Education in the Asia-Pacific Region:
Issues, Concerns and Prospects 64

Vincent McNamara
Martin Hayden *Editors*

Education in Cambodia

From Year Zero Towards International Standards

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Education in the Asia-Pacific Region: Issues, Concerns and Prospects

Volume 64

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Preface

This book has a back story.

Dr. Vincent (Vin) McNamara identified the need for the book early in 2017. He then set about finding authors and reviewing chapter drafts. Early in 2018, disaster struck. Vin's computer crashed, taking with it the draft chapters and all his email correspondence. Vin was at the time also struggling with the serious illness of his dear wife, Avis, who subsequently passed away. It seemed as if the book might never eventuate.

Early in 2020, Lorraine Pe Symaco, the series editor, asked if I could work with Vin to recover the manuscripts and help get the book published. I was honoured to do so. Though I had met Vin only once or twice over the years, I recalled his deep commitment to assisting Cambodia to develop a high-quality national education system. I also knew from colleagues in Cambodia how highly regarded Vin was as an adviser on policy options for the system.

And so, our collaboration as editors began.

We were greatly assisted by the authors of the chapters in the book. Their commitment was inspirational. Everyone contributing to the book felt a deep affection and respect for Vin.

Vin celebrated his 90th birthday in February this year. He was in good spirits. Sadly, a celebratory get-together of family and friends could not proceed because of the pandemic.

Many may be unaware of Vin's achievements as an educator and education manager. He began his career as a secondary school teacher in Australia in 1952. From 1953 to 1982, he worked in Papua New Guinea, first as a school principal and then as a school inspector and superintendent. He eventually became the Director of Planning and Deputy Secretary in the Department of Education in Papua New Guinea. During this period, he found time to complete a PhD at the University of Alberta in Canada. His distinguished achievements in Papua New Guinea resulted in him being awarded an Order of the British Empire in 1977. He was also recognised as a Fellow by the Australian College of Educators.

From 1983 to 1991, Vin was a Senior Policy Analyst with the Victorian Ministry of Education in Australia. Then, in 1991, he began a long and successful career as a

consultant, policy analyst, and senior advisor for a succession of high-level planning and evaluation projects in Cambodia.

Vin left Cambodia in 2019 to return to his home in Melbourne. In many ways, though, he has never left Cambodia. It is a country for which he continues to have an enormous love. This book bears testament to his passion for Cambodia and its people.

Melbourne, VIC, Australia Martin Hayden
August 2021

Series Editors Introduction

This important book, edited by Vincent McNamara and Martin Hayden, on *Education in Cambodia: From Year Zero Towards International Standards,* is the latest book to be published in the long-standing Springer Book Series 'Education in the Asia-Pacific Region: Issues, Concerns and Prospects'. The first volume in this Springer series was published almost 20 years ago, in 2002, this book by McNamara and Hayden being the 64th volume to be published to date.

Education in Cambodia: From Year Zero towards International Standards provides a clear and comprehensive overview of education, schooling, and training in Cambodia, which as the editors point out 'is one of Southeast Asia's economically poorest, most youthful, least urbanised, and most culturally homogeneous countries'. The book examines all levels of education and schooling in Cambodia: Early childhood education, primary and secondary schooling, higher education, and technical and vocational education and training (TVET). In addition to examining these various education sectors, the book explores cross-sector issues, such as the teaching profession, national assessment, school leadership, finance and budgeting matters, current areas of cross-sector reform, women and girls, education of minorities, and inclusive education including that focused on children and adults with disabilities. It explores ways in which the education system in Cambodia had adapted over time to meet the diverse needs of students, local communities, the business sector, and the broader society.

But this book is much more than just a descriptive account of education and schooling in Cambodia. It also provides a perceptive and very helpful critical analysis of the functioning of the education and schooling system, identifying major issues and concerns that need to be consistently addressed if education and schooling in Cambodia are to operate most effectively and in ways which deliver high quality and relevant programmes to learners.

The 16 chapters in the book have been written by a total of 29 leading researchers, policy makers, and practitioners, each of whom has extensive and in-depth knowledge and experience of education and schooling in Cambodia. In addition to an introduction and conclusion, chapters in the book are organised into three parts:

Issues at the Sector Level; Cross-Sector and Policy Issues; and Stakeholder Inclusion Issues.

The book documents the change journey of educational innovation for development in Cambodia.

In terms of the Springer Book Series in which this volume is published, the various topics dealt with in the series are wide ranging and varied in coverage, with an emphasis on cutting-edge developments, best practices, and education innovations for development. Topics examined in the series include environmental education and education for sustainable development; the interaction between technology and education; the reform of primary, secondary, and teacher education; innovative approaches to education assessment; alternative education; most effective ways to achieve quality and highly relevant education for all; active ageing through active learning; case studies of education and schooling systems in various countries in the region; cross-country and cross-cultural studies of education and schooling; and the sociology of teachers as an occupational group, to mention just a few. More information about the book series is available at http://www.springer.com/series/5888.

All volumes in this series aim to meet the interests and priorities of a diverse education audience including researchers, policy makers, and practitioners; tertiary students; teachers at all levels within education systems; and members of the public who are interested in better understanding cutting-edge developments in education and schooling in Asia-Pacific.

The main reason why this series has been devoted exclusively to examining various aspects of education and schooling in the Asia-pacific region is that this is a particularly challenging region. It is renowned for its size, diversity, and complexity, whether it be geographical, socio-economic, cultural, political, or developmental. Education and schooling in countries throughout the region impact on every aspect of people's lives, including employment, labour force considerations, education and training, cultural orientation, and attitudes and values. Asia and the Pacific is home to some 63% of the world's population of 7 billion. Countries with the largest populations (China, 1.4 billion; India, 1.3 billion) and the most rapidly growing mega-cities are to be found in the region, as are countries with relatively small populations (Bhutan, 755,000; the island of Niue, 1600).

Levels of economic and socio-political development vary widely, with some of the richest countries (such as Japan) and some of the poorest countries on earth (such as Bangladesh). Asia contains the largest number of poor of any region in the world, the incidence of those living below the poverty line remaining as high as 40 percent in some countries in Asia. At the same time many countries in Asia are experiencing a period of great economic growth and social development. However, inclusive growth remains elusive, as does growth that is sustainable and does not destroy the quality of the environment. The growing prominence of Asian economies and corporations, together with globalisation and technological innovation, is leading to long-term changes in trade, business, and labour markets, to the sociology of populations within (and between) countries. There is a rebalancing of power, centred

on Asia and the Pacific region, with the Asian Development Bank in Manila declaring that the twenty-first century will be 'the Century of Asia-Pacific'.

We know from feedback received from numerous education researchers, policy makers, and practitioners, worldwide, that this book series makes a useful contribution to knowledge sharing about cutting-edge developments concerning education and schooling in Asia-Pacific.

Any readers of this or other volumes in the series who have an idea for writing or co-writing their own book (or editing/co-editing a book) on any aspect of education and/or schooling, that is relevant to the region, are enthusiastically encouraged to approach the series editors either directly or through Springer to publish their own volume in the series, since we are always willing to assist prospective authors shape their manuscripts in ways that make them suitable for publication.

Schools of Education, University of Tasmania, Hobart, TAS, Australia

Rupert Maclean

RMIT University, Melbourne, VIC, Australia

31 August 2021

Initialisms and Acronyms

ACC	Accreditation Committee of Cambodia
ADB	Asian Development Bank
ASEAN	Association of Southeast Asian Nations
AUN	ASEAN University Network
CAMBOW	Cambodian Committee of Women
CAMFEBA	Cambodian Federation of Employers & Business Associations
CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women
CESSP	Cambodia Education Sector Support Project
CFS	Child-Friendly Schools
CHEA	Cambodian Higher Education Association
CNCC	Cambodia National Council for Children
DECE	Department of Early Childhood Education
CCHR	Cambodian Centre for Human Rights
CDC	Council for the Development of Cambodia
DGHE	Directorate General of Higher Education
DGVET	Directorate General of Technical and Vocational Education and Training
ECE	Early Childhood Education
ECED	Early Childhood Education Department
EFA	Education for All
EGRA	Early Grade Reading Assessments
EMIS	Education Management Information System
ESCUP	Educational Support to Children in Underserved Populations
ESSS	Education Sector Support Secretariat
ESWG	Education Sector Working Group
EQAD	Education Quality Assurance Department
ESP	Education Strategic Plan
GER	Gross Enrolment Rate
GPI	Gender Parity Index

HEI	Higher Education Institution
HEQCIP	Higher Education Quality and Capacity Improvement Project
IBEC	Improved Basic Education in Cambodia Project
ICC	International Cooperation Cambodia
ICT	Information and Communication Technology
ILO	International Labour Organization
IO	International Organisation
JICA	Japan International Cooperation Agency
KAPE	Kampuchea Action to Promote Education
MDG	Millennium Development Goals
MENAP	Multilingual Education National Action Plan
MoAFF	Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries
MoEF	Ministry of Economy and Finance
MoEYS	Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport
MoWA	Ministry of Women's Affairs
MoH	Ministry of Health
MoLTV	Ministry of Labour and Vocational Training
MoP	Ministry of Planning
MoRD	Ministry of Rural Development
MTEF	Medium-Term Expenditure Framework
NCGP	National Council for Granting Professorship
NEA	National Employment Agency
NER	Net Enrolment Rate
NGO	Non-government Organisation
NGPRC	New Generation Pedagogical Research Center
NIE	National Institute of Education
NIS	National Institute of Statistics
NPRD	National Program for Reconstruction and Development
NSDP	National Strategic Development Plan
NTB	National Training Board
NTTI	National Technical Training Institute
OECD	Organisation for Economic and Cultural Development
PAI	Public Administrative Institution
PIRLS	Progress in International Reading Literacy Study
PISA-D	Programme for International Student Assessment for Development
POE	Provincial Office of Education
PPP	Public-Private-Partnerships
PSTTC	Preschool Teacher Training Centre
PTTC	Provincial Teacher Training Centre
PTC	Provincial Training Centre
RTC	Regional Training Center
RTTC	Regional Teacher Training Center
TIMSS	Trends in Mathematics and Science Study
RGC	Royal Government of Cambodia

RUPP	Royal University of Phnom Penh
SBM	School-based Management
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal
SEA-PLM	Southeast Asia Primary Learning Metrics
SNCE	Supreme National Council of Education
SES	Socioeconomic Status
SRS	Secondary Resource Schools
STEM	Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics
TEC	Teacher Education College
TEPS	Teacher Education Provider Standard
TTC	Teacher Training Centre
TTI	Technical Training Institute
TVET	Technical and Vocational Education and Training
SIDA	Swedish International Development Agency
SNEC	Supreme National Economic Council
UN	United Nations
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNTAC	United Nations Transitional Authority of Cambodia
VSO	Volunteer Service Overseas
WB	The World Bank
WEF	World Education Forum

Contents

Contributors

Luise Ahrens received her PhD from Fordham University, USA. Her research areas have centred around higher education issues in Southeast Asia. Until her return to the United States, she worked at the Royal University of Phnom Penh. For 25 years, she supported the reform of higher education at that institution and throughout Cambodia.

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Chapter 1
Education in Cambodia: An Overview

Vincent McNamara and Martin Hayden

This chapter presents an overview of the education system in Cambodia. It also serves to introduce the other 15 chapters in this book. The chapter begins with a brief account of the country setting. The regulatory context for education in Cambodia is then outlined. Next, some crucial challenges are summarised. Finally, each of the chapters in the book is introduced.

1.1 Country Setting

Cambodia is one of Southeast Asia's most youthful, least urbanised, and most culturally homogeneous countries. About one-third of the country's population of 16.5 million are children under the age of 16 (The World Bank [WB], 2021); three-quarters of all Cambodians live in rural areas (WB, 2021); and nearly all (90%) Cambodians are ethnically Khmer (Open Development Cambodia, 2016). Other ethnic groups include Vietnamese, Chinese, Cham, and indigenous peoples, but only the Cham and the indigenous peoples are officially recognised as ethnic minorities.

Cambodia is also one of Southeast Asia's poorest countries. In 2019, gross domestic product per capita, adjusted for purchasing power parity, stood at only $4583 in US dollars, which was well below the levels for the country's immediate neighbours, Laos ($8172), Vietnam ($8397), and Thailand ($19,276) (WB, 2021).

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Poverty affects about 13% of the population (WB, 2021) and is especially prevalent amongst ethnic minority groups. Until 2020, when the global pandemic struck, the Cambodian economy was growing strongly at an average of 7% per year. This growth rate contributed significantly to improvements in the country's human development indicators, including the expected years of schooling for young people. Still, these indicators continue to lag those for all but one of the other Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) member states (United Nations Development Programme [UNDP], 2021). In 2015, Cambodia reached lower-middle-income status on the World Bank's classification of developing economies. The next development milestone is upper-middle-income status, which the Government aspires to achieve by 2030.

Cambodia's recent history is tragic. In 1953, after achieving independence from France, the country experienced a tide of post-independence optimism that gave rise to wide-ranging social and economic reform. By the late 1960s, however, the optimism was beginning to disappear. Various reforms were becoming too difficult to fund, and the shadow of an escalating civil war in neighbouring Vietnam gave rise to increasing political instability in Cambodia. A pro-Western coup d'état in 1970 tipped the country into civil war. The Khmer Rouge, a pro-communist guerrilla movement, progressively took control of the countryside and then, in 1975, of Phnom Penh, the national capital. The Khmer Rouge declared Year Zero in April 1975. The brutal restructuring of Cambodian society that followed led to the decimation of about one-quarter of the population, whether through execution, starvation, or illness. A disproportionate number of the victims came from the urbanised and more educated classes. In 1979, Vietnam forcibly removed the Khmer Rouge, but civil war flared for much of the following decade. Finally, in 1989, Vietnam withdrew from Cambodia, leaving behind a fragile political situation. Peace accords intended to end the internal conflict were signed in 1991, leading to the first democratic election in 1993. The task of rebuilding Cambodia could then begin in earnest.

Until recently, the country's education system has not fared well. The country's education system had not prospered under French colonial rule but was beginning to show signs of vigour during the late 1960s. It was then wholly destroyed by the Khmer Rouge. As Ayres (2000) records, the Khmer Rouge turned schools into "prisons, pigsties, or storage sheds" (p. 450). By 1980, 75–80% of the country's teachers and higher education students had been killed or had fled the country (Collins, 2009, p. 192). Vietnamese authorities sought to rebuild the education system along Soviet lines, but a lack of teachers and infrastructure made progress difficult. It was not until the formation of a national government in 1993 that the education system's redevelopment could properly begin. The story of this redevelopment provides the unifying theme for the chapters in this book.

1.2 The Regulatory Context

The *Education Law* of 2007 provides the legal foundation for the regulation of the national education system. The Law prescribed a structure for the system and authorised the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports (MoEYS) to promulgate rules and principles for its establishment and administration. The system's structure has the following components: early childcare and childhood education; general education (primary, grades 1–6; lower-secondary, grades 7–9; upper-secondary, grades 10–12); technical and vocational education and training; and higher education. In addition, the Law proclaimed, ambitiously at the time, that "Every citizen has the right to access quality education of at least nine years in public schools free of charge" (Article 31).

A feature of the Law was the importance it appeared to attach to creating a Supreme National Council of Education (SNCE),[1] chaired by the Prime Minister, responsible for developing policy proposals, devising long-term strategies, and evaluating the performance of the sectors in the education system. In 2009, a draft Royal Decree that sought to create the SNCE was prepared, but the matter subsequently lapsed. So instead, MoEYS continued to be primarily responsible for setting priorities and devising plans for the education system. This process involves producing five-yearly *National Strategic Development Plans* (NSDPs) that set broad strategic directions and priorities for national socioeconomic development. Coinciding with these NSDPs, MoEYS issues five-yearly *Education Strategic Plans* (ESPs). The current ESP covers the period from 2019 to 2023 (MoEYS, 2019a).

MoEYS is a relatively large entity within the Government of Cambodia. In 2019, it had 7 directorates, 37 line departments, 25 provincial offices, and 197 district offices (MoEYS, 2019b, p. 9). One directorate has responsibility for general education (the preschool and school sectors), and another has responsibility for the higher education sector. There is one provincial office per province/municipality. These offices are responsible for implementing national policies, developing plans for future development, and reporting data to the Ministry. District offices provide a direct interface between MoEYS and school management committees regarding the preparation, implementation, and monitoring of school development plans. Technical and vocational education and training is now essentially a responsibility of the Ministry of Labour and Vocational Training (MoLVT). Sixteen different ministries, including MoEYS, exercise line-management responsibility for public higher education institutions. MoEYS provides oversight of private universities, which account for about 50% of all higher education students.

[1] Referred to in translations of the Law as the National Supreme Council of Education, but most authoritative sources refer to this body as the SNCE.

1.3 Contemporary Challenges

The redevelopment of the national education system since the early 1990s has, in some respects, been remarkably successful. The primary education sector's net enrolment rate reached 92.4% in 2018 (MoEYS, 2021), representing a vast improvement from the situation in the early 1990s. Gross enrolment rates in 2018 for the lower- and upper-secondary sub-sectors stood at 61.1% and 31.2%, respectively (MoEYS, 2021), which also represented a significant improvement over the past two decades. In 2019, the pre-primary education sector's net enrolment rate was 24% (UNESCO, 2020). Though low, it was steadily growing. The gross enrolment rate for all forms of tertiary education (including higher education) was 14.7% in 2018 (UNESCO, 2020), which was low but significantly higher than in the early 2000s.

In other respects, though, the system has not been doing so well. Its most significant challenge concerns quality. There is much evidence to suggest that, in general, Cambodian schools are not equipping students sufficiently with the knowledge and skills required to be competitive in a global context. The results of a well-established national assessment process, first introduced in 2006, show, for example, that Cambodian school students are consistently under-performing against national educational standards for different grade levels in the school sector. *Cambodia's Education 2030 Roadmap* (MoEYS, 2019b) acknowledged this fact. It reported that:

> Early Grade Reading Assessments (EGRA) conducted in 2010 and 2012 suggest that children in Cambodia are not adequately prepared for primary schooling. In the 2012 EGRA test, half of grade 1 students could not recognise any letter and two-thirds could not read any familiar word. Likewise, half of grade 2 students were unable to read a familiar word. Similarly, of the total grade 3 children who took the Khmer and Math tests in 2012 only 54.1% and 48% answered correctly respectively. The assessment conducted in 2014 was even more disappointing as only 35.2% of the total grade 3 children taking the Khmer test demonstrated correct performance. The pattern of under-performance is also found among the 6th graders. Only 45.7% of the total grade 6 children who took the test in Khmer responded correctly whereas in Math only 43.4% did so in 2013. (p. 12)

International reviews of student performance, including the OECD's Programme for International Student Assessment for Development (PISA-D) survey in 2017 and the ASEAN-endorsed Southeast Asia Primary Learning Metrics (SEA-PLM) survey in 2019, confirm the pattern. The PISA-D results were based on the performance of a nationally representative sample group of 15-year-olds on globally referenced tests of proficiency in reading, science, and mathematics. They showed that a remarkably high proportion (over 90%) of the students surveyed performed below a baseline level of proficiency across the three tests in question (MoEYS, 2018, p. 28). Moreover, average performance on the tests also fell significantly below the ASEAN region's average. Of additional concern was that only 2% of 15-year-olds in Cambodia demonstrated proficiency levels equivalent to average performance levels across the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Cultural Development (OECD) group of member countries (p. 30).

Fifteen-year-olds attending rural schools in Cambodia were, on average, the lowest-performing students on the PISA-D tests. The advantage experienced by

students at urban schools, compared with rural schools, equated to more than a full year of schooling. As documented in the survey report, "If they [students in rural schools] were, for example, in grade 10, their abilities were likely equivalent to those of grade 9 students [in urban schools] or even below that" (MoEYS, 2018, p. 43). Rural students attached as much importance as urban students to school and learning (p. 62), most likely because they were happy to obtain an education. However, they were not getting access to an equivalent quality of educational experience. They tended, for example, to have fewer and less well-qualified teachers, less adequate school facilities, and fewer instructional materials (p. 67).

The PISA-D survey also found that 15-year-olds in Cambodia had exceptionally high grade-level repetition rates (MoEYS, 2018, p. 21). As many as 29% of the participating students reported that they had already repeated at least one grade level. Comparable rates for Thailand and Vietnam were 6% and 7%, respectively. As observed in the PISA-D report, "Grade repetition is often unfair and is always costly, both for individual students who suffer from the stigma and for school systems as a whole" (p. 22). In addition, boys were 1.4 times more likely than girls to have repeated a grade (p. 22).

A matter not yet adequately addressed in the research literature concerns how the complexity of the Khmer script may inhibit young people's academic progress in schools in Cambodia. A vast amount of research shows how critical early literacy skills are to subsequent academic success. If there is generally a delay in developing literacy skills by children in Cambodia because of the elaborate nature of the Khmer script, then this may adversely impact their performance in surveys such as PISA-D, in which much of the focus is on international comparisons of academic proficiency skills.

Another significant challenge concerns the attainment of equity. Recent official documents, including the *ESP for 2019 to 2023* (MoEYS, 2019a), the *2030 Roadmap* (2019b), and the *Policy on Higher Education Vision 2030* (MoEYS, 2014), have emphasised the importance of achieving more equitable access to educational opportunities. However, policy documents do not provide much detail about the scope of the problem, perhaps because of the limitations of official information management systems (MoEYS, 2019a, p. 53). There is ample evidence from survey sources, though, that equity is a severe problem for Cambodia's education system. The PISA-D survey results, for example, indicated clearly that young people from less advantaged home backgrounds performed more poorly on the reading, science, and mathematics proficiency tests. The gap was not as comprehensive as might have been anticipated (MOEYS, 2018, p. 38). Still, there was a gap. Students from the least advantaged home backgrounds were also shown to have little likelihood of ever achieving a baseline reading and mathematics proficiency level.

Test performance differences were also evident according to the type of school attended, whether public or private (MoEYS, 2018, pp. 44–45). The performance gap here, especially in mathematics and reading, was equivalent to about 2 years of schooling. In other words, the average proficiency levels of grade 10 students in public schools were about the same as the average proficiency levels of grade

8 students in private schools. When socioeconomic status was allowed for, the size of this gap was markedly reduced, confirming that private schools were more likely to be attended by students from more socially, educationally, and economically advantaged homes. Private schools are becoming a more substantial presence in the preschool and school sectors in Cambodia. By 2018, private preschools enrolled about 11% of all 5-year-olds; private primary schools enrolled 6.37% of the primary school population; and private secondary schools enrolled 21.7% of the secondary school population (MoEYS, 2021). As noted earlier, private universities now account for about 50% of all higher education students.

A third significant challenge concerns the development of effective leadership and management in the education system. According to *Cambodia's Education 2030 Roadmap* (MoEYS, 2019b), there are sector-by-sector challenges in this regard. Access and quality issues in the preschool sector were said to be affected by, amongst other things, a weak policy framework, poor coordination, and inadequate monitoring (p. 11). Poor student assessment results in the primary education sector were attributed to, amongst other things, the loss of teaching hours in schools because of teacher absenteeism and fewer classroom contact hours during teaching days—"often fueled by weak management and leadership capacities" (p. 12). In the technical and vocational education and training sector, continuous coordination was reported to be absent. Furthermore, it was claimed that training needs were not sufficiently well-identified. There was also inadequate provision for non-formal training and a gap in achieving a more strategic and coordinated relationship between this sector and the secondary education sector (p. 14). The main challenges identified in the higher education sector were unplanned and uncoordinated growth without any long-term strategic policy direction. Management by multiple ministries and agencies also made it difficult to achieve quality control, share information, and avoid administrative overlap (p. 15).

There is not much recent literature about leadership and management issues in either the school or the technical and vocational education and training sectors in Cambodia. The absence of much reporting about the topic could indicate significant improvements in these sectors, possibly because of an increased focus on inspection in the school sector and a policy of eliminating corruption. Issues reported in the past have included the absence of a climate of accountability (Tan, 2007, p. 22), difficulty ensuring transparency and meritocracy (Tan, 2007, p. 22), the highly centralised manner of introducing reform initiatives (Keng, 2009, p. 146), an absence of genuine power-sharing (Pellini, 2005), the lack of parent participation in school management decision-making (Shoraku, 2008, p. 13), and the prevalence of different types of corruption (Brehm, 2016; Hayden & Martin, 2011). These issues seem unlikely to have disappeared but are certainly now much less frequently reported. The ongoing implementation of a results-based approach to resource allocation may well also be having a positive impact. As described in *Cambodia's Education 2030 Roadmap* (MoEYS, 2019b), it will establish a clear link between the availability of financial resources and the attainment of results in areas of staff development, the enforcement of performance standards, capacity development, and improvements in stakeholder engagement (p. 11).

Un and Sok (2018) provide a comprehensive account of current leadership and management issues in the higher education sector. They report on governance fragmentation because 16 different ministries and central agencies manage public higher education institutions. They also comment on the absence of a comprehensive information management system for the sector, limiting the pursuit of efficiency and effectiveness. Deficiencies in the capacity of the Accreditation Committee of Cambodia (ACC) to implement adequate external quality assurance and accreditation processes are also identified. Other concerns include the highly centralised and bureaucratic process for appointing professors, the lack of much participation in institutional governance by non-state stakeholders, and the overall rigidity of institutional governance and management systems. Other scholars (Ngoy et al., 2019; Sen & Ros, 2013; Touch et al., 2013; Wan et al., 2018) confirm the existence of these issues, whether in whole or in part.

1.4 About This Book

This book seeks to provide a comprehensive overview of education in Cambodia. Unfortunately, there is little in-depth scholarly material currently available to an international readership concerning the whole of Cambodia's education system. The book addresses this gap. It also provides a point of reference for future scholars interested in appraising Cambodia's progress in expanding, diversifying, and improving its national education system.

The book has three parts. The first part concerns sector-level issues. The second addresses cross-sectoral and policy-related matters. Finally, the third part focuses on stakeholder inclusion issues.

The five chapters in the first part of the book provide insights regarding each of the five declared sectors in Cambodia's education system. *Sokha Om* (Chap. 2) presents a comprehensive analysis of the early childhood sector, which is expanding steadily, but badly needs a well-defined and firmly enforced set of quality standards. *Fata No* and *Say Sok* (Chap. 3) review the primary education sector's significant achievements since the early 2000s. However, they also observe that quality standards need to be better enforced. *Kurt Bredenberg* (Chap. 4) identifies two reform cycles since 2000 in the secondary education sector, reporting that each has been successful in different ways, the first by addressing access and the second by addressing educational quality and school governance. He remarks that future progress with reform will require sustained leadership drive from a high level within MoEYS. *Perry Daroesman* (Chap. 5) reviews the historical development and current state of the technical and vocational education and training sector, observing its fragility over an extended period and expressing concern about its continuing reliance on funds obtained from grants and multilateral loans. *Vicheth Sen* (Chap. 6) addresses the reform of governance, quality, and funding in the higher education sector, explaining that reform in the sector needs to be better understood

by considering traditional cultural values concerning social hierarchy and the nature of leadership.

The second part of the book has eight chapters. Five of these chapters focus on cross-sectoral issues. The remaining three chapters focus more on policy-related issues, with each chapter addressing the higher education sector.

The cross-sectoral issues concern teacher education, national assessment, school leadership, capacity development, and policy-based budgeting. *Visal Sot*, *Chan Oeurn Chey*, and *Sitha Chhinh* (Chap. 7) provide an extensive review of the state of teacher training in Cambodia, observing that, despite remarkable improvement over the past 20 years, three-quarters of all newly trained teachers entering the profession each year do so without having attained a degree-level qualification. *Jeffery Marshall* and *Chinna Ung* (Chap. 8) report in detail on Cambodia's experience over 10 years with the national assessment of student achievement levels, noting the extent to which student achievement levels over that period have generally failed to meet the standards prescribed by the national curriculum. *Andrew Jones* and *Michael Nagel* (Chap. 9) review the role of the school principal, referred to locally as the school director. Their account suggests a growing recognition in Cambodia of the importance of having effective school leadership and management. *Jenny Pearson* (Chap. 10) identifies the challenges for education reform in Cambodia by examining cultural perspectives relevant to implementing a child-friendly school policy adopted by the Government. *Vincent Vire*, *Simeth Beng*, and *Tsuyoshi Fukao* (Chap. 11) report on developing policy-based budgeting for the education sector. This development followed a discovery that, from 2007 to 2013, MoEYS was receiving a smaller budget than warranted and spending less than it had been allocated, with obvious adverse consequences for the education system.

The policy-oriented issues addressed include the development discourse shaping higher education policy, the reform agenda for public universities in Cambodia, and the ACC's accreditation and quality assurance approach. *Leang Un* and *Say Sok* (Chap. 12) throw light on how a prevailing discourse of economic liberalism has underpinned the process of policy development and implementation in Cambodia's higher education sector to the present day. They appeal for an approach that focuses more directly on expressed community needs. Next, *Chet Chealy*, *David Ford*, and *Luise Ahrens* (Chap. 13) report how the Royal University of Phnom Penh (RUPP), one of the most established universities in Cambodia, has been responding to an eight-point reform agenda issued by MoEYS for improving quality across the higher education sector. Their account provides valuable insights regarding the obstacles to reform in the sector. Finally, *Chhang Rath* and *Nary Tao* (Chap. 14) show how the ACC, which has a brief to conduct institutional and programme-level reviews across the higher education sector, performed its role when implementing a comprehensive review of graduate schools in the higher education sector.

The third part of the book has two chapters, each addressing an issue concerning stakeholder inclusion. *Rinna Bunry* and *Karen Walker* (Chap. 15) address the topic of women's access to and retention in the higher education sector, observing that, while there have been significant improvements since the early 2000s, some deeply entrenched cultural attitudes, beliefs, and social customs continue to limit the

availability of educational opportunities for women. *Jan Noorlander* (Chap. 16) then reports on a highly successful initiative to address disadvantaged ethnic minority groups' needs by establishing a multilingual education programme.

1.5 Concluding Remarks

Cambodia's education system has done well in recovering from its decimation following Year Zero. It now has a significant challenge ahead in seeking to achieve international standards of provision. As recognised by the Government, the focus must switch from improving access to attaining equity and quality. The system needs to be better funded. It also must continue to be well-led at a ministerial level. Shifting a national education system's culture is a significant undertaking. The effort required is enormous. The cost of failure would be immense.

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Part I
Issues at the Sector Level

Chapter 2
Early Childhood Education in Cambodia: Current Challenges and Development Trends

Sokha Om

2.1 Introduction

Early childhood education (ECE), which includes both early childhood care and preschool education, provides children with an essential foundation for success in life. As Erikson (1950, 1968), an acclaimed theorist of childhood development, has explained, the preschool years are critical to the subsequent intellectual, social, psychological and physical development of a child. These are years in which exploration of the world occurs through engagement in playful activities intended to foster humour, empathy, confidence and resilience. They are also years that lay the groundwork for morality, citizenship, economic development, equity and social inclusiveness. They enable children to become better prepared for primary school and, hence, to succeed in subsequent education levels (Taylor, 2015).

ECE is of immense importance to Cambodia, a country with one of the most youthful population profiles in the ASEAN region (UNICEF, 2019). About one-third of all Cambodians are below 15 years of age. In 2019, there were almost 1 million 3- to 5-year-olds (6.2% of the national population) in Cambodia. This number will increase to about 1.1 million by 2030 (Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport [MoEYS], 2019a, p. 47). These young people are pivotal to the country's future development and sustainability. They require access to a good quality of ECE that enables them to reach their highest potential. Providing for these children is a responsibility of the family, the education system and the Government. The goal must be that they experience adequate social welfare, good healthcare and nutrition and freedom from all forms of violence (MoEYS, 2019a, p. 24).

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This chapter presents an analysis of the current state of ECE in Cambodia. It also addresses challenges and development trends for the sector, and it discusses how Cambodia can develop capacity, access and excellence within the sector over coming years. The chapter concludes with a review of viable strategies for achieving defined sector development goals.

2.2 The Policy Context

Cambodia's Constitution declares that: "The State shall protect and promote citizens' rights to quality education at all levels and shall take all measures, step by step, to make quality education available to all the citizens ..." (Article 65). The *Education Law* further prescribes that:

> Every citizen has the right to access [a quality] education of at least nine years in public schools free of charge. The Ministry in charge of education [MoEYS] shall gradually prepare the policy and strategic plans to ensure that all citizens obtain [a quality] education as stipulated by this law. (Royal Government of Cambodia [RGC], 2007, Article 31)

In 2010, a significant turning point for ECE in Cambodia was the policy statement that: "All Cambodian children, from conception to age under six, especially disadvantaged, vulnerable and poor children, shall be provided with care and development services in line with the Constitution of the Kingdom of Cambodia" (Council of Ministers, 2010, p. 3). Subsequent policy development concerning the educational needs of preschool children has proceeded in light of this statement.

Policy documents making explicit reference to the importance of the ECE sector include the *National Strategic Development Plan Update 2009–2013* (RGC, 2010); *The Organization and Functioning of the National Committee for Early Childhood Care and Development* (RGC, 2013); the *Sub-Decree on the Organization and Functioning of the General Secretariat of the National Committee for Early Childhood Care and Development* (RGC, 2013); the *Education Strategic Plan 2014–2018* (MoEYS, 2014); the *National Action Plan on Early Childhood Care and Education 2014–2018* (RGC, 2014); and the *Multilingual Education National Action Plan 2014–2018 and 2019–2023* (MoEYS, 2015, 2019b). More recently, in the *Education Strategic Plan 2019–2023* (MoEYS, 2019c, p. 15), the Government endorsed the importance of ensuring that all children should have access to ECE. Notably, the current *National Policy on Child Protection System, 2019–2029,* spells out additional roles for MoEYS, including the need to raise broader awareness of children's treatment and promote child protection research (Cambodia National Council for Children [CNCC], 2020).

Developing the ECE sector is not, however, a new priority for Cambodia. Cambodia ratified the *Convention on the Rights of the Child* in 1992. Then, from 2003 to 2015, the country made good progress in implementing its *Education for All* national plan (RGC, 2003, 2019a, p. 4). Cambodia is now committed to achieving targets by 2030 that are specified under Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4), as

articulated by the United Nations (United Nations Development Programme [UNDP], 2020). Various of these targets relate directly or indirectly to the ECE sector. In particular, it is intended that by 2030 "all girls and boys in Cambodia will have access to quality early childhood development, care and preprimary education so that they are ready for primary education" (UNDP, 2020). As is often the case in Cambodia, though, the gap between aspirations and achievements can be significant, principally because of the limited availability of resources, weak policy frameworks and institutional capacity constraints (MoEYS, 2019a, 2019c).

2.3 Profile of the Sector

ECE in Cambodia provides for 3- to 5-year-olds. There are three age-related program levels, delivered across three types of schools, that is, public preschools, private preschools and community-based preschools. Table 2.1 shows the number of children by age level attending one or other of the three types of preschools. As shown in Table 2.1, public preschools account for 76% of all ECE enrolments; private preschools account for 11%; and community-based preschools account for 13%.

Table 2.2 shows the current number of preschools and preschool classes, according to the different preschool types. Public preschool programs generally take place in classrooms located at primary schools. Responsibility for their management lies with the Department of Early Childhood Education (DECE) within MoEYS. With support from development partners, this Department plays a critical role by providing sufficient inputs in human, technical, financial, physical and

Table 2.1 Enrolments in ECE by age and type of preschool, 2019–2020

	3-year-old children	4-year-old children	5-year-old children
Type of preschool	Total	Total	Total
Public preschool	16,763	67,864	147,580
Private preschool	11,289	15,711	21,072
Community-based preschool	17,419	29,824	25,171
Total	45,471	113,399	193,823

Source: MoEYS (2020)

Table 2.2 Number of preschools and preschool classes by type of preschool, 2019–2020

Type of preschools	Number of preschools	Number of classes
Public preschool	4409	7761
Private preschool	594	2596
Community-based preschool	3064	3197
Total	8067	13,554

Source: MoEYS (2020)

Table 2.3 Number of ECE personnel in the academic year 2019–2020

	Early childhood education staff	
Type of preschool	Total	Female (%)
Public preschool	5678	94.85
Private preschool	5215	79.13
Community-based preschool	3264	96.96
Total	14,157	89.55

Source: MoEYS (2020)

material resources. It also manages academic (curriculum, teaching and learning) and administrative matters.

In contrast, private preschool programs are offered entirely on a fee-paying basis and managed by a school's owners. In general, these programs are well-resourced. They are also the most likely to have access to well-qualified national and international teachers. The number of community-based preschools is relatively large. Still, these preschools are generally quite small, with classes often conducted in private homes or shelters provided by the community, primary schools or pagodas. Community-based preschools are mainly located in rural and peri-urban areas where access to public or private preschools is difficult. There are many different types of community-based preschool programs, each created to respond to the needs of children living in a local geographical area. There are, for example, community-based preschools that meet the needs of children in flooded areas. Other community-based preschools serve ethnic-minority populations. Local governments (known as commune councils) are responsible for managing community-based preschools. Development partners and international non-government organisations have played a vital role in supporting these preschools. Mobile preschools have proven to be especially useful in helping preschool participation by children whose parents are affected by seasonal employment opportunities. In as many as 303 community-based preschools and 545 public preschools, there are now programs available to meet the learning needs of children with disabilities (MoEYS, 2020).

There are also home-based parenting programs. These are established and supported by commune councils. Their primary aim is to educate parents about taking care of their children's health and well-being. These programs also allow children living in rural and disadvantaged areas to participate in home-based early learning activities. There are currently 69,289 children (51% female) and 67,027 parents, most of whom are female, participating in home-based programs (MoEYS, 2020, p. 33).

There are currently 11,799 members of teaching staff, and 2358 members of non-teaching staff members, in the ECE sector. As shown in Table 2.3, it is primarily a female workforce. Considering the number of preschools (as shown in Table 2.1), public preschools have an average of 1.3 staff members per preschool, and community-based preschools have an average of 1.1 staff members per preschool. In contrast, private preschools have an average of 8.8 staff members per preschool.

The number of preschool teachers continues to increase annually. In 2019–2020, another 566 preschool teachers found employment. As many as 15,162 preschool teachers will likely be required by 2023 (MoEYS, 2019a).

Access to ECE continues to widen in Cambodia. In 2013, approximately 19% of all children below 6 years of age participated in one form or other of ECE. By 2016, the proportion had increased to about 22% (MoEYS, 2017). Recent figures indicate that this trend is being maintained (MoEYS, 2020), with a relatively even proportion of boys and girls participating in ECE.

Overcoming equity barriers to access continues to be an important public policy goal. To this end, the national objective is that, by 2030, all 3- to 5-year-olds should have completed a preschool year before commencing grade 1 of primary school. In 2019–2020, the proportion of grade 1 students who had completed 1 year of preschool stood at 74.5% (MoEYS, 2019a, p. 25). On present trends, this proportion will reach 82.8% by 2030 (MoEYS, 2019a, p. 25).

2.4 Challenges for the Sector

Empirical and anecdotal evidence indicates that there has been an enormous investment over recent decades of effort, resources and care by many stakeholders in the ECE sector. Cambodia continues, however, to struggle with achieving the quantity and quality of ECE provision required to meet national needs. Most recently, in a review of progress made by the sector, significant new were identified:

> Quality of [ECE] remain[s] major concern of the MoEYS. Many of these access and quality related to challenges can be attributed to the lack of appropriately trained and qualified teachers/early childhood educators, limited regulation and monitoring institutional and staff capacities in various [early childhood] settings, insufficient financing, weak policy framework, poor coordination among the various sectors, inadequate monitoring, and lack of adequate learning materials. (MoEYS, 2019a, p. 11)

These areas of concern are now addressed in more detail.

2.4.1 Limited Personnel Capacity

The quality of ECE programs in Cambodia relies heavily on having personnel with well-developed skills and knowledge. Providing more training programs for these personnel and parents and guardians was set as a fundamental policy goal for the sector in 2010 (Council of Ministers, 2010). To date, however, personnel capacity remains a significant challenge. There is generally a shortage of qualified ECE teachers (Om et al., 2020; MoEYS, 2019a, 2019c; Tandon & Fukao, 2015). The problem is especially acute for community-based multilingual preschools, where a severe teacher shortage has significantly impaired expansion (Om et al., 2020; Ball & Smith, 2019). It is also difficult to retain high-performing personnel because

employment in the sector is not well-remunerated and lacks social status (MoEYS, 2020). There is also a problem with the variable quality of teachers employed in the sector. Different types of preschools have different qualification requirements. Differences also exist in terms of the resources available to support teacher professional development. In this regard, private preschools, especially if they have an international connection, are better placed because they can set demanding selection criteria for the appointment of teachers.

To become a public preschool teacher, a candidate must complete a 2-year pre-service training program at the Preschool Teacher Training Centre (PSTTC). Admission is open to any student who has completed the grade 12 national examinations. Community-based preschools and home-based programs do not have the same pre-service training requirements. Community-based preschool teachers are most likely to have undertaken only a short pre-service training program before commencing as a teacher. In general, those admitted to this pre-service training program will not have completed the grade 12 national examinations. Preparation for the delivery of home-based programs is organised locally by parents, in some cases within the framework of guidelines issued by Core Mothers, a program sponsored by UNICEF. MoEYS provides limited support with training for parents conducting home-based programs.

A shortage of qualified staff members also constrains the PSTTC. There are, in general, an insufficient number of teacher trainers with specialised knowledge in ECE and with postgraduate qualifications in teacher education. The PSTTC is affected by the same conditions that contribute to losing high-performing ECE teachers: poor remuneration and the lack of much social status.

There is also a gap in the availability of well-qualified and experienced preschool managers. Strengthening leadership and management at all levels within the education system has been designated a priority in successive MoEYS strategic planning documents (MoEYS, 2014, 2019c). Preschool managers are now required to have better leadership and management skills than ever before because of the sector's expansion. Still, there continues to be a severe shortage of personnel with well-developed skills (MoEYS, 2019a). Effective preschool management remains, therefore, a significant concern for the sector. Community-based preschool programs are especially disadvantaged because they are managed by commune councils that may have little or no understanding of ECE programs and few skills in managing personnel and resources. Preschool programs for ethnic minority groups are similarly disadvantaged in this regard (Om et al., 2020).

2.4.2 Program Development and Management

To date, ECE programs lack coherence and have not been systematically developed and implemented. Their implementation is subject to variations in socioeconomic conditions and the availability of resources across the country. Different models of ECE provision exist between public and private preschools and between

community-based and home-based models. Programs delivered also vary according to particular geographic circumstances and social needs. In general, there is a lack of coherence in how different government levels participate in the management of preschools. Public preschools are under the control and supervision of the DECE within MoEYS. They receive human resources, finance and technical support from MoEYS. Private preschools rely entirely on their owners. Though nominally conducted under the auspices of MoEYS, community-based preschools and home-based parenting programs are effectively managed and supported by commune councils, with support from local community groups and international non-government organisations.

Limited resources and an inadequate institutional capacity to effectively manage entire public preschool programs present challenges for the sector. Community-based preschools, which depend on commune-level funds, are created to respond to the needs of children living in rural and remote geographical areas. To receive technical, financial and human resource support from MoEYS, they must undergo an assessment process whereby they are evaluated across six areas: planning, monitoring and evaluation; teaching and learning; general management; reporting and feedback; outdoor playground and equipment; and utilities and furniture (MoEYS, 2018). If they fail the assessment, they do not become standard community-based preschools and do not have access to financial and other forms of support from MoEYS. Therefore, these preschools are very poorly placed in terms of how they can function (Om et al., 2020; Ball & Smith, 2019). Their situation persists for as long as there is a lack of funds to enable them to be upgraded.

2.4.3 Preschool Teacher Training

As reported earlier, ECE teacher training is a responsibility of the PSTTC, which is limited in its capacity to access qualified and experienced preschool teacher educators. Preschool teacher training programs have also been adversely affected by variations in the availability of financial resources. Two modalities of preschool teacher training, short-term and long-term, have been in place since the 1980s. The standards required for admission to long-term teacher training programs have changed markedly since the mid-1980s. From 1987 to 1994, preschool teacher candidates were required to complete grade 8 in school and then undertake a 1-year training program at one of the PSTTCs or in the Faculty of Pedagogy (now the National Institute of Education). From 1995 to 1997, the requirement for admission to this program was the completion of grade 11. From 1997 to 2004, the condition was the completion of grade 12. Currently, the requirement to be a preschool teacher is the successful completion of grade 12, together with success in passing an entrance examination, and then the successful completion of a 2-year (full-time) pre-service training program. Newly graduated teachers must then spend 1 year teaching in a public preschool before being officially recognised as a public preschool teacher.

Across the education system, there are currently 16 Provincial Teacher Training Centres responsible for training primary teachers, four Regional Training Centres responsible for training lower-secondary teachers, two Teacher Education Colleges responsible for training primary and lower-secondary teachers and one institution, the National Institute of Education, responsible for training upper-secondary teachers. There is only one institution, the PSTTC, responsible for training preschool teachers. The number of teacher candidates able to be accepted by this institution is only 200 per year. As such, the PSTTC cannot provide preschool teacher training at a level sufficient to meet the current critical level of need.

2.4.4 Financial Support

The shortfall in financial resources able to be invested in ECE over the period up to 2030 represents a critical challenge for the sector. It has implications for Cambodia's ability to achieve various targets under its Sustainable Development Goal for quality education (Goal 4) by 2030. Public preschools rely mainly, if not entirely, on public financial support. The only other source of financial support is the development partner community. The Government committed $915 million in US dollars to the entire education system in 2019, and the system will receive as much as $1586 million annually by 2030. Funding gaps persist, however. In 2019, the education system's funding gap was estimated to be $20 million, while by 2030 it is projected to be $45 million (MoEYS, 2019a, pp. 49–50).

In 2016, the total operational allocation to the ECE sector was $69.52 million, representing 9.1% of the total education budget. By 2019, the figure had increased to $93.60 million. Financial projections indicate the required funding for program development and operation will keep rising over the coming years, to $115.65 million in 2023, $143.91 million in 2028 and $155.43 million in 2030 (MoEYS, 2019a, p. 49).

The funds proposed to be invested in the ECE sector will be insufficient for capacity expansion purposes (MoEYS, 2019a). Public preschools, especially community-based preschools, require more funding support to upgrade their infrastructure and physical resources, learning and teaching materials and facilities. Also, new public preschools are needed to meet the growing number of children now being enrolled in ECE programs. Costs continue to grow, in which case the extent of the investment required to achieve growth in the sector must increase faster over the next decade.

2.4.5 Policy Gaps

Expanding the scale and quality of ECE is a long-term developmental goal for Cambodia. Over the past 15 years, Cambodia has demonstrated a strong

commitment to increasing ECE enrolment rates. However, achieving quality and equity in the sector has been difficult due to shortages of qualified staff, low instructional quality and severe financial constraints. The mid-term review of the *Education Strategic Plan 2014–2018* led to identifying three important policy priorities: strengthening infrastructure; improving curriculum and textbooks; and strengthening the quality of teacher training (MoEYS, 2016, p. 81). MoEYS also set aspirational enrolment targets for the ECE sector, to be achieved by 2017–2018. In an evaluation of the *Education Strategic Plan 2014–2018*, MoEYS reported that:

> Enrolment in [ECE] has been positive, but there are still challenges, such as poor nutrition in remote areas, limited home-based education programmes, multi-sector facilitating institutions, community preschools not meeting quality standards and a lack of pre-school teachers. Where there are pre-school teachers, many are not sufficiently trained. (MoEYS, 2019c, p. 12)

Statistical evidence pointed to continuing enrolment growth across the sector, but the quality of education in the sector has remained of significant concern to relevant stakeholders (MoEYS, 2019a, 2019c). Even where specific policies and development plans have been documented, there has been a lack of legal frameworks and intervention mechanisms to enforce implementation. Weaknesses in policy implementation across the whole system were also identified. These were attributed to factors that included limited functional capacities at an institutional level, poor alignment between regulatory documents and performance indicators, insufficient financing and inadequate monitoring and evaluation capabilities (MoEYS, 2019a).

The national policy on Early Childhood Care and Development identified significant roles and responsibilities for MoEYS in leading and supervising the ECE sector, especially concerning public institutions' development (Council of Ministers, 2010). To translate the national policy into action, MoEYS has recently spelled out critical policy interventions. The three new priorities for the ECE sector were declared to be increasing access to a quality, equitable and inclusive ECE service; improving the quality standards of preschools; and strengthening the capacity of early childhood leadership to give effect to school-based management (MoEYS, 2019c, p. 21). More specifically, MoEYS has committed to implementing an effective system of school-based management for public preschools. To this end, it is implementing the following initiatives: providing professional development on management and technical skills to school principals and teachers in the targeted preschools; granting more autonomy to school management committees to enable them to do their job responsibly and effectively; and strengthening the use of data management for preparing school development plans and providing school inputs (MoEYS, 2020).

However, various factors are slowing progress. There is a limited institutional capacity for coordination and supervision, resulting in incoherent and unsystematic management, together with the delay in incorporating all ECE programs into the formal education system. The gap between official aspirations and actual achievements in the sector remains wide because of inadequate facilities, insufficient teaching and learning materials and limited financial resources. Underinvestment

in the sector continues to be a critical challenge. Additionally, policy guidance on standards and frameworks for early childhood and service providers' quality and sustainability, curriculum and teaching methodologies, assessment methods and monitoring and evaluation are all not yet well-established and implemented (MoEYS, 2020).

2.5 The Way Forward

To realise the Government's vision for ECE by 2030, all relevant stakeholders need to resolve the sector's current challenges. First and foremost, there must be a strengthening of the institutional capacity of appropriate departments within MoEYS (Om et al., 2020; Ball & Smith, 2019). Limited capacity and ineffective and unsystematic management within the sector are matters of significant concern to stakeholders. These matters have drawn increasing attention to how to ensure effective program establishment and coordination across the country. A viable strategy is to reach an official agreement among all key stakeholders to designate specialised departments within MoEYS to manage all types of public ECE programs responsibly and effectively. To achieve this goal, development partners, aid agencies and international non-government organisations would need to shift effort from providing direct support to schools to providing direct support to the responsible departments. Once fully capable, these departments could assume leading and coordinating roles in managing entire public ECE program development and services by effectively implementing national laws, policies and strategic planning.

Second, school-based management implementation in public schools has been set as one of the strategic directions for achieving the national education vision for 2030. School-based management also applies in the ECE sector. MoEYS is working to develop institutional-level capacities by providing professional training on school leadership and direction to preschool directors and members of management committees. To date, 278 (65% females) of all preschool directors/vice directors have received professional training on effective school-based management practices (MoEYS, 2020). This training seeks to develop their competencies and professional skills.

Third, currently available resources and facilities are inadequate for ensuring a standard level of service and quality across the ECE sector. Resource constraints also limit prospects for expansion of the sector. The less-than-optimal learning environment because of limited resources also adversely affects teaching and caring for children. An investment in physical resource improvement needs to be made if there is to be a healthy and friendly learning environment, as well as to accommodate more children. Therefore, increasing the national budget for preschool program development and expansion is critical to the realisation of an effectively functioning ECE sector. Development partners have played a crucial role in the past by providing technical and financial support. Hopefully, this support will continue to be made available over the next decade. It is accepted that the Government will need to focus

on securing more external funding support from new and traditional sources if the ECE sector is to become capable of providing for the expanding needs of young children in Cambodia (MoEYS, 2019a, p. 50). In the meantime, the country needs to have smart investment strategies and transparent, effective, efficient resource management, especially given the national context in which resources are scarce.

Fourth, the national policy on ECE provides a regulatory framework for ensuring that children's growth and development (physical, emotional, psychomotor, psychological) are adequately addressed. MoEYS plays a critical role in the coordination and supervision of ECE program development and delivery and promoting positive treatment awareness and child protection research (CNCC, 2020). To accelerate national development goals, the quantity and quality of ECE research and development need to be strengthened. All related ECE research findings must be widely disseminated to relevant key stakeholders and the public at large. Empirical findings should also be used to inform decision-making, as well as for policy development and implementation in the sector.

Moreover, there is a need to have national laws and regulations on early childhood and protection that provide a legal instrument to ensure quality early childhood and service provision to children nationwide. Additionally, however, there is also an urgent need to "enhance the complementarity among policy initiatives to ensure better quality health service delivery, nutrition, early childhood development, education and social protection" (MoEYS, 2019a, p. 7). In line with the national policy and regulations, a national quality standard framework on ECE should be developed. Other national authorities/agencies would be required to be involved in this development if there is to be a national policy and quality assurance framework that applies uniformly across the sector.

Fifth, various additional regulatory frameworks are needed to ensure alignment between developments in the ECE sector and the policies and aspiration espoused in the *National Strategic Development Planning 2019–2023* (RGC, 2019b). Program benchmarking indicators for ECE need to focus on improving the program services and structures, teaching and learning materials, pedagogical approaches, learning objectives and assessment, monitoring and evaluation. Quality management of ECE service providers and preschool standards can only be ensured by implementing quality frameworks for ECE program development and operations.

Sixth, early childhood education practitioners need to have commitment and competencies in ECE and the professional skills required for teaching and providing service to children. Having a sufficient number of qualified ECE educators and professionals is critical for ECE development and expansion in Cambodia. Investment in human resource (i.e. preschool teachers, teacher trainers, preschool administrators) capacity development has emerged as the primary mechanism to accelerate progress in expanding ECE capacity to respond adequately to children's needs nationwide (MoEYS, 2020; Om et al., 2020). In-service training or capacity development related to children's social, emotional and physical development is essential to national needs. Additionally, there should be a broader awareness of the essence of ECE's contribution to the development of every child. Practitioners in the ECE sector require academic and professional skills development and recognition. The

quality of ECE is strongly determined by teachers and administrators' competencies, skills, commitment and values. Failure to attract and retain qualified teachers, teacher trainers and program managers/school heads will result in poor management and poor-quality ECE. The lack of professional and social recognition, and of the valuing of ECE professionals, together with a realisation of the difficulty they have surviving on low salaries, is a long-term problem that silently hinders the development of the sector. Therefore, the social and economic status of ECE educators and leaders must be promoted, and this objective must be set as one of the policy priorities for the sector.

Seventh, in Cambodia, the potential for increasing the number of qualified preschool teachers heavily depends on the country having to expand the quality and quantity of PSTTC capacity to respond to this critical need. Additionally, Provincial Teacher Training Centres and Regional Training Centres need also to provide pre-service preschool teacher training. Expanding the quantity and improving the quality of ECE services must be seen as interdependent, and these goals relate to the reform of teacher education in Cambodia. Investment in program establishment must aim to reach national quality standards and ensure comparable teacher training standards across the country. Educational program benchmarking, particularly in the academic areas of curriculum development, teaching and learning materials and program structures, should enable the setting of clear indicators of quality standards in early childhood teacher education. The development of the curriculum must involve creating tools to shape teacher trainees' competencies, skills, attitudes and values to match the children's learning and care needs. The curriculum contents should cover the main areas of child development: the social, emotional, psychomotor and physical learning needs of children; the nature of a play-based pedagogical approach; the creation of a safe, healthy and friendly learning environment; assessment techniques and skills; language development and learning; the use of information and telecommunication platforms; professional ethics and responsibilities; and practicum. Further, the curriculum of preschool teacher training must be aligned with preschool or service providers' needs to equip teacher students with the content knowledge, pedagogical skills and professional values relevant to employer needs (SEAMEO & UNESCO, 2016).

Eighth, Cambodia needs to develop preschool teacher standards to ensure effective teaching and services provision to children (Om et al., 2020). Teacher trainers need to have academic knowledge in early childhood care and education and professional skills in training (SEAMEO & UNESCO, 2016). Initially, teacher trainers need to have adequate knowledge competencies in early childhood care and education and past and on-going teaching experience in these areas – and they need professional training skills (SEAMEO & UNESCO, 2016). To ensure preschool teacher quality, countries such as the Philippines, Singapore, Laos and Malaysia have developed preschool teacher standards according to their national educational development goals and visions (SEAMEO INNOTECH, 2011). Although there are different teacher standards across the region, the common elements to be covered include subject and assessment knowledge, pedagogical skills, positive behaviour and attitudes towards the love and care of children, lifelong learning skills and professional ethics (SEAMEO INNOTECH, 2011).

Also, national preschool teacher standards need to be established and implemented as indicators of the teacher management system (i.e. recruitment, development, performance evaluation, promotion), teacher training program development and evaluation and institutional evaluation. Cambodia should observe other countries' best practices and adopt them as models for policy development and implementation. SEAMEO and UNESCO (2016) have recommended, for example, that countries in Asia need to set minimum standards for the length of preschool pre-service teacher training. For instance, minimum standards in Indonesia, the Philippines and Thailand now exist and require preschool teachers to have a university degree. In some countries, such as the Philippines, Brunei Darussalam, Malaysia and Thailand, preschool teaching candidates must pass a national examination to obtain a licence for licenses to practice as a preschool teacher.

Last but not least, SEAMEO and UNESCO (2016) have suggested that countries in Asia need to have systematic teacher training management systems that start "from initial recruitment through pre-service training, induction and CPD, [and that] are based on a clear set of professional standards or minimum qualification competencies" (p. 9). A systematic procedure of teacher development and management should begin with upgrading teacher qualification policies, recruitment, pre-service training, deployment, in-service training and continuous professional development (SEAMEO & UNESCO, 2016). Besides teacher training management, there needs to be an accreditation and licensing authority responsible for ensuring the quality of teacher training and early childhood education service providers (SEAMEO & UNESCO, 2016). Examples in the ASEAN region include the Early Childhood Development Agency in Singapore, the Teacher Council in Thailand, the Board for Competency Certification in Indonesia, the Professional Regulation Commission in the Philippines and provincial- or district-level Ministry offices in Laos.

2.6 Conclusion

Cambodia has invested heavily in seeking to integrate ECE with the rest of the national education system. However, the country has struggled to realise its ambitious goals for the sector. Limited resources have severely constrained what is possible, and deficiencies in leadership and management have not assisted. Optimism remains about the future. Projected investment in the sector over the coming years will progressively increase accessibility and improve quality. Cambodia will hopefully meet various ECE targets for STG 4 by 2030. There will be a need for firm action, strong dedication and a high level of involvement by all key stakeholders. MoEYS will take a leading role in this regard, with support from important development partners. Having more trained preschool teachers will be critical. There will also be a need to attract and retain well-qualified and capable teachers and administrators in the sector. The physical state of public and community-based preschools also needs to be improved. Perhaps of over-riding importance will be the need to establish a national quality standards framework for the sector.

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Chapter 3
Primary Education in Cambodia: In Search of Quality

Fata No and Say Sok

3.1 Introduction

The education system in Cambodia is structured into sectors, including the early childhood (5-year-olds and below), primary (grades 1–6), lower-secondary (grades 7–9) and upper-secondary (grades 10–12) sectors, all of which are age-specific. The non-formal and the vocational and technical education sectors, intended mainly for young people and adults who drop out of school, have never attended school or are disadvantaged, are not age-specific. The higher education sector is for those who complete a general education programme(s) to grade 12 or equivalent.

The Royal Government of Cambodia (RGC), as a signatory to the World Declaration on *Education for All* in Jomtien, Thailand, and the United Nations *Millennium Development Goals* (MDGs), is committed to fulfilling its promise of universalising access to basic education, interpreted as the first 9 years of general education. By law, children must enrol in grade 1 by the age of 6 (or at least 70 months). They have full rights to basic education free of charge in a public school. Parents who wish to enrol their child in a private school must pay tuition fees, for which there is no public subsidy. Attendance at a public school for upper-secondary education is also free.

The Government and its development partners have invested heavily in the primary education sector over many years. The investment has achieved remarkable improvements in access and equity. Qualified achievements have also been secured in pre-service teacher education and curriculum development. However, quality and equity remain persistent concerns. Other areas of concern include deficiencies in school management and a declining level of investment in the sector.

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This chapter seeks to provide a bird's eye view of the significant achievements and current challenges in the primary education sector. It also addresses possible avenues for ongoing development at a time of shrinking financial support from the national budget and external sources. It canvases the adoption of innovative and proactive approaches towards realising a vision of the sector that is distinctive for its success in terms of equitable access and quality.

3.2 Achievements

The sector's visible achievements include increased enrolments, reduced dropout and repetition rates, increased promotion rates, improvements in teacher training arrangements, progress in curriculum development and some advances in governance mechanisms. These topics are now addressed.

3.2.1 Enrolments

Cambodia has been highly successful in expanding the size of its primary education sector. Significant public investment and support by development partners have been instrumental in this regard (Keng, 2009). Figure 3.1 shows how the net enrolment rate (NER) over the past 20 years increased from 83.8% in 2000 to 91.0% in 2019. There was a sharp increase after 2000 when the Government made public education free for all citizens. Gross enrolment rates (GERs) jumped from 100.8% in 1999 to 125.1% in 2001. These rates remained at around 120% until 2010 and then gradually

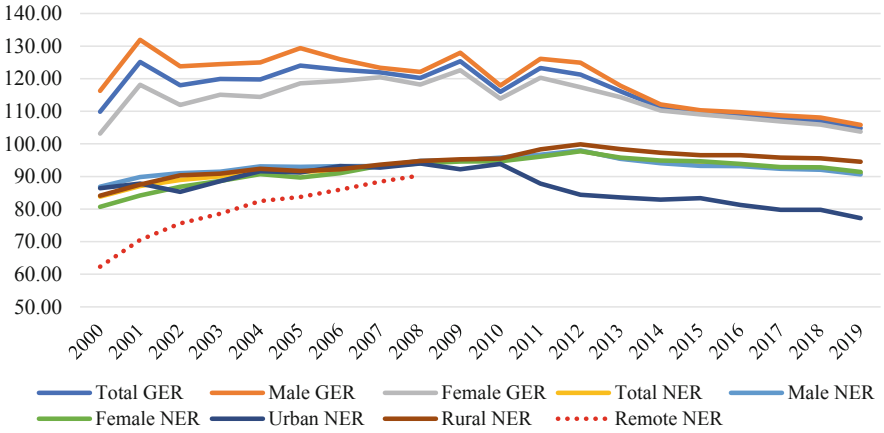


Fig. 3.1 Net enrolment rates (NERs) and gross enrolment rates (GERs) of public primary schools by areas and gender. (Sources: EMIS data from 2000 to 2019)

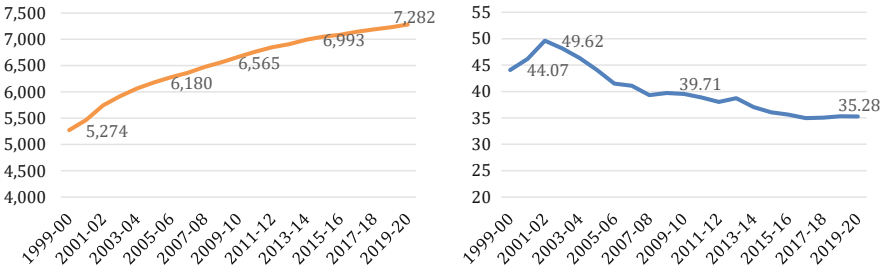


Fig. 3.2 Increased number of primary schools (left) and reduced pupil-to-teacher ratios in the last 20 years. (Sources: EMIS data from 2000 to 2019)

declined to their level in 2019 of 105.8%. The gap between NERs and GERs in Fig. 3.1 indicates that many children had late primary school entry and tended to repeat grades before they finished their primary education. The Programme for International Student Assessment for Development (PISA-D) survey results shed light on the extent of grade repetition, showing that 29% of the 15-year-olds surveyed in 2017 had repeated a grade at least once at an earlier stage in their education. This rate was much higher than the average for both the OECD (12%) and ASEAN region (13%) (Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports [MoEYS], 2018). Another explanation for the gap is late school entry or late admission to grade 1. According to data from Cambodia's Education Management Information System (EMIS), 42.19, 36.68 and 18.12% of the children admitted to grade 1 for the first time in 1999, 2009 and 2019, respectively, were older than the required age for admission to grade 1. In this regard, Cambodia has made good progress in getting more children admitted to grade 1 by the required age.

Enrolment growth has been greatly assisted by national policy initiatives and an expansion in schools and teacher availability. Over the past 20 years, the Government has supported the construction of 2383 new primary schools across the country, and there has been an increase of 10,200 in the number of staff members in schools over the same period. In 2007, it adopted a Child-Friendly School policy that pushed inclusive access to primary education to the front of its priorities. There has, therefore, been a substantial improvement in pupil-to-class and pupil-to-teacher ratios, from 43.4:1 and 44.1:1 in 1999–2000 to 32.4:1 and 35.3:1 in 2019–2020, respectively (see Fig. 3.2) (MoEYS, 2020a, 2020b). Classes became much less crowded, and teacher workloads became less demanding as a result. The enrolment increase was well supported by a policy of seeking to establish at least one primary school per village, one lower-secondary school per commune and one upper-secondary or integrated secondary school per district. Cambodia's development partners also invested strongly in primary education to achieve the *Education For All* vision and the national MDGs.

Cambodia has maintained a reasonable gender balance in its primary education enrolment rates for most of the past two decades. As shown in Fig. 3.1, a gap favouring boys in the early 2000s has effectively been closed. Since 2014, more girls than boys have tended to enrol in primary school. The current gender-disparity index

Table 3.1 Primary school enrolments for public and private schools, and their percentage shares, 2014–2015 to 2019–2020

	Primary schools				Students			
	Number		Percentage share		Number		Percentage share	
Academic year	Public	Private	Public	Private	Public	Private	Public	Private
2014–2015	7051	297	95.96	4.04	2,012,175	73,794	96.46	3.54
2015–2016	7085	357	95.2	4.8	2,010,673	95,230	95.48	4.52
2016–2017	7144	417	94.48	5.52	2,022,061	89,570	95.76	4.24
2017–2018	7189	432	94.33	5.67	2,028,694	111,798	94.78	5.22
2018–2019	7228	488	93.68	6.32	2,040,257	122,886	94.32	5.68
2019–2020	7282	574	92.69	7.31	2,023,473	137,637	93.63	6.37

Sources: Extracted from the Education Congress Reports from 2015 to 2020 (MoEYS, 2015b, 2016, 2017, 2018, 2019a, 2020a)

is 1.01, indicating a negligible difference in enrolment rates between boys and girls. It is not until secondary and tertiary education that the gap widens, favouring males.

Regional disparities in primary education enrolment rates continue, however, to be a feature of the sector. From 2000 to 2008, the urban and rural primary school NERs at public schools followed a common trend, increasing from around 85% in 2000 to 95% in 2008 (see Fig. 3.1). During this period, the remote primary school NER at public schools increased sharply, from 62.3% in 2000 to 90.3% in 2008. Cambodia at the time claimed that it no longer had any remote locations. The rural primary NER at public schools continued to increase, reaching 99.9% in 2012, and then gradually declined to 94.5% by 2019. The urban primary NER at public schools began instead to decline, and by 2019, it was 77.2%, compared with the rural primary NER in 2019 of 94.5%. The most likely explanation is that better-off parents living in urban areas started enrolling their children in private primary schools. Table 3.1 provides evidence over the past 6 years of a steady drift in this regard. By 2019, there were 137,637 private primary school students, representing 6.37% of the primary school population. The NER in 2019–2020 was 97.3% (97.7% for females); the NER for the public schools was 91.0% (91.4% for females); and the NER for private schools was 6.3% (6.5% for females) (MoEYS, 2020a, 2020b). Private schools have recently started to reach out to the rural, especially semi-urban, parts of the country.

The expanding role of private schooling in the primary education sector is in line with a public policy of promoting public-private partnerships in education provision. However, explanations for the increasing attractiveness of private education are mainly anecdotal. The main reason appears to be sustained economic growth, resulting in a relatively rapid increase in mostly white-collar salaried workers and businesspeople living in urban areas.[1] These people are more likely to afford private schooling, and they may also be attracted to its pitch of 'better' education, 'better'

[1] Urban areas include provincial towns in 24 provinces and all districts in Phnom Penh. This definition is given in the EMIS data from MoEYS.

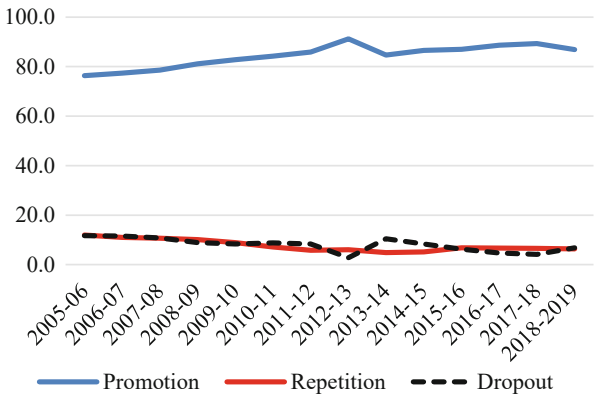


Fig. 3.3 Promotion, repetition and dropout rates in primary education from 2005–2006 to 2018–2019. (Sources: EMIS data from 2006 to 2019)

behaviour and 'better' school administration. There is also an increased incidence of smaller families in urban areas, with both parents working or busy with a business. Some observers also claim that the increasing enrolment in private primary schooling reflects poorly on the trust placed in the public system for delivering quality education.[2] This claim gains some credence from national assessment and PISA-D results, which consistently show private school students outperforming public school students. Student discipline at private schools is strongly enforced, with absenteeism monitored and with the routine provision of feedback to parents on student performance. Private schools also offer other attractive services to busy parents, including school buses, whole-day programmes and catering services for their children. No and Nguon (2018) found that the high incidence of private schools in provincial towns was due to the parents' demands for strong school discipline and education quality management. Of much current concern to parents is student truancy from school.

3.2.2 Internal Efficiency and Survival in Public Primary Education

There has been a remarkable improvement over the past two decades in the promotion rate within primary schools, that is, the rate at which students in a grade level in 1 year are promoted to the next grade level in the following year. Figure 3.3 shows that the promotion rate increased substantially from 78% in 2005–2006 to 88% in 2018–2019, peaking at 91% in 2012–2013. In line with this trend, the dropout rate decreased from 11% in 2005–2006 to 8% in 2018–2019, bottoming out at 3% in

[2]The Government has started to improve the quality of public education in recent years with initiatives such as the establishment/pilot of full-day public schools, new-generation schools and school-based management. These initiatives are showing promise in terms of quality enhancement.

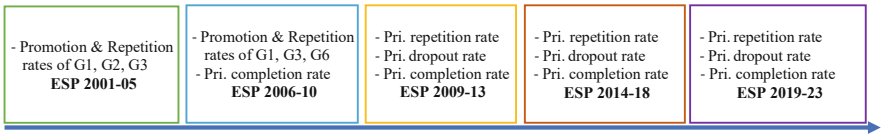


Fig. 3.4 Core breakthrough indicators for primary education quality and efficiency in ESPs. (Notes: Extracted from the Education Strategic Plans 2001–2005, 2006–2010, 2009–2012, 2014–2018 and 2019–2023. *G* grade, *Pri* primary)

2012–2013; and the repetition rate gradually decreased from 11% in 2005–2006 to 8% in 2018–2019.

Over the past 10 years, the primary school completion rate was 80%, plus or minus 5%, with a relatively slight downward trend since 2013. The Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports (MoEYS), through successive *Education Strategic Plans* (ESPs) since 2000, has been working strenuously to improve the primary school sector's internal efficiency by increasing promotion and completion and reducing dropout and repetition rates. Figure 3.4 provides a snapshot of the evolving internal efficiency indicators over the past five ESPs. The transition rate to lower-secondary school reached 86% from 2016 to 2018, before slightly dipping back in 2019.

3.2.3 Teacher Training

MoEYS has, over many years, significantly reformed pre-service teacher training. Before 1993, appointment as a primary school teacher required only the successful completion of a lower-secondary education, followed by 1 year of pedagogical training before 1991 and 2 years of pedagogical training after 1991. As shown in Table 3.2, the admission requirement was increased in 1993 and has continued to increase since then. A pre-service qualification for teaching now requires 2 years of pedagogical training following grade 12 of upper-secondary education. The training may be undertaken at any 1 of the 16 provincial teacher training centres and includes content knowledge upgrading and pedagogical training. Teacher trainees receive 2726 h of structured learning across five domains: professional skills; basic education upgrading; major-related knowledge and teaching methodology; pedagogy and practicum; and pedagogical research. The 'major-related knowledge and teaching methodology' domain receives the most time (1209 h), while 'pedagogical research' is taught in 16 h (MoEYS, 2011). In 2019–2020, a new development was a 4-year teacher training programme delivered by the Phnom Penh Teacher Training Institute. This initiative has arisen from a Teacher Policy Action Plan. It is currently supported by the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA), which is helping to upgrade the Phnom Penh and Battambang Regional Teacher Training Centres to Teacher Training Institutes. This 12+4 programme is an expanded and modernised version of the 12+2 training programme.

Table 3.2 Primary school teacher training formula from 1980 until now

Years	Training years and required education level
1980–1982	•Short training
1982–1987	•1 year of training for candidates with 7 years of schooling (7 + 1)
	•1 year of training for candidates with 3 years of schooling (3 + 1) for disadvantaged areas
1987–1991	•1 year of training for candidates with 8 years of schooling (8 + 1)
	•3 years of training for those with 5 years of schooling (5 + 3) for disadvantaged areas
1991–1993	•2 years of training for candidates with 8 years of schooling (8 + 2)
1993–1995	•2 years of training for candidates with 11 years of schooling (11 + 2)
	•2 years of training for candidates with 8 years of schooling (8 + 2) for disadvantaged areas
1995–1997	•2 years of training for candidates with 11 years of schooling (11 + 2)
	•2 years of training for candidates with 9 years of schooling (9 + 2) for disadvantaged areas
	•1 year of training for bachelor's degree holders (BA + 1)
1997–1998	•2 years of training for candidates with 12 years of schooling (12 + 2)
	•2 years of training for candidates with 9 years of schooling (9 + 2) for
	disadvantaged areas
	•1 year of training for bachelor's degree holders (BA + 1)
1998–2015	•2 years of training for candidates with 12 years of schooling (12 + 2)
	•2 years of training for candidates with 9 years of schooling (9 + 2) for disadvantaged areas
2015–2019	•2 years of training for candidates with 12 years of schooling (12 + 2)
2019–2020	•2 years of training for candidates with 12 years of schooling (12 + 2)
	•4 years of training for candidates with 12 years of schooling (12 + 4) for only Phnom Penh Teacher Training Institute

Source: No and Heng (2017)

The Teacher Training Department within MoEYS is principally responsible for delivering in-service training on pedagogy, classroom management and so on. However, some other departments also provide in-service training. The Primary Education Department delivers training on early-grade reading and mathematics and specific pedagogical practice; the Education Quality Assurance Development provides training on student assessment; the School Health Department provides training on disability screening and student health training; and the Department of Information Communication Technology offers training on information and communication technologies.

Aggregate data for all in-service training are unavailable; however, data from the Teacher Training Department suggest that the extent of the training provided may be limited. Its quality may also be questionable. From 2012 to 2016, according to a survey conducted by the World Bank (2017), using the recorded training data from the Teacher Training Department, there were around 10,221 teachers trained (see Fig. 3.5). These included 4347 primary school teachers. Thus, there were annually

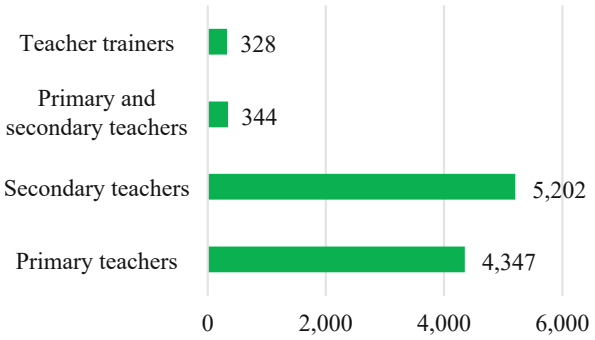


Fig. 3.5 Number of teachers receiving in-service training from 2012 to 2016 (World Bank, 2017)

around 870 out of 46,000[3] primary school teachers who received in-service training on average. The in-service training included training on general pedagogy (27%), subject-related pedagogy (9%), use of specific tools (27%), classroom management (9%), student assessment (9%) and other kinds of training (18%).

There are issues concerning the quality and efficiency of in-service teacher training. First, the training provided by the various departments is random, not adequately coordinated and not well designed to build cumulatively to meet competence requirements. Second, the training is not based on evaluating teaching capacity gaps because there is no systematic annual performance review process to identify these gaps. Third, the training provided tends to be supply-driven or donor-driven rather than focused on meeting expressed needs. Fourth, the District Team for Monitoring and Training is supposed to play a role in the training, but it cannot do so for lack of capacity and an operational budget. Finally, teachers appear to have no real interest in continuous professional development because it is not linked to career development, promotion prospects or prospective pay rises. Teachers are paid based on the grade level taught, and salary differences within a school are relatively small.

3.2.4 Curriculum Development

Over the last two decades, the curriculum for primary education has undergone several developments and revisions. MoEYS developed its first national curriculum framework, constructed around a *Policy for Curriculum Development 2005–2009*, in 2006. Given the lack of internal personnel capacity at the time, international technical advisors were entirely responsible for developing the framework. Its most notable feature was that the early-grade Khmer language teaching method was changed from a phonetic to the whole-language approach, reflecting how English and many other foreign languages were taught. Khmer textbooks for primary school students were subsequently changed, published and sent out to

[3] The proxy number of the primary school teachers in 2017 was 46,157 (EMIS data).

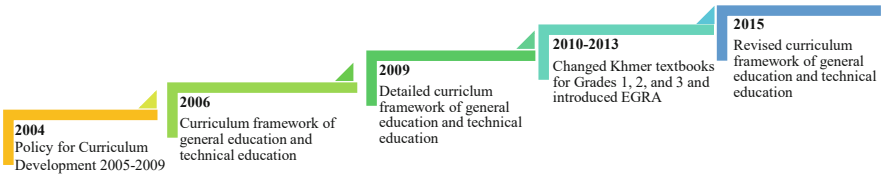


Fig. 3.6 Evolving curriculum development for primary education since the early 2000s

classrooms. Later assessments found that students struggled with reading Khmer, so language achievement was adversely affected. In 2010, MoEYS changed back to the phonics-based approach (known as the *Chet Chhem*), and new Khmer textbooks for grades 1, 2 and 3 were issued in 2011, 2012 and 2013, respectively. Those textbooks have continued in use since then. MoEYS, with support from the World Bank and considering lessons learned from various non-governmental organisations, introduced early-grade reading assessments for the first time in 2010. Figure 3.6 provides an overview of the evolving nature of primary school curriculum development between 2004 and 2015.

