a process that inquires into, identifies, and further develops the best of what is in organizations in order to create a better future”(Coghlan et al., 2003, p. 5), the



researcher looked through the lens of AI in order to establish the participants' views about the strengths and the benefits of the ASP and what the ASP could introduce to overcome the challenges in order to maximise the outcomes of the program. In addition, by discussing and interpreting the findings through the lens of AI, the researcher aimed to identify what public organisations could do to improve staff retention, and what aspects of the ASP policy could be improved and developed further to maximise outcomes for recipients and employers.

## **Section 1: The benefits and strengths of the scholarship scheme both for employers and recipients**

Results from online survey and findings from interviews reported in Chapters 4 and 5 respectively revealed some common perceptions of the strengths and the benefits of the ASP. The key findings from the most significant to the least significant are: increase in English language competency, promotion opportunities, applicable skills and knowledge for Lao national and human resource development, financial benefit, sound preparation in the pre-departure program, good relationships between Laos and Australia, high retention rate of scholarship recipients by previous public employers, and social and personal development

### **English language Competency**

The development of English language competency of scholarship recipients was one of the key findings from this study. Improving English language is crucial because English has become the global language of communication, a universal global *lingua franca* (Crystal, 2003). Held, McGrew, Goldblatt, and Perraton (1999, p. 346) referred to the role of English Language as “the central language of communication in business,

politics, administration, science and academia, as well as being the dominant language of globalised advertising and popular culture”.

Living and studying in Australia under the ASP and having direct interaction with native speakers in Australian social settings had a positive influence on the second language acquisition of the alumni. These findings correspond with findings by Cummins and Man Yee-Fun (2007); Duff (2008); and (Ellis, 1997) who suggested there were many variables that influence second language learning which can be broadly categorised into individual and social factors. Previous work by Arkoudis et al. (2009, p. 28) also supports the positive influence social factors have on second language acquisition when they state:

Social factors include the opportunities a learner has to communicate in social interaction in academic learning contexts and social settings, the support available to develop their academic language skills while studying, as well as their living with people with whom they can speak in English (Arkoudis et al., 2009, p. 28).

While studying in Australia under the ASP the scholarship recipients had opportunities to communicate and interact with people around them in both academic learning contexts and social settings, and this positively influenced their English language learning.

### **Promotion opportunities**

Promotion opportunities was identified as one of the key findings from both the survey and interviews. The participating scholarship recipients acknowledged that upon their return to Laos from study in Australia under the ASP they had opportunities for promotion to better positions in their organisations because of their performance. Several studies have been carried out to investigate firms’ promotion decisions, for

instance Breugh (2011) and Waldman (2013) whose studies mostly focused on explaining promotion tournaments. They referred to promotion tournaments (PT) as competition for promotion among employees to higher position level which based on performance and to promote the best contestants. "...promotion tournaments are a prominent instrument in the practice of human resource management" (Höchtel, Kerschbamer, Stracke, & Sunde, 2011, p. 1). Claussen, Grohsjean, Luger and Probst (2014) recognised that human and social capital were the key factors that underpinned promotion decisions. They claimed that managers' own expertise, and experience which they referred to as human capital, and network size and colleagues which referred to as social capital positively have effect on their promotion. This supports findings in this study because alumni of the ASP reported that they gained skills, knowledge and expertise as well as had more friends and networking when they returned from study in Australia. These factors underlying the alumni's promotion. Coff (2002) referred to human capital as the skills, knowledge, and abilities embodied in managers and this was considered a key factor in explaining the competitive advantage of the firm (Crook, Todd, Combs, Woehr, & Ketchen, 2011). These conclusions are consistent with the findings, mainly from the survey, which show that different scholarship recipients with different levels of education/qualifications and experience (in other words social and human capital) were promoted to different hierarchical positions. Survey results unveiled that the scholarship recipients were promoted to hold positions which ranked from low, middle, and to the high positions in both public and private/NGOs. The work of Claussen, Grohsjean, Luger, and Probst (2014) which reported that middle and senior management positions require different skills and characteristics and, therefore, differ in their promotion criteria also supported this finding.

Talent management (TM) has become a key debate situated within the broader field of human resource management (Lewis & Heckman, 2006). Both managerial practice and academic research have paid more attention to TM in recent years (Capelli, 2008; Scullion, Collings, & Caligiuri, 2010; Tarique & Schuler, 2010). The government of Australia has provided Australian aid to help develop Lao human resource by offering the ASP to Laos. Collings and Mellahi (2009) assertion that strategic talent management organizations identified key positions and then developed a talent pool to fill those positions is associated with the move by Lao public and private/NGOs that, in response to the ASP, had identified key positions needed, and sent staff to study under the ASP and when the staff returned from study promoted them to fill those key positions.

### **Skills and knowledge for national and human resource development**

Studies on effects of foreign aid, especially aid to support education have shown that there is evidence of a correlation between GDP growth and public expenditure on education, and that aid would be best focused on the development of human capital (Balogun, 2011). In this regard, Australian aid to Laos has invested in developing Lao human resources by providing scholarships to Laos under the ASP. There is no doubt about the strengths of the ASP which were outlined in the previous chapters, and Australian aid through the provision of scholarships to Laos has benefited Lao employers and scholarship holders in many ways.

Findings from the survey and interviews with scholarship recipients, employers, and AusAID staff<sup>7</sup> revealed that the scholarship recipients gained skills and knowledge

from their study in Australia under the ASP which they believed were crucial for Lao national and human resource development. The participants in this research clearly believed that Australian Aid on education through provision of scholarships to Laos had made a significant contribution to Lao human resource development which was crucial for poverty eradication and Lao national development. Evidence in the literature review supports this finding. “Investment in education is a crucial element in any strategy to reduce poverty” (Tarabini & Jacovkis, 2012, p. 510) because “education has acquired an increasing international legitimacy as a preferential strategy in the fight against poverty...It has encouraged developing countries to make investment in human capital the focus of their strategies and policies for poverty reduction” (Tarabini, 2010, p. 205). In addition, education has been seen as “a vision which is placed at the heart of development” (Commonwealth Secretariat, 1993, p. 5), and “investment in education can have social and economic benefits, through the development of a greater bank of knowledge and skills, referred to as ‘human capital’ (OECD, 1997, p. 29).

The groups of participants in this study believed that by focusing on education and providing a number of scholarships to Laos, Australian aid made a significant contribution to Lao economic growth and Lao human resource development. This belief is supported by research that claims “investment in education makes it possible to empower the poor, to enhance their opportunities and to increase their capacity to create income and participate in economic growth” (Tarabini & Jacovkis, 2012, p. 510) and “education is one of the original three key indicators in the HDI [Human Development Index], the others being life expectancy and income security” (Cremin & Nakabugo, 2012, p. 502). In addition findings also indicated that skills and

knowledge that the scholarship recipients gained from study in Australia under the ASP were applicable in their workplace. The majority of the respondents from the interviews accepted that the skills and knowledge from Australia can be applied in Lao context.

### **Financial benefits**

The scholarship recipients and Lao public employers both clearly identified financial support from the Australian government to provide full scholarships to Laos which covered all expenses as one of the key strengths of the ASP. In addition, the scholarship recipients' claimed that earning more after completing the ASP and returning to work in Laos reflected the financial benefit to the alumni. The positive link between levels of education and salary levels was reported by Maazouz (2013, p. 530) who said that there is a " ... positive relation between the levels of education and the level of salary". In other word employees with higher qualifications can earn higher salary. In addition, an international comparative study of sixteen OECD countries, Pereira and Martins (2002) found that the higher the variation in earnings, i.e. the higher the risk, the greater the returns to education. In addition, "individuals with college degrees, and to a lesser extent those who have some college experience but do not have a degree, earn more than others and enjoy better working conditions" (Baum, Ma, & Payea, 2013, p. 10).

### **Pre-departure program**

Scholarships recipients and the employers insisted that the pre-departure program was a major strength of the ASP scheme as it provided intensive training and prepared the scholarship recipients well before travelling to study in Australia. The pre-departure program offered a broad range of essential skills needed to adapt to life in Australia

and to ease transition to study in Australian institutions which enabled the scholarship recipients to build skills in critical approaches to knowledge, analytical thinking, independent learning, academic study techniques, and problem-solving as well as English competency (Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, 2013b). Depending on English language levels the scholarship awardees undertook up to 12 months in an intensive pre-departure training program in Vientiane to prepare recipients for the rigours of tertiary study in Australia (Laos Australia Institute, 2015). All scholarship recipients had to attend the intensive program before travelling to study in Australia.

The scholarship recipients benefited from attending the pre-departure program in Vientiane, Laos which ran intensive English language course and other related topics. The findings showed that the English competency of the scholarship holders improved dramatically after attending the intensive program. This finding corresponded with other findings from recent literature. According to Hong-Nam and Leavell (2006) who studied the language learning strategies of students from different cultural and linguistic backgrounds at a college Intensive English Program which was a language learning institute for pre-admissions to university found that the intensive English Program was an important step in developing not only the students' basic interpersonal communications skills, but also their cognitive academic English language proficiency.

### **Good relations between Laos and Australia**

Findings from AusAID staff and employers' interviews indicated that the ASP to Laos had contributed to good relations between Laos and Australia. Good cooperation between Laos and Australia at high level was identified as a strength of the ASP. This

finding is consistent with evidence from the document of the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade Australia which revealed the good relations between the two countries. According to the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (n.d.) Laos and Australia are long-standing regional partners and the two countries share a diverse and strong relationship underpinned by deepening economic ties, community links and development cooperation. Clearly the ASP has contributed to the good relations between the two countries. According to Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (2013b, p. 17) “the goal of the (current) Lao-Australian Scholarships Program (LASP) is...to improve human resource capacity in the Lao PDR ... and the broader bilateral relationship”, and this has resulted in good cooperation.

Document analysis revealed there were two consultative structures which comprised Lao and Australian representatives who worked together to form policy and manage the ASP to Laos, namely a High-Level Advisory Council (HLAC), and a Program Steering Committee (PSC) , and the council and committee meet annually and twice yearly respectively (Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, 2013b). Participants described how the good cooperation between the representatives in the council and the committee and the opportunity to share information, consult, negotiate, and make decisions together contributed to the good cooperation between Laos and Australia.

