

4 things for expats to think about before learning Khmer

By Pisey CHAN, Language and Cultural Specialist, Making It Easy| September 22, 2016

If you are an expat living in Cambodia and are having difficulty in basic conversations with local people about topics such as shopping, travelling etc., studying Khmer could be a perfect solution for you. So, how long will you need or want to spend studying?

Cambodian people start school at the age of 6. Naturally, they can speak before going to school, but they cannot read and write until they attend primary school. It might take at least 3 years for them to be able to read and write Khmer, yet they still might not be able to read and write advanced or academic words or articles until they upgrade to a higher level of education, for example, 7th or 8th grade. They are supposed to be proficient in Khmer after they graduate from high school. However, there are still some who don't achieve this level of proficiency.

Even native Khmer speakers still have to spend a long time to comprehensively develop their mother tongue skills. For this reason, it will almost certainly take an even longer time than this for those who are non-native speakers to gain proficiency. How, then, can expats acquire the language within the short period of time they stay in Cambodia?

Setting your learning objective is the most fundamental starting point. Firstly, you will be taught what you expect to learn. Thus, you will be able to achieve the level of proficiency for



which you aim. Secondly, it saves on cost. If you do not set specific goals for study, you may just study in a random manner, resulting in learning that is inconsistent with your needs or current level of knowledge. This, in turn, could waste your money as well as your time. Therefore, before deciding to study, you would be wise to consider the following factors:

1. **What is your learning goal?** Do you want to be able to speak with local people about shopping, travelling, to engage in bargaining; or do you need technical or interpersonal communication skills??



2. **Are you committed to learning?**

The level of difficulty when learning a language is different for different people, and ranges from easy to more difficult. It takes patience and



commitment in order to achieve your learning goal. Teachers also need students' cooperation in the class. For example, students should review what they have already learnt, do homework, practice, and attend classes regularly.

3. **Which tutor should you choose?** Find a Cambodian tutor from a reliable tutoring centre or company.



4. **What should you do after class?**

Learning in the class alone is not sufficient to improve your Khmer language skill. "Practice makes perfect" so you should practice having a dialogue with local people



wherever possible, for example, at your home, workplace, market etc. Also, you can ask your tutor to recommend a self-study book; by doing so, you can do the exercises to help you become more proficient.

Carefully considering these issues before commencing any course can help towards ensuring that you obtain the skills you expect. And remember that achieving a learning goal is likely to occur only if there is a good level of cooperation on the part of both teachers and students. Teachers provide helpful guides or instruction to their students, and students pay attention to the lessons, are committed to learning and complete the tasks assigned by the teachers.

For more information about upcoming Khmer courses for expats, please visit our website <http://www.makingiteasycambodia.com/khmer-language-courses.html> or directly contact Ms. Pisey CHAN at lcs@makingiteasycambodia.com |+85589714442.