In 2015, using local experts, MoEYS developed a new curriculum framework for general and technical education. However, details for specific secondary education subjects were not issued until 2018. The detailed curriculum for primary education has not yet been developed. Development of the curriculum framework was based on an in-depth analysis of the in-use curriculum and textbooks that showed some content mistakes, a negligible link between subjects of study, redundancy between grade levels, a lack of coherent progression of skills and a lack of real-world context (MoEYS, 2015a). The framework aims at realising the country's vision of being a high-middle-income country by 2030 and a high-income nation by 2050. It also seeks to address the needs in the labour market, ASEAN integration and the fast-changing nature of employment. The framework has a strong emphasis on the acquisition of twenty-first-century skills. It includes several new subjects at the primary education level, such as foreign languages from grade 1, computer skills from grade 3 and arts education from grade 1. It also reduces the hours for studying Khmer from 13 h to 11 h per week in grades 1–3. For the moment, though, the older national curriculum framework approved in 2004 remains in force because the new framework does not yet have the necessary assessment tools and inputs for implementation. Therefore, how much this new framework will produce a real impact on teaching and learning is yet to be seen. Table 3.3 provides details of the allocation of hours per week to different subjects as approved in 2004 and revised in 2015.

3.2.5 Financial Management

Over the last few years, there has been significant progress made with national budget support for public primary education (Ashida & Chea, 2017). First, the

Table 3.3 Comparison of subjects and hour allocation for each subject in the curriculum in 2004 and 2015

	Curriculum policy 2005–2009						Curriculum framework 2015					
Subjects	G1	G2	G3	G4	G5	G6	G1	G2	G3	G4	G5	G6
Khmer	13	13	13	10	8	8	11	11	11	9	9	9
Mathematics	7	7	7	6	6	6	7	7	7	6	6	6
Science	3	3	3	3	4	4	3	3	3	3	3	3
Social studies				4	5	5	3	3	3	3	3	3
Physical education	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2
Health education							1	1	1	1	1	1
Computer							0	0	0	1	1	1
Arts education							1	1	1	1	1	1
Foreign languages							2	2	2	2	2	2
Local life skill programmes	2–5	2–5	2–5	2–5	2–5	2–5	0	0	0	2	2	2

Source: MoEYS (2015a)
G grade

funding modality for schools has improved substantially, having been greatly simplified. Instead of line-item budgeting, as previously practised, each school now receives a block grant that includes a fixed amount for each school and a variable amount based on student numbers. As shown in Table 3.4, a regular school receives 5,350,000 riels ($1304 in US dollars) plus 16,150 riels per student ($4 in US dollars).

Second, the number of budget disbursement rounds has been reduced from four to two, one in January and the other in June, and, since 2015, the budget is directly transferred to each school's bank account (Ashida & Chea, 2017). Each school must create an account with a private bank, and the advance is directly transferred to that account. Transfer and clearance of the budget are, therefore, more timely and more convenient. To clear an advance each round, the school must submit the budget request, an expenditure report and supporting documents to the Provincial Department of Education, Youth and Sport, which consolidates the requests and sends them to the Municipal/Provincial Department of Economy and Finance, which then transfers the money into the bank account for each primary school. Each school and school cluster also gets a small budget for the Thursday technical meetings, and this too is transferred to a school's or school cluster's bank account.

Third, there is an increased level of deconcentration of financial management to the provincial authorities. The Provincial Department of Education, Youth and Sport is the designated budget manager for MoEYS. The Municipal/Provincial Department of Economy and Finance makes allocation decisions on behalf of the Ministry of Economy and Finance (MoEF).

Finally, at the school level, there is a trend to mobilise participation by teachers and the community in decision-making through school support committees and school management committees (Ashida & Chea, 2017; MoEYS, 2017). School support committees were introduced in 2002 with the intention of engaging local

Table 3.4 School operation budget funding modality

	Fixed/per school/per year	Unfixed/per pupil/per year
Regular school	5,350,000 riels	16,150 riels
School in remote area or difficult area	5,550,000 riels	18,700 riels

Source: Ministry of Economy and Finance (2019)

authorities and prominent figures, including monks, people in business, alumni or parents and other stakeholders, in school-related tasks to ensure the effective functioning of school operations. Each school has a school support committee, which plays a role in fundraising and securing community resource contributions to schools (No & Heng, 2015; Pellini, 2005, 2007). More involvement by the community through these committees was envisaged, but school principals mostly continue to hold the financial purse strings. Parents and local communities tend to regard school leaders as having the most responsibility for ensuring their children receive good-quality schooling; thus, it is considered inappropriate for them to 'interfere' (Shoraku, 2008). Establishing a new participatory management structure does not always guarantee a change in social behaviours (e.g. active participation in school management) if the new design seems contrary to its broader institutional setting's cultural norms.

Despite progress made, some significant challenges remain. First, the budget support level for public primary schools' operation is inadequate for achieving effective school functioning and development. School operational budgets were around 13% of total school expenditure in 2014 (Ashida & Chea, 2017). This proportion has been reduced substantially over recent years because of increasing staff salaries. While the funds are adequate to run day-to-day operations (Ashida & Chea, 2017), they are insufficient to support larger civil works, more expensive equipment purchases and meaningful teacher development. Assuming that all two million students were equally distributed among the 7282 public primary schools, a regular school would get roughly 10 million riels ($2500 in US dollars) per annum, or some $200 per month, for its operational budget. Budget leakage, which is not explored here, can further limit active budget allocation. Therefore, construction and significant repairs rely heavily on external funding from non-governmental organisations, international organisations, prominent business and political figures and random public capital investments. The financial support coming from non-government sources is gradually declining, with more and more of this funding being redirected to secondary and tertiary education. The RGC has shown little interest in borrowing money to support public primary school development. Amid the COVID-19 pandemic, with general revenue drastically reduced, national expenditure has been halved for at least in the next few years, and development partners are also reducing their funding. The immediate future of the financing of public primary education is not looking rosy.

3.3 Key Challenges

While Cambodia has made impressive progress in expanding access to primary education, there are remaining concerns about quality and equity. These concerns are now addressed.

3.3.1 Quality

To measure student learning progress against the national curriculum, MoEYS conducts national assessments for grades 3, 6, 8 and 11 on a cyclical basis. To gain insight about performance against other countries, it also participates in the PISA-D survey process; and it has joined the Southeast Asia Primary Learning Metrics (SEA-PLM) initiative. These are trusted sources of data about the learning performance of primary school students. Classroom-based assessment is also conducted, but solely to decide on a child's suitability for promotion to a higher grade level. It relies heavily on the subjective judgement of classroom teachers.

To date, the quality of student learning in primary schools remains low, and there is not much evidence that it is improving. As shown in Fig. 3.7, the success rate in Khmer language and mathematics assessments for grade 3 students was low between 2006 and 2015, though with some small improvement—from 40.8% in 2006 to 41.5% in 2015. The comparable rates for mathematics were 38–39.6% in 2006 and 2015, respectively. Figure 3.7 also presents the success rates for Khmer language and mathematics in grade 6. Though higher than for grade 3, these rates had declined over the decade. However, the equated score for the 'anchor items' (test items that appeared in every assessment test across the years) in the 2006 and 2015 tests indicated a slight increase: for Khmer, it increased from 500 in 2007 to 503.5 in 2013 and 504.1 in 2016, and for mathematics in the same years, it decreased from 500 to 489.4, before rising to 519.1.

The relatively low performance in the national assessments is in line with findings from PISA-D and SEA-PLM sources. According to human capital index data on the years of schooling and quality of learning for students aged 18 years, Cambodian 18-year-old students had received around 9.5 years of schooling, which was lower than for all other ASEAN countries and Timor-Leste (see Fig. 3.6). Schooling for 9.5 years translates into 5 years of learning (in terms of competence), which is again lower than that of all ASEAN countries surveyed plus Timor-Leste (see Fig. 3.8) (Deon, 2019). It has been estimated that a Cambodian child born today would be 49% as productive when she grows up if she enjoyed complete education and full health. According to PISA-D, only 8% of Cambodian children achieved a minimum level of reading proficiency; and only 10% achieved a minimum level of proficiency in mathematics (MoEYS, 2018).

Unsurprisingly, a new finding from SEA-PLM (UNICEF & SEAMEO, 2020) showed that only 11% of Cambodian fifth graders had a reading proficiency at the

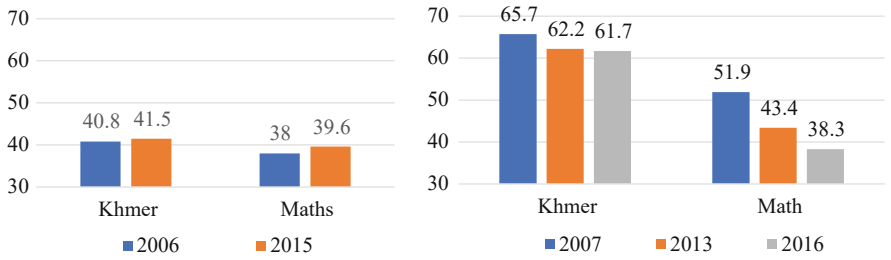


Fig. 3.7 Overall percentage correct in Khmer and maths for grade 3 students (left) and for grade 6 students (right) in 10 years. (Sources: MoEYS (2016, 2017)

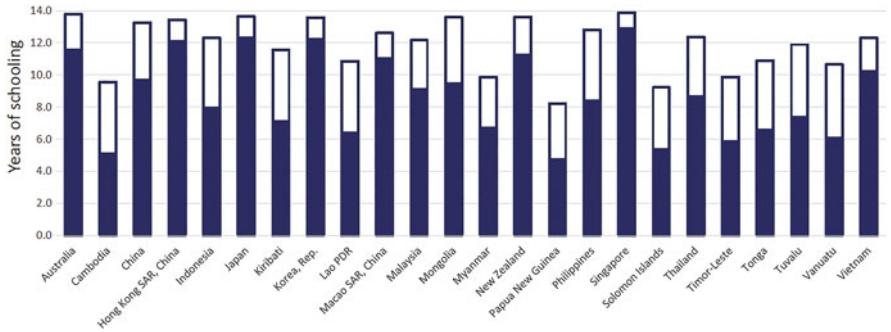


Fig. 3.8 Expected years of schooling, unadjusted and adjusted for learning. (Source: Presentation by Deon (2019) using Human Capital Index 2019 data)

level prescribed by Sustainable Development Goal 4.1.1b for attainment by the end of primary school (Level 6 or higher on SEA-PLM).[4] In mathematics, only 19% of fifth graders performed at or above the requirement of Sustainable Development Goal 4.1.1b.[5] These results imply that years of schooling in Cambodia do not automatically translate into commensurate years of learning. The country is away behind its commitment to achieving Sustainable Development Goal 4.

[4] Cambodia ranked with Myanmar (11% of fifth graders achieving Level 6 or higher), did better than Lao PDR (2%) and the Philippines (10%), but performed well below Vietnam (82%) and Malaysia (58%) in reading proficiency.

[5] Cambodian achieved higher than Lao PDR (8% of fifth graders achieved Level 6 or higher), Myanmar (12%) and the Philippines (17%), but achieved well below Vietnam (92%) and Malaysia (64%).

3.3.2 *Equity*

Though access to public primary education in Cambodia is free, children's learning outcomes vary significantly according to social structural conditions relating to the home location, socioeconomic status and the existence of a disability. These matters are now addressed. Also addressed is the extent to which access to a private primary education confers advantages not attainable through the public education system.

There has been a significant improvement in Cambodia's student-to-teacher ratios over recent years, but classrooms remain relatively crowded. The situation is worse in rural areas, where classrooms are often overcrowded and school buildings are more dilapidated. There is also a large gap between rural and urban schools, estimated to be in the order of 10–15% points each year, in grade 6 completion rates. National assessment tests in 2016 indicated that while 62% of grade 6 students from urban areas were either proficient or advanced in Khmer language, only 35% of students from rural areas met this standard (see Fig. 3.9). Only 17% of students in urban regions fell below a basic proficiency level in the Khmer language, but 35% of students from rural areas did so. In mathematics, 61% of students from urban areas were proficient or advanced, compared with only 34% of rural students (see Fig. 3.9). One-third (33%) of students in urban areas fell below a basic proficiency level in mathematics, but 58% of students from rural areas fell below this level. The PISA-D results record a similar pattern, with the rural-urban differences remaining statistically significant even after adjustment for student family resources. Differences were reported in performance on the reading, mathematics and science scales, with the largest differences seen in reading and mathematics (MoEYS, 2018). The extent of the rural-urban gap was estimated to be equivalent to more than 1 year of schooling. Likely reasons for the gap include less school accessibility, higher teacher absenteeism levels, higher transaction costs associated with staying at school and lower-quality teaching for rural students (Edwards et al., 2015; Tan, 2007).

Socioeconomic inequity is also evident in the results of the grade 6 assessment tests. Students from better-off households were much more likely to have outperformed students from less well-off home backgrounds. As shown in Fig. 3.10, 60.6% of grade 6 students from the top quintile of family socioeconomic status were considered proficient or advanced in Khmer language, compared with only 24.4% from the bottom quintile of family socioeconomic status. Only 16.4% of the top quintile students lacked a necessary mastery of the Khmer language, compared with 47.4% from the bottom quintile. The gap was even more pronounced in mathematics. More than one-half (55.3%) of students from the top quintile for family socioeconomic status were proficient or advanced in mathematics, compared with less than one-quarter (23.1%) from the bottom quintile; and while 39.4% from the top quintile were below a basic level of proficiency in mathematics, the proportion for the lowest family socioeconomic status quintile was 73.1% (see Fig. 3.10).

Attendance at a public or private primary school was also strongly associated with different performance levels in the grade 6 Khmer language and mathematics tests. In the mathematics test, 67.4% of private school students obtained correct answers,

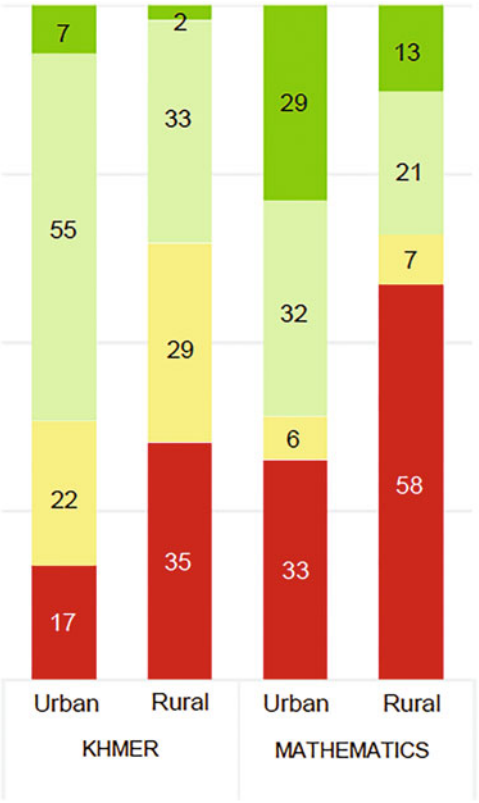
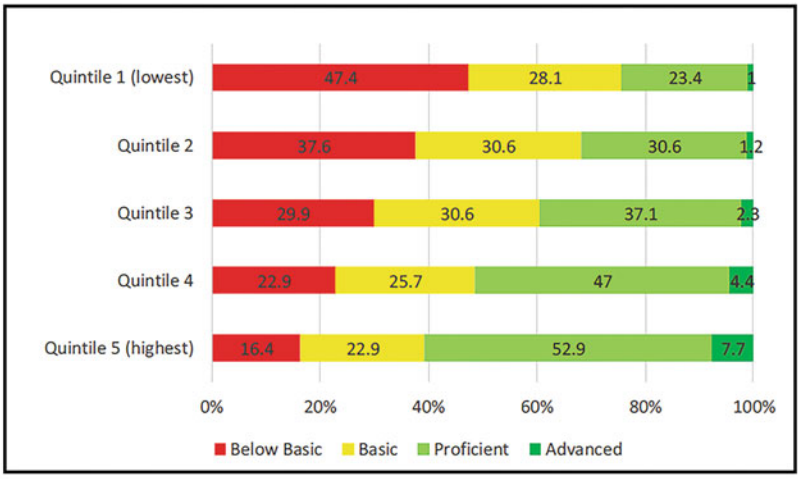


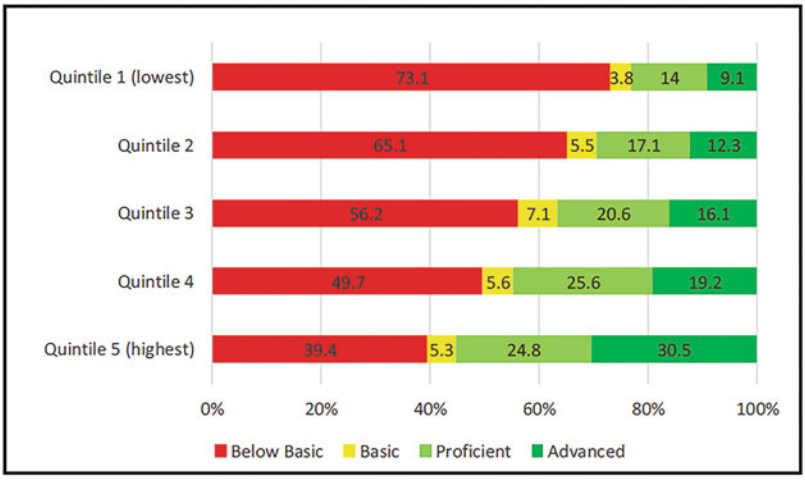
Fig. 3.9 Grade 6 students' performance in the national assessment by regions (urban vs. rural)

whereas only 48.4% of public school students did so (see Fig. 3.11). In the Khmer language test, 52.1% of public school students achieved a satisfactory outcome, compared with 72.1% of private school students (see Fig. 3.11). PISA-D survey results confirm the pattern. Fifteen-year-olds from private schools consistently outperformed their peers from public schools across the three areas of reading, mathematics and science. The performance difference was estimated to be equivalent to more than 2 years of schooling, meaning that, on average, the abilities of grade 6 students in public schools could just match the abilities of grade 4 students in private schools. However, private school education's advantage was largely reduced after adjustment was made for family socioeconomic status. Students from better-off households were more highly represented at private than public schools (MoEYS, 2018).

Disability is often overlooked as a source of inequity in the education system in Cambodia. There are no reliable data on the number of disabled students in schools (MoEYS, 2020a). The *National Strategic Development Plan 2018–2023* reported that there was no accurate information on orphans, vulnerable children and disabled children in Cambodia. However, based on the *National Strategic Plan on Orphans, Vulnerable Children and Disabled Children*, it was estimated that 14% of all



(a)



(b)

Fig. 3.10 The performance of the rich and poor students on Grade 6 National Assessment in 2016

children had a disability. According to EMIS, 11,934 children with disabilities were enrolled in primary schools in 2019–2020, of whom 4906 were female (MoEYS, 2020a, 2020b). Two approaches have been taken to improve access to school for children with disabilities. The first is to improve school facilities and teacher capacity to deal with special needs students in regular public schools. With support from the Disability Action Council, MoEYS piloted an inclusive education project for children with disabilities with one cluster school in 2000. It was expanded to 14 cluster schools and 80 schools, with training for 824 teachers, as of 2008.

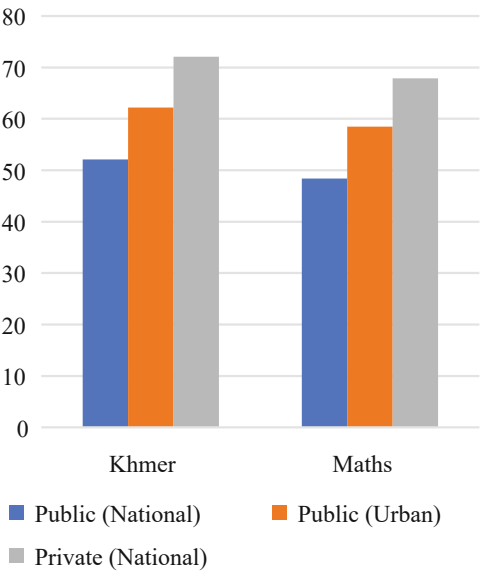


Fig. 3.11 Performance differences among the national-averaged public schools, national-averaged private schools and urban public schools

Besides, 42 integrated classes were created for deaf and blind students across 12 provinces (MoEYS, 2008). The latest data are unavailable. The second approach is to establish special schools for disabled children. Since 2018, five schools for disabled children and an institute for special education (training) have been transferred to the supervision of MoEYS. Previously run by a non-governmental organisation, it has been placed under management by MoEYS. As highlighted in Tables 3.5 and 3.6, those five special schools enrolled around 700 students annually between 2018 and 2020, of whom about 170 students had vision disabilities and the other 530 were deaf. In each special education school, there are around 30 teachers. The National Institute of Special Education is tasked to train teachers for special schools.

As reported in Cambodia's Education Response Plan to COVID-19 (MoEYS, 2020b), there is a large gap in primary education attainment and the out-of-school rate for children aged 14–16 with and without disabilities. In 2018, 73% of the children without disabilities, compared to only 44% of their peers with disabilities, completed primary school. There was a 7% out-of-school rate for non-disabled children, compared with a 57% out-of-school rate for children with disabilities. Inequitable access is seen in an adjusted disability index of 1.88, an indication that children with disabilities are almost two times more likely to be out of school than non-disabled children. Earlier studies by Kalyanpur (2011) and by Hayashi and Edwards (2015) indicated that insufficient attention was being given to the needs of disabled children. As an illustration, in the Education Sector Plan (ESP) for

Table 3.5 The number of students with disabilities enrolling in five special education schools operated by MoEYS

Years	Number of students					
	Blind		Deaf		Total	
	Total	Female	Total	Female	Total	Female
2018	176	56	529	195	705	251
2019	169	61	534	223	703	284
2020	167	59	555	212	722	271

Table 3.6 The number of teachers and teacher trainers by schools and majors

Schools/institute	Intellectual disabilities		Blind		Deaf		Total	Female
	Total	Female	Total	Female	Total	Female		
National Institute of Special Education	1	1	12	2	17	6	30	9
Phnom Penh Thmey Special Education School	1	0	13	7	17	11	31	18
Chbar Ampov Special Education School	0	0	0	0	22	10	22	10
Battambang Special Education School	1	0	11	5	12	6	24	11
Kampong Cham Special Education School	1	0	12	3	19	9	32	12
Siem Reap Special Education School	1	0	8	2	21	12	30	14
Total	5	1	56	19	108	54	169	74

Notes: The special schools intake the students from grade 1 to 12.
Sources: Department of Special Education (2020)

2019–2023, the only quantifiable leading outcome indicator was the training of 100 teachers in a special education diploma programme being offered by the National Institute of Special Education.[6] Overall, more attention was given to access for children with disabilities than to the quality of their education. Education quality for disabled students is not explored here.

[6]The ESP enlists the following activities and policy actions on special education: to develop Inclusive Education Action Plan 2019–2023; to provide scholarships for merits students, students from poor families and students with disabilities; to manage the National Institute of Special Education sustainably; to implement low hearing and vision programs and provide materials; to provide training on special education to teachers and student teachers; and to provide adequate teaching and learning materials to all students (including assistive devices to learners with special needs) (MoEYS, 2019b).

3.3.3 Management

Responsibility for the day-to-day management of a public primary school rests with the principal, who is supported by one or more vice-principals, depending on the school size. In 2017, to better define the qualities required in a principal, MoEYS developed a set of six school principal standards. The standards dealt with qualifications, competency and achievements, problem-solving skills and innovation, school leadership on administrative tasks, leadership on teaching and learning and school communication facilitation. It has proven to be difficult, though, to persuade principals to exercise innovative leadership. Most principals subscribe to a traditional view of the role as being purely administrative. They mainly focus on implementing directives from their superiors and following rules and regulations issued by MoEYS and other related regulatory instrumentalities. Besides, they are often not adequately trained to carry out the job because they are mainly trained to be teachers and are promoted among the teachers and thus have little knowledge and experience in school management and leadership.

To support school management teams, MoEYS established school support committees. They were given responsibility for (1) designing the school development plan, (2) enforcing school enrolment, (3) monitoring student learning, (4) collecting and managing funds, (5) developing and maintaining school infrastructure, (6) experience and life skills sharing, (7) irregularity prevention and (8) capacity building. In practice, however, and as reported earlier, they have been important only in fundraising and securing community resource contributions to schools. They have also contributed to enrolment campaigns. Significantly, they have rarely sought to coerce principals regarding school priorities and the utilisation of funds.

MoEYS has responsibility for appointing teachers at public primary schools. The process for doing so is intensely bureaucratic. MoEYS obtains an estimate from its provincial offices of the number of teachers required by all provinces. The Department of Personnel in MoEYS then sends the requests to the Ministry of Civil Service, which works with the Ministry of Economy and Finance on how many teachers MoEYS may recruit. This information is fed back to the Department of Personnel, which then sets about recruiting the candidates to be trained as teachers. The Teacher Training Department in MoEYS administers the entrance exam. It assigns the successful candidates to 1 or other of the 18 provincial teacher training centres (PTTCs) where they complete a 2-year programme to become qualified. All trainees tend to complete the training programme. Provincial offices of education then assign them to approved positions in schools. Success in obtaining an appointment to a preferred school is affected by academic performance when completing teacher training.

An appointment as a teacher or school principal is for a lifetime. Removing someone from a teaching or principal position can be difficult because the process involved is lengthy, centralised and bureaucratic. Based on the Law on Common Statutes of Civil Servants, if a primary teacher or school principal performs unethically or poorly, an ad hoc discipline committee, usually requiring endorsement

by the Minister, must be established to investigate to build a strong evidence base for disciplinary action. MoEYS must then conduct a further investigation. The punishment, including the dismissal of a teacher or principal, requires a directive signed by the Minister. Given the complexity of the process, the more usual punishment is a transfer to work in an administrative capacity in a school office or other part of the MoEYS bureaucracy.

Another issue concerns the absence of a formal annual result agreements and annual performance review process for teachers and school principals. Basing promotion and pay on demonstrated performance is challenging to implement in these circumstances. Salary levels for teachers and school principals are determined centrally, and the salary can be increased incrementally every year, depending upon the national budget. Promotion to the next level in the civil service is done once every 2 years and upon completion of a higher degree. Promotion results in a salary increase too, but the increase is very minimal. Primary school teachers and principals automatically receive lower wages than their counterparts in lower- and upper-secondary school. A long-term trend in the primary sector is for teachers to seek to transfer to urban schools, where opportunities to supplement family income are available. This trend has contributed to ongoing teacher shortages in rural schools.

3.3.4 Budget

National expenditure on education in Cambodia increased from $334.7 million in US dollars in 2014 to $827.7 million in US dollars in 2020 (see Fig. 3.12). However, national expenditure is beginning to decline in the primary education sector as more public funds flow to secondary and other education sectors. As shown in Fig. 3.13, development partners have also significantly reduced the extent of financial support available for primary education. Though the Asian Development Bank (ADB) and World Bank have funded several sector projects, most support is now going to the other sectors.

MoEYS has requested its development partners to jointly implement the ESP for 2019–2023 and improve student learning outcomes and ensure equity. Several development partners are working to support the core reform programmes. However, support in the form of grants started winding back when Cambodia achieved lower-middle-income status in 2015. The proportion of overseas development assistance for the primary education sector has reduced from 54% in 2010 to around 27% in 2020. In primary education, USAID, UNICEF (via the Global Partnership for Education financing), the Swedish International Development Agency (SIDA) and the World Food Programme are currently key partners supporting early-grade reading and mathematics. In contrast, the World Bank and ADB support the secondary and tertiary sectors. Though there has been substantial support for the education sector, financial and technical support in the form of grants will be phased out in the next few years, according to a February 2020 mapping exercise on education support conducted by the Education Sector Working Group (ESWG).

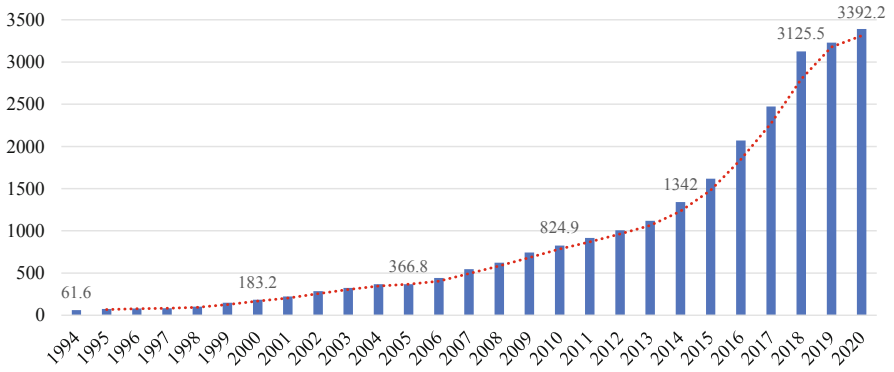


Fig. 3.12 Education budget in billion riels from 1994 to 2020. (Sources: Data on the budget from 1994 to 2013 taken from the presentation by the Minister of Education, Youth and Sports at the National Congress on Education, Youth and Sport in 2015 and the budget from 2014 to 2020 received from the Department of Finance (DoF)) (Note: US$1 ≈ 4060 riels (based on the exchange rate in October 2020))

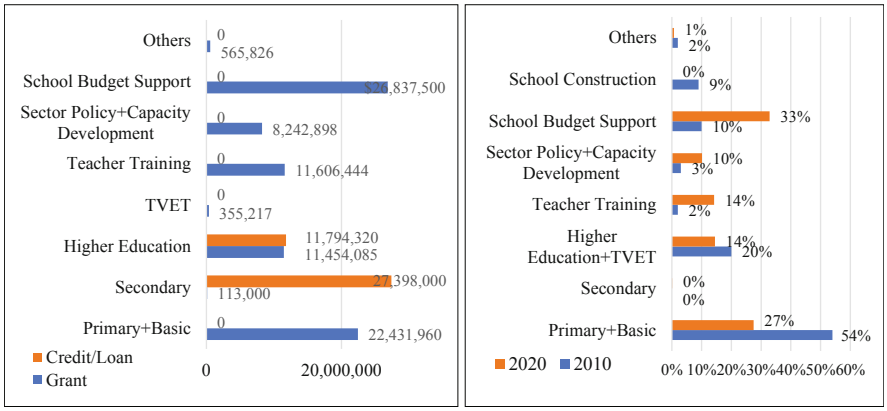


Fig. 3.13 The amount of budget in the form of grants and loan/credit for 2020 by sub-sectors and programmes (left) and percentage shares of the grants by sub-sectors and programmes in 2010 and 2020 (right). (Sources: Data in 2010 were provided by the Primary Education Department and data in 2020 from the database collected by the Education Sector Working Group (ESWG))

COVID-19 has adversely affected the national economic growth, which has already and will continue to hurt the education budget. Following the outbreak, the Government planned to trim the 2021 government budget to around $4 billion in US dollars, accounting for about a 50% drop from this 2020 budget, including an 11.3% drop for social affairs and a 6.4% drop for general administration. The Government will not allow any public instrumentality to spend beyond its permitted budget. This policy will undoubtedly have implications for expenditure on primary education.

3.4 Options for the Future

Cambodia now has no problem getting primary school-aged children into primary schools, as indicated by the current enrolment rate of 97.3%. This outcome reflects a strong commitment to the expansion of the sector over the past three decades. After the Khmer Rouge, almost all Cambodian intellectuals were killed or fled the country to seek political asylum abroad, and so the development of a primary education sector had to start again almost from scratch. Cambodia needed human resources to build the country; as a result, it had to expand access to education rapidly, based on the maxim of 'Those who know much teach those who know little and those who know little teach those who know nothing'. With some support from the Eastern bloc, Cambodia worked to expand access with an expectation that a generational cycle of illiteracy could be broken.

More recently, there has been a shift in emphasis to improving the quality of primary education. The transition is partly a result of the Government's commitment to improving its human resources and changes in the commitment of the international community, including the adoption of Sustainable Development Goal 4.1 on Quality Education, with primary school students needing to achieve at least Level 4 of UNICEF's Southeast Asia Primary Learning Metrics (SEA-PLM)[7] and lower-secondary students needing Level 2 of PISA-D. Other relevant indicators include the Human Capital Index launched in 2018 by the World Bank and the Learning Poverty Index established by the World Bank in 2019. Cambodia has committed to policy initiatives that include the *Teacher Policy Action Plan* in 2015 and the *Curriculum Framework for General Education and Technical Education* in 2016. Also recently developed are a revised Curriculum Framework and the ESP 2019–2023, both issued in 2018, and *Cambodia's Education Roadmap 2030*, published in 2019. The Government's commitment to education quality has been spelled out in its *National Strategic Development Plan 2019–2023* and its *Industrial Development Policy 2015–2025*. Education is identified as the top priority for the development plan. Parents are also demanding a better-quality primary education for their children. There was widespread dismay among parents when, in a more transparent final-year secondary school examination in 2014, only 25.73% of students could pass the exam. Previously, under conditions of much less transparency, pass rates of some 80% were the norm. The public is now demanding more from its school system. As the economy expands, better-off parents will turn more to national and

[7]There are various assessment tools used to measure the achievement of SDG4.1. These include Early Grade Mathematics Assessment (EGMA); Early Grade Reading Assessment (EGRA); Latin American Laboratory for Assessment of the Quality of Education (LLECE); People's Action for Learning (PAL); Programme of Analysis of Education Systems of CONFEMEN (PASEC); Pacific Islands Literacy and Numeracy Assessment (PILNA); Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS); Programme for International Student Assessment for Development (PISA-D); Southern and Eastern Africa Consortium for Monitoring Educational Quality (SACMEQ); and Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS).

international private schools if public primary education does not improve from a quality-related perspective.

While social demand for quality primary education increases, the budget available for the public primary schools is declining. More investment is going into other sectors in the national education system, and development partners are also making less aid available to the primary education sector. The education budget is being and will continue to be further reduced in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. Innovation, transparent management of the sources and sound strategy are now critical. In this regard, three broad options are now advanced.

3.4.1 Strengthen the Utilisation of the Current High Share of Expenditure on Staff

As most of the current education expenditures are on the salaries of teachers and non-teaching staff and staff-related categories, MoEYS might seek to ensure that this large expenditure yields a high impact on education quality. This strategy would mean:

- Make teachers and school principals more accountable for student learning and drastically reduce the number of poorly performing teachers and school principals. MoEYS should strengthen its teacher and school principal evaluation system to ensure that teachers and school principals receive the support necessary to perform their work effectively. Merit-based incentives for improvement and performance-based management (tied to incentive schemes) should be introduced. Tracking teachers' absences seriously and monitoring their professional effectiveness are essential measures to reduce the amount of learning time wasted in schools and reduce the number of unwanted teachers. A strict assessment of student learning progress should also be introduced to enable teaching performance and school management to be objectively appraised.
- Tackle the existing uneven distribution of teachers. MoEYS needs to deploy new teachers to where they are required and redeploy surplus teachers. Deploying and transferring of primary school teachers must be strictly enforced and monitored. MoEYS should stop fast-tracking the upgrading of primary school teachers to basic education teachers because this practice results in a surplus of lower-secondary and a shortage of primary teachers.

Target the Operation Budget Targeted on School and Teacher Support

- Allocate more of the operating budget to in-service training for primary school teachers, with a better focus on developing knowledge and skills that will improve student learning outcomes. In-service training should be more of the form of structured coaching, mentoring and peer-supported learning. Its design

should be based on a competency framework that builds the knowledge, skills and attitudes of the teacher trainees from basic to advanced levels.
- Deploy education technology (EdTech) more effectively in teacher training, mentoring and coaching, as well as in teacher evaluation and the distribution of teaching and learning materials. More than 120,000 teachers need professional development, and MoEYS is not up to the task, and the budget can be limited. Investment needs to be more efficient, and it must be more sharply on boosting digital education development. The success of such a new initiative will depend on its careful design and change being adequately managed to ensure buy-in from the teachers.
- Provide budgetary incentives to enable high-performing teachers to produce teaching and learning materials for sharing with all teachers and to mentor other peers and for the effective school principals to share their knowledge and experience through such innovative means as structured, long-term coaching and mentoring of their peer school principals.

Generate Additional Funding for the Sector

- Increase community participation. Parents and communities stand ready to provide financial support to public primary schools. However, they do not trust schools to spend the funds transparently and in ways that will improve children's learning. School-based management as currently practised in the Secondary Education Improvement Project is a reasonable means to attract more investment from parents and communities, alumni and local authorities, as it helps create trust in those stakeholders by engaging them in the operation of schools, showing them transparent processes of managing income and expenditures and, most importantly, producing concrete results from the financial contributions made by parents and communities. Such an arrangement should be implemented across the primary education sector.
- Enhance and regulate public-private partnerships. Private primary schools have been mushrooming in the sector, and MoEYS should have policies to encourage more of them in urban and well-off areas and regulate their quality adequately. MoEYS should then use the savings to develop public primary education in rural and hard-to-reach areas. MoEYS must first ensure quality assurance mechanisms in and for private primary schools work effectively. MoEYS, with support from the Government, should push for the collection of the income tax from private schools. If income tax is waived, then these schools should be required to contribute an equivalent amount to pay the tuition fees for attendance at these schools by underprivileged or disadvantaged children, for example, through the provision of equity-based scholarships to ensure equitable access to quality primary education.

The development of primary education in Cambodia has come a long way, especially in terms of access expansion. That almost all primary-school-aged children can now access primary education amid resource shortage and in the aftermaths of a disastrous genocide is no small feat. The genuine commitment and shared

contribution from the Government, development partners and parents should be duly admitted. Amid decreasing external financing on account of Cambodia having graduated from being a low-income country, the Government will need to continue its commitment to maintain this achievement and to ensure successful completion of primary education and mass transition to the lower-secondary school level and beyond.

Despite progress made in expanding access, improving primary education quality and equity remains a significant concern requiring urgent attention. Achieving success in these two areas is attainable and will require more strategic, participatory and systematic interventions. Good national planning, careful execution of the plan at all levels of the bureaucracy and strategic investment from the Government will hold the key, and sustained support and meaningful engagement of teachers, school principals, parents, communities and private education businesses will be the core driving forces. To avoid the recurrence of its disastrous past and to create a harmonious, civilised nation, Cambodia has no choice but to develop its most important natural resource: its citizens. This commitment will rely heavily on its strategic investment in basic education. A national champion of reform urgency and transformative leaders at all bureaucracy levels will help speed up the reform.

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Chapter 4
Progress with Reforming Secondary Education in Cambodia

Kurt Bredenberg

4.1 Introduction

This chapter recounts the development strategies employed by the Cambodian Government and its development partners to raise educational quality and efficiency in the secondary education sector during the period from 1999 to 2020. The chapter describes two reform cycles in this regard, where their focus lies, and how they fared in terms of success rates. The first cycle, from 2000 to 2014, focused primarily on access issues. Though achieving some success, educational reforms had stalled within a decade, and growth in net enrolment rates had reached a plateau. This stalling out process may be explained by structural changes within the education system, as well as by an acceleration of social and economic changes in Cambodian society. The second reform cycle, from 2014 to 2020, was catalysed by the 2013 national election and focused more on educational quality and school governance issues. It culminated in a radical experiment to promote charter schools known as New Generation Schools.

4.2 The Past as Prologue

Throughout most of the 1990s, development aid for education was singularly focused on primary education, given the huge number of students enrolled in this sector and the significant needs implied across multiple areas, including infrastructure, teacher training, and others. Secondary education has historically been the poor

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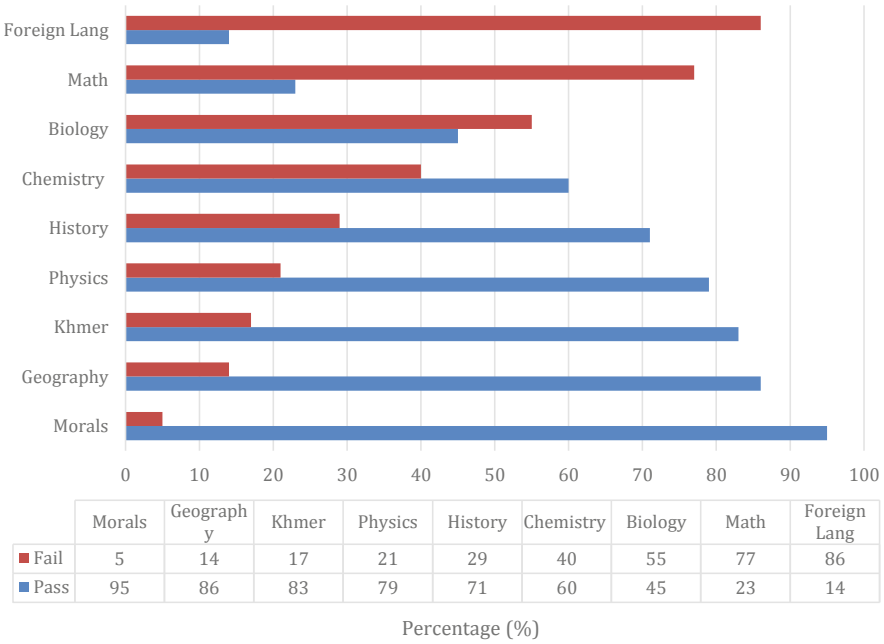
cousin, with national resource allocations to secondary education accounting for only 11.2% of the entire education budget in 2001, compared with 74.4% for primary education (UNESCO, 2008). To be sure, there were 2.2 million children enrolled at the primary level at the beginning of the century, against only 0.34 million registered at the lower-secondary school level (Education Management & Information System [EMIS], 2000–2019). Nevertheless, the disparity in resourcing was high. In 2005, a re-ordering of investment priorities began to take shape with the advent of the first international aid project focused on secondary education, funded by the World Bank.[1] This initiative was followed by several other large development projects funded by both multi- and bilateral donors, including the Asian Development Bank (ADB), USAID, and Belgian Aid.

The need for expanded investment in secondary education was first highlighted by policy changes in 1996 that subsumed the lower-secondary education cycle (i.e. grades 7–9) within the parameters of what is known as 'basic education', free access to which is guaranteed by Cambodia's constitution. Many factors were figured into the calculus to bring about this policy change, including the desire to catch up with Cambodia's neighbours, as well as considerable empirical evidence that individuals who completed 9 years of basic education had improved chances for better health, smaller families, and higher income per capita (UNICEF, 1996). Nevertheless, as the new century began, the net enrolment rate at the lower-secondary school level was reported to be only 14%, compared with 93% at the primary level (EMIS, 2002). This sharp difference highlighted several unique needs in the secondary sector, including the scarcity of schools, which extended the daily time required to get to and from school and amplified school distance as an important impediment to participation. When this disadvantage was added to opportunity and direct educational costs, as well as structural differences in staffing that made it more challenging to recruit, post, and keep teachers at rural secondary schools, even more so in remote locations, it is hardly surprising that the lower-secondary enrolment rate was so low.

As the twenty-first century unfolded, there was an increasing focus on the need for heightened investment in Cambodia's secondary education sector. Indeed, the share of public funding for secondary education has now increased significantly since that time. This situation stems from several reasons beyond those mentioned above, perhaps the foremost of which is the observation that Cambodia's youth population has been exploding. Indeed, Cambodia has one of the most youthful populations in Southeast Asia, with an estimated 59% of its population under 30 years old and 28% between the ages of 15 and 29 (Population Pyramid.net, 2019). Despite this preponderance of youthful citizens, fewer than 40% of Cambodian adolescents have been enrolling in the secondary education sector in recent

[1] Otherwise known as the Cambodia Education Sector Support Project, or CESSP. Although this project also included several subcomponents focused on primary education and national capacity-building, the lion's share of funding was allocated to lower-secondary education with funding levels fixed at $19 million in US dollars in grant funds and $8 million in US dollars in credits.



	Morals	Geography	Khmer	Physics	History	Chemistry	Biology	Math	Foreign Lang
Fail	5	14	17	21	29	40	55	77	86
Pass	95	86	83	79	71	60	45	23	14

Fig. 4.1 Pass and failure rates on Bac II Exam, 2019

decades, and only about 6% have been enrolling in technical and vocational training institutions (The World Bank [WB], 2012; Kampuchea Action to Promote Education—Save the Children International [KAPE-SCI], 2014). These numbers suggest that almost two-thirds of Cambodia's youth population transitions into the country's workforce at a very early age and with little in the way of the skills preparation needed for a capable workforce. This situation largely explains why employers identify 'analytical' and 'decision-making' skills as among the most wanting among Cambodian workers in skilled and semi-skilled positions (Cambodian Federation of Employers & Business Associations [CAMFEBA], 2008). As Cambodia positions itself to better compete with its neighbours under conditions of increased economic integration, these deficiencies will most certainly become more pronounced.

Cambodia's performance in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) subjects poses especially serious challenges for the nation's planners, with implications for Cambodia's ability to compete effectively in both the regional and global economy. Observers have noted that only about 3.87% of Cambodians study science subjects at tertiary level (WB, 2018), which compares with the OECD average of 27% (OECD, 2017). The problem is highlighted best by the low scores that Cambodian students register on the National Leaving Examination at the end of grade 12, where mathematics, chemistry, and biology evinced failure rates of about 40% or more in 2019 (see Fig. 4.1) (Department of Examinations, 2013–2019). Though slightly improved from even lower scores earlier in the decade, these rates

suggest an urgent need for enhanced investment in STEM education at all levels, but particularly at the secondary level where basic STEM skills are formed.

4.3 Early Development Strategies

A growing consensus emerged in the Cambodian Government and among its development partners in the early 2000s about the need to increase investment in the secondary education sector. The investments that subsequently took place were guided by lessons learned during the 1990s when investment imbalances within the primary sector led to stagnation in school participation and flow rates (Bredenberg & Sao, 2003). There had been an overemphasis on *supply-side* investments focused heavily on inputs such as infrastructure, teacher education, and policy-driven changes (e.g. certifying primary school teachers to teach at secondary school level), with less attention given to the need for *demand-side* investments.

The First Education Reform Cycle, which began in 2000, refocused investment in the education system to include 'pro-poor' strategies and demand-side interventions, including the provision of scholarships, the abolition of school fees, and the initiation of school breakfast programmes. Demand-side strategies such as these are distinguished by their focus on the stimulation of educational demand among service recipients. The success of these strategies, which had dramatically impacted school participation rates among primary school-age children, was not lost on policymakers when designing investment programmes for the secondary education sector (Education Sector Support Secretariat [ESSS], 2002). Many of the investment programmes that got underway, therefore, included demand-side measures to complement what continued to be significant investments in infrastructure and other forms of supply-side support. The provision of scholarships, for example, was favoured, often focusing on achieving improved participation rates in secondary education among high-risk demographic groups, especially girls and minority groups.

Early programming in the secondary education sector also focused on several non-capital components that included investments in school governance, curricular reforms to increase educational relevance (especially life skills education), and expanding the holistic approach to development expounded in MoEYS' Child-Friendly School Policy to lower-secondary schools. Child-Friendly School programming is a global movement supported by UNICEF and others that is designed to refocus educational investment from a uni-dimensional emphasis on school efficiency to a more rights-based approach for children that takes in multiple areas of concern across five key dimensions (access, learning environments, health and safety, gender, and stakeholder engagement) (Bredenberg, 2009).[2] This policy

[2] Cambodia has actually developed its Child-Friendly School Policy to include a 'sixth' dimension that focuses on 'School Enabling Environments', which is a code word for school governance issues (cf. MoEYS, 2008).

change, though many years in the making, helped to restructure development aid for both the primary and secondary education sectors into a multi-dimensional framework that focused not only on access issues but also on educational quality, community engagement, and school governance. It was particularly attractive to child rights-based agencies such as UNICEF and Save the Children because it was believed that formulating interventions in this way helped refocus development efforts away from the economic efficiency models of educational development popular with the development banks.

For its part, the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports (MoEYS) also sought to accommodate expanded access to secondary education by increasing the number of teachers certified to teach at the secondary school level, converting primary schools into basic education schools by allowing them to add grades 7–9 to their programmes, and providing free textbooks to all students engaged in study at the lower-secondary school level. Restructuring the grade make-up of primary schools was particularly effective at reducing distance as an enrolment impediment. These efforts complemented significant investment in infrastructure to expand the number of secondary schools in the countryside, thereby reducing travel time between home and school and generally making access easier.

4.4 Early Successes Under the First Educational Reform Cycle (2000–2009)

The more balanced investment approach for secondary education, comprised of both supply-side and demand-side strategies, produced some early successes, particularly in the area of school access (see Table 4.1). For example, supply-side interventions such as infrastructure investments over the 10 years from 2005 to 2015 increased the number of secondary schools nationally by 52%. This expansion helped to address a distance factor widely seen to be one of the significant impediments to secondary school enrolment (KAPE-SCI, 2014). Most notably in this regard, net enrolment rates increased dramatically from the high teens in 2000 to as high as 35% by 2010. The gender gap in secondary school enrolment favouring males also disappeared, and then reversed, at both the lower-secondary and upper-secondary school levels. This outcome was very likely due to the profusion of Girls' Scholarship Programmes being supported by large development partners, such as the World Bank and ADB, as well as by many smaller NGOs. Several studies have empirically validated the effectiveness of such programmes over the years (Collins, 2005; Filmer & Schady, 2006).

The impact on school access was also demonstrated by a steep decline in overage enrolment so that by 2015 only about a quarter of the students enrolled at secondary school level were overage, compared with a rate of more than 40% in the previous decade. The significance of declines in overage enrolment cannot be understated because of the link between age and the opportunity costs associated with secondary

Table 4.1 Snapshot of change in secondary education in Cambodia, 2005, 2015

Indicator	2005	2015
Total enrolment		
• Lower secondary	588,333	558,464
• Upper secondary	204,925	266,606
Number of secondary schools	1129	1714
Net enrolment rate		
• Lower secondary	33.7	—[a]
• Upper secondary	12.5	—[a]
Gross enrolment rate		
• Lower secondary	60.0	53.8
• Upper secondary	21.2	24.3
Student dropout		
• Lower secondary	22.8	19.2
• Upper secondary	15.9	23.8
Gender Parity Index (enrolment)		
• Lower secondary	0.81	1.05
• Upper secondary	0.63	1.01
Transition rate		
• Lower secondary	78.7	82.1
• Upper secondary	66.2	72.4
Overage enrolment		
• Lower secondary	43.9	27.7
• Upper secondary	41.1	23.3
Student repetition rates		
• Lower secondary	2.5	2.2
• Upper secondary	3.3	3.2
Pupil-teacher ratio	31.2	20.2
% MoEYS budget allocation	11.2%[b]	44.1%[c]

[a]MoEYS no longer reports on net enrollment rate for secondary school level
[b]For the year 2001
[c]For the year 2014

education. The older a student becomes, the more likely he or she will forego income that could be earned in the labour market. With a youth unemployment rate of 1.1%, that is, among the lowest in Southeast Asia (WB, 2020a), Cambodia exhibits a very high demand for youthful labour. As a result, opportunity costs for education in Cambodia are generally recognized as one of the leading factors that depress enrolment at secondary school level (Bredenberg & Sao, 2003; United Nations Development Programme [UNDP], 2009; KAPE-SCI, 2014). Thus, by decreasing overage enrolment, the Government was, to some extent, also able to minimize the impact of opportunity costs on school retention. Opportunity costs continue, though, to be one of the leading causes that depress participation rates in the sector. In this

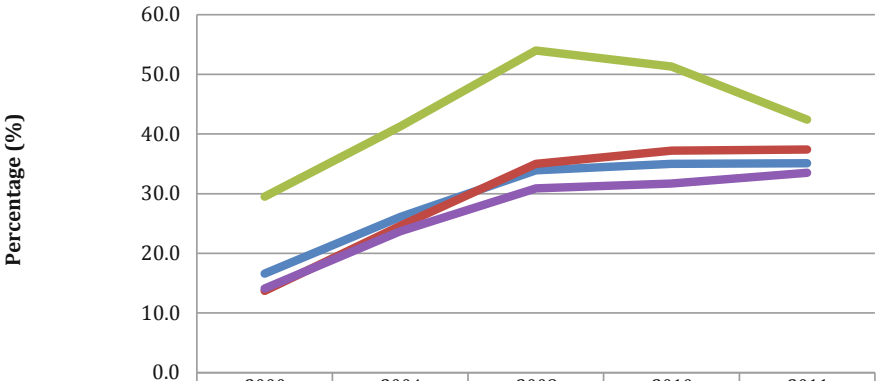
respect, opportunity costs have been cited by as many as 23% of secondary school students as the leading cause of their decision to leave school (KAPE-SCI, 2014).

Transition rates and enrolment were areas of mixed success over the period of the First Educational Reform Cycle. As primary school enrolment expanded because of the demand-side reforms described earlier, there were dire predictions that transition rates would plummet if the capacity of the secondary school sector was not expanded dramatically (Bredenberg & Sao, 2003). Happily, these predictions did not materialize due to the rapid expansion in sector capacity; thus, the education system was able to maintain relatively high transition rates in the 70 to 80% range at the lower-secondary and upper-secondary levels, with some modest improvement by several percentage points in these rates over the decade up to 2015. On the other hand, overall enrolment declined slightly at the lower-secondary school level, even though it increased significantly at the upper-secondary level. Enrolment declines in this regard occurred despite massive investments in infrastructure that, as noted earlier, had increased the number of secondary schools dramatically. Investments in infrastructure and additional staffing likely contributed to a major improvement between 2005 and 2015 in the pupil-teacher ratio.

As a result of education reforms initiated at the start of the century, Cambodia's secondary education sector was much different by 2015 from how it was in the early 2000s. Secondary schools were more ubiquitous, and net enrolment was much higher than at any other time previously. The secondary school population had also become much more diverse, from both a gender and a socioeconomic status perspective (Education Sector Support Secretariat [ESSS], 2002; KAPE-SCI, 2013). The enrolment growth was highest among youth in the lower-income quintiles of the population and among girls. These successes were attributable mainly to the systematic application of demand-side interventions that sought to stimulate educational demand.

4.5 Stalled Progress and the Limits of Reform (2010–2013)

As often happens, the vigour that drives a reform movement can tend to wane as enthusiasm diminishes and high-level leadership changes occur. The First Educational Reform Cycle took such a trajectory so that by 2010 the impact of the reforms had begun to stall. Major improvements in participation rates had run out of steam. In this respect, increases in national net enrolment rates at the lower-secondary level peaked in the range from 35% to 39% and were unable to break through a ceiling of 40%, as had been hoped. Indeed, MoEYS had expected to achieve a 47% net enrolment rate by 2014 (MoEYS, 2014). Not only did enrolment rates reach a plateau across all demographic groupings, but they also began a steep decline among urban populations (see Fig. 4.2). This trend was particularly true of Phnom Penh, suggesting the emergence of an urban-rural enrolment gap like the one that used to exist for gender. These enrolment trends spoke to the impact of the rapid



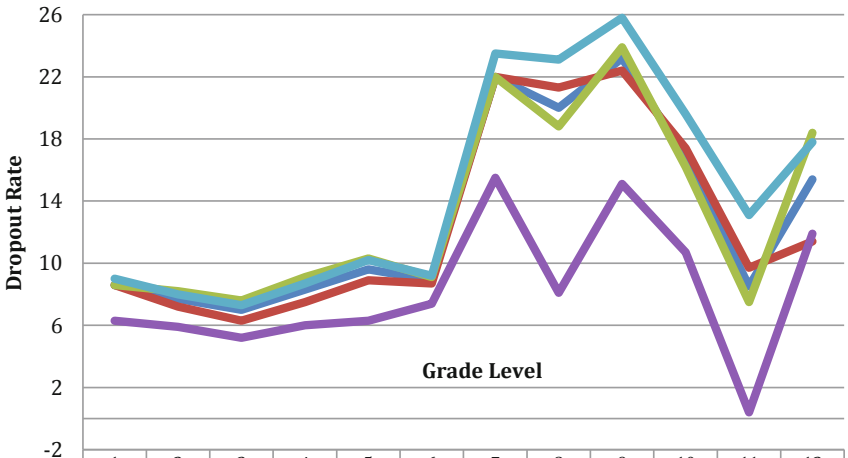
	2000	2004	2008	2010	2011
LSS NER (Total)	16.6	26.1	33.9	35.0	35.1
LSS NER (Fem)	13.7	24.6	35.0	37.2	37.4
LSS NER (Urban)	29.5	41.3	54.0	51.3	42.4
LSS NER (Rural)	14.1	23.7	30.9	31.7	33.5

Fig. 4.2 Change in net enrollment at lower-secondary school level, 2000–2011

proliferation of private schools in urban areas, which is an issue dealt with in more detail later in this chapter.

One of the performance targets relating to school access where educational reform had the least impact concerned school retention. There were spikes in dropout rates that were especially pronounced in the secondary school sector. Dropout rates appeared to peak most at the grade 7, 9, and 12 levels, each representing a key transition point, whether between primary and lower-secondary or between lower-secondary and upper-secondary (see Fig. 4.3). High rates of dropout across the grade 7–9 levels hovered at about 20% for the better part of a decade. Indeed, there was hardly any change in the magnitude of dropout within the sector during the period from 2005 to 2015, and dropout rates had increased substantially at the upper-secondary level. Even by 2019, dropout rates in the secondary education sector continued to be in the range of 16–17% (EMIS, 2019a). This situation is surprising given the large investments made in scholarship support and expanded secondary school capacity.

Various factors help to account for the stagnation in educational access and retention rates towards the end of the First Educational Reform Cycle. These factors relate mainly to the changing economic landscape in Cambodia. In this respect, the rapid proliferation of factories based in the countryside, as well as a plantation-based economy focused on sugar cane, cassava, red corn, and rubber, seems to be much more of a problem now than in years past, displacing the traditional subsistence rice farming economy that had contributed to more seasonal patterns of dropout (ADB, 2012). Traditional dropout patterns used to result in students leaving school after the Khmer New Year holiday, when the rice-planting season began, only to re-enrol again during the following school year. However, with the draw of factory and



	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
Total	8.6	7.7	7	8.3	9.6	8.9	22	20	23.2	16.8	8.5	15.4
Female	8.6	7.2	6.3	7.5	8.9	8.7	22	21.3	22.4	17.4	9.7	11.4
Male	8.6	8.2	7.6	9.1	10.3	9.1	22	18.8	23.9	16.2	7.5	18.4
Urban	6.3	5.9	5.2	6	6.3	7.4	15.5	8.1	15.1	10.7	0.4	11.9
Rural	9	8	7.3	8.7	10.2	9.2	23.5	23.1	25.8	19.6	13.1	17.8

Fig. 4.3 Change in dropout rate by grade level, 2010/2011

plantation-based employment, which tends to be year-round, dropout now seems less seasonal than in the past, with students leaving school and then not returning. These new plantations are not small family-run businesses of the traditional variety, but rather large enterprises run by huge agro-businesses.

As noted earlier, opportunity costs have always been a significant factor in accounting for high dropout rates. It now appears that recent changes in the Cambodian economy, such as opportunities for employment in factories and the expansion of the plantation economy, are greatly amplifying the impact of opportunity costs in depressing school participation rates. The impact is also being intensified by the willingness of young people to migrate. Studies of migration in Cambodia have noted that 70% of migrants are under 30 and that migratory trends are increasingly characterized by rural-to-rural migration, as opposed to the rural-to-urban migratory patterns of previous decades (Supreme National Economic Council [SNEC], 2008; Ministry of Planning [MoP], 2012). Such trends confirm the increased attraction of employment opportunities in an expanding planation-based economy, not only in Cambodia but also in nearby countries, especially Thailand.

Another important social change that has undermined public school secondary enrolment rates in urban areas concerns the proliferation of private schools. Historically, the private school sector in Cambodia has provided educational services to only a very small fraction of the population, mainly the wealthiest and most privileged fraction of Cambodian society. However, a growing middle class in Cambodia's urban areas, combined with mounting dissatisfaction with the public

school system at both the primary and secondary levels, has recently resulted in an explosion in the number of private schools. According to official statistics, there are now 225 private secondary schools nationwide, enrolling 47,153 students and serving about 21.7% of the urban secondary school population (EMIS, 2019a, 2019b). The vast majority of these students are located in Phnom Penh, where there are 102 private secondary schools, or 45% of the total, attesting to the mostly urban nature of the private school phenomenon. The emergence of a vibrant private school sector offering educational services to a large segment of the urban population is an unprecedented development in Cambodia's education system. The public education system, with its past monopoly on the provision of education in Cambodia, has struggled to deal with the phenomenon of service alternatives in the private sector, often even denying its very existence or increasing scale.

The impact of competition for students between public and private schools in Cambodia has not been well documented. Still, its effect on public school enrolment has been showing up in dramatic declines in national net enrolment rates in urban areas. MoEYS started the collection of statistical data on private schools in 2015, which testifies to the observation that these institutions are no longer just serving a small fraction of the population but rather a growing segment of Cambodian families, especially in urban areas. Some studies have found that enrolment shifts in Phnom Penh have been dramatic, especially in the wealthier districts of the capital. In this respect, about 27.6% of the capital's secondary school students are now enrolled in the private sector (EMIS, 2019a, 2019b). In some districts, such as Khan 7 Makara, this proportion has been reported to approach or even exceed 50% (KAPE-SCI, 2013). A sampling of some of the largest secondary schools in Phnom Penh tells the story about trends in enrolment, with dramatic declines of 50% or more over the last 15 years. Enrolment levels at Preah Sisowath HS, Cambodia's oldest public school, have dropped by 45% since 2005.[3] According to school officials, most students leaving public schools are from the upper-income quintiles. Such trends are of great concern because, if left unaddressed, they will eventually reduce the public schools to the preserve of the urban poor, thereby greatly exacerbating class differences in Cambodian society.

Public schools are at a significant disadvantage with respect to the private sector because of the increasingly common view that there is little or no accountability for the former's performance (Bredenberg, 2008). Private schools, on the other hand, are wedded to a more rationalized resource allocation system that demands high standards of performance from school administrators and teachers. Private schools that do not perform well face insolvency, whereas public schools never close, no matter how low their standards of performance. Anecdotal evidence suggests that there is indeed a high rate of closure among Phnom Penh's private schools, which suggests a fierce competition for students. Because private schools generally recruit teachers from the public sector, the conventional wisdom is that there is little difference in educational quality between the public and private sectors, especially

[3] Personal communication with Preah Sisowath HS, 2016

Table 4.2 Contrast in educational attainment level among public and private school teachers, 2018–2019

Education level completed	Public school teachers (%)	Private school teachers (%)
Primary level	1.8	1.4
Lower-secondary school	18.4	6.0
Upper-secondary school	54.2	29.2
Undergraduate degree	24.2	58.4
Graduate degree or higher	1.5	4.9
Total	≈ 100	≈ 100

Source: EMIS (2019b)

among city education officials. It is difficult to draw any specific conclusions in this regard because there has been little in the way of empirical investigation of quality differences between the two sectors. Although official statistics do not break down private school teachers by subsector, recent reporting indicates that 63.3% of private school teachers have undergraduate or postgraduate degrees, compared with only 25.7% of teachers in the public sector (see Table 4.2) (EMIS, 2019a, 2019b).

The above notwithstanding, the movement of middle-class students to the private sector in ever-higher numbers does suggest that there are indeed quality differences between public and private schools. Small-scale attitudinal surveys among school managers, teachers, and students also suggest higher standards of governance in private schools, which promote stronger teacher discipline (KAPE-SCI, 2013). More recently, testing by the Programme for International Student Assessment for Development (PISA-D) found major differences in ability rankings between students in private and public schools, with the performance difference equivalent to about 2 years of schooling; that is, grade 8 students at private schools have the equivalent performance of students in grade 10 at public schools (MoEYS, 2018). Whether standards of quality in private schools are indeed higher or not, the perception among parents appears to be that they are. This suggests that the loss of middle-class students to the private sector will continue unabated unless MoEYS can make public schools more competitive, especially in inner-city areas where the wealthy tend to live.

This discussion should highlight the mixed nature of the success of Cambodia's First Educational Reform Cycle regarding the secondary education subsector. The strategies employed internalized many of the lessons learned from the 1990s, including the need for a balanced approach to development that comprised both supply-side and demand-side inputs. These inputs had a major impact on student participation rates; however, these improvements soon reached a plateau due in large part to radical changes in the country's social and economic context, notably an expansion in the factory and plantation-based economy in many provinces, intensified migration, and the burgeoning growth of the private secondary school sector in Cambodia's urban areas. By the end of the first decade of the new century, reform had largely stalled, setting the stage for a new wave of reform.

4.6 Nemesis: Educational Quality-Focused Programming

Overall, earlier educational reform achievements were mainly limited to changes in school access. Even in this area, such performances appeared to have peaked by 2010, as described above. Although very low rates of secondary school repetition remained virtually unchanged between 2005 and 2015 (see Table 4.1), there are doubts about this data's integrity, given the pervasive practice of student payments to teachers for private classes. These payments are generally seen as quid pro quo exchanges in which students buy their grades (UNDP, 2015). In terms of external assessments of the sector, there is generally a lack of systematic data collection on meaningful educational quality indicators. Nevertheless, there is growing evidence that educational standards in the public secondary school sector are low. This conclusion can be inferred from several different sources: employer surveys that voice concerns about low levels of critical thinking ability among school graduates (Cambodian Federation of Employers and Business Associations [CAMFEBA], 2008); plummeting pass rates on the *Bac II Examination* at grade 12 when rigorous standards of invigilation were introduced in 2014 (Department of Examinations, 2013-19; see also Table 4.3); and reports of extensive private tutoring that in many cases approximates teacher-mediated extortion (Brehm & Silova, 2014; UNDP, 2015). As noted above, the latter problem suggests that most students cannot access the full state curriculum unless they pay extra fees to teachers, which hits the most deprived students the hardest.

Given the deficits in educational quality recounted above, a number of large-scale educational development projects supported by bilateral donors (e.g. USAID, Japan International Cooperation Agency [JICA]) and the development banks were introduced around the start of the second decade of the new century. These projects sought to expand improvements in the sector by shifting the primary focus from school access issues to educational quality concerns. These new projects were characterized by a number of critical strategies that included enhanced curricular relevance (e.g. life skills education reform); increased focus on science and technology; capacity-building for teachers with a focus on inquiry-based learning (especially in the natural sciences) and other new methodologies; school governance enhancement; and the utilization of stakeholder-driven development approaches. The latter approach was particularly innovative and entailed multiple sub-strategies that included school self-selection for participation in a project; school-based selection of life skills topics based on locally perceived needs (e.g. drug abuse prevention, migration); and school improvement grant planning

Table 4.3 Progression of Bac II Examination pass rates, 2013–2019

Year	2013	2014[a]	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
Bac II pass rate	86.8%	40.7%	55.9%	62.2%	63.8%	67.1%	67.5%
Total sitting exam	108,288	89,937	83,341	89,661	99,728	113,365	117,043

Source: Department of Examinations, MoEYS 2013–2019
[a]Implementation of examination reforms

based on the use of Activity Menus. The use of Activity Menus sought to help stakeholders identify their problems and then match interventions from the menu accordingly (see, e.g. Educational Support to Children in Underserved Populations, [ESCUP], 2008).[4] Menu approaches enabled freedom within a fixed structure so that communities with limited exposure to new ways of doing things could experience some 'pump-priming' in the way that they undertook educational planning. The rationale behind this strategy was to build ownership of programming and, by extension, long-term sustainability.

Bank-funded programming that sought to improve educational quality focused heavily on the development of large resource centres equipped with state-of-the-art science and computer labs, as well as libraries and faculty meeting rooms. Secondary Resource Schools (SRS) were intended to share their facilities with surrounding secondary schools, following a resource sharing strategy employed under MoEYS' cluster school policy in the primary school sector (Pellini & Bredenberg, 2015). These investments were coupled with massive capital spending in infrastructure repair and construction as well as the procurement of sophisticated science equipment and supplies to equip lab facilities. Computer lab development embraced new technologies such as 'thin clients' to reduce energy consumption, minimize maintenance, and reduce costs.[5] These innovations made computer labs much easier to maintain and sustain. As was the case with bilateral programmes, the international banks also provided school grant assistance to build local ownership and enhance curricular relevance.

The quality-focused investments of the 2010s were characterized by well-thought-out strategies that in any professional school environment should have worked. Unfortunately, the verdict on much of this investment is that impacts were muted at best (see, e.g. Improved Basic Education in Cambodia Project [IBEC], 2014). Not surprisingly, the most significant successes occurred in schools where school governance and leadership were strong. But, by and large, investments to raise educational quality collided with a culture of risk avoidance among school managers and income generation activities among teachers (KAPE, 2014). Various assessments found that in many cases, lab facilities were underutilized because teachers placed a higher priority on their private teaching than they did on their public teaching, for which they were being paid by the government (KAPE, 2014). Similarly, school directors did not wish to come into conflict with their teachers by curtailing their income generation activities, even when these clearly impinged on mandates from government-supported projects.

The emergence of private teaching as a significant problem in the secondary education system started many years ago as an unofficial means for teachers to cope

[4]The ESCUP Project was one of the several innovative programmes across several countries supported by USAID through an umbrella project called EQUIP.

[5]Thin client labs proved to be a major innovation in computer lab emplacement strategies and were piloted successfully by USAID in 2009 and then subsequently embraced by the ADB in the years following.

with chronically low salaries. Over the years, these practices have become more and more entrenched to the point where, in many cases, private teaching has now displaced the number of hours that teachers are supposed to spend on their regular classes. Particularly in urban schools, secondary school teachers are now emboldened to teach their private classes during working hours and on school premises as an ideal supplement to public classes. Attendance of these classes is mandatory for a student to pass. As noted above, most school directors generally turn a blind eye to these practices to avoid conflict with their teachers. Indeed, many school directors are sometimes complicit in promoting these practices because they organize the wealthiest students into special classes and then take commissions from teachers to get assigned to these classes since teaching them can be highly lucrative (MoEYS, 2016a). Ironically, the entrenchment of these behaviours has happened as teacher salaries have been increasing dramatically (WB, 2020b). Not surprisingly, unconditional increments in salary payments have not necessarily translated into higher professional standards among teachers or administrators.

In an environment of such low standards of school governance, the introduction of quality-focused programming had met its 'nemesis', and it is doubtful that any programming, no matter how well thought out, can succeed unless governance standards can first be improved. Herein lies one of the significant lessons learned from quality-focused programming during the last decade, namely, that *investment in educational quality interventions cannot succeed without good school governance and professional teacher standards.* This conclusion undercuts an oft-proposed remedy for improving educational quality, which is that Cambodia must increase its budget allocations for the education system to a higher proportion of GDP. While such amplified investment is indeed a 'necessary' condition for improvement, it is likely that it will not be 'sufficient' by itself to make the difference without major reform in school governance. That is, educational investment without performance accountability cannot succeed.

Poor school governance is a problem that grows mainly out of the politicized nature of Cambodia's education system in which most school directors hold their posts not because of any merit but rather because of their seniority and political affiliation. This is not to say that a politically appointed school director cannot be both competent and properly affiliated, but only that competence is often not seen as the most relevant criterion for one's appointment (Bredenberg, 2008; Kelsall et al., 2016). This situation is highly specific to Cambodia's culture of patronage networks, upon which many Cambodians depend for their economic and social survival. The cultural and political roots of such arrangements make it very difficult to professionalize the education service, which sometimes requires removing individuals due to incompetence, poor leadership, or even corruption. Given the lucrative nature of secondary education service provision, such problems are particularly intractable in many secondary schools. And because school managers are vetted based on their political affiliation, and not necessarily any qualities of leadership or professionalism, efforts to mitigate school governance issues by providing school leadership and management training have had very mixed success; indeed, many would argue that such training interventions have had only a marginal impact on school governance,

though this remains a favourite strategy of many donors (Improved Basic Education in Cambodia Project [IBEC], 2014; KAPE, 2016). Given this analysis, school governance became a central focus of new reforms that started in 2014.

4.7 The Second Education Reform Cycle (2014–2019) and a Charter School Movement

Continuing deficits in educational quality at the secondary school level created high levels of public dissatisfaction (especially among youth), embodied mainly by middle-class flight from the public schools and static net enrolment levels. These trends came together in the 2013 national elections in which the ruling party nearly lost its parliamentary majority. Some observers attributed the large loss of seats by the ruling party in part to the disaffection of youth who voted in record numbers during the 2013 election (e.g. KAPE-SCI, 2014). Winning back the youth vote, therefore, became an important political strategy for the ruling party, thereby making renewed educational reform a key priority.

These events catalysed a decision at the highest levels to replace the leadership in MoEYS with more forward-looking individuals who had a higher tolerance for risk-taking and who better understood the needs of a twenty-first-century economy and the role of the education system in meeting these needs. A new Minister of Education, Youth and Sports, appointed in 2013, moved quickly to create and implement a new reform package, summarized in Box 4.1. Eventually, the number of measures included in this new Educational Reform Cycle reached 15 discrete points that included support for 'autonomous public schools' (also known as New Generation Schools), school-based management to improve school governance, and teacher career paths, among other things. By 2015, many of these measures were in full swing, initiating a new wave of reform in the school system at all levels.

Box 4.1 New educational reform agenda (2014)

1. Strengthen in-depth reform of public finance management
2. Strengthen personnel management
3. Examinations reform
4. Create a think-tank to stimulate educational innovation
5. Reform higher education
6. Improve educational quality
7. Develop technical and soft skills
8. Reform physical education and sport

Many of the reforms summarized in Box 4.1 were targeted at the secondary education sector, including reforms that abolished the *Diplome Examination* at grade 9 as a centrally administered test and cleaned up administration of the *Bac II*

Examination at grade 12. The implementation of examination reform at the grade 12 level in 2014 illustrated how poorly prepared many students were for the examination, with pass rates dropping by more than 50% when students were no longer allowed to bring cheat sheets into national test sites. This outcome also exposed the ineffectiveness of private tutoring in the face of a rigorously administered external examination system. The transformation of the external grade 9 examination into a locally set and administered examination also undercut a huge rationale for private tutoring at the lower-secondary school level, which in turn helped to curtail teachers' ability to extort money from students. Without the need to teach to the test, there was now greater freedom to teach at the lower-secondary school level in ways that moved away from rote memorization of facts and figures for the examination. Besides, the localization of the *Diplome* Examination at the grade 9 level saved the Ministry a huge sum of money in administration costs, which could be diverted to efforts to raise teacher salaries.[6] Raising teacher salaries at all levels was another important strategy to bring about educational reform, but particularly at the secondary school level where MoEYS had historically had little leverage over teachers to curtail their private classes. In this regard, it should be noted that many secondary school teachers in urban areas were being paid a salary as full-time civil servants but only worked a small fraction of the official hours required.

One of the key MoEYS strategies employed to support improved school governance involved the use of a school-based management (SBM) model. This strategy and others like it grew out of the *Effective Schools Movement* of the 1980s, which emphasized the identification of key practices such as strong accountability as being crucial for improved school performance (Bennet, 1991). The World Bank has been particularly fond of this strategy in recent years. Essentially, SBM seeks to give schools more freedom and autonomy to improve their performance, but with strong safeguards to ensure that they are held accountable for the new freedoms that they receive. Different approaches to achieve SBM-mediated school accountability were put in place by MoEYS as part of second-wave reforms. Some of these followed more conventional methods, such as project-based models implemented by the international development banks. In contrast, others have used more radical approaches involving fundamental institutional changes leading to the establishment of charter schools that form part of the public education system, but which operate almost like private schools.

The current wave of educational reform has some other key features that greatly distinguishes it from earlier efforts. A key point of contrast in this regard refers to the need to move away from uni-dimensional development models in which all schools are treated as though they are the same. This realization grows out of the muted success of earlier investments aimed at raising educational quality standards that did not take account of the high degree of variability between schools, particularly as

[6] Private conversation with H.E. Dr Hang Chuon Naron, Minister of Education, Youth, and Sport, 2015. See also Education Congress (2015).

this concerns issues of school governance. As noted earlier, schools with good governance were more likely to use resources effectively, whereas poorly managed schools largely wasted the support provided to them. Thus, Ministry reformers realized that it made no sense to provide investment to schools equally without regard to their standards of internal governance. This realization led to a greater willingness to introduce 'multiple development tracks' involving differential investment in secondary schools based on their ability to utilize the investment effectively (KAPE, 2016). Such willingness entails many risks in terms of perceptions of fairness and social equity, particularly from the public and development partners who are often wedded to politically correct notions that investment in public education should benefit all students equally. Nevertheless, the willingness of educational leaders in MoEYS who are guiding current reforms to take these risks has opened the door to one of Cambodia's most radical experiments in improving educational quality, namely, a homegrown charter school movement seeking to establish independent public secondary schools that have the autonomy needed to innovate and raise educational standards.

In the Cambodian context, charter schools are commonly known as *New Generation Schools* and are an official part of the new reform agenda of MoEYS.[7] Charter schools that have in place high standards of governance are eligible for significant levels of investment so long as they can maintain their accreditation as New Generation Schools. Strategically, it is believed that more individualized channels of investment in a few good schools today will generate the high-quality human resources that will in the future be better able to support an expansion in the quality of educational services across the entire country. Thus, high investment in publicly subsidized charter schools does in some sense address social equity concerns in the far future but recognizes that there is simply not the necessary human resource base in Cambodia to raise standards at all secondary schools at the same time (KAPE, 2016). Such reforms take a long-term view of 15 or 20 years, which is generally impossible in short-sighted donor-funded projects that occur in very short time frames of 5 years or less.

As part of the New Generation School Policy developed by MOEYS in 2016, a *National Oversight Board* was created to approve and monitor the use of funds received from the public and other sources to ensure that these investments yielded improved student services (MoEYS, 2016b). Breaking with precedent, the Ministry contracted the services of a local NGO partner to assist the Board in the development and oversight of New Generation School programming. This was the first time that the Ministry has ever used taxpayer receipts to engage a civil society partner to implement its programming. The Board makes recommendations for continued *accreditation* of each New Generation School. If a school is found to be in non-compliance with key criteria for performance (e.g. no private tutoring, enhanced library services, and so on), it may lose its accreditation. Without continued

[7] New Generation Schools are designated as an official Ministry policy measure in 'Point 14' of the new Education Reform Agenda promulgated by the new Minister of Education.