### **High retention rate of scholarship recipients by previous public employers**

One of the key strengths of the ASP is that the majority of the scholarship recipients from public organisations returned to work for their previous public employers upon their return from study in Australia. Findings show that there was a very high retention



rate of alumni from public organisations who participated in the ASP. The reason that most of the scholarship recipients from public organisations returned to their previous workplace was because of their obligation to return which was clearly indicated under the conditions of accepting the ASP. According to Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (2015, p. 12) which referred to the Australia Awards Scholarships Policy Handbook

To ensure the development impact of Australia Awards Scholarships, all awardees must return home on completion of their studies so they can contribute to development in their country. Awardees are required to leave Australia for a minimum of two years after completing their scholarship. Failure to do so will result in the awardee incurring a debt to the Commonwealth of Australia for the total accrued cost of their scholarship (Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, 2015, p. 12)

Based on the findings all scholarship awardees were required to sign a contract to return to serve their previous public organisations for twice the duration of their time studying in Australia. Thus, the majority of the scholarship recipients returned to serve their public organisations after finishing their study in Australia under the ASP.

## **Social and personal development**

Increases in the social and personal development of the scholarship recipients has been of a great benefit in studying in Australia under the ASP. It was found that time management, maturity, independence, teamwork, confidence, critical thinking and problem solving skills of the scholarship recipients increased as a result of their studies. Similar findings from a study conducted by Nunan (2006) with 818 former University of Melbourne students, using the IES survey instrument, found that study abroad had increased personal and social development of students and it increased students' personal attributes in the following ways: independence, maturity, self-confidence, openness to new ideas, creativity and problem solving skills, leadership skills, as well as planning and time management skills.

The impact of study abroad on social and personal development was also consistent with findings by Dwyer (2004, p. 161) who reported that “study abroad has a significant impact on students in the areas of continued language use, academic attainment measures, intercultural and personal development, and career choices”. This study also found that having opportunities for better jobs, gaining respect, making friends and networking, developing relationships, cultural learning, and work experience have been identified as the strengths and benefits of the ASP. In addition, the findings revealed that the spouses and children of the scholarship recipients also benefited from accompanying the scholarship recipients to Australia as their English language increased as a result of attending schools in Australia and having access to employment opportunities. This is in line with findings of research by Nunan (2006) who reported that cultural learning, building relationships (meeting of new loves, life partners), valuing friendships, increasing value of family connections either overseas or at home, enhancing employability and skills for careers, increasing personal development and intercultural competence, continuing contact and international networking, and enhancing interest in further study are beneficial and major positive outcomes of the international study experience.

## **Section 2: The challenges of the scholarship scheme both for employers and recipients**

Apart from investigating the strengths and the benefits of the ASP through the lens of appreciative inquiry (AI) to see what worked well for the ASP, AI also allows the researcher to identify what areas that the ASP can be improved by identifying the challenges of the ASP and finding ways to overcome the challenges. AI encourages

the researcher to examine challenges and negatives with a view to improvement because “the AI research approach seeks to identify positive elements of the immediate social world in terms of what is working or what appears to be causing a sense of life” (Kung et al., 2013, p. 29), and it looks at the challenges, issues, and concerns of the organisation in a significantly different way by discovering what is working well and what can be improved (Coghlan et al., 2003).

Although a number of strengths and benefits under the ASP were critically discussed in the previous section, findings also revealed that some of the same aspects of the ASP which were identified as the strengths and benefits were also seen as the challenges. They were the two sides of a coin: the strengths and benefits and the challenges.

Results revealed common reflections of what the scholarship recipients or alumni of the ASP, the employers and AusAID staff perceived as the challenges of the program. The key findings from major to minor challenges are: English language difficulties, resistance to knowledge transfer in Lao public organisations and issues of applying skills and knowledge in Lao public workplaces, loss of staff in public organisations and open category migration for better jobs, academic challenges, social and personal challenges, poor planning in selecting levels and fields of studies, and the selection process of the ASP.

### **English language difficulties**

Findings from the survey and interviews revealed that English was identified as one of the most challenging aspects of studying under the ASP. Scholarship recipients found

that they had problems in learning English. According to Daif-Allah (2012) English learning or learning a second foreign language is a process of developing or acquiring all the linguistic skills for communication purposes. However, learning English is difficult for some internationals which includes Lao students. According to Tsai (2012) there were many factors that affected the proficiency of English skills, and different learners needed different time frames to command different English skills depending on their learning styles and their perceptions of the difficulty level of each skill (Tsai, 2012). However, the timeframe of the English training which was part of pre-departure program of the ASP was a one-year program, and every scholarship recipient had to pass the English test or International English Language Testing System (IELTS) at the end of the program.

Scholarship recipients addressed the challenge of studying in English. They revealed that even though they passed the IELTS in Laos, when they came to Australia to study they experienced difficulty in listening to and understanding university lecturers. This finding is supported by Littlemore (2001) who found that international students whose first language was not English often experienced difficulties understanding metaphors used in university lectures, and this caused problems for the scholarship recipients because important pedagogical functions such as description, explanation, and evaluation often used metaphor (Cameron, 2003). Lacking understanding of metaphor was also suggested by (Littlemore, Chen, Koester, & Barnden, 2011) to hinder a student's ability to follow the academic content of a lecture, and to grasp the lecturer's stance towards the material presented.

## **Resistance to knowledge transfer in Lao public organisations and issues of applying skills and knowledge into Lao public workplace**

The scholarship recipients experienced resistance of knowledge transfer or knowledge sharing barrier when they attempted to share their skills and knowledge that they gained from study in Australia into their public organisation. Knowledge sharing has been widely recognized as an effective approach to maintain sustainable competitive advantages of the organisation (Liebowitz, 2003; Song, 2002). The factors that hinder knowledge sharing were source reliability, ability to learn and apply new knowledge, and motivation to share (Kwok & Gao, 2005). There have been a wide range of studies about knowledge sharing, and knowledge sharing barriers that support this study. For instance, knowledge sharing barriers by (Riege, 2005), barriers to effective of knowledge sharing (Szulanski, 1995) and others. Asian behaviours such as being less open, more passive, and too polite to criticize others hindered knowledge sharing in organizations (Ritter & Choi, 2000) and this corresponds with these findings from the Lao context which is an Asian country. Findings from the present study showed that Lao public employees were reluctant to take scholarship recipients' opinions into account because they were less open. In addition, other factors that participants believed hindered knowledge sharing which align with the research findings of Kwok and Gao (2005) were source reliability, ability to learn and apply new knowledge, and motivation to share.

Adapting gained skills and knowledge from study in Australia into the Lao public workplace was identified by alumni as challenging. The scholarship recipients reported that they needed to be selective and careful in applying what they had learnt from Australia under the ASP into Lao public organisations. They recognised that the

skills and knowledge from the West may not be fully applicable to the East. Thus, the scholarship recipients acknowledged they needed to adapt what they gained from study in Australia to suit the local Lao context. There are a wide variety of studies on the need for adapting knowledge from the West in the East and one example was in the leadership area. Research in cross-cultural leadership established the need for adapting leadership practices to suit local contexts in order to become successful (Bird & Osland, 2006; Claude, 2007; Hofstede & Hofstede, 2005; Zhu, Bhat, & Nel, 2005). The reason that there was a need for knowledge to be adapted was that people from Western and Eastern cultures had different values and beliefs and clearly thought differently because of the differences in the societies in which people had lived across centuries (Nisbett, 2003). As a result, knowledge from the West needed to be adapted to suit the local Lao public organisational context in order to become successful.

### **Loss of staff in public organisations and open category migration for better jobs**

The ASP had significantly contributed to Lao human resource development in Laos and each year half of the scholarships were allocated to public organisations and the other half to the open or private/NGO category (Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, 2013b). Findings revealed that although most of the scholarship recipients from public organisations returned to serve in their previous public organisations after finishing their study in Australia under the ASP, some of them moved to work with private/NGOs. In addition, results from AusAID staff interviews showed that the scholarship recipients from the open category were more inclined to leave the country to migrate for better jobs. As a result, losing key public employers to private/NGO sectors was identified as one of the challenges of the ASP because “the most valuable

asset available to an organisation is its people, thus retaining staff in their jobs is essential for any organisation” (Ng’ethe, Iravo, & Namusonge, 2012, p. 205)

The problem of staff leaving public organisation, especially academic staff, affected both developed and developing countries (Ng’ethe et al., 2012). While there were staff retention difficulties documented in the developed countries such as the US, Canada, and Australia (Sanderson, Phua, & Herda, 2000; Yousaf, 2010) there were fewer studies in the developing countries (Ng’ethe et al., 2012), in particular there was no evidence of any study conducted in the Lao context. In other developing countries the issue tended to be included as part of the general category of brain drain without specific attention being devoted to it (Mihyo, 2007).

The key findings underpinning the movement of the scholarship recipients under the ASP in this study were job satisfaction and income issues. One similar finding that corresponded with this study was from a Kenyan public university context where there was a similar trend of losing staff. This study of public academic staff retention in Kenya, a developing country, showed that qualified academic staff resigned from Kenyan public universities to work for better paid jobs (Waswa & Katana, 2008), and internal brain drain also increased with mobility of highly skilled academics to other sectors in Kenya (GOK, 2006 as cited in (Ng’ethe et al., 2012). The studies by Stalker, (2000); Xaba and Phillips (2001) also supported the findings of the present study. They found that the key factor underpinning the migration of skilled workers from developing countries to developed countries was because of substantially better salaries.

## **Academic challenges**

Adapting into the Australian educational system was one of the challenges for the scholarship recipients when studying in Australia for the first time. Moving to study in Australia under the ASP came with a number of social and academic challenges such as adjusting into Australian teaching and learning systems, lacking of needed research skills, looking for fieldwork placement, having critical thinking and time management skills, and completing assignments. There were other studies of international students moving to study abroad and one was of international students in Australia (Townsend & Poh, 2008). Well documented findings of similar research on the difficulties of international students studying in foreign countries supported this finding. A qualitative study of living and studying at an Australian rural university campus identified that adjustment to teaching style was a major difficulty of international students studying and living in a regional area (Edgeworth & Eiseman, 2007; Townsend & Poh, 2008).