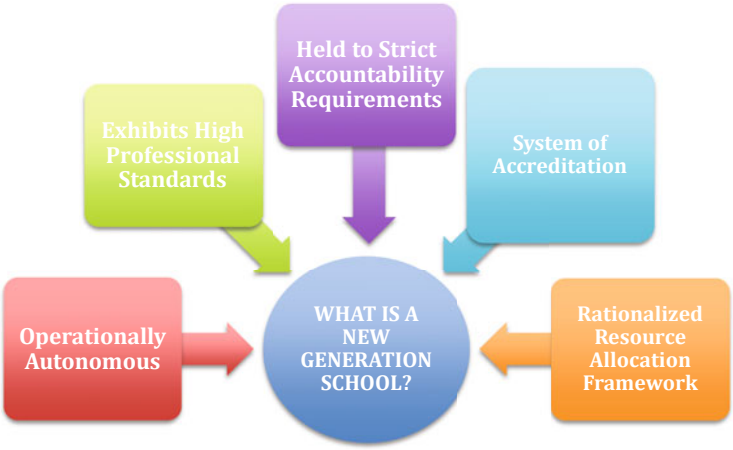


Fig. 4.4 Core principles defining a New Generation School. (Source: MoEYS, 2016c)

accreditation, the school will lose its access to special public resources. The composition of the Board reflects public-private partnership principles in that it includes both public and non-public actors.

MoEYS identified *five core principles* that should define a New Generation School. These principles are illustrated in Fig. 4.4 and address matters of governance, professionalism, autonomy, accreditation, and rationalized resource allocation (MoEYS, 2016c). The core principles underlying a New Generation School relate above all to its *new governance structure.* This structure provides *operational autonomy* to school managers to *innovate* and ensure *high professional standards* at all levels. However, the price of this freedom is that school managers are held strictly accountable for their performance and teachers must meet high standards of professional behaviour. Private tutoring is forbidden, and teachers are required to teach the maximum number of hours per week, as prescribed by MoEYS policy. Teachers are also required to use technology in their teaching, set professional goals, and attend regular professional development meetings that often entail individualized conferencing. Teachers receive special incentives to supplement their salaries (to compensate for the cessation of private tutoring), as well as scholarships for professional development opportunities. Importantly, teachers are vetted at the end of each school year by an accreditation body that may or may not authorize contract extension, based on a performance review. To ensure that both school managers and teachers are motivated to meet these new standards, they are competitively recruited by the Oversight Board. Competitive recruitment of school managers and teachers is an unheard-of practice which conflicts with the patronage-based system of appointments that generally governs the public education system. In this sense, New Generation Schools have adopted new practices of personnel management in the public sector that are revolutionary and more akin to the private sector.

Another defining aspect of a New Generation School is the emplacement of a *rationalized resource allocation* framework. In a normal public secondary school, parents and students pay hefty unofficial fees directly to teachers. Thus, there is a significant investment from local communities in public schools, but none of this investment adds value to school services because it bypasses the school and flows directly to teachers who are not held accountable for their performance. In a New Generation School, a school must abolish all informal payments but may negotiate voluntary contributions from middle-class parents (low-income families are exempt) and local communities. These funds flow directly into school coffers. Schools are required to use the funds and those from other sources to ensure the delivery of high-quality student services, teacher incentives that are linked to performance, and investment in school facilities, among other things. In this respect, accreditation visits are conducted to ensure strict compliance with these expectations. Thus, New Generation Schools approximate in many ways private schools in terms of the way that they allocate resources from all sources to ensure a high standard of services.

Finally, New Generation Schools are defined as 'schools of choice'. This means that parents from any part of a province or municipality may enrol their child there if the child meets admission criteria (e.g. entrance examination results, literacy tests, and so on). Parents may be asked to contribute a voluntary fee to the school in exchange for the abolition for all unofficial fees and the maintenance of the school's accreditation as a New Generation School. According to policy guidelines, this happens in the fourth year of implementation, conditional on continuing high standards of education and accreditation. Parents who are determined by the school to be of limited means are exempt from such payments. To assist the school in waiving these voluntary fees, MoEYS provides a substitute payment in place of the exempted family using funds from a *Social Equity Fund.* This special fund, administered by the Oversight Board, ensures that all social classes have access to New Generation School services.

The implementation of New Generation School reforms has not been easy for MoEYS. The governance requirements of the New Generation School system very much collide with deeply entrenched, and essentially dysfunctional, behavioural patterns among teachers, school managers, and local education officials in the public sector. These patterns include the politicization of appointments, shadow teaching practices (i.e. private tutoring), and a general lack of accountability. Historically, public schools have never been denied investment due to poor performance, nor have teachers or school managers ever been demoted, re-assigned, or sanctioned in any way due to their performance (except in cases of egregiously corrupt behaviour or abuse). Early efforts to establish a New Generation School governance model in one of the most corrupt secondary schools in Phnom Penh provide a good case study of some of the challenges faced by MoEYS reformers. In this case, New Generation School emplacement met with fierce resistance from resident teachers that could only be addressed by a firm determination on the part of the most senior management within the Ministry. This was an encouraging display of political will to enforce reform. The Ministry was able to deal with opposition from teachers by establishing what is known as a 'school within a school' model in which an oasis of good

governance was created within the school with its own managers and externally recruited teachers. Nevertheless, the students who enrolled in classes within this oasis stopped paying for private classes, which infuriated their former teachers who lost thousands of dollars in illicit fees. Such problems will likely occur in many urban schools where shadow teaching that involves significant sums of money is rampant. Teacher demonstrations at the school have periodically marked the implementation of reforms and demonstrate the limits of replication.

4.8 Assessing the Results of the Second Education Reform Cycle

As the second decade of the twenty-first century ends, overall impressions of the second-wave reform cycle in the secondary education sector have generally been positive (WB, 2020b). Reforms focusing on improved governance and quality seem to have reached farther than they ever have before in achieving some notable changes in secondary education, including cleaner examinations, higher teacher salaries, more efficiency in the allocation of resources (e.g. the direct deposit of teacher salaries to eliminate skimming), some improvements in dropout reduction, rapid progress towards school-based management, and the establishment of an operational policy framework that creates autonomous public secondary schools (see Box 4.2). In addition, MoEYS also brought about some radical changes in the modalities of reform in the sector by outsourcing the implementation of some selective reforms, such as charter school establishment, to the non-state sector. This strategic decision by the leadership in MoEYS, while not popular among bureaucrats, represented a dramatic break with precedent. The New Generation School model and its new paradigm for educational reform have enabled MoEYS to accelerate reforms by side-stepping the bureaucracy; increase accountability by linking contract renewals with performance; and save money by eliminating the opportunity for bribes and kickbacks for capital expenditures.

Box 4.2 Key Achievements Under the Second Education Reform Cycle for Secondary Ed Sub-sector (2014–2019)

1. Elimination of corruption in Bac II Examination administration
2. Improvement in Bac II Exam pass rate from 40.7% to 67.5% in spite of more rigorous test administration
3. Increase in lower-secondary school starting salaries from $1259/year to $3876/year (+208%)
4. Increase in upper-secondary school starting salaries from $1,814/year to $4,222/year (+327%)
5. Decline in dropout rate at lower secondary from 21.2% to 15.8%

(continued)

Box 4.2 (continued)
6. 245 secondary schools receiving active investment in SBM
7. Establishment of an Operational Charter School Policy Framework and 7 Secondary Charter Schools

Sources: EMIS (2019a), WB (2020b)

One of the first steps that MoEYS pursued in changing teacher behaviours and pushing the school system towards greater accountability was a major increase in teacher salaries. A key reason that teachers often refused to comply with mandated rules and regulations (such as prohibitions against private teaching) was that salaries were too low. Thus, a first step towards leveraging change effectively was to increase salaries to address this long-standing grievance. During the second reform cycle, MoEYS succeeded in making major increases in teachers' starting salaries, with increases ranging between 208% (lower-secondary level) and 327% (upper-secondary level) in comparison to salary levels in 2014 (see Box 4.2). These increases fuelled a massive expansion in the overall annual education budget from $343 million in US dollars in 2014 to $848 million in US dollars by 2019, 80% of which comprised salaries (WB, 2020b).

Though increasing salaries was a necessary and long overdue step in the process of leveraging behavioural change, the massive increase in the education budget has placed great pressure on MoEYS to demonstrate some tangible improvement in learning outcomes, which continues to be elusive. In this regard, PISA-D testing of 15-year-old students in 2017 found that only 8% of those tested could perform at minimum proficiency in reading and that only 10% could do so in mathematics (MoEYS, 2018) (see Table 4.4). These results came as a major disappointment to policy makers and were much worse than expected by many observers. Similarly, the *National Student Assessment* conducted by MoEYS in 2017 in the subjects of Khmer, Mathematics, and Physics showed hardly any improvement in performance scores from the baseline levels established in 2014. By and large, these outcomes suggest that increases in salary have had little impact on teacher performance or changes in behaviour. Indeed, anecdotal observations suggest that most teachers continue to place a higher priority on their private classes in comparison to their public classes, which contributes to underutilization of new school facilities and a rationing of the official curriculum (based on students' ability to pay) (KAPE, 2019). This points to a problem of enforcement and the unwillingness of school directors to use the provision of higher salaries to leverage behavioural changes at their schools.

An important bright spot for MoEYS in the battle to improve educational quality has been the reported outcomes in the New Generation School pilot. Between 2015 and 2019, MoEYS invested about $4.8 million in the New Generation School system for school modernization as well as policy and curriculum development (MoEYS, 2020). These schools have not disappointed and have reported very encouraging outcomes on several important metrics, including very high pass rates on the national

Table 4.4 Learning outcomes at secondary school level

PISA-D testing (15-year-old children)	Baseline	Post-test (2017)
Khmer reading (% achieving minimum proficiency)	—	8%
Mathematics (% achieving minimum proficiency)	—	10%
National Student Assessment (grade 8)	(2014)	(2017)
Khmer (% correct)	56%	54%
Mathematics (% correct)	44%	47%
Physics (% correct)	53%	46%

Source: World Bank (2020b)

Table 4.5 Key metrics for New Generation secondary school performance (2019)

Metric	NGS	National
Bac II Examination pass rate	91%	68%
Students with A, B, or C Bac II pass	35%	8%
Transition to university	88%	13.69%[a]
Students receiving medals/awards	612	n/a
Students studying ICT 3 hrs/week or more	100%	0%
Dropout rate	4%	LSS: 16%
		USS: 17%
Secondary schools accredited	5/7	n/a
Secondary school teachers with 4-year degrees or higher	86%	43%
Teachers completing career path plans	98%	n/a
Student projects completed per year	490 projects (1 project per 6 students)	n/a

Sources: MoEYS (2020), EMIS (2019a), World Bank (2018)
[a]Gross enrolment (tertiary)

Bac II Examination, high transition rates to university, very low dropout rates, an accelerating rate of school accreditation, and high professional standards among teachers (see Table 4.5). Many of these indicators move beyond test scores and demonstrate the ability of students who study in these schools to compete successfully in international academic competitions as well as attain high rates of transition to university. In addition, learning appears to have broken out of an exam-driven mode, leading to a profusion of project work completed by students. For example, in 2019, students enrolled in secondary New Generation Schools completed 490 group projects on topics of their own choosing. This was a significant breakthrough in the culture of learning, which is still very much exam driven. New Generation School administrators have also been reporting that many of the students enrolling in their schools are returning from the private sector, which demonstrates the ability of public schools to effectively compete with private schools when conditions of governance improve. Indeed, one New Generation School in the capital reported

that demand for enrolment was so high that it could not accept more than 19% of the students applying because of a shortage of classroom space (MoEYS, 2020).

New Generation School reforms are also driving innovation in the secondary education sector more broadly, leading to partial replication in several larger bank-funded projects, thereby fulfilling high expectations among MoEYS leaders for knock-on effects. In addition, the high level of usage of new technologies in the New Generation School system is providing a useful foundation for MoEYS planning to address school closures resulting from Covid-19, including the production of hundreds of archival video lessons that are being presented online, as well as other general resources for online education. Similarly, the New Generation School system is pioneering a network of school-based mentoring that links with a special training centre established at the National Institute of Education (NIE) for this purpose. Indeed, MoEYS has established the New Generation Pedagogical Research Center (NGPRC) at the NIE to train experienced secondary school teachers (often recruited from New Generation School sites) to work as full-time, school-based mentors in all the New Generation School sites. Candidates recruited to the Center study intensively for 1 year and receive a master's degree in mentoring before being posted at a New Generation School. These innovations represent a major step towards continuous professional development goals in the New Generation School system and will contribute to the emergence of a non-threatening professional support model for all teachers.

4.9 Future Prospects

The second-wave educational reform cycle has raised optimism among reform-minded educators and development partners to levels not seen in a long time. To a large extent, this optimism derives from strong leadership at the highest levels that is, at last, willing to take major political risks to achieve significant change in the work culture at many secondary schools. For the first time, current educational reforms are moving beyond access concerns to focus on educational quality and governance issues that have the potential to bring Cambodia's secondary education system into the twenty-first century. This is an important change from a previous leadership that looked back to the 1960s as the golden age for which Cambodia's secondary schools should strive. Current reforms also have a greater air of realism that recognizes the variability among schools, particularly concerning good governance. This has led to a greater commitment to a strategy of employing multiple development tracks of investment, using different gradations of good governance as a key criterion for high or low investment pathways. These strategic changes have created an operational environment where a charter school movement can now exist and even thrive should the political will to support such change continue into the far future. Even more importantly, MoEYS has made a strategic decision to challenge vested interests both among the bureaucracy and among teachers to bring about a much-needed change in how schools are managed. This courageous decision-making process demonstrates a

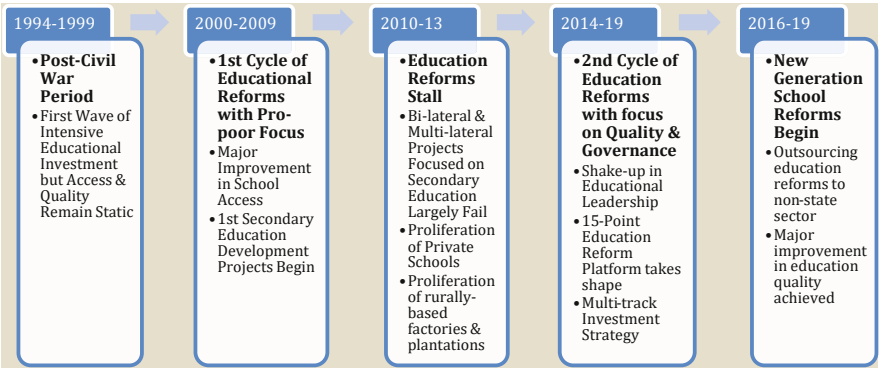


Fig. 4.5 Timeline of education reforms focused on secondary education

unique and rarely seen political will to achieve change. And while first-wave reform cycle achievements began to stall after 5 or 6 years, second-wave reform cycle initiatives are still showing vigour even after 7 years of implementation (see Figure 4.5).

However, there are concerns that the strong political leadership animating current reforms may not last beyond the next national elections in 2023, which may lead to a change in Minister and the possible re-ordering of priorities. Nevertheless, there are signs that reforms have gone too far to be reversed. For example, not only has MoEYS created an approved policy framework to promote New Generation Schools (MoEYS, 2016b, 2016c), but the Royal Government of Cambodia has also adopted the New Generation School concept for inclusion in the *Rectangular Strategy Phase IV*, which outlines the national strategy for social and economic development (Royal Government of Cambodia [RGC], 2018). To be sure, there also continues to be major opposition to current reforms, particularly from among risk-averse bureaucrats and teachers whose lucrative private classes are now at risk. There is even an apprehension that the mandate for change from the highest levels of the Government may also wither away when political patronage arrangements that govern school appointments are challenged by decision-making to remove and replace incompetent school directors. Time is on the side of those who wish to maintain the status quo, and those actors with such vested interests are acutely aware of this. Therefore, there is a willingness to obstruct or slow down reforms until there is a change in ministerial leadership, but without doing so in a way that directly challenges the current leadership. Reformers are, therefore, implementing reforms as quickly as they can to ensure that the reforms will have some staying power, particularly with the broader public, which appears to support the changes that are unfolding. If successful, these efforts could create the political pressure needed to counterbalance more conservative vested interests that favour preserving the status quo. Only time will tell whether the reformers will win their race against time.

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Chapter 5
Technical and Vocational Education and Training Reform in Cambodia 1970–2020

Perry Daroesman

5.1 Introduction

Cambodia appears in many respects to be following a 'factory Asia' model of economic growth (Asian Development Bank [ADB], 2019, p. 1). While its industry sector is expanding and accounted for 26% of all jobs by 2017 (compared with 15% in 2007), most manufacturing relies on low-skilled and poorly paid workers engaged in producing cheap products, particularly garments and footwear for export. Cambodia does not rank highly on global indices for the quality of its vocational training (112th), the skillset of its graduates (112th), the ease of finding skilled employees (123rd), or the level of digital skills among its active population (112th) (World Economic Forum, 2019, p. 132). Indeed, Cambodia's National Employment Agency (NEA) recently reported that technician and associate professional positions were the most difficult to fill in the country because of skill shortages (National Employment Agency [NEA], 2018; see also an earlier report by Bruni et al., 2013). In 2017, only 1.5% of Cambodia's labour force held a formal technical and vocational education and training (TVET) qualification (National Institute of Statistics [NIS], 2018).

In 2019, there were 325 TVET institutes in Cambodia. Of these, 56 were public institutes, 38 of which were managed by the Ministry of Labour and Vocational Training (MoLVT). The remaining public institutes were managed by various other ministries, including the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports (MoEYS); the Ministry of Women's Affairs (MoWA); the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries (MoAFF); and the Ministry of Health (MoH). Private sector institutes, though more numerous, are generally small and operate on the periphery of the sector, specialising mainly in the delivery of short training programs in niche areas

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such as information and communication technologies (ICTs), business studies, hospitality studies, and foreign languages (mostly English).

Despite 25 years of bilateral and multilateral donor assistance, there is not yet sufficient capacity and coherence to the delivery of TVET in Cambodia. There continues to be a lack of industry-relevant certificate-level and diploma-level programs. Many of the programs available have not been updated for over a decade and do not necessarily reflect contemporary industry standards. There are no effective mechanisms for updating curriculum considering rapidly changing industry needs. Theory-based teaching tends to dominate over practical training. Training facilities are unattractive. Training equipment is often not aligned with contemporary technological standards and industry needs. Trainers lack technical and pedagogical skills, with most having negligible industry-based experience. Links with the private sector are weak. There is widespread confusion about the nature of competency-based assessment. There are insufficient labour market information for students and inadequate student engagement with employers. Public funding for the TVET sector remains highly constrained.

This chapter focuses on the current state and the historical development of the TVET sector in Cambodia. To begin, there is an account of the sector's evolution. Then, significant challenges currently having to be addressed by the sector are discussed. Finally, consideration is given to possible future directions.

The chapter's development is informed by the author's participation in donor projects over many years. These projects have required formal and informal interviews with senior officials across various ministries. Additional information comes from policy statements, planning documents, relevant academic articles, and project reports completed for different development agencies.

5.2 Historical Development

5.2.1 Pre-colonial and Colonial Period to 1953

During the Angkor Empire, which flourished from the ninth to the fifteenth centuries, educational, cultural, and innovative activities were based mainly on pagodas and temples. The temples focused on vocational skills training, particularly for artisan and construction endeavours such as the building of more pagodas and temples and other significant structures and artworks. Buddhist monks performed the role of trainer and teacher, transferring skills-based knowledge together with religious and cultural instruction. Itinerant monks and acolytes were able to observe technical developments and innovations in their travels and were instrumental in spreading new knowledge. Such knowledge tended to be limited to agriculture or areas relevant to the daily lives of the primarily rural populace. The inheritance of artistic or construction experience—tile making, stone masonry, sculpture, metalwork, and so on—was dependent on an informal, unstructured, and individual apprenticeship or journeyman system.

After 1863, France began to transform Cambodia's education system. Over the following 90 years of colonial rule (1863–1953), the French introduced their own administrative and educational system, including the first public schools and a training centre for colonial administrators and officers in 1893 (Fergusson & Masson, 1997; Rany et al., 2012). These institutions were developed primarily to equip the country with many competent civil servants (Clayton, 1998). Still, there were problems integrating traditional (maintenance of socio-religious/cultural mores) and western educational systems (Tully, 2002).

The first significant local reform occurred during Prince Sihanouk's reign, after Cambodia's independence in 1953. Sihanouk initiated the transformation of Cambodia into an industrialised and more technologically advanced state. However, while educational development appeared to abound, with the over 15 new educational institutions established, including the Institute of Technology of Cambodia, there was little evidence of ongoing support for education delivery, quality, content, or funding (Ayres, 2000).

A coup d'état in 1970 enabled the establishment of the US-backed Lon Nol government. It regarded education as a national priority for Cambodia's development, but plans to address this priority were destabilised by political ideologies and civil war (Ayres, 2000; Chandler, 2008). In addition, most educational institutions either were destroyed by the US bombing between 1969 and 1973 or were forced to close on account of political instability.

5.2.2 Year Zero: Technical Training Under the Khmer Rouge

The Khmer Rouge takeover in April 1975 effectively destroyed the nation's education system. Between 1975 and 1979, the Khmer Rouge destroyed 90% of whatever had been left of school buildings, libraries, and school equipment (Jeong, 2014). The regime's economic priority was the transformation of Cambodian agriculture by increasing rice production and exporting the surplus to finance industrialisation (Chandler, 2008). Nothing appeared to come from this plan. Training, if any, focused on informal basic literacy and necessary farming technology, accompanied by political and social indoctrination. Some anecdotal evidence exists concerning the provision of basic training in some technical areas, but, for the most part, the curriculum for educating and developing potential cadres consisted of regular meetings, self-criticism sessions, and sessions for receiving criticisms from the Party.

A Four-Year Plan for the education system was adopted by a Party meeting attended by top cadres between July 21 and August 2, 1976. Within the 110-page document was a new policy on educational reform, entitled *The Fields of Culture, Literature, Art, Technology, Science, Education of the People, Propaganda, and Information* (Chigas & Mosyakov, 2020). It included a section proposing workshops and sites for experimentation in cooperatives, essential factories, and primary and secondary technical schools covering mainly agricultural activities and industrial

crops. There is very little evidence, however, that any of the planned reform was ever implemented. Education beyond the primary school level did not exist before 1978, when an attempt was made to establish a technical high school in Phnom Penh (Chandler, 2008, p. 263). Khieu Samphan, President of the State Presidium of Democratic Kampuchea from 1976 to 1979, stated in 1977: 'Our goal is to keep schooling close to production work . . . We learn technological skills and implement them while working' (Jackson, 1989). Education, particularly literacy, was relevant only to learn technological skills. Still, little was done to ensure successful implementation—teachers were recruited from 'ideologically pure peasants' (Procknow, 2009) who had limited technical knowledge or experience in teaching or a trade.

5.2.3 Vietnamese Occupation (1979–1990)

Cambodia's current TVET system had its beginnings in 1979 after the Khmer Rouge was overthrown. Following isolated clashes along the Vietnam-Cambodia border between 1975 and 1977, Vietnam launched a full-scale invasion of Cambodia on December 25, 1978, subsequently occupying the country and removing the Khmer Rouge from power. Under Vietnamese occupation, TVET benefitted from establishing several institutions, including Russey Keo College in Phnom Penh in 1979 and the National Training Institute in 1981. Until 1989, Vietnam, Russia, Eastern Europe, and Cuba provided technical assistance and hardware for TVET. Most of the instructors were Vietnamese or came from the former Soviet Bloc. When bilateral aid from these countries collapsed, instructors returned to their home countries, and from 1989, many of the training units fell into disuse. TVET provision throughout this period remained limited in scope and coverage and was not highly regarded, even though the centrally planned State effectively guaranteed trainees employment. Over the period from 1979 to 1986, some 14 TVET institutes were established by different ministries (Duggan, 1997; Duggan & Daroesman, 1998). Still, the training tended to revert to the inculcation of administrative skills or else to a form of semi-technical training specific to the parent ministry's requirements. The need to build capacity by training technical teachers did not appear to be considered.

The Vietnamese presence led to many Cambodians' migration to the Thai border, where refugee camps were established. In these camps, emergency response and rehabilitation non-government organisations (NGOs) initiated a range of short-term non-formal occupational and vocational training programs, primarily in village industries and agriculture. Suenobu (1995) noted at the time that the Thai Government was reluctant to encourage refugees and so opposed the development of educational programs in the camps. However, it tacitly agreed to a limited educational program. The Thai Government's policy guidelines included providing displaced people to receive vocational training for use in resettlement countries or on return to their country of origin and to receive training for daily living. Although the main emphasis of the border camp education programs tended to be on primary and basic education, many NGOs provided adult and vocational education

programs. At Khao-I-Dang, a camp with as many as 160,000 refugees, for example, a Women's Rehabilitation and Development Centre organised skill development programs for about 1000 trainees in areas that included machine sewing, knitting, and weaving. Classes were also held for the development of numeracy and literacy skills. Though mainly focusing on emergency relief and health, voluntary agencies also provided vocational training, particularly the Catholic Office for Emergency Relief and Refugees, the International Rescue Committee, the Japan Sotoshu Relief Committee, and the Japan Volunteer Center. By 1986, the NGOs and international organisations (IOs) assisting with humanitarian needs, resettlement, and rehabilitation in the border camps had established a range of short-term, non-formal training programs in vocational skills for local income-generating activities, mainly for the rural agrarian population.

During this period, what was defining for TVET was that many of the emergency/refugee organisations later followed the Cambodian refugees along returnee settlement corridors and then continued to provide rehabilitation activities in Cambodia, including the delivery of vocational skills training to the rural populace. Training activities centred on small-scale local markets, essentially at the commune level, and covered basic agricultural production and micro-scale income-generating activities such as sewing, hairdressing, and motorbike mechanics. In a period of almost total lack of government capacity, the NGOs/IOs devised their own local coordination schemes. As the country developed, however, many international NGOs were unable to sustain their training programs because of dwindling emergency funding. Management of the training programs was slowly taken over by various ministries—mainly MoAFF, MoWA, MoEYS, and the Ministry of Rural Development (MoRD) (Duggan & Daroesman, 1998). Training provision was eventually integrated into the voucher skills training, post-harvest technology, and skills bridging programs.

Despite the benefits of these programs in alleviating chronic poverty and reskilling a generation of Cambodians, many issues arose, some of which continue to exist to the present time. One was that, although there were attempts to undertake 'needs analyses for training', these were generally oriented towards gathering demographic and industry information. Agencies such as the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), International Labour Organization (ILO), and Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) were primarily concerned to map agricultural activities and make an inventory of resources available after the Khmer Rouge period. Subsequent training, mostly short-term and non-formal, tended to be supply-oriented and determined by trainers and donor funds' availability. Much of what was provided was essentially livelihood or cottage-industry training geared towards poverty alleviation. NGOs providing the training were generally required to be associated with a ministry. They aligned themselves with whichever ministry appeared to be relevant to their priorities and with which registration was easiest (Daroesman & Trewavas, 1999). This situation led to fragmentation and inconsistent approaches to training delivery and content.

An issue with these programs, and one that persists to this day, was that the training provided was supply-oriented, often delivered by trainers with limited technical knowledge and little or no pedagogical experience. Most Cambodian

trainers who had survived Year Zero had skills that were more than 10 years out of date. Options were limited by both the restricted availability of trainers and the quality of the training provided. Though envisaged as income-generating and poverty-alleviating initiatives, the supply-oriented nature of the training programs being supported effectively negated their potential for poverty alleviation.

By 1990, therefore, TVET, whether formal or non-formal, essentially did not exist. Where some basic level of training was being provided, it was typically unrelated to labour market and future development needs and depended on poorly qualified trainers with little or no industrial experience, often themselves having only recently completed the training programs they now had to deliver.

5.2.4 Reconstruction (1991–2000)

When international relations with Cambodia began to normalise after the Vietnamese withdrawal in 1991, humanitarian assistance was rapidly restored. Shortfalls in education and training were quickly recognised as a significant obstacle to economic development. Various UN agencies became strongly active in providing support, as did individual countries, including Australia, France, the United Kingdom, Japan, Norway, and the United States (Duggan, 1997). With the presence of the United Nations Transitional Authority of Cambodia (UNTAC) and with democratic elections scheduled for mid-1993, large-scale bilateral assistance programs were established. Donors tended, however, to concentrate on the safer urban areas in selected regions and municipalities because remnant factions of the Khmer Rouge were continuing to present danger across various parts of the country.

By late 1993, signs of project fragmentation, duplication, inefficiency, and ineffectiveness were beginning to show concerning the delivery of technical training programs. NGOs delivering local short-term livelihood training programs were competing for trainees to justify their rehabilitation funding, leading to increased supply-side training. The rivalry between anglophone- and francophone-funded programs was hampering informed discussion and planning at senior ministerial levels. The provision of bilateral support for TVET was experiencing fragmentation and a lack of coordination. Significant funding gaps were occurring for all post-primary education. A plethora of small private sector training institutes emerged in response to the demand for English-speaking office, business, and IT staff. Still, the programs provided were often delivered by teachers from public institutions, usually as a second or third job.

By 1994, Cambodia had 26 officially recognised TVET institutions, staffed by fewer than 500 teachers. Student intake was estimated to be around 3000 per year, but program details remained lacking. The training programs were mainly supply-driven and unrelated to labour market requirements (Daroesman & Trewavas, 1999). TVET remained mostly an area of responsibility of MoEYS, but various other ministries, notably MoAFF and MoWA, also began to manage training institutions.

In 1995, the first major Asian Development Bank (ADB) investment, the *Basic Skills Project*, commenced. Approved in November 1995, it was funded by an ADB loan. The TVET component of the Project, delivered through MoEYS, sought to strengthen skills training systems needed to support physical infrastructure development. It also aimed to promote the formalisation of voucher skills training, post-harvest technology training, and skills bridging programs to equip disadvantaged and displaced groups with necessary income-generating skills. Establishing capacity within MoEYS for initial planning and management for technical skills training was also a priority.

Building on previous ILO and UNDP support, a National Training Board (NTB), National Training Fund, and Department of Vocational Orientation within MoEYS were established (Daroesman & Trewavas, 1999). A Cambodian Qualifications Standard was also mooted. These activities began to bring about improvements to the quality and relevance of skills training programs. Gains were made by rehabilitating selected skills training institutions, establishing a national TVET curriculum and staff development centre, and expanding TVET outreach programs to include provincial training centres (PTCs), women development centres, and community-level mobile training support. Other achievements included building several PTCs, the rehabilitation of regional training centres (RTCs), and the development and production of curriculum and training materials. The initial scope was designed to strengthen outreach capacity in five PTCs. However, while being implemented, the scope was extended to cover 16 PTCs and 9 women development centres.

The *Basic Skills Project* exceeded expectations regarding the rehabilitation of TVET institutions, especially at the National Institute of Business, Preah Kossomak Polytechnic Institute, the National Technical Training Institute, and, to some extent, the Russey Keo Technical Institute (ADB, 2005). The voucher skills training program facilitated the delivery of non-formal competency-based training to allow future recognition of prior learning. It also acted as a vehicle to provide funding to the PTCs and RTCs, particularly for salary support.

5.2.5 Towards a Modern TVET Sector (2000–2024)

A transfer of TVET responsibilities from MoEYS to MoLVT occurred in 2004. It required an almost complete handing over of funds, personnel, functions, and post-secondary institutions. Responsibility for non-formal and informal vocational training was also transferred to MoLVT, in this case from the Ministry of Social Welfare. There were, however, many secondary schools with TVET training programs that continued to be under management by MoEYS. Some other ministries also continued to maintain their existing technical training institutes.

Following on from the *Basic Skills Project*, the ADB's *Strengthening Technical and Vocational Education and Training Project* (2008–2015) sought to build a platform for continued reform by developing replicable models to enable TVET to become more relevant to industry. The Project focused on improving non-formal and

entry-level programs, resulting in increased enrolment in short-course programs from 6300 trainees in 2004 to 27,000 trainees by 2018. Other achievements included the establishment of three industry advisory groups; the development of skill standards to be promoted by these groups; the development of competency-based training and assessment procedures; the retraining of instructors, including in skill areas; an upgrading of facilities; and the preparation of institute directors to operate in more enterprise-directed ways.

Three sectors (mechanics, construction, business services and ICT) were chosen for the development of these models because these sectors represented mainstream skill areas with substantial national coverage, including at both the low- and mid-level skill levels, and were offered in all PTCs. The PTCs in five provinces (Battambang, Kampot, Siem Reap, Svay Rieng, and Takeo) were expanded and upgraded to RTCs to offer formal TVET certificate programs in mechanics, construction, business services, and ICT at entry, mid-level, and technician levels. The RTCs were expected to act as primary conduits for regional in-service training for instructors and develop as centres of excellence. Independent industry advisory groups consisting primarily of selected employers from the three sectors were established to review and endorse skill standards. These groups also sought to provide ongoing assistance in curriculum development, training development, and assessment. The communes selected for inclusion in the Project were supplied with 'vouchers' to fund training linked to local commune planning. A revised voucher skills training program was then extended to all 24 provinces, involving a further 210,000 participants. Each province was intended to receive funding for 2 years. To improve the quality of training, the expanded voucher skills training program was modified by reducing group size for field-based training, putting greater emphasis on enterprise attachments and centre-based training, or combinations of both, offering new incentives for placing graduates in employment and implementing two new pilots—one for microenterprise training and the other for urban skills, such as car mechanics (ADB, 2014).

A follow-up *Skills Development Project* (2015–2021) supported further improvements in access to and the quality of certificate-level training programs (levels 2–4 on the Cambodia Qualifications Framework, or grades 10–12 for school-based TVET courses), as well as the development of skill standards for key certificate-level occupations. Also, there was investment in the assessment, certification, and quality assurance system for TVET. A National TVET Policy (2017–2025) was developed. Sector Skills Councils were established for priority sectors.

In 2017, a labour market and TVET assessment found that TVET support had been spread rather thinly across the institutes under management by MoLVT. It was recommended that there should be a concentration of future support on a smaller number of institutes, each with a clear sector focus. These were to include the Institute of Technology of Cambodia, under management by MoEYS. In 2019, a *Skills for Competitiveness Project* (2019–2023) (ADB, 2019) followed, focusing sharply on the priority sectors of electronics/electrical industries, manufacturing, and construction. Despite demand, the tourism and ICT industries were not included because the private sector and other stakeholders were already playing a significant

role in providing technical support and training in these sectors. The *Skills for Competitiveness Project* was intended to support the national priority of modernising and transforming Cambodia's industrial structure from labour-intensive to skills-driven by 2025. It envisaged the development of human resources in higher value-added industries by strengthening selected public post-secondary technical training institutes (TTIs) in priority sectors and locations, promoting work-based learning programs to upskill the current workforce, and supporting the Government's planned Skills Development Fund, a program to incentivise industry sector participation in technical training and upgrading.

5.3 Current State

5.3.1 Governance of TVET

TVET development is currently tailored to meet national policies, especially the *Industrial Development Policy 2015–2025*, the *National Employment Policy 2015–2025*, and, most recently, the *Technical and Vocational Education and Training Policy 2017–2025*. The current policy focus is the improvement of quality in terms of the sector's capacity to meet national and international market demand, increase equitable access, and promote public-private partnerships to support sustainable development. There is also a policy commitment to improving governance.

The MoLVT, through its Directorate General of Technical and Vocational Education and Training (DGTVET), is primarily responsible for the delivery of TVET. The DGTVET manages 7 central training institutions, 5 regional training centres (RTCs), and 26 provincial training centres (PTCs), delivering formal training at certificate, diploma, and bachelor's degree levels.

MoEYS continues to play a crucial role in providing for improvements in the quality of the labour force. Since 2015, MoEYS has established policies, guidelines, and plans to improve the quality of technical education under its mandate, focusing on providing technical skills for youth (Sothy et al., 2015). The 2007 *Education Law*, which provided for the development of qualified human resources in general, with a focus on lifelong learning, the quality of education, and the role of educators, also covered vocational education. The *Education Strategic Plan 2014–2018* (MoEYS, 2014) was formulated to include technical education at the upper-secondary level. As a result, the MoEYS' Vocational Orientation Department, in collaboration with the Korean International Cooperation Agency, published a *Master Plan for Technical Education at Upper Secondary Level (2015–2019)* (MoEYS, 2015), which provided eight comprehensive strategies to enhance productivity and improve quality and efficiency. The strategies covered curricula and textbooks, facilities and equipment, teacher qualifications and competency, accreditation and quality assurance, sustainability, and gender mainstreaming. Other ministries directly involved in managing technical training centres are usually focused on

preparing staff for their specific administrative and fieldwork rather than industry-related functions.

5.3.2 National and Provincial Training Boards

A National Training Board (NTB) was constituted in 1996 but was not formally recognised until the promulgation of sub-decree no. 790 in 2005. Chaired by the Deputy Prime Minister, the NTB has 31 members, including senior government officials, representatives of ministries involved in the delivery of TVET, and representatives of employer associations, trade unions, NGOs, and private training institutions. The NTB has three subcommittees, responsible for TVET accreditation, national competency and testing standards, and labour market information.

The NTB's principal responsibility, discharged through the DGTVET secretariat, is to coordinate TVET responsiveness to Cambodia's socio-economic development needs. Its mandate includes formulating national TVET policy and plans; coordinating and guiding TVET; recommending reforms for TVET quality and effectiveness consistent with national development priorities; linking with and responding to the needs of industry, trade, agriculture, and the service sectors; and building relationships between industry and training. However, neither the sub-decree nor the *Education Law* provided the NTB with the authority required to approve TVET policy and plans. This authority must be exercised by the issuing of regulations or directives by ministers or ministry secretary-generals. Nevertheless, the NTB remains responsible for the national coordination of TVET, for management of the National Training Fund, and for determining the functions and duties of Provincial Training Boards. Unfortunately, though, there is little evidence of NTB meetings and determinations over most of the past decade.

5.3.3 Regulatory Framework

The policy and planning framework for TVET has its foundation in Cambodia's *Rectangular Strategy' for Growth, Employment, Equity and Efficiency Phase III* (Royal Government of Cambodia [RGC], 2013) and the resulting *National Program for Reconstruction and Development (NPRD)* and *National Strategic Development Plan 2014–2018* (RGC, 2014). A *National TVET Development Plan*, initially drawn up in 1996 as a 25-year plan (Ministry of Labour and Vocational Training [MoLVT], 1996), was not formally approved until 2006. It has subsequently been updated periodically, most recently in 2018. A central objective of the Plan and other sector development initiatives was to strengthen national capacity for planning and implementing skills training programs as part of improved coordination of public and donor support programs. A related objective was to enhance public training delivery systems to reduce reliance on fragmented externally assisted programs.

5.3.4 Funding

The Government has experienced ongoing difficulty in providing a stable and adequate funding base for skills development. It remains highly dependent on multilateral and bilateral funding to enable it to provide further development in this regard. Because of low government salaries, the first call for non-budget revenues is usually supplementary payments or teaching incentives for staff.

Funding to the DGTVET has generally increased over the last 10 years. In 2018, MoLVT had a budget of $54 million in US dollars, 34% of which was allocated to the DGTVET. About 80% of the DGTVET budget is allocated to recurrent expenditures, particularly the salaries of trainers and staff.

The primary sources of TVET funding include direct budgetary support to the DGTVET, tuition fees, private contributions, and donations.[1] There are also limited voluntary industry levies. Central and larger institutes can charge tuition fees. Grants and concessional loans are received from the ADB and South Korea, Japan, India, Germany, and France. A range of international and domestic NGOs self-fund their training programs.

The DGTVET does not know the budgets of all its TVET institutions, given that they each receive funds from multiple sources. Except for a few central institutions, RTCs and PTCs generally do not and have been unwilling to provide information about their budgets and expenditures to the DGTVET. Some may not even have the capacity to account adequately for their revenues and expenses.

Thus, there is an almost total dependence upon grants and multilateral loans for system development and improvement. Other issues relate to coordination and accountability challenges arising from funding diversity, sustainability and system maintenance arising from dependence on donors, the quality of teaching and staff arising from low wages and salaries, and a limited capacity to respond to industry and labour market needs, stemming from a low involvement of industry with the TVET system. The absence of adequate and transparent financial data is a significant obstacle to policy development, planning, and operational management.

Attempts are being made to diversify and improve funding. These include developing a per capita funding mechanism, increasing system decentralisation and deconcentration to increase provincial-level funding, increasing institutional autonomy and legislating for fees, encouraging private sector financing, and promoting the production and sales of goods and services. Options for enterprise payroll or training levies are also being considered.

[1] Private contributions to publicly delivered long-course TVET by way of fees are not uncommon and may account for up to 70% of recurrent training costs, most of which become contributions to salaries. Fees are technically supposed to be remitted to central revenues, but doing so means reducing an institution's revenue.

5.3.5 *Teacher Training*

The National Technical Training Institute (NTTI) under the DGTVET is mandated to provide training for TVET instructors and contribute to curriculum development and associated training materials. The NTTI has designed and currently delivers a 1-year (960 h) TVET teacher training program. Applicants for admission must hold an approved degree in the subject area in which they will teach. Two types of instructors are trained in the program: senior and junior. Upon completion of training, senior instructors are certified to teach up to the bachelor's degree level. Junior instructors are certified to teach upper-secondary (grades 10–12) programs, diploma programs, and short courses (a few weeks to less than a year), known as certificate courses. Senior instructors can teach at a TVET institute or a polytechnic, while junior instructors often find employment in PTCs.

5.4 Relevance to the Labour Market

The legacy of 30 years of supply-driven vocational training, disjoints between industry and training providers, cheap unskilled labour, and a reliance on donor funding has left Cambodian TVET in the doldrums. Information is lacking on shortages and surpluses of skilled labour, making it challenging to decide on the need for adjustments to training supply. There is also a lack of employer participation in advising, directing, and evaluating the outcomes of the training process. Most employers view lack of quality, and not numbers of graduates, as a significant issue. Many larger employers, mostly foreign owned, tend to develop their own training programs. Employers also often comment on the lack of training in soft skills.

Labour market needs tend to be location-specific. For example, in Siem Reap province, the labour market is dominated by accommodation and hospitality businesses, as might be expected because the local airport receives more than 2 million visitors annually. In contrast, in Svay Rieng, about one-half of the large employers are in the entertainment subsector, reflecting the presence of casinos along the border with Vietnam. Only in Phnom Penh, or in the designated tax-free zones, is manufacturing predominantly.

Most employment growth is occurring in the category of unskilled workers in both the industry and services sectors. Employment opportunities are starting to grow for medium-level skill groups, such as service workers in the tourism and real estate sectors and craft workers in the garment and wood/paper sectors. The only high-level skill groups expected to enjoy improved employment opportunities are professionals in the real estate and business sectors and technicians in the utilities (electricity/gas/water) sectors. Short- and medium-term labour policy for skills promotion for the next planning cycle period should, therefore, be consistent with current and forecast trends.

Overall, the expansion of access to TVET in the past decade or so has not been matched with quality improvement in curriculum standards, teacher qualifications, the standard of facilities, and an awareness of the importance of skilled manual work. International experiences of TVET reform have shown that limited results of TVET improvement programs are due to overly involved governments, particularly as TVET providers. Instead of relying heavily on public providers and financiers for TVET, the private sector's role in TVET development must be promoted. One well-known model of private sector engagement is through public-private partnerships (PPP) for the provision of training in areas such as 'curriculum design, training, apprenticeships, internships, standard-setting and certification schemes, along with significant investment and funding by the private sector' (International Business Chamber of Cambodia & Cambodia Development Resource Institute [IBC & CDRI], 2016, p. 4). The *Skills for Competitiveness* Project is beginning to incentivise training institutes to work more closely with industry, including by encouraging internships, reassessing competencies, and improving trainer competencies focused on priority industries. The Skills Development Fund is intended to provide increased opportunities for industry-based training.

5.5 The Future of TVET in Cambodia

The TVET sector in Cambodia is not producing the skilled workforce that businesses and industries need. Many factors contribute to the perceived low quality of TVET graduates. The system has focused on delivering diploma and degree programs and not on shorter, cutting-edge certificate-level programs that target new and emerging industries. Linkages between TVET providers and industry continue to be weak, resulting in supply-driven training programs, with businesses and industries not usefully engaged in identifying training needs or in the development and delivery of training programs. TVET institutes, RTCs, and PTCs have tended to develop their teaching standards and curricula in a manner that is not linked to industrial standards and practices. Also, RTCs and PTCs have not had, and still do not have, qualified instructors to implement competency-based training.

TVET remains stretched across ministries and other providers, a characteristic that will continue to confound coordination and harmonisation. Certification is, therefore, provided under different conditions and systems. This situation is likely to persist until stakeholders agree on the National Qualification Framework's critical components, required competencies, and the development of a method for providing formal recognition of acquired learning.

The Government, especially the MoLVT, has established national policies, strategies, and plans to improve PPPs. Industry should be both encouraged and coerced to provide (pre-employment) internship and apprenticeship opportunities for TVET students, in addition to more in-service training for employers.

The MoLVT has shown its intention to reform learning and teaching methods. Even as the *National Technical Vocational Education and Training Policy*

2017–2025 (MoLVT, 2017) is being implemented, it is planned to focus on teacher training, the curriculum, soft skills, and industry-relevant skills.

The deep-rooted issues of governance and institutional arrangements and coordination that hinder the progress of TVET must be a top priority for reform. Education and training improvement takes considerable effort and time, as the experiences of some countries in the region have shown (Gill et al., 2000). Instead of seeking quick and often unsustainable solutions, reforms must be inclusive and sensitive to Cambodia's industrialisation vision and socio-economic-political-cultural context. They must also focus on empowering women, youth, and marginalised groups.

There is a pressing need to improve access and retention rates in the TVET sector. This issue relates to the broader topic of the quality of lower-secondary education. Because of poor quality at the lower-secondary level, many young Cambodians are neither well qualified nor highly motivated to proceed to further studies through the TVET sector. High drop-out rates at the end of the lower-secondary program and then in TVET programs manifest this severe problem. Accordingly, questions must be asked about improving lower-secondary education and integrating TVET studies more effectively with the upper-secondary curriculum.

Another matter that will require more attention concerns the need for better integration between the TVET and higher education sectors. At present, the extent of permeability between these sectors is modest. Questions must be addressed, therefore, about how the boundaries between the TVET and higher education sectors can be made more surmountable. There is a specific need to develop options whereby there are more pathways for young people who begin TVET to transition to higher education and vice versa.

As mentioned previously, the TVET sector also needs to be better engaged with the private sector. PPPs would more rapidly enable this engagement to occur, but there is a need for different training options within PPP frameworks to be explored. Ways need to be found to provide opportunities for the private sector to contribute to curriculum improvement within TVET, invest in intercompany training centres, and expand apprentice programs.

The TVET sector also needs to overhaul its curriculum. In a world characterised by rapid technological change, it is no longer acceptable for the TVET curriculum to be exclusively focused on attaining a high level of competency across a relatively narrow band of vocational skills. The curriculum must also respond to the challenge of equipping students with twenty-first-century skills (critical thinking, creativity, collaboration, initiative, productivity, lifelong learning skills, technological literacy, communication skills, social skills, leadership, media skills, and so on). A question for exploration, therefore, is how best to integrate these skills with existing curriculum requirements.

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Chapter 6
Higher Education in Cambodia: The Constraining Effects of Traditional Values

Vicheth Sen

6.1 Introduction

Once elections in 1993 brought peace to Cambodia, the Government, with support from the private sector and donor community, was able to begin the urgent task of rebuilding the economy. Critical to this task was the need to reconstruct a higher education sector which at the time was small, poorly funded, and unremarkable. A policy of expanding the sector began in the mid-1990s. The policy was very successful. At the time, there were only ten higher education institutions (HEIs) in Cambodia, attended by about 10,000 students (Pak, 2011). By 2017–2018, Cambodia had 125 HEIs and more than 210,000 higher education students (Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport [MoEYS], 2019a). Private investment in the sector played a critical role in this expansion. Cambodia's first private university became operational in 1997. In 2017–2018, there were 77 private HEIs, accounting for about 60% of all higher education students (MoEYS, 2019b).

The expansion did not, however, eliminate many long-term problems for the sector. These included the sector's inadequate infrastructure, limited teaching and learning resources, negligible research opportunities, and failure to meet the country's need for graduates in areas of immediate relevance to national economic development (Dy, 2015; Khieng et al., 2015; Phan, 2015; Sam & Dahles, 2017; Sen, 2013; Sen & Ros, 2013; Un & Sok, 2014; United Nations Development Program, 2011). The sector has also been adversely affected by weak national coordination for much of the period since 1995.

This chapter seeks to present a cultural perspective on the development and present state of Cambodia's higher education sector. To date, only a few scholars

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(Ayres, 2003; Leng, 2015) have adopted a cultural perspective to seek to understand how the sector functions and responds to external challenges. In the international literature, however, there are many examples available of the adoption of a cultural approach to the study of issues in higher education. Significant contributions in this regard include those of Välimaa (1998, 2008), Välimaa and Ylijoki (2008), and Liu (2011, 2012).

The chapter begins with a review of recent reforms affecting the higher education sector. Issues currently having to be addressed by the sector are then reviewed through a cultural lens. Finally, the chapter addresses ways in which the sector might be better able to make faster progress over the coming years.

6.2 Recent Reforms

David Sloper's (1999) book, *Higher education in Cambodia: The social and educational context for reconstruction*, provided the first comprehensive overview of Cambodia's higher education sector. The concerns identified by Sloper included system fragmentation, the minimal relevance of degree programmes to labour market needs, underfunding, and inappropriate or outdated curriculum offerings. These have been ongoing concerns for the sector. Also, there has been an emerging problem with high rates of unemployment among recent graduates. The Government has sought to address these matters through a succession of reforms, described by Touch et al. (2013) as 'far-reaching' (p. 52). However, many of the reforms have tended to be reactive and in some cases were initiated simply to secure a continuing supply of foreign aid. The main reforms and indications of their impact will now be addressed.

6.2.1 Governance and Management

Reforms to the governance and management of Cambodia's higher education sector have occurred at both the systemic and institutional levels. At the systemic level, three developments are especially significant. The first was the promulgation in 1997 of a *Royal Decree on the Legal Status of Public Administrative Institutions* (Royal Government of Cambodia [RGC], 1997). This Decree aimed to decentralize governance and management within the public sector generally, thereby alleviating pressure on the national budget and the weight of responsibilities being carried by individual ministries. In the higher education sector, the Decree's impact was that it provided an opportunity for public HEIs to seek Public Administrative Institution (PAI) status. Public HEIs granted PAI status were to be given the freedom to generate additional income through the provision of teaching, research, and consultancy services. They were also to be permitted to decide for themselves how to apply the extra revenue obtained to the improvement of their institutional capacity (Touch

et al., 2013). They were expected to become more individually accountable for the quality of their teaching and research provision (Touch et al., 2013). They were also given more room to develop new programmes and services. The Decree was revised in 2015, but concerns about some of the revisions have meant that the revised Decree has not yet been implemented (Mak et al., 2019b; Sok et al. 2019). To date, ten public universities, representing about one-fifth of all public HEIs in Cambodia, have been granted PAI status (Mak et al., 2019a).

The second was the establishment in 2004 of the Cambodian Higher Education Association (CHEA). This Association was intended to better coordinate private sector HEIs and support them by developing their capacity to implement quality improvements (CHEA, 2016). As expressed in a statement of purpose published in 2016, the Association sought to 'gather the intelligent resources from all private higher education institutions to make it easy for exchanging opinions, ideas, views, experiences and school curriculums for promoting the quality of education in Cambodia to meet the national and international standards' (CHEA, 2016, para. 2). At the time of its establishment, CHEA had 13 institutional members. Currently, it has 80 members, but only 30 of these are private HEIs, and the rest are private secondary schools (Mak et al., 2019b).

The third was the adoption in 2007 of a new *Education Law*. This Law sought to provide a clear direction for the development of the education system (Touch et al., 2013). It stipulated, for example, the need to establish a Supreme National Council of Education (SNCE) as a mechanism for overall governance and development of the education system. This Council would be chaired by the Prime Minister and would address long-term policies and strategies. It would also be responsible for evaluating all education programmes, as well as for mobilizing financial resources in support of the national education system.

At an institutional level, public HEIs granted PAI status experienced a significant impact on how they were governed. Instead of being line-managed by a ministry or other public instrumentality, they were each given the opportunity to have a governing board, referred to as a Board of Directors, with between 5 and 11 members. The Government specified that the five core members should include one representative from the institution's parent ministry/agency, one representative from the Ministry of Economy and Finance (MoEF), one representative from the Office of the Council of Ministers, the institution's rector, and one representative of university staff. The other members could include deans of colleges or faculties, a representative from outside the university community, a representative of academic staff, and a student representative.

The autonomy given to PAI universities' governing boards enabled them to exercise many freedoms not previously available to them. They could, for example, hire qualified human resources, develop new curricula and programmes, and support the exercise of academic freedom by faculty members. A survey of these institutions by Touch et al. (2013, p. 62) reported that PAI status had enabled them to implement new academic programmes, achieve more efficient administrative processes, and make decisions much more rapidly than before. In general, PAI status helped them to achieve some definite improvements in their governance and management.

Table 6.1 Number of HEIs under parent ministries/institutions

No.	Parent ministries/institutions	Public	Private	Total
1	Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports	13	63	76
2	Ministry of Health	2	0	2
3	Ministry of Culture and Fine Arts	1	0	1
4	Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries	3	0	3
5	Ministry of Cults and Religion	3	0	3
6	Ministry of National Defense	5	0	5
7	Ministry of Interior	1	0	1
8	Office of the Council of Ministers	1	0	1
9	Ministry of Public Works and Transport	1	0	1
10	National Bank of Cambodia	1	0	1
11	Ministry of Social Affairs, Veterans and Youth Rehabilitation	1	0	1
12	Ministry of Mines and Energy	1	0	1
13	Ministry of Labour and Vocational Training	12	14	26
14	Ministry of Posts and Telecommunications	1	0	1
15	Ministry of Economy and Finance	1	0	1
16	Ministry of Land Management, Urban Planning and Construction	1	0	1
Total		48	77	125

Source: MoEYS (2019a, p. 65)

Governance reform was also promoted within private HEIs. The *Prakas on Conditions and Detailed Criteria for HEI Licensing* (RGC, 2007), issued in 2007, required private HEIs also to have governing boards, referred to as Boards of Directors. Their membership was to include five persons, including shareholder representatives, dignitaries from the fields of education, politics or the economy, and representatives of the institution's administration. Students were not included in the membership. Currently, most private HEIs have established governing boards in compliance with the Government's legislation (Un & Sok, 2014).

Beneficial as the various reforms have been, they have not been sufficient to overcome ongoing governance and management problems in the sector. At a systemic level, the higher education sector's coordination remains fragmented and bureaucratically inflexible (Breitschwerdt & Sen, 2017; Chet, 2006; Dy, 2015; Sen, 2013; Sen & Ros, 2013; Un & Sok, 2014). Public HEIs belong to as many as 16 different ministries (MoEYS, 2019a) (see Table 6.1), none of which subscribes to a standard set of higher education policies and regulations. MoEYS and the Ministry of Labour and Vocational Training (MoLVT) have the most responsibility for public HEIs. It has long been recognized, though, that these Ministries compete more than they cooperate (United Nations Development Program [UNDP], 2011). Furthermore, while MoEYS is mandated to formulate sector-wide policies and plans to evaluate the higher education sector and improve quality (RGC, 2009), its authority is effectively restricted to the HEIs for which it is directly responsible. At inter-ministerial meetings, MoEYS has been reported to be 'limited to tasks such as the

selection of government-funded scholarship students, provision of technical assistance on some specific courses and some policy dialogue' (Sen & Ros, 2013, p. 6). It is widely claimed that the multiplicity of ministries responsible for the line management of public HEIs within the sector has resulted in poor policy implementation and monitoring, as well as insufficient attention being given to serious matters relating to graduate employability and the relevance of higher education to the economy (Sen, 2013; Sen & Ros, 2013). Fragmentation has also limited the quality of the sector's support by agencies such as the Accreditation Committee of Cambodia with sector-wide responsibilities (Breitschwerdt & Sen, 2017; Dy, 2015).

The SNCE was meant to address inter-ministerial coordination of the higher education sector. As indicated in the *Education Law*, it was intended to provide a mechanism for governance and the national education system's development, including the higher education sector. However, the SNCE has never materialized. Even by 2014, a vision statement for the higher education sector (MoEYS, 2014b) was calling for the establishment of the SNCE. The fact that it has not been established may be due to the kind of organizational structure proposed for it in the *Education Law*. There is also a view that the proposed SNCE may never, in any case, have been of much benefit to the higher education sector because it merely added another layer of bureaucracy to a sector that was already subject to too much bureaucratic control (Sen, 2019).

The CHEA seems, however, to have been successful in promoting better coordination and the exchange of ideas, experiences, and curriculum initiatives for private HEIs. Recently, though, its impact appears to have diminished—its webpage has not been updated, and its website has been temporarily offline for an extended period. Dy (2015) argued that: 'CHEA's ability to promote mutual benefit and help develop member institutions' capacity for growth and quality improvement has been limited and influenced by political leaders' (p. 51). The point here was that CHEA appeared to be reluctant to engage politically on behalf of private HEIs. It was also unable to cooperate with any organization representing public HEIs because of the intensity of the competition for students between public and private HEIs.

At an institutional level, the main governance issues are related to autonomy. Public HEIs under direct control by parent ministries/agencies have limited freedom in financial, administrative, and academic decision-making, despite adopting policy changes such as the provision of PAI status. The culture of governance and management remains anchored to a traditional model, regardless of PAI status. Indeed, the PAI policy was not designed to provide full stakeholder participation in HEI governance (Touch et al., 2013). Institutional autonomy remains weak in a context in which centralized and bureaucratic mechanisms are employed to control the internal management and administrative affairs of individual public HEIs. Of relevance here is that the core members of the governing boards of PAI universities include representatives from ministries, and the system of reporting requires accountability to both a parent ministry and the MoEF (Sen, 2019).

In a revised Royal Decree on PAIs that was adopted in 2015 (but not yet been implemented), one of the most controversial points was the stipulation that all revenues generated by PAI HEIs were to be deposited in a designated account at

the National Treasury, a move that would have further tightened the extent of central control within the sector (Sok et al., 2019). There also remains a lack of clarity about the rector's role as the chair of a PAI university's governing board. Under the initial PAI legislation, the rector could bypass the views of community representatives and other stakeholders on a Board of Governors (Touch et al., 2013). Surprisingly, the revised PAI legislation in 2015 removed the rector from being a member of the Board of Governors (Mak et al., 2019b; Sok et al., 2019). This stipulation was one of the most contentious of the revisions introduced by the Royal Decree of 2015. It is highly likely to have contributed strongly to the Government's subsequent decision to hold off on implementing the new Decree (Sok et al., 2019, p. 7). For the moment, therefore, it is the 1997 version of the Royal Decree that remains in effect.

Overall, as Un and Sok (2014) have observed, 'There is a clear tendency towards centralization in staff and financial management as a majority of institutions report that decisions on these matters lie in the hands of the board of directors or the rector/director of an institution, while decisions on academic affairs are more decentralized' (p. 93). Reform of governance and management in the sector has mainly been symbolic, with not much changing in practice. MoEYS (2016) acknowledged that more work needed to be done to develop regulations and policy for providing public HEIs with more autonomy. In the meantime, public HEIs continue to be seen mainly as part of the machinery of government. Sloper's observations in 1999 about the state of governance and management in public higher education sector remain all too relevant to the current state of governance and management in the sector.

6.2.2 Accreditation and Quality Assurance

Quality is a significant issue for the higher education sector in Cambodia. The Government and various individual ministries have implemented several reform measures. The most important of these was the establishment in 2003 of the Accreditation Committee of Cambodia (ACC) (RGC, 2003). The ACC was given the task of managing the accreditation of all HEIs and degree programmes. The ACC is financed by the Office of the Council of Ministers. It has a core group of members nominated by different ministries, and MoEYS appoints its president. As of 2013, a decade after its establishment, the ACC had not moved beyond accrediting the foundation year programmes of most HEIs (Touch et al., 2013). In 2013, because of concern about its public accountability, independence, and capacity to undertake its work effectively and efficiently, the Government assigned the ACC secretariat to MoEYS. Discussion then took place about the ACC's future and the minimum quality standards it had established for HEIs (Un & Sok, 2014).

A related initiative in 2003 was the decision taken by the Government (*Royal Decree on Higher Education Accreditation*) to require the establishment of an internal quality assurance unit in each HEI. These units were to be responsible for conducting internal self-assessments of the quality of academic programmes. The Education Congress Report of MoEYS (2016) noted that the establishment of these

units had developed an internal quality assurance system at the programme level for HEIs, based on the ASEAN University Network (AUN) model.

Other initiatives of note include a *Decision on Credit and Credit Transfer Systems*, issued by the ACC in 2004 (Un & Sok, 2014), and adoption of the *Cambodia Qualifications Framework* in 2012 (RGC, 2012). These initiatives have ensured easier credit transfer between different kinds of HEIs in Cambodia (Un & Sok, 2014).

Despite these reforms, concern has repeatedly been expressed about the quality of higher education provided in Cambodia (Chet, 2006; Dy, 2015; Sen, 2013; Un & Sok, 2014; UNDP, 2011). MoEYS and the World Bank (WB) (2015) have even argued that 'the roles of HEIs have primarily been concerned with enrolment and production of a large number of tertiary degree holders with little attention to quality, academic integrity and research skills' (p. 17).

The credibility of the ACC is a matter of concern. After more than a decade since being established, it has not brought about any positive change in public perceptions about higher education quality in Cambodia (Breitschwerdt & Sen, 2017; Sen & Ros, 2013). Part of the problem is that, because it was based at and financed by the Office of the Council of Ministers, an executive arm of the Government, questions have continued to surround its professional integrity and political independence (Sen & Ros, 2013). The ACC is supposedly an independent entity, but independence was never possible for as long as its core members were appointed by different ministries (Sen, 2019).

The ACC's capacity has also been a matter of concern. Over its first 10 years of operation, it had not given full accreditation to a single HEI (Un & Sok, 2014). This situation may be explained by the rapid and relatively uncontrolled growth in the number of HEIs since 2000 (Dy, 2015). The need to recruit and train assessors could not keep up with the massive expansion in the number of HEIs requiring accreditation. Limited resources and the lack of much sector-wide coordination were undoubtedly also contributing factors (Breitschwerdt & Sen, 2017; Dy, 2015; Sen & Ros, 2013).

6.2.3 Teaching, Research, and Funding

Cambodia's HEIs are primarily teaching-based institutions that sustain themselves by collecting tuition fees (Ahrens & McNamara, 2013; MoEYS & The World Bank [WB], 2015; Peou, 2015; Sam & Dahles, 2017). Teaching itself is predominantly lecture-based and often not well informed by research (MoEYS & WB, 2015). With the rapid growth of the number of HEIs, teaching at a university has become a significant employment opportunity for university graduates. Minimal attention has been given research (Touch et al., 2013). This situation, coupled with the disconnect between HEIs and industry (Dy, 2015; Sam & Dahles, 2017), has resulted in the quality of what is taught being questioned (Touch et al., 2013).

MoEYS has recently initiated various reforms intended to promote a research culture across the higher education sector. At the policy level, the *Master Plan for Research Development in the Education Sector 2011–2015* (MoEYS, 2011), the *Education Strategic Plan 2014–2018* (MoEYS, 2014a), the *Policy on the Higher Education Vision 2030* (MoEYS, 2014b), and the *Royal Decree on Professorial Ranking* (RGC, 2013) all aim to promote a research culture in the higher education sector, which in turn is expected to contribute to an improved quality of teaching (Sen, 2019). The Government and concerned ministries have also encouraged development partners and HEIs themselves to support faculty members to engage in research (MoEYS & WB, 2015). In 2010, a significant development for promoting a research culture within the sector was a joint initiative between the WB and the Government to launch a Development and Innovation Grants Scheme. The Scheme, which was the first of its type in Cambodia, aimed 'to promote research activities through funding, to build research and managerial capacity of HEIs in managing research projects, and to offer a workable model of an open grant scheme—one that allows local academics to initiate their own research, develop their research and substantive expertise, and contributes to building a sustained research culture' (MoEYS & WB, 2015, p. 12). The Scheme was one of four components of a US $23 million Higher Education Quality and Capacity Improvement Project (HEQCIP), contributed to equally by the WB and the Government (MoEYS & WB, 2015; WB, 2010). According to a final stocktaking report produced by MoEYS and WB (2015), a total of 45 projects were awarded to 24 HEIs (13 public and 11 private), with the total budget of US$3.5 million, 96% of which was funded by the HEQCIP, and the rest contributed by participating HEIs.

The Government partly funds Cambodia's public HEIs, but not private HEIs. Since the 1990s, the share of public expenditure allocated for public higher education has been on average 0.09% of Cambodia's GDP, or about 5% of the national budget for the education sector (Mak et al., 2019a). It was planned, however, that the budget allocation would be almost 12% of the total public expenditure for the education sector by 2018 (MoEYS, 2014a). This plan appears to have been reached. In a progress report prepared by MoEYS, the budget for higher education in 2018–2019 was reported to sit at 12.76% of the total education budget (MoEYS, 2019a).

Since 1997, public HEIs have been permitted to offer fee-paying programmes to offset the low level of public funding. This reform has enabled enrolments to increase without the need for reliance on public financing (Touch et al., 2013). The Government also introduced a policy of increased private participation in higher education provision to promote higher education access. The rapid growth of the sector has for many years, therefore, been driven mainly by privatization measures, with private HEIs accounting for a large share of growth in higher education enrolments (Touch et al., 2013).

However, the promotion of a quality teaching and research culture in Cambodian HEIs remains a significant challenge. With private HEIs relying almost entirely on tuition fees (Sam & Dahles, 2017; Sen & Ros, 2013), and with 80% of the revenue of public HEIs coming from private sources (Ahrens & McNamara, 2013), funding for

research has been almost non-existent (MoEYS, 2016; MoEYS & WB, 2015; Un & Sok, 2014). Government funding for public HEIs serves primarily to support essential operations. At the same time, private HEIs are not willing to allocate funds for research because it does not yield immediate and tangible results (MoEYS & WB, 2015). Without a sustained source of funding for research, Cambodian academics at both public and private HEIs continue to engage solely in teaching (MoEYS & WB, 2015).

Another issue concerns the overwhelming tendency for private HEIs to offer degree programmes in disciplines such as accounting, finance, and management, where the costs of physical infrastructure are low and where there are opportunities for making a quick profit. This situation results in gaps in the provision of degree programmes in the sciences and technologies, which are areas of high demand in the labour market (Dy, 2015). Graduate employability then becomes an issue because of a mismatch between graduate labour supply and demand (Dy, 2015; Sen, 2013; United Nations Development Program, 2011), exacerbated by the lack of effective linkages between HEIs and industry (Dy, 2015; Sam & Dahles, 2017).

Meanwhile, although several important policies have recently been adopted to promote research culture and improve teaching within the sector, a significant issue has been the absence of a sufficient budget to implement these policies. Funding through the Development and Innovation Grants Scheme provided an excellent start to promote a culture of research in the sector. However, the main issue is the need for a sustained source of research funds. As the final stocktaking report on the Scheme made clear, 'sustaining academic research within Cambodian higher education is very challenging' (MoEYS & WB, 2015, p. 9).

6.3 Understanding Cambodian Higher Education Issues Through a Cultural Lens

Culture is not necessarily a determining factor in higher education reform in Cambodia, but it is a vital force. Its salience has tended to be overlooked in discussions about policymaking and improvement of the sector. Because 'the key assumptions of policymaking are based on Western institutions and Western values' (Liu, 2012, p. 648), examining issues in higher education through the lens of a national culture potentially makes a significant contribution to the development of an understanding of policymaking and policy reform in non-Western contexts such as Cambodia's.

Culture has been shown in different comparative higher education studies to influence reform processes because 'culture both facilitates and blocks change' (Brennan & Shah, 2000, p. 341). The cultural lens introduced in this chapter does not focus on the cultures of groups of people working within higher education (Clark, 1963), nor does it focus on the culture of organizations such as HEIs, campuses, and disciplines (Becher & Trowler, 2001; Marginson & Rhoades, 2002; Tierney, 1988, 2008; Välimaa, 1998). Instead, it approaches culture as 'national

culture specifically as a shared value system and has a stronger orientation to cultural perspectives than most similar research' (Liu, 2012, p. 648). This framework is underpinned by an understanding that has been developed by Weber (1958) and more recently by Liu (2012), who views culture as 'hidden forces shaping societal institutions' (p. 649).

Liu (2012) argues that 'cultural beliefs and values shape institutions and define the rationality of such social behaviour as policy making and implementation, and consequently shape social phenomena such as educational inequality in a given society' (p. 649). Making use of culture as 'an intellectual device makes it easier to explain traditional patterns or socio-cultural structures, which influence the social dynamics of higher education' (Välimaa, 2008, p. 16). With this framework, higher education issues can be explained through the cultural beliefs, values, and practices that undergird human activities within a particular socio-cultural context.

Cambodia is a society where the social hierarchy has traditionally been organized around an absolute monarchy and an entrenched set of patronage practices. This form of socio-cultural and political organization sheds some light on the kind of power configuration governing the nature of relationships between the ruler and the ruled. Hierarchical and patronage relationships and practices persist and form the fundamental basis of socio-cultural and political life at all levels of contemporary Cambodian society (see Chandler, 2008; Ebihara, 1966, 1968; Ledgerwood, n.d.; Scopis, 2011; Slocomb, 2010). These cultural values and practices constitute a system of thought (or episteme) that underpins people's mindset and behaviour in their everyday lives and interactions—from trivial, daily social encounters up to government and management decisions at a national level. Any way of structuring power relations or social order in contrast to or not in line with this epistemic framework holds little meaning in the societal context of Cambodia and could be rejected outright; it could also be viewed as an attempt to challenge the existing social order and the 'accepted' ways of thinking and behaving.

In Cambodia, the 'continuing predominance of the tradition of patron-client relationships, symbolized at the peak by the king as the patron of his subjects, and now in the form of Prime Minister-citizen relationships, is seen as a constraint on change and development' (McNamara, 2015, p. 14). However, judged from the traditional socio-cultural worldview of Cambodians, patron-client relationships are viewed as how power relations and social order are supposed to be structured, that is, premised upon unequal power relations and hierarchical social order. Regardless of how ineffective, socially, and economically, this worldview may be judged by those with a different cultural lens, or even by some within Cambodia itself, 'traditional' socio-cultural values and practices are deeply embedded in Cambodian society and are instrumental in shaping both institutions and policymaking, and governance and reform, in present-day Cambodia.

In the field of higher education, many of the reforms and policies adopted since the mid-1990s are underpinned by this 'traditional' socio-cultural frame of reference. The use of 'parent ministry/institution' discourse to denote a particular HEI as a 'child' institution functioning under the guardianship of a particular 'parent'

ministry (or other public instrumentality) is a classic example of how a hierarchical socio-cultural order underpins the power relationship in Cambodia.

The importance of this socio-cultural order may be illustrated with respect to two separate policy initiatives approved by the Government. The first concerns the *Royal Decree on Professorial Ranking* (RGC, 2013), and the second concerns the establishment of Boards of Directors in public HEIs (RGC, 1997). A cultural lens is required to shed light on the reasoning that gave rise to these initiatives.

6.3.1 The Royal Decree on Professorial Ranking

The *Royal Decree on Professorial Ranking* (RGC, 2013) aims to improve the quality of higher education through assessing and recognizing the academic scholarship and research of faculty members and by ranking them accordingly, from assistant professorship through to full professorship. Some consider the Decree as the missing policy needed to promote a research culture, academic scholarship, and publishing in Cambodia's higher education sector. The Decree draws upon the discourse of higher education quality improvement as one of the main drivers of its materialization. Although not directly stated, one of the objectives of this Decree is to promote academic freedom and scholarship. However, the Decree could be critiqued from two related perspectives. First, while in most countries professorial ranking is an internal institutional affair, in Cambodia, the process is required to be undertaken at a governmental level, which is consistent with the state of the power relations between the academic community and the Government of Cambodia (Sen, 2019). It illustrates a discourse of subordination and domination embedded in the 'traditional' socio-cultural understanding of hierarchy in Cambodian society.

A national body, the National Council for Granting Professorship (NCGP), was established to implement the Decree. Its establishment represents yet another aspect of Cambodia's 'traditional' socio-cultural understanding of hierarchy, that is, concerning a preference for bureaucratic centralization (Sen, 2019). As stated in Article 5 of the Decree (RGC, 2013, p. 3), the NCGP is required to have the following members: the Deputy Prime Minister as chair; the Minister of Education, Youth and Sports (as permanent vice-chair); one Secretary of State from the Council of Ministers (as vice-chair); one Secretary of State from MoEYS (as vice-chair); one Secretary of State from MoLVT (as vice-chair); two representatives from relevant ministries and agencies (as members); and three professorial representatives from related fields (as members).

The composition of the NCGP reflects clearly how hierarchical and centralized its exercise of decision-making is meant to be. It also means that the process of regulating and administering professorial ranking becomes a political matter, handled centrally by representatives of the Government. The professorial ranking and appointment process becomes even further centralized and even more hierarchical by the fact that the granting of professorial status requires the use of a decree signed by both the King and the Prime Minister. To a certain extent, it is understandable that

there might be a lack of trust and confidence in Boards of Directors to fulfil the task. However, while aimed at promoting academic freedom, recognition of academic scholarship, research, and teaching quality within higher education, the process of professorial ranking serves instead to suppress academic freedom because of how it is conceptualized and administered (Sen, 2019).

The entire professorial ranking process represents a symbolic embrace of the global discourse of improving the quality of higher education through properly ranking academic staff members. Looking at the process through a cultural lens, however, it presents 'a normative worldview that only through a central body that this kind of task can be done' (Sen, 2019, p. 521). This is the 'Cambodian way' of addressing a critical higher education need, and it is rooted in 'traditional' socio-cultural values and political norms.

6.3.2 Boards of Directors of Public HEIs

The need for each public HEI to have a Board of Directors was identified by the *Royal Decree on the Legal Status of Public Administrative Institutions* (RGC, 1997). The Decree was intended to grant more institutional and financial autonomy to public HEIs regarding their governance and management. A public HEI with PAI status is 'a legal entity with financial autonomy' (Article 2), as exercised by a Board of Directors. Allowing a public HEI with PAI status to offer fee-paying education programmes, the Decree also sought to reduce the extent of control able to be exercised by parent ministries over individual public HEIs. As noted earlier, though, the core members of institutional Boards of Directors include representatives from MoEYS, MoEF, and the Office of the Council of Ministers.

As with the *Royal Decree on Professorial Ranking*, the prescribed composition of the Boards of Directors gives a different impression than the one intended by the Government. With ministries continuing to play a dominant role through their membership of Boards of Directors, HEIs with PAI status inevitably remain institutionally and financially under centralized control. Moreover, Boards of Directors of HEIs with PAI status continue to be required to submit reports of their meetings, including meeting minutes, management reports, and financial reports, to both the MoEF and the relevant 'parent' ministry. As Article 19.2 of the Royal Decree states, 'any decisions of the Board of Directors regarding the organization and implementation of the budget shall be approved by the Minister of Economy and Finance' (RGC, 1997, p. 9). In other words, the entire accountability process contradicts the Royal Decree's expressed intention concerning the need for public HEIs with PAI status to have greater institutional and financial autonomy.

Viewed through the lens of Cambodian culture, however, the Royal Decree's accountability mechanisms make perfect sense, given that they comply fully with a 'traditional' socio-cultural worldview in Cambodia. For the Royal Decree to be implemented successfully, and for a Board of Directors to function effectively, normative values about power relations and hierarchy need to be institutionalized.

It seems, therefore, that the discourse of institutional autonomy is embraced for the policy to be relevant to the ideals of Western-imposed norms. In the meantime, only through a centralized and hierarchical mechanism of control and management is the reform made possible. This is another example of a worldview that is rooted in the socio-cultural and political norms and practices of Cambodia since pre-modern times.

6.4 Conclusion

Despite ongoing efforts by the Government, development partners, and other concerned stakeholders to reform Cambodia's higher education sector and improve the quality of graduates, the sector continues to face many challenging issues in the areas of governance and management, accreditation and quality assurance, and teaching, research, and funding. Applying a cultural lens to examining these issues may provide useful insights into the foundational underpinnings that characterize the organization and development of the sector and of the issues it has inherited. The two cases reported in this chapter show how reforms can be trapped in an age-old cultural tradition underpinning the system of thought and the power structure that perpetuates this hierarchical social order. As David Ayes (1998) correctly argued more than two decades ago, 'conditions tied to Cambodian culture: a nostalgia for the past, traditional patterns of authority, and traditional conceptions of leadership' (p. 7) continue to undermine the development of Cambodia's education, including the higher education sector. This argument still holds today, considering what has happened over the last decade in terms of 'reform' of the governance structure and organization of the higher education sector and the policies developed.

While the cultural perspective, as advanced in this chapter, is tentative and far from being a working conceptual framework, it casts some light on the current issues in the higher education sector in Cambodia. It provides a more nuanced understanding of how 'traditional' socio-cultural and political norms and values underlie the complexities and challenges the higher education sector continues to face. Higher education issues must be analysed as part of a broader societal organization and tradition (Ylijoki & Välimaa, 2008).

Cambodian scholars and researchers must take a more critical look at the socio-cultural norms and values that may underpin current and future issues for the higher education sector. As a way forward, what might be pursued is a critical examination of any cultural elements that have significant negative bearings on the development of the higher education sector and its reforms. Scrutiny from a critical lens of the impact of cultural tradition on the higher education system should serve to provide a different and more revealing perspective on Cambodian administrative thinking and practice, which might, in turn, lead to changed behaviour that contributes to alternative ways of improving the system. This alternative approach might be promoted at the discourse level, hopefully resulting in a change in social practice.