Adapting to the Australian learning culture which adopted student centred and active learning modes was particularly difficult for scholarship recipients in their first year of study. Scholarship recipients reported they had problems in adapting from teacher centred to student centred approaches that required critical thinking skills and independent and self-learning skills. This difficulty in adapting to different academic approaches is contrary to the findings of Biggs which found that Asian students were able to adjust well into the Western learning cultures since they continued to rank in the top levels of university courses (Biggs, 1999). In addition, this study is also contrary to findings of Reid's (2002) survey of more than 300 postgraduate international students from Asian backgrounds at Macquarie University which found



that the international students valued the interactive mode, for instance discussion based learning of unit delivery (Reid, 2002). While Biggs and Reid's studies explored the adjustment of Asian students, this study focused only on alumni of the ASP from Laos. These findings are consistent with evidence from an international student survey carried out in New Zealand by Ward and Masgoret (2004) which indicated that factors such as English language skills, conceptions of learning, prior learning experiences, beliefs, personal traits, cultural values, and motivations influenced Asian student cultural adaptation (Berno & Ward, 2004).

The findings from this study revealed that the scholarship recipients had transitional problems adjusting into Australian teaching and learning systems. Research findings focusing on international and local mainstream students supported this finding. Researchers Levy, Osborn, and Plunkett (2003) and McInnes (2001) in their study of international students' academic and social transition requirements, unveiled that first year students reported no different problems and issues for international and local mainstream students undergoing the transition to an academic university culture. Comparing the findings from this study, which focused on the scholarship recipients who were international, to findings from the study by Krause (2001) on the transition issues and problems of local students similarities existed in the adjustment problems particularly in respect to fitting into disciplinary cultures in terms of academic writing genres. The present study also corresponded with findings by Clark (2005), and Inkelas, Daver, Vogt, and Brown Leonard (2007) in their study of living-learning programs and first-generation college students' academic and social transition to college where both noted the socio-cultural and academic challenges these students

experienced. However, these studies were about local domestic students moving to colleges.

The scholarship recipients claimed that the lack of needed research skills, difficulties in looking for fieldwork placements and completing assignments on time were challenges experienced while studying in Australia under the ASP. This was exacerbated by the lack of appropriate prior learning experiences which they believed should have included research and time management skills. These findings are consistent with results from an international student survey carried out in New Zealand by Ward and Masgoret (2004) which indicated that apart from other concerns Asian students also experienced more adjustment problems relating to intellectual challenges and academic difficulties than students from Australia, Europe, North America, and South America. Findings from a case study of Asian students' learning experiences at a New Zealand University by Li and Campbell, (2006) also supported this finding. International students, especially students from Asian backgrounds found it difficult to adjust to the university teaching methods where they were encouraged to take responsibility for their learning, and develop their own analytical and independent skills (Li & Campbell, 2006).

The personal and intellectual attributes of the graduates of the ASP were perceived by the employers not to have met labour market expectation. Despite graduates of the ASP being well qualified in their field of study, they were not well equipped with leadership and managerial skills and this fact affected their employability. Findings from AusAID staff's interviews reported that employers in Laos, especially in private/NGO sector offered new graduates from Australia under the ASP senior or

important positions when they applied for the jobs since the employers assumed that the graduates from Australia were highly qualified. However, many scholarship recipients lacked leadership and managerial skills and experience and when given managerial roles they had problems. This finding aligned with studies on graduate employability. A study by Lees (2002) on this area found that the reason that graduates of the ASP were not equipped with managerial skills was because there were fundamentally different understandings between higher education institutes (HEIs) and employers on employability which impeded the employability of graduate . Studies by Dunne, Bennet, and Carré (2000), and Harvey (2000) also reported that HEIs and employers also had few common understandings about relevant skills for employment as some employers saw graduate attributes to be increasingly more important to them than the degree subject studied. Research by Knight and Yorke (2000) supported the views of the employers. Their study found that some employers demanded other skills such as intellectual and personal attributes, rather than specialist subject knowledge because the graduates' ability to effectively handle complex communication and information was more important than the degree subject studied.

A further challenge experienced by alumni was the expectation that they would take responsibility for their own learning, especially finding and arranging their fieldwork placement. There are some well documented studies in the literature by Kember (2001), Prescott and Simpson (2004), and Winn (2002) that support this finding. They claimed that students had difficulties in dealing with the academic and social demands of transition into a placement environment.

## **Social and personal challenges**

Culture shock was another challenge reported by scholarship participants. They found settling down, finding accommodation, feeling insecure and homesick, time management, making friends, discrimination and racism, all part of this challenge. Findings from recent literature pertaining to culture shock supported this finding, for instance, a study by Friedlander, Reid, Shupak, and Cribbie (2007) who studied 128 first-year undergraduate students at a midsized Canadian university where ninety percent of students were attending away from home found that when people are immersed in a different culture from their own they experience stressors that could have a negative impact on their academic performance and psychological well-being. Another similar study using a qualitative approach by Wilcox, Winn, and Fyvie-Gauld (2005) who interviewed 34 first-year undergraduate Applied Social Science students at the University of Brighton also supported this findings. Their study found that “when new students enter university, feeling lonely and homesick is a common experience” (Wilcox et al. (2005, p. 713)

Further studies by (Bradley, 2000; Lee & Rice, 2007; Leong & Chou, 1996; Msengi, 2007; Roberts, Golding, Towell, & Weinreib, 1999) provided evidence to support the effect of social and cultural challenges experienced by the alumni in this study. Using quantitative methods they reported a wide variety of stressors: discrimination, communication/language difficulties, culture shock, lack of appropriate accommodation, financial hardships, homesickness, values and customs, adjustment to unfamiliar cultural norms, isolation and loneliness, education system differences, and loss of established support and social networks.

Findings also revealed that some of the scholarship recipients faced difficulties in adapting back into their Lao culture and society after spending a long time studying in Australia under the ASP. In other words, the scholarship recipients experienced reverse culture shock upon their return to Laos. Culture shock as a phenomenon is well documented in the literature, but according to Christofi and Thompson (2007, p. 53) there has been little research on cultural shock “resulting from culture shock resulting from reentry into one’s home country following a sojourn abroad”. Reverse culture shock has been defined as the “temporal psychological difficulties returnees experience in the initial stage of the adjustment process at home after having lived abroad for some time” (Uehara, 1983, p. 420).

### **Poor planning in selecting levels and fields of study**

Sending some of the scholarship recipients from public sectors to study in Australia under the ASP was not always well planned, sometimes leading to inappropriate levels of study or irrelevant fields of study. These were perceived as part of the challenges of the ASP by the scholarship recipients. The findings revealed that scholarship recipients who studied in a field that was un-related to their previous degree and which did not relate to their work experience or who studied a lower degree than their previous qualification, gained skills and knowledge that could not be applied in their workplace. Scholarship recipients who had completed a bachelor degree (BD) in Laos, and came to study in Australia under the ASP to undertake vocational education and training, or who studied in a field that was not related to their previous qualification and their jobs had problems when these skills could not be applied in their Lao public workplace upon their return. The work of Harbison (1967) reflected this lack of planning in this study. Harbison (1967, p. 29) stated that:

In setting targets for education and training programmes, the analyst is concerned with two related but distinct concepts-manpower requirements and absorptive capacity. 'Manpower requirements' may be defined as clearly evident needs for persons with particular education, training and experience. The assumption here is that such persons are necessary, if not indispensable, for achievement of a programme of national development. 'Absorptive capacity' is a looser term which refers to a country's capacity to provide some kind of useful employment for persons with certain educational qualifications.

The findings from this study showed that setting targets for education and training programmes of the scholarship recipients under the ASP, did not always meet manpower requirements and absorptive capacity since there were no clear evident needs for persons with particular education, training and experience, as well as skills and knowledge achieved from the program were not necessary for national development (Harbison, 1967). Although considerable challenges to the management of human resource training and development (HRTD) were identified in empirical evidence from other developing and developed countries (Al Bahar, Peterson, & Taylor, 1996; Alzalabani, 2002; Ardichvili & Gasparishvili, 2001; Bing, Kehrhaan, & Short, 2003; Budhwar, Al-Yahmadi, & Debrah, 2002; Lloyd, 2002) there has been a lack of evidence in the Lao context so these findings will add to the body of knowledge, of HRTD planning issues in Laos context.

### **Selection process of the ASP**

Findings showed that there were difficulties in securing qualified female candidates from the public sector during the selection process. Although the first Constitution of Laos adopted in 1991 guaranteed equal rights for women and men and equal treatment before the law (JICA, 2006), gender inequality still exists. Persistent gender inequality has been seen in the education sector; for example, the gross secondary educational enrolment ratio for women in 2005 was 40%, and gross secondary enrolment ratio of female rate to male rate in 2005 was 0.76% (Sharp & Costa, 2010):

this would reduce the number of available female graduates in more recent years. Although there were less female candidates, the selection process of the ASP had to consist of both genders because every organisation needed to have gender equality policy (Workplace Gender Equality Agency, 2014).

Findings also revealed that applying for many scholarships at the same time by individual applicants caused trouble for the ASP selection panel. Apart from the ASP, there were some other attractive scholarships that Lao applicants applied at the same time each year. They were New Zealand Scholarships which covered New Zealand Development Scholarships, New Zealand ASEAN Scholars Award, New Zealand Pacific Scholarships (non-New Zealand citizens only), and New Zealand Commonwealth Scholarships (New Zealand Foreign Affairs and Trade, n.d.), and Japanese Scholarships such as The MEXT scholarships, and JDS scholarships (Embassy of Japan in the Lao PDR, n.d.; The Japanese Grant Aid for Human Resource Development Scholarship (JDS), n.d.). In some cases some applicants were offered more than one scholarship at the same time, so that some successful ASP recipients withdrew at the last moment. This caused problems for the selection panel to find new applicants to replace those who withdrew from the ASP at the last moment. This finding came specifically from the Lao context and adds to the body of knowledge in relation to the selection process of the ASP.