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Part II
Cross-Sector and Policy Issues

Chapter 7
The Teaching Profession in Cambodia: Progress to Date and Ongoing Needs

Sot Visal, Chey Chan Oeurn, and Sitha Chhinh

7.1 Introduction

The task of systematically rebuilding the education system in Cambodia could not properly begin until 1993 when peace was finally restored. The enormity of the challenge was vast. The Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports (MoEYS) played a vital role in providing leadership, but progress also required a great deal of support from other ministries, the private sector, and development partners. The achievements recorded have been remarkable, but the system continues to be constrained by teacher shortages, curriculum deficiencies, inadequate teaching and learning resources, poor capital infrastructure, weaknesses in leadership, and a highly bureaucratic form of national coordination.

This chapter addresses the specific topic of the teaching profession in Cambodia. It provides an overview of progress made over the past three decades, and it identifies the need for ongoing reform.

There is a developing literature on teaching in Cambodia, but mainly in the form of reports produced by MoEYS (2015, 2016a, 2018a, 2019a, 2019b). It has not been until recently that other kinds of literature have begun to appear (see, e.g. Tandon & Fukao, 2015; Chhinh et al., 2016; No & Heng, 2017; Sot et al., 2019).

This chapter is informed by available documentary sources and by interviews held with key local informants about the current state of teaching in Cambodia. These include Dr Dy Sam Sideth (Deputy General Director of Education in MoEYS), Dr Sok Soth (Dean of the Faculty of Education, Royal University of Phnom Penh), Dr Set Seng (Director of the Teacher Education College in Phnom Penh), and Mr Pring Morkoath (Director of the General Secondary Education Department in MoEYS). Other high-level informants preferred to remain

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anonymous. Interviewing key informants served not only to generate insights beyond those attainable from documentary sources. It also enabled the triangulation of relevant facts and perceptions.

Teaching in Cambodia has undergone a significant transformation since the early 1990s when the training level required to be a teacher was minimal. Indeed, most entrants to the profession were unlikely to have completed grade 12 at school. Talented students were not interested because of poor remuneration, difficult working conditions, and the profession's low social status. The situation was especially bleak in the country's more rural parts (Tandon & Fukao, 2015; MoEYS, 2015).

Since then, however, there have been extensive improvements. All entrants to teacher education programs must now have completed at least grade 12. They then complete 4, 2, or 1 year of study, depending upon the level within the school system at which they will be permitted to teach. The profession is also becoming more attractive because of improved teacher salaries, a more teacher-friendly work environment, and increased professional support opportunities. However, much remains to be done. The duration of teacher education needs to be extended. Teacher education must also enhance the capability of future teachers regarding the creation of teaching and learning materials that respond to the learning needs of children from a diversity of educational, socioeconomic, and cultural backgrounds (MoEYS, 2019a).

7.2 The Teaching Profession

There are currently about 94,000 teachers working in the Cambodian school system, of whom nearly 6% are in preschools, 49% are in primary schools, and 45% are in secondary schools. About 3000 newly trained teachers join the profession each year. Almost three-quarters of all teachers hold a qualification lower in equivalence to an undergraduate degree (MoEYS, 2019b). The number of new teachers entering the profession each year with an undergraduate degree remains relatively low, meaning that by 2030, unless there is a decisive policy intervention, most teachers will continue to be poorly qualified. Ensuring that opportunities are provided for more teachers to obtain the equivalent of an undergraduate degree has become a pressing mandate for the profession (MoEYS, 2015; Sot et al., 2019).

7.2.1 Teacher Training

Teacher training, which is a Government responsibility, is delivered as follows: a preschool teacher training centre, located in Phnom Penh, offers a 2-year teacher training program for preschool teachers; 14 provincial teacher training centres (PTTCs) provide 2-year teacher training programs for primary school teachers; 4 regional teacher training centres (RTTCs) offer 2-year teacher training programs

for lower-secondary school teachers; two newly established teacher education colleges (TECs), one in Phnom Penh and the other in Battambang, offer 4-year teacher training programs for basic education (grades 1–9) teachers; and a National Institute of Education (NIE), located in Phnom Penh, offers a 1 year of teacher training to bachelor graduates, for upper-secondary teachers.

Responsibility for the administration of the teacher training system rests with MoEYS. One of the Ministry's most notable achievements to date has been the gradual lengthening of the duration of teacher training. There remains, however, a pressing need for most teachers in Cambodia to upgrade their qualifications. About one-fifth of all classroom teachers have never completed upper-secondary schooling, which means that many hold the same qualification level as the students they teach (MoEYS, 2019b). It is estimated that as many as 70,000 teachers need to upgrade their qualifications to bachelor level, which presents MoEYS with an enormous challenge.

The related problem is that many of those responsible for delivering teacher training programs are also not well qualified and may not be up to date with contemporary teaching methodologies. They may not, for example, be capable of equipping trainee teachers with the knowledge and skills required for a future in which student-centred pedagogical approaches will be essential (Tandon & Fukao, 2015; Chhinh et al., 2016).

A feature of the curriculum at teacher training institutions in the past is the extent to which students were overloaded with class attendance requirements (Chhinh et al., 2016). Students attending the RTTCs, for example, were required to participate in classes for a total of 2658 h. Too many subjects were crammed in, some of which were not of great importance (Chhinh et al., 2016). Meanwhile, other subjects, such as those relating to student assessment and research, were neglected. Therefore, it is not surprising to find that classroom teachers in Cambodia are often unable to implement various kinds of student assessment practices effectively and do not have the research skills needed to improve their teaching or embark on lifelong learning.

The recent establishment of two TECs has introduced a new model of teacher training. Young management teams have been appointed, and lecturers are beginning to be selected through competitive procedures. These lecturers will have more access to well-equipped buildings and will increasingly be able to participate in professional development programs. The new TECs are setting a standard for other teacher training institutions. Training programs at these other institutions are being revised, and class attendance requirements are being reduced. However, there remains a pressing need for all students who are training to be teachers to have professional practice experiences in schools, currently being provided but with minimal support from either the training institution or schools. According to Darling-Hammond (2014) and Sot et al. (2019), teacher training programs must include high-quality supervised teaching experiences under the watchful eye of experienced and qualified practising teachers. In many OECD countries, the balance in teacher training has shifted to give students much more time in school settings

where they can learn about the balance between theory and practice (Schleicher, 2012).

7.2.2 Teacher Deployment

The deployment of newly qualified teachers takes account of geographic preference, place of residence, and exit examination scores (Benveniste et al., 2008; Tandon & Fukao, 2015). New teachers nominate three schools in a preferred province, usually one close to family and in an urban rather than a rural location. Those coming from rural and disadvantaged areas can generally expect to be sent to a school back in those areas. The over-riding determinant affecting success in being appointed to a preferred school is, however, academic attainment. Those with the highest exit examination scores can generally expect to have their first preference met.

Tandon and Fukao (2015) reported that less than one-third of all recent graduates were attracted to teaching at a school in a remote area, principally on account of the travelling distance to an urban centre, the lack of comfortable living conditions, and the virtual absence of any additional financial incentives. Staffing these schools is, therefore, highly problematic. To address this problem, MoEYS (2015) adopted a Teacher Policy Action Plan in 2015. Various priorities were endorsed. These included the upgrading of teacher training programs to 4 years in duration (up from 12 + 2 to 12 + 4) and the diversification of teacher education institutions by allowing universities to apply for certification in meeting a set of Teacher Education Provider Standards (TEPS). However, the problem persists (MoEYS, 2018a; Sot et al., 2019). In 2019, MoEYS issued a new policy to tackle issues of teacher deployment. To be admitted to a teacher education program, a candidate must now have obtained prior approval from the director of a school with a need for teachers. Whether this policy impacts the difficulty of staffing schools in remote areas remains to be seen.

7.2.3 Teacher Induction

Notably absent in Cambodia is any formal process of professional induction for beginning teachers. Teacher induction can have a significant and positive career impact, providing beginning teachers with an opportunity to ask questions and learn from one another about teaching effectiveness (Dogan et al., 2015; Hairon & Tan, 2017). Ideally, senior teachers would work closely with novice teachers by observing classes, providing mentoring support, and sharing teaching resources. In Cambodia, however, teaching continues to be widely regarded as a part-time occupation because so many teachers consider it critical to have a second job to supplement their income. Studies by Voluntary Services Overseas (VSO) (2008) and Benveniste et al. (2008) indicated that school principals were reluctant to oblige teachers to attend

school for full days because they were aware of how much teachers and their families depended upon being able to earn additional income. Under these conditions, therefore, senior teachers do not have the time needed to provide an adequate professional induction process for beginning teachers.

7.2.4 Teacher Working Conditions

Working conditions for teachers at most public schools in Cambodia are adversely affected by limited teaching resources and inadequate teaching facilities. Teaching and learning materials remain insufficient and of poor quality (Tandon & Fukao, 2015; MoEYS, 2015). Textbooks and teaching guidance documents are inadequate. The books available are not free from errors and are poorly designed. They also encourage rote learning at the expense of critical thinking, creativity, flexibility, collaboration, and problem-solving skills (Chet et al., 2014). Even though a new national curriculum framework has been developed (MoEYS, 2016a), the relevant textbooks have not yet all become available. The need to improve the quality of classrooms, staffrooms, and teacher housing has also been well established (Tandon & Fukao, 2015: MoEYS, 2015), but progress is slow. Currently, for example, more than one-half of all schools in Cambodia do not have a water supply, and almost one-third of them have no latrines (MoEYS, 2019b). Deficiencies also exist regarding the availability of information and communication technologies (ICT).

The teaching of science subjects is especially challenging because of the absence or poor quality of laboratory infrastructure despite the concerted efforts of the stakeholders to focus on science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM). Much of what is taught is, therefore, guided to enhance factual and conceptual knowledge. Even where laboratories exist, teachers don not have the skills to use them effectively, or there may be a minimal budget for buying experimental materials. These conditions affect teacher motivation and student performance. Recent national assessment results indicated that 52% of grade 8 students and 82% of grade 11 students had a proficiency level in physics that fell below the official requirements (MoEYS, 2018b, 2019c).

The lack of library and ICT resources also restricts teaching and learning quality (Tandon & Fukao, 2015). Recently, the Covid-19 pandemic has forced school closures across the country, meaning that the only way to continue providing education in an interactive manner has been through an internet connection but without video links. Cambodia has not generally been able to adjust to the new e-learning environment because of limited competency with online teaching and an inability to afford functional but high-cost ICT tools. Fewer than one-third of students and one-half of teachers were able to resume classes using internet technology. Those who did use the technology reported a dramatic decline in the quality of teaching and learning.

Pupil-to-teacher ratios remain too high, reflecting mainly a shortage of qualified teachers (MoEYS, 2019b). In 2018–2019, the pupil-to-teacher ratio at the primary

level was 44:1. In rural areas, it was 47:1. At the secondary level, where there is more of a need for specialist teachers, it was 22:1 (MoEYS, 2019b). These ratios do not compare well with the ratios reported across the ASEAN region (MoEYS, 2018a).

At a select number of public schools, such as the New Generation Schools and the School-Based Management schools, and at many private schools, the situation is better. Students at these schools are more likely to experience a dynamic curriculum that focuses on twenty-first-century competencies, with STEM education and foreign language (mainly English) programs treated as core components. Teachers in these schools are encouraged to adhere to high professional teaching standards and are better supported with conditions and resources to enable them to do so.

7.2.5 Teacher Performance

Not surprisingly, in light of the lack of induction processes and inadequate working conditions, Cambodia's teaching performance is generally poor. The most recent national assessment results for grade 3, 6, 8, and 11 students (MoEYS, 2016b, 2017, 2018b, 2019c) have shown low student achievement levels. The PISA for Development (PISA-D) results reported in 2018 also indicated performance gaps, with Cambodian students performing below-average in the science and the reading areas, compared with other PISA-D counties, and especially with ASEAN and OECD countries. The need to foster quality in teacher education and help students become independent and critical learners was explicitly identified (MoEYS, 2018a).

There are many factors inhibiting teacher performance in Cambodia. Among these, perhaps the most important is the lack of much incentive to demonstrate high performance. As reported later in this chapter, teacher compensation is modest. There are also few opportunities to obtain bonus payments for exceptional performance or compensations for the acceptance of severe hardship (Tandon & Fukao, 2015; MoEYS, 2015). Teacher evaluation is not linked effectively with teacher performance, teacher competency, or student learning. Neither is it tied to any professional standards or career pathways (Tandon & Fukao, 2015; MoEYS, 2015). New policies for continuous professional development and providing teacher career pathways are being developed, but their implementation and impact are not yet evident.

Also significant is the extent of official tolerance of a lack of professional commitment to teaching. Teacher absenteeism, for example, continues in one form or another to deprive students of classroom instruction. Primary teachers are estimated to be absent for almost 11% of the school year, and about 12% of teaching hours are said to be lost because teachers start classes late and leave school early (Ang et al., 2015). There is also time wasted in classrooms through checking attendance, giving students material to copy from the blackboard, dealing with disciplinary matters, and leaving the class for short periods (Tandon & Fukao, 2015). These behaviours reflect poorly on the profession. They also suggest that the quality of school management is deficient.

There has been a remarkable growth over recent years, principally in urban areas, in private schools in Cambodia. The Government requires these schools to employ teachers who have a recognized teaching qualification. Teachers from public schools engage extensively in moonlighting by teaching in these schools on a part-time basis, enabling many private schools to remain financially viable. These teachers are then overloaded because of the number of hours worked, the number of students for whom they are responsible, or the range of subjects they teach. These conditions impact unavoidably on the quality of teaching, both at the public schools from which the teachers have come and at the private schools where they are teaching part-time.

Private tutoring is another way in which teachers can increase their level of take-home income. This practice is now embedded in the education system in Cambodia. It has many adverse consequences, including that students begin to rely on their 'night classes' more than their 'day classes' for quality learning. It also disadvantages students from low-income families unable to afford the cost of sending their children to a private tutor (UNESCO, 2015).

7.2.6 Teacher Professional Development

Teachers are now expected to help their students to be ready for jobs that have not yet been created, to utilize technology and tools that have not yet been invented, and to address social issues that have not previously existed. Given these expectations, teachers need to be provided with a wealth of opportunities to update their skills and knowledge and become lifelong learners (Schleicher, 2016; Reimers, 2020). Cambodia has spelled out the knowledge, skills, and attitudes required, but teachers are not yet given the opportunity to participate in professional development activities beyond classroom teaching (Tandon & Fukao, 2015; MoEYS, 2015). It has been many years since the need for a traditional in-service training program for teachers has been discussed.

7.2.7 Teacher Compensation

Teacher salaries in Cambodia have traditionally been relatively low, with teachers earning barely enough to cover the basic needs of a family with two children (Tandon & Fukao, 2015). Since 2013, however, the Government has almost trebled the size of teachers' salaries, enabling them to be recognized as highly paid compared to other public sector employees. Notwithstanding this improvement, most teachers, especially if living in a city, continue to have trouble making ends meet because of the impact of domestic inflation and the costs associated with maintaining a higher living standard. A survey conducted by No and Heng (2017) found that teachers regarded their occupation to be stressful and not sufficiently rewarded. As

noted earlier, two common ways teachers earn additional income are by teaching part-time in private schools and providing individual tutoring.

A problem with the salary scale for teachers is that it takes no account of the current level of qualifications. There are three salary scales for teachers: one for preschool and primary school teachers, one for lower-secondary school teachers, and one for upper-secondary school teachers. Though teachers may seek to move to a higher salary scale as their qualifications improve, the process is complicated. Lower-secondary teachers undertaking studies to achieve an upgrade of their qualifications have found, for example, that they could not be lifted from their existing scale to the one that applies to upper-secondary teachers.

7.3 Discussion and Recommendations

Over recent years, there have been many policy reforms canvassed regarding ways of improving the quality of teaching and the strength of the teaching profession in Cambodia. A repeated failing, though, is that they do not result in actual implementation or effective implementation. The following account seeks to be holistic. It addresses measures needing to be taken to better attract, prepare, support, develop, and incentivize teachers in Cambodia.

7.3.1 Attracting Teachers

Sustain practical reform actions to attract more talented teacher candidates. Over recent years, a firm and concerted effort has been made by MoEYS to raise teacher salaries, improve teachers' working conditions, improve the teaching profession's status, promote various forms of transparency, and tighten the selection procedures for admission to teacher training programs. These measures need to be sustained to encourage more young people to consider a future career as a teacher.

Recruit potential teacher trainee candidates through multiple options. A particular area of need relates to having more entrants to the profession with a degree or even a postgraduate qualification. Providing an opportunity for more universities to offer teacher training programs for future secondary school teachers would open a gateway for many more well-qualified graduates to commit to a teaching career. A commitment to following this pathway was spelled out in the Teacher Policy Action Plan of 2015. Still, the only evidence of implementation has been the establishment of two new TECs. This response is not sufficient to address a shortage of well-qualified teachers at every school level.

Provide a teaching licence. Diversifying the pathways for entrance to the profession should be accompanied by implementing a teaching licence that will make the teaching profession more appealing. Teachers will have many options to work for public, private, or NGO schools after they graduate from a teacher training

program. It might also nurture growth and quality across teacher training providers. Besides, it might fix problems of teacher shortages and low commitment. Once teachers from public schools are required to work for 8 h per day for 5 days per week, private and NGO schools would suffer a critical lack of teachers with formal pedagogical training.

7.3.2 Preparing Teachers

Upgrade all teacher training centres (TTCs) to teacher education colleges (TECs). All teacher training centres need to be upgraded in terms of their infrastructure and access to resources. Three strategies suggested by Sot et al. (2019) to ensure a sufficient number of qualified teacher educators are persisting with efforts to upgrade qualification levels within the profession by supporting more teacher educators to obtain a quality graduate degree; recruiting graduate degree holders to become teacher educators and retraining them by utilizing a 1-year teaching residency program; and providing a 3-year rigorous and intensive training program to top bachelor graduates to become future teacher educators. An additional and potentially complementary strategy would be to provide TTCs with the capacity to convert to become TECs. Teacher trainers at TTCs would need to have earned a qualification higher than that of an undergraduate degree in their specialized subjects teaching. Management teams and non-teaching members of staff would also need to undertake more training in the form of capacity development programs to ensure a smooth transition in institutional status. The quality of infrastructure in classrooms, working offices, laboratories, libraries, ICT rooms, and dormitories at TTCs would also need to be extensively reviewed.

Implement Teacher Education Provider Standard (TEPS). To date, the only Cambodian higher education institution acknowledged as complying with the TEPS is the Royal University of Phnom Penh (RUPP), the largest and oldest university in the country. With certification for compliance with the TEPS, RUPP was permitted to implement a 5-year project (2017–2022) to upgrade more than 2000 teachers' qualifications to a BA level. However, it is estimated that as many as 70,000 teachers need to attain at least a BA qualification. Other well-regarded universities, both public and private, should be strongly encouraged and assisted in applying for TEPS certification so that they may also offer qualification-upgrade programs for teachers. While upgrading all TTCs to TECs can lead to strategic benefits and better potential utilization of the limited resources at TTCs, officially recognizing universities as compliant with TEPS can diversify teacher education programs, allowing established higher education institutions such as RUPP to become providers of upgrading qualifications.

Prepare teachers with a vibrant and relevant curriculum. Prospective teachers need to be prepared with respect to four dimensions that are vital to teaching: significant and applicable knowledge and skills; twenty-first-century skills, including fundamental literacies about how teachers apply core skills to everyday life,

skills of creativity, critical thinking, problem-solving, communication, and collaboration; character qualities, which affect how teachers approach their changing environment, including curiosity, persistence/grit, adaptability, leadership, and social and cultural awareness; and meta-learning, that is, learning how to learn, interdisciplinarity, systems thinking, and personalization (Schleicher, 2012). Furthermore, teacher training institutions need to ensure that daily classroom practice reflects teacher standards, fosters a focus on student-centred pedagogy, and promotes peer collaboration among teacher trainers and the broader education system (Tandon & Fukao, 2015; MoEYS, 2015).

According to Schleicher (2016), teachers in the twenty-first century need to respond to a wide range of tasks at different levels. Teachers must deal with initiating and managing learning processes at the individual student level, responding to the learning needs of individual learners, and integrating formative and summative assessments. Teachers are supposed to teach in multicultural classrooms at the classroom level, emphasize cross-curricular studies, and integrate students with special needs. Teachers need to work and plan in teams at the school level, evaluate and plan for improvement, utilize ICTs, and share leadership practices. At the level of parents and the wider community, teachers are expected to provide professional advice and establish community partnerships for learning.

As well as equipping future teachers with the capacity to address these needs, teacher training providers must also prepare students to master student assessment practices and relevant research skills (MoEYS, 2019a). Teacher trainees need to be familiar with different types and purposes of student assessment. They also need to be trained to design, administer, analyse, and use those assessments to apply them to improve their student learning and teaching at schools. Similarly, teacher trainees are supposed to acquire practical research skills and the ability to conceptualize their teaching approaches. A sound knowledge of student assessment practices, together with a capacity to systematically investigate teaching practices, will potentially encourage trainees to practice their analytical thinking, reasoning, and problem-solving skills and refrain from promoting rote learning behaviours by their students.

Implement the credit system. There are many reasons why all teacher training or education institutions should develop and implement a credit-based curriculum. A credit-based curriculum guarantees that teacher trainees are not overloaded with too many subjects in a short period because the credit system requires them to study approximately 30 credits per year and allows them sufficient time to prepare before and after classes and to do additional study. Besides, it strongly motivates teacher trainees to pursue the next level of their qualification as they can use their already accumulated credits from their previous training for a new one. It is also time- and cost-saving for the Government to launch and for trainees themselves to participate in any qualification upgrading arrangements in the future (Chhinh et al., 2016).

Introduce a teaching residency model to all teacher training or education programs. An extensive residency training model is popular and influential in teacher training programs in many OECD countries (Schleicher, 2012). As stated by Darling-Hammond (2000), even the top-performing graduates passionate about teaching do not easily succeed without systematic and sufficient preparation.

Additionally, training through a residency model is a highly effective method for increasing teacher-trainee confidence and efficacy and for motivating these students to remain committed to a teaching career (Darling-Hammond, 2014). A teaching practicum model does exist across teacher training institutions in Cambodia, but for less than 200 working hours in every teacher training centre. The model needs to be intensified and extended so that there is at least a 1-year or more than 500 working hours of a practical residency program that combines fieldwork, mentorship, and simultaneous coursework for initial teacher training or education. In this residency model, each trainee would be assigned to work with a highly qualified and genuinely dedicated teaching mentor who would provide ongoing constructive feedback and encourage trainee teachers to develop habits of reflection on student learning (Sot et al., 2019).

7.3.3 Supporting Teachers

Generate a more conducive environment for effective teaching. The physical infrastructure of schools in Cambodia needs to be improved. Teacher workstations, water supply, and latrines need to be ensured to enable and motivate teachers to work a full day at school, as in other professions. Similarly, instructional materials need to be available and accessible to teachers and students. These outcomes can be achieved by allocating more funds for school resources and infrastructure from the national and sub-national levels or through school initiatives to raise community commitment to improving the teaching environment.

Teachers must also be strongly encouraged and sufficiently supported to incorporate ICT tools into their teaching, making teaching and learning processes more dynamic and participatory. This priority was critical during the Covid-19 pandemic when many teachers were required for the first time to maintain a connection with their students using the internet. Cambodia has emphasized using ICT to improve its education system in many recent policy papers, but these policy commitments urgently need to be implemented. To this end, schools need tools such as computers, screens, and internet connections.

Moreover, the curriculum and textbooks must be thoroughly developed and periodically revised to ensure applicability and relevance (Schleicher, 2012; UNESCO, 2015). Once teachers can teach and students can learn in a comprehensive curriculum that is well supported by relevant textbooks, there will be more student commitment and a higher level of active student involvement with class activities. Thus, classroom interactions can be improved, and teachers can teach more effectively.

Fostering peer collaboration in teaching through technical meetings, creating opportunities for co-teaching, and working in teams on curriculum reviews can contribute significantly to the assurance of ease, productivity, and efficacy in teaching, with beneficial consequences for student quality learning (Schelicher, 2012). Cultivating a friendly atmosphere for teaching and learning also requires a

healthy and safe environment that is inclusive and protective and in which gender equity and social fairness are ensured (UNESCO, 2015). Furthermore, the efficient and smooth performance of administrative tasks by non-teaching staff at a school can significantly reduce teacher encumbrances.

Ensure efficient evaluation and monitoring. Teacher classroom practices must reflect professional teacher standards, namely, expert knowledge, professional teaching, professional learning, and professional ethics. Teachers must be required to adhere strictly to these standards when performing their tasks. Other vital agents such as school directors, colleagues, parents, and the community should also be well informed about standards and get the teachers to deliver the standards appropriately with carrot and stick measures (Tandon & Fukao, 2015; MoEYS, 2015). In this regard, proper implementation of continuous professional development and teacher career pathways can guarantee that teachers will meet professional standards, staffing norms, and job description and specification. Monitoring and evaluation criteria need to be widely and consistently used by all educational personnel. Improving on-site monitoring by school directors can make tight, regular, and effective monitoring and evaluation feasible. School directors can be held accountable for permanent inspection to provide ongoing feedback to teachers based on teacher professional standards and the school management handbook (MoEYS, 2015).

Promote the decentralization of education governance. MoEYS has complete control over curriculum content, instructional time, teacher salaries, and resource allocation to schools but provides freedom of choice to schools regarding teaching methods, the selection of teaching and learning materials, and support activities for students. Within this framework, improvement remains slow and falls far short of expectations. A more decentralized form of governance would contribute significantly to improving students' education quality, together with a more sensible utilization of available resources. It would also generate greater efficiency because long and complicated communication processes between different public school system levels could be avoided, and individual school managers could exercise more autonomy.

Additionally, school personnel could be held more accountable for performing their duty in planning, implementing, and evaluating and monitoring school activities. However, the successful implementation of a more decentralized school governance system would require strong capacity and sufficient resources at the school level as the foundation. This suggests that only those schools with this capacity and adequate resources should be authorized to become more decentralized. New Generation Schools and School-Based Management schools, together with private and NGO schools in urban areas, implement and promote a decentralized governance system. Substantial benefits are evident in terms of improved student achievement levels and better provision of community support. These are good examples of what might be achieved if more public schools improved their capacity to exercise greater autonomy.

7.3.4 Developing Teachers

Enact mandatory professional development for teachers. Given unprecedented changes in education, and with most teachers potentially staying longer in the teaching profession, there is a pressing need for teachers in Cambodia to undertake ongoing learning in addition to their initial teacher education. There seems little doubt among experts that teachers with a well-developed understanding of theories and practices related to teaching and learning are more effective with students in cultivating higher-order thinking and problem-solving skills. In developed countries, teachers generally require at least a bachelor's or a master's degree to pursue a teaching career. They are then routinely required to access new pedagogical knowledge and skills throughout their career (Schleicher, 2012, 2016). In contrast, most Cambodian teachers have completed their education at a level lower than a bachelor's degree and rarely receive any further professional development. In-service teachers must continue their study to BA and MA levels, participate in ongoing professional development to be qualified as teachers, and fulfil a new reform mandate (MoEYS, 2015; Sot et al., 2019).

Compulsory professional development and upgrading qualification programs for all teachers would be heavily labour-intensive and costly, yet it is a significant investment for a fundamental quality reform. Reimers and Chung (2018) advocated that effective teacher development programs can assist and empower teachers as professionals to develop their autonomy and agency, strengthen their capacity to become independent learners, spark their interest in constant learning and increased effectiveness, and foster their intrinsic drive to strive for excellent teaching.

Make teacher professional development attainable, responsive, and freely accessible. Requiring teachers to upgrade their qualification will not be a success unless support mechanisms are in place. These would include monetary and non-monetary benefits. Furthermore, the professional development programs should be designed to meet the teachers' interest, motivation, and pedagogical and content needs for their effective instruction (Donaher & Wu, 2020). Moreover, there is a need to seek evidence based on previous successful professional development practices to guide future professional development opportunities on a large scale. Given Cambodia has had both success and failure in implementing many upgrading endeavours, there should now be enough known to initiate a systematic and high-quality professional development effort that is consistent with the realization of overarching national goals (Sot et al., 2019). As in international practice, professional development can be institutionally driven or individually pursued. In some countries where teacher licensing is regulated, teachers are mandatorily required to participate in professional programs for a certain period of days or hours every year. In Singapore, for example, teachers are required to work together for 20 h per week to plan lessons, prepare materials, execute lessons, and discuss their good practices and challenges. Furthermore, the Government in Singapore pays teachers to attend professional development for 100 h per year outside of school hours, with programs conducted by expert practitioners and academics (Wei et al., 2009). Without fiscal and logistical support

from MoEYS and other relevant stakeholders, teachers in Cambodia would encounter serious difficulty attending and completing award programs (Sot et al., 2019). There is, however, a positive example to follow in the form of the BA upgrading programs being conducted by RUPP for teachers and school directors at RUPP. With fully funded university fees and sufficient stipend being provided, the professional development participation rate in the RUPP upgrading programs has been very high. As documented in a mid-term project review, the initiative has met overall expected standards regarding its impact.

Hold teachers and school directors accountable for teacher professional development. In the past, there has not been a rigorous approach to accountability for teachers who received scholarships. In recent upgrading programs at RUPP, however, MoEYS has required that scholarship recipients apply individually to participate in the program, and ongoing support for their participation has been made contingent upon attendance and grades achieved each term. For example, participants who attend less than 70% of their classes or receive fail grades can be dropped from the program. Moreover, those teachers who have failed the upgrading program due to low attendance and performance are not eligible for future government scholarships. To successfully graduate from the RUPP upgrading program, teachers must show concrete evidence of using the skills and knowledge acquired to achieve positive change in the school at which they work. A similar policy needs to be strictly applied in other teacher professional development attempts in the country to promote attentive participation and actual impact at a grassroots level.

Besides, school directors need to ensure that the professional development opportunities being provided for teachers are based on school needs and individual teacher merit and motivation. The selection process of professional development scholarships must also reflect fundamental principles of transparency, equity, and fairness. The national budget for education is not adequate to support non-productive school personnel. Teachers who lack proper credentials hamper reform efforts and take up positions that more competent teachers could have better occupied with a commitment to the MoEYS reform agenda (Sot et al., 2019). Additionally, to scale up the impact of training participation and to provide more support for teacher professional development, school directors need to reduce the teaching and administrative commitments of teachers who are completing a professional development program. Hence, teachers will have enough time to learn and view the training as an excellent chance to gain new insights and not as an additional burden.

Allow only high-quality teacher education programs to offer degree programs for teacher professional development. Only prestige higher educational institutions, or TECs that have already been accredited by TEPS and have been actively involved in the process of upgrading plans and activities with MoEYS, should be entitled to run undergraduate and graduate programs for teacher professional development. MoEYS and other relevant stakeholders should review the programs regularly to ensure that the faculty members responsible for their delivery are adequately qualified and experienced, the curriculum is coherent and relevant, high-quality teaching facilities and materials are available and accessible, programs enact best practices for

teacher training and education, and, most important, the program can satisfactorily achieve indicators defined by upgrading projects.

Prepare prospective teacher educators. There is an urgent need to plan for how to prepare the next generation of teacher educators. Even with a policy of recruiting and promoting talented schoolteachers with extensive experience to work as teacher educators, the number of qualified teacher educators will not be sufficient to meet the future demand for teacher education training across the country. Moreover, those teacher educators currently available, though in many cases highly competent, are reaching an age at which retirement becomes necessary. A scheme for ensuring a future supply of teacher educators is becoming critical, but there is no firm and transparent mechanism for developing such a scheme. Collective effort is required to mobilize programs that aim to prepare the next generation of teacher educators. Teacher educator programs can be carried out locally or internationally or in a collaboration between leading local universities and top universities abroad. Starting to educate future teacher educators can strengthen pre-service teacher training and education while at the same time catering for in-service teacher training and education and professional development (Sot et al., 2019). Junior teacher educators trained under these programs may not have long experience and the depth of expertise of seniors recruited from schools or elsewhere. Still, they will have a competitive advantage in introducing new conceptual approaches to teaching practices. They are likely to be versatile and enthusiastic in responding to the dynamic and rapidly evolving working environment of school education over the coming years. Junior and senior teacher educators can also team up as perfect partners to produce the next generation of teachers for the country.

7.3.5 Incentivizing Teachers

Provide competitive salary compensation. The teaching profession's attractiveness and prestige are strongly influenced by salary levels (UNESCO, 2015). The significant effort to date by the Government to increase teacher salary levels should be gratefully acknowledged. However, teachers' current salary levels remain too low compared with salary levels for other professions requiring a graduate qualification. Salary levels for teachers at public schools also fall below those offered to teachers at private schools, and they are not yet sufficient to enable a teacher to meet basic family needs. In short, teachers' salary levels in public schools need to be brought up to, at least, the salary levels available in other professions. Otherwise, Cambodia's teaching profession will not attract and retain the best students to work as a future teaching workforce.

Increasing the salary levels of teachers in public schools would also have a positive impact on accountability. With sufficient salary, teachers would no longer have an excuse for not coming to work for 8 h each day and not attending properly to the preparation and delivery of classes for students. It would also make induction and professional development more viable and productive because teachers would have

more time to commit to these responsibilities. Salary bonuses and other appropriate incentives might also be provided to encourage teachers to participate fully in professional development through qualification upgrading, high performance, and extra exertions in satisfying school needs and raising students' achievement. Automatic promotion based on the logic of a civil service should be abandoned. Incentives for teachers who work in understaffed or remote areas must be provided (Tandon & Fukao, 2015; MoEYS, 2015).

The salary scale for teachers in public schools should generally be based on appropriate qualification levels, as approved by MoEYS, and not the level of their initial pedagogical training or the school at which they teach. Highly qualified teachers are required across the whole of the school sector and not exclusively in particular schools that have been designated as providing for high-performing students. A new salary policy for teachers needs to provide a strong incentive for teachers at all schools to aspire to be better qualified.

Provide preferable working conditions and other social benefits to teachers. Providing good working conditions is one of the central parts of facilitating teachers' work (MoEYS, 2015). Teachers should be allowed to have some opportunities for flexibility and diversity in terms of their work within and outside schools and in both local and foreign contexts. Permission to do so must take account of justice, equality, and equity principles. Teachers should also be provided with sufficient teaching materials and facilities for their work, and these should be of much better quality. Moreover, a forum is needed that permits established and beginning teachers to collaborate in sharing teaching experiences and providing feedback to improve their work, thereby building collegiality and preventing burnout (Schleicher, 2012). Offering chances in an open, fair, and transparent manner for teachers to have professional development to update their knowledge and skills and increase their practical experiences would also be an effective way of improving teachers' working conditions.

To support teaching as a career, teachers deserve better social status and welfare (MoEYS, 2015; UNESCO, 2015). The actual implementation of a teaching award for any teacher who performs well and establishing on a national basis a teacher's prize in the form of a cup would stimulate professional and community commitment to the importance of the work done by teachers. Awards and cups for outstanding teachers should be achievable by more teachers, not only a few, as is the current practice. Additionally, developing and exploring a possibility of providing lifelong social welfare encompassing free medical insurance, life insurance, loan/credit schemes, subsidized housing, overtime teaching, and pension benefits should be promoted to motivate teachers to do their utmost in their teaching role.

7.4 Conclusion

Although the Government and stakeholders have invested considerable effort in improving the teaching profession, the teaching workforce is not adequate in terms of the number of well-qualified teachers available, and most existing teachers are insufficiently trained for the task of enabling their students to achieve a high level of success in attaining expected learning outcomes. The focus must be on how to make improvements for the sake of bringing about a better situation in the future. To this end, measures are required to attract highly capable young people into teaching. Their experience as trainees must be characterized by having excellent lecturers, adequate facilities, and a dynamic curriculum. Once through their training, they must be better supported financially and professionally.

Many interventions have been proposed in this chapter. Some of these are currently under consideration and even active implementation, but many remain to be addressed. Teachers are today's 'brain growers' for the next generation. They contribute directly to producing the human capital for tomorrow. If Cambodia is not strategic and successful in addressing its current challenges regarding the teaching profession and the recruitment and training of new teachers, then its success in attaining status as an upper-middle-income country by 2030, and high-income nation by 2050, will remain seriously constrained.

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Chapter 8
Cambodia National Assessment: A Summary of 10 Years of Student Achievement Results

Jeffery H. Marshall and Chinna Ung

8.1 Introduction

Following the Khmer Rouge takeover of Cambodia in 1975, "Year Zero" became the beginning of the destruction of the previous regime, many of its officials and teachers, and its education system. With the expulsion of the Khmer Rouge in 1979, the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports (MoEYS) faced a massive task of rebuilding an education system with strictly limited numbers of teachers, materials, and classrooms. By the first decade of the twenty-first century, considerable progress had been made in the task of rehabilitating the essentials of the primary school system, with majority enrolments of both girls and boys, emerging improvements in retention, and the beginnings of a modern curriculum. The basis had been established for planning more sophisticated standards of learning to enable the Cambodian economy to prosper.

Since 2006, MoEYS has regularly measured student achievement levels through the application of standardized tests, called national assessments. The tests—the first of their kind in Cambodia[1]—are made up of multiple-choice and open-ended questions that are drawn from the official (or intended) curriculum and are applied in samples of primary and lower-secondary schools across the country. The

[1]The Education Quality Improvement Project (EQIP) ran from 1999 to 2004 and included an ambitious testing programme in the three provinces where it operated. However, the standardized tests were not as comprehensive as the later assessment tests and were only applied in this one region of the country (in one grade).

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assessment work was initially conducted (2005–2011) with World Bank support as part of the Cambodia Education Sector Support Project (CESSP). Since 2011, national assessment has been merged into MoEYS as part of the Education Quality Assurance Department (EQAD). Beginning in 2006 with grade 3 testing, 15 assessments have been completed by CESSP-EQAD with more than 80,000 students and 3000 schools covering grades 3 and 6 in primary, grades 8 and 9 in lower-secondary, and grade 11 in upper-secondary.

This chapter summarizes the main findings from 10 years of student assessment in Cambodia, focusing on the two overarching goals of education systems worldwide: quality and equity. It begins with an abbreviated summary of student achievement levels across multiple grades and test subjects. There is a large body of evidence to summarize. Still, the accumulation of 10 years of data makes it possible to form some general conclusions about student achievement levels, as well as how achievement has evolved. The second part of the chapter addresses the question of equity and how test scores vary by gender, location (urban-rural), and socioeconomic status (SES). The chapter then introduces the national assessment function and provides a history of assessment work in Cambodia during the 2005–2016 period. Subsequent parts of the chapter separately address the main results in the areas of Khmer language, mathematics, and physics (grade 8 only), the main findings from comparisons of student achievement levels on the basis of "equated" tests that include sets of identical test questions in different test application years (by grade), and comparisons between different categories of students and schools. The final part concludes the chapter.

8.2 National Assessment in Cambodia

8.2.1 An Introduction

National assessment is a form of large-scale educational assessment that measures student achievement levels using grade-specific standardized tests. The overarching purpose of national assessment is to provide a systemic diagnostic of overall performance based on student competencies on the official curriculum. Additional aims are to monitor changes in performance over time, undertake comparisons of achievement levels across important strata (e.g. urban and rural), and gather information about factors that explain differences in student achievement scores (Clarke, 2011).

One of the main differences between national assessment and other common educational assessments is the treatment of individual results. National assessments are usually based on samples, which means there is no plausible gate-keeping function for using the results to determine individual proficiency and/or advancement for a particular population (as in national examinations). The national assessment emphasis on identifying areas of student strength and weakness is like what teachers do through periodic classroom assessments, except the national assessment

tests are likely to be more comprehensive, and the results are intended to communicate this information at the system level.

National assessment also differs from international educational assessments, such as the Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS) and the Trends in Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS). Both types of assessment share some standard features, such as the use of samples to obtain national averages. However, international assessment projects rely on tests that cover common areas of curriculum, which in turn facilitates the comparison of achievement levels across national boundaries. National assessments are instead focused solely on the national curriculum goals, which means the results are more aligned with national learning objectives and goals.

8.2.2 National Assessment in Cambodia: A Brief History

National assessment began in Cambodia during the CESSP, a World Bank-funded education initiative from 2005 to 2011. Before the CESSP started, there was a pre-project consultancy period where meetings were held with MoEYS personnel to discuss national assessment objectives. These initial discussions, together with World Bank national assessment experiences in other countries, eventually formed the basis for national assessment during the CESSP.

To carry out the national assessment work, MoEYS assigned team members from different departments, including Secondary Education, Pedagogical Research Department, Inspectorate, and Education Planning. None of the assessment team members was full-time, meaning each maintained individual responsibility within their department while working on assessment. They also did not receive any extra salary compensation. An international consultant was hired to develop a more detailed implementation and training plan. The training and preparation work began in 2005, ahead of the first test application in grade 3 in June 2006. Additional assessments in grades 6 (2006–2007), 9 (2007–2008), 3 (2008–2009), and 9 (2009–2008) were then carried out as part of CESSP.

In 2011, the assessment function was moved to the EQAD within MoEYS. The transition from World Bank-supported project to formal Ministerial entity took some time, and no assessment was undertaken in the 2011–2012 school year. A grade 3 assessment was eventually conducted at the beginning of the 2012–2013 school year (in grade 4 classrooms). By 2013, the national assessment team was more established, with new staff members and more office space. Current staff members are full-time employees of EQAD, although they have other responsibilities in addition to their work on national assessment. EQAD has completed additional assessments in grade 3 (2014–2015), grade 6 (2012–2013, 2015–2016), grade 8 (2016–2017), and grade 11 (2017–2018). EQAD was also responsible for coordinating (and implementing) Cambodia's participation in the Programme for International Student Assessment for Development (PISA-D) test of 15-year-olds

(2017–2018), as well as the Southeast Asia Learning Primary Learning Metrics (SEA-PLM) regional assessment in grade 3 in 2018–2019.

Table 8.1 provides a summary of the CESSP and EQAD assessments, including year, grade, sample size, and data collection instruments. The standard data collection includes tests in Khmer and mathematics, a student interview (or questionnaire), a teacher questionnaire, and the collection of information on student marks (in Khmer and maths) and absences based on the teacher grade book. In some applications, additional questionnaires have been applied, mainly for teachers, as well as physics tests for students in grades 8 and 11.

8.2.3 The National Assessment Process

Before discussing national assessment results, it is important to explain how they are generated in the first place. CESSP and EQAD reports provide detailed summaries of the test development, application, and analysis activities (see Education Quality Assurance Department [EQAD], 2015a, b, 2016). An abbreviated summary is provided here, divided by topic.

Curriculum Blueprint. The test development process begins with the creation of a curriculum blueprint that identifies the main components of the official curriculum. Curriculum experts from different departments, and in-service teachers, are brought in to create the blueprint. Based on their discussions, the formal curriculum for that grade is broken down into total hours of instruction for each of the main content (e.g. Reading, Geometry, etc.) and sub-content (e.g. Geometric shapes within Geometry) areas.

Item Writing. The same experts that prepare the curriculum blueprints are also involved in developing the individual test questions (items) that make up the initial item bank. Depending on the grade and subject, the item banks include roughly 80–120 items (test questions). Most problems are multiple-choice, with some fill-in-the-blank formats. In reading, there are open-ended activities that require writing sentences, paragraphs, and poems, in addition to a dictation section (since 2013) where students write out words that are given to them orally. In maths (and physics), there are fewer open-ended test questions. Each question is assigned a code that corresponds to the subject, content area, sub-content area, and question number. Test items are also classified based on Bloom's taxonomy, divided into four (out of six possible) categories: knowledge, understanding, application, and analysis. Finally, each item is also assigned a difficulty level based on three levels: easy, medium, and difficult.

Pilot Test (Trial) and Initial Item Analysis. A critical step in the test development process is the pilot or trial test, which is completed between April and June (depending on the school calendar). The item bank questions are divided into three forms (A, B, and C) by subject. Each form includes a set of standard items (or "anchor items", or "link items"), as well as items that are only included on one form. About 20 schools are selected (randomly) for the trial, drawn from different

Table 8.1 Summary of CESSP and EQAD National Assessments, 2005–2016

Year and grade	Sample size		Questionnaires applied
	Schools	Students	
CESSP period 2005–2011			
Grade 3 (2005–2006)	210	6814	G3 student tests (Khmer-Maths) and background, G3 teacher background, G3 teacher mathematics teaching, student marks-absences
Grade 6 (2006–2007)	204	5994	G6 student tests (Khmer-Maths) and background, G6 teacher background, G6 teacher mathematics teaching, student marks-absences
Grade 9 (2007–2008)	200	5882	G9 student tests (Khmer-Maths) and background, G9 teacher background (Khmer and maths teachers), student marks-absences
Grade 3 (2008–2009)	210	6877	G3 student tests (Khmer-Maths) and background, G3 teacher background, student marks-absences
Grade 9 (2009–2010)	200	5772	G9 student tests (Khmer-Maths) and background, G9 teacher background (Khmer and maths teachers), G9 teacher mathematics knowledge, student marks-absences
EQAD period 2011–			
Grade 3 (2012–2013)[a]	150	4341	G3 student tests (Khmer-Maths) and background, G3 teacher background, G3 teacher classroom observations, G3 teacher mathematics knowledge, student marks-absences
Grade 6 (2012–2013)	210	5984	G6 student tests (Khmer-Maths) and background, G6 teacher background, student marks-absences
Grade 8 (2013–2014)	200	5902	G8 student tests (Khmer-Maths-Physics) and background, G8 teacher (all subjects), student marks-absences
Grade 3 (2014–2015)	210	5851	G3 student tests (Khmer-Maths) and background, G3 teacher background, student marks-absences
Grade 6 (2015–2016)	230	6381	G6 student tests (Khmer-Maths) and background, G6 teacher background, student marks-absences
Grade 8 (2015–2016)[b]	150	4815	G8 student tests (Maths-Physics) and background, G8 teacher background, G8 teacher mathematics and physics knowledge, student marks-absences
Grade 8 (2016–2017)	230	6608	G8 student tests (Khmer-Maths-Physics) and background, G8 teacher background, G8 teacher mathematics and physics knowledge, student marks-absences
Grade 11 (2017–2018)	230	6641	G11 student tests (Khmer-Maths-Physics) and background, G8 teacher background, G8 teacher mathematics and physics knowledge, student marks-absences
15-year-olds (PISA-D) (2017–2018)	170	5162	15-year-old student from grades 7 to 12 (Reading-Maths-Sciences) and background, teacher and school background

(continued)

Table 8.1 (continued)

Year and grade	Sample size		Questionnaires applied
	Schools	Students	
Grade 5 (SEA-PLM) (2018–2019)	179	5450	G5 student tests (Reading-Writing-Maths-Global Citizenship) and background, G5 teacher, school and parent background

[a]The Grade 3 assessment in 2012–2013 was conducted in the middle of the 2012–2013 school year as part of a larger study on teaching in Cambodia (see Tandon & Fukao, 2015). The test results are therefore not comparable with other G3 applications because of the difference in the timing
[b]The Grade 8 assessment in 2015–2016 was organized by the World Bank, with a focus on Maths and Physics, and carried out by a private firm. However, the EQAD team provides the student tests that were used and were involved in some aspects of the planning

regions of the country. The trial data collection is conducted by EQAD staff, and the test data (items) are then analysed using Item Response Theory (IRT) software (usually a program called Item and Test Analysis, IATA, www.polymetrika.com). Final item selection is based in part on the results from the IRT analysis, as well as a qualitative review of the test questions and their importance in the curriculum. The selection of the final test items is one of the most technically demanding aspects of assessment work, and the results from this phase have far-reaching consequences for the assessment data analysis and interpretation.

Sampling. Final samples of roughly 200 schools are selected using the International Institute for Education Program sampling software (called "IIEPSAMP"), which is designed to create samples using the Probability Proportional to Size (PPS) sampling strategy. Schools are randomly chosen and divided into urban and rural strata from all 25 provinces in Cambodia. Within each school, a second sample is taken among students in the selected grade. The sampling strategy—which is technically known as "Two-Stage Randomized Cluster" sampling—follows basic sampling principles established by international testing programmes (PISA, TIMSS, etc.) and is designed to create a nationally representative sample. It is important to note that the samples are not intended to be representative *within* each province; they are simply not large enough, as in some provinces there are only 2–3 schools chosen. This limitation rules out comparisons of assessment results across individual provinces.

Are CESSP-EQAD samples large enough to safely draw conclusions about student achievement levels in Cambodia? It should be restated that the samples are created using the same processes (and software) that have been used by PIRLS and TIMSS participants. A sample of roughly 200 schools (and 6000 students) is quite large for a country the size of Cambodia and is larger than the samples used by some much larger states in international assessments (e.g. Japan in 2011 TIMSS had a sample of 149 schools).

Final Data Collection and Analysis. Before the data are collected, some final steps are completed, including creating the final student test booklets (divided into three forms); finalizing the student and teacher questionnaires; training enumerators from MoEYS departments to apply the tests; and carrying out a workshop with

relevant provincial and district education office directors to clarify the school name, location, number of students, learning shift, and accessibility for each school in the sample. The data are collected during a 2-week window towards the end of the school year (but before final examinations). EQAD personnel are responsible for the supervision of the data collection process. Data entry is completed by EQAD (and MoEYS) staff using data entry software (WINDEM). Once the final raw files are created for each study subject (students, teachers, schools), the data are ready to be analysed. The ultimate product is a report that is usually available in the year following the actual data collection. The actual analysis is carried out by EQAD staff with support from an international technical assistant.

8.3 National Assessment Results

The CESSP-EQAD project has already referenced the substantial amount of information generated by 10+ years of assessment work covering primary and lower-secondary grades with different subjects. It is not possible here to provide an exhaustive review of these results, so this section instead focuses on the main themes to emerge during the national assessment period. This account begins with some additional background on how to best present (and interpret) national assessment results.

8.3.1 Interpreting National Assessment Scores

To date, the CESSP and EQAD assessment results have mainly been presented based on percentage correct (between 0 and 100%). The reliance on percentage correct reflects the popularity of percentages as a way of summarizing student test scores in Cambodia (and beyond). However, in the context of assessment work, this summary strategy is quite limited. The best-known assessment projects (TIMSS, PIRLS, PISA, etc.) do not report scores based on percentage correct and rely instead on scale scores and proficiency levels. One problem with percentages is that most people have their own opinion about what constitutes mastery, such as 90% or higher is an "A", and below 60% is an "F". But standardized assessment tests tend to use very different scales for defining mastery. They do so because of how national assessment tests are created and the reliance on technical tools like Item Response Theory (IRT) to select test questions. Based on the way these tests are created, the averages tend to be in the middle ranges, like 40–60% overall (Cartwright, 2013).

This method does not mean that the percentage correct is not a useful summary. As will be shown below, some assessment averages in Cambodia are quite low, which almost certainly points to significant deficiencies in student skills in these subjects, rather than the test being "too hard". But a more informative method for presenting assessment results is called a proficiency scale. This strategy groups test

subjects into a series of categories—or levels—based on specific skills or knowledge of test content. The percentage distribution of these categories provides a more detailed summary of how the student population is performing overall. In recent years, EQAD has developed proficiency scales for a handful of test subjects and is continuing to work to build capacity to present student results most effectively.

8.3.2 *Results Summary: Khmer Reading and Writing*

Reading and writing skills are critical for success in school and beyond, and measuring these abilities is a central function of assessment projects. Figure 8.1 begins with Khmer reading, which is mainly made up of reading comprehension and grammar content areas and is measured using multiple-choice and matching questions. The results show that the average grade 3 student was able to answer between 40 and 54% of the reading questions correctly, compared with substantially higher averages in grades 6 and 9 (and 8). Focusing on grade 3, the average in 2009 is much higher than in other years, but this does not mean that knowledge levels improved and then declined. As explained before, each item bank (and test) is unique, in part because of changes taking place in the official curriculum (introduction of Minimum Standards, etc.). The only way to compare scores over time is to look at the common test questions (the "link" or "anchor" questions) that are included within each subject

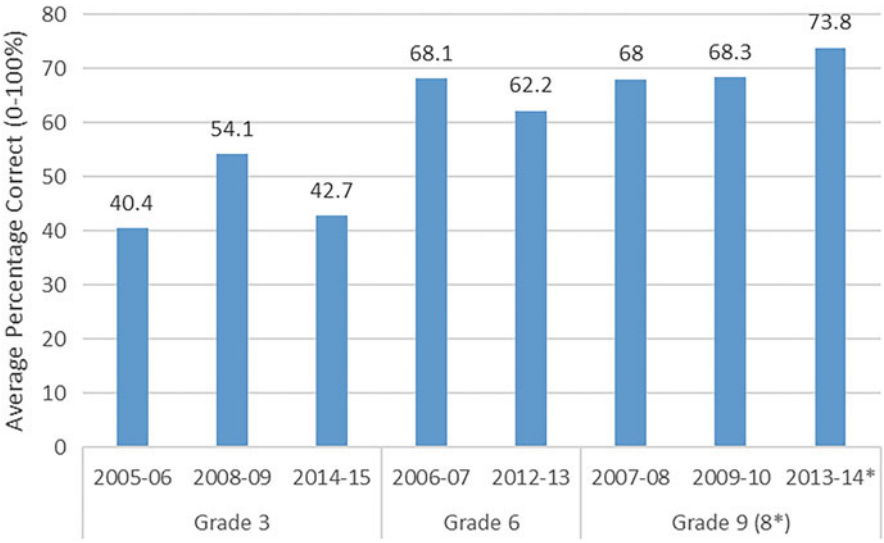


Fig. 8.1 Summary of Khmer reading achievement by grade and year, 2006–2015. *Source*: CESSP and EQAD achievement reports, various years

and grade on all tests; those more focused comparisons are presented later in this chapter.

Despite the inherent difficulties of comparing percentage correct across different national assessments, the results in Fig. 8.1 do suggest that grade 6 and grade 9 students are more comfortable with the reading curriculum than the grade 3 students. One explanation is that less "filtering" (i.e. dropout) of students takes place before grade 3 than before later grades, which would suggest a better-prepared grade 6 or grade 9 student, on average. Nevertheless, the fact that students in higher grades can answer *more* language questions correctly does not mean that Khmer achievement levels are at a *sufficient* level.

Even at grade 3 level, less than one-half the students can cope with the reading materials for their grade. When writing skills for grade 3 are also tested, it is noted that an even smaller proportion of students are proficient in writing. These low levels of achievement, with only the brightest students achieving proficiency for their grade, have serious consequences for performance in other subjects in grade 3.

Khmer citizens are proud of their language and its beautiful script. However, learning its many complexities takes longer than language learning in other cultures. In the period before the Khmer Rouge, attention was given to teaching phonic skills (learning the unique sound of each of the many scripts), so being able to recognize each script symbol in a long word or sentence, and so identifying the written word by its familiar oral sound. In recent years, some attention has been given to re-instating phonics in the Khmer curriculum.

Many countries worldwide have simplified their traditional script to make it easier to be learned and read by all citizens, rather than only a select elite. Vietnam is a convenient example for Cambodia. Simplifying Khmer script need not follow the Vietnamese model of using Latin script. The Khmer script could be retained but simplified, as happened in Germany when the traditional Gothic German was converted to the current German script.

Box 8.1 summarizes the results for two reading comprehension questions, taken from the grade 6 Khmer national assessment in 2007. The results show that 61.5% of the students correctly answered that Mai and Tao were disappointed—which is the actual adjective used in the passage—and that about one-half of the students (51.7%) chose the correct adjective ("cunning") to describe Keo, which they had to infer. These results provide some very useful context for understanding student achievement levels in grade 6. Most students were able to answer questions that rely on reading comprehension and some understanding of adjectives, which is certainly higher than corresponding averages in grade 3 assessments on reading comprehension questions of this type. But there is still a significant proportion of students not able to answer questions of this type correctly, even though these two specific examples were not very demanding.

Box 8.1 Grade 6 Khmer Reading Example Items (2006)
Story of Mangosteen

On Sunday, Mai and Tao went for a walk. They found a piece of mangosteen on the road. Neither one wanted to share the fruit with the other. Suddenly Keo arrived and asked "why are you fighting?" Mai said, "he is trying to take my fruit". Keo then asked, "whose fruit?", to which Tao replied, "it is my fruit". Keo continued: "where do you get the fruit from?" Tao said, "in the middle of the road". Since Keo now knew the story, Mai and Tao asked him to be the judge. Keo thought "how can I divide the fruit for both Mai and Tao?" After thinking for a while, Keo took the fruit and cut out two pieces, and he said: "this piece of the skin goes to the person who first saw the fruit, and this piece of the skin goes to the person who picked it up". "Who gets the middle part?" Keo then ate the fruit and, while chewing, said "the middle part should go to me as the fee for being the judge, right?" He laughed and then walked away, leaving Mai and Tao disappointed.

Please read the above text; answer the items by marking this sign √ in front of the right answer:

Item KA1.7X

1. During the fruit judgment, how do Mai and Tao feel?

☐ **1- disappointed = 61.5 percent**
☐ 2- happy = 9.0 percent
☐ 3- uncertain = 11.6 percent
☐ 4- agree = 17.4 percent

5-leave answer blank = 0.5 percent

Item KA6.1

1. Keo is:

☐ 1- gentle = 11.5 percent
☐ 2- modest = 13.0 percent
☐ **3- cunning = 51.7 percent**
☐ 4- courageous = 23.6 percent

5-leave answer blank = 0.3 percent

Source: CESSP Grade 6 National Assessment report (2007), Box 1.1.

Figure 8.2 continues with a summary of writing scores on the different assessments. Writing activities in the CESSP-EQAD assessments usually consist of sentence and paragraph construction (e.g. "Please describe your house in a paragraph") and poems; in grade 9 (or 8), there are also activities like writing a thank-you letter, an announcement, or an application. Writing scores are comparatively high on the first two grade 9 assessments, but this is because of the emphasis on writing activities related to job applications, which mainly consists of filling in their names and personal details. In other years and grades, the scores are much lower. For example, in grade 3, the student averages are at 30% or lower in all three assessments. The grade 6 average in 2007 is also relatively high, but again this appears to be due to relatively easy writing activities being included. The scores in grades 6 and 8 are much lower in the most recent iterations.

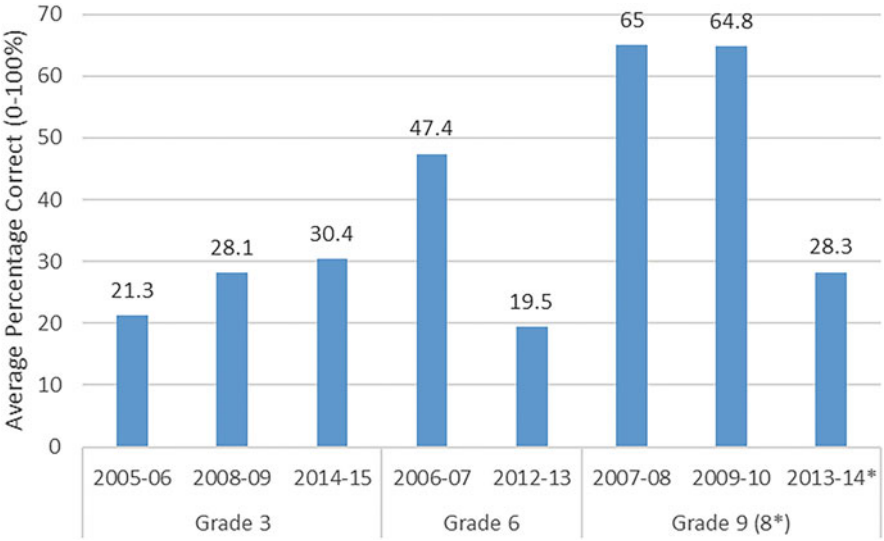


Fig. 8.2 Summary of Khmer writing achievement by grade and year, 2006–2015. *Source*: CESSP and EQAD achievement reports, various years

The overall percentage correct in Fig. 8.2 highlights a common theme that appears throughout the CESSP-EQAD assessment reports: writing skills—primarily related to creative writing—are well below desirable levels in most assessments. For example, in the 2014–2015 grade 3 assessment, 24.4% of students could not correctly write even one word as part of a dictation activity where ten words were read out loud to be written by students (EQAD, 2016). On this same test, over 60% of rural students received a zero score (out of 10 points) on the main writing activity. In the 2014 grade 8 test, 25% of students received a zero on the Writing a Letter activity, compared with only 3% receiving a perfect score (of 10 points) (EQAD, 2015b).

Figure 8.3 concludes the summary of overall measures of achievement in Khmer with a breakdown of proficiency levels, again using the grade 6 assessment from 2012 to 2013. As described above, proficiency levels have been created by EQAD using the cognitive skill classifications assigned to each test question by the item writers. The results in Fig. 8.3 show that about 39% of grade 6 students are classified as "Below Basic" in Khmer reading, which means they were not able to answer at least two out of three of the most basic skill level questions (called "Knowledge"). At the other end of the spectrum, almost 30% of students were classified as "Advanced", which means they were able to answer at least two of three of the most challenging reading questions (called "Analysis and Application"). The results

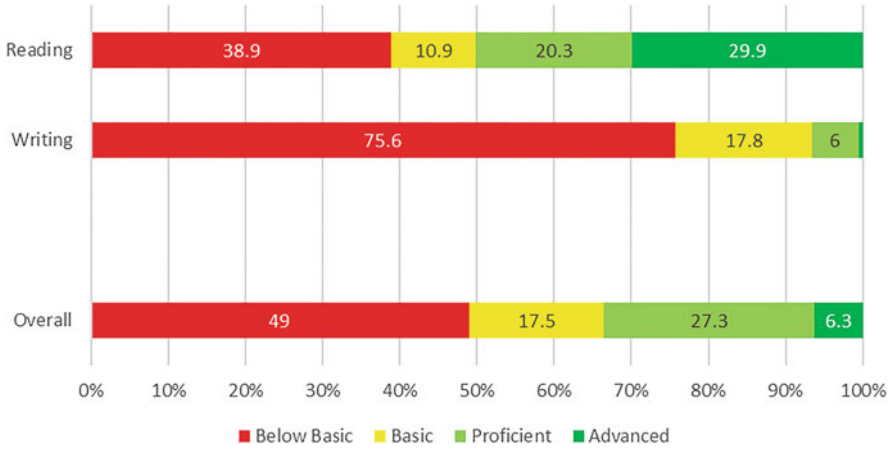


Fig. 8.3 Proficiency scale summary of grade 6 Khmer achievement, 2013. *Source*: EQAD Grade 6 Assessment (2013)

for the writing show that most students are at the Below Basic level. And finally, when combining the reading and writing activities to form a single overall proficiency scale (bottom row in Fig. 8.3), the results show that about one-half of the students were in the Below Basic category.

8.3.3 Results Summary: Mathematics and Physics

Mathematics skills have been measured in every national assessment going back to the original CESSP grade 3 study in 2006 (see Table 8.1). Physics has only been assessed more recently in grade 8 by EQAD (2014), so it receives much less attention here. Figure 8.4 begins with the inter-year summary of mathematics assessment results based on percentage correct. The results are somewhat different from the earlier summary for Khmer (see Fig. 8.1) and show averages that are consistently in the 40–50% range across all years and grades. As discussed earlier, the test construction process in assessment often produces average scores in this middle range, and comparisons across grades (and years within grades) are problematic. Nevertheless, the results in Fig. 8.4 consistently show that the average grade 3, 6, and 9 (or 8) student is unable to answer at least one-half of the mathematics questions included in the assessment.

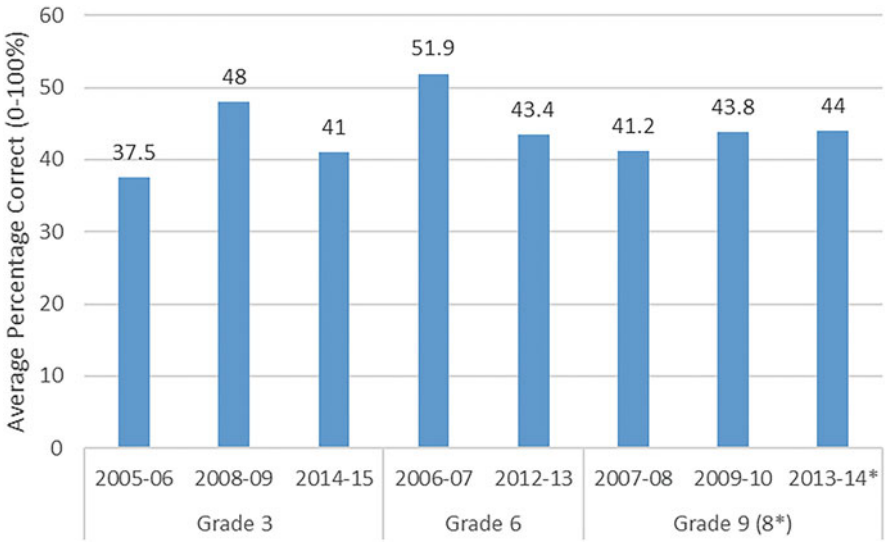


Fig. 8.4 Summary of mathematics achievement by grade and year, 2006–2015. *Source*: CESSP and EQAD achievement reports, various years

The percentage correct summary in Fig. 8.4 provides a very general overview of student achievement. So, once again, it is necessary to bring in actual test questions to help the reader better understand what student knowledge levels look like in mathematics.

Box 8.2 provides some question examples from the grade 9 assessment in 2008. The results are consistent with the earlier summary of grade 6 reading: most students can correctly answer relatively easy test questions but struggle in more demanding areas of the mathematics curriculum. For example, over 70% of grade 9 students (in 2008) correctly answered the question about the multiplication of negative numbers (example 1); but less than 30% correctly answered test questions covering probability (example 3) and geometry (example 4).

Box 8.2 Grade nine mathematics example items (2008)

Please read the above text; choose answer A, B, C, or D by marking this sign √ in front of the right answer:

Item MA1.1X

1. Solve a=(-2)*(-3)

☐	A -6	= 19.6 percent
☐	B -5	= 5.0 percent
☐	C 5	= 3.4 percent
☒	**D 6**	**= 71.4 percent**

leave answer blank = 1.8 percent

MB3.3X

2. Solve for x: 2 – (3/4)x < 7/2

☐	**A x > -2**	**=49.7 percent**
☐	B x < 2	= 8.4 percent
☐	C x > -4/3	= 31.9 percent
☐	D x < 3/2	= 9.5

leave answer blank =2.1 percent

MC1.1X

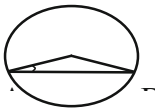
3. If you throw a single dice in the air, what is the probability of getting the same number four times?

☐	A 4/6	= 37.1 percent
☒	**B 1/6**	**= 27.5 percent**
☐	C 1/4	= 30.0 percent
☐	D 1/3	= 3.0 percent

leave answer blank = 2.8 percent

MD4.2X

4. For circle with centerpoint O and angle OAB=20°, find AB



☐	A AB=40	= 30.1 percent
☐	B AB=80	= 17.8 percent
☒	**C AB=140**	**= 22.6 percent**
☐	D AB=160	= 26.4 percent

Source: CESSP Grade 9 National Assessment report (2009), Box 4.1.

The mathematics assessment tests mainly consist of multiple-choice questions, with some "fill in the blank". In grade 9 (in 2008), there were also some open-ended activities for students to complete, which were then reviewed (and marked) by MoEYS staff; this is similar to the process for writing activities on the Khmer language tests. The averages on the grade 9 open-ended mathematics questions (in 2009) were lower than the multiple-choice percentage correct, as students struggled to successfully complete problems that required reading instructions and carrying out multiple steps. The open-ended questions were not included on the grade 8 mathematics test in 2014.

The grade 8 physics results from 2014 show that students answered 52.8% of the questions correctly. Figure 8.5 summarizes the proficiency scale results for grade 8 maths and physics. The same process described before (see Fig. 8.3 for grade 6) was used, which ranks students based on their ability to answer questions belonging to different cognitive domains. The results show that large numbers of students in

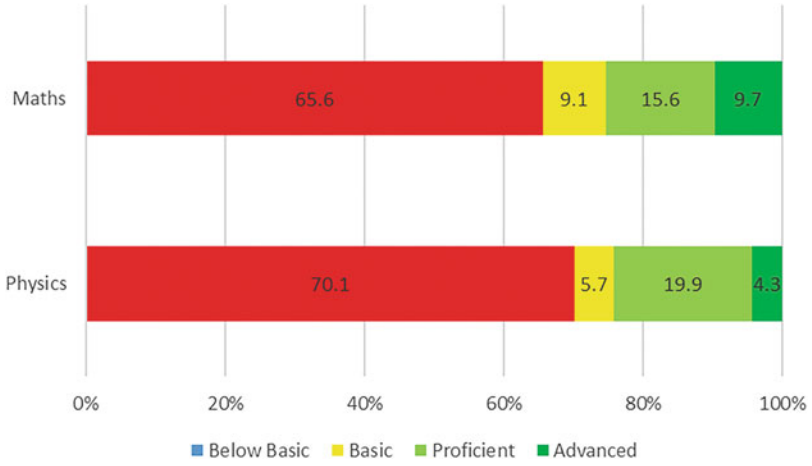


Fig. 8.5 Proficiency scale summary of grade 8 maths and physics achievement, 2014. *Source*: EQAD (2014)

grade 8 did not demonstrate mastery (answer 2/3 of questions) of the lowest cognitive skill class of question (Knowledge). At the other end of the scale, about one-quarter of students were classified as "Proficient" or "Advanced".

8.3.4 Student Achievement Levels: Summary

The most consistent finding across all of the EQAD and CESSP national assessments is that students are not performing at the expected—or desired—level for their grade. This general finding does vary somewhat by grade and subject. Still, it must be restated that national assessment tests are made up *entirely* of content with which students are supposed to be familiar. And since most averages are near (or below) 50%, there are a significant number of students who are not comfortable with most of the curriculum.

Another way of taking stock of the assessment findings is by considering three types of students. On the positive side, there are the high-performing students who can answer questions drawn from a range of content areas and difficulty levels. In some subjects and grades (like grade 6 Khmer reading), a relatively large proportion of the student population is in this group. The second group of students can answer most—or at least a majority—of relatively easy test questions and at least some of the more difficult test items. But their overall achievement level is still considerably below the expected level for their grade.

The third group is the most troubling and includes students who can answer very few of the relatively straightforward questions and who struggle to score even one point on open-ended writing activities. This group is most prevalent in grade

3, which is not surprising since students who have not yet obtained the most basic skills are less likely to make it to grade 6 or 8. It should be noted that the low scores (overall) in the grade 3 Khmer reading and writing activities have been corroborated in a separate set of assessments carried out by MoEYS that focus on early grade reading skills (Early Grade Reading Assessment, or EGRA). In later grades, there are also sizeable numbers of students who are struggling with the mathematics and physics content. As is the case with the high- and middle-performing students, the size of this third group varies by grade and subject. But the overall goal of the system should be to have no children in this category.

8.4 Student Achievement Comparisons over Time

The inclusion of common test questions on assessments carried out in different years makes it possible to monitor average achievement levels within specific grades. The task of making the results from various tests comparable over time—called test equating—is one of the more challenging technical aspects of EQAD's work.[2] But this is another critical function of national assessment projects because it makes it possible to assess whether the system is improving.

Figure 8.6a, b shows the evolution of student achievement levels in grade 3 during the CESSP and EQAD testing periods (2006–2015), by sample strata. As is customary for inter-year comparisons of this kind, scaled scores—rather than percentages—are used to measure student achievement. The scaled score has a mean of (roughly) 500 points at the beginning of the comparison period (2006) and a standard deviation of 100 points. Beginning with the national averages (far right bar), the results show that average achievement levels have improved by 0.33 (Khmer) and 0.29 (maths) standard deviations between 2006 and 2015. These are significant—and relatively large—improvements during this nearly 10-year period. This progression is excellent news from a systemic monitoring standpoint because it suggests that the average grade 3 student is learning more of the intended curriculum. This, in turn, should bode well for student performance in later grades and beyond.

The comparisons by sample strata in Fig. 8.6a, b show that improvement in grade 3 is not uniform. Large urban school students experienced the most substantial gains between 2006 and 2015: in mathematics, the increase is 0.80 standard deviations.

[2] In general, groups of 8–14 common test questions (called "anchor" or "link" questions) are included on otherwise different tests that are applied in different years. Item Response Theory (IRT) tools are used to obtain statistical scores that can be compared between years. This process does depend on the quality of the common questions, which are evaluated one-by-one to insure they meet the standard of acceptable link/anchor items. All of this work is completed by EQAD using the Item and Test Analysis (IATA) software. The number of acceptable common questions varies by test subject and grade, although in some cases a relatively small number of common items are used, which can impact the validity of the comparisons over time (see Marshall et al., 2012, for a more detailed discussion of this process).

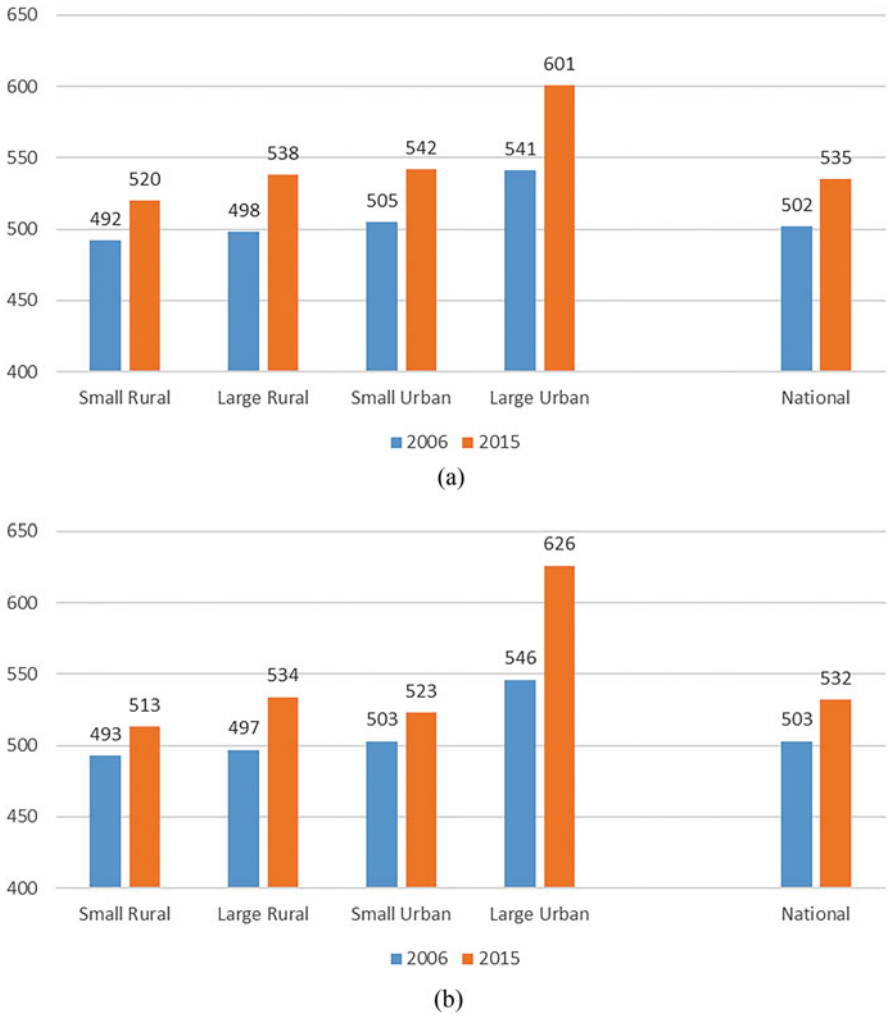


Fig. 8.6 Comparisons of grade 3 Khmer and maths achievement, 2006–2015. (**a**) Khmer Reading. (**b**) Maths. *Source*: CESSP Grade 3 Assessment (Marshall et al., 2006), EQAD Grade 3 Assessment (2015a, b)

But in the small rural category, the rate of change—while significant—was much slower. For the large rural category (which is where most students are found), the improvement was 0.40 SD in Khmer and 0.37 SD in maths. So, there is certainly evidence that achievement levels are improving in rural areas, but in the small schools especially, the rate of change is not keeping up with large urban contexts.

The sizeable improvement in grade 3 achievement has not been confirmed in other grades. An earlier study carried out by CESSP (Marshall et al., 2012) found some evidence that grade 9 achievement levels had improved in between the 2008

and 2010 assessments. Figures in Appendix provide a summary of grade 6 achievement levels in 2007 and 2013. The results show some modest improvement overall in mathematics between the two test applications, but Khmer language achievement declined. Once again, the results vary substantially by school type: achievement levels went down in 2013 in small rural schools but improved (or stayed the same) in the other school categories. One possibility is that more poor students were reaching grade 6 in 2013 in comparison with 2007, especially in rural areas, which would make it harder for the overall average to increase. This kind of selection problem is less likely in grade 3 since most Khmer children—regardless of social class background—are eventually making it to grade 3.

The results from the equated test comparisons are not consistently positive, although the significant improvement in grade 3 is very important, given how critical it is to develop basic skills in early grades. If this trend continues, then we can expect significantly fewer grade 3 students to be classified in the lowest achievement categories in the future. In higher grades, the dynamics are potentially more complicated because more and more poor children (and communities) are reaching levels like lower secondary.

Overall, the results reported here highlight the need for regular—and careful—monitoring of student achievement to establish trends over time. This topic causes a lot of confusion since it is easy to look at tests from the same grade in two separate years and simply compare the percentage correct on each test to assess whether things are improving. This is not viable, for many reasons already discussed. So EQAD will continue to develop capacity in the vital area of test equating and monitoring.

8.5 Achievement Comparisons

The summary of student achievement scores reported in the previous two sections of this chapter raises some concerns—and indicates some progress—in terms of education quality in Cambodia. This section addresses the topic of equity and how student achievement levels vary by student, school, and community characteristics.

All EQAD (and CESSP) national assessment reports include comparisons of student test scores across different categories. These include boys versus girls, and urban versus rural, which are standard comparisons in education. Also, using data collected from the teacher grade books, students are divided into groups based on the number of absences and their marks within each subject. Finally, using the student questionnaire that includes a list of household possessions (television, refrigerator, car, etc.) and services (electricity, water, etc.), students are divided into different levels of socioeconomic status (SES). EQAD reports provide more details on how these comparisons are constructed.

Once again, it is not possible to provide an exhaustive summary of the student achievement comparisons during the entire CESSP-EQAD period. Figure 8.7 instead focuses on grade 3 (2015) and 8 (2014) Khmer results, showing the

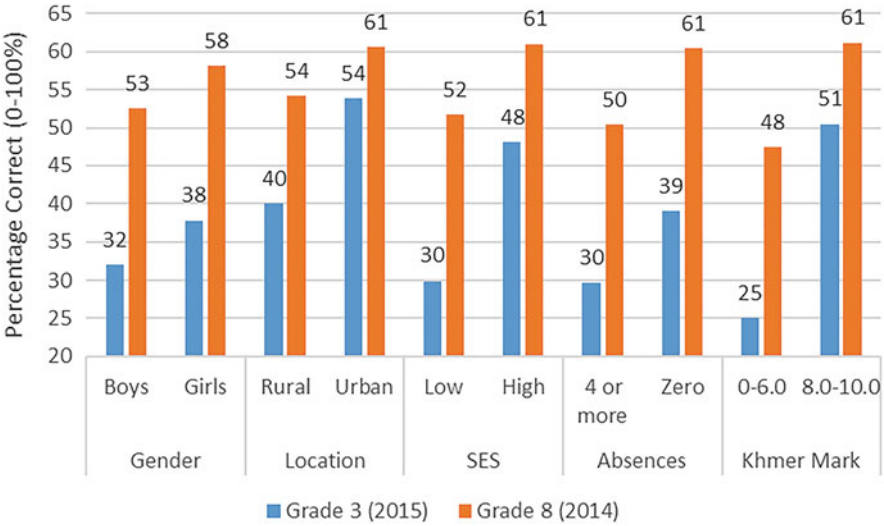


Fig. 8.7 Comparisons of grade 3 and 8 Khmer achievement by gender, location, SES, absences, and marks. *Source*: EQAD (2015b, 2016)

percentage correct by category. The blue bars refer to the grade 3 application, while orange is used for grade 8. There is a lot of information in Fig. 8.7, but the graphical depiction is useful for demonstrating the size of the gaps between different groups of students, as well as for comparing them across grades. For gender, the results show that girls scored 5–6% higher than boys in both grades. These differences are statistically significant and are the equivalent of 0.25–0.35 standard deviations. One interesting—and somewhat unusual—result in Cambodia is that girls also tend to score higher on the mathematics tests (not shown in Fig. 8.7), although the differences are smaller.

The results for urban versus rural and low SES versus high SES are consistent with most education research conducted globally and show significant stratification (or inequality). In grade 3, rural students averaged 40% correct on the Khmer test, compared with 54% for urban students; the corresponding averages in grade 8 were 54 and 61%. For SES, the gaps are even larger: the poorest children in grade 3 averaged just 30% correct on the test, versus 48% for higher SES children.

The final comparisons are for student absences and teacher-assigned marks in Khmer. Students who had zero absences scored about 10% higher than those who had four or more absences recorded by teachers. Students who had relatively high marks in Khmer (8 points or higher) had much higher Khmer assessment scores than students who had low marks (6 points or lower). In grade 3, the gap is very large: high mark students averaged 51% on the test, versus only 25% for low mark students. The consistency between the national assessment results and the teacher-assigned marks provides some validation for both forms of assessment.

One last result stands out in Fig. 8.7: grade 3 achievement is much more unequal compared with grade 8 achievement. Based on this pattern, it is tempting to conclude that the school system in Cambodia is reducing inequality over time. However, this explanation is probably not valid. Instead, the results are consistent with the filtering process referred to earlier in the chapter. Students who don't do as well in school—who also tend to be poorer—are leaving the system before reaching higher grades. This is another result that will need to be monitored closely over time since achievement differences may increase in the future in higher grades as more and more poor children reach this level.

8.6 Conclusion

Cambodia has made impressive gains over the past 20 years in improving educational participation. As a result, more attention is being paid to quality. Using data generated during 10 years of national assessment testing in the Kingdom, this chapter reviews education system performance based on average student achievement levels while also considering equity and the learning gaps that exist between different categories of students. By focusing on actual student skills and learning results—as opposed to more commonly referenced measures of system performance, like repetition or dropout rates—the summary provides a unique overview of school quality and the challenges facing the system.

The main result is that student achievement in Cambodia is not at the expected, or desired, level. This is especially true in grade 3, where significant numbers of students are not acquiring the kinds of basic skills they need to be successful in later grades. Also, there are large achievement gaps between urban and rural areas and between students from low and high SES families.

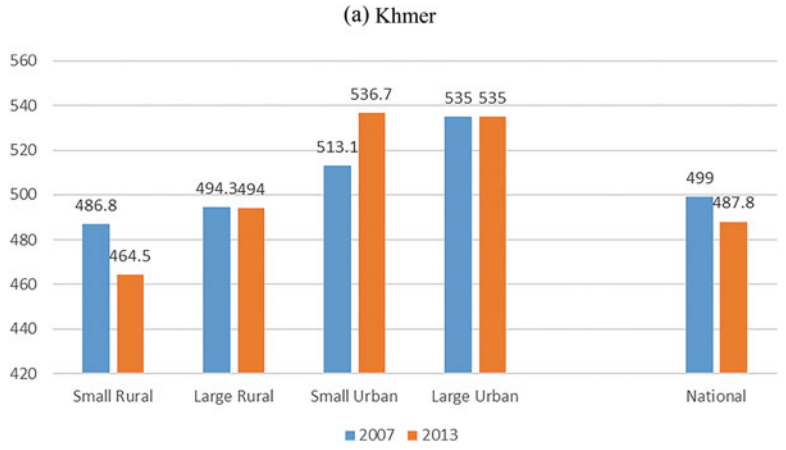
Overall, the assessment results raise some concerns about school quality and the preparation levels of Khmer students who are entering an increasingly globalized labour market. But these kinds of findings are not unusual in developing countries and need to be put into proper perspective. Cambodia has experienced rapid growth in educational participation in recent years, which in turn puts a lot of pressure on the system. First, the increase in school coverage means that more children from the poorest families and communities are enrolling in school. And second, the growth in enrolment requires more teachers to be trained and assigned to new schools, especially in rural and remote areas (Tandon & Fukao, 2015). Simply stated, it is extremely difficult for education systems to ensure high levels of learning for every student while also undergoing rapid expansion.

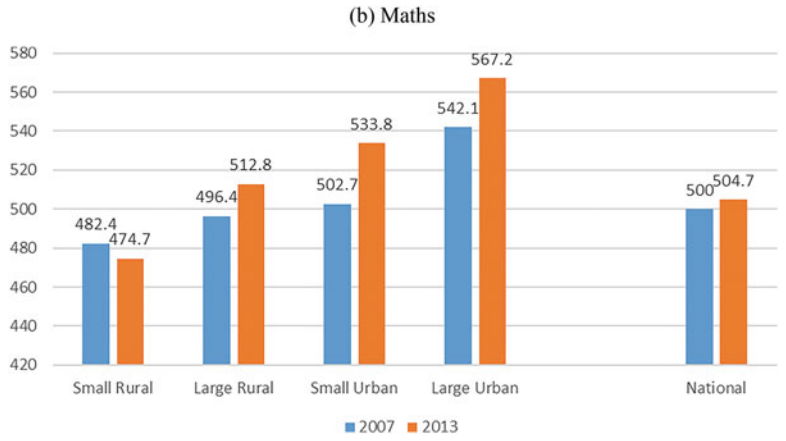
Furthermore, there is some evidence that student achievement levels in Cambodia are improving. The comparison of grade 3 assessments between 2006 and 2015 shows significant improvement in the average student's Khmer and mathematics achievement at this level. This improvement is an important result because it suggests that the system has turned a corner in terms of quality, at least at the primary level. If this trend continues—and if it extends into higher grades—then the

consequences for overall system performance, and the broader economy, are potentially far-reaching.

Finally, this review has highlighted the critical role played by national assessment in systemic monitoring and quality measurement. The application of tests in different grades provides education stakeholders with annual updates on student achievement levels, and the use of equated tests also makes it possible to monitor systemic improvement over time. There is still room to improve this function, both at a technical level (such as the use of proficiency scales rather than percentage correct) and in terms of institutionalization. To date, the assessment function has mainly provided a series of reports for MoEYS, but the impact of these reports on the work across MoEYS departments is limited. This is also not an unusual finding in most developing countries. In these countries, time is required to build capacity to undertake valid national assessments of student achievement and to create linkages with different government departments and offices to translate assessment results into actions that can improve school quality. The work of building capacity and enhancing the use of assessment results to drive quality improvements in the system will continue. Still, the critical point is that Cambodia has a functioning national assessment system to build on in the future.

Appendix: Comparisons of Grade 6 Khmer and Maths Achievement, 2007–2013





Source: CESSP Grade 3 Assessment (2007), EQAD Grade 3 Assessment (, 2013).

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Chapter 9
School Leadership in Cambodian Schools

Andrew Jones and Michael C. Nagel

9.1 Introduction

Over recent years, there has been a growth of scholarly interest in the topic of educational leadership and management in the East Asian region. Studies have come from China (Ho & Tikly, 2012; Liu et al., 2016; Walker et al., 2012), Hong Kong (Dimmock & Walker, 1998; Li et al., 2016), Malaysia (Bajunid, 1996), the Philippines (Brooks & Sutherland, 2014), Singapore (Ng et al., 2015), Taiwan (Pan & Chen, 2015), Thailand (Hallinger & Kantamara, 2003; Hallinger & Lee, 2011), and Vietnam (Hallinger et al., 2015; Hao & Wu, 2012; Truong & Hallinger, 2015; Truong et al., 2017; Walker et al., 1996). The research has highlighted the importance of the role played by culture (Bass, 1997; Bjork, 2006; Cravens & Hallinger, 2012; Dimmock & Walker, 2000; Hallinger, 2011; Hallinger & Bryant, 2013; Tu, 1996; Walker & Hallinger, 2015), particularly concerning collectivism and power distance. According to Hofstede (1991), *collectivism* refers to 'societies in which people from birth onwards are integrated into strong, cohesive in-groups, which throughout people's lifetime continue to protect them in exchange for unquestioning loyalty' (p. 51); and *power distance* refers to 'the extent to which the less powerful members of institutions and organizations within a country expect and accept that power is distributed unequally' (p. 28). Hallinger and Kantamara (2003) asserted the importance of exploring the relevance of these concepts in the cultural context of school leadership. To date, however, few such studies have been reported from Cambodia (Bredenberg & Heeyit, 2004; Bredenberg, 2008; Lee, 2006; Morefield, 2007; Selvarajah et al., 2012; Shoraku, 2006, 2008).

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This chapter reviews the role of the school principal in Cambodia.[1] It begins with an account of the context for principalship in Cambodia, giving attention to contemporary needs. Programs for the professional development of Cambodian principals are then reviewed. Much of the rest of the chapter is given over to reporting on an ongoing empirical investigation of principals' conceptions of effective school leadership and management in Cambodia. Finally, insights to emerge from the investigation provide a basis for proposing areas for development and integration in support of more effective school leadership and management in Cambodia, and a vision for the further professional development of school principals is also commended.

9.2 Leadership in the Cambodian Context

Selvarajah et al. (2012) addressed the importance of cultural context in Cambodian society when examining leadership behaviour through the prism of religious beliefs. Inglehart and Baker (2000) had previously drawn attention to the potential of religion to influence behaviour and, by extension, managerial and leadership behaviours. According to Selvarajah et al. (2012), leadership behaviour in Cambodia was based on adherence to dharmic philosophies[2] and Theravada Buddhist traditions of authority, individual pursuit of achievement, social interaction, and balance. The social fabric of Cambodia intertwined with religious practices derived from Hinduism over the first 12 centuries of the Common Era (CE) and then from Buddhism (Chandler, 2008). As Hinton (1998) observed, 'Cambodia exhibits strong hierarchical tendencies that give rise to legitimized authority, power, moral order, respect, obedience, honour, and obedience to social superiors. Relationships in Cambodia tend to be structured vertically in terms of power, status, and patronage' (p. 98). Hinton's thesis concurred with Hofstede's findings about the importance of collectivism and power distance in East Asian cultures. Educational leadership in Cambodia may, therefore, be seen to tend towards achieving objectives in a pragmatic and deferential manner, grounded in centuries of hierarchical tradition and custom.

There is also an overlap with Confucianism found in neighbouring China and Vietnam. According to a Confucianist perspective, individuals form part of a network of social relationships within which obedience and respect for authority are vital to building social harmony and stability (Yao & Yao, 2000). Chandler (2008) went further by proposing that the value attached to subordination through

[1] In Cambodian schools, head teachers are referred to as school directors. For the purpose of this chapter, they will be referred to as school principals.

[2] These philosophies emphasize individual salvation through self-realization. Following a virtuous path of righteous duties lessens or removes the effect of *karma*, where past or present actions are seen as either assisting or obstructing salvation.

status entrenched feudalistic behaviour which can lead to subjugation under autocratic rule.

The explanation of leadership behaviour in Cambodia as advanced by Selvarajah et al. (2012) resonates with an earlier argument by Argyris that there is a universal human tendency for leadership behaviour to subscribe to four basic values: remain in unilateral control; maximize 'winning' and minimize 'losing'; suppress negative feelings; and be as rational as possible. These values, he argued, served to avoid embarrassment (losing face) and being seen as threatened, vulnerable, or incompetent (Argyris, 1991).

Until recently in Cambodia, school principals have been appointed with little or no management training or prior leadership experience. As one primary school principal in Kampot District related, 'After the Khmer Rouge, there was only one school left in this district and I was the only teacher, so I was appointed principal after only one year's teaching' (Jago, 2008, p. 40). This situation reflects the impact of Khmer Rouge atrocities. As Ung Luong (2000) reports in an account of her personal family story, executions, starvation, disease, and forced labour under the Khmer Rouge resulted in the deaths of an estimated two million Cambodians, almost a quarter of the country's population.

Beginning in 2000, the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports (MoEYS) mandated that school principals should be responsible for a wide range of school-based activities. These included everything from incorporating national policies into a school's operations to advancing student learning through the implementation of evaluations and the review of student progress (MoEYS, 2000). Shoraku (2006) reported how the responsibilities of Cambodian school principals had increased considerably because of education reforms associated with the *Education for All* agenda. Significant among these was the adoption of a Child-Friendly Schools (CFS) approach (see Box 9.1), requiring school principals to consider teaching and learning within the classroom, community engagement, school-based management, and issues of health and safety. Responsibility for these matters took principals well beyond a traditional need to be concerned solely with policy compliance and the management of facilities.

Box 9.1 Child-Friendly Schools

Child-Friendly Schools (CFS) is an approach to the improvement of school operations and student learning outcomes. CFS programming has provided an effective alternative to prescriptive, top-down programming because it focuses on the development process as much as, if not more, than on product. It provides a structure in which stakeholders (including children) can define their own needs and identify interventions to meet those needs. Standardized project packages are strictly avoided, leading to a situation where the stakeholders are given real choices and opportunities for decision-making in project design and implementation. Thus, one of the key characteristics of CFS

(continued)

Box 9.1 (continued)
programming is the idea that 'child-friendliness' is locally defined by stakeholders and that interventions are identified locally rather than imposed from above. CFS integrates six dimensions: equitable access, effective teaching and learning (ETL) methods, safety and security, gender issues, community engagement, and school governance. In 2001, MoEYS collaborated with UNICEF and NGOs to integrate the CFS approach in teacher in-service (INSET) and head-teacher training, curriculum and teaching resource development, WASH facilities and programs, and parent-teacher associations, among others.

Over the ensuing years, a stronger focus on child rights in education has been observed with a more comprehensive approach to a child's learning including gender-sensitive and inclusive education, psychosocial learning environments, health and nutrition, and parental engagement. CFS recognizes the importance of a holistic view of the child and adolescent (Bredenberg & Heeyit, 2004; Bredenberg, 2008).

In 2014, a sub-decree entitled *The Administration and Management of Teaching Services in Public Primary Education Institutions (No. 309 ANKr.BK, December 2014)* further specified the role and responsibilities of school principals in a Cambodian school sector that had progressively become more decentralized. Primary school principals were now required to oversee, manage, and arrange teaching services more expertly and to exercise authority in assigning teaching duties, including additional responsibilities, multi-grade class duties, and the use of contract teachers. Directors of provincial and district offices of education were made accountable for supervising the performance of school principals within their respective jurisdictions (MoEYS, 2014). These provisions were consistent with the national model of a decentralized education system (Pellini & Bredenberg, 2015). They meant that school principals became directly responsible for supporting effective teaching and learning.

These developments came against the background of various studies about the importance of school leadership and management to teacher motivation in Cambodian schools. One of these studies was a long-term investigation by Volunteer Service Overseas (VSO), an organization with a deep engagement with the education sector in Cambodia over many years.[3] Its study focused on the motivation and morale of teachers and school principals in Cambodian schools (Jago, 2008). The traditional view of school principals, as reported by the study, was that they were 'exclusively managers: their job was to implement the directives from their superiors and ideas of leadership, self-initiative or creativity were not expected. . .' (Jago,

[3] VSO, a UK-based not-for-profit organization, has provided volunteer professionals for the past 25 years to the education, health, agriculture, forestry, and fisheries sectors in Cambodia, working directly with government ministries and local NGOs.

2008, p. 39). However, that view was said to have been evolving. When asked about their role, school principals were said to be more likely to report that 'transparency, strong leadership, and gaining staff cooperation are essential in motivating teachers' (Jago, 2008, p. 39). Debate surrounding school leadership and management continued because the reality presented by some teachers during the VSO study indicated that criticism of personnel still displaced encouragement, and the expression of views and new ideas by classroom teachers was not commonplace.

In the VSO study, enjoyment of teaching children was most often reported to be the main factor motivating teachers in Cambodia. There were, however, various demotivating factors identified. These included low salary, corruption and nepotism, poor leadership, and a lack of much voice within the sector. Underlying causes here included limited education budgets, systemic problems with transparency and accountability, low levels of administrative and managerial competence, poor leadership skills, and relatively few incentives. The VSO study recommended, therefore, that there should be training in leadership skills at all levels, together with the indexing of sector remuneration levels with inflationary pressures and increases in the cost of living (Jago, 2008, p. 60). The importance attributed by the VSO study to improving school leadership and management resonated with observations reported by Bennell and Akyeampong (2007) concerning teacher motivation in developing countries:

> Teacher motivation depends critically on effective management, particularly at the school level. If systems and structures set up to manage and support teachers are dysfunctional, teachers are likely to lose their sense of professional responsibility and commitment. Teacher management is most crucial at the school level, where the importance of teachers' work and their competence in performing it are crucially influenced by the quality of both internal and external supervision. (p. 43)

MoEYS subsequently sought to address the need to improve the quality of school leadership and management. Some initiatives implemented will now be discussed.

9.3 Professional Development of Cambodian School Principals

The focus since the 1970s for education in developing countries has been improving access, with issues relating to the quality of student learning regarded as being of secondary importance (Farrell, 2011). Over recent years, however, these issues have attracted much more attention, especially in light of high repetition rates and relatively low school retention rates (Caillods, 2011). In Cambodia, though both Grade 1 enrolment and gender parity rates have generally increased in line with official policies and initiatives, transition rates from primary to secondary education have not been improving as expected. Low rates of secondary school completion continue to be problematic (EMIS, 2001–2016). To date, various initiatives have sought to address these challenges.

An additional approach was to build capacity among school principals. Over the past 30 years, various development partners, including UNICEF, UNESCO, the World Bank, the Asian Development Bank, the Japan International Cooperation Agency, and non-governmental organizations (NGOs), have sought to provide management and leadership training for school principals. Many school principals, however, have had limited teaching and management experience. The training programs themselves also varied in their rigour and effectiveness, sometimes with little or no follow-up to reinforce application or assessment to reflect on the training process (Morefield, 2007).

Since 2005, relatively small-scale professional leadership programs have been introduced through discrete projects such as the Cambodian Education Sector Support Project (CESSP) (see Box 9.2) and the School Management and Leadership Training Course (World Education & Kampuchean Action for Primary Education). These programs were effective in providing school principals and their supervisors with practical training grounded in relevant theory and a Cambodian context (World Education, 2009). With limited funding, however, only about 1500 educational administrators have participated in these programs. Over the years, development partners and NGOs have also offered school principal and school support committee training, but with most of this constrained by limited time and resources.

Box 9.2 Professional School Leadership Development

John Morefield had been a teacher, school principal, district superintendent, and university instructor over 45 years in Seattle, Washington. In 2003, he travelled to Cambodia as a volunteer with the Maryknoll Sisters. With the permission of MoEYS, he began to work with school principals in the field of educational leadership. With the able assistance of Kim Reaksmey as translator, John met monthly with 40 principals from Kandal, Kampot, and Takeo provinces in the Ang Ta Som Primary School, Takeo. It was there that he met Iv Sarik, Deputy Director of the Takeo Provincial Office of Education. Between the workshops, John and Reaksmey would visit each principal at their school and explore issues in leadership. Once the project concluded in April 2004, they initiated a similar project with principals in Phnom Penh. The lessons learned from these two experiences became the basis for what became known as Leadership I, which was integrated into the Cambodian Education Sector Support Project 2005–2010 (CESSP). It was during CESSP that John and Sarik became the team that eventually designed and delivered school leadership training to 950 primary and lower secondary school principals, and provincial and district staff members, across 13 of the most disadvantaged provinces in Cambodia.

The program developed by John and Sarik offered a new vision of leadership in Cambodian schools. Its objectives included an understanding of the key elements of good practice in leadership, the ability to learn and

(continued)

Box 9.2 (continued)
demonstrate new skills in leading schools, and changes in schools that result in educational excellence for all children. The content of the program covered various aspects of leadership, including topics that included differences between leadership and management, beliefs and values, vision, team building, instructional supervision and leadership, motivating and inspiring teachers, being creative, running effective technical group meetings, and so on. The methodology was learner-centred and experiential. The delivery strategy involved a course across 4 years with on-site mentoring and support components in the intervals between annual workshops. A key element of the CESSP program was the inclusion of provincial and district education personnel as core trainers, thus creating a learning community in which provincial and district staff members become more competent leaders and mentors for schools within their jurisdiction—they learned about school leadership through teaching about it. The leadership training program complemented a more general nationwide Primary and Secondary Principals Training Program (PSPTD) course initiated in 2003–2004 for new principals and deputy principals. The PSPTD was more theoretical in emphasis and focused more on management, administration, and compliance.

Aside from these initiatives, higher education institutions, such as the Royal University of Phnom Penh (RUPP), have provided graduate programs in educational leadership and management as a way of further developing professional leaders in both the public and private sectors (Royal University of Phnom Penh [RUPP], n.d.). RUPP characterizes its program mission as providing high-quality teaching and learning opportunities to prepare professionals for leadership in a wide variety of educational careers; engaging in scholarly research to prepare scholars who can conduct academic research that addresses critical national and regional educational issues; and providing valuable service to the field through collaboration with other educational agencies, institutions, and scholars to contribute to the improvement of the education system in Cambodia and the region.

Juxtaposed with these programs is a growing belief that, to ensure all schools have appropriate leadership and management, it is essential to have professional standards for school principals, high-quality preparation, and in-service programs grounded in those standards (Morefield, 2007). Professional standards would indicate the minimum competencies required of all school principals, while career preparation and ongoing professional growth would reinforce the important place of school principals in the implementation of education policy, school improvement, effective schools, and improvements in student learning outcomes (Morefield, 2007). To address the need for professional standards in a more general way, the Cambodian Government in 2012 produced a *Policy on Human Resources in [the] Education Sector*, which affirmed the importance of personnel recruitment and professional development. The policy's primary objective was 'to transform the

Table 9.1 Characteristics of school principals

A traditional school principal	An excelling school principal
Is a follower	Is a follower and an initiator
Implements guiding manuals	Interprets and implements manuals
Follows processes	Follows and creates processes
Avoids challenges	Addresses and resolves problems
Waits for support from the top	Creates support at the bottom
Avoids making mistakes	Learns from making mistakes
Sees the school as separate from the community	Collaborates with the community
Receives a salary	Receives a salary and incentives
Is restrained by authorities	Is facilitated by authorities
Has a job	Has a passion

human resources in MoEYS to be more competent, effective, efficient and reliable in the provision and support of educational services contributing to the capacity development of individuals and institutions' (MoEYS, 2012, p. 2). In 2017, the Ministry also approved new School Principal Professional Standards (MoEYS, 2017a).

MoEYS announced that a school principal professional development program would be financially supported, starting in the 2017–2018 school year (MoEYS, 2015). This program had its foundations in both the traditional MoEYS management training for principals and the CESSP leadership modules. Modules in the program included administration and finance, classroom observation, community relations, gender issues, governance and school-based management, inspection, lesson planning, monitoring and evaluation motivation, roles and responsibilities of the school principal, school improvement planning, teacher standards, and 'green schools' (MoEYS, 2017b). In recent years, MoEYS has initiated school-based management training for lower-secondary school principals through the Secondary Education Improvement Project, funded through the World Bank, while upper-secondary school principals will experience similar training through the *Upper Secondary Education Sector Development Projects 1 and 2*, financed through the Asian Development Bank (ADB).

A MoEYS workshop conducted in May 2015 in preparation for the school principal professional development program generated two lists of characteristics of school principals, one referring to the traditional school principal and the other to an excelling school principal (MoEYS, 2015). These lists (see Table 9.1) aligned with the viewpoints of Cambodian principals involved in a research study begun in mid-2015, as outlined in the following section of this chapter.

9.4 Conceptions of Effective School Leadership and Management

An investigation currently underway in Cambodia is seeking to explore the world of the school principal in the context of public schools in Cambodia. Its focus is the conceptions of effective school principals as they work to improve the quality of primary and secondary education. Given that it is often suggested that good leadership will make things better and that organizations can be improved through good leadership (Palestini, 2012), the investigation has sought to uncover conceptions of good leadership in the Cambodian education context. The research also involves a concurrent analysis of data derived from interviews with school principals, which seeks to uncover what actions 'good' or effective school principals do differently from or, in addition to, what other school principals are doing that contribute to the successful implementation of initiatives towards improved school operations and the quality of learning.

To address these questions, the study's focus was to uncover the conceptions of effective school principals in Cambodia, and as such, the study employed a phenomenographic methodology, with semi-structured interviews as the primary mechanism for gathering data (Marton, 1988, 1994). All interviews were taped and transcribed verbatim. The transcripts themselves were produced by a professional Khmer-English translator and cross-checked with the audiotapes and field notes by the researcher. Twenty school principals in primary and secondary schools (including one private sector school) located throughout Cambodia (Phnom Penh municipality and Battambang, Kampong Cham, Kampot, Siem Reap, Tbong Khmum provinces) were interviewed in 2015 and 2016 to explore their conceptions of effective school principalship and to gain a stronger sense of indigenous perspectives around these questions. Another five national and sub-national education sector personnel (central and provincial levels) were also interviewed to ascertain their conceptions of effective school principals.

The following sections provide insights to emerge to date from the findings. These insights throw light on the nature of the challenges being experienced by principals and their schools, conceptions of the nature of an effective school principal and of a 'good' school, and recommendations for school improvements.

9.4.1 Characteristics of Participants and of the Setting

The 20 participants ranged in age from their 30s to their 50s, and most had more than 10 years of classroom teaching experience. One had less than 3 years. Regarding school leadership and management, however, there was a considerable spread, from less than 1 year to more than 16 years of experience as a school principal or deputy principal. There were only four female participants (20%), one of whom was very highly respected and was about to be appointed to the directorship role in the District

Office of Education. All participants had attended the MoEYS School Management Program, conducted over 20 days, in preparation for the performance of their duties. Nine participants had also participated in school leadership and management professional development programs offered by either CESSP (2005–2010), the KAPE School Management and Leadership Training Course (2010–2012), or Teachers Across Borders (Australia).

In terms of academic qualifications, 9 participants, representing almost half of the 20 participants, had completed a postgraduate degree, usually in education management or else in business management. Six participants had obtained an undergraduate degree within which they had also studied matters related to pedagogy. Three participants had completed lower-secondary education (grades 7–9), and two had completed upper-secondary schooling (grades 10–12). These principals had started as teachers at a time when having a higher education qualification was not a requirement for appointment as a teacher or even for appointment as a school principal. All participants had undertaken their studies solely in Cambodia.

Of the 20 schools represented, 7 were situated in urban centres, while the other 13 were in rural, but not remote, areas. Eight schools were primary level (K-9). The others were either lower-secondary, upper-secondary, or full secondary schools, except for one school that was an all-grade (K to grade 12) school. Three of the four female participants were principals of primary schools, and the fourth female principal was the principal of a secondary school.

The schools themselves varied greatly in size. The primary schools had between 122 and 999 students, but 1 primary school had as many as 6095 students.[4] Secondary schools ranged in population from 137 to 1173 students, while the all-grade school enrolled 605 students.

9.4.2 Challenges Reported

The participants reported various challenges faced within both their own schools and the education system. These challenges were said to impact adversely on their effectiveness as school leaders and on opportunities for their students to succeed.[5] Low student achievement, student disinterest in sport and art education, and high dropout rates in lower-secondary grades were widely agreed to be challenges for schools. There were also said to be a lack of qualified and committed teachers and school principals, an absence of succession planning for school leadership, resistance to change from some quarters, gender discrimination in the teaching profession, and high staff turnover rates. Parental and community involvement was reported to be limited in many schools, due in part to a tendency for parents and community members who were not well educated to place little value on the

[4] This school used double shifts from Monday to Saturday to accommodate its student population.

[5] One participating principal noted that there were no problems in his school. Lucky person!

education of their children. It was also noted that classroom space was limited, water and sanitation services were non-existent or in a state of disrepair, and there was a widespread lack of suitable teaching and learning materials. Most importantly, school operational and improvement funds were reported to be too restricted at every governmental level, including the local, regional, and national levels.

These challenges were referred to by the participants when advancing views about the elements of school improvement. They also affected their perceptions of the ideal of an effective school principal.

9.4.3 Conceptions of Effectiveness as a School Principal

The themes reported below emerged from responses provided by the participants when asked about the attributes of an effective school principal. As is evident from the themes identified, the participants ranged widely in identifying desirable attributes.

Vision: The importance of having a clear school vision was emphasized by most of the participants. Many of the participants reported that having a vision involves developing a sense of school ownership by students, staff, and community to encourage sustainability and continuity—it provides a long-range perspective on the school as a community of learners. Goal setting by school communities through strategic planning grounded in creative thinking and risk taking was stressed as a means of achieving the vision created for a school. Several respondents also alluded to the fact that, through daily observation and encouragement, an effective school principal supports the realization of a shared institutional vision, which is in turn an important attribute of school effectiveness.

Management: Management skills also emerged from the interviews as being essential to institutional effectiveness. The participants regarded good management as requiring the inclusion of staff and community members in the decision-making process concerning the annual school plan, resourcing matters, and local curriculum offerings. Participants also referred to trust as being an important element in personal and professional relationships in school settings. Many participants pointed out that trust could be developed through demonstrating professional competence in teaching, modelling positive attitudes and behaviours, being visible within the school for staff and students (by having 'walkabouts'), building relationships among school community members, ensuring equitable timetabling for teaching duties, achieving consensus decision-making, and providing encouragement to others. They believed that relationships were best developed when you 'Try your best', 'Act on your words', 'Do what you say', and 'Don't blame' (interviewees from Phnom Penh, Siem Reap, and Kampot). Competency in specific management skills was especially emphasized. These skills included time management, staff supervision, problem identification, setting priorities, and fundraising. Effective principals were also seen to be compliant with and implementers of national education policy. One of the participants declared, for example, 'The principal should serve the school and the

government'. Some of the participants who were principals of New Generation Schools[6] referred also to the need to bar teachers from engaging in outside employment, including the provision of fee-based tuition during school hours.

Teacher context: Most participants also made some reference to the importance of teamwork and collegiality. Reference was made by more than one-half of the participants to the need for subject classrooms in which teachers were able to set up learning environments for students who moved from class to class. This arrangement was viewed as being preferable to having teachers moving between classrooms with resources under their arms. The ability to teach students how to undertake research within subject areas was also valued. It was considered that student achievement and appropriate behaviour could not to be attained through corporal punishment. It was strongly emphasized that the health and safety of students and staff was paramount. Supervising principals highlighted the need for adequate and equitable salaries for all staff to ensure that teachers could provide for themselves and their families in the current economic climate.

Personal qualities: Almost all participants made explicit mention of the importance of school principals having certain personal qualities. These qualities were perceived as indispensable for effective school leadership and management. Having knowledge and skills (*competence*), for example, was seen as being foundational to the management of people and facilities. Competence was said also to underpin another essential quality, that is, *confidence* in providing leadership and management within a school. An appreciation of the opportunity to support teachers and students and an understanding of the importance for children to learn about the world they live were said to be critical to yet another of the personal qualities identified, that is, *commitment*, also referred to as 'warmth of heart'. The participants also referred to the importance of *ethical behaviour*, as indicated by an insistence upon transparency and accountability; *patience*, as indicated by a willingness to accept situations as they appear and make decisions based on evidence; and an *open mind*, as indicated by respect for the ideas of other people in the school community were offered as building blocks to enhanced community engagement. Taking time to think about one's experiences in order to be an effective leader and manager (*self-reflection*) and a commitment to *lifelong learning* through self-study were also identified by the participants as being essential personal qualities for a principal.

Creating a school environment: When discussing the creation of a school environment, most participants referred to the school's physical environment, that is, the quality of the facilities provided and the physical appearance of the school. The view expressed by one participant that 'schools are more than appearance' may well have been more widely shared but was less commonly expressed than views about the importance of providing for the safety and security of children attending a school. Comments focused mainly on the need for well-constructed school fences and gates, as well as the need for wells, toilets, and handwashing stations to promote hygiene.

[6]MoEYS approved a New Generation Schools policy (2016), grounded in the innovative work of KAPE and its partners in government schools in Kampong Cham, Svay Rieng, and Phnom Penh.

Comments were also made about the value of student feeding programs, supported by community members and by external donors. It was evident also that principals were beginning to promote 'reduce, reuse, and recycle' ways of thinking within their schools, with some principals also referring to the desirability of 'green schools', though this reference related mainly to providing shade trees as a way of making attendance at school more attractive for children.

Providing instructional support: Supporting classroom teachers through observation and feedback was reported by a small number of participants, who also valued this practice and had built it into their daily schedule of activities. Illustrative quotes were: 'Instructional supervision is the school principal's obligation – make time' (a primary school principal) and 'The school principal has [an] effect on teachers, but [is] not directly able to influence student performance' (a secondary school principal). While some participants reported that they did conduct informal 'walkabouts' at their school, they also indicated that they did not engage in structured classroom supervision and were more likely to delegate this responsibility to their deputies or even department heads. In one example of shared responsibility, it was reported that the principal, the deputy principals, and the department heads each observed five classes per month, providing feedback to the teachers concerned. It was also reported that in some schools there were monthly staff meetings at which classroom teachers shared experiences about their teaching.

A future-oriented outlook: The participants spoke frequently of the need for principals to continue to learn about school leadership and management through self-study, as well as by participating in in-service training and relevant university graduate programs. It was evident that they shared a deep interest in acquiring skills for motivating staff and for communicating more effectively with school communities. Enhancing ICT and English language skills was also seen as being important to the role of a principal.

9.4.4 Conceptions of a 'Good School'

The participants were also asked about their perceptions of the attributes of a 'good school'. Not surprisingly, given the commitment shown by MoEYS over more than a decade to a Child-Friendly Schools (CFS) framework (MoEYS, 2007), comments made by the participants were strongly influenced by the dimensions and objectives of the framework. Given the extent of its influence on the participants' views about what the requirements were for a 'good schools', Table 9.2 provides details of the dimensions and related objectives of the framework, together with recommendations made by the participants concerning the attributes of a 'good school'.

Recommendations accentuated for their importance by the participants fell into three categories:

Table 9.2 Dimensions and objectives of the Child-Friendly Schools framework and participant recommendations for a 'good school'

Dimensions	Objectives	Recommendations for a 'good school'
1. Access to education	To ensure and support all children, especially vulnerable children, in difficult circumstances to have access to schooling with equity (i.e. children of poor families, orphans, child victims of domestic violence, children with disabilities, ethnic minority children, children affected by drugs, children affected by HIV/AIDS and other diseases)	Adequate teaching space for student numbers Inclusive education teacher training (PRESET/INSET) to support children with learning difficulties and CWD Reduce repetition and early school leaving/dropout
2. Effective teaching and learning	To develop teacher proficiencies so that teachers have both theoretical and practical knowledge with a specific focus on teaching and learning strategies and resources which promote active, creative, and child-centred approaches to learning in a joyful classroom environment. To nurture teacher and student attitudes, behaviour, and moral values that lead to learning together in a harmonious way	Art education > more hands-on, less theory Bilingual textbooks/readers (Khmer/English) Create science labs Develop ICT skills programs Develop life Skills programs Full day instruction—Reduce double shifts Improve pedagogy through professional development of teachers Improve student learning and achievement Libraries/reading rooms/corners More highly qualified and competent teachers More textbooks with graphics/images Strengthen literacy and numeracy outcomes to increase success in secondary Subject integration (i.e. history in science, mathematics in life skills)
3. Health, safety, and protection of children	To ensure that all children who participate in education are cared for and supported by all concerned people and institutions to keep them healthy and safe and protect them from violence at school, in the family, and in society	Discourage discrimination and build harmonious relationships among staff and students Importance of adequate food for children Provide appropriate water and sanitation for all schools Importance of sports in young people's lives

(continued)

Table 9.2 (continued)

Dimensions	Objectives	Recommendations for a 'good school'
4. Gender responsiveness	To promote awareness in schools, families, and communities of their roles and responsibilities for providing equal and equitable education and educational opportunity for both girls and boys so that they can participate equally in all activities in school, family, and society	Consistent water supply and sanitation facilities, especially in relation to girls' education Encourage gender parity and sensitivity in the teaching profession
5. Children, family, and community engagement	To enhance the dynamic relationship and two-way participation between schools and communities so that schools become community-supported resource centres, while children, families, and communities become resources for school improvement and play an active role in management	Develop strong relationships with external organizations/ donors Improved communication with community Keep parents informed of student progress Stronger communication between primary and secondary schools and teachers
6. National education system supports the child-friendly Schools approach	To ensure the effective and sustainable implementation of the child-friendly Schools policy in all schools with a high spirit of responsibility, all mechanisms and levels of the national education system must work together to support schools in improving the quality of education	New school principals should be trained and mentored—Put a professional preparation program in place Strong management team Succession planning for school leadership and management

- *Access:* Attendance by all children is encouraged; school mapping[7] is in evidence with school expansion plans to address student numbers as a result of mapping and enrolment campaigns; girls, poorer children, and children with disabilities (CWD) are supported to attend and achieve.
- *Effective teaching and learning:* Qualified and quality teachers, instructional competence, adherence to instructional time, and healthy retention and transition rates.
- *Community engagement:* Cooperation with communities; student achievement objectives agreed to by the community.

[7] School mapping is a data collection (census) exercise conducted by local schools on pre-school and school-age children as a way of supporting access for all children through enrolment campaigns, teacher in-service, infrastructure, resourcing, etc. School catchment areas are displayed graphically in school offices with annual student population/grade-level statistics as a planning tool.

9.5 Conclusion

The Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL) presents five elements of Educational Leadership Profiles, these being leading teaching and learning; developing self and others; leading improvement, innovation, and change; leading the management of schools; and engaging and working with the community (Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership [AITSL], 2015). The Cambodian school principals surveyed for this investigation, together with who participated in the 2015 MoEYS workshop (MoEYS, 2015), touched upon each of these elements when reporting on their conceptions of effective school leadership. Their discussion of instructional supervision, encouragement of professional development, school improvement initiatives, shared management, and parental and community engagement made connections with what are typically regarded as Western conceptions of effective school leadership and management. That may be a consequence of the influence of these models on account of exposure to international aid and development projects, or it may be a universal exploration and search for what works best in this human endeavour—the education of our children.

There is a growing recognition of the importance of school leadership and management in Cambodian schools, not only in schools but also at the level of senior management within MoEYS. Political will is critical to the effective advancement of decentralization and school-based management, which in turn rely to a large degree on the competence and capacity of school principals. The investigation identified four main areas for further development and integration to generate effective school leadership and management in Cambodia:

(a) School principals should be selected on the basis of their academic qualifications, prior work experience in schools, continuing professional development, and success in performance appraisals. In other words, there should be a strong commitment to merit-based appointments. There should also be a standardized induction program available for new school principals, supplemented by rigorous annual performance appraisals.
(b) A balanced school leadership and management program needs to be made available for aspiring and practising school principals. The program should be delivered by accredited institutions with relevant professional curriculum experience and with access to qualified and competent facilitators.
(c) MoEYS should develop and implement terms of reference for school principal positions, indicating relevant roles and responsibilities, and these should be complemented by the School Director Professional Standards (MoEYS, 2017c).
(d) MoEYS should establish and sustain a centre for professional development program accessible by school principals to enable them to improve school operations and student learning outcomes, as well as to realize career advancement opportunities.

Sapre (2002), writing on India, has presented a vision of school leadership and management that might work in Cambodia to help integrate leadership styles for the

purposes of addressing school operations and student achievement in an effective manner. The vision is as follows:

> Since the primary condition for any organizational change to take place is collective will, administrators must become effective change agents. This calls for leadership, which is both collaborative and authoritative. School leaders need to have a vision as well as the ability to communicate that vision to all stakeholders. (p. 107)

This image of effective school leadership speaks to the traditions of Confucianism whereby respect for power and seniority are acknowledged and to the successes of teamwork, cooperation, and collaboration. In a country, such as Cambodia, Sapre's (2002) vision may be an appropriate one for the ongoing development of educational leadership and management to support improvements in student learning outcomes, achievement, and eventual progression to adult society.

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Chapter 10
Capacity Development in Cambodia: The Challenge of Changing an Educational Culture

Jenny Pearson

10.1 Introduction

Learning drawn from the discourse about global capacity development can be used as a guide to exploring challenges to achieving sustainable capacity within the Cambodian education sector. It is now accepted that capacity is multifaceted and exists at all levels within any given system, as well as in the relationships between the levels. It is also understood that capacity is a great deal more than technical skills and that soft capacities are equally, if not more, important because frequently the lack of intangible capacity prevents the application of technical capacity. In summary, the current understanding is that within any given system capacity is a holistic set of conditions and abilities at multiple levels. Consequently, approaches to capacity development need to go far beyond the traditional default method of skills training for individuals. It is also understood that undertaking sector-wide development that includes introducing new concepts and approaches from other contexts and cultures inevitably creates challenges.

The Royal Government of Cambodia (RGC) Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport (MoEYS) drew on the UNICEF Child-Friendly Schools (CFS) model when developing its own policy to introduce a new pedagogy in schools. The concepts in this model provide a framework analysing how relevant beliefs and attitudes in Cambodian culture impact on educational culture and how that culture impacts on change and performance. The CFS pedagogy has now been a part of MoEYS policy and strategy for almost two decades. However, the underpinning values of this approach directly conflict with how children are expected to behave and counter-cultural to how learning is understood in the Cambodian context. Having two opposing sets of values in the classroom inevitably creates a complex challenge

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for everyone working to ensure that children have the best possible learning experience. The cultural beliefs and attitudes of educators, children, and their parents are all a fundamentally important element of educational capacity, dictating how approaches to teaching and learning are received and applied. This chapter sets out challenges for education reform by examining cultural perspectives relevant to the *Cambodian Child-Friendly School Policy* (MoEYS, 2007).

While the RGC, supported by many development partners and non-government organisations (NGOs), has, without question, achieved many successes in educational reform, the fact is that many challenges remain. This chapter is not concerned with the ongoing reform processes to improve hard capacity dimensions, such as curriculum development, infrastructure, and management systems, but with the all-important soft capacity considerations that define the quality of the learning environment and the teacher-child relationship in the classroom.

10.2 Capacity and Capacity Development: Current Understanding

One of the first substantive reviews of capacity development in recent years was the 2006 Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) publication entitled *The challenge of capacity development: Working towards good practice.* In part, this report was motivated by the recognition that the annual multi-billion-dollar development aid spending[1] on capacity development was not producing the expected results. Later studies analysed capacity development from different perspectives to further the discourse within development assistance trends. For example, the OECD working paper entitled *Training and beyond: Seeking better practices for capacity development* (Pearson, 2011a) noted that, following the emphasis placed on capacity development in the *Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness* (2005) and *Accra Agenda for Action* (2008), the donor community was working to identify the theory and practice of more effective approaches. The two declarations highlighted the need for important changes to previous approaches, most notably for capacity development, rather than being supply-driven, to become a country-led and demand-driven, based on locally formulated policies.

In the OECD working paper, Pearson identified some changing trends in both conceptual understanding and implementation practice. The study set out the growing recognition of capacity development as: "... a multi-dimensional process that goes far beyond knowledge and skills transfer at the individual level to embrace

[1] The OECD report states that "In recent years, about a quarter of donor aid, or more than USD 15 billion a year, has gone into technical co-operation, the bulk of which is ostensibly aimed at capacity development". Specific current figures are impossible to capture due to the various headings and mechanisms under which support for capacity development is disbursed. However, there are no indications that the level of capacity development support has changed significantly.

Table 10.1 Examples of hard and soft capacities

Hard	Soft
Capacities that are generally considered to be technical, functional, tangible, and visible • Technical skills, explicit knowledge, and methodologies (which for individuals can be considered as competencies). • Organisational capacity to function: Appropriate structures; systems and procedures for management, planning, finance, human resources, monitoring and evaluation, and project cycle management; the ability to mobilise resources. • Laws, policies, systems, and strategies (enabling conditions) **Note:** Tangible resources like infrastructure, money, buildings, equipment, and documentation can be considered as the material expression or product of capacity, but they are not capacity in and of themselves	*Capacities that are generally considered to be social, relational, intangible, and invisible* **Operational** capacities such as: • Organisational culture and values • Leadership, political relationships, and functioning • Implicit knowledge and experience • Relational skills: Negotiation, teamwork, conflict resolution, facilitation, etc. • Problem-solving skills • Intercultural communication **Adaptive** capacities such as: • Ability and willingness to self-reflect and learn from experience • Ability to analyse and adapt • Change readiness and change management • Confidence, empowerment, and or participation for legitimacy to act

Source: Pearson (2011b)

whole organisations, sectors and systems, and the culture and context within which they all exist" (Pearson, 2011a). As the name of the study implies, there was an emerging consensus that, while there is still a valid place for training in the overall approach to capacity development, for many capacity needs it is far from being the appropriate response. Yet despite this consensus, the practice of using training as the default methodology for meeting capacity needs continues, largely unabated.

Theory and practice of the last decade have generated new learning about capacity and its development, the key points of which are:

– Capacity exists at *multiple levels of systems and in the relationship between the levels*. The levels are usually designated as individual, organisational, and enabling environments (sometimes called the institutional level). In some frameworks, the sectoral level is also included.
– Further, it is now understood that at each level capacity will have a range of *soft and hard* dimensions. This means that capacity is far more than the technical skills of individuals, as Table 10.1 sets out. The fundamental importance of soft capacity at all levels cannot be overestimated because the ability to utilise hard capacity is often dependent on whether relevant soft capacity is in place.
– Capacity is always *culture and context specific* because any entity, or capacity need, can only be fully understood in relation to all its relevant cultural and contextual factors.[2] The concept of participation, for example, will be differently

[2]In the capacity development debate culture is understood to be the system of values, beliefs, norms, and practices of a society, including religious and traditional beliefs. Context is understood as the combination of factors in place at any point in time, including political and institutional

> understood from one culture to another, and the practice of participatory methods will therefore need to be adapted to fit local conditions. The relationship between culture, context, capacity, and change is very complex. Failure to take this fact into account, and a tendency for planners to ignore critical enabling or disabling factors, such as the political economy for change, results in many initiatives producing limited sustainable capacity change, if any at all.

Taking account of all these factors means that planning for capacity development interventions should embrace the *complexity* of the situation. Complexity is a way of understanding that living communities and systems rarely function in an ordered, logical, or linear manner, and they should not be approached as if they do. Instead, responses need to be appropriately systemic and holistic in design. Sustainable change can only be achieved in large systems by applying multiple, coordinated, and iterative methods, used at all levels over an extended period. Further, approaches need to be responsive and flexibly adapted to emergent capacity or changes in the host environment. In complex systems, simplistic planning will inevitably lead to poor results because it is impossible to make accurate predictions about what will work and what will emerge.

Clarity about definitions is essential. All too often assumption-based words and terms are used widely without any attempt to ensure that meaning is shared between all stakeholders. This leads, at best, to confusion, and at times to significant problems in implementation. Many governments and organisations have adopted the OECD definitions for capacity and capacity development, which are:

- Capacity: The ability of people, organisations, and society as a whole to manage their affairs successfully.
- Capacity development: The process whereby people, organisations, and society unleash, strengthen, create, adapt, and maintain capacity over time. (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development [OECD], 2006).

Of necessity, the definitions are generic, and while they give guidance, they do not serve the purpose of defining capacity within a particular context. In this discussion about capacity development in the Cambodian education sector, the working definition of capacity is:

> The ability of the education sector, supported by all relevant stakeholders, including families, to ensure that every child has the education she or he needs to achieve their full personal and academic potential.

This definition purposefully includes stakeholders beyond those within the education sector to stress the importance of thinking systemically when framing something as complex as the capacity for a national education programme.

One of the most profound challenges to capacity development is not so much the introduction of new ideas, systems, or tools, as in persuading or enabling those

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systems, intra- and international relationships, the political economy, and a range of socioeconomic aspects of society.

involved to let go of old ways. Many initiatives are successful in the creation of hard capacity. Still, the blocks created by cultural beliefs, experience, or other factors prevent the necessary changes in attitudes and behaviour, so the new capacity is neither utilised nor sustainable. It has been noted that this challenge is especially prevalent in societies where people have experienced extreme and complex trauma, such as Cambodia (Pearson, 2011c).

Rules for social behaviour are passed from one generation to the next through multiple means, including proverbs and sayings. As noted in a commentary by Leng and Pearson (2006) on people's ability to learn and change, "... they still have a strong influence on the minds and behaviour of Cambodians. They influence the ability of Cambodians to learn in the new changed environment". An example cited is the saying "Take the beaten path even if it is crooked", which is linked to the fact that, for many Cambodians, change is seen as "... risky, frightening and likely to lead to disaster" and thus to be avoided (Leng & Pearson, 2006). People's tendency to hold on to their historical habits or decision-making criteria, despite newer and better options being available, is called path dependence. Overcoming path dependence calls for actions to address beliefs and feelings at the deepest level.

However difficult to achieve, culture change is essential if other aspects of capacity within the system or sector are to be utilised successfully.

10.3 Constructs of Culture

In common usage, the word culture has multiple applications, any of which may have various dimensions. Organisational culture has been the subject of much academic inquiry and analysis. Understanding this specific conceptual application of the word is a critical step to understanding an educational culture and how it could be changed.

A leading authority on the subject is Geert Hofstede, best known for his groundbreaking work on comparative analysis of national cultures, who defines culture as: "... the collective programming of the mind that distinguishes the members of one group or category of people from others" (Hofstede, 2011). He notes that the concept of culture is relevant and can be applied to many different types and levels of group organisation, from nations through to professions, genders, and so on. Of particular importance to the messages of this chapter is Hofstede's assertion that "Societal, national and gender cultures, which children acquire from their earliest youth onwards, are much deeper rooted in the human mind than occupational cultures acquired at school, or than organizational cultures acquired on the job" (Hofstede, 2011). The implication of this statement for a school setting is that the culture of home and family is the most influential in terms of determining how a child will behave at school.

Hofstede's work analyses culture against six dimensions: power distance; uncertainty avoidance; individualism versus collectivism; masculinity versus femininity; long-term versus short-term orientation; and indulgence versus restraint. While all

are relevant, power distance, uncertainty avoidance, and individualism versus collectivism are of particular interest in analysing why some capacity development initiatives fail to produce the expected results in Cambodia.

Another model for understanding organisational culture comes from Edgar Schein, whose definition of culture is "the learned product of group experience" or "the way things get done around here" (Schein, 1985). In his model, culture manifests at three levels:

- *Artefacts:* the overt and visible aspects of the organisation that can be seen by insiders and outsiders alike, such as patterns of behaviour and how status is demonstrated.
- *Values:* the statements of ideologies and philosophies that provide organisational guidance.
- *Basic beliefs and assumptions:* that are so taken for granted that they become invisible, and more than anything else, are the source of behaviour and decisions.

Schein argues that the foundation of any given culture is at this deepest, usually unconscious, level of fundamental beliefs and assumptions shared by its members about issues such as the nature of relationships between people. He goes on to argue that unless there is real congruence between stated values and subconscious beliefs, the organisation will struggle with many aspects of its functioning. Otto Scharmer, a management scholar, echoes this belief in the importance of the "invisible territory" and argues that truly transformational change only happens at this level, not at the surface level at which most interventions are targeted (Scharmer, 2003).

10.4 Cambodian Culture

The nature of relationships is a critical and powerful aspect of any national culture. Relationships in Cambodian culture are primarily based on its historical adherence to Confucian principles such as harmony at all costs, the importance of face, and the need to respect and obey elders and those of higher social status. Many have noted the prevalence of patron-client relationships in most aspects of society, which is crucial in understanding Cambodian culture in either the Hofstede or Schein models.

There can be no doubt that children are loved and valued in Cambodian culture, but how they are valued, and what that means in terms of expectations about their behaviour, is, of course, uniquely Cambodian. The relevance of powerful messages conveyed to children from a very young age has been noted in studies on development and reforms. For example, in a seminal study on development practice at the grassroots level in Cambodia, it was pointed out that:

> The social order of Cambodian society, reinforced by some Cambodian understandings of Buddhism, depends upon everyone respecting the social hierarchy and keeping her or his place in it. From childhood, people are taught to obey and respect those with authority. Challenging, questioning, and holding dissenting views are discouraged, conflict is seen as bad and loss of face is to be avoided at all costs. (O'Leary & Meas, 2001).

This study also noted that, from an early age, children are discouraged from asking questions of their parents or teachers. Parents frequently respond to questions with anger, almost certainly echoing the response they themselves experienced as children. So, children quickly learn the lesson that asking questions can produce negative consequences, and it is safer not to do so. In an analysis of the decentralisation process, Chan and Chheang (2008) noted the prevalence of high power distance, which is inculcated into children from birth with the expectation of unquestioning obedience to parents and teachers. They argue that the prevalence of such influential cultural factors in Cambodian society makes reforms based on concepts introduced by the international community challenging to achieve.

Similarly, recent research for a master's degree thesis led to a similar conclusion:

> ... formidable barriers to implementation and development are caused by aspects of Cambodian national culture. Specifically, the strict hierarchy—exacerbated by the way in which status and power is allocated on non-merit based characteristics such as age and gender—and the fear of losing face serve to undermine effective service delivery and CD in the public and NGO sectors. (Hewitt, 2015)

While teachers no longer attract the very high esteem they once had in Cambodian society, they still have a degree of status and are expected to behave in specific ways, including upholding social values and the traditional way of doing things. One saying indicative of attitudes to teaching is "Know 10, teach 7", meaning that the teacher should always know more than and, importantly, hold something back from the students so that he or she will be able to maintain power distance and status. In a similar vein, teachers are expected to know everything already and never admit that they might have anything to learn. Given that the vast majority of today's parents experienced a severely disrupted education, which was certainly delivered in a teacher-centred pedagogy, there can be little expectation that they will understand any new approach to their children's education. One of the country's leading international schools has adopted state-of-the-art pedagogy, but one Cambodian mother commented to this author about the education her children were receiving there, "They aren't learning anything in that school, they just play". These beliefs, held by parents and teachers alike, create powerful blocks to implementing child-centred learning approaches.

This brief examination of Cambodian culture explains why, while theoretically the CFS Policy's values statements guide the education system and how schools are run, the reality is that the fundamental determinant of behaviour is the educational culture, which is based on different beliefs and assumptions. There is incongruence between the CFS principle of child-centredness and Cambodian attitudes towards children. There is also incongruence between the principle of democratic participation and how most people relate to authority and any type of state institution, including schools. Thus, the invisible territory in the relationship between teacher and child creates profound challenges to developing soft capacity. Real change cannot come until and unless there is a transformational change in the underlying beliefs and assumptions that the teacher and child each take with them into the classroom.

10.5 Dimensions of an Educational Culture

There are few definitions of educational culture given in resource sites. One of the few is "Educational cultures are the framework in which educational activities take place" (Council of Europe, n.d.), which is devoid of any detail about how a school might look and feel. There are, however, many definitions offered for school culture. The definition below is both representative of many others and comprehensive with a broad focus on all aspects of school functioning, including the welfare of the child and inclusiveness:

> The term ***school culture*** generally refers to the beliefs, perceptions, relationships, attitudes, and written and unwritten rules that shape and influence every aspect of how a school functions, but the term also encompasses more concrete issues such as the physical and emotional safety of students, the orderliness of classrooms and public spaces, or the degree to which a school embraces and celebrates racial, ethnic, linguistic, or cultural diversity. (Glossary of Education Reform, n.d.)

This resource notes the many influences that come together to create a school culture: values; the nature of relationships and interactions; expectations, academic and others; leadership; physical factors; policies; attitudes to mistakes; and access to resources.

10.5.1 Child-Friendly Schools

UNICEF launched the CFS concept in the late 1990s in response to the need to improve education in many parts of the world. Based on two key international declarations, namely, the *Convention on the Rights of the Child* (United Nations, 1989) and the *Declaration of Education for All* (United Nations, 2000), the CFS model is grounded in a child-rights approach. Three principles underpin all aspects of the model, namely, child-centredness, democratic participation, and inclusiveness.

UNICEF has since shared its learning from the early application of the CFS model in a publication entitled *Manual: Child-Friendly Schools* (UNICEF, 2009). This publication elaborates the concepts and principles at the heart of the model and guides application. In setting out guidance for implementation, UNICEF recognises the very substantive differences between countries, so it does not promote the model as something that requires rigid adherence to all dimensions but rather as a guide offering pathways to quality education based on the fundamental principles.

The principle of *child-centredness* puts the child at the heart of the education system as an active, participating learner. This principle is about ensuring the relevance and quality of the curriculum and teachers' ability to deliver it and that while learning, children will be protected from harm within healthy and safe school environments. It thus follows that the child's interests and wellbeing should be held central to both policy formulation and all aspects of education delivery.

The *democratic participation* principle goes beyond the child to recognise family and community as important rights-holders in educational matters such as school management and improvement. Thus, the school should be accountable not only to education authorities but also to its host community. This principle recognises that solid and constructive links between school, family, and community are fundamental to the child enjoying the full benefits of everything their education has to offer. There is, of course, a qualification to this principle that recognises the need for expertise to supersede other considerations on matters of curriculum.

The third principle, *inclusiveness*, is concerned with all children's rights to have access to an education, regardless of gender, poverty, disability, ethnicity, sexual orientation, religion, or any other factor that might cause them to be excluded from school. UNICEF notes that this means that a school should be "child seeking" (UNICEF, 2009), working to identify, attract, and retain children from diverse backgrounds.

To summarise, the CFS framework, as articulated by UNICEF, is a multi-dimensional approach designed to "... move schools and education systems progressively towards quality standards by addressing all elements that influence the wellbeing and rights of the child as a learner and the main beneficiary of teaching, while improving other school functions in the process" (UNICEF, 2009). The principles of the CFS philosophy do not, on their own, provide sufficient guidance for understanding the effectiveness or otherwise of approaches to educational capacity development. For that, it is necessary also to understand the values and beliefs on which the educational culture is founded because, without question, the educational culture of a CFS is substantively different to that of a school using teacher-centred pedagogy. Also without question is the fact that a CFS cannot exist in isolation. It needs to be mandated and actively supported by all key stakeholders, not only all education authorities but also the families and communities it serves.

10.6 The CFS in Cambodia: Policy Versus Practice

10.6.1 Capacity Development in the Cambodian Education Sector

Since 1979 the Government has made it a priority to rebuild the education sector destroyed by the Khmer Rouge. The urgent first steps in 1979, from the starting point of virtually nothing, were to re-establish the basics of an educational infrastructure, find and employ anyone capable of teaching, and begin getting children into school. Since then, it has achieved a great deal with the support of development partners and NGOs. Multiple strategies and initiatives developed to address different aspects and levels of the national education programme have produced significant results. There are now laws, strategies, and policies in place to mandate and guide improvement in multiple aspects of the sector at the enabling environment level. Statistics show

yearly improvements in school infrastructure, teachers' qualifications, and other important indicators of progress (MoEYS, 2015a).

However impressive as all these achievements are, they are almost exclusively focused on the education sector's hard capacity. Soft capacity dimensions, including the educational culture, are less easy to quantify. Still, evidence points to the fact that this aspect of capacity development has not yet been given sufficient attention.

10.6.2 MoEYS Policy and School Practice

One of the significant shifts that MoEYS and its partners have been working to achieve is adopting child-centred pedagogy (as opposed to the rote learning of the traditional teacher-centred pedagogy). The MoEYS CFS Policy (Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport [MoEYS], 2007, revised 2012) was developed to build on initiatives piloted since 2000, supported by UNICEF and a small group of NGOs. The Policy includes a statement about the concept and key principles of the CFS.

A Child Friendly School is a school that recognizes and nurtures the achievement of children's basic rights. Child Friendly Schools work with all commitment-holders, especially parents/guardians of students, and values the many kinds of contributions they can make in seeking all children to go to school, in the development of a learning environment for children and effective learning quality according to the children's current and future needs. The learning environments of Child Friendly Schools are characterized by equity, balance, freedom, solidarity, non-violence, and a concern for physical, mental and emotional health. These lead to the development of knowledge, skills, attitudes, values, morals so that children can live together in a harmonious way.

A child-friendly school nurtures a school-friendly child, support children for development and a school-friendly community. These two paragraphs are a quote and should be marked as such (MoEYS, 2007).

The policy goes on to set out six "Dimensions", as follows:

- All children have access to schooling (schools are inclusive).
- Effective teaching and learning.
- Health, safety, and protection of children.
- Gender responsiveness.
- The participation of children, families, and communities in the running of their local school.
- The National Education System supports and encourages schools to become more child friendly. (MoEYS, 2007)

For each dimension, there is a related objective, which is, in effect, a statement of intent for how the dimension will be addressed. There is also a table setting out the "core activities" for the achievement of each objective. The policy's section on "educational methodology" notes that some overarching methodologies are "vital"

to the policy's achievement. The following characteristics define these methodologies:

- Teaching and learning through creative idea (sic).
- Participation and co-operative learning.
- Research, analysis, and critical thinking.
- Problem solving.
- Innovation and encouragement of creative and divergent thinking. (MoEYS, 2007)

These factors are an unambiguous indication that there is an understanding of the CFS approach as encompassing a very different pedagogy. The use of the word "creative" twice in this statement, alongside others like "co-operative learning", "innovation", and "divergent thinking", shows that new ideas were taking root. For those ideas to become a classroom reality, firmly embedded in a new educational culture, requires all stakeholders to have a substantive change in their beliefs and assumptions about education in general and classroom practice and children's behaviour. Given the structure of initiatives to roll out the CFS Policy, the need for that amount of change, which is both deep and broad in terms of scope, was not understood then and is still not understood now.

The CFS approach was evaluated in 2005, and the Policy evaluated in 2008 and again in 2016. These evaluation reports, combined with other sources of information, provide the means to analyse what implementation initiatives have achieved in changing educational culture.

The first Dimension of *inclusiveness* is about ensuring that all children go to school—girls and boys, children with disabilities, those from ethnic minorities, and others who are disadvantaged in any way. In many respects, this dimension has been very well achieved by implementing media campaigns and other means. Evidence is provided in the Ministry of Planning (MoP) statistics showing the results for the Cambodia Millennium Development Goal (CMDG) indicators for education. The figures show that, from a baseline of 81% net enrolment rate in 2001, in the 2014–2015 school year the rate was 94.5% (94.9% for girls) (Ministry of Planning [MoP], 2013; MoEYS, 2015a).

The Gender Parity Index figures show that Cambodia has also achieved full gender parity in primary enrolment from a baseline figure of 87% in 2001 (MoP, 2013; MoEYS, 2015a). The last CMDG scorecard (MoP, 2013) noted that "Parents are attaching equal importance to the education of children of either sex: preference for boys is an obsolete thought", which is arguably a simplistic statement about something that is still a trend rather than an absolute result. While there is, indeed, an encouraging trend of year on year increases in the percentage of girls transitioning to lower and upper secondary education, there is still a long way to go yet before both boys and girls attend school beyond the primary years as a matter of course.

Recent MoEYS documents (see, e.g. MoEYS, 2015c) prioritise children with disabilities. Again, while there has been some success, figures drawn from the *Cambodia Demographic and Health Survey 2014* show that there is still a long way to go (National Institute of Statistics [NIS], 2015).[3] For example, the relative enrolment ratios for girls and boys with severe disabilities were 30% and 63%, respectively, compared to 71% and 68% for the broad disability measure, and 91% and 89% for children without disabilities. It is less easy to find figures on other aspects of inclusion. Data about the rate of enrolment for children in ethnic minority communities, many of which are in remote areas, do not appear to be available. In 2016 evaluation findings were that, in many regions, these children are "disadvantaged in classrooms where their language is ignored or even repressed" (UNICEF, 2016).

In summary, it can be said that there has, without doubt, been some success in changing attitudes about girls' education, and about children with disabilities being able to join mainstream education. This is an encouraging development in terms of creating the enabling conditions for a new educational culture to emerge.

Looking at the *effective teaching and learning* Dimension brings the focus to the dominant pedagogy. A learner-centred approach that prioritises the vital overarching methodologies listed in the Policy requires not only new types of lesson plans and materials, but also children being permitted to behave differently in the classroom, that is, making and admitting to mistakes without fear of criticism, asking questions of the teacher, and expressing their views, even if they differ from those of the teacher. All of which, as noted above, is substantially different from the expectations of children's behaviour in Cambodian culture. A key finding of the 2016 CFS evaluation was that the necessary changes had not yet happened in any significant way and the traditional, teacher-centred, rote-learning pedagogy still predominates (UNICEF, 2016).

There has been some exploration of this issue linked to the science teacher-training programme at the Royal University of Phnom Penh, which works with the pedagogy of enquiry-based learning.[4] This pedagogy is strongly learner-focused. It

[3] See also the Disability Factsheet offering further analysis of the 2014 survey, which stated that: "Educational achievements are significantly lower for the disabled population. Among children of schooling age (defined as 6–14 years), 70% of children with disabilities were attending school in the academic year prior to survey compared to 90% of children without disabilities. On average, persons with disabilities completed 1.6 years or one-third less education than persons without disabilities".

[4] Voluntary Services Overseas (VSO) have been partnering with the MoEYS for several years on science teacher-training and have published reports on the progress of their different initiatives (Langendam, n.d., 2016). It is indicative of the past approach to science teaching that one of the major VSO project activities has been a 4-day training course for science teachers to learn how to incorporate an experiment into a lesson plan, because this approach, which would seem to be so fundamental to the study of science, is not something they had previously been taught how to do. During the project's second phase, there were follow-up activities and observations to see how the teachers were implementing their learning, and the findings were, on the whole, positive. It was observed that the teachers want to use experiments and most are now able to integrate them into

starts with questions or scenarios, emphasises the value of experiments as a learning tool, and facilitates the learners to find their own answers. In a paper on teacher beliefs, attitudes, and practices, Kheam and Prudente (2012) followed up with lower secondary school biology teachers introduced to the learner-centred methodology. Their findings were that teachers' beliefs and perspectives were "... leaning toward learner centered". However, for a variety of reasons, including a lack of incentives and resources, practices in the classroom were different:

> teachers did not generally apply learner centered approach in their classroom. Learner centered practice may be applied only if there are availability of resources and times. Although teacher beliefs were learner centered ..., the translation of their beliefs cannot perfectly accomplish and achieve in the actual teaching practices. (Kheam & Prudente, 2012)

This study noted that substantive change in education requires readiness in three spheres, namely, teacher, curricula, and society. In this instance, their findings identified the presence of motivation as an indicator of teacher readiness, and as a major constraint in the lack of enabling conditions (resources and time) for curricula readiness. The lack of incentives for the extra work involved in learner-centred methodologies was also noted as a significant hindering factor in the 2016 evaluation (UNICEF, 2016).

If the CFS approach is to become the norm of Cambodia's educational system, then an obvious foundational step must be to train teachers to apply the pedagogy. Findings in the 2016 evaluation were that there is "limited exposure" to CFS ideas in the pre-service training provided at teacher-training centres. Critical enabling conditions are also essential, such as the resources for implementation and the support of school directors. One mechanism created to support and accelerate the implementation of the CFS Policy, at school and classroom levels, was the creation of District Training and Monitoring Teams (DTMT). The reality in 2016 appeared to be that for multiple reasons the DTMT initiative does little to add value to the implementation process. DTMT support to the implementation of the CFS Policy was considered to be "ineffective, inefficient, and inequitable", mainly due to the lack of capacity and resources within the DTMT (UNICEF, 2016).

Gender issues have been addressed to some extent through media campaigns about enrolment rates. While the 2016 evaluation findings were generally positive,[5] using a more comprehensive consideration of gender as the criterion for assessment must conclude that the Dimension of *gender responsiveness* has not yet been fully achieved. Two recent sources indicate the challenges that still exist in this regard, and both have strong links with the Dimension of *health, safety, and protection of children*. On this Dimension, the 2016 evaluation found that "while schools may be

lesson plans. Despite this, only 68% of teachers in the follow-up activity indicated that they would use experiments regularly as part of their lessons. The reasons why some would not were not noted.

[5] The summary of findings in the evaluation was that "Noticeable increases in the confidence, leadership roles, and academic achievement of girls make this CFS dimension one of the most successfully achieved" (UNICEF, 2016).

mostly 'healthy' they are not necessarily safe and protective"; bullying and minor physical punishment are commonplace; and there is virtually no attention paid to issues such as mental health and psychosocial functioning (UNICEF, 2016).

The first source of information is about an incident that illustrates that some worrying attitudes are still embedded in the educational culture. The teacher prompted a boy student to remove an 11-year-old girl classmate's clothing as "punishment" for her not being able to read a sentence aloud correctly: the boy removed the girl's skirt and underwear.[6] It was, by all accounts, not the first time that the teacher had instigated such an incident in his class (Sokhean, 2015; Chakrya & Holman, 2015). The incident came to light when the girl refused to go to school, and her grandmother acted. The school director's first response was to transfer the teacher to another class and suggest that he apologise to the victim's family. Not satisfied, the grandmother complained to the commune police, and a human rights organisation took up the case. At a later stage, as the case and impending court proceedings became public knowledge, the teacher was not dismissed but moved to an administrative position in the District Education Office. When interviewed about this decision, the Minister stated that this was sufficient punishment, and he did not want to cause problems by dismissing the teacher (Cambodia Daily, 2015). Both the incident and the reaction of authorities indicate that, for some children, the educational culture cannot yet guarantee that a school is a safe place where they will be protected.

The second source of information is a study from the Cambodian Centre for Human Rights (CCHR) about the experiences of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) children in the education system (Cambodian Centre for Human Rights [CCHR], 2015). The findings were not only of widespread and repeated bullying, discrimination, and social exclusion of children perceived to be in any way "other" because of their sexual orientation, but also that these responses were perpetrated by teachers and classmates alike. The findings were also that these negative responses to sexual difference were more prevalent inside schools than in other parts of the children's lives. One-sixth of the respondents in the study reported being bullied by teachers, and the overall findings showed that slightly more than 25% of teachers either took part in the bullying of LGBT students or knew about it and did nothing:

> Particularly troublesome is the reluctance in reporting bullying to teachers; this may indicate a lack of faith in the school system to address the issue, but could also be symptomatic of the school itself, as evidenced in this study, being a source of the bullying. (CCHR, 2015)

It must, of course, be noted that in this respect the school is a microcosm of broader society, reflecting attitudes towards LGBT people that are not universally tolerant and accepting. As a research team member noted: "There are strong cultural beliefs that being LGBT is an illness, or the result of a traumatic break-up, or due to a certain upbringing" (CCHR, 2015).

[6]This action constitutes a crime of sexual indecency under the Cambodian Law on Suppression of Human Trafficking and Sexual Exploitation.

Both examples show that some of the fundamental principles and objectives of the CFS Policy are still far from being the reality of everyday practice in some schools. To enhance its capacity to implement the safety Dimension, MoEYS is now developing a policy for child protection, supported by the United Nations agencies and NGOs working in education. The policy will address the relevant issues in teacher training; educate students about their rights; and establish more robust reporting mechanisms in schools. However, as the CFS Policy itself demonstrates, there is a considerable journey between policy formulation and full implementation. It will need a complex and lengthy process of addressing both teacher and social readiness before the intended changes impact and become embedded in the educational culture.

The school support committee was established as one of the critical mechanisms for implementing the fifth Dimension about *participation*, with its associated objective:

> To enhance the dynamic relationship and two-way participation between schools and communities so that schools become community-supported resource centers, families and communities become resources for school improvement and play an active role in management. (MoEYS, 2007)

In 2012 MoEYS issued a guiding *Prakas* (proclamation) for the establishment and functioning of SSCs, which covers the committee's composition, functions, and tasks and who is eligible to hold positions. The Chair should be either a representative of the authorities, a head monk, or a private donor, but community members are eligible to hold all other positions. In theory, this is a practical option for community representation and involvement in the development and coordination of their schools. The reality is that this representation is not happening to the extent envisioned in the Policy. A study[7] in 2013 found that, while SSC members are usually well respected by the local community, there is no direct citizen or parent participation. Another study reviewing this mechanism from the governance perspective concluded that:

> Theoretically, the SSC empowers communities and leads to participatory and locally grounded decision-making in primary schools. Practically, however, SSCs have not yet proved to be an effective mechanism for taking on the responsibilities and roles as stipulated in the national guideline (MoEYS, 2012). This has led to weak governance of primary schools and limited power or participation of local communities. (Sothy, Madhur, & Rethy, 2015)

A slightly more positive view has emerged from the 2016 CFS evaluation study, which did find evidence of SSCs becoming more active, although again not to the extent envisioned in the Policy. This is another dimension where the prevailing culture, in this case the norms of behaviour resulting from power-distance beliefs, is influential in creating a block to capacity development. However, it must be noted that this gap between strategic intentions at the central level and actual implementation in communities is far from unique to the education sector. It is frequently

[7] World Bank and Asia Foundation (2013).

remarked upon, in a variety of contexts, that participation mechanisms have yet to show strong results.

The final Dimension, *support from the education system*, can be reviewed in the first instance by looking at the Ministry-level initiatives to implement the CFS Policy. There has been a rolling programme of creating and/or updating policies, master plans, guidance notes, and such like. As noted above, MoEYS is trying to respond to some of the issues that are a cause for concern and remain challenges to achieving the desired level of change. Two of the most relevant instruments that could be influential in increasing the success of CFS Policy rollout are the *Master Plan for Capacity Development in the Education Sector 2014–2018* (MoEYS, 2015b), which is aligned to the *Education Strategic Plan* (ESP) (MoEYS, 2014) for the same time frame, and the *Master Plan on Child Friendly School for Basic Education, 2015–2018* (MoEYS, 2015c).

The capacity development plan prioritises "Ensuring effective leadership and management of education staff at all levels", which is one of three policies identified as necessary to achieve the immediate objective of the ESP (MoEYS, 2014). It is particularly interesting that in the section on "Capacity Development Principles", there is recognition of the importance of both national and sector culture. What is also of note is that nowhere does the ESP mention the CFS Policy or any aspect of its implementation. It was also noted in the CFS evaluation study (UNICEF, 2016) that the CFS Policy was utterly ignored in the minutes of the last annual Education Congress,[8] leading the report authors to question how seriously the education system takes the CFS Policy.

The 2015 Master Plan sets out a comprehensive rationale for each Dimension's objectives and target outcomes. It has sections listing main assumptions, challenges, stakeholder roles and responsibilities, principles of implementation, principles of developing CFS modules, and main outputs, before offering a results framework with 12 objectives across the six Dimensions, a total of 69 activities to achieve them, and an expected outcome for each activity. The plan does address all levels within the education sector, including outreach to communities, so in this respect it is holistic. The strong emphasis on children with disabilities seeks to address some of the remaining discrepancies of exclusion and inequity. The remaining emphasis is on aspects of the system such as data capture and recording for monitoring purposes, the quality of teacher training curricula and assessments, systems to promote physical health, and so on.

The plan does little, however, to address any aspects of soft capacity. For example, while the campaigns to improve enrolment rates, which have been so successful for changing beliefs and attitudes about girls' education, will continue, there does not appear to be anything similar to address other issues. Activities for participation include developing a manual to address community awareness. Also listed as an activity was "Improve trust and links between schools and communities", with no indication of how this might be achieved. The activities listed are all

[8] Mentioned, but not fully referenced in the UNICEF (2016) report.

necessary and relevant, but a holistic approach to capacity development would also include initiatives to address the much-needed aspects of soft capacity that will support a change in the classroom practices and the educational culture.

Recognition of how much change is needed to embed child-friendly learning practices has been fully acknowledged in the Education Strategic Plan 2019–2023. This plan makes multiple references to the CFS, starting with the statement "Some 73 per cent of primary schools implemented the Child-Friendly School Policy at middle and advanced levels" (MoEYS, 2019). Still, there is no comment about the quality of the implementation. The Plan notes the need for policy and programmes on child-friendly schools to be aligned with Sustainable Development Goal 4 and linked to the policy revision is an action to address the previous problems with the DTMTs to make them more effective. The Plan also sets several targets for extending the policy's implementation to more primary schools and begin implementation in secondary schools. Importantly, child-friendly school checklists will be included in inspection and monitoring and evaluation criteria.

In recent years two MoEYS initiatives have begun to address some of the problematic issues that are primarily embedded in the culture. UNICEF has been leading on "positive discipline" training for teachers. This initiative has undoubtedly had some success in bringing about change, but its acceptance is complex, as noted by an education specialist: "From teachers that I talk to as I go around doing various evaluations, they despise positive discipline because '*now the children do not listen - if we cannot hit them, they will not pay attention to us, they do not respect us*'" (Reimer, 2020). This statement powerfully highlights the challenges of changing cultural expectations, as it shows so clearly that training teachers in new methods is not enough to bring about a complete change. The message about doing things differently has to be shared with families so that children come to school both expecting and valuing a different relationship with their teachers.