### **Section 3: The nature of the labour mobility trend**

Another question this study aimed to answer is: What is the nature of the labour mobility trend? Labour market mobility may be revealed in several ways, including transition from public to private sector employment (including self-employment) or

promotion within either sector (among low, medium and high-level positions) or movement to/from unemployment or further study. The survey results outlined in Chapter 4 provide details of scholarship holders' occupations before and after their study in Australia and display movement from one sector to others (see Tables 4.5 and 4.7 in Appendix 7).

This section discusses the findings from research question (2) What is the nature of the labour mobility trend? and covers the labour mobility trends of the scholarship recipients: (1) within the private/NGO sector, (2) within the public sector, (3) from the public to private/NGO sectors, (4) from students to public and private/NGO sectors, (5) from students and public sector to self-employment, (6) from the private/NGO sector to unemployment, and (7) from students and public sector to further study.

### **Labour mobility trend of the scholarship recipients within private/NGOs**

Data showed that there was labour mobility within private/NGOs by scholarship recipients holding low, middle and high positions. Scholarship recipients from private/NGOs were frequently promoted to hold higher or more senior positions after returning from study in Australia under the ASP (see survey result in Chapter 4 and qualitative findings from the interviews in Chapter 5). The scholarship recipients were promoted because they were well educated. There are studies in the literature that support this finding. Crook et al. (2011) found that education and training of employees played a key role in organisational performance. They explained that organisations were more likely to promote staff who had a good education and training



background. Becker (1962) also noted that promotion of managers and employees was strongly linked to their education and the experience they possessed.

In addition, the participants confirmed that there was no labour mobility from private/NGO to public organisations under the ASP. The assumption underpinning this finding could be the low salary in the public sector and issues of applying skills and knowledge from study in Australia into public workplaces, which was reported in both Chapters 4 and 5.

### **Labour mobility trend of the scholarship recipients within public organisations**

This study found a trend for scholarship recipients from the public sector to be promoted after returning from study in Australia under the ASP. Scholarship recipients described the movement of alumni from low to middle and in a few cases to high positions in public organisations upon their return to Laos. Findings from the quantitative data reported in Chapter 4 and the interviews reported in Chapter 5 reflected the trend to promote public employees. This finding reflects the labour mobility trend within private/NGO sectors (discussed above). Correspondingly the research by Crook et al. (2011), and Becker (1962) found that education and training was strongly linked to their mobility within organisations.

### **Labour mobility trend from public to private/NGO sectors**

This study aimed to investigate whether there is labour mobility from public to private sectors. Overall little evidence emerged that, although some scholarship recipients left public jobs after returning from study in Australia under the ASP, the majority

remained in public organisations. Losing public employees as a result of sending them to study in Australia under the ASP was identified as one of the minor challenges of the ASP. Studies on labour mobility from private to public sectors, especially in developing countries support this finding. Wibulpolprasert and Pachanee (2008), and Wibulpolprasert and Pengpaibon (2003) in Thailand; and Waswa and Katana (2008) in Kenya found that in Thailand and Kenya there was labour mobility from public to private/NGO sectors, and the reason underpinning the mobility was better salary in the private sector.

### **Labour mobility trends of students to public and private/NGO sectors**

Drawing on the experiences of participating alumni it was found that scholarship recipients who were students before going to study in Australia all moved into employment in either public or private/NGO sectors after returning from study in Australia under the ASP. There are a wide range of reports and studies on new graduates going to labour market that correspond with this finding. A report from the Office for National Statistics (2013, p. 6) showed that “graduates were less likely to be out of the labour force”. A report prepared by Shah, Cooper, and Burke (2007) for the Office of Training and Tertiary Education, Department of Innovation, Industry and Regional Development, Victoria also support this finding that people with qualifications have higher rates of employment. A survey by Graduate Careers Australia (2012, p. 2) found that “graduates are less likely to be unemployed in the long-term than non-graduates”.

## **Labour mobility of students and public sector employees to self-employment**

Labour mobility of both students and public sector employees to self-employment was another trend that emerged from this study. This finding is consistent with studies on self-employment that explore why individuals/graduates entered self-employment and how they utilized their skills and knowledge. A survey carried out by Dennis in the late 1980s of 3000 new business founders in the United States suggested that people entered into self-employment because they wanted to and not because they lacked of available alternatives (Dennis, 1996). A study by Dawson, Henley, and Latreille (2009) on why individuals choose self-employment found that economic factors and entrepreneurship motivated individuals to choose self-employment. A study by Carroll and Tani (2011, p. 14) on utilising the skills and knowledge of the graduates in self-employment found that “self-employed graduates were less likely to be under-utilised than graduates employed by firms”.

## **Labour mobility from the private/NGO sector to unemployment**

Minimal evidence emerged from the survey that participating alumni who had worked in the private/NGO sector before studying in Australia were unemployed upon their return from study in Australia. It could be reasonably assumed that at the time of completing the survey the scholarship recipients could possibly have just returned from study and started to look for jobs because findings from interviews unveiled that the scholarship recipients of the ASP were highly sought after by both public and private/NGO sectors. A study by Graduate Career Australia in 2014 supported this finding. It acknowledged that new graduates spent some time searching for jobs after graduation, claiming, “for the graduates of some fields, the transition to full-time

employment from higher education takes a little longer than others”. Findings from an Australia graduate survey (ASG) conducted by Graduate Careers Australia (2014, p. 2) reported:

The results of the 2014 AGS show that, of all new domestic bachelor degree graduates either in or seeking full-time employment, 68.1 per cent were in full-time employment at the time of the survey, with a further 20.3 per cent working on a part-time or casual basis while continuing to seek full-time employment. An additional 11.6 per cent were not working and still looking for full-time employment four months after completing their qualifications...

### **Labour mobility from students and public sector to further study**

Minimal evidence emerged that scholarship recipients continued to study further after completing degrees in Australia under the ASP. A study by Graduate Careers Australia (2012) also found that some new graduates continued further study after their first degree. That study showed that “in 2011, almost one in every five new bachelor degree graduates (19.4 per cent-see Figures 1 and 3) continued in some type of full-time study immediately after their first degree (similar to the 2010 figure of 19.0 per cent)” (Graduate Careers Australia, 2012, p. 3).

### **Summary**

The findings revealed that labour mobility from the public to private sector was relatively low. Although there were some scholarship recipients leaving public jobs to work in private/NGOs, self-employment, and to study further, the majority remained in public organisations. In contrast, findings show no evidence of labour mobility from private/NGOs to public organisations after returning from study under the ASP. This study also found that the majority of the scholarship recipients from both public and private/NGOs were promoted to hold higher or more senior positions upon their return. Finally it also emerged that scholarship recipients who were students before studying

in Australia moved to work in public and private/NGO sectors, entered self-employment, or continued their studies.

#### **Section 4: Policy structures to optimise outcomes for the benefit of the Lao PDR, employers and alumni**

The discussion in this section concerns research question three which covered two distinct aspects of the policy regarding the selection and management of the scholarship recipients under the ASP namely (1) the existing policy around the ASP, and (2) a need for further policy development.

##### **Existing policy of Lao and Australian government around the ASP**

Participating employers, AusAID staff and alumni described the policies and regulations that had been developed by both Lao and Australian government to guide the management of the ASP. The participants acknowledged that the Lao and Australian governments had developed separate policies which had been used to guide managing the ASP. The ‘Australian Awards Scholarships Policy Handbook, DFAT 2015’ was used to manage its scholarships in many countries including Laos whereas the government of Laos, through the Ministry of Education and Sports had developed a policy/regulation called ‘Regulation to protect Lao students overseas No: 3552/13 dated 28 August 2013’.

In general the ‘Australian Awards Scholarships Policy Handbook’ was reported to be a good policy as it helped guide the practice of the ASP and met demand of local of Laos. A report from Coffey (2014) who managed the Australian scholarships or awards in 13 countries cited a reason for the success of the Australian awards that

“Australia Awards program is the creation of opportunity to build knowledge and meet local needs in each of the countries it operates in”. Different countries have different needs and the policy of the ASP has been designed to meet the needs of Laos. This is the strength of the policy. Findings, however, indicated some areas that the policy needs to be developed further which are discussed in section: “A need for further policy development by AusAID staff”.

The policy of Lao government called ‘Regulation to protect Lao students overseas No: 3552/13 dated 28 August 2013’ found to be newly developed by Lao government which aimed at protecting Lao students overseas. In general ‘Regulation to protect Lao students overseas’ is a good policy, but there is neither critique nor report about this policy to be found to support this finding. Finding revealed that there are some areas that the policy needs further development which are discussed in the following section.

### **A need for further policy development by Lao government**

Participating employers, AusAID Staff and alumni identified four areas of the existing policy that they believed needed to be either revisited or developed: (1) a monitoring system, (2) issues of returning to work (closing waiting gap for ‘a decree to return to work’, employment for graduates upon their return, and appointing positions to match with expertise and field of study and encouraging people to use their learned skills and knowledge), (3) selection processes (selecting suitable staff), (4) appropriate system for income, rewards and sanctions

## **A monitoring system**

The need for a proper monitoring system to manage and monitor Lao students' study abroad was discussed by participants. The public employers revealed that when sending scholarships recipients to study in Australia under the ASP, especially the scholarship recipients from public sectors, the public organisations via MES needed to have a monitoring system to track their study progress and wellbeing. In this regard they believed that the monitoring system would provide the MES with information and records of the scholarship recipients and if they had problems, MES could provide assistance and support in order to help them accomplish their study. They considered that the basic paper system of the Ministry of Education and Sports (MES) that students needed to submit before travelling to study abroad was inadequate. Indeed, in line with the Centre for Disability Research and Policy, University of Sydney (2014, p. 5) they deemed that the MES needed a monitoring system to gather information that could be used to report and document outcomes and progress for participants and the organisation as well as to reflect on the program progress and make adjustments if needed. (International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, 2011) supports this claim arguing that monitoring is a continuous process of collection and analysis of information in order to track progress against set plans. Thus, having a monitoring system is crucial as “monitoring is a more immediate and continuous process meant to keep things on track and ensure that the right inputs are included for successful implementation of a model” (UNICEF, 2009, p. 1).