The MoEYS *All Children Reading* initiative, supported by development partners and implemented by NGOs, is being piloted in three provinces. This is part of the *Early Grades Reading* strategy and targets upper-preschool and grades 1 and 2. A critical focus is to identify children with disability, particularly hearing impairment, and introduce teaching materials and methods suitable to their needs, including Khmer Sign Language. While the numbers in the pilot are small, the indications thus far give hope that inclusive education can become a reality on a broad scale one day.

While there is still much to do to ensure that education system support is doing all it can to embed child-friendly learning practices in the classroom, there are positive signs that progress is being made. A great deal depends upon teacher training, but others, like school directors and families, are also critical. All need to be educated about the value and positive results that can be achieved by using child-centred learning pedagogies. Given this methodology is so different from the traditional Cambodian experience of education and challenges cultural beliefs about children's expected behaviour, it will need a very persuasive approach to get the message across. Using media campaigns, perhaps fronted by some well-known Cambodian personalities, might be one way to start people thinking differently. Awareness and

acceptance of new ideas are prerequisites for learner-centred classroom practices to become the norm rather than the exception as they are at present. Another important factor currently missing is an incentive system to motivate teachers to use child-centred learning methodologies. The scheme does not need to be financial (though low-paid civil servants always welcome a salary increase). Recognition and praise are potent motivators too. While it could be argued that any such scheme might motivate change for the wrong reasons, any resulting positive change in classroom practices would make such arguments spurious.

10.7 Conclusions

This chapter has argued that culture is fundamental to how people understand their world and their place in it, and thus its importance cannot be overemphasised. Culture dictates how all forms of social relationships are constructed and how people behave within them. Culture is also a critical factor in determining how people will respond to suggested changes. It can be a powerful force for maintaining the status quo, especially in the absence of equally powerful incentives to prompt people to risk letting go of old ways to embrace something new. These points are important factors underpinning how the CFS approach's principles are interpreted, accepted, and implemented (or not) by all stakeholders in the education sector.

Notwithstanding the significant amount of enabling instruments and tools that have already been put in place, the overall conclusion must be that there is still a great deal to do before all aspects of the CFS Policy are fully embedded in Cambodian educational culture and practices. The small shoots of positive change already in place need to be nurtured and extended at all levels in the education sector. It is not sufficient simply to ensure that artefacts and values statements of change are in place; further action is needed. MoEYS has stated its intention to give higher priority to mainstream CFS principles at the level of enabling conditions, such as the ESP, as well as at the school level. Effective mainstreaming calls for a consistent and robust push from the top, accompanied by resource allocation for implementation. It will be possible to start changing the educational culture and ensure that every school is child-friendly in all its dimensions only when capacity development initiatives embrace the need for change at the deepest level of beliefs and assumptions about children and how best to educate them.

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Chapter 11
Policy-Based Budgeting: Financing Priority Education Reforms in Cambodia

Vincent Vire, Simeth Beng, and Tsuyoshi Fukao

11.1 Introduction

In 1990, over 150 governments adopted the *World Declaration on Education for All* (EFA) at Jomtien (Thailand) to boost efforts towards delivering the right to education by working in partnership to provide quality basic education for all children, youth, and adults. Article 9 stated that regarding mobilizing resources for education:

> If the basic learning needs of all are to be met through a much broader scope of action than in the past, it will be essential to mobilize existing and new financial and human resources, public, private and voluntary. [. . .] Enlarged public-sector support means drawing on the resources of all the government agencies responsible for human development, through increased absolute and proportional allocations to basic education services with the clear recognition of competing claims on national resources of which education is an important one, but not the only one. Serious attention to improving the efficiency of existing educational resources and programs will not only produce more, it can also be expected to attract new resources.

The Jomtien Framework of Action called for governments and their partners to analyze the current allocation and use of financial and other resources for education

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and training to assess whether efficiency could be improved, and additional resources mobilized within and outside the national budget.

Ten years later, the 164 governments (including Cambodia)[1] participating in the World Education Forum in Dakar (Senegal) reaffirmed this commitment and adopted the six EFA goals that ran to 2015, including a commitment to boost resources allocated to the education sector. The EFA Dakar framework of action noted that:

> Ensuring that Education for All is provided with adequate, equitable and sustainable resources is the foremost challenge. Many governments do not give education sufficient priority in their national budgets [. . .]. Lack of resources is often a matter of political will [. . .]. This means first that governments must make firm political commitments and allocate sufficient resources to all components of basic education—an absolutely essential step to meeting the state's obligation to all of its citizens. In many countries, this will require increasing the share of national income and budgets allocated to education and, within that, to basic education, balanced by reduced allocations to sectors of lower development priority. Resources have to be used with much greater efficiency and integrity, and governments should set goals for more equitable spending across education sub-sectors. Corruption is a major drain on the effective use of resources for education and should be drastically curbed. Structures are needed to enable civil society to be part of transparent and accountable budgeting and financing systems.

In 2004, the EFA Fast Track Initiative adopted some key indicators concerning education financing, including that (a) government should spend about 20% of the national budget on education; (b) about 50% of the education budget should be spent on primary education; and (c) teacher salary should be about 3.5 times GDP per capita. While recommendations about the share of government resources that should be allocated to education were made in several Action Plans related to the EFA Framework, a clear global political commitment by all governments to a specific target was only enshrined in the Incheon Declaration adopted at the 2015 World Education Forum (WEF):

> We are determined to increase public spending on education in accordance with country context, and urge adherence to the international and regional benchmarks of allocating efficiently at least 4–6% of Gross Domestic Product and/or at least 15–20% of total public expenditure to education.

The Incheon Declaration emphasized the need to increase public funding for education; prioritize those most in need; increase efficiency and accountability; and increase and improve external financing.

The EFA Framework strongly encouraged governments to increase domestic financing to education, but also acknowledged the importance of *complementing* these resources by external financing, acknowledging that, in many developing countries, domestic resources were not sufficient. The EFA Framework of Action made a strong call for the international community to increase its financing of education in developing countries and emphasized the importance of improving

[1] Represented by H.E. Im Sethy (then Secretary of State in MoEYS) and H.E. Nath Bunroeun (then Director of Teacher Training Department).

aid effectiveness through better harmonization and coordination in support of the national government's agenda. This was seen to be crucial to ensuring government ownership and accountability to citizens for strengthening the education sector. Indeed, the traditional project approach had come under severe criticism in the late 1990s, and planners started to focus attention on sector-wide strategies built around enhanced cooperation among various actors, including donor agencies, governments, and non-governmental organizations.

In a nutshell, in most developing countries, there was a need to put more money into education, use the resources with greater efficiency and integrity, and work towards increased aid effectiveness. This call for action became the driving agenda behind the cooperation between the Government of Cambodia and development partners in the education sector from 2011 onwards.

11.2 Government Financing to Implement the Education Sector Plan (ESP) 2009–2013[2]

So how did Cambodia do in terms of following its EFA commitments and allocating the necessary resources effectively to an education sector which had to be rebuilt from scratch following the destruction brought by the Khmer Rouge regime and subsequent civil war?[3]

While the share of Government expenditures allocated to the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports (MoEYS) increased sharply from 13.9% in 2000 to 19.5% in 2004, showing a clear priority towards this sector, a worrying reversing trend started from 2007. Although the nominal value of the MoEYS budget increased every year, the share of MoEYS allocation in the Government budget declined from 19.2% in 2007 down to 15.5% in 2013, as shown in Fig. 11.1.

At about 2% of GDP in 2010 (see Fig. 11.2), the level of education funding in Cambodia was the lowest in the region. There was no doubt that to meet the challenges and achieve its educational aspirations and economic growth targets by 2030, "the country needed much more ambitious targets and much more aggressive public investments in its education sector"[4] because low levels of resource allocation were restricting major improvements in all sub-sectors and impacting on quality. Cambodia was expected to invest a much higher level of GDP in education than its neighbors to catch up, especially given that it had to rebuild the sector from scratch

[2] All data used in this chapter are sourced from the Government Budget Law, the Government Table of Financial Operations (TOFE), and MoEYS Budget allocations and expenditure records.

[3] According to the literature (NGO Education Partnership, Northern Illinois University, UNESCO, World Bank, etc.), it is estimated that between 75% and 90% of Cambodia's teachers and higher education students were killed or fled the country and most of the education infrastructure was destroyed.

[4] Appraisal of the Education Sector Plan (ESP) conducted for the Global Partnership for Education (GPE), August 2013.

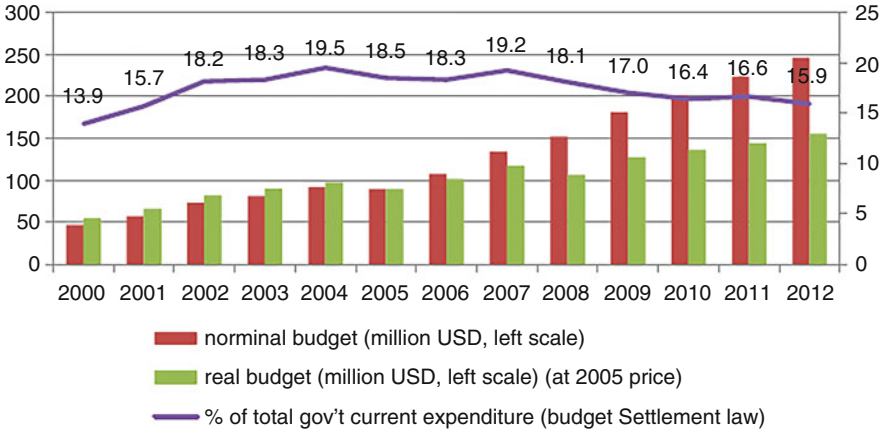

Fig. 11.1 Share of MoEYS allocation in the Government current expenditures. *Source*: National Budget Laws (2000–2013)

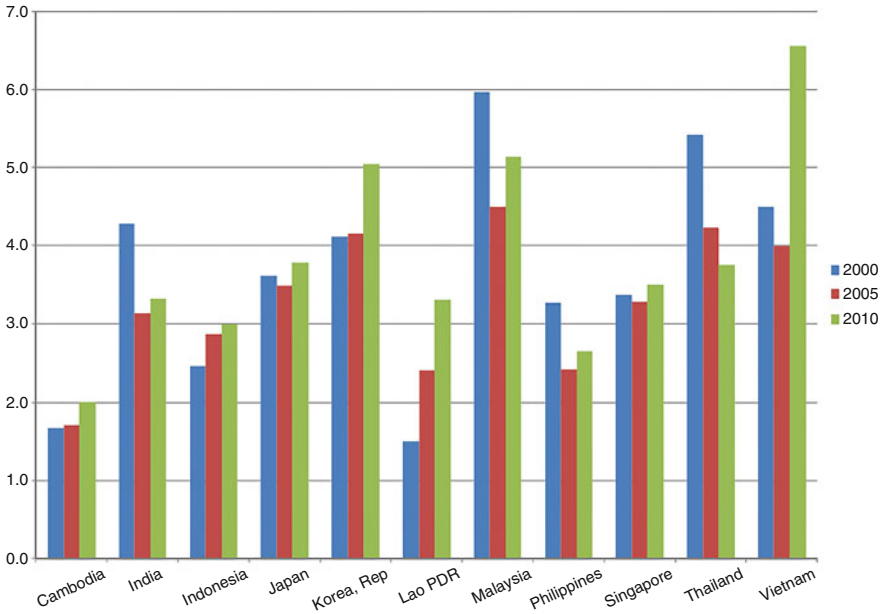

Fig. 11.2 Share of public education to GDP (%) in selected Asian countries. *Source*: World Development Indicators

after the Khmer Rouge period and then a civil war. On the contrary Cambodia was the only country in the region (apart from Laos in 2000) with public education spending representing less than 2% of GDP.

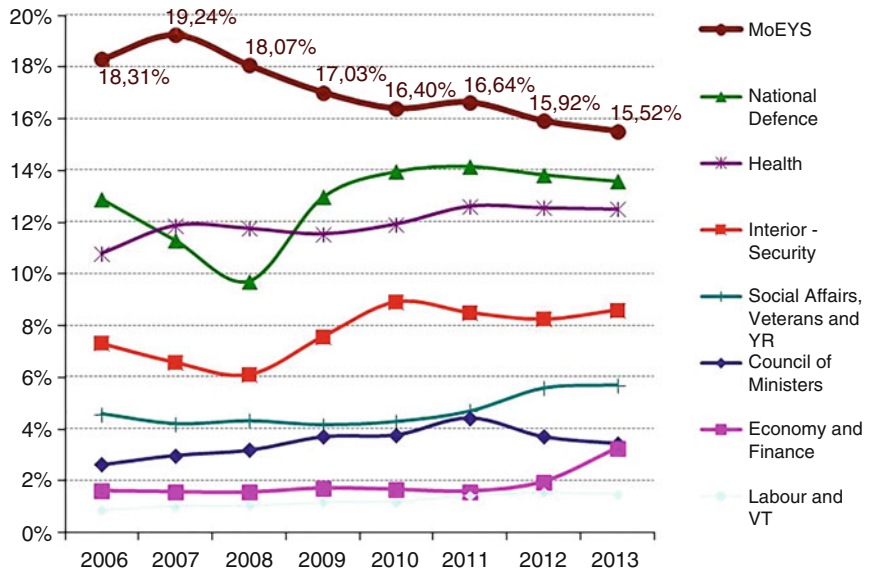

Fig. 11.3 Share of the total recurrent expenditures allocated to selected Ministries. *Source*: Budget Laws

While the education budget increased in nominal terms from $155 million in 2007 to $280 million in 2013,[5] its share as a proportion of all public expenditure declined from 19.2 to 15.5% over the period. Article 9 of the Jomtien Declaration noted that "the urgent task of meeting basic learning needs may require a reallocation between sectors, as, for example, a transfer from military to educational expenditure." This was not done in Cambodia where, over the same period, the budget share allocated to the Ministry of Defense increased from 11.3 to 13.6%; and for the Ministry of Interior[6] it increased from 6.6 to 8.6%. Figure 11.3 shows how the education share was gradually "eaten" by other ministries over the period from 2006 to 2013. While the nominal allocation to education increased each year, the percentage increase was much smaller than for the other ministries, hence the declining education share in the budget.

Moreover, most of the annual increase in the MoEYS budget in nominal terms was absorbed by an increase in the number of teachers and an annual salary increase of 20% for civil servants approved in 2009 (MoEYS absorbed around 55% of all

[5]Throughout this chapter the amounts in Khmer Riels (KHR) are converted at the following exchange rate: 1 US$ = 4000 KHR. The $ sign is used for the US dollar.

[6]It should be noted that the Ministry of Interior's budget not only covered security spending but also allocations to the Commune Fund, which were increased during the period.

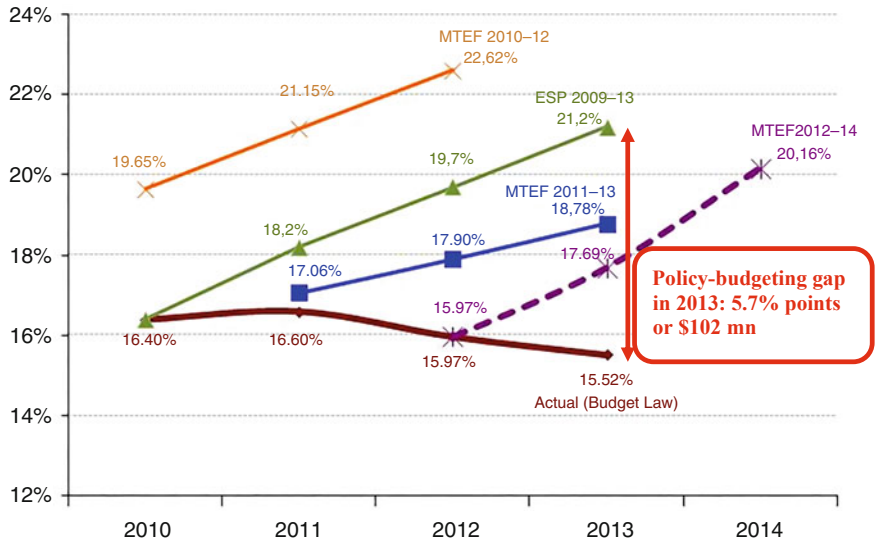

Fig. 11.4 Share of national recurrent budget allocated to MoEYS. *Source*: Budget Laws, MTEF, ESP 2009–2013

civil servants in 2012). MoEYS' Program Budget[7] (used for scholarships, textbooks, school operating budgets, and so on) had increased by only 2.4% annually on average over the period from 2008 to 2012, that is, well below inflation rates. In fact, when factoring for inflation, the Program Budget had lost close to 20% of its purchasing power from 2006 to 2012. In simple terms, considering the high inflation over this period (especially 5.9% in 2007 and 19.7% in 2008), it meant that MOEYS was not able to buy the same number of textbooks, tables, pens, and so on in 2012 with about the same budget as in 2006. This was also a real problem for scholarships at secondary level which had remained unchanged at $45 per year, regardless of the high inflation.

The fact that the allocation to the education sector consistently deviated from the Government's stated commitments in both its Medium-Term Expenditure Framework (MTEF) and Education Sector Plan 2009–2013 (ESP) was of great concern, as it showed that the sector was not given the resources it required to achieve the policy objectives set and that priority was therefore placed on other sectors. For example, the MTEF for 2010–2012 (adopted in 2009) foresaw an allocation of 22.62% to MoEYS in 2012; the ESP for 2009–2013 adopted in 2010 lowered this foreseen allocation for 2012 to 19.7%; and the MTEF for 2011–2013 (adopted in 2010) lowered it even further to 17.9% (see Fig. 11.4). The education sector actually only received 15.9% of the Government budget in 2012, that is, an astonishing 6.7%

[7]MoEYS budget is split between Non-Program Budget (principally personnel costs) and Program Budget. The Program Budget, which was introduced in 2007, was used to finance programs/interventions such as scholarships, school grants, textbooks, and so on.

points less than foreseen in the MTEF for the period from 2010 to 2013. In 2013, the education sector received 5.7% points less than foreseen in the ESP, and 2.2% points less than foreseen in the MTEF for the period from 2012 to 2014.

The amount "lost" in US$ to the education sector gives a fairer picture of the situation: if the education sector received in 2012 the share of the national budget foreseen for that year in the MTEF for 2010–2012, it would have received $358 million, that is, $106 million more than the $252 million allocated to the sector in the 2012 Budget Law! When adding up these annual losses for the period of the ESP from 2009 to 2013, the education sector lost a total of $182 million compared with ESP targets for MoEYS recurrent expenditures.[8] This meant that many of the relevant interventions foreseen in the ESP, such as an increase in scholarships and school grants, could not be implemented due to the much lower than expected government financing to the sector. Year after year, a widening "policy-budgeting gap" was observable in the education sector, between the resources required to implement the interventions and the resources required to achieve the results foreseen in the ESP (triangle-dotted green line in Fig. 11.4) and the resources actually allocated to the education sector in the successive Government Budget (bold diamond-dotted brown line).

It was even more worrying to note that Development Partner disbursements to the education sector in 2012 and 2013 were, respectively, $85 million and $90 million (database of the Cambodia Council for Development). Development Partners were providing a substantial amount of funding to the sector for school construction, scholarships, training, and other interventions to compensate for the gap in Government resources allocated to the sector. This situation reflected the fact that Development Partner external resources were not *additional to* Government investment in the education sector (as recommended in EFA declarations) but were instead *substituting for* the Government resources initially intended to be spent in the sector. Development Partner resources to the education sector freed Government resources so that they could be allocated to other sectors, such as Defense and Interior, as illustrated in Fig. 11.3.

Looking at Government allocations to the education sector is, of course, only one part of the equation. Budget allocations are an important policy signal in terms of priority setting and investment effort to achieve policy objectives. But it is only when looking at the level and composition of expenditures that one can analyze how the budget allocations effectively translate into appropriate actions and results on the ground.

The situation on this front was also not a good story for the education sector. Indeed, the expenditure rate of MoEYS' budget allocation, that is, the amount spent by MoEYS compared with the amount it was allocated in the Budget Law, decreased from 100.8% in 2006 to 87.3% in 2011. In contrast, other ministries spent

[8] It is important to note that the ESP for 2009 to 2013 was approved in 2010, and as such, it already integrated the actual low allocations to MoEYS in 2009 and 2010, instead of the more ambitious initial allocation targets. Thus, the loss actually only corresponds to the years 2011, 2012, and 2013.

substantially more than they were initially allocated in the Budget Law, up to about 280% in the case of the Council of Ministers in 2008 (see Fig. 11.5).

In 2012 alone, MoEYS under-spent $47 million of its initial allocation of $252 million in the Budget Law. Throughout the ESP for 2009 to 2013, MoEYS underspent a total of $124 million out of the resources it was allocated. This was an incredibly large amount of money lost to the education sector, while Development Partners were at the same time trying to pump money in the sector, given the low Government allocations and limited outcomes being achieved.

With such a large underspending in the MoEYS budget, it was inevitably difficult to argue for an increased budget allocation for the following year, so the Ministry of Economy and Finance (MoEF) could not be blamed for the limited annual nominal budget increase given to MoEYS. A quick assessment of MoEYS expenditures showed two major factors for underspending. One was the introduction of the Program Budget in 2007, which led to a large amount of underspending in 2007 and 2008 due to the time it took for all stakeholders to understand this new instrument and its related procedures and processes. But the largest share of the underspending came from the budget line for Personnel (mainly teacher salaries). In 2010, 89% of the total amount of $29.7 million underspent by the MoEYS from its annual allocation was due to underspending under the budget line for Personnel ($26.5 million). In 2011, the amount represented $22 million out of a total of $29.1 million underspent (i.e., 75%) (see Fig. 11.6). This situation was even more shocking in light of the very low salary for teachers and the critical lack of teachers to meet teacher/pupil ratio targets. One of the reasons for this underspending was that

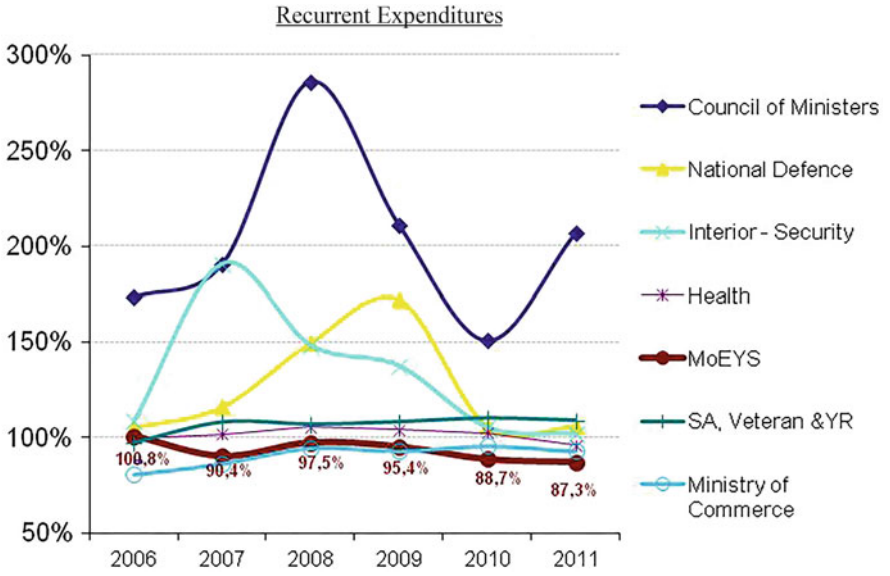

Fig. 11.5 Ratio of budget spent (actual expenditures) compared to budget allocated (Budget Law). *Source*: Budget Laws, Tableau des Opérations Financières de l'Etat (TOFE)

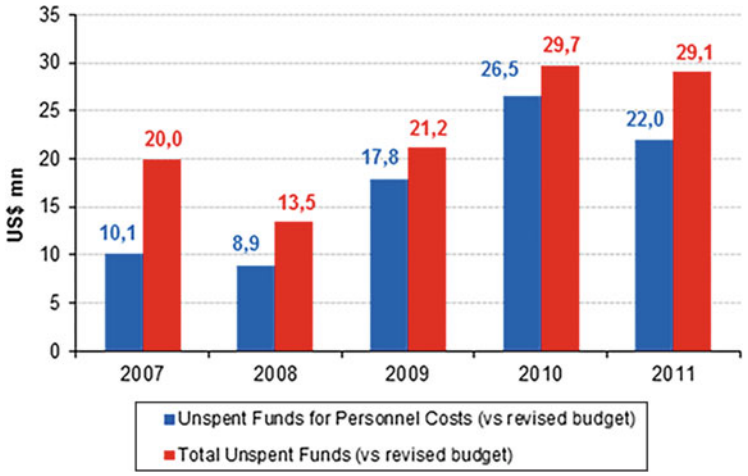

Fig. 11.6 Share of unspent funds for personnel costs in total unspent funds by MoEYS. *Source*: MoEF and MoEYS expenditure records

MoEYS did not prepare the budget for teacher salaries at the central level. Provincial education offices were communicating directly to MoEF the forecast budget for teacher salaries, including new teachers, resulting in a total budget for teachers covering more than the maximum 5000 additional teachers allowed to be recruited every year by the Civil Service Commission.

In fact, the budget spent by MoEYS steadily declined from 18.9% of the total Government actual recurrent expenditures in 2006 to 13.8% in 2011 (which was less than the 14.3% of Government recurrent expenditures spent by the Ministry of Defense that year).[9] It then increased to 14.6% in 2012 and 15% in 2013. This actual MoEYS share of total government spending represented a massive gap compared with the resources foreseen to be invested in the sector in both the MTEF and the ESP. For instance, in 2012, the difference between the expenditures foreseen in the ESP (19.7% of total public recurrent expenditures) and the actual spending by MoEYS (14.6% of total public current spending) represented over $107 million lost to the sector ($60 million less than foreseen in the ESP actually allocated to MoEYS and $47 million of underspending).

If we compare what MoEYS should have received under the ESP targets to what it did receive, and with what it eventually spent over the period from 2009 to 2013,

[9] It is important here to note that these figures only reflect MoEYS spending and do not take account of educational expenditures by other line Ministries. Neither do they take account of capital expenditures in the education sector that were grouped with all other capital expenditures under MoEF actual expenditures.

Table 11.1 Cumulated "losses" in MoEYS current spending (in US$ million)

	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	Total
MoEYS share of national budget foreseen in the ESP 2009–2013	17.0%	16.4%	18.2%	19.7%	21.2%	
MoEYS allocation, if the ESP share were followed [*A*]	185.35	206.18	250.46	311.78	382.27	**1336.04**
MoEYS actual share of national budget (budget law)	17.03%	16.40%	16.64%	15.92%	15.52%	
MoEYS allocation (budget law) [*B*]	185.64	206.22	228.97	251.91	279.89	**1152.63**
→Loss in allocations [$D = A - B$]	−0.29	−0.04	21.49	59.88	102.38	**183.41**
MoEYS actual spending (TOFE) [*C*]	177.67	183.54	199.90	205.34	264.00	**1030.45**
→Loss in underspending [$E = B - C$]	7.97	22.68	29.07	46.57	15.89	**122.18**
Total loss [$=D + E$]	7.68	22.64	50.56	106.45	118.27	305.59

Source: ESP2009–2013, Budget Laws and TOFE

then the education sector "lost" a very significant amount of $305 million[10] (see Table 11.1), including $123 million of underspending. The disbursement of $417 million from Development Partners in the education sector during the same period thus represented an overall net gain of only $112 million of external aid for the sector during that period.

In summary, over the period from 2009 to 2013, MoEYS not only received much less than foreseen in the ESP and MTEF (with a declining share of the Government budget year after year and a negligible nominal increase, below inflation, in its operating budget), but it also spent considerably less than had been allocated. In contrast, other ministries (such as Defense, Interior-Security, Council of Ministers) received more than foreseen over the period and spent considerably more than had been allocated. This pattern meant that a significant amount of Government resources intended to be invested in the education sector for the purposes of achieving the Government's stated development policy objectives were, in effect, "transferred" to other sectors, through both a reduced allocation in the Budget Law and then a level of underspending to the benefit of other ministries. In this circumstance, Development Partner funding, which was effectively substituting for Government funding to the education sector, freed Government resources to be allocated to other sectors, and contributed to only a small overall net gain for the sector for the period from 2009 to 2013. For the education sector to benefit from adequate

[10]This figure actually does not include any loss with regard to budget allocations in 2009 and 2010, since the 2009 and 2010 allocations for MoEYS in the ESP were based on actual (low) allocations in the Budget Law.

investment, not only was it necessary to allocate resources to the sector in a way that directly supported policy objectives, but it was also critical that there should be better budget planning and execution.

11.3 Overall Progress in Achieving the Objectives of the ESP 2009–2013[11]

This significant loss of resources to the education sector compared with what was envisaged to implement the ESP 2009–2013 considerably hindered the achievement of ESP targets. Whereas, during the period from 2009 to 2013, there was undeniable progress in most key educational indicators (except at the secondary school level), many indicators fell behind the targets—which were considered realistic had the ESP been adequately resourced and implemented as initially envisaged. In the school year of 2012/2013, for example, almost one-half of the key educational targets in the ESP were not met (only 16 out of 28 targets for the Key Performance Indicators were met, and only 3 of the 8 core Breakthrough Indicators were met). Indicators on enrolment and dropout at secondary level were far off-track (e.g., the dropout rate at the secondary level at 21.2% in 2012/2013, compared with a target of 12%). Out of 121 policy actions to be implemented in 2012, only 42 were completed (including only 23 out of the 64 policy actions not implemented in 2011 and postponed to 2012).[12] Remote areas continued to show relatively poor performance, although the gap in this regard seemed to reduce. In addition, the achievement of some targets (e.g., primary enrolment rate, primary dropout rate) raised doubts about questionable data adjustment in the final version of Education Management Information System for 2012/2013.[13]

There is no doubt that the sector would have shown much better outcomes if the Government had allocated and spent all the resources initially envisaged, for example, for an increase in teacher numbers, teacher salaries, teacher training, school numbers, pre-schools, textbooks, scholarships, and monitoring visits from district officials. As the Secretary of State for Basic Education, H.E. Nath Bunroeun, told the Ministry of Economy and Finance (MoEF) in a workshop to prepare the ESP for 2014–2018: “In order to achieve our objectives in the education sector, MoEF needs to give us quality input [adequate budget to the education sector]. [. . .] It is like if you send me on this budget to a restaurant, I can only eat Khmer noodles in the street.”

[11] It is not the purpose of this section to make a detailed assessment of trends in education access, equity, and quality (this is discussed in other chapters of this publication), but simply to reflect the fact that many targets were not met due to a shortfall of resources allocated and spent in the sector.

[12] 2013 Annual Education Congress report.

[13] See chapter on education data quality.

Another dramatic consequence of the underfunding of the sector was that it encouraged fraud, corruption, and informal charges, often at the expense of the poor.[14] With a salary of only about $40–60 a month in 2013, primary teachers were obviously struggling to survive. Many had second jobs, and absenteeism was high, which harmed education quality. Most teachers in urban areas were reported to charge informal fees (from about $5 per week), which had a negative impact on education access and equity. There was widespread cheating in national exams as students routinely bribed teachers and school heads. With teacher salary payments made in cash through district offices, many district education officers were reported to be taking a commission. Not-for-sale textbooks were finding their way into shops instead of classrooms, forcing students to share textbooks among many or to buy them from the shops. Some school heads were also reported to capture the allocations provided for school operating budgets.[15] This dire situation, which was a direct consequence of the underfunding of the sector, had to be addressed as a matter of urgency to improve sector performance and re-establish integrity and full trust in the education system.

11.4 Collaborative Process Between Development Partners and Government

Government-led sector coordination provides a sound platform for the Government and Development Partners to work together and coordinate their actions to achieve the policy objectives and targets defined and agreed in each sector. In the education sector, Development Partners have an Education Sector Working Group (ESWG) which meets monthly (or more frequently when necessary). It shares information and coordinates Development Partner support programs to avoid duplication and ensure full alignment with MoEYS priorities. In 2011–2012, the ESWG was chaired by UNICEF and co-chaired by UNESCO, and in 2013–2014, it was headed by UNESCO and co-chaired by UNICEF. MoEYS and the ESWG meet every quarter as a group called the Joint Technical Working Group. This Group ensures general coordination and the alignment of Development Partner programs with MoEYS policy priorities. The Joint Technical Working Group is chaired by the MoEYS Minister and co-chaired by the ESWG Chair. MoEYS and Development Partners

[14] "Many governments do not give education sufficient priority in their national budgets. Too many do not use resources for education effectively and efficiently, and often subsidize better-off groups at the expense of the poor. As a direct consequence, user charges continue to be a major deterrent to poor children attending school and to young people and adults in need of non-formal learning. In some countries, passing the cost burden on to poor parents has had a devastating impact on enrolment and retention" (Jomtien Framework of Action).

[15] As signaled in several reports from Transparency International and the NGO Education Partnership (NEP), and by Development Partners following many interviews with teachers and parents, and observations during numerous field visits.

also meet regularly in Sub-Technical Working Groups (early childhood education, teacher training, non-formal education, higher education, public finance management, and so on). Also, once a year, MoEYS and the Development Partners meet for a 2-day retreat to analyze and discuss sector trends and critical policy issues, and to draw up relevant recommendations for joint action.

The low budget allocation and underspending in the education sector became the most important policy discussion between the Government and Development Partners during the period from 2011 to 2014. In mid-2011, the Delegation of the European Union (EU), supported by the Chair and Co-Chair of the ESWG (UNICEF and UNESCO), started a process of harmonizing policy messages among Development Partners to strengthen policy discussions with MoEYS. The ESWG agreed on a list of a dozen priority issues in the education sector for which a common view was forged.[16] The EU proposed on one hand to include in the agenda of each Joint Technical Working Group an item on policy discussions, and on the other hand, to provide MoEYS with background information on issues ahead of these discussions so that MoEYS officials could better prepare for meaningful discussion and informed decision-making. After some initial resistance, MoEYS agreed. This agreement was a significant achievement in the process of strengthening joint sector coordination, not only because it meant that MoEYS showed some openness to engage in frank exchange about key policy issues, but also because it meant that the Development Partners became obligated to agree beforehand on messages to convey to MoEYS. The Development Partners were then more ready to speak with one voice and dialogue as a group with MoEYS. The underlying strategy was not so much to engage in in-depth policy dialogue at Joint Technical Working Group level. Instead, it was more to raise issues and get some clear mandate and guidance from the Joint Technical Working Group Chair (Minister) for sub-technical working groups to work on these issues and then report back to Joint Technical Working Group to inform decision-making.

The agreement on a limited number of sector priorities helped to focus the discussions and work of the ESWG. The Development Partners routinely raised issues relating to these priorities on every possible occasion (including the ESP mid-term review workshop, the annual Education Congress, Joint Technical Working Group meetings, the Joint Technical Working Group retreat, sub-technical working group meetings, Development Partner workshops and meetings, bilateral meetings with high-level officials, meetings with non-governmental organizations (NGOs), visit from Development Partner headquarters, and so on). This sent a strong and unified signal to MoEYS and the Government about the importance of sector

[16]The initially agreed priority policy issues were increase and better use of MoEYS budget, including school operating budgets; expansion of early childhood education; better targeting of interventions towards disadvantaged areas/groups; emphasis on quality issues, including conducting of standard tests and teacher guidebooks; improved textbook printing and distribution mechanisms; drafting of teacher policy in consultation with all stakeholders; increased use of banking systems; strengthen interventions aimed at reducing repetition and dropout; improved quality assurance in higher education; scaling up non-formal education and inclusive education.

priorities. Furthermore, MoEYS increasingly integrated these priority issues with its public statements, especially issues relating to its budget, the targeting of interventions in favor of disadvantaged areas, and the placement of more emphasis on education quality.

The EU proposed to engage as a priority in a discussion about the declining education budget share[17] because this had an impact on all the other priority issues in the sector, where in many cases underperformance was the result of limited financing. The EU made a preliminary analysis of the declining budget shares compared with Government commitments in the ESP and successive MTEF.[18] The purpose of analyzing the education budget was fourfold: (i) to reveal the budgeting trends in terms of allocations and expenditures compared to plan; (ii) to analyze the current budgeting priorities and perform a gap analysis; (iii) to federate Development Partners towards a common policy objective and encourage them to look at the budgeting and planning processes within MoEYS instead of focusing mostly on Development Partner projects; and (iv) to engage in a dialogue with the Government on the need to increase and make better use of the resources allocated to the education sector.

All Development Partners agreed on the importance of this priority. A preliminary analysis was presented in late 2011 at the Education Public Finance Management (PFM) Sub-Technical Working Group (chaired by MoEYS Department of Finance and co-chaired by the World Bank) and at the JTWG. The reaction from MoEYS was initially defensive, arguing (rightly) that the analysis did not consider all Government education expenditure and that funds had been diverted due to emergency interventions as well because of the border conflict with Thailand. However, because all the Development Partners recommended to conduct further analysis and proposed to support MoEYS in the future budget negotiations with the MoEF, the Minister agreed to involve the Development Partners in the MoEYS budgeting process. He asked the PFM Sub-Technical Working Group to analyze the issue further and report back on progress at the next meeting. This clear mandate from the Minister provided a critical turning point in this joint policy-based budgeting process as it represented a significant shift in the partnership between MoEYS and the Development Partners. The Development Partners became wholly involved in the planning of how MoEYS allocated its own resources to the whole of

[17] In accordance with its commitments to the global aid effectiveness agenda, the EU was providing "budget support" in the education sector in Cambodia. This consists in an annual transfer of funds directly to the Government Treasury based on the implementation of policies and programs and the results achieved in the sector. The EU funds disbursed are used by the Government in accordance with its own policy, budgeting, planning, procurement, monitoring, and auditing processes. Thus the declining share of MoEYS budget and the significant underspending was of very high concern to the EU.

[18] The Jomtien Framework of Action recommends to "assess the resources actually or potentially available for basic education and comparing them to the budget estimates underlying the plan of action, [which] can help identify possible inadequacies of resources that may affect the scheduling of planned activities over time or may require choices to be made."

the education sector, instead of simply holding bilateral discussions with MoEYS focusing simply on the use of Development Partner project funds.

This development triggered unprecedented policy discussions between all ESWG members and the Ministry. The Development Partners started a very intensive collaboration process with the MoEYS departments for planning and finance, thereby gaining access to all relevant budget documentation (detailed allocations and expenditures at the central and provincial level). The EU completed the budget analysis, digging deeper into budget execution, and this analysis was presented at the JTWG meeting in February 2012. All participants were worried about the declining share of Government budget allocated to education, but most importantly, they were shocked by the huge extent of the underspending of the MoEYS budget allocation (about $30 million in 2010 and 2011), especially one line item relating to teacher salaries. It became evident that, before arguing for an increase in the Government budget for the sector, the planning and budgeting process within MoEYS had to be improved to ensure that resources allocated to MoEYS were being effectively and efficiently used.

The discussions rapidly focused on identifying the most relevant priority interventions in need of an increased budget allocation and the underlying causes of the large underspending by MoEYS on personnel. Agreement was reached to increase school operating budgets according to a revised formula that would be biased towards small/remote schools. It was also agreed to introduce scholarships at the primary level and increase the number and value of scholarships at the secondary level, increase teacher salary and allowances for teachers in remote areas, and increase the number of textbooks. An increased allocation towards these interventions was expected to lead to a visible positive impact in terms of access, quality, and education in the sector. Important bottlenecks were identified: (i) the amount of the school operating budgets, which had not increased since 2007, was governed by *Prakas 191*, which included ceilings fixed by the MoEF; (ii) the amount of scholarships funding was set in *Anukret 66* (sub-decree 66), approved by MoEF; (iii) the increase in the number of teachers and in teacher salary was dependent on public service reform implemented by the Council of Administrative Reform; and (iv) the allowance for teaching in remote areas was governed by another separate *Anukret*, also approved by MoEF.

The Development Partners split into smaller groups to work on these aspects. The EU and UNICEF worked with MoEYS on the revised Prakas 191 (Prakas 508), proposing a new formula to calculate school operating budgets. The EU, the World Bank (WB), and the Asian Development Bank (ADB) worked with MoEYS on the revision of the *Anukret* on scholarships. The WB, UNESCO, and the NGO Education Partnership liaised with the Council of Administrative Reform on different scenarios for increasing teacher salaries. These negotiations were also supported by, among others, the ADB, the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA), the Royal University of Phnom Penh (RUPP), and the Swedish International Development Agency (Sida). Teacher Unions also seized upon the evidence-based information provided by the Development Partners to reinforce their call for increased teacher remuneration and attention to be given to other grievances. For the first

time, all Development Partners were closely involved in the preparation of the MoEYS annual Budget Strategic Plan (the budgeting document to be submitted to MoEF in preparation of the Budget Law). The EU continued to make presentations to various stakeholder groups about the issue of education financing. All the development partners continued to raise this issue at every opportunity in meetings with MoEYS, MoEF, the Council of Administrative Reform, and other relevant official bodies.

Despite these efforts, the MoEF did not approve the revised *Prakas 191* (proclamation 191) in time for the 2013 budget, and the revised legislation for scholarships was not ready. Although the nominal value of the MoEYS allocation increased in the 2013 Budget Law over 2012, its share of the total Government recurrent expenditures declined further to 15.5%. The MoEYS Budget Strategic Plan had proposed a 28% increase in the MoEYS Program Budget. However, MoEF only approved an 8.3% increase (which was still higher than the 2.4% average increase in the previous 5 years), mainly covering an increase in financing for textbooks. Although this outcome was disappointing, a momentum had been created in 2013 to address the concerns related to the financing of the education sector in Cambodia. The Development Partners were speaking with one voice vis-à-vis MoEYS and MoEF, and they became much more involved in sector budgeting; MoEYS started to raise publicly concerns about its declining allocation as a share of Government funds; Development Partners' support opened the door to MoEYS to have much more meaningful discussions with MoEF on its budget allocation; and the Development Partners and MoEYS engaged in a very important discussion about improving the use of MoEYS' financial resources, its strategic planning, and result-based budgeting processes.

Following approval of the 2013 Budget Law, the Development Partners intensified their dialogue and worked on the area of MoEYS budgeting. This commitment coincided with the preparation of several major Development Partners' programs in the sector, including the Global Education Partnership 2014–2017 with an allocation of $38.5 million and the EU budget support program 2014–2016 with an allocation of $55 million. These programs provided additional leverage for the Development Partners to negotiate an increase in and better targeting of resources allocated to the education sector. The EU included an increase in the value of the Program Budget and of scholarships as a condition to the disbursement of budget support. The EU, UNESCO, and the WB met on several occasions with H.E. Hang Chuon Naron (then MoEF Secretary of State, currently serving as MoEYS Minister) to discuss the matter. H.E. Hang Chuan Naron then wrote a note to the MoEF Minister about education financing, which played a crucial role in progressing negotiations between MoEF and MoEYS on the revision of *Prakas 191*.

Local and international NGOs, Teacher Unions, the Opposition, the media, and the Development Partners started to sharply criticize the very low share allocated to education by the Government in the 2013 Budget Law. After building a coalition, engaging in intensive, evidence-based dialogue with the Government, and creating awareness among key stakeholders in the education sector, the debate about the MoEYS budget had reached the "democratic space." During a workshop organized

by the EU in January 2013, to which members of the media were invited, the MoEYS Minister (then H.E. Im Sethy) publicly called upon the MoEF to increase the level of resources allocated to MoEYS. This public display of friction attracted much attention in the media and featured on the first page of *The Cambodia Daily* on February 1, 2013. The mounting public pressure, H.E. Hang Chuon Naron's note, and the EU Ambassador's meeting with Prime Minister Hun Sen on February 18, 2013, played a significant role in unlocking this issue. During the Education Congress in March 2013, Prime Minister Hun Sen publicly thanked the EU for pointing out the effect of declining allocations to the education sector and committed to looking personally into this matter to solve the problem. This was the most important political decision in the whole negotiation process. A mandate had been publicly given at the highest political level to address a problem initially raised by the EU.

The Development Partners continued to work together with MoEYS, MoEF, and the Council for Administrative Reform on revising Prakas 191 regarding school operating budgets, *Anukret 66* regarding scholarships, a revised *Anukret 37* for allowances for teaching in remote areas, the projections for teacher salary increase, and various other priority policy issues, although in a more tense and less trusting environment, given the high profile of the matter only a few months before the July 2013 general elections.[19] Following the elections, in which the Cambodia People Party's parliamentary majority was unexpectedly and severely reduced, MoEYS became a focal point for post-election reforms. Following his appointment in September 2013, the new Education Minister, H.E. Hang Chuon Naron, formerly Secretary of State in MoEF, embarked on wide-ranging reforms in close collaboration with Development Partners. By that stage, much progress had been achieved in terms of securing additional resources for the sector, and so these resources now became available to support implementation of the new Minister's reform agenda.

11.5 Increase in Education Financing after 2013

All this dialogue and technical work on increasing financing for priority education interventions was not in vain. In May 2013, the MoEF approved the *Prakas 508* (revised *Prakas 191*) covering a significant increase of financial ceilings for the MoEYS Program Budget which resulted in an increase of 25.6% in the Program Budget under the 2014 Budget Law. This result included an increase in grants provided to all educational institutions, thereby enabling more to be spent on maintenance repairs, furniture, pedagogical materials, and teaching activities.

[19]During a workshop to prepare the new ESP 2014–2018 in August 2013 (in the middle of the negotiations for the 2014 Budget), H.E. Nath Bunroeun recalled the importance for MoEF to provide sufficient resources to the education sector in order to achieve its objectives. *The Cambodia Daily* used it for another catchy headline ("Finance Ministry accused of ignoring the education sector," August 28, 2013).

The Government also approved an increase of salaries for lower-grade civil servants in September 2013 (to be paid retroactively from the 2014 budget), which benefited pre-school and primary teachers, with the Prime Minister announcing that further substantial increases would be made in 2014 and 2015 (which were eventually delivered). While it may well be that the July 2013 elections played a role in this decision, the decision was also directly affected by negotiations between Development Partners, MoEYS, MoEF, and the Civil Service Commission, which worked together on different increase scenarios, acknowledging the discrepancy between teacher planning and budgeting and the problems related to low teacher salaries. MoEYS negotiated a reform of several allowances, and MoEF approved *Anukret 41* to integrate the pedagogical allowance, the functional allowance, and other allowances within one category of Functional Education Staff Allowance on March 9, 2016. The minimum basic monthly salary (without allowances) dramatically increased, therefore, from $55 in 2011 for pre-school and primary teachers to US $197 (including functional allowance) in 2016, and there was a commitment made to increase it further to $250 by 2018.[20] The total of basic salary and functional allowance for basic/lower secondary teachers also increased, starting from $217, and $240 for upper secondary teachers. This very positive development for the sector allowed the Development Partners to begin discussing more meaningfully with MoEYS a range of topics concerning teaching quality, teacher absenteeism, and the elimination of informal fees.

Other developments included:

- In 2013, the MoEF approved *Anukret 174* to increase the number of scholarships for teacher trainees (a revision of *Anukret 18*). It was approved by the Council of Ministers in May 2015.
- *Anukret 34*, relating to scholarships for needy students at the primary level and scholarships at the secondary level for poor and merit students, was revised in 2013/2014 and approved on March 15, 2015. The value of scholarships for secondary students was increased to $60 for lower-secondary and $90 for upper-secondary school students. A scholarship scheme for primary school students was introduced, providing an amount of $60 per month. This scheme was expected to impact positively on student enrolment and retention rates.
- MoEYS sent formal instructions to provincial education offices to be more conservative in their planning of teacher needs when preparing the 2014 budget. MoEYS also discussed with the Council for Administrative Reform and MoEF the possibility the possibility of increasing the number of new teachers being recruited annually from 5000 to 7000 during the ESP for 2014 to 2018, which effectively translated into the recruitment of 5900 new teachers in 2014. After that, however, the number of new teachers recruited went down to 3007 in 2015 and to 2448 in 2016 due to the significant increase in teacher salary levels.

[20] When adding other allowances (such as hardship allowances), this would bring teacher salaries close to the living wage in Cambodia, which is estimated at about $300–350.

- The revised *Anukret 37* (concerning monthly hardship allowances for teaching in remote areas) was approved on March 18, 2015. It increased hardship allowances as follows: $20 a month for staff working in disadvantaged areas, $25 for staff working in urban/remote areas, and $30 for staff working in rural/remote areas. This revision was expected to help deploy and retain teachers in rural and remote areas.
- Additional funding was also allocated to build more schools and colleges. MoEF allocated an additional $8.75 million in 2015, followed by $10 million in 2016.
- Simultaneously, the new MoEYS Minister embarked on a campaign to curb fraud, corruption, and the imposition of informal fees in the sector. The Minister showed a firm determination to address cheating in the national exams for grade 12 and to put education quality back at the center of the sector's priorities.[21] Salary transfers for MoEYS teaching and non-teaching staff were authorized to be made through the banking system, thereby increasing transparency and efficiency, and ensuring all teachers receive their full salaries on time. Despite good intentions however, deep-rooted irregularities concerning informal fees and textbook leakages to the private markets have been difficult to eliminate.

The substantial budget increase achieved by MoEYS in 2014 was widely celebrated by all relevant stakeholders. It raised its share of the total Government recurrent budget to 16.2%. *The Cambodia Daily* on October 29, 2013, announced: "If approved by the National Assembly later this year as expected, [this increase] will represent a 19.6% hike in funding for the Ministry, which aid agencies and teachers' unions have long considered desperately underfunded." In the years that immediately followed, MoEYS continued to be prioritized by the Government. Its recurrent budget allocation more than doubled between 2013 ($280 million) and 2017 ($596 million), and its share in the total Government recurrent expenditures increased from 15.5% in 2013 to 18.19% in 2016 (see Fig. 11.7). The percentage then increased moderately to 18.26% in 2017.

11.6 Conclusion

Having recognized the dramatic underfunding of the education sector during the period from 2007 to 2013, the Government and its Development Partners collaborated closely, in line with their commitments in the *Education for All* (EFA) framework, to ensure that education would be reprioritized and adequately resourced, to reduce widespread fraud, and to implement robust reforms to improve access, quality, and equity in the education sector. Other relevant stakeholders, such as teacher unions, universities, the media, the Parliament, and the Opposition, also

[21] The results of the 2014 examinations were an undeniable evidence of the magnitude of the previous cheating: only 26% of students passed, compared with 87% in the previous year. Three-quarters of students who failed this year were then given a second chance.

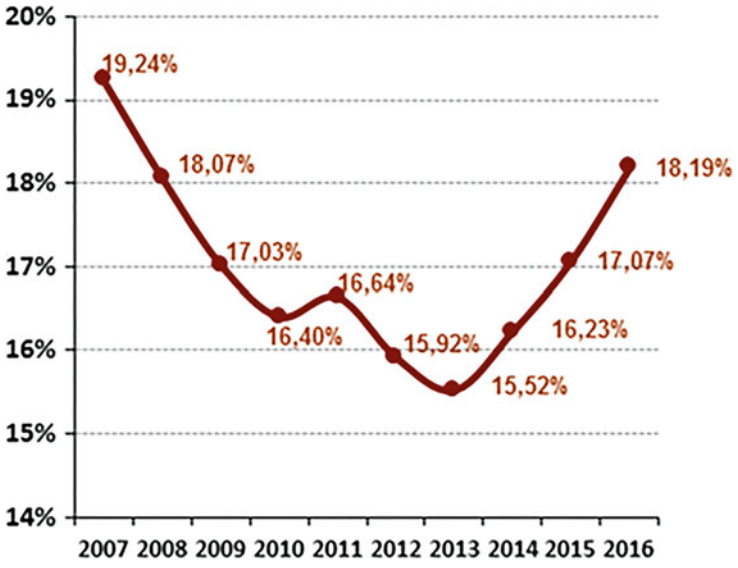

Fig. 11.7 Share of national recurrent budget allocated to MoEYS (Budget Laws). *Source*: Budget Laws

played a critical role in that process. While there are many remaining challenges in the education sector (such as a shortage of teachers and textbooks, the persistence of informal fees, poor access in rural areas, high dropout at the secondary level, low education quality, and so on), the significant increase in Government financial support for the sector since 2014 has without doubt benefited teachers, parents, and the new generation of Cambodian children who will shape Cambodia's future.

Cambodia's investment in education may not yet have fully caught up with its neighbors, but it is on the right path to do so. As noted by Minister H.E. Hang Chuon Naron, there is first a need for the Ministry to show that this additional funding to support priority educational reforms and eliminate fraud will deliver positive outcomes in the classrooms: "The increased money will cover the salary reforms mainly, and then the school budget and also scholarships, among other things [. . .]. It is a big increase. We will have to prove the current budget can get results and then we could ask for more."[22] It is hopefully another success story in the making in Cambodia's education sector, from consolidated policy-based budgeting to concrete results on the ground.

[22] *Education funds to get Bump*, Phnom Penh Post, November 11, 2014.

Chapter 12
(Higher) Education Policy and Project Intervention in Cambodia: Its Development Discourse

Leang Un and Say Sok

In 2009, the first author travelled as far as Africa to do fieldwork for a comparative study of Cambodia and Uganda's development trajectories. He fell in love with the following Ugandan quotation:

> In our single-minded pursuit to create centres of learning and research of international standing, we had nurtured researchers/educators who had little capacity to work in surrounding communities, but could move to any institution in any industrialized country, and serve any privileged community around the globe with comparative ease. In our failure to contextualize standards and excellence to the needs of our own people, to ground the very process and agenda of learning and research in our conditions, we ended up creating an intelligentsia with little stamina for the very process of development whose vanguard we claimed to be, like birds who cross oceans when the weather turns adverse, we had little depth and grounding, but maximum reach and mobility. (Mamdani, 1993, p. 15)

In 2013, the second author went on an academic exchange trip to a partner university in Korea. During the dinner reception, a Korean scholar concurred with him that like Korea, Cambodia 'shall determine its own development path/agenda' if it is going to be prosperous. These observations have shaped the authors' interest in the development path that Cambodia has taken over the past 25 years.

12.1 Introduction

At the heart of education policy is the development discourse whereby the strategic plans and project interventions are to be achieved. This chapter, using critical discourse analysis, attempts to illustrate what have been the drivers since the early

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1990s of the development discourse in Cambodia, as reflected in its official higher education policies, strategic plans and project interventions, and so track the actual outcomes of that discourse.[1] It also explores whose voices are forgotten, that is, unable to find their way into policies, strategic plans and project interventions, through analysing the discourse in selected critical reports and prominent publications on higher education since the 1990s.

Moving on from the work of Vin McNamara (2013), who argued that Cambodia had finally achieved complete sovereignty over its policymaking, the authors further illustrate the nature of the development discourse that recent higher education policies, strategic plans and project interventions aim to achieve. Finally, they describe the unresolved complexities and the consequent development challenges of contemporary Cambodia.

Since the 1990s, neoliberalism as a development discourse has spread around the globe through the intensification of globalization and recently of regionalization, especially in the context of ASEAN integration. At its core, regionalization/globalization is an ideologically rooted belief in the value of a free market and of faith in minimizing controls over the flow of goods, services and capital. In many ways, it is a global extension of traditional liberalism, which argues for a separation of politics from the economy and that markets should be 'free' from interference by the state to maximize economic growth and development and the expansion of economic activities across national boundaries.[2] For each engaged country, it involves the identification of strategies for rapid, successful integration into the regional and global economies. Under the influence of neoliberal regionalization/globalization policies, countries come to see themselves as always under threat of competition but are attracted by the potential for benefits. Within this context, higher education is recast as one major key to competing in this new arrangement (Baker & Wiseman, 2005; Weber & Duderstadt, 2008).

Under the new neoliberal policy focus, higher education reform gears its graduates for economic growth and development, and its higher education institutions (HEIs) towards providing marketable products (including skilled students) which can only be achieved through mainstreaming neoliberal practices into the higher education system. The neoliberal trends in higher education reform since the 1990s have revolved around four distinctive policy shifts: privatization; the rise of corporate-style managerialism in higher education governance and finance;

[1] Critical discourse analysis in educational research brings together social science and philosophy to understand the nature of development discourse and examine strategic communicative interventions in development institutions for educational change in terms of the identified problems and solutions designated. This analytical perspective is even more critical in the case of heavily aid-dependent countries like Cambodia, as it can illustrate how and in what form various sorts of power relationships between recipient states and donors and within the state itself emerge. For details, see Schiffrin et al. (2001) and Badat (2007).

[2] This approach is based on four principles, all of which involve liberalization (i.e. reduction of rules and restrictions): capital account liberalization, trade liberalization, domestic liberalization and privatization.

internationalization of higher education; and a paradigm shift in the focus of the curriculum, moving from academic discipline-based learning to a core set of subjects facilitating the transferability and employability of graduate skills to meet market-driven demand (Land, 2004; Wan et al., 2018). These four shifts are seen in both developed and developing countries, through policy borrowing and the exportation of project intervention around the globe.

After independence in 1953, Cambodia enjoyed relative peace, stability and progress for about 15 years, before plummeting between the late 1960s and the early 1990s into protracted civil war, genocide and then foreign occupation, followed by an international embargo. The emergence of Cambodia, during the early 1990s, out of the civil wars, with support from the 'international community' occurred in conjunction with the rise in Asia of the neoliberal development agenda, focused on intense regionalization and globalization. Economically, the Government fully endorsed the overall aim of international technical assistance which sought to support Cambodia's transition from a planned economy to a market economy by helping to implement the government's economic reform programme. This aspiration became the full-fledged comprehensive national reform programme that has served as an overarching framework for subsequent *National Strategic Development Plans* (NSDP) (Hill & Menon, 2013).[3] This economic growth and development goal was seen as being achieved through strengthening the economic management team and then helping to put in place the foundations for an environment conducive to private sector development. The process dealt not only with physical infrastructure, the legal framework and institutional capacity, but also with human resources.

The higher education system, which was solely provided by the State (via eight public HEIs, and centrally planned with the enrolment of about 10,000 students) during the early 1990s was seen as ill-fitting to the need to carry out this mission (Un & Sok, 2014), given that its mission was merely to supply graduates for public sectors. In response to this development goal, the higher education system was called to reform.

It is important to note that since the 1990s, higher education systems around the globe, driven by the neoliberal agenda, pursued a similar trend. This agenda advocates for allowing the private sector to establish HEIs and public HEIs to accept self-sponsored students through establishing fee-paying programmes. Treasurers worldwide welcomed this shift of responsibility for financing public services away from government.

Since the adaptation of this public-private partnership promoted by the World Bank, Asian Development Bank and some other 'development partners', and broadly endorsed by the Government in 1997 through a series of forums and national workshops, the Cambodian higher education landscape, whether taking on a life of

[3] The *Triangle Strategy* and *Rectangular Strategies: Phases I, II, III, and IV* were translated into NSDPs for 2001–2005, 2006–2010, 2009–2013, 2014–2018 and 2019–2023.

its own or undergoing a silent revolution,[4] was transformed dramatically. There was subsequently a mushrooming in the number of HEIs as well as of student enrolments. As of 2020, there are 125 HEIs (77 private) serving a student enrolment of around 250,000 (about 90% were self-sponsored students) (Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport [MoEYS], 2019; Un & Sok, 2014), compared with only eight public HEIs serving around 10,000 students during the early 1990s. In a sense, the Government allowed for the emergence of both a parallel system of higher education (i.e. with public and private providers) and a parallel system within public HEIs (i.e. marginalized enrolment of public scholarship students and a rapidly growing number of privately self-sponsored students).

12.2 Cambodian Higher Education Policies: What Is the Development Discourse and Whose Voices Are Heard? (and Who's Not?)

The year 2000 was a turning point where bilateral support was declining and multilateral support was increasing to accelerate the speed of Cambodian development through grant and credit project intervention. At the macro-level, the NSDP was introduced as the instrument of national sovereignty within the overall development discourse of 'economic growth and development', 'regional integration and competition' and 'good governance',[5] achieved through productivity improvement, economic diversification (industrial development policy and special economic zone) and a legal framework. Also, an attempt to address poverty-related issues was included in the NSDP. This development discourse became the guiding framework for sectoral reforms, especially in sectors that are of interest to Cambodia's 'development partners' and which are not politically sensitive from the perspective of the Government (Ou & Kim, 2013; Sok, 2012).

At the sectoral level, the piecemeal project interventions implemented throughout the 1990s by ministries were deemed not to have produced the needed results, and the sector-wide approach (known as SWAP) was promoted by donors, although some donors still adopted piecemeal project intervention. For the higher education sector, the Government generally played a laissez-faire role, at least up to 2005.[6]

[4] Noted by many observers during the period, including Luise Ahrens, a foreign expat who worked on higher education in Cambodia for many decades, and Neth Barom, a former Vice-Rector of Royal University of Phnom Penh.

[5] For more detail, see the first *Socio-Economic Development Plan 1996–2000*, second *Socio-Economic Development Plan 2001–2005*, *NSDP 2006–2010*, updated *NSDP 2009–2013, NSDP 2014–2018, NSDP 2019–2023* and *Rectangular Strategies: Phases I, II, III, and IV* the policy on special economic zones, and Industrial Development Policy 2015–2025 and even Cambodia's Vision 2030.

[6] At MoEYS, the first *ESP 2001–2005* was aligned with the *National Development Plan 2001–2005* but did not cover higher education due to the intensified effort to achieve *Education For All* (EFA)

This was evident in the lack of systematic investment to build public capacity and HEIs' capability,[7] the absence of serious focus on higher education in the first *Education Strategic Plan (ESP) 2001–2005* (MoEYS, 2001) and the fact that the first national policy on higher education development was not approved until more recently.

From the mid-2000s, however, the way the Government treated higher education had changed, as reflected by the inclusion of higher education in all its subsequent ESPs (MoEYS 2004, 2005, 2010, 2014a, 2019). In all ESPs, the goal of education was aligned with the broader national development policies and priorities which were derived from the neoliberal global development discourse. That is, education reform was repositioned to respond to the reality of globalization and regionalization and meeting the labour market demand and the immediate and long-term need for economic growth and the country's competitiveness (MoEYS, 2009, 2014a, b). The goal sought to address the nearly 20 years of unfinished business regarding three policy objectives: access and equity (to create a comprehensive access and equity and access program); quality and relevance (to develop and design relevant curricula towards more employability); and the development of a governance and finance system, mechanisms, policies and management and leadership, as well as decentralization and deconcentration directed at institutional autonomy, efficiency and effectiveness through the implementation of Public Administrative Institute (PAI) legislation.

goals for basic education. It can be argued that it was not until 2010 that significant investment in and attention to higher education started, with first the investment of $23 million in US dollars through the *Higher Education Quality and Capacity Improvement Project (2010–2017)* and at the time of the writing the follow-up $92.5 million dollar *Higher Education Improvement Project (2018–2024),* implemented from late 2018.

[7] Some might claim that this is a historical legacy of genocide where formal schooling was abolished and more than two decades of civil war hindered serious investment in education, so there was an urgent need to re-establish basic education, but that might be only partially an explanation. Since the 1990s, investment in education at the global level had been shifted from higher education to EFA (focusing on primary education). This does not, however, mean that there was no investment in post-secondary education during this period. Investment in post-secondary education followed directly from the donors' mission assessment on Cambodia's future investment and development which argued that strengthening the nation's economy could be most rapidly achieved by strong investment in technical and vocational education and training (TVET) that provided immediate returns (Duggan, 1997). This argument led to priority being given to TVET (short course training) over higher education (four-year programmes) by the Cambodian Government and donors. The support to higher education relied on bilateral assistance rather than multilateral assistance during the 1990s and focused on strengthening a particular specific programme at each individual HEI. The support was mainly on the expansion of the language departments, particularly French and English at the Royal University of Phnom Penh, in part because they had been prohibited during the 1980s and in part to serve over 200,000 UN personnel and the influx of international organizations (UN, 2012) and later rising private firms. There was also assistance that supported several studies on higher education, resulting in reports and recommendations for future higher education reform (Denham, 1997; Sloper, 1999), but some of these reports and recommendations never found their way into policy and project intervention.

In 2014 and 2017, respectively, the Ministry, in a project funded by the World Bank, developed the first-ever vision paper for the higher education sector, entitled *Higher Education Vision 2030*, and the *Cambodian Higher Education Roadmap 2030 and Beyond*, which aimed to operationalize the *Vision 2030*. Again, the same three policy objectives (plus internationalization for the roadmap) were enshrined in these 'visionary' documents, though with a slight change of discourse in this document to include a social orientation educational programme. Why had there been no significant change in the development discourse, which the education reforms claimed to address, during the preceding two decades?

Actually, the series of ESPs had been significantly influenced by outsiders with the same global agenda.[8] The reliance on foreign consultants/advisors in Cambodia has been well documented (Global Partnership for Education [GPE], 2011), with evidence of the co-signature by MoEYS and a donor representative in the *ESP 2006–2010* and of the high proportion of aid funds allocated to technical assistance, amounting to 19.5% to 27.34% of the total budget (Un, 2012).[9] Donor consultant control is seen in the staging of writing the ESP, written first in English, and then translated into Khmer for consultation. Hence, the input from the Cambodian side was somewhat limited. In this regard, Sloper and Moock (1999) had long ago noted that 'often the government's approach has been passive adapting its stance to each new donor initiative and trying to maximize the grant support and minimize the policy content'. After more than a decade, even with loan money for which Cambodia ultimately pays, the Government continued to adapt its stance to each donor initiative passively. A study by Un (2012) found that Cambodia did not reject external offers of technical assistance personnel, even though many were suspected of being unnecessary or dysfunctional. Many were ill-informed and conducted study visits on short-term contracts from which they could gain little understanding of the complexities of the context of aid, as well as of Cambodian society.

[8]The introduction of the updated *ESP 2009–2013* concurred with the reform at the Ministry of Economy and Finance regarding programme-based budgeting and multi-year financing. MoEYS was selected as a pilot Ministry for programme-based budgeting and a medium-term budget strategic plan. Actually, the implementation of programme-based budgeting and a medium-term budget plan, plus the effort to enhance aid effectiveness (via *Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness* in 2005 and *Accra Agenda for Action* in 2008) which supported the harmonization and alignment of donors' resources with national development policies, opened the window for MoEYS to set its own educational goals as essential components of the development discourse. However, there was no change in terms of educational goals and ownership. The production of the updated *ESP 2009–2013*, though written first in Khmer and then translated into English, was still led by foreigners, as reflected by the presence of foreign advisors and consultants hired by donors in almost every technical department of MoEYS.

[9]Even with the recent Higher Education Quality and Capacity Improvement Project (HEQCIP), which attempts to reduce foreign consultants/advisors, a large amount of the fund is still devoted to three prominent long-term advisors and a few other short-term ones, plus two foreign advisors hired directly by the World Bank and the costs of a mission team every 6 months to support project implementation throughout the years of project-life.

For these consultants/advisors, who perhaps read mainly mainstream English publications and were hired by donors, neoliberal development discourse was taken for granted and/or impressed upon them; therefore the issues in education were not about educational goals, but about how to make education strategies work. One of the most notable long-term consultants argued that the problem of Cambodian higher education was not about 'system reform' but about 'system control' (Sloper, 1999). This situation eventually strengthened the argument on how to make development projects work more effectively and efficiently but was no longer about the goals of higher education.

On a different note, the reliance on outsiders was entirely consistent with an observation made by Ball (2012), who noted that, whether deliberately or not, elites in developing countries tend to welcome a neoliberal development discourse regarding educational reform, especially considering the success recorded by recently underdeveloped countries/territories such as Taiwan, South Korea, Singapore and, to some extent, Malaysia. Commitment to this discourse has likewise been strengthened by many Cambodian overseas graduates who return home to work as consultants/advisors with donor agencies or within public institutions. This situation explains why, despite the increasing extent of consultation during policy formulation, the input and discussion focuses only on 'HOW' to implement policy, but not on such broader philosophical questions as 'WHAT' education policy aims to achieve and why.

Despite the dominance of the neoliberal discourse in higher education, there have been voices emerging that have attempted to highlight the essence of broader development goals and an alternative development discourse. A long-stay expatriate consultant, McNamara (2013), was able to observe the evolution of policy reform in Cambodia by examining the emergence of national leadership and its association with outputs. A case in point is the *ESP 2014–2018* (MoEYS, 2014a).[10] A closer look at the process for its formulation indicates that there is indeed a higher degree of 'national ownership' over long-term planning and a lot of debate was going on about educational goals at the higher education sub-sector, but not much at the lower levels.[11] At the Directorate General of Higher Education (DGHE), the highest

[10] Various technical departments were responsible for producing their own sub-sector plans, and then these were pulled together to produce the ESP. This process was facilitated by the Department of Planning, recently upgraded to the Directorate General of Policy and Planning. Though the production of *ESP 2014–2018* was mostly led by Cambodian technocrats, technical support from donors was still visible, as indicated in the hiring again of the same foreign facilitator (who actually produced the previous ESPs) to finalize the *ESP 2014–2018* (from a personal conversation with Cambodian experts engaged in JTWG-E). A recent mid-term review of the ESP, and a Rapid Needs Assessment to provide input into a new education project proposal, was also led by foreign consultants who came from the same institution (IIEP).

[11] Why? It is important to note that the capacity of different technical departments at MoEYS varies substantially. In general education (K-12), due to the lower capacity among officials and a long-term reliance on foreign consultants/advisors, especially due to the intensification of the current effort to consolidate the achievement of EFA, there is no discussion on the discourse. This may also be due to the fact that the goal of general education is more inclined towards basic reading and

technical body at MoEYS, the influence of foreign advisors/consultants is rather limited, not only because of the relative lack of donor support to higher education, but also because the capacity[12] at DGHE is relatively strong, due to the recent recruitment of more qualified staff to lead the consultation and policy discussion. However, its translation into policy and project intervention is a great challenge, given limited political support from higher up in the political echelons and within the state, limited vertical communication on the issue and limited public funding for such initiatives and for higher education more broadly.

Despite donors physically distancing themselves from direct influence on policymaking, their development agenda is well received by most of the technocrats at MoEYS and even by policymakers and politicians influenced by capacity-building programmes and overseas study tours since the early 1990s. Within this context, the emerging voices alongside those of the donors were lost along the way[13] when the ESP was finally approved by the Minister, due to the advocacy made by long-term technocrats and the Secretary of State, or the trust that the Minister had in them.[14]

Increased DGHE ownership of higher education goals is now evident in the Government's adoption and publishing of *Education Vision 2030* and *Roadmap 2030 and Beyond*, where a balance between economic growth and other essential aspects of human development was inserted in the Vision statement by Cambodian technocrats – that is, where higher education is tasked to achieve a broader set of development goals. In addition to its direct role in promoting economic development, higher education is asserted to be central to the '*development of active citizenship. Higher education also plays a crucial role in informing public and*

numeracy skills, rather than to contribute to economic growth and development, though we keep hearing about the linkage to employability and income-generating programmes at upper secondary school level and now the World Bank finally introduces this income generating programmes under its supported project.

[12] Not in terms of policy formulation and implementation, but at least at the policy discussion table. It is important to note that policy formulation and implementation in Cambodia is very much influenced by neopatrimonialism reflected in weak governance (lack of accountability and transparency) (see Hughes & Un, 2011; Pak et al., 2007; Milne et al., 2015).

[13] Another piece of evidence to support why content debate or emerging voices are losing out is that one of the authors was invited to partake in a consultative workshop on a Teacher Policy Action Plan in 2015. The predominant global trend of Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) education was on the agenda. But when he raised the issue of moral education, given that he saw moral values as declining in Cambodian society, it was not accepted by a senior colleague. The overall goal of teacher reform was said to be the promotion of STEM education in order to lead to economic growth and development, as per the language of the donors.

[14] In Cambodia, politicians at the level of Secretary of State (Vice-Minister) are assigned to take charge of different technical directorate generals in the Ministry. In practice, the Secretary of State in charge of planning, who coordinates the production of ESPs, is different from the Secretary of State in charge of other sub-sectors. In reality, though they try not to confront each other, sometimes confrontation does occur. This subtle confrontation is not only about the Secretaries' own interests and spheres of influence, but also about protection of the interests of their subordinates, due to the widespread practice of neo-patrimonial decision-making in Cambodian politics (see Pak et al., 2007; Un, 2012).

policymakers on matters of cultural, social, political and economic importance' (authors' emphasis in italics) (MoEYS, 2014b, p. 2). Its vision is to '*build a quality higher education system that develops human resources with excellent knowledge, skills and moral values in order to work, [learn] and live within the modern era of globalization and of a knowledge-based society*' (authors' emphasis in italics) (MoEYS, 2014b, p. 3).[15]

12.3 Cambodian Higher Education Project Intervention: Who Finances It and What Is the Development Discourse?

Policy discourse, if it is going to have tangible impacts on the economy and society, must be translated into concrete project intervention. The actualization of the emerging voices remains, however, rather unclear.[16] In Cambodia, despite the rhetoric of moving from donorship to ownership, the competencies and capabilities required to translate the voices into strategies, and especially project intervention with adequate financial support, particularly from the Government, remain rather limited or totally absent as the investment fund depends much more on the donors (Wu et al., 2015). As noted by Sam (2016), 'Though the government and development partners have become close partners, forming a synergy to push the wheel of the sector forward in terms of policy, despite the conflicting views - in practice, donors remain more influential in decision making[17] e.g. to select which aspects are

[15]Despite these significant gains, the struggle over the ownership and voices heard between Cambodian technocrats and donors remains far from finished. This can be seen in the recent production of the *Cambodian Higher Education Road Map* 2030 *and Beyond*. During a consultative workshop, in the introductory note one long-term senior Cambodian technocrat opined that the draft roadmap smells more like the strong scent of Cambodian *prahok* (fermented fish paste) than 'cheese' as it is reflected not only in the roadmap team composition (four Khmers and one foreigner hired by the World Bank) but also in the team leadership (a Cambodian served as the team leader, while the foreigner served as the facilitator) and more importantly in the contents of the draft roadmap: e.g. local knowledge and wisdom; promotion of national identity, such as via Buddhist Studies and Khmer Studies; contextualized curriculum; and STEAM (the A refers to liberal Arts in a broader sense) and not STEM.

[16]Recently, there was an attempt to produce a concrete action plan to achieve *Cambodian Higher Education Road Map* 2030 *and Beyond*, but the issue of ownership remains at the core of negotiations between MoEYS and donors as to how to finance the process and who should take the lead. Finally, money talks. There is no action plan to achieve *Cambodian Higher Education Road Map* 2030 *and Beyond*, but there is another new 5-year project with total budget of $92.5 million ($90 million credit from the World Bank and $2.5 million counterpart fund from the government) called 'Higher Education Improvement Project'.

[17]Most studies about aid-dependent countries indicate that donors are more powerful in proposing or even forcing poor developing countries to adopt the neoliberal reform agenda, especially at the point of deciding whether or not to lend aid with conditionality or at the time that there is no local capacity/strong institutions (Bräutigam, 2000).

to be invested first (authors' addition) *due to their greater technical and financial support capacity* (authors' emphasis in italics)' (p. 159). Within this context, it is mainly the neoliberal higher education agenda items that get funded.

The following cases are illustrative. The introduction of higher education privatization was driven by a series of national forums and workshops sponsored by the World Bank during the 1990s. There were at least two reasons for the push for privatization: first, there was a need to broaden access due to the increasing number of students graduating from high school, as state-run HEIs had limited capacity to respond; and, second, it was out of the fear not only that the state-run HEIs would not be able to address the issues of employability after the abandonment of the state-owned enterprises and immediate job placement policy after graduation,[18] but also that there could be a misalignment between skilled graduates produced by HEIs and labour market demand. This is reflected in a report by Coyne (1997) (a consultant hired by the World Bank to take part in the national higher education taskforce) where the term 'labour market' and 'mismatch' were used for the first time, leading to the call for a tracer study to inform curriculum design.

Once the impact of the broadening of access to higher education was generating far higher enrolments in HEIs, the need for a quality assurance framework was identified in 2000, and in 2003 the Accreditation Committee of Cambodia (ACC) was established, again sponsored by the World Bank, at least initially. With all the hard infrastructures put in place,[19] World Bank's recent support (*Cambodia Education Sector Support Project* [CESSP] 2006–2010,[20] *Higher Education Quality Capacity Improvement Project* [HEQCIP] 2010–2015[21] extended to 2017 and *Higher Education Improvement Project* [HEIP] 2018–2024)[22] calls for further reforms in the quality assurance and governance frameworks, restructuring curriculum and research and innovation, especially in selected HEIs, to fix the mismatch between higher education provision and labour market demand.

[18] After the end of the Khmer Rouge (1975–1979), Cambodia attempted to rebuild the country with assistance from the eastern bloc under a planned economy. At that time, HEIs were tasked to produce graduates for this planned economy, and graduates were immediately placed in state-owned enterprises and relevant line-ministries, resulting in no unemployment rate among graduates.

[19] We are not claiming that the reform has achieved its intended goal as reflected in the current effort to pursue the unfinished project.

[20] This project was designed by the World Bank and its advisers. Since 2000s, the World Bank had attempted to find its way into Cambodian higher education. With the cheapest project to sponsor the extension of Hun Sen Library building at RUPP and some capacity building programmes at Directorate General of Higher Education and Accreditation Committee of Cambodia, the World Bank successfully launched its bigger higher education project, HEQCIP 2010–2017 and HEIP 2018–2024.

[21] This project, to a large extent, was a carbon copy of a project in Bangladesh, implemented in 2009. It was designed by the same World Bank consultant who designed the Bangladesh project.

[22] The HEIP was an extension of the HEQCIP, with a narrow focus on assisting selected HEIs to be on par with regional and international partners.

This engagement logically flows from the World Bank's global trend,[23] derived from its publications, especially *Constructing Knowledge Societies: New Challenges for Tertiary Education* (World Bank, 2002), *Putting Higher Education to Work: Skills and Research for Growth in East Asia* (World Bank, 2012) and *Higher Education in Developing Countries: Peril and Promise* (World Bank, 2000). The overall logic of these publications is that technical skill/STEM education and soft skills[24] (the effectiveness and efficiency of labour) are the keys to economic development, which eventually lead to national development.