## **Issues of returning to work – need for policy directives**

Lao public organisations lost some of their highly skilled employees to private/NGOs when their employees returned from study in Australia under the ASP. Issues

exacerbated by the decree re return to work of returning alumni and policy on staff retention caused some mobility from public to private/NGOs.

The following sections discussed issues of (1) Closing waiting gap for ‘a decree to return to work’ and providing employment for graduates upon their return, and (2) Policy on staff retention: matching expertise and field of study of scholarship recipients to utilise their skills and knowledge into their workplace in order to maximise outcomes of the ASP.

### **Closing waiting gap for ‘a decree to return to work’ and providing employment for graduates upon their return**

Employers, AusAID Staff and alumni discussed the need to close the waiting gap caused by the ‘decree to return to work’ needed so scholarship holders could be employed upon their return to Laos. They emphasized that the wait for ‘a decree to return to work’ from the MES, which sometimes took a long time, accounted for some scholarship recipients leaving their public organisations after finishing study from Australia under the ASP. These participants explained that without this decree public servants were not legally allowed to work in public organisations after returning from long term study abroad so some chose to apply to work with the private/NGO sector where they were offered jobs immediately because, as (Sandhya & Kumar, 2011, p. 1778) stated: “a talented employee will never fall short of the opportunities”.

Of concern for participants was that in some cases even when they had already obtained ‘a decree to return to work’ they were not given any position since their previous tasks and positions had been taken by someone else while they were studying in Australia with the result that they had to wait until another position was available.



In the meantime they could not fully use their skills and knowledge which contributed to them leaving public organisations upon their return to Laos. Research by Irshad (2011) reports “the retention factors of the mental dimension are work characteristics, employees are retaining by flexible tasks where they can use their knowledge and see the results of their efforts” (Irshad, 2011, p. 85) and reflects why alumni look to where they can maintain their knowledge and skills. .

### **Policy on staff retention: matching expertise and field of study of scholarship recipients to utilise their skills and knowledge into their workplace**

The employers and scholarship recipients emphasised that appointing scholarship recipients into positions to match with the expertise and field of study was crucial when forming policy related to staff retention. There is a wide range of studies from recent literature on motivation and retention that support this finding. According to Sandhya and Kumar (2011, p. 1778) the job of human resource personnel is to “place a right person for a right job at a right place in a right time”. This is also supported by Edward (1999) and Lofquist and Dawis (1969) in what they called ‘employee personal value match with job’ which meant qualifications, ability, skill, knowledge, and other characteristics of employees that were suitable and match with the job. This finding is also supported by Walker (2001) who identified seven factors that can enhance employee retention and one of which was providing challenging to match with their skills and knowledge.

Findings also showed that from the perspectives of the participants, encouraging staff to utilise the skills and knowledge they gained from study in Australia under the ASP

to contribute into their workplace was also important for public sector staff retention. According to Van Knippenberg (2000) employees become more loyal and stay in the organization when they contributed to the organisation performance and are part of a team. Findings also revealed the importance of putting the right people to match with field of study allowing them to utilise their learnt skills and knowledge in their workplace.

Alumni of the ASP who moved from public to private/NGOs revealed that if they were promoted to hold a position that was relevant to their skills and knowledge and where they could use their skills and knowledge in their workplace, they would stay with their previous workplace. Thus, when forming policy in sending and welcoming back the scholarship recipients under the ASP this issue needs to be taken into account.

### **Selecting suitable staff to study under the ASP**

Critical to selecting suitable staff for study under the ASP was their level of English language competency and their potential in their chosen field of study. Participants claimed that English language and academic issues were to blame when the scholarship recipients failed to complete their study as planned. Although the English language of the scholarship recipients met Australian universities entry requirement, findings revealed some of them still had problems with their English while studying in Australia. The lack of prior knowledge and experience when they studied in a new field which differed from their previous degree was also highlighted as a problem and possible cause of difficulty or failure. These findings were identified in a previous section: 'the challenges of the ASP'. Research by Ballard and Clanchy (1997); and Robertson, Line, Jones, and Thomas (2000) found that English language difficulty and

deficiencies in academic skills are the main source of difficulties for international students. Most recent studies of international students in Australia identified their problems in coping with English in both conversational English and academic English in the field of education (Sawir, 2005). Thus, selecting suitable staff to study under the ASP needs to be reviewed when forming the policy related to selecting and sending staff from public organisations to study in Australia under the ASP.

### **Sufficient income, and appropriate reward and sanction system**

Findings indicated that the scholarship recipients sometimes left their public organisations after returning from study in Australia under the ASP because of low salaries in the public sector. When forming policy regarding sending public employees to study in Australia under the ASP the government needed to consider providing sufficient income as part of staff retention. Research findings by Samba (2007) who evaluated Motivational Packages in Tanzanian Public Organizations supported this finding. Samba (2007) found that staff retention is affected by inadequate payment including fringe benefits because it triggers employees to consider quitting their organizations for better jobs elsewhere. Research findings by Parker and Wright (2001) align with this finding. They claimed that:

Our research clearly shows that there is an association between compensation and employee commitment. By enhancing compensation conditions and practices, commitment will likely improve. With improved commitment, retention will increase, turnover will decrease and employee morale will get stronger (Parker & Wright, 2001, p. 73)

The foundation element of the contractual and implied bond between employees and employers are fair wages, and the underlying supposition being that behavior can be persuaded by monetary factors (Parker & Wright, 2001). Correspondingly Shoaib,

Noor, Tirmizi, and Bashir (2009) stated that one of the key factors of retention is attractive remuneration packages because it fulfils material and financial desires.

Apart from providing fair wages to the scholarship recipients other motivation and retention strategies such as a reward and sanction system were identified as areas for improvement when sending public employees to study in Australia under the ASP. This finding corresponds with study made by Agarwal (1998), Mayo (2003), Walker (2001), McGregor (1985), and William and Werther (1996).

Reward was important and needed to recognise the performance of the scholarship recipients who finished their study in Australia under the ASP and returned to contribute in their previous public organisations according to the participants. This tallies with studies that concluded that reward is an important factor in staff retention. Mayo (2003) suggests that an organisational reward system is among one of the traditional ways of managing employee turnover and retention. Reward refers to something that organisations provide to workers in response to their work and performance which they desire (Agarwal, 1998). William and Werther (1996) define reward as what workers get in exchange for their contributions to the organisations. The reward could be in the form of promotion, salary, bonuses and other incentives (Mayo, 2003), as well as recognition which, according to Walker, enhances loyalty. Recognition from team members, co-workers, bosses, and customers enhances loyalty (Walker, 2001).

Findings from employers' interviews also indicated that apart from rewards, a sanctions system was needed when forming policy around sending public staff to study

in Australia under the ASP to prevent losing key staff to private/NGOs. Findings reported in Chapter 6 relating to the Policy on sending Lao students/staff to study abroad revealed that public employees must contract to return to work for their public organisations before travelling to study in Australia under the ASP. Findings indicated that there were, however, some scholarship recipients who did not return to work for their public organisations upon their return from study. Although the contract between the scholarship recipients and their public employers was signed, it emerged from this study that the public employers did not have the power to enforce it. In response to this issue findings from public employers' interview reported that there needed to be a sanctions system for those who break the contract in order to ensure they stay with the organisation. Studies from the literature on motivation, punishment, and retention, particularly McGregor's X-Y Theory (1985) supported this finding.

### **A need for further policy development by AusAID**

It emerged from this research that AusAID policies/regulations needed further development in relation to (1) reaching out to disadvantage: candidates with disabilities and (2) recruiting quality female candidates (3) adding managerial and generic skills to the program and encouraging work experience.

### **Reaching out to disadvantage: Candidates with disabilities**

Findings from AusAID staff interviews showed that providing scholarships to reach disadvantaged candidates in the provincial and rural areas needed to be taken into consideration when forming policy around the ASP. In Laos there are differences in development and social inequality between urban and rural areas which limit the ability of people in rural and provincial areas to obtain scholarships when applying for

the ASP. Previous research conducted by Khan (2000, p. 7) acknowledges that “The existence of disparities between the rural and urban sectors is an important dimension of the overall inequality in developing countries”. In the Lao context there are big differences between city and rural areas. This fact is verified by Epprecht, Minot, Dewina, Messerli, and Heinimann (2008, p. 21) who note that “Vientiane Capital City has the lowest poverty rate (17 percent), while the poverty rate in the rest of the country varies from 38 percent in the north, to 38 percent in the centre, and 33 percent in the south”. Ogawa (2009) found that about 93 per cent of students at the National University of Laos (NUOL) were ‘Lao Lum’ who were the majority group, whereas ‘Lao Sung’ and ‘Lao Theung’ students, the minority group, covered only five and two per cent respectively (Ogawa, 2009).

Findings from AusAID staff interviews also indicated that there was a need to provide equal opportunities for people with disabilities in Laos when reviewing and developing the ASP policy since it did not cover this group of people. In Laos the estimation of disability prevalence is around three per cent (Mitra, Posarac, & Vick, 2011). The widespread and severe unexploded ordnance (UXO) contamination, dropped by the US between 1964 and 1973 of which up to 30 percent of the 270 million cluster bomblets failed to detonate and remained after the conflict ended, is a major cause of disability in Laos and around 12,500 to 15,000 UXO survivors are currently alive (Hinton & Rutherford, 2014).

### **Recruitment of quality female candidates**

AusAID staff interviews revealed that although the ASP had a gender equality policy, it was hard to get enough quality female candidates from public organisations to apply

for the ASP during the selection process. That was because women in Laos had fewer opportunities to access education than men. Reports and studies from previous literature provide evidence of a large gender gap in education in Laos. Although the right of all Lao citizens to education is recognised by the Lao Education Law (2000) and Constitution (1991), there are more illiterate females than males, and the gender gap in education, especially in rural areas continues to widen (JICA, 2006). According to The Office of Development Effectiveness (2014, p. 2) “Laos ranks 100 out of 148 countries in the gender inequality index”.

### **Adding managerial and generic skills to the program and encouraging work experience**

The scholarship recipients and AusAID staff reported in Chapter 5 and 6 revealed that although the ASP had provided opportunities for the scholarship recipients to study in Australia to acquire new skills and knowledge in their specialist fields of study, managerial skills or generic skills and real work experience were not well incorporated into their programs of study. These participants suggested that the policy of the ASP needed to cover managerial or generic skills in order to meet the demands of the labour market. There are a number of studies from recent literature that support the need to equip graduates with generic or managerial skills as reported in this study. According to Hager, Holland, and Beckett (2002) generic skills have been emphasised in higher education since business and employer organisations’ demand for graduates to possess generic skills has been increasing. In addition, managerial skills and knowledge are at the centre of implementing on-going and continual innovations which enable enterprises to gain competitive advantage (Papulova & Mokros, 2007).

Results also indicated that there was a need for the ASP to provide scholarship recipients with real work experience as part of learning principles or work-based learning. There is a wide variety of studies and articles on work-based learning that support the finding in this study. This finding corresponds with work of many researchers (Eraut & Hirsh, 2007; Felstead et al., 2005; Gear, McIntosh, & Squires, 1994). Studies on learning at work indicate the significance of learning in real work situations. Felstead et al. (2005) support this claim stating that workplace learning is more likely to adopt a 'learning as participation' approach which is often crucial to the effective execution of tasks. Eraut and Hirsh (2007), Felstead et al. (2005), and Gear et al. (1994) affirm this argument suggesting that the most valuable and effective learning happened through the medium of work or occurred in response to particular workplace issues.

### **Need for further joint development by both Lao and Australian government**

Participants revealed that some policy/regulation areas needed to be developed collaboratively by both Lao and Australian governments in order to maximise the outcomes of the ASP for the benefit of the scholarship recipients and employers. These areas cover (1) the contradictory and unbalanced policy (2) identification of Lao Labour needs and (3) policy that does not adequately address human resource development.

### **Contradictory and unbalanced policy**

Employers and AusAID staff interviews as well as document analysis indicated that Lao policy contradicted AusAID policy in terms of the requirement for scholarship



recipients to return to Laos after finishing their study in Australia. Whereas the Lao public policy No: 3552/13 dated 28 August 2013, section 17 stated that students who get outstanding results after finishing study will be supported to continue further study (Department of Students Affairs, 2014) the Australia Awards Scholarships Policy clearly indicates that “...all awardees must return home on completion of their studies...” (Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, 2015, p. 12).

AusAID staff interviews revealed that some parts of the ASP policy, in particular the country program strategy which was formed by the HLAC and PSC, were unbalanced. Although both Lao and Australian governments agreed on a policy to exclude health in the country program strategy, training in some health related subjects such as nutrition and community health were still offered under the ASP. AusAID staff believed Laos and Australia needed to develop this area of the policy further in order to resolve the conflict and form more precise policy.

### **Identification of Lao labour needs and a broader perspective on human resource development**

When receiving the ASP from the Australian government employers’ believed the government of Laos was not well equipped to inform Australia about the areas of labour need in Laos. They claimed that Australia tried to understand the labour needs on the Lao government’s behalf by allocating a certain number of scholarships for what they considered to be priority areas of study. The strongly believed that these needs should come from the Lao side and the Lao government should know which areas of labour are needed and Laos should send the scholarship recipients to study in Australia under the ASP in the needed fields.

What is also apparent from the findings is that the policy does not have a broad perspective on human resource development. Findings indicated that the policy focused on specific details such as the obligation of the returnees from public organisations to return to serve in their previous workplace upon their return from study in Australia under the ASP while failing to develop an overall strategy for human resource development. One key AusAID staff member mentioned that:

Not to get a perspective on human resource development not really. It doesn't give the direction for the future work or at the moment, but that's coming there's really discussion about it in government. The policy's doing things more like the policy around if you go away if you are a government employee you go on scholarship you come back and you have to return to your bounden for a certain period ... that doesn't get that much different because there isn't that much mobility from public sector to private sector ah so you know there's the policy around scholarships, but other areas where it could be what can we use Australian scholarships for compare to the Vietnamese scholarships compare to the Japanese scholarships that's in areas where our work can be done...

## **Conclusion**

This chapter discussed the findings in terms of the themes generated by the data analysis in relation to the strengths, benefits and challenges of the ASP, the labour mobility trend of the scholarship recipients under the ASP, and the policy structures that underpin the program.

From the foregoing discussion the ASP had both the strengths and benefits as well as challenges. By looking at the strengths and benefits as well as the challenges of the ASP through the lens of AI the strengths and benefits clearly outweighed the challenges.

The key findings that were identified as the strengths and benefits of the ASP were English language competency, promotion opportunities, skills and knowledge for Lao

national and human resource development and applicable skills and knowledge, financial benefit, pre-departure program, good cooperation between the two countries, returning to work for previous public employers of the scholarship recipients, and social and personal development.

In contrast, by looking at the challenges of the ASP through the lens of AI there were some areas or opportunities that ASP could develop or improve further in areas such as English, resistance to knowledge transfer in Lao public organisations and issues of applying skills and knowledge into Lao public workplace, causes of losing staff in public organisations, loss of staff in the open category who are more inclined to leave the country to migrate for better jobs, academic challenges, social and personal challenges, poor planning in selecting levels and fields of studies, and the selection process of the ASP. Comparing the strengths/benefits and the challenges there were some areas such as English and social and personal development that were identified as both the strengths/benefits and challenges. They were two sides of a coin.

Regarding to labour mobility trend, findings uncovered that there was labour mobility under the ASP from public to private organisations, but the movement was not significant. In contrast, there was no evidence of labour mobility from private/NGO to public organisations.

By investigating the labour mobility trend through the lens of AI the majority of the scholarship recipients under the ASP in both public and private/NGOs were promoted to hold higher or more senior positions after returning from study in Australia.

Finally, findings from document analysis also supported findings from the interviews that the policy structure around the ASP had been already developed. However, AI enabled the research to identify a need for further policy development in order to maximise the outcome of the ASP for the benefit of the scholarship recipients and employers. Some areas that needed further policy development such as reaching out to disadvantage and candidates with disabilities, recruiting quality female candidates, and adding managerial and generic skills to the program and encouraging work experience have also been found in this study.

The next chapter, conclusion and recommendation, summarises the key findings of this study and draws conclusions in relation to the aims of this study. It presents some key findings that are possibly contributed to the body of knowledge by reflecting to exist literature, especially in Lao context. It also presents some recommendation and consideration for further study in this area of research.

## **CHAPTER 8 : CONCLUSION**

### **Introduction**

This chapter presents the overall conclusions of the key findings in relation to the aims and research questions which investigated (1) the strengths and benefits, and the challenges of the ASP, (2) the labour mobility trend, and (3) policy structure around the ASP. In addition, this chapter also presents recommendations for further research. The first section summarises and draws conclusions related to the contribution of this study to the body of knowledge on the strengths and benefits, and the challenges of the ASP, the labour mobility trend under the ASP, and policy structures around the ASP. In the penultimate section, the need for further policy development by Lao public employers and AusAID, and joint development by both Lao and Australian governments, that emerged from the findings of this study have been suggested. In addition recommendations on how the policy around the ASP could be developed further in the light of the findings of this research have been identified. Finally, the recommendation for further research has been provided.

### **Contribution to Knowledge**

The analysis of the data obtained from the survey and interviews with scholarship recipients, employers, and AusAID staff resulted in a number of emergent themes relevant to the strengths, benefits and the challenges of the ASP, the labour mobility trend under the ASP, and the policy around the ASP. The conclusions pertinent to these themes are presented in the following section.

## **The strengths, benefits, and the challenges**

This study identified that an increase in English language competency, promotion opportunities, increased skills and knowledge that could be applied by alumni in their workplaces, Lao national and human resource development, financial benefit, effective pre-departure programs, good cooperation between Laos and Australia, recipients' return to work for previous public employers, and social and personal development were the strengths and benefits of the ASP.

The challenges of the ASP were examined through the lens of appreciative inquiry (AI) which allowed the researcher to see the challenges as areas for further improvement. This study established common views of scholarship recipients or alumni of the ASP, employers and AusAID staff of the challenges of the ASP. The key aspects that emerged were: inadequate English language competency; resistance to knowledge transfer in Lao public organisations and issues of applying skills and knowledge into Lao public workplaces; staff loss from public organisations; inclination of graduates in the open category to migrate for better jobs; academic, social and personal challenges for scholarship holders; aspects of the selection process of the ASP and poor planning in selecting levels and fields of study.

The findings on the strengths and benefits as well as the challenges of the ASP revealed that some key aspects constitute both strengths and challenges. These included issues such as: English language competence; workplace resistance to applying skills and knowledge gained; staff retention issues such as difficulties in returning to work to previous public employers; staff lost from public organisations; and international migration by open category scholarship.

## **Labour mobility trends**

Minimal labour mobility occurred between low, medium and high-level positions in public and private/NGOs, from public to private sector employment, between unemployment, self-employment, to further study, public and private/NGOs. The mobility trend was more likely within public organisations (promotion from low to medium and high-level positions) and between public and private/NGOs. A few incidences of moves to self-employment, to/from unemployment and to further study were reported. Clearly it must be acknowledged there were some incidences of labour mobility from public to private sector employment, but the level of mobility was not significant. Findings revealed that the majority of the scholarship recipients from public organisations remained in their public organisations after returning from study in Australia under the ASP.

In contrast, findings among private/NGOs showed no evidence of labour mobility from private/NGO to public organisations. Some evidence of Labour mobility was apparent, however, from private/NGOs to unemployment, and within private/NGOs from low to medium and to high-level positions. Although the findings indicated negligible labour mobility from private/NGOs to unemployment, evidence showed that the scholarship recipients were actually more highly sought after by both public and private/NGO employers upon their return from their studies. The evidence concerning unemployment must be interpreted with caution because at the time of completing the survey the respondents may have just returned from study in Australia under the ASP and had not yet started working. Overall, the majority of the scholarship recipients

from both public and private/NGOs were promoted to hold higher or more senior positions after returning from study in Australia under the ASP.