12.4 Pursuing the Unfinished Project and Beyond

In 2014, the Government envisioned the country to be a high-middle-income country by 2030 and a developed country by 2050. The influence of this neoliberal thinking is the primary rationale behind all the current official policy and development interventions. The overall strategy for how to move Cambodia forward economically is by improving the low productivity of Cambodian workers and by diversifying the narrow base of economic activities (currently rice, garments, tourism and construction). Through this analysis, higher education, especially in public HEIs, is called to reposition itself to respond to the first-ever *Industrial Development Policy (IDP) 2015–2025* by strengthening and expanding technical skill/STEM education. However, the kinds of specific technical skills/STEM graduates Cambodia needs to fuel the proposed industrial and national development have yet to be further defined.

The intensification of regionalization and globalization, especially the recent introduction of the free flow of skilled labour within ASEAN,[25] pushes Cambodian higher education, even more so for the private HEIs, to internationalize academic programmes resulting from the presence of foreign campuses, joint degree programmes and international exchanges, programmes using foreign languages (especially English) as a medium of instruction, foreign experts and ex-pats holding positions in HEIs, regional quality assurance engagement and above all curriculum focusing on skills and employability servicing the private sectors, multinational organizations and regional labour market demand.

[23] Though during the implementation, local voices and the consultation process seemed to intensify due to new recruitment of more competent public officials to participate in the project team management, this needs to be interpreted carefully as the World Bank and consultants (via mission fact finding, mission support every 6 months and especially Non-Objection Letter from the World Bank for any new activities that the World Bank has not yet approved). Further, the consultation focuses more on the process – i.e. key deliverables, rather than discourse.

[24] The detailed analysis of the soft-skill and STEM education programme intervention so far indicates that it is a market or private good driven, or, more broadly expressed, it is a functionalist model to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of the production and service sectors.

[25] Currently, mutual recognition arrangements in eight professions have been signed. The professions included are doctor, dentist, nurse, accountant, surveyor, architect, engineer and tour guide, which are being piloted as the first attempt to test the free flow of skilled labour among ASEAN community.

12.5 Contextualizing Cambodian Higher Education and Alternative Development Discourse

The main goal of higher education is to produce qualified graduates, but the most important question is: graduates qualified for what? Since the late 1990s, fulfilling 'perceived' market demand has taken over from the goal of a comprehensive national development agenda in curriculum policy design and programmes offered by HEIs, to say nothing about policy and programmes that can transform Cambodian society, addressing issues of nation-building, citizenship and social justice/public good. This does not mean that such efforts to contextualize Cambodian higher education have been totally absent since the 1990s.

Before the World Bank's engagement in 2000, bilateral donors and UN agencies played a critical role in supporting higher education reform, especially to explore the role of higher education in 'national rehabilitation' and 'reconstruction' as an essential base for 'national development'.[26] These discourses appeared in higher education consultancy reports, but they seldom found their way into higher education policies and project intervention. For example, during the 1990s, a human resources demand analysis of Cambodian agriculture skill needs was carried out by the staff of the Royal University of Agriculture, with assistance from experts from the University of Toulouse. It specified precisely and in detail a large number of agriculture sector technical skill training needs. Unfortunately, little evidence has yet been seen of efforts to develop technical agricultural training programmes to meet these needs, even until recently.

The biggest effort towards systematic, comprehensive reform was the production of the National Action Plan [for Higher Education] in 1997 by a task force under the supervision of the Council for the Development of Cambodia, and with a membership comprised of local (including Khmers from the diaspora) and international experts, funded by a group of multilateral and bilateral donors. Unfortunately, the Plan failed to be operationalized.[27] Overall it contained little in the way of neoliberal

[26] The Netherlands Organization for International Cooperation on Higher Education and UNESCO, (1992); Sloper, 1999

[27] There are a number of explanations for the failure to transform this action plan into policy intervention. One is that this local development agenda was dropped in front of the advancement of, or swallowed up by, the global development agenda: MDGs, EFAs and neoliberal agenda priorities such as privatization and employability, where funding from external actors were/are readily available. Political rivalry between the two main parties and donors' involvement at the time may have also contributed significantly to the failure. The document was developed under the Council for the Development of Cambodia, a Government arm to deal with foreign investment and support, which was chaired by senior politicians from the Cambodian People's Party (CPP), and not under MoEYS, which was then run by a Minister from the FUNCINPEC party, yet the Department of Higher Education and Technical Training of MoEYS was run by a member of the CPP. MoEYS's involvement in the preparation of the document was limited, and few people from the Ministry were appointed to sit in the various committees under the taskforce. Reportedly, there was resentment over this arrangement among key staff at MoEYS when this document was passed on to MoEYS for implementation.

language, and it detailed locally relevant and eminent areas of reform covering areas such as the review and revision of academic programmes to produce greater relevancy to national development (including the development of locally designed and produced higher education instructional materials, and the development of indigenous graduate degree programmes); strengthening of the use of the national language in higher education (including the development of a national language policy and the development of teaching materials for higher education in the national language); and improvement in resource and management capacity at HEIs (including better remuneration for the academic and non-academic staff, development of academic staff via a long-term plan for professional training and review and revision of procedures and criteria to appoint 'major' institutional administrators). Almost all the areas recommended for reform in the Plan were never picked up by Cambodian politicians, policymakers and donors for comprehensive reform to a point where they could make lasting positive sustainable impacts on higher education development (see Council for the Development of Cambodia [CDC], 1997).

Another instance is the failure of a UNESCO/UNDP project between 1995 and 1998 (budget $3.4 million in US dollars) which focused on building national capacity to formulate a nationally driven and owned education strategy development and planning process. It did not translate into the creation of the critical mass necessary to take ownership of policy and project intervention (Altner, 1999).[28]

Since 2000, the increasingly prevailing outlook of the future for higher education, influenced by the neoliberal agenda and broadly endorsed by the Government, has been 'misleading' Cambodian technocrats, policymakers and HEIs, as well as students, about the role of higher education and the reasons for obtaining a higher education qualification. In many cases, the consequence from the neoliberal intervention is not anything that could be identified even as neoliberalism, often with catastrophic consequences for the poor[29], given questionable higher education quality (Ford, 2013). Around the globe, the advancement of holistic human development such as social justice/public good seems to be incomplete or in decline. Actually, using social justice/public good as an alternative development discourse, the late developed countries such as Singapore and Malaysia and even advanced countries such as the USA, the UK and Australia are all following this declining trend (Connell, 2015).[30] This is because of the inability of governments to contextualize higher education programmes to serve their own people, to contribute to nation-building and broader development and to address social justice/public good

[28] There are four main challenges: low salary and incentives to civil servants; more promising opportunities in the private sector resulting into job jumping; competition among donors for qualified local staff; and lack of a professional career path and transparent and accountable promotion within the civil service.

[29] 'The poor getting poorer and the rich getting richer' as reflecting in the widening income inequality.

[30] Recently, there is a rethinking on these issues in these countries as they have quite a large number of public intellectuals challenging the existing public policies.

(Brennan & Naidoo, 2008; Marginson, 2011; Weber & Duderstadt, 2008).[31] The general idea of social justice refers to 'a just society', defined by Rawls (1999) as an attempt to have a fair distribution of benefits and burdens throughout society. This generic social justice framework includes the idea of a public good,[32] as developed by Huyser and Smith (2016).

12.6 The Consequent Plight of Development Discourse in Cambodia

Though a direct linkage between higher education and development outcomes cannot be established, Cambodian reality seems to reflect what happens (or not) to education and national policy goals set to achieve economic equity. Since the 1990s, Cambodia has experienced a sustained annual GDP growth rate of nearly 7%, which is expected to be maintained over the coming years. Strong economic growth, along with relative macroeconomic and political stability and a low inflation rate, can be translated into substantial and sustained poverty reduction and GDP per capita growth. The percentage of people living on less than $1.25 in US dollars per day continues to decrease substantially, from around 50% in 1994 to 32.8% in 2004 to about 10% in 2010 (ADB, 2014a). The impact of rapid 'development' can be observed in the capital and in key urban provincial towns in the form of more skyscrapers and residential complexes with expensive villas, as well as in improvements in public infrastructure. The 'middle class' remains small but is expanding. Cambodia, though still a poor country, is on its way to becoming one of the 'new tiger economies' of Asia (ADB, 2016). In 2016, Cambodia was reclassified by the World Bank, moving from low-income status[33] to lower-middle-income status.[34] Cambodia's Gross National Income per capita increased from only $300 in 1993 to $1480 in 2019 (World Bank, 2020).

[31] Ball (2012), reviewed by Soudien et al. (2013), looked at how reform and education policy is being impacted upon by new layers of decision-makers – businesses, social enterprises and philanthropies – and how these decision-makers are entering the traditional domains of the state in making policy and driving service delivery. There is currently no space for any scholars/public intellectuals, due to the limited independent funding, for discussion of alternative discourse for educational policy.

[32] Public good has two characteristics: non-rivalry, which means that when a good is consumed, it does not reduce the amount available for others; and non-excludability, which means when it is not possible to provide a good without it being possible for others to enjoy.

[33] Low-income economies are defined as those with a GNI per capita, calculated using the World Bank Atlas method, of $1025 or less in US dollars in 2015.

[34] Lower-middle-income economies are those with a GNI per capita between $1026 and $4035; upper middle-income economies are those with a GNI per capita between $4036 and $12,475 and high-income economies are those with a GNI per capita of $12,476 or more.

However, progress so far is serving a small proportion of Cambodia's society, and otherwise foreigners and foreign countries, rather than most of the Cambodian poor. Using the social justice/public good framework, Cambodian society is rather more unjust in comparison with many other countries in the region and perhaps even with its former self before the onset of a neoliberal economy, unhindered by government regulation. Cambodia is now moving quickly into minority individual enrichment from mass consumption rather than a steady and equitable rise in the standard of living of all citizens.

First, income inequality, between rich and poor, and between rural and urban populations, has remained the same or even widening during the last two decades of sustained economic growth. Further, the poverty rate in rural areas, especially among people engaged in agriculture, is very high – with these areas accounting for 90% of the population (ADB, 2014a). It is important to note that, though the percentage of people living below the national poverty line has been reduced substantially during the last two decades, in absolute terms, the number of people living below the poverty line is only marginally reduced. Further, many families have moved only slightly above the poverty line: about 50% and 75% of the population still lives below $2 and $3 in US dollars per day, respectively (ADB, 2014b). This situation indicates that there is no common national sense of what constitutes a fair public share of benefits. Second, due to the limited state subsidy for public services and rather low quality of public services, the growing number of private service providers influenced by the neoliberal agenda, which seek to profit from providing such services as education, health care and even importing food from outside Cambodia by/for those who can afford it (អ្នកមាន the rich), are on the rise, while those people who do not have the money to do so (អ្នកក្រ the poor) often get treated poorly in receipt of service delivery due to the low Government investment and absence of a strong quality control system.

Though there has been much progress across the country in terms of access to sanitation, health care, electricity, roads and education around the country, the overall level of improvement remains well below regional performance standards. These service delivery shortfalls can be seen especially in rural areas, but also in cities among the poor (ADB, 2014b). The efficiency and effectiveness of public services (mainly for the poor) remain far from satisfactory, as was acknowledged in the national programme for public administration reform 2015–2018 (Royal Government of Cambodia [RGC], 2015). This indicates that there is no general sense of what constitutes a fair share of carrying the burden of service costs. Further, there is an increasing incidence of takeovers and the exploitation of public resources for the private delivery of public services across the country, but only at a cost provided to the entrepreneurs by the minority who can afford to pay the fees (Un & So, 2011; Sok, 2014). In this regard, it is notable that the boom in the growth of the provision of educational services, from pre-school to university, has occurred mainly in locations where there is money to pay tuition fees.

The development discourse has impacts on higher education curriculum development and management too. This is especially so given the lack of comprehensive national curriculum guidelines and little investment by the State in higher education.

Virtually all subjects within higher education programmes are tailored towards competing for jobs offered by the private sector, with little focus on creating well-rounded graduates/citizens. The popularity of majors of study is determined by (perceived) market demand (mostly from the service sectors) and changing global trends, with STEM majors currently promoted as the sole solution to Cambodian ills. There is a concern that important majors such as in the creative arts, Khmer language and culture, history and philosophy, all of which are also key to Cambodian comprehensive national development, are being forgotten. The call and support for privatization within public higher education institutions with little comprehensive development plan for higher education and strong commitment from the State to advance higher education has been manipulated to mean meagre public investment in higher education (see Un & Sok, 2014). Paradoxically, many public higher education institutions are even called on to bear the burden of government-sponsored scholarships in all fields of study (i.e. providing from their direct revenue, mainly from tuition fees from fee paying programmes).

At an individual level, competition and being able to afford a mass consumption lifestyle are widely acknowledged as being symbolic of a successful life, at the expense of what George Monbiot (2016) calls the plagues of anxiety, stress, depression, self-harm and loneliness that take away one's quality of life, happiness and humanity. The current Cambodian philosophy of life, as a colleague says, is to get rich before getting old. The sense of social responsibility, collective reciprocity, civic engagement and citizenship can be said to be quite low and geared only towards self-interest calculations (Oversen et al., 1996; Sen, 2008, Zucker, 2013).

Though we cannot document these attributes as a direct result of the current state of the higher education sector, the extent of sector reform to date has not been sufficient to produce many notable public figures who seek to assert that social justice/public good needs to be protected and that a commitment to nation-building and citizenship needs to be upheld at any cost. Actually, the terms social justice/public good and nation-building do not exist in the various ESPs, nor in the *Higher Education Vision 2030 and Cambodian Higher Education Roadmap 2030 and Beyond*. Cambodia's response to the question of a public-good/private-good balance seems to fall solely in favour of the private-good arena. A view by the Government that higher education is a private good, and thus not primarily a public responsibility, seems to be the actual though unstated official policy (Ahrens & McNamara, 2013).

12.7 Discussion

Since 2002, when it issued its *Constructing knowledge societies: New challenges for tertiary education* report, the World Bank's take on higher education in developing countries has been gearing up in favour of the attainment of a neoliberal agenda. Knutsson and Lindberg (2012) wrote: 'Today the Bank's perspective on higher education for development has been established as common sense among policymakers worldwide; this is reflected in the policy documents of most

developing countries' (p. 810). This neoliberal interpretation of 'common sense' has impacted heavily on many ASEAN countries, including Cambodia. The prevailing focus on HOW to develop Cambodian higher education (asserted mainly by Cambodian scholars, technocrats and policymakers, but backed by donors)[35] concerns the need to reform 'governance and finance', and 'autonomy and accountability', to align with neoliberal ideologies and practices that are considered to be the key to producing qualified graduates to service the industrial and private-led development project which most policymakers (and donors) believe will lead Cambodia to economic prosperity.[36]

To date, there has been limited rigorous academic research concerning the impact of education with a view to informing policy development. Much scholarly work on 'traditional' and 'modern' Cambodia focuses on Angkor Wat and the rise and fall of the Khmer Rouge. Recently, however, research on Cambodia is focusing on either democratization or development policy, underpinned by a common assumption that if everyone plays their appropriate role, the prescribed neoliberal education policies will lead Cambodian society to development – science, industrialization and a consumption-based market economy. There have been few scholars, such as Ear (2012), who have been willing to criticize donors and the way the Government engages with them. The focus of many studies, however, continues instead to centre around the effectiveness and efficiency of public and private measures in terms of achieving the neoliberal agenda. Ear (2012) also accused many development approaches as 'trial-and-error donor experiments' that have often produced unintended consequences including poor governance and low tax revenue performance - a major factor curbing sustainable, nationally owned growth. With the reform in governance and accountability, the neoliberal scholars believe that the final stage of human progress would be achievable 1 day.

Cambodia is a perfect example of what Klein (2007) described as an attempt by capitalists to create an ideal free-market economy through development aid provided because of Cambodia emerging from civil wars and the abandonment of a planned economy. She argued that in the context of this economic shock therapy the winners are narrow groups that will often do very well by moving into luxurious gated communities. At the same time, the losers are the large section of the population who are left with underfunded and therefore decaying public services.

We argue here that reform concerning privatization, governance and finance (concerning autonomy, accountability and non-state funding) is not wrong in itself, but it may be simply a means to advance a neoliberal development discourse. The change in governance and finance can be a surface change that might merely bring about reform in the institutional structure (កំណែទម្រង់) but not deep and foundational

[35] Cambodia's destiny will be determined by Cambodia from now on.

[36] This includes increases in income and remittances. In this sense, the mainstream donor agenda (neoliberal agenda) which has been introduced since the 1990s seems to be complete. The Cambodian case is not much different from global experience where alternative discourses on educational policy, such as Education for Science and Culture (UNESCO), lose to the discourse of educational policy for economic development/growth (OECD).

change in terms of educational discourse and philosophy (re content) (កំណែទម្រង់សារ). Today, policy is treated uncritically and denuded of its ultimate values, neglecting to assess how it impacts the society.

Educational policy discourse goes to the very heart of philosophy – what is education for? for whom? who decides? So what does Cambodia need to do? Should Cambodia continue to consolidate the unfinished neoliberal agenda (deepening that level of reform) or look seriously for an alternative discourse that addresses at a national level not only the functionalist role of education to serve economic development but also issues of societal transformation, addressing questions relating to social justice/public good, nation-building and, at the individual level, civic engagement, citizenship, quality of life and happiness beyond a materialist and consumption-focused lifestyle? We act according to how we see the issues and what we think the problems are. An alternative discourse beyond materialism in our public policy may reshape how we define the issues (at the national, communal and individual levels) and how to address them.

The absence of a social justice/public good, nation-building, citizenship and quality of lifestyle discourse is not only a matter of policy formulation at the national level, but also a matter of the absence of the university as a 'public sphere'. Though we do not fully agree with Habermas (1991) in terms of a final development goal, we like his idea of a university as a 'public sphere' to describe an abstract, discursive form of public space filled with ideas, opinions and debates about issues of public interest. In other words, a public sphere is an area in social life where individuals can come together to discuss and identify societal problems freely, and through that discussion influence political as well as individual action. Thus, the public sphere provides individuals with an opportunity to engage in political participation and self-actualization and enlightenment through discussion, forming opinions and building consensus. Habermas notes that the public sphere originally was identified with public authority and institutions, and university as a public sphere par excellence where intellectual discussion, informed opinions and expert-knowledge consensus are made to inform policy formulation and so decision-making at the individual level.

It is increasingly rare today to find any public sphere that has not been influenced by neoliberal logic and policies. As mentioned earlier, the neoliberal agenda impacts higher education not only at the system level but also at the institutional level. This can be seen at public universities in the rise of corporate culture: managerialism to achieve and maintain efficiency and effectiveness (academic capitalism, power in the hands of the top administrator and the co-opted governing board), rather than promoting scholarly intellectual inquiry and an academic culture characterized by collegiality and *esprit de corps*. In Cambodia, this neoliberal trend has been fused with the politicization of HEIs and limited public funding for higher education to advance academic research and debates. The commercialization and politicization of higher education, especially since the late 1990s (Ford 2006; Sam, 2016), and little public funding for academic research, prevent the university from becoming a public sphere.

The main characteristic of a university as a public sphere will be achieved by the academics who exercise critical pedagogy, community engagement and public intellectual journey, together with a focus on academic research to advance knowledge and to inform public debate. Critical pedagogy, community engagement and public intellectual journey are a teaching and dialogue approach that attempts to help students and the public at large to question and challenge domination, and the beliefs and practices that dominate them, and so become critically conscious (Shor 2012). As they currently stand, Cambodian public universities are no more than predominantly privately sponsored teaching enterprises, on the move to become more entrepreneurial, and are pursuing academic capitalism and entrepreneurialism with little institutional identity or academic culture building.

The dominance of the neoliberal agenda and the lack of an alternative discourse in public policy in higher education results from the limited capacity of the state, especially its policy capacity, within the bureaucracy and the power relations and dynamics between the bureaucracy and the upper echelon of the state (politicians and senior policymakers) and Cambodian donors. Policy capacity is referred to broadly as 'the ability to marshal the necessary resources to make intelligent collective choices about and set strategic directions for the allocation of scarce resources to public ends' (Peters, 1996 as cited in Painter & Pierre, 2005, p. 3). Wu et al. (2015) further elaborate that such capacity comprises of a 'set of skills and resources – or competencies and capabilities – necessary to perform policy functions' (p. 166). Cambodian bureaucrats are more occupied with their reactive, routine bureaucratic tasks, which are more regulatory in nature and so are less involved in policy initiatives and debates. Unlike a Weberian ideal bureaucracy, and what Evans (1995) attests about bureaucracy in more advanced East Asian countries like Japan, Korea, Singapore and other ASEAN countries where the bureaucracy is 'competent' and forward-looking, the Cambodian bureaucracy is not adequately staffed with the best and brightest who are developed through thorough selection based on evidence of superior capacity and advanced capacity building. Many in the bureaucracy can be said to be mediocre 'part-timers' moonlighting in second jobs, with limited opportunities and/or commitment for re-skilling or up-skilling. Such a lame bureaucracy does not provide senior technocrats and senior politicians with adequate policy support. By contrast, this lack of competent support is even burdensome as the senior technocrats are forced to become more involved in the support tasks of actual implementation and day-to-day management of the institution (HRINC, 2010).

Not much has been written about the power relations and dynamics among the key actors in Cambodian higher education public policy development, especially between senior technocrats, politicians and donors, and how they affect the discourse in public policy. This topic warrants further research. Yet it suffices to note that the three key sets of actors seem to talk in quite similar language/discourse in public. However, given the power of financial support and the lack of funding from the state for a large-scale project and capital investment in higher education, there is a need to comply with the language and initiatives of the funder(s) to get projects and activities funded, as conversation with senior technocrats and politicians attests. While

discussion about public policy and planning between senior technocrats and politicians exists and sometimes compromises are made, generally politicians are the ones who set the agenda and are more powerful in policy setting, in many instances, pragmatism and reaction to existing phenomena as ordered by the more powerful higher-up rules over comprehensive, strategic planning and visionary thinking. The call for privatization in 1997, the issuance of a HEI institutional licensing sub-decree in the early 2000s and the passage of the STEM policy in 2015 are three cases in point. The limited policy capacity and the existing power relations which favour funding agencies and politicians are conducive to the adoption without change of policies that have travelled from other parts of the world to Cambodia and so limit growth in policy development capacity within the bureaucracy (see Portnoi, 2016; Steiner-Khamsi & Waldow, 2012).

It is worth underscoring that neoliberal and donor agenda policy borrowing do not confine themselves only to the higher education sector and that other global and bilateral agencies such as the Asian Development Bank (ADB) and Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) are advocates too of neoliberalism. They sprawl across the entire education sector, as well as many other sectors, with some degree of contextualization in the intervention. Up to 2015, the major focus of the sector was 'Education for All', advocated by UNESCO and (Cambodian) Millennium Development Goals advanced by the UN ((MoEYS) 2003). With funding for the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) looming, the popular policy rhetoric was 'localization' of the SDGs. Simultaneously, the ADB, with its interest in promoting trade and foreign investment in the broader Greater Mekong Sub-Region and promoting technical and vocational education, has been funding projects to advance such interests, accordingly. In his research on the fisheries subsector, Sok (2012) observes a similar phenomenon – that is, DANIDA of Denmark and the EU were concerned about resource conservation, while JICA was interested in aquaculture, and thus they fund(ed) the activities concerned accordingly.

12.8 Concluding Remarks

At the heart of education policy is the development discourse from which education strategic plans and project interventions are derived. In this regard, the quality of the discourse is crucially important in setting the ultimate goal for (higher) education as it will provide the blueprint for all development actions to be taken. Cambodian higher education policy, as it currently stands, gears the 'system' towards a neoliberal end with a heavy focus on marketability of the skills acquired by graduates, employability of graduates (mainly by the private sector) and extensive promotion of fields of study that are (perceivably) demanded by the fast-changing labour market (national and regional) with the end goals of industrialization of the economy and the promotion of mass consumption. This discourse has shaped not only the tone of national policy but also the way HEIs are run and their curriculum. It has even

affected how individuals perceive themselves in terms of their relationships with one another and with society.

Given the current dominance of the neoliberal discourse and agenda, other discourses that could change the mindset of individuals from being (ultra)-materialistic to being more holistic, well-rounded citizens in a more pro-egalitarian society focused on social justice/public good, nation-building and citizenship have been crowded out. Discourses intended to contextualize development goals for Cambodia are having difficulty to find space and time to emerge. The missing voices are re-emerging, but whether they will be included in public policy discussion is yet to be seen. More challenging still is whether they will be translated into project interventions.

Has Cambodia determined its best possible development path? What is meant by Cambodian ownership of its development policy? Over the past decade, more Cambodians have been involved in policymaking, and more Cambodian politicians and technocrats and even donors have encouraged Cambodians to engage in policy formulation. In a sense, we have increasingly owned and led the process of policymaking, with 'facilitation' from or involvement of foreign consultants/advisors. Unsurprisingly, the development goals in the higher education policies/plans in the past 15 years have had one continuing thread: the language is still very global and neoliberal. Cambodian policymakers and scholars have yet to rigorously discuss and debate the core issues and challenges facing Cambodian higher education, let alone how to tackle them to build a solid foundation for development and both social and economic transformation. Notably, many studies show that some countries, despite impressive economic growth, fall back into conflict and fragility after a long period of transition due to the limited investment of effort in nation-building and the promotion of citizenship, resulting in the continuing persistence of social injustice.

To improve the quality of public policy formulation, the process should include the participation of (foreign) public intellectuals where new scholarship inquiries are protected and promoted, to advance knowledge for itself and, equally importantly, to feed the State with new strategic options and alternatives. But to do so, Cambodian public universities should not be merely a teaching enterprise, nor should they be purely a machine to feed graduates and other products to industries and private sectors. Neither should they be heavily politicized nor treated as an independent public enterprise with shoestring public funding available. Institutional leaders and prominent faculty members should display the heart of an educator and be involved more meaningfully as leaders in public policy formulation and advocacy.

To re-orient public universities and to develop and shape what are genuinely its own national policy path(s), Cambodia needs to be the leader/champion of its policy formation, in this case, higher education policy. The State needs to be brought in, yet again. The current neo-patrimonial State needs to transform itself from being restrictive, reactive and ad hoc to being more 'developmental' (Pak et al., 2007; see also Evans, 1995; Evans et al., 1985; Wu et al., 2015, Tilak 2007) in thinking, planning and implementation. 'Copy and paste' policy borrowing, with little contextualization, finds its best foothold in a country where the state has limited capacity, especially in terms of policy capacity (see Migdal 2001; Evans, 1995;

Sok, 2012; Portnoi, 2016). The Cambodian State needs to treat public policy regarding higher education with due respect and give due essence to policy and implement it, accordingly. The State capacity, especially policy capacity, needs to be strengthened. And at its core, the debate within the State should be about what constitute(s) the ultimate/supreme goal(s) of higher education and national development. Higher education policy should be re-oriented to produce graduates and products to serve not only the economy but also society, and this implies that the development and higher education discourse as enshrined in official policies need to be re-oriented. This is how a just society can come into existence.

The power dynamics and relations between key actors are perhaps vital determinants of public policy formulation and policy discourse. This barrier to a frank discussion of all needs has never been systematically studied and acted upon accordingly to improve policy formulation. This topic is very intricate and requires further research.

Cambodia will need to determine its own development path/agenda if it is going to be prosperous at all levels of society. In this regard, it needs to have 'policy autonomy and policy supremacy' and certainly more so collective will among the stakeholders and top leadership to have policy autonomy and supremacy in response to external attempts to promote their own interests and agenda. The development path/agenda should be grounded in the very process of learning through searching within local wisdoms and research to define what is a suitable vision for Cambodia and the actual context of Cambodian conditions and so contextualize all standards and goals for excellence to the needs of our own people and society.

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Chapter 13
Reforming Cambodian Universities: Building Best Practice at the Royal University of Phnom Penh

Chealy Chet, David Ford, and Luise Ahrens

13.1 Introduction[1]

Cambodian higher education is entering a new phase in its development. After two decades of rapid growth, enrolments have reached 13% of the 18-to-23-year-old age group, and the sector is positioned at the beginning of a transition from elite to mass status (Trow, 2005). Growth in the size of the sector has mainly been due to both an expansion in the number of private higher education providers and a transformation of some public-sector universities into semi-autonomous public administrative institutions (PAIs). The growth has, however, been strongly influenced by narrowly commercial considerations. Many higher education institutions (HEIs), especially private-sector institutions, focus exclusively on the delivery of business-related programs that, though popular, do not necessarily align well with Cambodia's long-term societal and developmental needs. There are now over 125 HEIs in Cambodia, of which about 40% are public institutions, and nine of those have become PAIs (Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport [MoEYS] 2018).

Over recent years there has been a much-needed re-emphasis in the sector on quality rather than quantity. This change is mainly due to policy initiatives introduced since the 2013 election by a newly appointed Minister of Education, Youth and Sport, Dr. Hang Chuon Naron. His appointment indicated that the Government

[1] This chapter was written just prior to the COVID-19 pandemic during which all higher education institutions in Cambodia were ordered to close. It is too early to assess the impact of this potentially devastating development.

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recognized the need for a change. As well as placing a moratorium on the establishment of new HEIs, the Minister created an ambitious eight-point reform agenda with an associated roadmap intended to improve quality across the sector. Improving governance, specifically in the form of strengthening of institutional autonomy in financial and human resource management, was central. The Royal University of Phnom Penh (RUPP) was made responsible for showcasing how institutional autonomy in these areas could be exercised.

This chapter presents a critical analysis of how RUPP, one of the oldest public HEIs in Cambodia, responded to the challenge of reform. The chapter begins with a brief discussion of the higher education reform agenda in Cambodia, with particular attention given to how the reform is situated in terms of the broader policymaking context.

13.2 The Reform Agenda

Soon after his appointment in 2013, the new Minister announced an ambitious eight-point reform agenda focused on addressing challenges that included low levels of skill among university graduates; a poor-quality research environment and the low quality of most research outputs (including patents); a mismatch between the fields of specialization of university students and the demands of the market; and a relatively low level of public funding for the higher education sector (MoEYS, 2014a). The eight-point reform agenda sought to:

- Clarify institutional autonomy and accountability.
- Support research and innovation at the institutional level.
- Improve secondary-higher education relations to prepare high school graduates better for post-secondary education.
- Increase the number of students pursuing STEAM (science, technology, engineering, creative arts, and mathematics) majors and improve the quality of these majors.
- Improve HEI-industry linkages to minimize skill mismatch and increase graduate employability.
- Attract and retain competent HEI staff.
- Provide national research grants to universities to build and strengthen their research and innovation capacity.
- Establish an Education Research Council to serve as the think tank for the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport (MoEYS) to promote insightful thinking and innovative ideas in the education sector.

The Minister was quoted in the local press as saying that: “The objective of the [M]inistry is to produce people who can find jobs. [...] University means you have a place to train people who can find jobs. That is the contribution of universities. Otherwise you cannot call them universities you can call them factories to produce diplomas” (Brito, 2015).

A road map, in the form of a higher education reform action plan for the period from 2015 to 2018, was produced by a higher education working group in June 2014 (Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport [MoEYS], 2014a). It identified governance reform as the main priority. Specifically, the plan aimed to support capacity building for the exercise of institutional autonomy, specifically in the areas of financial and human resource management. To start, responsibility for implementing institutional autonomy was assigned on a pilot basis to RUPP. It was intended those lessons learned might then be applied more broadly across the sector.

13.3 Sector Overview

Public higher education in Cambodia continues to function within a framework of horizontally shared governance involving line-management of universities by different ministries and public instrumentalities. This system was introduced during the 1980s at the time of the People's Republic of Kampuchea regime. Un and Sok (2018) describe the model as follows:

> Currently, the governance of HEIs is in the authority of 16 different ministries/central agencies, with the vast majority of them under the supervision of two important ministries—MoEYS and MoLVT [Ministry of Labour and Vocational Training]. The former supervises the biggest number (73) of HEIs, whereas the MoLVT supervises 25. The rest [are] thinly spread amongst other 14 ministries/agencies, including the National Bank of Cambodia, the Ministry of Industry, Mine and Energy, and the Ministry of Public Works and Transport (p. 10).

Cambodia's extraordinary recent history continues to have an impact on the higher education sector. There is no need to retell the details of the country's tragic past because these have been well covered elsewhere (see, e.g., Ayres, 2000). Some aspects relevant to this chapter are, however, noteworthy.

Between 1975 and 1979, the Khmer Rouge targeted Cambodians who were better educated, and many university faculty members were killed. Those who could flee abroad did so. Phnom Penh University, which subsequently became RUPP, ceased to function. All other HEIs were either closed or destroyed.

In 1979, with human and educational infrastructure decimated, the focus of the national education recovery effort was on re-establishing basic education. The few survivors with any background in education were asked to educate those who had none. The slogan adopted was that "those who know more teach those who know less." But the Vietnamese-supported People's Republic of Kampuchea (PRK) regime was still fighting a civil war with the remnants of the Khmer Rouge. Cambodia was also under international aid sanctions, and so support for the higher education sector was minimal. Providing basic education up to grade 9 was the immediate priority of the Government – a commitment that persisted well into the 1990s.

In 1997, a National Higher Education Task Force, comprised mainly of a group of international consultants, undertook the task of assessing the higher education

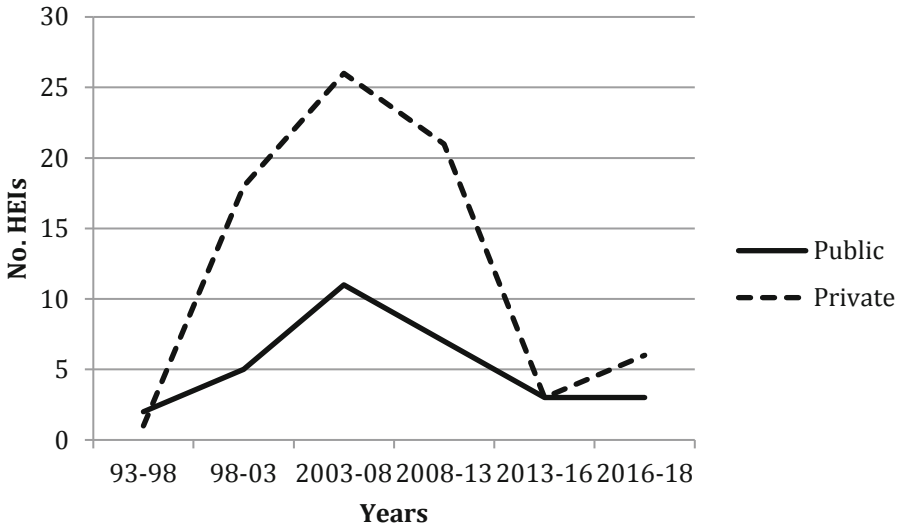

Fig. 13.1 Number of HEIs opened

situation at that time and then creating a National Action Plan for Higher Education. A challenge for the Task Force was that, of all the sectors in the economy, the higher education sector was the one that had been most damaged (Ahrens & Kemmerer, 2002, p. 8).

Two events in 1997 marked a turning point for the higher education sector. The first was the opening in 1997 of Norton University, Cambodia's first private university. This development marked the beginning of a period of rapid but mostly unregulated expansion in private higher education. The second was the adoption in 1997 of a *Royal Decree on the Legal Status of Public Administrative Institutions*. It paved the way for public HEIs opting to become PAIs to implement cost-recovery measures such as the introduction of fee-paying degree programs, which in turn boosted student enrolment numbers.

In 2002, a sub-decree approved by the Council of Ministers loosened the criteria for the establishment of a new university. The effect was dramatic. Between 2000 and 2011, as indicated in Fig. 13.1, 30 new public and 53 new private HEIs were opened. According to several education commentators at the time, "new institutions of varying levels of quality are opening each month and ... recognized institutions are expanding the number of programs offered. In the absence of an accreditation system, 'recognition' remains as much a political as a technical process" (Ahrens & Kemmerer, 2002). As Ford (2002) also observed, there was "a lack of regulation, huge demand, public institutions handicapped by government control and underfunding and private institutions growing rapidly in a narrowly commercial manner."

An Accreditation Committee of Cambodia (ACC) was established in 2003. Its role included a requirement to assure the quality of HEIs. A problematic aspect of its establishment, however, was that it was made accountable to the Council of

Table 13.1 Regional comparison of development indicators

Indicator	Cambodia	Lao PDR	Vietnam	Thailand	Malaysia	Singapore
HDI (2018) (rank/189)	146	140	118	77	61	9
Population total (mil) (2018)	16.25	7.06	95.54	69.43	31.53	5.64
2018 gross enrolment ratio - tertiary	14	15	29	49	45	85
Public expenditure on education (% of GDP)(2018)	2.2	2.9	4.2	4.1	4.5	2.9
GNI[a] per capita (2018) PPP current international $	3970	7410	7230	17,650	27,200	92,150
Knowledge economy index (KEI)(rank/144) (2012)[b]	133	131	104	66	48	23

Sources: UNDP Human Development Reports, http://hdr.undp.org/en/content/table-1-human-development-index-and-its-components-1

[a]Gross National Income includes Gross Domestic Product (GDP) + income generated outside the country

[b](World Bank, 2012)

Ministers, members of which were responsible for sanctioning the further growth of the higher education sector. A bubble of weak quality institutions continued to grow for most of the following decade (Ford, 2013). It was not until the appointment in 2013 of a new Minister for Education Youth and Sport, His Excellency, Dr. Hang Chuon Naron, that the bubble was burst.

In 2013, the Accreditation Committee of Cambodia (ACC) was restructured, so it became administered solely by MoEYS. In 2014, a new Higher Education Vision 2030, expressing an intention to "build a quality higher education system that develops human resources with excellent knowledge, skills and moral values in order to work and live within the era of globalization and knowledge-based society" (MoEYS, 2014b), was adopted. Also in 2014, irregularities in the conduct of the grade 12 examinations were addressed, resulting in a sharp contraction in the pass rate. In 2015, a moratorium was announced on the granting of new licenses for HEIs in the fields of business and finance, the intention being to address the skills mismatch between graduates and market demand. Between 2012 and 2018, only eight new public and 13 new private HEIs were registered (see Fig. 13.1).

Total enrolments in the higher education sector increased tenfold from about 25,000 students in 2002 to over 250,000 students in 2015, of which about 13% were supported by free tuition scholarships available for studies at public HEIs. Since 2015, enrolments have declined and were down to just over 210,000 in 2018 (MoEYS, 2018). The decline was most likely due to demographic factors, together with a stricter application of the rules for the conduct of grade 12 examinations. Despite recent increases to the proportion of the national budget being allocated to education (Un & Sok, 2018, p. 18), student enrolment numbers and levels of public expenditure on higher education remain among the lowest in the region (see Table 13.1). As also shown in Table 13.1, Cambodia's Knowledge Economy

Index ranking, representing a country's overall preparedness to compete in the Knowledge Economy, stood at only 133 (out of 144 countries) in 2012[2] (World Bank, 2012). Compared with various of its regional neighbors, Cambodia ranks poorly in terms of its Human Development Index and Gross National Income (see Table 13.1). Therefore, if Cambodia is ever to have a knowledge-based economy, then it will need to invest much more heavily in its higher education sector.

13.4 Policy Context

Essential to understanding why things are the way they are is a need to appreciate the dynamics of a policy environment in which there is rapid change. The interplay of politics, personalities, culture, and historical tradition contributes to an extraordinary level of complexity in all forms of national policymaking. To describe the situation in a meaningful and objective manner requires a systematic approach. Carden (2009) provides such an approach, based upon a review of projects funded by the Canadian Government's International Development Research Center. Twenty-three case studies covering more than 60 projects in over 20 countries from a wide range of fields were investigated to throw light on different policymaking environments and the reasons why some are more conducive to recommendations for policy reform than others. A classification system developed provides not only a convenient way to describe the present Cambodian policymaking context but also a useful tool for predicting the success of future policymaking strategies.

Carden began by classifying the nature of decision-making regimes according to whether they were routine, incremental, or fundamental:

> policymaking in most countries tends to be *routine* or *incremental*; decision makers in these settings are most receptive to research-based advice that looks to small changes along the familiar lines of logic, values, and expectations; *Fundamental* decision [making] regimes are much more open to big questions, and big answers, that depart from conventional wisdom. [...] *Routinists* and *incrementalists* are likely to favour prescriptions for change in small doses. *Fundamental* decision [making] regimes (governing countries in transition, for example, or in economic crisis) might be ready for more radical policy change. (Carden, 2009, p. 51).

> The current higher education *decision-making regime* in Cambodia would appear to be essentially *fundamental*, given that it is the Minister who is calling for dramatic reform. However, Cambodia has had a long history of centralized, top-down decision-making and many members of the Ministry who were selected under previous much more conservative administrations perhaps prefer *routine* or *incremental* change.

Carden identified different policymaking contexts according to their readiness to absorb research. Five contexts were described: (a) a welcoming environment with clear government demand; (b) government is interested but lacks leadership; (c) government is interested but lacks capacity; (d) policymakers are uninterested

[2] More recent estimates are not available.

in new research; and (e) government treats research with disinterest or hostility (Carden, 2009, p. 53). Factors deemed relevant by Carden included leadership, capacity (in the form of resources to implement), awareness of the issues, and politics of the day.

In terms of *policymaking context*, Cambodia is undoubtedly unique, given its extraordinary history and current transitional state. The appointment of a reformist Minister, who is a trained economist and former head of a respected research institute, and who was selected from outside MoEYS at a time when a long-serving Government was facing the most severe threat to its hold on power for 30 years, gave rise to an unprecedented opportunity for dramatic change. There was an apparent demand for policy change in the higher education sector, and so the policymaking context appeared to correspond with "a welcoming environment with clear government demand." Given the history of problems of the education system in Cambodia, however, the policymaking context may also have been one of "government is interested but lacks leadership," or "government is interested but lacks capacity." As Carden observed, the potential for change in these contexts can be high, but the risk of short-term failure is considerable.

Carden identified the importance of leadership and necessary decision-making processes, as well as the importance of capacity and the resources required to implement change. In the case of higher education in Cambodia, the Minister himself called for reform and commissioned research into the current state of the curriculum, and so clearly favored evidence-based decision-making and welcomed the results of research. His success in reforming the administration of the grade 12 examinations (Taing, 2015) indicated the strength of his commitment to implementing the recommended reforms. Despite strong direction from the Minister, however, capacity is an issue within some MoEYS departments. One of these, the Department of Scientific Research (DSR), has, for example, done virtually no research capable of being publicly disseminated. Another indicator of the capacity shortfall is the fact that several laws affecting higher education have been adopted but are not yet fully implemented. A striking example here is *Decision on Credit and Credit Transfer Systems* made in 2004 by the ACC to facilitate the movement of students between institutions that appears hardly to have ever been adopted by HEIs.

Another example is the establishment in 2009 of a Supreme National Council of Education (SNCE), responsible for coordinating 14 different ministries and other instrumentalities responsible for managing HEIs, that to date appears to have had little success in achieving cross-ministerial cooperation and collaboration (Mak et al., 2019, p. 2; Un & Sok, 2018, p. 10). Yet another example is the *Royal Decree on Professorial Ranking*, adopted in 2013 and which required the formation of a National Council for Granting Professorship. The Minister suggested that the process should be implemented at an institutional level, but individual HEIs have generally been slow-moving in terms of its implementation (Un & Sok, 2018). These examples point to a lack of capacity.

Characterizing the higher education policymaking context in Cambodia by looking at cases where the Minister has been successful in implementing change presents a more optimistic outlook. The strong leadership demonstrated by the

Minister indicates a policy environment with a high potential for change. However, the capacity of the bureaucracy to implement the Minister's agenda may be limited. MoEYS may not have sufficient resources to implement reforms. As reported by Un and Sok (2018, p. 8), MoEYS is also restricted through having a "relatively dysfunctional support structure, fairly high absenteeism and low commitment to their careers and limited financial resources." A further complicating factor is inconsistency in the legal instruments themselves, which are experienced by various leaders within the higher education sector as "confusing, changeable and inconsistent, giving freedom in one provision and taking it away in another" (Hayden et al., 2015).

This analysis of the *decision-making regime* and *policymaking context* using Carden's framework is well supported by recent research undertaken by Kelsall, Khieng, Chuong, and Tieng (2016), using a "political settlements" framework to describe the political economy of education reform in Cambodia. These authors observed:

> Our research suggests that with the current evolution of the national political settlement, and changes at the top in the education ministry, reforms are likely to go faster and further than ever before. Nevertheless, there remain powerful forces for inertia, extremely challenging sequencing and coordination problems, financial and human resource constraints, and ineffectual working modalities that will inevitably weaken them. (p. 32)

This sector overview presents a higher education system that is at a very significant moment in its evolution. New leadership is attempting to reform the sector and improve its quality and relevance before there is the onset of further quantitative expansion. However, the sector now faces a challenging policymaking environment, constrained by traditions of centralized, top-down leadership, lack of capacity to implement change, bureaucratic obstacles to access government funds, and inconsistency in the laws governing the sector. One of the reform strategies was to try to achieve reform in one HEI and then use the lessons learned as a model for the implementation of reform more broadly across the sector. As reported earlier, the university selected for this purpose was RUPP.

13.5 Rupp

13.5.1 Institutional Profile

RUPP is one of the oldest HEIs in Cambodia. It opened as the Royal Khmer University in 1960 and has passed through several name changes since then. The RUPP campus remained deserted for almost 5 years during the Pol Pot regime. Few lecturers survived, and many left the country. Students who trained afterwards in the mid to late 1980s and the early 1990s, some of whom are now senior academics and academic managers, received a limited basic education. Because of the time and required inputs, educating a prospective academic was necessarily a costly and

long-term process, so a small number of students were offered scholarships to study at postgraduate level in other socialist countries, including Russia, East Germany, Cuba, Bulgaria, and Vietnam. In 1996, the University underwent its last change of name, becoming the RUPP.

RUPP was first described as a flagship institution in 2001 in a draft of the legislative framework for higher education in Cambodia (World Bank, 2001). It remains the only university in the country that can legitimately claim to have the breadth and depth of course offerings to justify the description. Physically its two campuses occupy over 20 hectares in central Phnom Penh, giving it one of the largest university campuses in an urban area in Cambodia. Its membership as the first, and one of only two, universities representing Cambodia in the ASEAN University Network (AUN) is indicative of its national prominence.[3]

RUPP is the leading university in terms of research. A search of the Scopus database for research published in peer-reviewed journals with Cambodia in the affiliations shows RUPP as being the only Cambodian University in the top-10 institutions listed in terms of involvement in research. It is now third in this list, having improved four places in the last 4 years, behind the highly regarded (and well-funded) Pasteur Institute and the Ministry of Health.[4]

During the last decade, RUPP has continued to grow and now has six faculties, including the Faculty of Science, Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities, Faculty of Engineering, Faculty of Development Studies, Faculty of Education, and the Institute of Foreign Languages. In keeping with its commitment to higher education, RUPP started offering postgraduate degrees at the master's level in 2001 and the PhD level in 2018. Its current student population is around 23,000, about 13% of whom are on tuition-free government scholarships and 87% of whom pay tuition fees.

RUPP's position as one of the oldest public HEIs in Cambodia provides it with credibility and prestige. Many teachers and administrators across the national education system passed through RUPP as undergraduate students at a time when it was the only teacher training institution in the country. Many have now reached leadership positions and have retained loyalty as alumni to their *alma mater*. In a culture which generally values familial relationships over rules, this history has created an important network of supporters. The institution's prestige also makes it attractive to younger academics. Because of its age, however, much of its physical infrastructure requires renovation to cope with the increasing demands being placed on it. Its human resources only began to return after 1980 from a minimal pool of candidates. Its institutional memory was wiped out. The process of selecting staff was until recently more centralized than merit-based and conducted at a university level. Staff appointments are permanent, which has resulted in the institution being overstaffed and under-qualified.

[3] The other AUN member is the Royal University of Law and Economics, RULE.

[4] Accessed July 1, 2020

13.5.2 Governance

A Royal Decree on *Legal Requirements for the Establishment of a Public University* (2002) defined RUPP's internal governance. Public institutions like RUPP were to be governed by a Board of Directors that included the Rector, representatives of government ministries (MoEYS, Ministry of Economy and Finance (MoEF), a member of the Council of Ministers), and representatives from the University's academic community and its external community. The Board of Directors currently has six members and is chaired by an advisor to the Supreme National Economic Council (SNEC). It includes officials from the MoEF, the National Institute of Education, and the National Employment Agency, together with a staff representative and the Rector. Its duties are to direct the definition of policies and facilitate RUPP processes, approve development plans in line with RUPP's strategic plan and the National Strategic Development Plan, approve RUPP's budget objectives, approve internal orders in line with MoEYS guidelines, and monitor and evaluate the implementation of RUPP's development plans. RUPP has applied for PAI status. When approved, the Board of Directors will be chaired by a representative of MoEYS and will include representatives from MoEF and the professoriate and staff at RUPP. The Rector will also be a member, and there will be others appointed based on RUPP's needs, up to a total of 11 members.

RUPP currently has little organizational and financial autonomy, but it enjoys a reasonable degree of academic freedom. Except for the Foundation Year, which must conform with a standard framework prescribed by MoEYS for all universities, RUPP can design its own academic programs, including its graduate programs, with little involvement from the central government. The current organizational structure, however, is not responsive to RUPP's changing needs. It has some degree of autonomy in terms of how it uses its funds, but significant central control continues to exist, and excessive bureaucracy remains a problem in financial management. RUPP is not allowed by law, for example, to establish any new functional unit, such as a student counselling unit or a career advising group, without approval from MoEYS or other relevant agencies such as Ministry of Public Function or MoEF, which can be slow and burdensome.

Although public universities like RUPP are subject to government control, the extent of their public accountability is quite limited and is restricted mainly to the need to obtain prior approval of expenditures. Ways in which public HEIs might be made more accountable would include having external stakeholders on their governing boards, undergoing external quality assurance reviews, using performance-based funding mechanisms, being made more responsive to market forces, and being required to make public disclosures about their performance (Hayden et al., 2015). At present, there are no non-government stakeholders on RUPP's governing board. Still, more positively, RUPP was one of the first HEIs to create an internal Quality Assurance Unit, which was established in 2002 without having had its status recognized by MoEYS. Only since 2018 was it officially approved as a QA Office. It regularly conducts course evaluations, tracer studies,

Table 13.2 Faculty qualifications

	Non-degree	BA/BSc	MA/MSc	PhD	Total
Govt. staff	18 (15)	56 (18)	318 (72)	67 (15)	459 (130)
Contract staff	80 (31)	260 (119)	147 (40)	31(1)	518 (191)
Total	98 (46)	316 (137)	465 (113)	98 (16)	977 (311)

Note: Number of females shown in brackets
Source: RUPP Personnel Office; data from April 2020

and departmental self-assessments and is currently preparing for institutional accreditation with the ACC.

One option for improved governance at RUPP is for it to become a PAI, that is, a semi-autonomous state-owned enterprise. In May 2020, RUPP made such a request to the Government. In theory, PAI status would confer greater autonomy on RUPP regarding the management of its affairs under a governing board. It would also enable it to work directly with the Ministry of Finance (MoF), while technically remaining under management by MoEYS. However, the composition of the Board of Directors would change, as indicated earlier. Even though external stakeholders would join the governing board, there would continue to be de facto control by the Government. The role of the Rector in this situation remains unclear. PAI status would also bring about a heavier financial burden.

The dilemmas for public HEIs around issues of autonomy are well exemplified at RUPP and are in the process of being negotiated. Most importantly, RUPP faces challenges to manage its human and financial resources independently.

13.5.3 Human Resource Management

Cambodia's history is evident in the profile of RUPP's human resources. Staff who joined RUPP during the 1980s came from the small pool of survivors from the Khmer Rouge period and passed through a fragile basic education system. Some had little or no formal training in the work they were required to do. Those who were not qualified to teach were given jobs in various administrative offices, and many have now reached the nominal retirement age of 60 years.

All government staff are civil servants whose selection is controlled by MoEYS. RUPP is not allowed to use its public funds to appoint full-time staff. Applicants for appointment to RUPP must first pass exams conducted by MoEYS to obtain an appointment as a civil servant. There is then no other interview process required to become a university lecturer. Consequently, the process often results in unsuitable appointments. To obtain appropriately qualified academic staff, RUPP has recently begun to employ contract-based staff using its own money earned from tuition fees.

In general, older faculty members tend to have poorer qualifications (mainly local degrees) and weaker English language skills than newer staff (foreign-trained and with more advanced degrees) (see Table 13.2). Only one in ten of all RUPP

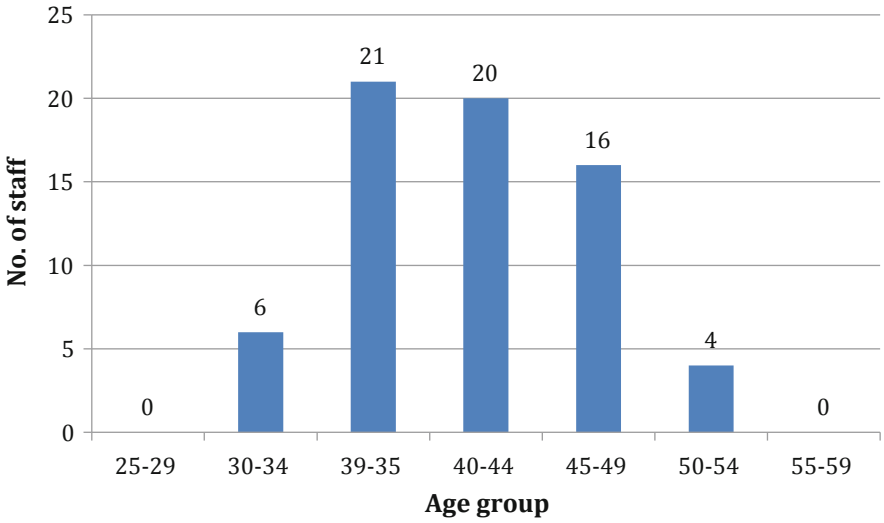

Fig. 13.2 Age profile: RUPP Govt. staff with PhD

academic staff has a PhD qualification, and none of these staff members is more than 55 years of age (see Fig. 13.2).

RUPP has many staff members compared to the number of students enrolled. Academic staff (MA/MSc + PhD), both government and contracted employees, total nearly 1000. Government staff salaries have increased regularly and come with various allowances and benefits but still do not provide a liveable wage for researchers and professors. Faculty members do, however, have the security of a job for life and even a small pension. Working at RUPP also provides opportunities for academic staff members to apply for research grants and scholarships that are only available to public employees. Government salaries remain a significant problem at RUPP because many staff members must take on additional employment, typically in the form of other teaching duties, to enable them to support their families. They have little time for engaging in research.

The absence of postgraduate trained senior staff is the reverse of what typically exists in most HEIs in more developed countries. It is, of course, a legacy of the Khmer Rouge period. By now, many of those who perished would have become experienced academics and administrators. They would have been available to mentor young faculty returning from overseas with advanced degrees, many of whom now do not continue their research after they return.

RUPP's unusual staff age-qualification profile has also been affected by the selection of new staff. New appointments now tend to be more qualified than senior faculty, which is a challenge to Cambodia's hierarchical society. So, reforms to human resource management systems that include performance evaluation are viewed as a threat to some in senior positions. Managing human resources at RUPP also faces many challenges not faced by newer institutions. As one of the

oldest public HEIs in Cambodia, its faculty members include a large number of civil servants over whom the University does not have direct management control. The situation is slowly changing as older members of staff reach the retirement age. As intended in the Minister's reform agenda, donor assistance has been used to improve governance, specifically human resource management, by upgrading RUPP's personnel office. MOEYS has already adopted performance evaluation guidelines, and basic faculty performance management at RUPP has begun. This experience has been shared with other public HEIs. Improvements in the University's research productivity provide evidence of the institution's growing capacity.

13.5.4 Financial Management

RUPP's status as a public university under the control of MoEYS fundamentally affects its finances. Its financial management is affected by, on the one hand, the extent of external control of its finances by MoEYS and the MoEF, and, on the other hand, its institutional capacity for internal financial management.

Regarding external control of its finances, RUPP's status as a public university, as distinct from a PAI, allows it to enjoy the benefits of not having to pay basic salaries to its government employees. Neither is it required to pay utility charges to other public agencies for water, electricity, or rent. It is, however, obliged to provide fee-free places to students awarded government scholarships based on the results of the grade 12 examination. About 20% of the University's revenue comes from the Government, mainly in the form of direct grants for staff salaries, subsidies for the use of public utilities, and, since 2007, program-based funding for initiatives such as teacher upgrading, infrastructure maintenance, consumables, and study tours. A further 70% of its revenue comes from fee-paying students. The University has been able to levy tuition fees since 2000. The remaining 10% of its revenue comes from research grants and grants made by international donors.

RUPP allocates the funds it receives in areas such as employing contract staff, renovating plant, the purchase of laboratory and classroom materials, and the provision of research support, but in doing so it must strictly adhere to rules and guidelines set by the MoEF on the expenditure of funds from the national budget. Government policy prevents the accumulation of cash reserves, which is a standard provision for public universities worldwide (Hayden et al., 2015). Very often, though, the regulatory controls on expenditures are not sufficiently practical to cover all areas of necessary expenditure by a university. It is also the case that official salary levels approved by the Government are too low. So faculty members are allowed to supplement their official salaries by undertaking additional work, whether outside the University or by accepting other teaching responsibilities at the University.

Regarding internal financial management, RUPP's capacity is greatly affected by its human resource limitations. In an evaluation of RUPP's internal financial management completed by the World Bank in 2015, 12 out of 15 different aspects of its

financial management system were judged to be at the lowest level. These weaknesses were hardly surprising considering legacy issues referred to earlier concerning RUPP's human resources. Other public HEIs are similarly affected, as was reported by the MoEYS Director General of Higher Education in mid-2016 (Maket al., 2019, p. 22). The World Bank evaluation led to recommendations for a well-structured, integrated business management system to replace the informal and unreliable procedures that had developed ad hoc at RUPP over many years. These recommendations were included in a national policy statement for higher education governance and finance that was issued in August 2017. Specific actions recommended included the need to improve the accounting software and management information systems of all public HEIs, and the need to strengthen the capacity of finance, accounting, and auditing staff members at these institutions. The new policy also proposed an increase in public funding for higher education, more use of performance-based grants, an extension of the right of public HEIs to vary tuition fees, and an increase in funding to support research and innovation. The process whereby this policy was developed was commendable, starting with the Minister's reform agenda, then involving experimental intervention at RUPP, and finally leading to recommendations and the development of new evidence-based policy. The next step will be to see the implementation of the policy. In this regard, an observation made by Mak et al. (2019) is of possible relevance: "in practice, talk of systemic and systematic reforms towards good institutional financial management and increased public funding have not been supported by action" (p. x).

13.6 Discussion

The previous sections of this chapter have described the many challenges RUPP faces in managing its human and financial resources. How it responds to these challenges may have significance beyond the University, and its experience could benefit other public HEIs in the sector. It should be noted, though, that there may be difficulties when trying to draw upon the experiences of one institution for the sake of generalizing to a whole sector. As Carden (2009) cautioned: "Every circumstance is different; every situation presents its own complications of need and choice, danger and advantage for researchers and for policymakers" (p. 50).

Many of RUPP's financial and human resource management problems are related to its inability to manage many aspects of its administration independently. But it is not the first Cambodian state-owned institution to face this problem, and so can learn from the experience of others. One example is the Phnom Penh Water Supply Authority, which is now an award-winning, internationally recognized leader in the water supply industry. Its transformation was mainly due to the leadership of its director, who acknowledged that the most critical factor in his ability to reform the dysfunctional organization was obtaining autonomy from the Government: "The autonomous status provides me [with] the right to take the initiative officially and legally. It gives me the right to make the decisions on the appointment of the staff

and managers. Autonomy lets me make a clear decision on our investment. This really makes for success" (Ek, 2009, p. 11).

International experience from OECD and other ASEAN countries indicates a clear trend towards greater autonomy being given to public HEIs. Public HEIs in Malaysia, Thailand, and Vietnam, for example, have all been given "significantly increased levels of institutional autonomy" (Hayden et al. 2015, p. 4). Autonomy is a critical concept in the Minister's reform agenda. It is seen as the first step in strengthening governance, a strategy supported by a major comparative analysis of HEI autonomy in five regional countries.

> The studies in general support the idea that institutions have become more independent in their operations, enjoy the freedom to appoint teachers, and take decisions regarding promotions. They are also free to mobilize resources and utilize the additionally mobilized resources for the good of the institution as they (the governing body) see fit. (Varghese & Martin, 2013, p. 43)

The study concluded, however, that autonomy does not automatically lead to an improvement in the quality of services proved by universities and that much depends on strong institutional leadership as well as coherent policies and cooperation between different ministries. The experience of governance reform in Indonesia, which also has a system of horizontally shared governance like that of Cambodia, is instructive: "Inconsistencies appeared between the policies and regulations pursued by the different ministries at the national level, which ultimately led to the failure of the governance reform" (Varghese & Martin, 2013, p. 43). The study also found that, in less developed countries such as Cambodia, autonomy tended to be less substantive and more related to procedural matters. Countries in which higher education has traditionally been managed centrally by the state may require a phased rather than a unilateral introduction of autonomy.

The experience of other Cambodian public universities that have made the transition to PAI status is instructive, but not yet encouraging. A recent investigation that collected the views of six national decision-makers, 24 institutional decision-makers, and 61 faculty members at two PAI universities concluded that, though PAI status had permitted significant changes in the governance structure, in practice the predominance of ministry and staff representatives on governing boards had meant that governance remained "centralized on the old model" (Touch, Mak, & You, 2014). The investigation recommended that the PAI law should be amended to allow for greater participation by external stakeholders, and for a clarification of the role of the rector as the one who executes the policies of the governing board rather than the one who directs the policies of the board. A telling indication that PAI status is not providing many of the anticipated advantages, including increased autonomy, is that two institutions, The Royal Academy and The Royal School of Administration, have renounced their PAI status. Other institutions also appear to be considering this option.

Strengths can also be weaknesses. RUPP's longevity and size give it credibility but also create inertia concerning change. The security of having a public-sector job attracts staff but also makes it difficult to motivate, discipline, or remove them. Many

years of appointments based upon government selection rather than institutional choice have resulted in too many staff members who do not have the necessary skills to perform their assigned roles. Even if increased autonomy is granted, reforming RUPP's human resources will not be easy. Hiring new staff will be much more comfortable than firing senior staff who have been loyal to the University for decades, even if now considered to be unqualified. Fundamental reforms to human resource management will be necessary, such as formal job descriptions, performance-based long-term contracts for competent staff, professorship rankings, and salary supplements. Some of these reforms have begun to be implemented. Reforming financial management may be less traumatic since the changes required in this regard can often be accomplished mainly through the automation of procedures.

13.7 Conclusion

This chapter has shown that reforming Cambodia's universities is possible in circumstances where there is committed ministerial leadership and an increasing number of highly competent academic managers. But there are numerous obstacles, including an unfortunate historical legacy, a fragmented higher education sector, resistance from entrenched vested interests, an unclear policy context, and bureaucratic difficulties involving MoEYS and MoEF.

The next few years will be critical for the future of the sector, and the University. The chapter has highlighted the importance of *genuine* autonomy for institutions like RUPP to enable them to manage their affairs efficiently and effectively. Ministries and other government agencies with managerial responsibilities for individual universities need to be ready to grant autonomy to public HEIs, and pubic HEIs need to have sufficient capacity and ability to be able to handle increased autonomy. Autonomy refers here to organizational autonomy, financial autonomy, personnel autonomy, and academic freedom, all of which are prerequisites for progress and positive changes in the higher education sector. All stakeholders must also understand, though, that the autonomy does not mean disregard for the priorities of the State and the values of the Cambodian people.

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Chapter 14
Accrediting Higher Education Institutions in Cambodia: A Baseline Study of Graduate School Programs

Chhang Rath and Nary Tao

14.1 Introduction

After the UN-sponsored elections in 1993, Cambodia began to transition from a centrally planned to a market-oriented economy. Reform rapidly ensued, including in the higher education sector, which in 1997 was the focus of a National Strategic Plan for Higher Education. With only eight public universities in Cambodia in 1997, the capacity of the sector to absorb a sudden increase in demand for higher education qualifications was severely constrained. The Government responded by enabling the establishment of Cambodia's first private university in 1997. Investors subsequently rushed to fund the establishment of new private universities. By 2005, there were 45 higher education institutions (HEIs) in Cambodia, of which 32 were privately owned (Un & Sok, 2014, p. 72). Demand continued to surge, and by 2014 the number of HEIs had increased to 105, of which 66 were privately owned (Un & Sok, 2014, pp. 72–73). Currently, in 2020, there are 116 HEIs in Cambodia, of which 78 are privately owned.

The focus in this chapter is the status of graduate school programs in Cambodian HEIs. As the economy expanded during the late 1990s and early 2000s, demand for master's and PhD qualifications began to boom, especially in areas related to business, finance, and management. By the late 2000s, however, concern was being widely expressed about the implications of this boom for scholarly quality. In 2009, the Prime Minister was even moved to declare that it had become far too easy to obtain a master's or PhD qualification in Cambodia, adding that some PhD students were hiring other persons to write their theses, and that some never attended

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classes or engaged properly with their studies. These concerns prompted a review of graduate school programs by the Accreditation Committee of Cambodia (ACC). Preparation for the review began in 2011, and the final report was submitted to the Committee in 2014.

This chapter reports on the substantive findings to emerge from the review. These findings continue to be relevant to graduate training up to the present time. Though many of the more egregious practices identified at the time were subsequently extinguished by means of legislation and regulatory controls, the potential for them to resurface in another form remains an ongoing threat to the integrity of the graduate school programs in Cambodia's higher education sector.

The chapter begins with a short account of the relevant developments in the higher education sector in Cambodia. Literature related to the conduct of quality assurance reviews is then briefly reviewed. The main part of the paper concerns the design, implementation, and results to emerge from the ACC's review regarding the quality of graduate school programs in Cambodia in 2014.

14.2 Development of the Sector

An obvious consequence of the dramatic expansion in the size of the higher education sector during the late 1990s and early 2000s was that quality was compromised. Many of the new private universities, for example, had commenced operations with limited resources to support them. Some had no more than a single building. Most were affected by staffing shortages, with teaching faculty shuffling between different universities to meet teaching program delivery needs. Of major concern was that these universities set financial gain against quality, resulting in a surplus of opportunities for students to obtain degrees in areas that did not reflect current labor market needs (Ford, 2006). In the words of one international observer, these universities were "plagued with difficulties" (Ford, 2006, p. 10). As their number increased, branch campus networks began to be developed across the country. By 2011, there were 59 private HEIs; there were as many as 111 operational campuses. In general, these campuses operated without strict licensing and gate-keeping constraints, and with inadequate policies relating to student admission. Some institutions were, for example, admitting underqualified students to 2-year associate degree programs and then allowing them to transfer to bachelor's degree programs. Many programs were also being taught by under-qualified teaching faculty, and few members of teaching faculty had access to adequate teaching resources (World Bank, 2010).

The situation with public HEIs was not all that much better. According to Ford (2006), a critical issue for many of these institutions was that they were "centrally controlled by the government with limited resources, political interference, and bureaucracy in terms of teaching staff recruitment, leadership appointments, and program approval" (p. 10). Control was exercised through various ministries and other state instrumentalities, including the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport

(MoEYS) and the Ministry of Labor and Vocational Training (MoLVT). It was not until about 2014 that there were sufficient resources which enable them to begin to implement a national process for monitoring and evaluating their performance.

In 1997, to identify public entities that would be permitted to function in a quasi-autonomous manner, the Government introduced a special category of public institution, referred to as a public administrative institution (PAI). Various public universities subsequently sought and were granted PAI status, which gave them more control over their governance and the management of their resources. The governing boards of these universities were to include the rector (or university president) and a representative from each of the relevant parent ministry, the Ministry of Economy and Finance, the Office of Council of Ministers, and the university staff (administrators and academics). Other stakeholders could also be members of these governing boards, but PAI universities continued to be managed in a manner not much different from how they had previously been managed (Mak, 2008).

In 2003, the Government established the Accreditation Committee of Cambodia (ACC) with a mandate to administer the accreditation to all HEIs. It was also determined that the ACC should develop and promote high standards across the higher education sector. The Committee was made accountable to the Office of the Council of Ministers, with a representative from MoEYS as its chair. Later, in 2013, the Committee became fully integrated with MoEYS.

Over time, the ACC has contributed in various ways to the "ferment of reform" in the higher education sector in Cambodia. Among other things, it assisted with the establishment of a credit-based scheme for higher education programs, and it established minimum standards and guidelines for the accreditation of HEIs. Its work was well supported by the World Bank. Various foreign experts also assisted it to have an impact on the sector.

14.3 Quality Assurance

Quality assurance has the potential to play a crucial role in ensuring the ongoing development and viability of a national higher education sector. It provides a basis for stakeholders to have confidence in the effectiveness of the sector and appropriateness of the use of any public resources. Quality assurance reviews are essential as a basis for the accreditation of HEIs and individual academic programs. When conducted at a program level, they typically focus on the quantity and quality of inputs, outputs, and support services, including ICT support, libraries, and so forth. When conducted at an institutional level, their focus is more likely to be institutional organization and administration processes, as well as considerations relating to the quality of outcomes (van Vught & Westerheijden, 2012). National quality assurance processes also have a role in protecting students from local and/or foreign degree mills, together with any other practices that result in poor academic performance being overlooked (Singh, 2010; van Vught & Westerheijden, 2012; Hou, 2014).

Quality assurance reviews are conducted internally as well as externally. Internal reviews concern the processes of quality assurance employed by an institution for the purpose of its institutional improvement. External reviews relate more to questions of institutional accountability. Accountability refers here to demonstrating compliance with policies or regulations and control functions. External reviews tend to proceed based on compliance with a checklist relating to relevant documentation and casual observation of an institution's facilities (Harvey & Newton, 2007).

It is crucially important for members of an external evaluation team to possess research-informed expertise in teaching and learning, together with professional experience of quality evaluation (Harvey & Newton, 2007). It is also important that, at an institutional level, there are faculty members who have received training in quality reviews and who are informed about quality assurance through participation in international and regional quality assurance networks. These networks enable a sharing of information, resources, and expertise (Hou, 2014).

There is a need to achieve a balance between quality assurance for accountability and quality assurance for improvement purposes (Kristensen, 2010; Singh, 2010). Van Vught and Westerheijden (2012), and Newton (2010) state that quality assurance for accountability tends to overshadow quality assurance for improvement purposes. Houston and Paewai (2013) claimed, however, that the purpose of all quality assurance is improvement in the quality of teaching, learning, and research. Ewell (2010) commented that quality assurance reviews needed to assist in redressing an imbalance between teaching over research. Amaral and Rosa (2010) added that quality assurance reviews tend to promote accreditation and stratification rather than quality enhancement. Kristensen (2010) suggested that quality assurance systems needed to incorporate a variety of methods, including self-assessment and peer-review reports, given that such methods have the potential to provide useful information to an institution undergoing a quality assurance review.

A quality culture is one where the importance of quality and quality assurance in the day-to-day life of an institution has been identified as being important (Kristensen, 2010). A quality culture may be either reactive or responsive (Tavares et al., 2015). A reactive quality culture is associated with accountability and compliance, whereas a responsive quality culture is related to improvement, as well as accountability and compliance. It has been claimed that effective quality assurance mechanisms are enhanced through the professional commitment of faculty members, particularly through a proactive interaction between students and their lecturers (Neal, 1998). It has also been claimed that quality culture is effective when it involves not only open communications but also cooperation between internal and external quality assurance mechanisms, and close connection with the regular work of academic staff (Kleijnen et al., 2014). Building an institutional quality culture by allowing various actors to participate in the process is an effective way of achieving a common value-driven purpose (Vettori & Rammel, 2014).

Effective quality assurance systems tend to be associated with having a strong financial and academic staff base, and with not being under the direct control of a government (Odhiambo, 2014). Houston and Paewai (2013) add that it is crucially important to have a quality assurance system that permits the institution to make

autonomous decisions regarding its core values and the evaluation of its own mission, as opposed to having decisions made by the government. Less effective quality assurance reviews appear to be those that position academic staff as the passive recipients of quality assurance mechanism designs, even though they are directly affected by such mechanisms (Houston & Paewai, 2013).

Quality assurance systems in Asian countries have developed rapidly over the past decade. Their establishment has had two primary motives: ensuring the quality of institutional programs and enhancing the global competitiveness of HEIs. Hou et al. (2015a) surveyed 17 Asia-Pacific Quality Network (APQN) members about their use of the International Network of Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education (INQAAHE) and APQN guidelines (Blackmur, 2008; International Network of Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education [INQAAHE], 2013; Asia-Pacific Quality Network [APQN], 2010). Over 50% of respondents reported that their quality assurance systems involved external evaluations controlled by national governments. This kind of direct government control was reported to permit quality assurance agencies to lose autonomy over their quality operations.

To promote internationalization, a number of universities in Asian nations have begun to collaborate with prestigious foreign universities through joint graduate degree programs (Hou et al., 2015b). In this context, quality assurance systems play a vital role in raising standards and facilitating the comparability of qualifications. Linking the learning outcomes and using outcomes-based assessment for cross-national qualifications can enable comparability of standards between different national higher education systems (Bohlinger, 2012; Tao, 2016). Countries in the East Asian region should also stipulate national regulations for joint degree programs, given that there is a lack of quality assurance mechanisms across the region for cross-border higher education (Hou et al., 2015c).

In Cambodia, the ACC conducts both institutional and program-level reviews. At a program level, it has promulgated criteria addressing six dimensions for Foundation Year Course Assessment, these being management and governance; strategic planning; curriculum; academic staff; teaching and learning resources; and student admission. At an institutional level, it has promulgated nine dimensions for institutional accreditation, including vision, mission, and goals; management and governance; academic staff; academic program; student services; learning resources; physical facilities; financial plan and management; and internal quality assurance. In addition, the ACC has required HEIs to establish an internal quality assurance unit to conduct self-assessment reviews focused on institutional quality (Un & Sok, 2014). To date, however, only a small number of HEIs have established these units.

14.4 A Review of Graduate Programs

In 2011, the ACC commenced a process for reviewing the quality of graduate school programs in HEIs in Cambodia. The review employed a mixed-methods approach, involving an analysis of both quantitative and qualitative data. The use of a

mixed-methods approach compensated for weaknesses in relying solely on either quantitative or qualitative methods (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004; Bryman, 2006; Greene, 2007; Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2009; Tashakkori et al., 2013; Creswell, 2014).

14.4.1 Survey Questionnaire

The first phase of the review involved use of a survey questionnaire. The goal here was to examine the status of graduate school programs in the higher education sector. The questionnaire had two sections, one concerning general information about the graduate school programs, and the other concerning the status of the graduate school programs. Once developed, it was sent to 42 public and private HEIs from across Cambodia. Thirteen of these institutions were in Phnom Penh; five were in Battambang; four were in Banteay Meanchey; four were in Kampong Cham; four in Siem Reap; three were in Takeo; three were in Preah Sihanouk; two were in Kampot; two were in Svay Rieng; one was in Pursat; and one was in Prey Veng. The survey was administered by ACC staff. The 42 respondents included deans of graduate schools or holders of other equivalent positions.

The survey data showed that 63% of the institutions surveyed did have a separate graduate school; 67% had a governing board of the graduate school; 72% had an executive committee; 66% had an academic committee; 58% had a research committee; 77% had an office of research; and 53% had guidelines for selecting members of these committees. This profile suggested that the management of graduate school programs was problematic for some of the HEIs because of the lack of any management structure for monitoring the operation of the programs. A comparison of private and public HEIs showed that private HEIs were generally more ready than public ones in terms of the establishment of a management structure for their graduate schools. In general, the management structure of most graduate schools' public HEIs appeared to be weak. The governing board of the graduate school at these institutions was often embedded in the governance structure for the institution. Private HEIs, because of their higher level of financial autonomy, seemed to be more ready to establish a management structure specific to their graduate school. A poorly developed governance structure was seen as being more likely to impact adversely on the quality of graduate programs offered by the public HEIs.

The most popular of the graduate programs were in Business Administration, with 80% of all survey respondents reporting that their institution hosted a graduate program in this area. Other graduate programs were in Education (40%), Law and Public Affairs (31%), Social Sciences and International Relations (26%), Tourism (23%), and Economics (20%). The least popular areas for graduate programs were in Rural Development and Project Management, TESOL, and Technology/Information Technology (14%), followed by Arts and Humanities, and Finance and Banking (11%), Mathematics, Sciences and Engineering, and Agriculture (9%), Public Health, and Communication and Media (3%). This result suggested that the

establishment of graduate school programs in Cambodia was not entirely driven by the labor market forces. Various of the professional areas that were not well represented were also areas of employment where graduates with postgraduate qualifications were needed to meet social demand.

The medium of instruction in most graduate school programs was a mix of Khmer and English (71%). Khmer was the only language spoken in 20% of the programs. This result indicated that there was no uniform policy for language of instruction at the graduate program level. Many graduate schools did, however, consider including English in the criteria for admission to their programs because knowledge of English provided students with more opportunity to access information from international peer-reviewed journals.

The graduate school programs surveyed reported that they employed both Cambodian and expatriate academic staff. With regard to the Cambodian academic staff, 57% had master's degrees, and 21% had PhDs. Regarding the expatriate academic staff, 12% had master's degrees and 10% had PhDs.

It was also found that 24% of the graduate school staff had 10 years and more experience in teaching and supervising in graduate school programs. Another 45% had 4 to 9 years of teaching and supervising experience, while 31% had 1 to 5 years of teaching and supervising experience. This result indicated that experience in teaching and supervising students at the graduate school was not deep across most of the graduate programs surveyed.

The quantitative data also revealed that graduate students at the master's level were mainly studying Business Administration (6706 students), Law and Public Administration (4627 students), Finance and Banking (1343 students), Rural Development and Project Management (1225 students), and Education (1056 students). The four graduate programs with the lowest numbers (below 30 students) of master's degree enrolments were Agriculture, Economics, Communication and Media, and Public Health. It was also found that the highest numbers of PhD enrolments were in Business Administration (225 students), and Law and Public Administration (129 students). Then came Social Sciences and International Relations (64 students), and Education (13 students). Few PhD students were enrolled in areas of Agriculture, Economics, Communication and Media, and Public Health.