## **Policy structure**

The study determined that Laos and Australia had formed policies on the ASP. Document analysis revealed that the Laos policy governed broad practices with general guidelines: (1) a general statement, (2) Requirements for students to study overseas, (3) Monitoring and management of Lao students overseas, (4) Power, duty, and forbidden things to do abroad, and (5) Rewards and punishment systems. In contrast, the Australia Awards Scholarships Policy Handbook of the Australian government covered a wide range of key points including how to apply, eligibility criteria and other aspects such as obligation to return to Laos upon completion of study. Two levels of committee managed the ASP; namely a High Level Advisory Council (HLAC), which met annually, and a Program Steering Committee (PSC), which met twice yearly. The study revealed that whereas the council and the committee both provided input into the Australian Awards scholarships policy which both Laos and Australia had to agree upon, the Lao policy/regulations came solely from the Lao government as it applied not only to the ASP, but also to other foreign scholarship programs.

## **Implications of contributions to knowledge**

This section provided the theoretical and practical implications of the contributions to knowledge of this study to both Lao and Australian policy makers in order to maximise the outcomes of the ASP for the benefits of the scholarship recipients and the



employers. The study established that further policy development was needed by: (1) the Lao public employers, (2) AusAID, and (3) both Lao and Australian government

### **A need for further policy development by Lao public employers**

Findings reported that in order to maximise the outcomes of the ASP, key areas of the policies/regulations need to be revised by the Lao government in order to support the scholarship recipients while studying in Australia under the ASP, and to reduce even further the labour mobility from public to private/NGO sector employment. Key areas pertaining to: improving a monitoring system, closing the waiting gap for ‘a decree to return to work’ for scholarship recipients, providing employment for graduates upon their return as well as appointing them to positions to match with their expertise and field of study in order to encourage them to use their learned skills and knowledge in their workplace, selecting suitable staff to study under the ASP, providing appropriate income, and applying rewards and sanctions emerged clearly from the findings of this research.

### **A need for further policy development by AusAID**

Although findings indicated that the selection process and policy of the ASP were transparent and fair, there were some key areas that needed further development by AusAID in order to provide equal opportunity for all. It emerged from this research, that AusAID policies/regulations needed further development in relation to reaching out to disadvantage, and recruiting candidates with disabilities and quality female candidates. In addition, this study provided evidence that in order to improve the quality of the graduates from Australia under the ASP, managerial and generic skills needed to be added to the program, and real work experience for the scholarship

recipients in Australia before returning to Laos as part of the ASP would add more value to the ASP.

### **Need for further joint development by both Lao and Australian government**

Additionally, to maximise the outcome of the ASP Laos and Australia needed to collaboratively develop the ASP policies further in order to resolve the contradictory and unbalanced policies existing between Laos and Australia. This study provided evidence that the Lao general regulation designed to manage Lao students overseas: No: 3552/13 dated 28 August 2013 supported scholarship recipients who had outstanding results to continue study further, whereas the Australia Awards Scholarships Policy Handbook stated that the scholarship recipients must return home after finishing study under the ASP. In addition, when receiving scholarships and sending students and staff to study in Australia under the ASP the research revealed that the Lao government needed to understand their own Labour needs and that the identification of labour need should come from the Lao government.

### **Recommendations for Further Research**

There are a number of areas that this study could not cover because of the constraints of the EdD. Based on the findings of this study, recommendations for further research related to the ASP are provided. This research was carried out to investigate the strengths and benefits, and the challenges of the ASP from the perspectives of the scholarship recipients, the employers and AusAID staff. Only public employers were interviewed while employers from private/NGOs were excluded. In addition, only four public employers were interviewed in this study so the findings need to be interpreted

with caution as they do not fully represent Lao public employers' perspectives. The limitation, which excluded employers from private/NGOs and restricted the number of public employers involved limits the extent to which the knowledge obtained from this study can be applied to private/NGO sectors, and other public organisations outside this geographical region (the capital city Vientiane). It is recommended that further research be conducted to:

1. investigate the strengths and benefits, and challenges of the ASP from a much broader sample of public employers outside the geographical region covered in this study.
2. investigate the strengths and benefits, and challenges of the ASP from the perspectives of employers from private/NGOs.
3. conduct an investigation of labour mobility across a wide geographical region.
4. conduct a much broader study of the Australian Awards scholarships policy and the Lao policy/regulations from the perspectives of scholar recipients and employers.

## APPENDICES

### Appendix 1. Survey questionnaires

<http://www.surveygizmo.com/s3/1815273/Stengths-benefits-and-challenges-of-Australian-Scholarship>

#### Instruction:

Please check the box that best fits you.

1. What is your gender?

- |        |                          |
|--------|--------------------------|
| Male   | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Female | <input type="checkbox"/> |

2. What the highest education level did you finish your study in Australia?

- |                      |                          |
|----------------------|--------------------------|
| TAFE                 | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Undergraduate        | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Graduate certificate | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Master degree        | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Doctor degree        | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Others               | <input type="checkbox"/> |

3. What was your job before studying in Australia?

- |                                             |                          |
|---------------------------------------------|--------------------------|
| Unemployed                                  | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Student                                     | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Running business/self-employed              | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| High position in public organization        | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Middle position in public organization      | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Low position in public organization         | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| High position in private/NGO organization   | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Middle position in private/NGO organization | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Low position in private/NGO organization    | <input type="checkbox"/> |

4. What is your current job?

Unemployed	<input type="checkbox"/>
Student	<input type="checkbox"/>
Running business/self-employed	<input type="checkbox"/>
High position in public organization	<input type="checkbox"/>
Middle position in public organization	<input type="checkbox"/>
Low position in public organization	<input type="checkbox"/>
High position in private/NGO organization	<input type="checkbox"/>
Middle position in private/NGO organization	<input type="checkbox"/>
Low position in private/NGO organization	<input type="checkbox"/>

### Question 5 and 6

To what extent do you agree with the statements below (Please check the box that best describes the extent to which you agree/Yes or disagree/No or Not sure/applicable with each statement).

Question 5		Yes	No	Not sure/ applicable
<i>After finishing study in Australia...</i>				
1	I find good jobs.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2	I have been offered better position in my workplace.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
3	I feel that people respect me more.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
4	I earn more.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
5	I know more people and have more networking.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
6	I have the ability to work as a team and independently.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
7	I have the ability to solve problems and work more effectively	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
8	Overall I have benefited from studying in Australia.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Question 6		Yes	No	Not sure/ applicable
<i>From my points of view people quit their public jobs to work with private/non-government organizations after finishing study in Australia because of...</i>				
1	income issues.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	lack of incentives.			
2	being treated unfairly.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
3	not being promoted.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
4	no proper system in placing new arrival staff.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
5	not being respected & welcome back.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
6	boring/not challenging job.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
7	having conflict with boss/colleagues.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

8	no obligation to return back to their old organisation.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
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7. What are the strengths and benefits of Australian Scholarships Program?

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8. What are the challenges of Australian Scholarship?

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**Appendix 2. Questionnaires for interviewing public employers and AusAID staff**

1. Do you think having Australian scholarships to Laos is important for human resource development? How?

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2. Do you have any problem when sending your staff to study in Australia? Or are there any challenges in sending scholarship awardees, especially public employees to study under Australian scholarships?

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3. Do you think scholarship completers always return to work for their sending organisations, especially public sectors when they finish their study in Australia? If no what do you think is the cause?

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4. In order to optimise the outcome of the scholarship scheme what should be doing more to benefit awardees, employers, Australia, and Laos?

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5. Are you aware of any policies regarding to sending staff to study in Australia? If yes, do you think current policies are adequate or need further development?

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6. Do you have any comments or advice in receiving Australian Scholarships and sending staff to study in Australia in order to optimise the outcome of the scholarship program, and to minimize or tackle the challenges?

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### **Appendix 3. Questionnaires for interviewing alumni of the ASP**

#### **Section 1 Structured interview questions**

Male ☐ Female ☐

##### **A. Benefits/strengths**

Choose only one answer that suits you the most (**Yes** or **No** or **Not sure/applicable**)  
to the following questions:

1. You can choose a better job and have more options to choose your careers after  
returning from study in Australia than before

Yes ☐ No ☐ Not

sure/applicable ☐

2. You have had or more likely to have a good job after returning from study in  
Australia

Yes ☐ No ☐ Not

sure/applicable ☐

3. You have earned or more likely to earn more after returning from study in  
Australia

Yes ☐ No ☐ Not

sure/applicable ☐

4. You have been or more likely to be promoted to higher position after returning  
from study in Australia

Yes ☐ No ☐ Not

sure/applicable ☐

5. You agree that skills, knowledge, and expertise you gained from studying in Australia have been used or can be applied in your workplace.

Yes ☐

No ☐

Not

sure/applicable ☐

6. Overall you have been benefited from study in Australia

Yes ☐

No ☐

Not

sure/applicable ☐

### **B. Challenges**

Choose only one answer that suits you the most (**Yes** or **No** or **Not sure/applicable**) to the following questions:

1. On new arrival settling down, living, and studying in Australia was difficult experience.

Yes ☐

No ☐

Not

sure/applicable ☐

2. I know that not every awardee has successfully graduated at the end of their scholarships.

Yes ☐

No ☐

Not

sure/applicable ☐

3. Skills, knowledge, and expertise that I gained from Australia are irrelevant and cannot be applied in my workplace.

Yes ☐

No ☐

Not

sure/applicable ☐

4. People in my workplace ignore me when I returned from study in Australia.

Yes ☐

No ☐

Not

sure/applicable ☐

### **C. Semi-structured interview questions**

1. What do you think are the most beneficial things in studying under Australian Scholarship?

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2. What do you think are the most challenging things in studying under Australian Scholarship?

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**D. Questionnaires for alumni who moved from public to private sectors**

Current employer

Private/cooperate ☐                      NGO ☐                      Self-employed/owned business ☐

1. How has your life change since you finished your studies in Australia?

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2. Why do you resign from public job?

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3. What do you think public employers/public organisations should do in order to prevent people like you leaving public jobs?

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4. Are you happy working with this organisation than working with public's? How?

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5. Can you compare good things and bad things in working with public and private organisation? What are they?

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6. Do you have any comments to add?

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## Appendix 4. Results from survey

Themes & subthemes from survey		Alumni	
		+	-
Social aspect	New perspective	6	
	Making friend or Knowing more people	1	1
	Learning culture VS different culture 6 + culture shock 1	2	7
	Building relationship	1	1
	Network or connection VS lost network	11	1
Increased skills knowledge and expertise	Adaptation skills	1	9
	Knowledge	20	2
	English Vs English + 2 negotiation skill	13	12+2
	Critical thinking	7	
	Problem solving	4	
	Teamwork	2	
	Time management	2	2
Personal development and opportunities	Promotion	1	
	Work more effective	2	
	Quality of life/lifestyle	3	2
	More self-confidence Vs provincial candidate 1	13	1
	Become more mature	1	
	Independence	4	1
Qualification	World class university/course	8	
Financial benefits	Financial support 3, more income 4 VS not enough stipend	7	2
Family benefits	Family	6	1 lost position
Selection process	Fair selection process Vs high competition in selection process	2	8
Pre-departure program	Pre-departure program	5	
Challenges in finding accommodation	Finding appropriate accommodation (accommodation 2 + house 1+ settle down)		4
Transition	Transition		2
	Lost position		1
	Finding job with her salary		1
	Applying what learned into practice		1
	Internship		1
	Return without gaining real work experience		1
	Discrimination		1
	Sickness meeting doctor		1
	Analytical thinking skills		1
	Doing assignment		1
	Work hard		1

## Appendix 5. The most common themes among three groups from chapters (4, 5, 6)

### Strengths & challenges

Employers	AusAID staff	Alumni
English	English	English <i>English language</i>
getting promotion	getting promotion	getting promotion <i>been promoted to higher positions</i>
benefits to Lao human resource development	bringing back lots of expertise, knowledge and skills  alumni of the program made significant contribution to Laos, helping Laos in getting WTO membership, having direct input into policy	skills and knowledge, Time management, <i>adaptation skills, communication skills, critical thinking and problem solving skills, teamwork, and time management</i>
	salary increase	financial benefit <i>Financial benefit</i>
pre-departure program		pre-departure program <i>Pre-departure</i>
good cooperation with the Lao government in the selection process	good cooperation at high level  steering committee	
The majority return to their public job	most of graduates returned back to their previous organisations	
transparency of the selection process  a process designed to select the best/right applicants.		<i>Selection process</i>
		Networking <i>networking making connections</i> Time management Teamwork More respect Becoming more independent <i>become more independent</i>  <i>more mature and confident</i> More opportunity to better jobs
	having scholarship as bigger program around human resource development	
		Facility and quality of Australia educational institutes



		Skills & knowledge can be applied in workplace
		cultural and work experience
		<i>new perspectives about the Australian way of life, social life experiences, making friends, , exchanging of cultures, , gaining respect, and developing relationships</i>
		<i>could work more effectively and their job performance had increased</i>
		<i>Their quality of lives improved a lot and they have enjoyed a better life style since returning to Laos because they earned more. They reported they have become more mature and confident than before. They also noted that they have become more independent</i>
		<i>programs and courses of their Australian universities/colleges</i>
		<i>universities/colleges had provided them with good academic support and their well-being had been looked after well</i>
		<i>Family benefit</i>
<b>Red italic letters are findings from survey</b>		

## Challenges

<b>Employers</b>	<b>AusAID staff</b>	<b>Alumni</b>
English	English language capability in the public category	English language <i>English language, IELTS, stress</i>
Can't apply what they studied into workplace	resistance of knowledge to be transferred to public sector by work colleagues	adapting and applying skills and knowledge gained from Australia to Lao context  <i>Apply skills &amp; knowledge into workplace</i>
Causes of losing staff  Can't maintain or losing of staff	not all return back to their workplace  open category are more inclined to leave the country to migrate for better jobs	Labour mobility from public to private from Survey results
Differences in working, learning and thinking systems		differences in teaching and learning systems  adapting into new social and learning environment  <i>Adapting into teaching and learning system,</i>
Difference in salary between public and private organisations		insufficient stipend  <i>Financial constraint</i>

Study in field that is not related to their previous field		working and studying field did not relate
	graduates have not been equipped with managerial skills and knowledge	lacking of research skills
High competition for public staff to get scholarships		<i>Selection process,</i>
	to keep ensuring that scholarships deliver the results that Laos wants	
		completing study on time
Some staff apply for many scholarships at once		
	we don't have good understanding of Lao government needs	
		studying lower degree than previous qualification
	not sure whether the candidates were the right ones since their own organisation prioritises them	
	small numbers of women in the public category apply, and it is hard to get enough female government staff for the scholarships	
		looking for fieldwork placement <i>Finding work placement</i>
		settling down and finding accommodation <i>Finding accommodation</i>
		feeling unsecured and homesick <i>discrimination, homesick,</i>
		time management <i>time management, meeting deadline</i>
		making friends and culture shock <i>culture shock,</i>
		<i>Transition after study</i>
		<i>Finding better job</i>
		<i>Adapting into Australian society, making appointment</i>
<b>Red italic letters are findings from survey</b>		

**Appendix 6. The most common themes from interviews among three groups of respondents with number of indication**

	Themes & subthemes	Employers		AusAID staff		Alumni	
		+	-	+	-	+	-
1	English language	2 (A, D)	2 (B, A)	2 (A, C)		5	8
	English language in the public category				1 (A)		
2	Getting promotion	2 (C, D)		2 (A, C)		12	
3	Benefits of the Australian Scholarship Program to Lao human resource development Laos (they contributed to socioeconomic development by working in both public and private sectors)	3 (A, B, C)					
	Helping Laos in getting WTO membership			1 (C)			
	Having direct input into policy			1 (C)			
	Alumni of the program made significant contributions to Laos	2 (A, C)					
	Skills and knowledge can be applied					17	
	Bringing back lots of expertise, knowledge and skills			2 (A, C)			
	Gaining skills and knowledge					15	
4	Good/sound cooperation with Lao government	1 (A)					
	Good cooperation at high level			1 (C)			
	Steering committee	2 (C, B)					
5	The Australian Scholarship Program Pre-departure Program	1 (A)				2	
6	The majority return to their public job	2 (A, D)		2 (A, C)			
7	Can't maintain or losing of staff		2 (C, B)		1 (A)		
	Not all return back to their workplace						
8	Inability to apply what scholarship recipients studied in the workplace		2 (C, D)		1 (C)		
	Resistance to knowledge transfer from public sector colleagues						
	Adapting and applying skills and knowledge gained from Australia into Laos context						7
	Barrier to knowledge application (Can't						4

	apply knowledge 3, seniority 1)						
9	Different in teaching and learning system						9
	Differences in working, learning and thinking systems		2 (A, B)				
	Adapting into social (2), and learning environment (9)						11
10	Study in field that is not related to their previous field		1 (B)				
	Working and studying did not relate						2
11	High competition for public staff to get scholarships		1 (B)				
	Small number of women in public category apply, and it is hard to get enough female government staff for the scholarships				1 (A)		
12	Salary increase			1 (B)			
	Financial benefit					23	
	6 financial support & 17 earn more						
13	Stipend not enough (1 family, 1 single)						2
	Difference in salary between public and private organisations		2 (B, C)				
14	Time management					3	5
	Having scholarships as part of a bigger program of human resource development	1 (B)					
	Some staff apply for many scholarships at once		1 (A)				
	Causes of losing staff		2 (C, A)				
	Transparency of selection process	1 (A)					
	A Process Designed to Select the Best/Right Applicants	1 (A)					
	Graduates have not been equipped with managerial skills and knowledge				1(C)		
	To keep ensuring that scholarships deliver the results that Laos wants				2 (B, D)		
	We don't have good understanding of Lao government need, and not sure whether the candidates were the right ones that organisation prioritise them				2 (A, B)		
	Open category are more inclined to leave the country to migrate for better jobs				1 (C)		
	Professional development						
	Personal development						
	Independent,					1	
	teamwork					1	
	More opportunity to better jobs/careers					14	

	More respect					6	
	Work colleagues welcome back					14	
	More respect					6	
	Cultural and work experience					3	
	Networking					7	
	Facility and quality of Australia educational institutes					6	
	Completing study (2 extended themselves, 7 knew someone extended, 3 knew someone failed)						12
	Studying degree lower than previous qualification						1
	Looking for fieldwork placement						1
	Finding accommodation and settling down						10
	Making friend						1
	Culture shock (making appointment)						1

## Appendix 7: Table 4.5 and 4.7 Analysis of labour mobility before and after studying in Australia

**Table 4.5**

List	Names of occupations	Jobs before study		VS	Current Jobs	
		Frequ-ency	Per cent		Frequ-ency	Per cent
1	Unemployed	0	00.0		3	4.2
2	Students	15	20.8		2	2.8
3	Running business/self-employed	1	1.4		3	4.2
4	High position in public organisations	0	0.0		3	4.2
5	Middle position in public organisations	10	13.9		21	29.2
6	Low position in public organisations	29	40.3		15	20.8
7	High position in private/NGOs	0	0.0		6	8.3
8	Middle position in private/NGOs	11	15.3		19	26.4
9	Low position in private/NGOs	6	8.3		0	0.0
	Total	72	100.0		72	100.0

**Table 4.7**

			Current jobs (jobs after study)								
			Unemp loyed	Stude nts	Self- empl oyed	Public sectors			Private/NGO		
						Hi	Mid	Low	Hi	Mid	Low
Jobs before study	Unemployed		Count								
	Students		Count		1	2			5	1	6
			Per cent		1.4	2.8			6.9	1.4	8.3
	Self- employed		Count					1			
			Per cent					1.4			
	Public sectors	Hi	Count								
		Mid	Count				2	7		1	
			Per cent				2.8	9.7		1.4	
		Low	Count		1	1	1	14	9		3
			Per cent		1.4	1.4	1.4	19.4	12.5		4.2
		Private / NGO	Hi	Count							
	Mid		Count	3						4	4
			Per cent	4.2						5.6	5.6
	Low		Count								6
Per cent										8.3	

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