Regarding facilities for supporting research and learning activities, 63% of graduate schools reported that they had research centers for students, and 41% reported having an E-library. Nearly all (97%) had Internet networks to support student research, and about 88% had public filing of theses/dissertations. About one-half (53%) had printed journals to publish research findings from faculty staff and graduate students, but only 24% had E-journals supported by other HEIs and inter-library loan systems. This result reflected the fact that E-journals and inter-library loan systems were not generally available at HEIs in Cambodia. This situation related to the fact that there was little or almost no external funding support for graduate school programs, and public funding to support graduate school programs or research in priority areas of studies was negligible at the time.

Nearly all (97%) of the graduate schools had criteria for admission to a master's program, together with guidelines for writing master's theses. Most (85%) also had

guidelines for a master's thesis examination. About 50% had criteria for student admission to PhD candidacy, a research policy for academic staff of graduate programs, guidelines for writing PhD theses, and for PhD thesis/dissertation examination. A large proportion (73%) had a research policy for all graduate students.

It was also found that 85% of the graduate schools had criteria for master's thesis examination, and 87% of them had a policy on the length of time allowed for the completion of a graduate degree program. Most (73%) had communication systems linked from one graduate school program to other graduate school programs. About 65% had codes of ethical conduct for academic staff, and 63% had a strategic plan for graduate school programs. About 50% had criteria for PhD thesis/dissertation examination and policies for intellectual property rights and plagiarism, while 43% had policies and services for students with special needs. Even though some graduate schools did not have these policies, they still provided services. Only 24% had policies governing joint graduate degree programs. This result indicated that guidelines for supporting research and teaching remained problematic.

Regarding financial sources and management, 94% of the graduate schools had published tuition fees for master's students, whereas only 59% had published tuition fees for PhD students. HEIs had little or no external funds for supporting PhD training programs, and only a small amount of government funds to support research in priority areas of study. Though universities often referred to research as one of their core functions, only 44% of the institutions surveyed had adequate funding allocations for academic staff to do research (44%), and only one-fifth of them reported having funds to support their graduate students to do research.

In relation to partnerships with other institutions, the quantitative data showed that 77% of the graduate schools had partnerships with international HEIs, but partnerships between local HEIs were generally much less common (only 38%). Partnerships between HEIs and local NGOs and industries, as well as with international NGOs and industries, were often not pursued. Networks between local and international researchers were also small in number (36%). Exchange programs were reported to exist for teachers (55%) and students (53%). This result indicated a negligible incidence of partnerships between HEIs and both local and international NGOs and industries.

With respect to the curriculum development, about 70% of the graduate schools reported that they had policies for graduate school program curriculum development and revision, and these programs generally also reviewed and updated their curricula on a regular basis. It was found, however, that there was no clear and demonstrable process for developing and reviewing curricula, particularly in terms of integrating graduate attributes into curricula. This result indicated that there was a lack of evidence showing the process of curriculum development in the graduate school programs.

14.4.2 Interview Findings

The second phase of the review required use of an unstructured interview. The goal here was to obtain further insights into the participants' views on key features of quality assurance mechanisms at their institutions. Open-ended questions were utilized in an unstructured interview with each of the 42 participants. The purpose was to develop an in-depth understanding of their practices, issues, and concerns regarding quality assurance mechanisms in their graduate school programs. Thematic analysis, following standard guidelines for the interpretation of qualitative data, was used to analyze the interview transcripts (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Patton, 2002; Gibbs, 2007; Yin, 2009). Inductive coding enabled the identification of themes from the data (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006). Despite the process of analysis being time-consuming, it brought to light several important themes.

All participants reported that their graduate schools had been established under the umbrella of a university or an institute. This meant that universities and institutes had no separate governing board for their graduate schools. The participants also reported that their institutions did not have separate graduate offices, and so the management of graduate students, lecturers, and study programs fell under the supervision of the undergraduate academic office. The usual justification here was that graduate school programs were too small to support the existence of a separate graduate school office. Because of these arrangements, there were no separate internal regulations and guidelines for graduate schools. Contributing to this situation was the fact that there was a lack of government funding for graduate schools. This situation reflected the ineffective nature of the internal and external quality assurance mechanisms. Odhiambo's (2014) argument that effective quality assurance systems are associated with having a strong financial base was strongly supported by the reports from the participants.

Many participants also reported that their graduate schools did not have sufficient guidelines, policies, and regulations in place to support the processes of running graduate school programs. Guidelines and policies regarding the timeframe for degree completion for master's degree or PhD programs were, therefore, not clearly specified. There was a need identified for the ACC or MoEYS to provide technical assistance in developing relevant policies and guidelines. The claims expressed resonated with a view that cooperation between an arm of government and a HEI could build a quality culture (Kleijnen et al., 2014) by allowing various actors to participate in the institutional community to achieve a common value-driven purpose (Vettori & Rammel, 2014).

Some participants reported that there was a critical issue associated with lecturer employment and mobility for branch campuses located in provinces. This issue mainly concerned the difficulties associated with maintaining and assuring quality of the programs because most lecturers had their homes in Phnom Penh. Lecturers went to the provinces solely to teach and had no time for student consultations on assignments or for research activities, or even meetings with other faculty members

and management teams. There was, therefore, a lack of meaningful interaction between the students and their lecturers. This result was in line with Neal's (1998) argument that a proactive interaction between students and their lecturers plays an important role to contributing to a high-quality education at the graduate level.

Many participants also commented that there were some difficulties with the implementation of the credit-based system, given that there was a lack of consistency between the credit system guidelines of the ACC and those produced by MoEYS. They also explained that many HEIs did not receive credits from other institutions because the standards varied significantly between different HEIs. These comments indicated that there was inconsistency between the two credit-based systems, making it difficult for the participants to determine credit hours for their graduate school programs.

Many participants also stated that there was the lack of a national qualifications framework for recognition of degrees awarded by foreign universities. HEIs were reluctant, therefore, to introduce joint degrees or sandwich programs involving international and local HEIs. It was also reported that the process of recognition of foreign degrees was time-consuming and costly. These findings suggested a need for the ACC to develop the national qualifications framework for recognition of foreign universities' awards. This insight is consistent with support by Hou et al. (2015c) who found that Asian countries needed to stipulate national regulations for joint degree programs, given the lack of quality assurance mechanisms for cross-border higher education.

In addition to reporting the key features of quality assurance mechanisms at their institutions, all participants made recommendations for enhancing the quality assurance mechanisms. Most commented that the ACC and MoEYS urgently needed to develop minimum standards, as well as guidelines and indicators for accreditation, for graduate school programs. They also stated that HEIs should be well informed in advance regarding the accreditation process for graduate schools so that they have sufficient time to prepare their graduate programs for an external evaluation.

Some participants also recommended that English be included in the criteria for student admission to graduate school programs, although it was argued that students' theses/dissertations should be written in the Khmer language. They stated that English was an important language as most books and journals came from the English-speaking academic world. This recommendation aligned with Ahrens and McNamara's (2013) view that English language should be the medium of instruction in all Cambodian HEIs, mainly because it would enable access to a wider variety of academic materials.

All participants recommended that the ACC should pay great attention to improving the quality of graduate school programs. They suggested that master's students should be required to write well-supervised theses, followed by a strict examination by a credible committee convened in conjunction with professional bodies and associations organized by the graduate school in question.

It was also suggested that PhD students should be required to publicize the date of their thesis presentations at least 3 months before their oral defense presentation, and that there should be a severe punishment for those who committed plagiarism or

other form of academic misconduct. HEIs had to be penalized for allowing students to pass even though they had committed plagiarism. Moreover, graduate schools had to guard against passing low-quality graduates from their programs. Thus, the national quality assurance mechanism played an important role to protect students from degree mills, passing low-quality graduates from the program (Singh 2010; van Vught & Westerheijden, 2012; Hou, 2014).

All participants proposed the need to improve the competency of the staff in the ACC who were tasked with evaluating graduate school programs. The participants were concerned about the competency of staff members from the Department of Accreditation of Graduate Programs, given that these staff members played a vital role in the process of accreditation. When the ACC staff members possessed expertise in pedagogy and professional experience of quality evaluation, such expertise would enable them to have a better decision-making during the evaluation processes (Harvey & Newton, 2007). The participants also recommended that cooperation with foreign universities through the APQN or AUN would help to deal with this issue. Providing ACC staff members with opportunities through taking part in regional quality assurance networks would also help them to enhance their quality assurance capacity. This participation would provide them with opportunities to learn good practices from other countries' quality assurance agencies by means of sharing information, resources, and expertise (Hou, 2014).

Most participants also recommended that the ACC, in collaboration with the MoEYS, should conduct some training workshops for academic staff who were responsible for the graduate school programs. The purpose here would be to broaden their understanding of the process of graduate school management in their higher education institutions.

14.5 Conclusion

The findings of the review indicated that the graduate school system in Cambodia was slowly evolving, but in a highly uneven manner. Some graduate schools appeared to have clear standards, policies, and guidelines, while others did not or were still working on their development. The findings also showed that there remained major concerns about the quality of graduate school programs. It was, therefore, evident that there existed an urgent need to establish standards, policies, and guidelines for accreditation of graduate school programs across the higher education sector.

There was also much concern about the competency of staff members from the ACC's Department of Accreditation of Graduate Programs, which was reported to still be in an embryonic stage in terms of the quality assurance and accreditation of graduate school programs. The key question was whether the Department would seek competent individuals to perform this crucial task to enhance the quality of graduate school programs in Cambodia. To enhance the quality of quality assurance operations, Hou et al. (2015a, p. 105) have recommended that Asian quality

assurance agencies should adopt a number of strategies, including appointing excellent evaluators; developing more effective programs for evaluator training, deepening the extent of collaboration with other quality assurance agencies; engaging more in research activities on higher education and related issues; and attempting to stabilize the financial base of the relevant institutions.

The investigation of graduate school programs over the period from 2011 to 2014 made an important contribution to an understanding of the performance of graduate school programs in Cambodian HEIs. The findings served as a reference point or benchmark for institutional self-review regarding the quality of programs being offered. It also informed a revision in 2015 of the ACC's assessment tools, which are now called the National Standards, and of the development of various new standards, policies, and guidelines for monitoring the quality of graduate programs in Cambodian HEIs, including the Cambodian National Qualification Framework (CNQF) in 2014, and the Standards for Doctoral Program Accreditation in 2018. The implementation of these standards for doctoral program accreditation will promote the quality of doctoral education and will assure that the doctoral programs offered in Cambodia are comparable to doctoral degrees across the region as well as internationally.

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Part III
Stakeholder Inclusion Issues

Chapter 15
Cambodian Women and Girls: Challenges to and Opportunities for Their Participation in Higher Education

Rinna Bunry and Karen Walker

15.1 Introduction

Achieving enrolment equality between boys and girls in basic education has been a distinctive achievement of the Cambodian education system. At the upper-secondary level, and especially within the higher education sector, there is, however, more progress to be made. Achieving enrolment equality across all sectors will not automatically mean that there is equality of access to opportunity in many personal, professional, and political realms of life. Enrolment equality will not, for example, ensure that women have the right to an education, that they have the right within education to a gender-aware and supportive environment, and that they have the right through education to access meaningful education outcomes that link education equality with broader processes of gender justice (Colclough, 2008; Subrahmanian, 2005). Cultural norms and assumptions need to change for women in Cambodia to be able to enjoy a full range of these rights.

The focus of this chapter is women's access to and retention in the higher education sector in Cambodia. The chapter begins with an account of the national context. Female enrolment trends since the early 2000s are then reviewed. The main part of the chapter is devoted to addressing the challenges faced by girls and women in Cambodian society as they seek to achieve gender parity in participation in higher education.

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15.2 National Context

A critical early driver for gender equality in the education system in Cambodia was the country's need to become more economically competitive through achieving higher levels of participation in education. In 1993, the pivotal importance of education to Cambodia's economic development and progress was explicitly recognised by the International Committee on the Reconstruction of Cambodia (Pit & Ford, 2004, p. 342). A focus on the importance of education to the nation's economic development and national reconstruction was evident in numerous official documents and statements at the time. There also existed a commitment to recognising the rights of individuals regardless of their gender, age, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, religion, disability, or geographical location. Cambodia's Constitution of 1993 declared that "Every citizen has the right to access [a quality] education of at least 9 years in public schools free of charge" (Article 31). Cambodia had already (in 1992) ratified the *Convention on the Rights of the Child*. Against this background, various legislative and regulatory instruments were adopted to enshrine the right of girls to have as much access to basic education (grades 1 to 9) as boys.

The pressure to achieve gender equality was reinforced in the early 2000s when Cambodia signed on to UNESCO's *Education for All* campaign. In 2003, the Government issued an *Education for All (EFA) National Plan 2003–2015* (Royal Government of Cambodia [RGC], 2003) that presented an agenda for addressing the challenges associated with achieving the goals set out by *Education for All* in Cambodia. While not solely concerned with gender representation in the education system, the Plan was instrumental in identifying the extent of underrepresentation by girls in the education system, and by females in the management of the education system. It committed the Government to the need to ensure that all children, particularly girls, would have access to free and compulsory primary education of good quality by 2015 and that full gender equality in the education system would also be achieved by that date. A series of Education Strategic Plans (ESPs) (MoEYS 2004, 2005, 2010, 2014) then sought to reinforce progress towards the attainment of these goals.

More recently, since 2015, Cambodia has committed to the *Sustainable Development Goals* (SDGs) set by the United Nations for achievement by 2030. One of these goals (Goal 4) relates specifically to quality education. It seeks to ensure that "all girls and boys complete free primary and secondary education by 2030", and that there should be equal access to affordable vocational training, the elimination of gender and wealth disparities, and the attainment of universal access to quality higher education (United National Development Program [UNDP], n.d.). In the current ESP (2019–2023), these aspirations have been translated into a roadmap of specific strategies to be implemented over the coming years (MoEYS, 2019a, pp. 17–18).

The Ministry of Women's Affairs (MoWA) has also sought to promote gender equality in the education system in Cambodia. It has issued a series of 5-year strategic plans named *Neary Rattanak* (in translation, "women are precious

gems"). The first plan was published in 1999 (Ministry of Women's and Veteran's Affairs, 1999). Subsequent *Neary Rattanak* plans were labelled II (2005–2009), III (2009–2013), and IV (2014–2018) (Ministry of Women's Affairs [MoWA], 2004, 2009, 2014a). These Plans articulated not only priority areas for the education of girls and women but also the need to establish more supportive societal attitudes towards women and girls in Cambodian society. *Neary Rattanak II*, for example, focused on the need to mainstream gender in the education system as a tool for changing a traditional culture in school management that had long impeded girls' education and gender equality in Cambodia.

15.3 Enrolment Trends

There has been a significant improvement since the early 2000s in school enrolment rates for both girls and boys in Cambodia. Many more children, especially children from low-income families and girls, now have access to basic education for 9 years (Royal Government of Cambodia [RGC], 2014). There has also been significant progress made in enrolments in the basic education levels, such that net enrolment rates for girls and boys are now almost equal. Cambodia reached the EFA goal of increasing the number of girls accessing basic education (World Economic Forum, 2015).

15.3.1 Primary

Figure 15.1 highlights trends in primary education net enrolment rates over the period from 2004–2005 to 2018–2019 (MoEYS, 2005–2020; RGC, 2014; UNESCO, 2010).[1] Parity was attained in 2008–2009, after which time the net enrolment rates for girls have moved slightly ahead of those for boys.

15.3.2 Secondary

At the lower-secondary level (grades 7 to 9), as shown in Fig. 15.2, an increase in the gross enrolment rate (GER) for females was recorded for every academic year from 2004–2005 to 2007–2008, and then, from 2012–2013 onwards, the gross enrolment

[1] Net enrolment ratio (NER) is the share of primary school official age per grade children enrolled in primary school and cannot exceed 100%; gross enrolment rate (GER) is the share of any children of any age per grade that are enrolled in primary school, and in countries like Cambodia where children may enter school late or repeat a grade, the GER can exceed 100%.

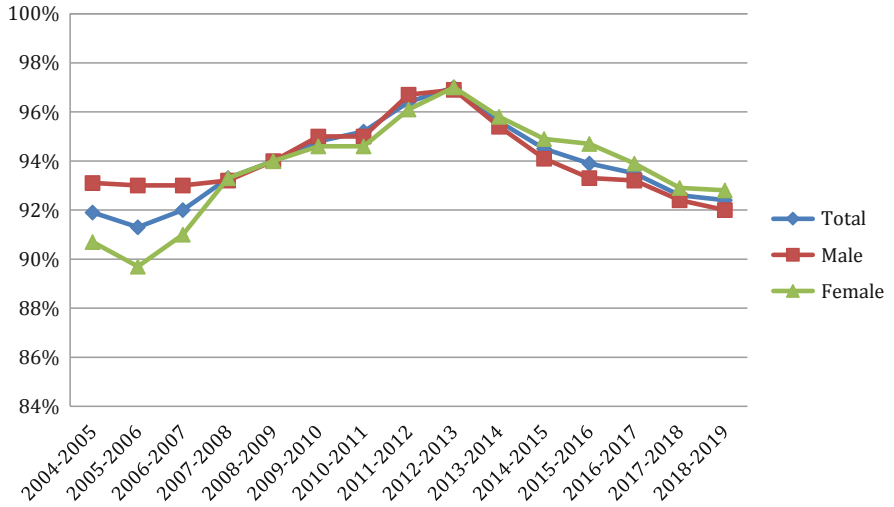

Fig. 15.1 NER primary school over 15 academic years (2004–2005 to 2018–2019)

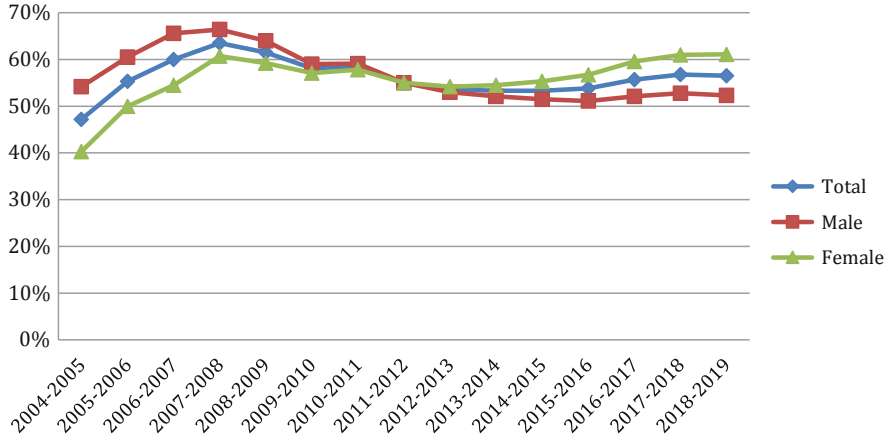

Fig. 15.2 GER lower secondary for 15 sequential academic years (2004–2005 to 2018–2019)

rates for girls were higher than boys. At the upper-secondary level (grades 10 to 12), female enrolment rates steadily increased over the period from 2004–2005 to 2010–2011 but remained below those of males. By 2014–2015, however, the female enrolment rate for girls was higher than that for boys, and the gap has widened since then. The upper-secondary years are critical as a pathway to university studies or other forms of postsecondary training. So the positive trend in the enrolment rates for girls in upper-secondary education is of much potential significance. Regrettably, though, fewer girls than boys have been completing the final year of

upper-secondary schooling, and so fewer girls have been able to gain direct entry to university.

In the adult population in Cambodia, males are generally better formally qualified than females. According to the National Institute of Statistics, the educational attainment rates of persons aged 18–65 years are higher for males than for females (National Institute of Statistics [NIS], 2015). In 2014, males aged 25 years or above recorded educational attainment rates of 25.2% for primary, 13.4% for lower-secondary, and 8.3% for upper-secondary. For females aged 25 years or above, the rates were 18.9%, 8.2%, and 3.9%, respectively. These data make clear that achievement of an equal enrolment share by girls in the 2018–2019 school year was a significant milestone against a lengthy historical background of underrepresentation by females in Cambodia's education system. However, this achievement has yet to be realised in postsecondary education outcomes, with subsequent access to opportunities for professional and skilled employment.

15.3.3 Higher Education

Higher education enrolment numbers have increased dramatically since the early 2000s. In 2005, there were more than 30,000 university students in Cambodia (Un & Sok, 2018). By 2018, the number had risen to 211,484 (MoEYS, 2019b). The expansion reflects a surge in the birth rate following the end of the Khmer Rouge regime, a gradual increase in the level of national prosperity in Cambodia, and the opening of the university sector, including since 1997 the availability of private universities. There are now 125 higher education institutions (HEIs) in Cambodia, offering programmes of study across more than 100 fields, including foreign languages, health science, engineering, agriculture, tourism, law, and economics and business. It is relevant, though, to note that higher education enrolment numbers are prone to be inflated because the system of data collection cannot control for individuals who enrol in several universities and university programmes at the same time. In Cambodia, it is not uncommon for the same student to be enrolled in study programmes from several universities at the same time.

Opportunities for females to participate in higher education have been significantly assisted by the establishment of more university campuses outside of the capital, Phnom Penh. In the mid-2000s, public universities were established in provinces such as Battambang, Meanchey, Prey Veng, and Svay Rieng (Khieng et al., 2015). The expansion of the number of regional universities permitted more young people, especially girls, to stay closer to home when studying. Currently, HEIs are in 20 of the 24 provinces and one municipality (Phnom Penh) (MoEYS, 2019b).

Commencing in 2002, MoEYS provided annual tuition fee scholarships for young people to attend university. There are currently up to 7000 scholarships available annually to support students enrolled in public and private universities. The awards are allocated in a way that assists students who are less well represented

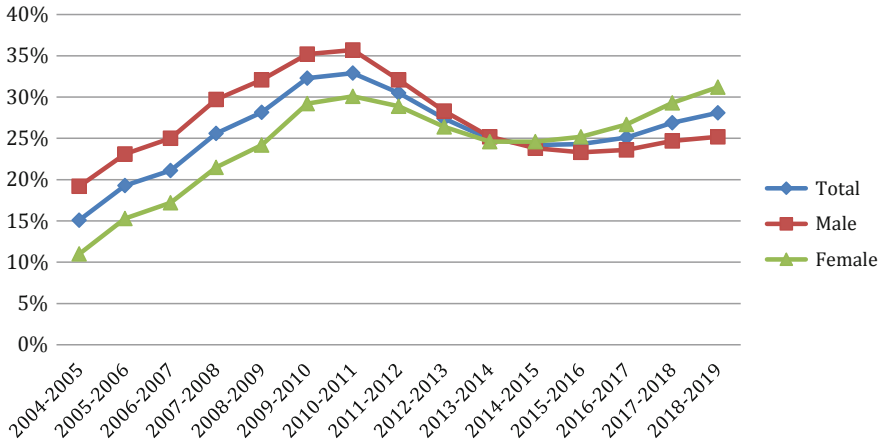

Fig. 15.3 GER upper secondary for 15 sequential academic years (2004–2005 to 2018–2019)

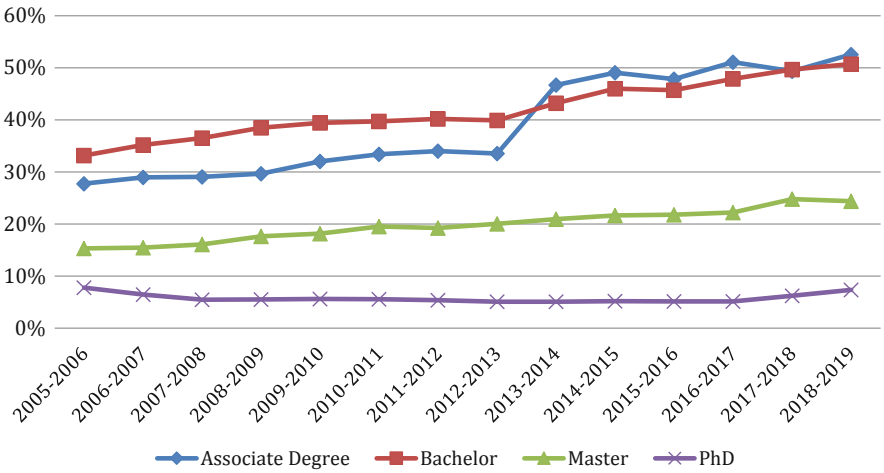

Fig. 15.4 Percentage of female enrolments in Cambodian HEIs over 14 sequential academic years

at university. While 60% are for merit-based students, 20% are for students from low-income families, 15% are for female students, and 5% are for students from remote areas. Female students are prioritised in three of the categories (merit-based, low-income families, and remote areas). In 2019, 58.66% of all scholarships awarded were won by females. Even so, Williams, Kitamura, and Keng's (2015) analysis of the gender parity index (GPI) of university enrolments across ten Asian countries found Cambodia to have the largest imbalance in favour of males. Between 2000 and 2005, the GPI disparity for Cambodia dropped significantly, but Cambodia continued to be the country with the lowest level of gender parity (Fig. 15.3) (MoEYS, 2005–2020).

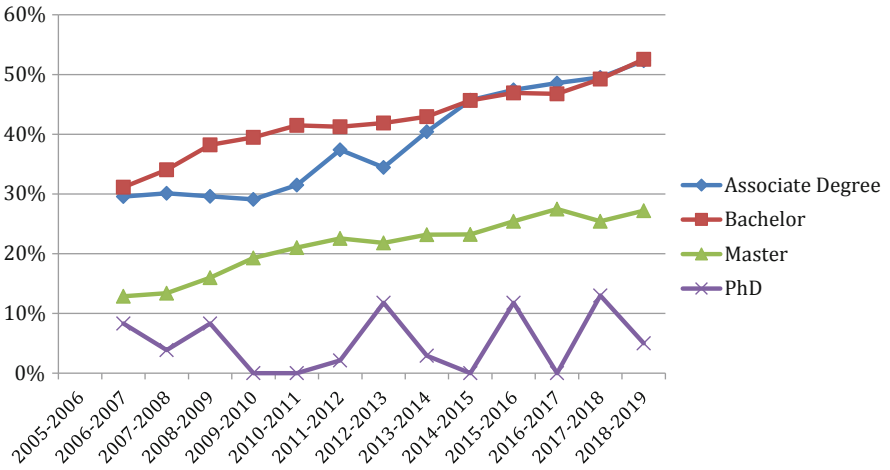

Fig. 15.5 Percentage of female graduates from Cambodian HEIs over 14 academic years

Figure 15.4 shows the proportion of female enrolments in associate degrees, bachelor's degrees, master degrees, and PhDs over the period from 2005–2006 to 2018–2019. By 2018–2019, enrolments of females had improved remarkably for associate degrees and bachelor's degrees. Females accounted for just over 30% of all bachelor-degree enrolments in 2005–2006, but only a bit over 50% by 2018–2019. For master's degrees and PhDs, however, the proportion of female enrolments remained minuscule over the same period.

While the pattern of university enrolment rates for women in Cambodia is one indicator of positive change, it is incomplete as an indicator if not also viewed through the lens of the rate of completions or graduations. Figure 15.5, highlights that female completion rates as a proportion of all associate-degree and bachelor-degree programmes have been steadily increasing. At the postgraduate levels, however, women continue to be underrepresented.

15.3.4 Science Technology Engineering and Mathematics (STEM)

In recent years, the Government has intentionally focused on the STEM subject areas as part of its drive to have a population with the skills needed to engage fully in the knowledge society.[2] It is also indicating that Cambodia must transform from being a low-level unskilled nation to one with a populace appropriately skilled in the

[2]The category of Science covers five major areas of study, including chemistry, physics, biology, health science, and agricultural science. The category of Technology refers to computer science. Engineering refers to various fields of engineering. Mathematics refers only to mathematics.

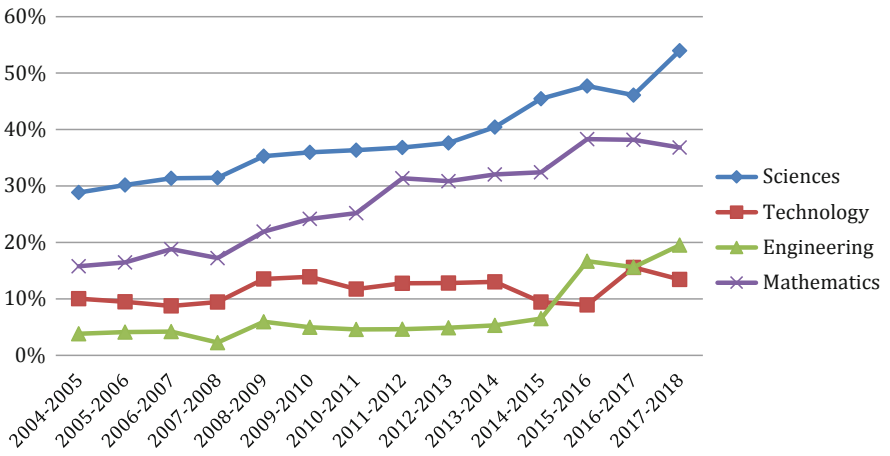

Fig. 15.6 Percentage of female STEM enrolments

sciences and technologies. Department of Higher Education (DHE) (2019) figures indicate a slight increase in the numbers of female enrolments in STEM over the past decade. Still, female enrolments in these fields remain relatively low (see Fig. 15.6). It is widely accepted careers in STEM areas yield higher incomes when compared to many other career areas. Many developed and developing nations recognise that STEM graduates generally have higher levels of income and a lower incidence of unemployment. Cambodia has relatively few students (male or female) enrolled in STEM degrees. According to the Cambodia Development Resource Institute (CDRI) (cited in MoEYS 2016), Cambodia needed 35,000 engineers and 46,000 technicians to help sustain national economic growth. In an attempt to address the shortage of STEM graduates, MoEYS has developed a policy on Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) Education (MoEYS, 2016).

15.4 Constraints on Female Participation

15.4.1 Socioeconomic Barriers and Child Labour

> Men are like gold; women are like white cloth. (A traditional Cambodian proverb).

As evident in the figures provided to this point, women and girls now account for at least one-half of all enrolments in school and university, though not within most of the STEM areas and not in postgraduate programmes in the higher education sector. Beyond the compulsory years of education, however, girls from lower-income families and the rural regions remain underrepresented. According to the NGO Education Partnership (NEP) (2007, cited in UNESCO, 2012), financial constraints are a severe barrier to participation by girls in upper-secondary and higher education.

With educational expenditure for one child to attend a public primary or secondary school estimated to be almost 9% of an average family's annual income, it is challenging for a needy family with an average of 5.7 children to afford an education for them all. Voluntary Service Overseas (VSO) (2011) reported that parents in Cambodia who sent their child to a public school spent an average of $100 in US dollars per year on the formal and informal costs of their child's schooling. For poor rural families reliant upon agriculture for a living, education costs are a weighty burden, and girls from these families are much more likely than boys to drop out of school (UNESCO, 2010). Khieng, Madhur, and Chhem (2015) explain that females from rural areas are the most disadvantaged social group in Cambodian society, with fewer of them ever likely to proceed to higher education. Embedded gender-based cultural values are a significant influence on family decision-making about who should continue at school and who should stay at home to assist with domestic tasks.

CEDAW (Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women) and CAMBOW (Cambodian Committee of Women) (2011) identified the combined influence of deeply rooted gender stereotypes and poverty on family decisions that hinder girls being sent to school. Poor households were more likely to send boys rather than daughters to school when deciding how to allocate the family's scant resources. UNESCO and UNICEF (2012) identified poverty as one of the leading causes of high drop-out rates among girls in rural areas. Many girls and young women in regional and rural areas are given caring responsibilities for other siblings and older family members, thereby enabling their parents to work in the rice paddies or go to work in factories in urban areas (Booth, 2014; Gender and Development for Cambodia [GAD/C], 2009). Traditionally girls and women are viewed as the keepers of a family's honour, and virtue (the "white cloth"), especially in rural and remote areas where travelling to school may be considered to place a girl at risk of rape. Families decide, therefore, to keep their daughter at home rather than face such a threat – "white cloth once soiled cannot be made white again".

While poverty contributes to both boys and girls not completing their secondary education because they are needed to contribute financially to the household income and to help parents with household chores, it is the daughters who are more likely to lose their opportunity to enrol at the post-compulsory levels of education (Swedish Agency for Development Evaluation [SADEV], 2010; Voluntary Service Overseas [VSO], 2011). This situation reflects traditional values ascribed to both women and men in Cambodian society. A Cambodian man is typically expected to be the provider for the family and to engage in public spheres. A Cambodian woman is generally expected to engage in the private sphere of the family, both as a carer and as nurturer. Education for females is, therefore, given less value, and so boys and men have priority access to the family resources needed to pursue post-compulsory educational opportunities (International Labor Office [ILO], 2011; SADEV, 2010).

15.4.2 Gender Norms

> Walk on the way that was paved by your parents and serve your parents well. (A traditional Cambodian proverb).

Cambodian women's behaviour has traditionally been regulated by moral principles that are written in the *Chbab Srey* (Code of Women's Behaviour), the *Reamaker* (a Cambodian epic poem), and various folk stories, journals, and books. These guides set the behavioural boundaries for girls and women in all spheres of their lives in Cambodia. The status of Khmer women has always been linked to proper behaviour, more so than in the case of Khmer men (Ledgerwood in Derks, 2008; Bradshaw et al., 2013; Brickell, 2011). These various codes determine the female identity and gender roles that are taught, with women encouraged to be not only gentle, soft, and subordinate to men (GAD/C, 2009; Grace & Eng, 2015) but also dutiful to their parents and other family elders. Some conventional wisdom found in the code includes: "You should remember to serve your husband, don't make him unsatisfied", and "You are to be patient and refrain from complaint even when your husband is angry, when he swears or curses".

Typically, Cambodian girls and women have been obliged to assume substantial roles in terms of domestic responsibilities from childhood until marriage. These responsibilities include taking care of younger siblings, helping parents with significant amounts of domestic work, and supporting male dominance and pre-eminence in family decision-making (Grace & Eng, 2015). Traditional social values place women firmly in the domestic and private spheres in Cambodian society, and these social values are deeply felt and highly influential among many girls and women, especially those from rural areas. Discrimination against girls and women is thus perpetuated, and they are blocked from experiencing freedom and independence of thought and action in both the public and private spheres of Cambodian society (GAD/C, 2009).

Women are expected to have a significant role in preserving cultural identity, taking care of children and the extended household, and speaking with a softer voice than men (Japan International Cooperation Agency [JICA], 2007; Mu, 1998). "Softer" refers here to both the tone of the voice and the words being used. Females who question the decisions of their husbands, or other males, run the risk of being described as "argumentative", which is the opposite of being softly spoken and is something to be avoided if social rejection or disapprobation is to be avoided. According to Imam (2010, cited in Booth, 2014, p. 45), the *Chbab Srey* focuses a great deal on how women should behave because they are expected to maintain the honour of their family. Women will insult or cause shame for their family if there is inappropriate behaviour (Booth, 2014). This projection onto the woman is a powerful influence for conformity to acceptable behaviour and speech within the family, the community, and broader society.

Under Cambodian law, girls and women are legally entitled to play an active role and have the same opportunities to participate in all activities at all levels in the society as men. For instance, women can have legally exercise economic

independence, own property, vote, stand for elected office, and make household decisions (Ing, 2013). However, in reality, entrenched traditional norms and male hierarchical culture continue to restrict decision-making opportunities for women and their overall level of empowerment. Established cultural standards and codes restrict, or even prohibit, women from exercising their rights, freedoms, and power in decision-making. These norms result in gender stereotypes and gender differences that discriminate against women in terms of their social status, work opportunities, power, and social relationships (CEDAW & CAMBOW, 2011).

The power of the *Chbab Srey* continues to exist in present-day Cambodian society, influencing both women and men. Many men continue to believe that women are less intelligent than men and that they prefer the private domestic space of life (Kent, 2011; Lilja, 2012). Traditional cultural norms and gender role expectations result in higher levels of education being considered unimportant for girls (Gorman et al., 1999). Indeed, higher levels of formal educational qualifications may even cause a Cambodian woman to be deemed to have an "unattractive", or at least a questionable, character. The following extract is from a university-educated Cambodian woman explaining her unmarried status due to her failure to fit into the stereotypic submissive, quiet, unquestioning female: "I am too intelligent to be a Cambodian woman, I cannot be a Cambodian woman" (Lilja, 2008, p. 72). The story of Vouchleng (Jackson & Muong, 2014) further illustrates the challenges of poverty and gender roles with which young Cambodian women struggle. A young woman from a poor rice-farming family and working part-time, Vouchleng was able to afford to live and study in the capital until her third year of study when, due to her father's ill health, she left her studies to find more work to support her family. She saw no alternative to this situation, saying that: "I'm very sad, I feel like I've wasted years of my life. I think it would have been different if I had been a boy. They don't need to think about their families; they just do what they want with their money".

15.4.3 Changing Gender Norms

Changes to ideas of what a proper Cambodian woman should do, appear, and sound like are emerging in the face of Cambodia's embrace of the free-market economy and engagement with the broader world. Traditional views of Cambodian womanhood are being challenged as increasing numbers of women leave their villages to find work in the cities, leaving their families and village networks to live independent lives, making decisions about their expenditure, personal relationships, and use of their own time (Derks, 2008).

Women in Cambodia are becoming increasingly aware of the inequities in relationships between men and women. These shifts in attitude are illustrated in the findings of the World Bank survey of Cambodian women and their willingness to accept being hit by their husbands for behaviours that are contrary to those of a "good wife". In 2005, as many as 26.8% women surveyed felt that a husband was justified in hitting his wife if she argued with him; by 2010, 23.4% held the same

view. In 2005, 34.8% of women surveyed believed a husband was justified in hitting his wife if she went out without telling him; by 2010, 29.8% were of the same view. In 2005, 45% of women surveyed felt a husband was justified in hitting his wife if she neglected the children; by 2010, the figure had dropped to 39.1%. While acknowledging that changes are occurring in gender norms within Cambodian society, there remains a strong and forceful influence exerted on lives and opportunities of Cambodian women by the *Chbab Srey* and associated traditional sayings and customs.

15.4.4 School Curriculum

A nation's school curriculum is a powerful force for either social change or the reinforcement of prevailing attitudes and values. In 2007 the Ministry of Women's Affairs requested the Government to remove the *Chbab Srey* from the school curriculum. It was subsequently replaced by a modified version of the teaching in the grade 7-to-9 levels of the compulsory subject, Khmer Literature. A 2014 study of gender equity in Siem Reap secondary schools reported between 93% and 97% of the teachers, and 76% and 79% of the students, interviewed agreed that: "The *Chbab Srey* must be taught to all students", "The *Chbab Srey* represents Khmer culture", and "Good women are those who follow and respect the *Chbab Srey*". In student interviews, gender inequities were evident as students "used descriptions of girls that mirrored the guidelines of the *Chbab Srey* ...[.] ... participants ... described female students as 'sweet' and 'shy', and identified gender-specific jobs, such as being a driver or engineer, that were inappropriate for 'weak' and 'vulnerable' girls" (Grace & Eng, 2015, p. 22).

Velasco (2004, cited in Booth, 2014) highlighted the absence of gender-equity issues in the MoEYS Curriculum Development Plan for the primary, lower-secondary, and upper-secondary curriculum over the period from 2003 to 2007. She pointed out the lack of any content analysis from a gender perspective of both the instructional materials (textbooks and teacher manuals) and curricula (in Booth, 2014). Given the lengthy timeline for any curriculum revision, production, dissemination, and evaluation process, the means for changing a nation's values that are transmitted and reinforced in the formal curriculum are a critical element of any national school curriculum. Once a serious attempt is made to implement gender changes to the school curriculum, it will be decades before a widespread national change in the national gender culture takes place.

15.4.5 Media

The news media are widely recognised to be a powerful tool capable of either confronting and reinforcing attitudes towards the rights of girls and women in

Cambodian society. In 2005, the Women's Media Centre of Cambodia (WMC) (cited in CEDAW & CAMBOW, 2011) reported that women were in the minority in all sectors of the Cambodian media (17% in journalism, 21% in technical roles, and 28% in administration roles). Of 137 journalists identified as decision-makers, only 6% were female. In the 2005 study, 69% of members of the general public surveyed reported female portrayals in the media to be negative:

> Across all media, the top three roles portrayed by women were: as victims (57%); positive roles (27%); and, as sex objects (22%). In comparison to the 1995 study, the 2005 survey reported an increase in portrayals of women as victims; a decrease in positive roles; and a slight decrease in women being portrayed as sex objects. (p. 23)

In general, the media can be a powerful influence in worsening gender inequities through its portrayal of women, whether print, on television and radio, or through the Internet. CEDAW and CAMBOW (2011) reported an increase in gender discrimination, negative models of femininity, and violence against women through negative portrayals of women in the media. According to the WMC, although there are depictions in the mass media of women as equal and empowered, those shown in these roles are usually well-known female singers and actresses who constitute only a small percentage of Cambodia's female population. For average Cambodian women, there are few role models of empowered, powerful women offered by the media (CEDAW & CAMBOW, 2011).

15.5 Women Engaging outside the Private Sphere

> A man should not be under the wife's apron. (A traditional Cambodian proverb).

Two international measures point to the modest nature of Cambodia's success in terms of creating an environment where traditional gender expectations are no longer a factor in a female's access to education, health, and employment opportunities. One is the United Nations Development Program's (UNDP) Gender Inequality Index (GII), which measures a nation's gender-equality achievements in the three areas of reproductive health, empowerment, and participation in the labour market. With a GII value of 0.474, Cambodia was ranked 114 out of 162 countries in the 2018 GII calculations (UNDP, 2019). The other is the World Economic Forum's (WEF) Global Gender Gap Index, which attempts to measure gaps between men and women in the areas of health, education, economy, and politics. In 2020, Cambodia ranked 89th out of 153 countries covered by the index (World Economic Forum [WEF], 2020).

15.5.1 The Political Domain

Although Cambodian women make up 51% of the population, they are underrepresented in the public decision-making and political spheres, whether for elected or appointed positions. Ledgerwood (1992, in Lilja, 2008) asserted that "while Cambodian women were and are extremely active in economic affairs, it was not considered appropriate for women to be active in politics" (p. 136). The extent of their representation in the National Assembly has not changed much since Ledgerwood made this observation. Females held 7 (5.83%) of the 120 seats available in the National Assembly in 1993. In 2018, they held 25 (20%) of the 125 seats available. This shift in the overall balance has been small, and men overwhelmingly continue to dominate in the formal political sphere. In the Senate, a similar profile is evident, with females occupying 13.11% of the seats in 1999, 14.75% of the seats in 2012, and 17.7% of the seats in 2018. At the national level of government, only three ministers (10.7% of the total) were female in 2014. The Cambodian judiciary is also dominantly male. Currently, less than one-fifth of all judges are female.

15.5.2 The Civil Service

Employment in the Cambodian civil service is highly valued, not least because it provides a regular source of income, albeit often a relatively small source. According to the Law on Civil Service, selection for appointment to a ministry or department requires merit based on performance in a competitive examination. Each year many thousands of Cambodians attempt the exam (whether for teaching, policing, academic, or other public salaried roles). Cambodian women have a limited presence in the nation's principal policymaking and service provision structures with women accounting for just 37% of the civil service (MoWA, 2014b).

At the higher levels of the civil service, the numbers of women employed in roles that provide opportunities to provide national leadership are marginal. The structure at this level has the following hierarchy: Vice Chief of Office, Chief of Office, Deputy Director, Director, Deputy Director-General, and Director-General. Though some progress has been made in increasing the number of women in civil service leadership positions, women's representation at these levels remains low. When looking for role models of women who are working in areas of responsibility and leadership within the Government, there are very few women in senior leadership roles to whom a Cambodian woman might look. Escamilla (2011, cited in Booth, 2014) argued that the cultural norms in Cambodian society limited women from pursuing further study, moving ahead in the workplace, and participating in politics. According to Lilja (2008), the "generally held image of Cambodian women as docile, gentle and subordinated remains and influences the organisation of society" (p. 140).

15.5.3 Labour Force

Women belong near the kitchen stove. (A traditional Cambodian proverb)

The number of women participating in the Cambodian labour force remains lower than for men. The World Bank estimated that the male share of the labour force for each of the years from 2008 to 2012 was consistently higher than the female share. Girls' and women's participation in Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) had increased, but their employment opportunities and their access to more senior positions continued to be limited (WEF, 2015). According to Ing (2013), less than one-third of women (27%) were employed in the stable, higher income formal sector. In contrast, they constituted the majority of those who are working in the vulnerable informal sector, including self-employment and unpaid work. Women in Cambodia have traditionally earned 30% less than men, even though they perform the same roles (Johnson-Welch, 2010; Booth, 2014).

15.6 Closing Comments

In this chapter, we have attempted to paint a picture of the context in which Cambodian girls and women pursue their lives, including the increasing extent of their participation in education, with all the potential promise that lies in such an achievement. As active members of society, women and girls in Cambodia continue to negotiate their place and their role. Many women have studied at universities in Cambodia and then sought to use their skills and knowledge to make a significant contribution to their communities. University study promises them a brighter future, but there are unspoken assumptions about women's roles that remain highly constraining. These assumptions are routinely reinforced in the media, the political arena, and everyday life. The lack of accurate, reliable data concerning the destinations of Cambodia's graduates, whether male or female, prevents much detailed discussion about the employment opportunities available for women. Equal access to education includes but is broader than merely seeing numbers of enrolments equalise for the genders. It involves equal access to the opportunities that can come when holding a qualification.

The enrolment figures reveal a trend towards more women participating in higher education, though progress continues to be slow. These figures need to be understood within the broader context in which Cambodian women live, study, aspire, and pursue opportunities for work and career. Some strong cultural beliefs and customs limit the educational opportunities available to women. For as long as these beliefs remain dominant, even though implicit and unchallenged, they will continue to exert a negative influence on the behaviour of women in the wider society. We hope that women in Cambodia who choose to progress to higher education, especially at the postgraduate level, may no longer find themselves facing the choice of pursuing

intellectual growth and professional opportunities at the cost of marriage and family, a not infrequent experience among many young female colleagues.

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Chapter 16
Multilingual Education for Ethnic Minorities in Cambodia

Jan Noorlander

16.1 Introduction

For almost two decades, there has been slow but consistent progress made in providing support for access to education for ethnic minority children living in the north-east region of Cambodia. A sustainable model of multilingual education was successfully developed by CARE Cambodia in these provinces.[1] Responsibility for implementing the model has now been largely transferred to the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport (MoEYS). The model's success will ensure that future generations of ethnic minority children in the region have access to and can succeed in school.

This chapter reports on the development and implementation of the model. Multilingual education refers to the planned and systematic use of two languages in a program of instruction for children.[2] It provides opportunities for children to start their education in their home language, which then acts as a bridge to learning in the national language. It is evident from the research literature that students learn best in their mother tongue (see Thomas & Collier, 1997).[3] It follows that children

[1] CARE International is a non-sectarian international development organization focused on ending global poverty. It especially seeks to assist women and girls to achieve sustainable community development. References in this chapter are mainly to CARE International in Cambodia.

[2] As there are numerous languages in Cambodia, it is preferable to refer to multilingual education, although in some schools/areas reference to bilingual education is possibly more accurate. Bilingual refers to a context in which two languages are used. This chapter refers to multilingual education, except where bilingual is the more accurate description.

[3] Also known as the home language or first language.

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with a solid foundation in their mother tongue will then more readily develop literacy skills in the national language, which in the case of Cambodia is Khmer. Multilingual education programs focus, therefore, on helping children not only to build a strong educational foundation in their home language but also to make a successful transition to learning through use of the dominant language in a country. In this regard, multilingual education is widely acknowledged for the positive contribution it makes to school retention and achievement for children who are minority language speakers (UNESCO, 2007). Multilingual education also improves thinking skills, creativity, flexibility, and adaptability (Kosonen, 2005). And it enables parents and other family members to participate more effectively in a child's education. It also allows minority languages to be preserved, and it strengthens the identity of indigenous peoples.

In Cambodia, the official language, Khmer, is the mother tongue for most of the population. For ethnic minority communities, however, who comprise a small percentage of the national population, Khmer is not the mother tongue. These communities have their own languages, and so children from these communities are disadvantaged early in their formal learning journey when required to use Khmer, a language with which they are unfamiliar. Some ethnic minority children may, of course, be able to converse in Khmer before they begin their schooling, but they may not be sufficiently proficient in Khmer to use this language for the purposes of learning new or more abstract concepts. Children whose mother tongue is not Khmer will typically need to develop the Khmer language skills before being able to utilize Khmer for the purposes of acquiring conceptual understandings. It is very often the case that the need for them to "catch up" in this regard has an adverse impact on their subsequent educational attainments.

The situation is not unique to Cambodia. Fifty percent of the world's out-of-school children live in communities where the language of schooling is rarely, if ever, used at home (Bender et al., 2005). Girls are especially disadvantaged because as many as 70% of the world's out-of-school girls belong to ethnic and linguistic minority groups (Lewis & Lockheed, 2007, p. 3).

16.2 The Setting

As many as 24 ethnic minority languages are said to be spoken in Cambodia (Benson & Wong, 2017, p. 251). These languages are spoken by about 4% of the national population, mainly indigenous communities living in one or other of five remote provinces in the north-east of the country, that is, Ratanak Kiri, Mondul Kiri, Stung Treng, Kratie, and Preah Vihear. Educational outcomes for these provinces, especially among the indigenous communities, are poor and fall well below national averages. Children in these communities are adversely affected by the lack of schools in nearby villages, teacher shortages, teacher absenteeism, a high incidence of untrained teachers, and curriculum materials that are culturally irrelevant. In addition, the language of the classroom is Khmer, which for the children concerned

is not their mother tongue. Not surprisingly, therefore, these children often find school to be an alien place. Many of them feel frightened, lose confidence, and drop out of schooling, or else need to repeat classes.

This situation has been of concern to various international humanitarian agencies, whose response has been to seek to develop multilingual education programs for delivery through the formal school curriculum in affected provinces across the north-eastern region of Cambodia. International Cooperation Cambodia (ICC), for example, engaged linguists to develop five approved orthographies.[4] CARE Cambodia piloted a multilingual program for use in the formal sector of primary schooling, later adding a program for use in preschools.

From its earliest days, the CARE pilot program, which was supported financially by the Australian Government and private donors from the USA and Australia, was intended to be scaled up for adoption by MoEYS and delivered across a wide range of schools attended by ethnic minority children. MoEYS largely accepted this responsibility and then went further by investing in capacity building of key Ministry staff. UNICEF played a key role in institutionalizing multilingual education, while at the same time CARE continued to provide technical assistance. At a national level, the Cambodian Government demonstrated its commitment to multilingual education through the promulgation of relevant legal instruments and the development of a national action plan. Over time, therefore, multilingual education has become firmly anchored in Cambodia's education system, ensuring that future generations of ethnic minority children will not only have access to education in their home language but also that individual ethnic minority communities can preserve their mother tongue and sustain their culture.

16.3 Development of the Pilot Project

In 1997, ICC, working collaboratively with UNESCO, introduced non-formal education programs in the provinces of Ratanak Kiri and Mondul Kiri. Basic literacy classes were held in villages, usually in the evenings. Due to the lack of primary schools in the vicinity, many children joined these evening classes, although the teaching style was one that had been designed for adults. Materials and instructions were in the vernacular languages, the goal being to develop literacy in both the mother tongue and the national language (Wright & Boun, 2015). Linguists working with ICC had started to develop orthographies for five ethnic minority languages—Kreung, Tampuen, Brao, Kavet, and Bunong—during the 1990s. These languages were subsequently approved by MoEYS for official use in 2003.[5] The project faced various challenges. One of these was that some sounds that existed in the minority languages did not exist in the Khmer language. An interesting and innovative

[4] Orthographies are sets of conventions for the writing of languages.

[5] In 2019, MOEYS approved the orthography of the Jarai language.

solution was suggested by the Royal Academy: some Khmer letters from the Angkorian period that had fallen into disuse were resurrected to represent the extra sounds used in the ethnic minority languages. ICC's work in developing orthographies and working to have them officially recognized laid the foundation for subsequent multilingual education programs.

In 2002, CARE Cambodia initiated a pilot project involving of the delivery of a multilingual education program in six community primary schools in Ratanak Kiri. The project's twin goals were "to address the needs of disadvantaged ethnic minority groups through the establishment of community schools targeting girls and boys who have never enrolled or who have dropped out of the formal system" and to provide MoEYS with "a model for the delivery of basic education in remote areas of Cambodia to highland minority peoples".[6] The project had four key components: establishing community school boards, now commonly referred to as school support committees; creating community schools; developing a multilingual education curriculum; and recruiting, training, and supporting community teachers.

The pilot project applied a transitional multilingual education model in which children in grade 1 were predominantly taught in their mother tongue in grade 1, with Khmer introduced as an oral subject. In grades 2 and 3, the proportion of Khmer language used was gradually increased, while use of the mother tongue language was concurrently wound back. From grade 4 onwards, instruction took place in Khmer, although support using the mother tongue language was provided in cases where a teacher who was able to speak the mother tongue language was available. While referred to in the international literature as an early exit model, the model adopted for the pilot project might more accurately be characterized as involving a "foot-in-the door" strategy. It sought to collect evidence regarding the success of a multilingual education approach in enhancing academic achievement. Ideally, the program would have extended to the grade 6 level, but MoEYS judged that a 6-year program would be too long and too costly to support. In 2016, however, MoEYS did approve a pilot for the delivery of a bridging program up to grade 6 at several schools in one ethnic minority language community.

At each of the six schools where the pilot project was implemented, a school support committee was established by community members. The committee took responsibility for overseeing the construction and maintenance of school buildings, the selection and supervision of community teachers, the enrolment of children, the management of school finances, and coordination with CARE's project teams, as well as with local and provincial educational authorities.

To develop a curriculum that was both culturally relevant and appropriately aligned with the national curriculum, CARE established a Resource Production Unit and hired curriculum professionals to write a 3-year program for use in the six selected multilingual education schools. Elders from the community were routinely consulted to ensure the cultural acceptability of the curriculum materials. Teaching resources were prepared in ethnic minority languages, with topics, such

[6]CARE Cambodia Highland Children's Education Project description 2001.

as learning about farming, how to bargain at the local market, and how to avoid malaria, suggested by the community elders. The learning outcomes were the same as those in the national curriculum, and so students developed the same cognitive skills and conceptual understandings as all other students in their age group in Cambodia. The only difference was that they were learning in their mother tongue.

The Resource Production team implemented a strict quality control process whereby all teaching materials were first trialled in the classroom and then underwent several checks by ICC staff, CARE staff, language committees comprised of elders, and school support committees. The purpose here was to ensure that the teaching materials were linguistically correct and culturally acceptable. The final step in this process was a review of the materials by a MoEYS-appointed Literature Review Committee. It gave all teaching materials used in the multilingual education classrooms a strong stamp of approval. By 2015, CARE had produced 99 book titles, 64 of which had been translated into Tampuen, Kreung, Bunong, and Kavet. These books included bilingual picture dictionaries and other resources, together with teachers' guides that included detailed lesson plans for use in the classroom.[7]

The pilot project also took into consideration other factors affecting student ability to attend classes. The school year was aligned with the planting and harvesting seasons to ensure that children were able to help their families during critical farming times without missing school.

In addition to generating high levels of community ownership, the project personnel sought deliberately to involve MoEYS representatives and officials from the Provincial Office of Education (POE). In the first phase of the project, various strategies were used to keep these personnel well informed. These included the provision of detailed written reports, the conduct of frequent meetings, and the delivery of workshops and presentations. In the early days of the project, experimentation and innovation were key to developing processes that would be successful. An element here included the use of a decentralized calendar, which would likely have been considered unorthodox if introduced to Government officials without evidence of its value for student and teacher attendance. There was a need, therefore, to build evidence of program effectiveness before embarking on the task of obtaining closer Government collaboration. As the pilot program progressed, its impact became more apparent. Student tracking of attendance and promotion rates, for example, showed that these were above the provincial averages. Once MoEYS and POE officials could see for themselves how well the schools were functioning, and how much progress the students were making in the context of a multilingual education program, they gradually moved from a position of being skeptical to one of being staunch supporters.

[7] Social issue books have also been produced for secondary schools, combining Khmer, a local community language, and English. These books cover topics which are highly relevant for young indigenous students, such as delaying marriage and appreciating the value of completing a basic education instead of working as a day laborer.

16.4 Supporting the Provincial Government

In 2007, following the success of the pilot project, the Ministry decided to implement its own community multilingual education schools. Six POE-administered multilingual education primary schools were opened in the province of Ratanak Kiri. These community schools followed very closely the CARE model and were developed with direct support from CARE's Ratanak Kiri office. That the Ministry was able to scale up CARE's multilingual education model testified to the "doability" of CARE's approach in the provision of multilingual education for ethnic minority children, as well as to CARE's capacity and its success in building a relationship with the Ministry. Through its mutually supportive and pro-active relationship with the Ministry, and with the support of UNICEF, CARE was progressively able to build the Ministry's capacity to assume ownership of a multilingual education program. Contributing to this success was the secondment of a senior officer from the POE to the CARE project office for several days a week. This secondment not only facilitated the flow of information between CARE and the POE, but it also allowed the officer to make personal observations about the implementation of multilingual education and become, therefore, a resource person on multilingual education for local authorities.

Importantly, the willingness of the Ministry and the POE to accept direct support for the implementation of multilingual education, and to work closely with a non-government organization (NGO), was the result of CARE's ability to develop trusting relationships with officials. This process often required patience and sensitivity. Initially, the program had been met with skepticism and caution by officials, who were wary of NGOs and of multilingual education. Compounding their sense of wariness was the fact that the first trials in multilingual education were undertaken by ICC, a faith-based organization, with the perceived risk of the focus being on the evangelization of ethnic minorities. Another complication was that the ICC non-formal education program was developed for adults.

Comprehensive collaboration between the three key partners, that is, the Ministry, UNICEF, and CARE, has been a key factor in institutionalizing multilingual education. It is exceptional that three such different entities should work so closely together for a long period of time on the one project. Elders from local ethnic minority communities also contributed significantly. Their contribution included the building of schools, the selection of teacher trainees, and the vetting of teaching materials.

16.5 Multilingual Education in Public Schools

In 2008, another significant step was taken towards scaling up multilingual education. This step involved the introduction of multilingual education to public schools in the province of Ratanak Kiri. With the inclusion of multilingual education classes

in six public schools, multilingual education was no longer a radical idea, acceptable only in community schools receiving assistance from NGOs, but was now an idea that MoEYS was willing to trial in the mainstream public school system. In this regard, Cambodia was the first country in the region to implement multilingual education programs in a public school system. In Ratanak Kiri, a special working group was established by the POE in consultation with CARE to coordinate and plan activities together. In addition to this planning work, meetings of the working group became an informal advocacy forum where a wide range of issues could be discussed. Not surprisingly, working closer with the POE led to some tensions and contradictions, most of which were inevitable because of differences between the organizations in terms of their accountability, communication, and reporting requirements.

16.6 A Preschool Initiative

In 2009, a pilot multilingual education program was initiated at the preschool level. It involved the creation of Play Groups in seven ethnic minority communities. The curriculum for this program was developed in consultation with village Women's Committees, using an action research cycle. This approach was intended to ensure that the curriculum was culturally relevant and appropriate. It also became a practical means for building empowerment, status, and the self-esteem of indigenous women.

As with the primary school pilot, the preschool program attracted the attention of MoEYS, particularly its Early Childhood Education Department (ECED). In 2011, the Ministry initiated its own pilot of a multilingual education community preschool across 20 ethnic minority communities in five provinces in the north-east. In doing so, it adapted the CARE model and curriculum to suit better the Ministry's requirements.

At about the same time, to enable a scaling up of its pilot project and to obtain official recognition as community-based preschools, CARE decided to bring its preschool Play Groups more into line with Ministry standards.[8] The Play Groups were renamed, and the program was restructured to comply with official guidelines. In 2013, responsibility for the pilot community preschools was successfully handed over to the Government.

A policy framework, called the Guidelines for Bilingual Education, was developed by the Ministry, with assistance from CARE, UNICEF, and ICC. It included the implementation of multilingual education in preschools. CARE provided technical support to this process, not only through the development of a suitable model of multilingual education for preschools but also by writing a training module on multilingual education for preschool teachers, by providing upgrading workshops

[8]There are three types of early childhood education recognized by the ECED: formal preschools, community preschools, and parent groups.

for ethnic minority preschool teachers, by creating tools for the monitoring of preschools, and by producing 2 years of train-the-trainer modules for the core group of trainers from the Ministry.

Under Cambodia's Organic Law on Administrative Management of 2008, which promotes decentralization and deconcentration, community preschools became the responsibility of Commune Councils, which are required to establish a Committee for Women and Children that is responsible for overseeing and finding finance for community preschools in the Council's locale. In rural and remote areas, many Commune Councils were overwhelmed by their new responsibilities. The requirement that they should budget for and oversee community preschools was often sidelined because of there being many other competing commitments.

Commune Council Consultative Working Groups engaged at the provincial level, and Commune Committees for Women and Children working at the commune level, began to push for the inclusion of teacher salaries in operational plans and budgets. Initially, members of Commune Councils did not see a need to include preschool teacher salaries in their budgets. However, with CARE's support and commitment to capacity building, Council members began to develop a better understanding of their role in providing for early childhood development in their communities. The lesson here that was that advocacy should not take place exclusively at national levels of policymaking. It has a vital to play at sub-national levels. National policymakers need to clearly understand project goals at a sub-national level so that they are better able to respond to local realities and priorities.

16.7 Political Support for Multilingual Education in Cambodia

Over the years, MoEYS has become more involved in multilingual education. This involvement has been encouraged by the positive outcomes of community-based multilingual education programs, and especially by the extent of interest in these programs within ethnic minority communities. As a result of this involvement, the following forms of political support for multilingual education have occurred:

- The 2007 *Education Law* stated that, while the Khmer language is the principal language of instruction, language use for Cambodians from ethnic minority groups would be determined by a proclamation from MoEYS. This proclamation was released in 2013. The proclamation on *Identification of Language for National Learners Who are Indigenous People* firmly anchored multilingual education in the policies and plans of MoEYS and reiterated the Government's commitment to providing sufficient educational opportunities through multilingual education for ethnic minority children.
- The *Guidelines for Bilingual Education*, signed into effect in 2011, were a first step in the Ministry officially recognizing and mainstreaming multilingual education. The Guidelines outlined the manner in which community-based

multilingual education schools were to be established and operated and included specifications about the location and types of schools permitted, student and teacher selection, and a breakdown of the curriculum for each language. Importantly the Guidelines allowed for a decentralized school calendar.

- The *Education Sector Plan 2014–2018* mentioned the importance of strengthening and expanding multilingual education in several sections. It did not, however, provide clear guidelines for budgeting and planning with respect to multilingual education at the sub-national level.
- A *Multilingual Education National Action Plan* (MENAP) was officially approved and released in 2016. The MENAP clearly stated that children have the right to access education in their home language in the early stages. It also outlined a clear plan for the scaling up of multilingual education, ensuring that budgeting for multilingual education programs should be included in provincial Annual Operational Plans.

16.8 Handing over Responsibility to the Provincial Office of Education

In 2013, a ceremony was held both to celebrate a decade of CARE's work with the school support committees of the original six pilot schools and to transfer responsibility for these schools to provincial education authorities. The handover represented the first stage of a complete exit by CARE from the provision of support for multilingual education. It was important that this stage should receive recognition by MoEYS. This recognition was provided when the schools were registered in the official Ministry database as annex schools and their land was registered with the land titles office as land for education purposes. In a subsequent stage, the schools began to receive a program-based budget from the POE for the purchase of school materials and to make school improvements. The final stage of the handover was the transfer of responsibility for the payment by POE of community teacher salaries. The handover was challenging because of the unique management structure of the school support committees. There had already been experience of Ministry-appointed teachers reorganizing community-based schools without inviting any community consultation, thereby undermining the ownership and authority of local community members. The handover required, therefore, a high level of consultation between community members and the public officials.

16.9 Training and Promoting Community Teachers

Throughout CARE's efforts to introduce multilingual education to the mainstream public education system in Cambodia—from the original pilot, to multilingual education in preschools, to providing support to MoEYS with a scaling up of multilingual education—teacher training has been a critical component. Research and experience confirm that individuals from ethnic-minority communities are often the best suited for teaching in multilingual education classrooms in situations where trained and accredited teachers are not available. With easy-to-implement curriculum materials, pre- and in-service training, and supportive coaching, community teachers, even those with limited formal education, can be effective educators in a multilingual education classroom. Additionally, because community teachers are usually from the villages in which they teach, or from nearby villages, parents feel more confident about sending their children to a local community-based multilingual school. Communication between parents and teachers can occur more easily, which helps to ensure that schools respond to community needs and values. Female community teachers provide the additional benefit of acting as role models for girls in their communities, thereby encouraging and motivating more girls to stay in school.

During the pilot phase, CARE provided training for community teachers from the six community schools involved. This training took the form of a 6-month, pre-service training program, supplemented by ongoing in-service training and academic upgrading. When the POEs in the north-eastern provinces began to implement multilingual education programs, CARE also provided pre- and in-service training to teachers. When ethnic minority students, some of whom had studied at the original CARE pilot schools, graduated from Teacher Training Colleges, CARE developed a fast-track multilingual education training program to ensure the young people concerned were well prepared to return to multilingual education schools as teachers. In addition to training ethnic minority community and public school teachers, CARE also trained Khmer public school teachers who had been assigned to multilingual education schools. These teachers were not required to teach in multiple languages because they had been appointed to teach at the grade 4 level and above. They were, however, stationed in multilingual education schools, and so it was important for them to be knowledgeable and supportive of community-based programs and activities at their schools.

As the skill levels and experience of community teachers increased, it became important to seek official recognition for them. UNICEF, given its unique position as a high-level advisor to the Ministry, was best able to advocate for community teacher recognition. Voluntary Services Overseas (VSO), another organization that is well respected and trusted by the Ministry, had additional influence, especially regarding teacher training.

In 2016, the Ministry decided that community teachers who had reached at least a grade 9 level of education, and who had completed at least 2 years of pre- and in-service training from CARE, would be given full status as public-school teachers.

There were 17 teachers recognized in this way in 2016. It is rare for the Government to give formal recognition to an NGO training program, yet there have been a few instances of this occurring in relation to the training of multilingual education teachers. A similar experience was recorded by Krousar Thmey, an NGO responsible for training special needs teachers.

16.10 Ongoing Longitudinal Research

With funding from the Patsy Collins Trust Fund Initiative, CARE embarked on a longitudinal study in 2009 to investigate the effectiveness of multilingual education by testing the academic performance of ethnic minority children who learn in their home language in a multilingual education school. Their performance was then compared with that of children who had only ever attended a school where Khmer was the language of instruction. The research aimed to test children's academic performance in mathematics, Khmer literacy, and oral Khmer. While there has been a wealth of research on the positive effects of multilingual education for children's academic performance, little of this research has been set in the Southeast Asian context, and none has taken place specifically in Cambodia (Lee et al., 2015). Multilingual education continues to be a controversial topic in many countries and robust evidence-based research supports advocacy.[9] The longitudinal research in the CARE multilingual education project was designed with national and international advocacy in mind.

The research question explored was: do ethnic minority children who receive a bilingual education in their first and the national language in the grades 1 to 3 learn the national language (literacy and oracy) and mathematics better than ethnic minority children whose education is in the national language only? In 2016, an additional focus was added to include the testing of their first language.

The main research question was applied in testing children from CARE-supported multilingual education public schools and CARE-supported multilingual education community schools in remote locations where there are no nearby public schools. CARE received permission from the POE in Ratanak Kiri to use Khmer-only public schools with ethnic minority students as the control group.

Data were collected over 7 years at a specific point of time each year, testing children in the areas of language and mathematics. The design of the mathematics tests was based on an Early Numeracy Research Project, while use of Khmer language was tested using the Early Grades Reading Assessment (EGRA), developed by the Research Triangle Institute. An analysis of the early results was conducted by the Minnesota International Development Education Consortium.

[9]The Asia Pacific Multilingual Education Working Group, consisting of UNESCO, UNICEF, Mahidol University, CARE International, Save the Children, and others, promotes multilingual education across the region.

In 2015, the results of the first stage of this research were published in *Compare: A Journal of Comparative and International Education* (Lee et al., 2015). The research had been supervised by an advisory group with representatives of the University of Minnesota, the Royal University of Phnom Penh, CARE USA, and CARE Cambodia. The findings to date have indicated that children in multilingual education schools perform better in mathematics than ethnic minority children who attend non-multilingual education schools. These results are consistent with other international research (Thomas & Collier, 1997) concerning the benefits of multilingual education. The early findings from the research were shared with MoEYS, as well as with scholars at the Royal University of Phnom Penh and with the Ministry's Education Research Committee. The research is contributing to a better and more evidence-based understanding of the advantages of multilingual education. In 2015/2016, scholars from Columbia University's Teachers College conducted a further assessment of the longitudinal research, resulting in a peer-reviewed publication.

16.11 The Multilingual Education National Action Plan (MENAP)

The most significant step taken by the Government in solidifying its commitment to the institutionalization of multilingual education was the development of the *Multilingual National Action Plan* (MENAP). The MENAP clearly articulated Cambodia's support for multilingual education programs and its commitment to funding and expanding multilingual education access for ethnic minority children at the preschool and primary levels. It was aligned with the Education Strategic Plan, which meant that activities were budgeted for at the national and provincial levels. The implementation of the MENAP provided access to multilingual education for more than 5090 children by 2018.

CARE worked with government representatives and other key partners in a long and thorough development process to gather inputs from multiple stakeholders and produce early versions of the MENAP, while at the same time advocating for its ratification at high levels. The full document was finalized in October 2015 and officially launched at an event in March 2016. The action plan was endorsed and supported by the Minister for Education, Youth and Sport. High-ranking officials then took the lead on the implementation of the action plan with invaluable inputs from provincial officials. The Plan demonstrated the Ministry's commitment to increasing the extent of participation in multilingual education and to raising the number of teachers with relevant training.

UNICEF and CARE Cambodia worked together in convening decision makers and in advancing the development of the MENAP. According to representatives from both organizations, the relationship between the two was highly collaborative and mutually supportive, with each organization bringing different but important sets of skills to the partnership. CARE had the technical expertise and experience on

the ground, as well as strong and established relationships with communities and officials at all levels. UNICEF had a long history of supporting Cambodia's education sector and was in a unique position of influence at high levels of national government. In early 2015, UNICEF and CARE provided support to a delegation headed by the Minister for Education, Youth and Sport on a field visit to multilingual education schools in Mondul Kiri and Ratanak Kiri. This visit provided opportunities to deepen the Minister's understanding of multilingual education and his already enthusiastic support of the MENAP.

16.12 Looking to the Future and Lessons Learned

CARE Cambodia now has almost two decades of experience in multilingual education development, implementation, and advocacy. Its focus over the coming years will be the promotion of full ownership of multilingual education by the Ministry at the national, sub-national, and district levels and the provision of support for the expansion of multilingual education. Handing over the program to the Ministry was vital in ensuring its sustainability because it was only through full public ownership that multilingual education could be scaled up and sustained.

In the early days during the pilot program, and during the first steps into early childhood development, and then through the upscaling of the initiative to public ownership, what started as a responsive advocacy has now been channelled into a strategic advocacy plan. CARE Cambodia is now working to build the organizational and technical capacity of Commune Councils with respect to the implementation of preschool education in their communities. It is also lobbying for CARE-trained community teachers to be fully recognized as public school teachers. CARE will continue to provide capacity-building opportunities for public officials at all levels on multilingual education to ensure they are able to take full ownership of Cambodia's multilingual education program. CARE has also been supporting the development of the MENAP, providing technical assistance so that it is synchronized and fully integrated with the Education Strategic Plan and other national and provincial planning processes.

While a strategic advocacy plan has been developed and approved, it is important to remain flexible and adjust to political conditions and realities at a local level. The development of the MENAP was a slow process, partly because of commune elections in 2012, and then national elections in 2013. Multilingual education was a sensitive issue for MoEYS during these elections and progress stalled. CARE's decision at the time was to not press forward with the MENAP, but to take a "look and listen" approach instead. This type of reassessment of strategic tactics towards advocacy goals is important to maintaining political trust.

The Cambodian model has been developed over many years with the input of several organizations, government officials, and community members. As a result of this work, Cambodia now has officially recognized scripts in five minority languages, a wealth of books and resources written in these languages, a formal

methodology for implementing multilingual education in preschools, primary schools, and non-formal education, and a national action plan for multilingual education. Progress continues to be made.

CARE's history of engagement with multilingual education in Cambodia provides the following important lessons for all advocacy groups:

- Keep public officials well informed in the early stages and move towards deeper involvement with these officials as the results of the project become available, allowing them to observe first-hand, engage with the issues, and observe the results. This approach can convert opponents into supporters.
- Be a supportive, responsive partner to build strong, trusting relationships with governmental bodies.
- Learn to work with and within the communication protocols of various government departments and understand their structures and functioning.
- Train staff at all levels on responsive advocacy strategies and develop creative approaches to working with public officials.
- Build a capacity for eventual public ownership.
- Find champions among the public officials who can advocate for acceptance and understanding at high levels.
- Underpin advocacy efforts with a strong evidence base, involving renowned institutions and applying rigor to results, and produce research that can be held up to scrutiny by international experts.
- Work with strategically positioned partners and through a broad-based network to maximize advocacy through supportive coalitions.
- Be involved in important forums that set standards and best practices and invite high-level public officials to participate.
- Develop a strategic advocacy plan while remaining responsive to the reality on the ground.

16.13 Conclusion

CARE's multi-layered and collaborative advocacy contributed significantly to the development and implementation of national policy on multilingual education in Cambodia. The Government's endorsement of the MENAP in 2016 provided tangible evidence of the success achieved. Securing public ownership of community-based multilingual schools has ensured their sustainability and will contribute greatly to future generations of ethnic minority children being able to access and reap the benefits of a quality education.

The advocacy work by CARE and its partners had three elements: government engagement and capacity building; gathering evidence; and building strategic partnerships. Actions in each area took place at multiple governmental levels. In the initial stages of its program, CARE worked towards building evidence at the local level through its pilot program, while concurrently using soft advocacy approaches

to engage with provincial and national education authorities with an eye to building strong, supportive relationships. International examples of multilingual education programs and success were utilized in developing a suitable model for the Cambodian context.

In the following stages, as the Ministry began to understand and support the model, and subsequently trialled its own pilot, and then opened public schools to multilingual education, CARE supported the Ministry's activities with technical capacity building at the sub-national and national levels. This work was not done in isolation, but in partnership with strategically placed organizations such as UNICEF. As the Ministry progressed with its implementation and policy support on multilingual education, endorsing first a set of guidelines and later issuing a proclamation, CARE promoted its efforts at national conferences and forums, presenting Cambodia as a progressive model in multilingual education implementation in the region.

In the final stages of promoting full ownership and expansion of multilingual education by the Ministry, CARE and its strategic partners worked closely to advocate for the development of the MENAP. This advocacy was strongly underpinned by CARE's high-quality research on multilingual education effectiveness in the north-eastern provinces and guided by international standards and best practices.

The MENAP (2015–2019) was implemented under the direction of the Special Education Department in MoEYS. During this time CARE's role shifted from an implementer to the technical adviser on multilingual education to the Ministry. CARE continued to train multilingual teachers and, collaboratively with UNICEF, trained 33 core trainers to enhance the sustainability of the program. In 2019 UNICEF published an independent evaluation of the MENAP (Ball & Smith, 2019). The key findings were that children, community members, and local authorities strongly agreed that multilingual education had produced more engagement in school and more meaningful learning. The evaluation also found that the curriculum was outdated, too easy, and in need of enriched cultural content that indigenous children, parents, and groups were willing to provide. And finally, they reported that targets were met in terms of quantity of provision, but that improved quality was now a priority.

These recommendations were included in the second phase of MENAP (2019–2023). The goal of the MENAP is to develop indigenous people' knowledge, skills, and attitudes through effective multilingual language education programs, leading to increased access and improved educational outcomes, and contributing to the preservation of indigenous languages and cultures. The updated MENAP was officially launch in December 2019 and currently guides the expansion of the multilingual education in Cambodia.

At the annual education retreat in November 2019, the Minister of Education, His Excellency Dr. Hang Chuon Naron, tasked CARE, with support from UNICEF and other development partners, with the responsibility of developing a vision and plan for the establishment of an indigenous center of learning and culture in the Teacher Training College in Stung Treng Province. This development will ensure the

institutionalization of the multilingual teacher training within the Ministry's infrastructure. Dr. Jack Frawley was commissioned to develop a 5-year plan for the establishment of this center, which he submitted on May 12, 2020**.** This plan will guide the development of the Stung Treng Teacher Training Center's Indigenous Center of Expertise. The first phase of this new phase of the implementation of multilingual education in Cambodia starts with the embedding of the multilingual teacher training in the public system. Lecturers at the college will be trained to teach a specialization course for indigenous teacher graduates, which will qualify them to teach at MLE schools in the districts of their origins. As recommended by the MENAP evaluators, the MLE curriculum will be revised to update it to align it with the revised national curriculum**.**

Although CARE Cambodia and others have had significant success in promoting multilingual education and seeing it progressively accepted and more solidly institutionalized, the idea of multilingual education remains politically sensitive, and its elevation to a national program remains fragile, as is the case in many countries. Many officials at district, provincial, and national levels who have been involved with the program for years are well aware of the potential and importance of multilingual education. However, as new officials replace outgoing ones, there is the potential for backward steps in terms of institutional understanding. For this reason, even in a climate where multilingual education is protected by policies and high-level officials, the foundations can become weak at any time. Old misconceptions can re-emerge through new staff, such as the idea that multilingual education will encourage ethnic minority communities to break away from the nation, or that the use of the Khmer alphabet for minority languages can have a negative impact on the national language. Individuals or departments may also become taken by new ideas of educational reform, ones that sideline education for minorities. Multilingual education may once again find itself on the fringes. For this reason, advocacy efforts at all levels must be responsive, and program staff should be on guard for shifts and changes in attitudes. Many of the advocacy strategies and tactics reported in this chapter—finding champions in the Ministry, inviting officials to international forums, building trusting and responsive relationships—can all aid in this effort.

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