Basic Education Development in Cambodia: Targets and Policies for Quality Improvement

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List of Abbreviations

ADB Asian Development Bank
ASEAN Association of South-East Asian Nations
CRC Convention on the Rights of the Child
EFA Education for All
EMIS Education Management Information System
EQIP Education Quality Improvement Project
ESP Education Strategic Plan
ESSP Education Sector Support Program
MoEYS Ministry of Education, Youth, and Sport
NGO Non-Governmental Organization
PAP Priority Action Program
UDHR Universal Declaration of Human Rights
UN United Nations
UNDP United Nations Development Program
UNESCO United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization
UNICEF United Nations Children’s Fund
WCEFA World Conference on Education for All
WEF World Education Forum
Chapter 1

Introduction

Globalization encourages every nation-state to spare no effort to provide equitable access to basic education and enhance schooling quality for sustainable participation. Well-designed education policy, curriculum, and educational system will play a fundamental role in building peaceful and prosperous society and socioeconomic development, only if they are timely and properly implemented. This sentiment has been confirmed by a number of studies and observations in many East-Asian countries during the last few decades that once the vast majority of the populace grew to be functionally literate. The ideal way for national development is significantly an improvement of education in which people become more productive, capable of utilizing innovative technology, and flexible in new socio-cultural environment. In this sense, basic education furthermore has been increasingly viewed as a vehicle leading to poverty alleviation, better lifestyles, and national development (Adams, 2002b; Cummings, 2004; Sperling, 2001).

The Global Trends and Issues in Educational Development

The General Assembly of the United Nations (UN) adopted and proclaimed the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), on December 10, 1948, to promote, basically, freedom, justice, and peace in the world. As regards education, Article 26 stated: (i) everyone has the right to education. Education shall be free, at least in the elementary and fundamental stages. Elementary education shall be compulsory. Technical and professional education shall be made generally available and higher education shall be equally accessible to all on the basis of merit; (ii) Education shall be directed to the full development of the human personality and to the strengthening of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms. It shall promote understanding, tolerance, and friendship among all nations, racial or religious groups, and shall further the activities of the UN for the maintenance of peace; (iii) Parents have a prior right to choose the kind of education that shall be given to their children.

This declaration called upon all member countries/states to publicize the text and assure that human beings must be educated efficiently and formally to be able to adapt themselves in their respective society. This historic act has provided a baseline for many world education policymakers to shape and structure their national education systems; and enhance equality of educational opportunity accordingly.
Growing body of debate over ‘equality of educational opportunity’ mounted among many Western scholars during the past few decades. Coleman (1968) raised two questions on whose obligation was to provide such equality; and whose obligation was to use the opportunity: the child or the family? Bastian, Fruchter, Gittell, Greer, and Haskins (1985, p.28) argued that “the commitment to equality can be satisfied by offering each child the same structures of opportunity that, formally at least, make the opportunity universally accessible”. This deems to offer children the same chance to have access to formal schooling provided by the state which is free and, in any case, having a common curriculum.

A suggesting approach would be to include all the poor or other disadvantaged groups into the system of education provided by the state. Boyd (1989) acknowledged the vital role of the state to enhance this equality, and then he argued that equality in education existed only when schooling became compulsory at a basic level. Boyd continued to explain:

The notion of equality related to state education can almost be seen as a by-product of educational provision. More tangible goals such as inculcation those skills and knowledge that an economically-effective workforce should have, and inducting the young into cherished values and mores, will necessarily be in the foreground of all state-funded education systems (p.38).

For the time being, Cole (1989) noted inequality existed in social class, race, and gender. He raised a question on what the state education policy should do to reduce or close the gaps among this social phenomenon. This truly is a challenging task for the state.

Everyone agrees that children are human-beings and the future relies on them. Thus, a convention was adopted in 1989 to ensure that the rights of the children must be respected. The 1989 Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) not only recognized the 1948 UDHR but also appealed for more attention to this so-called vulnerable group, especially children in developing world. Article 28 of the CRC stated:

State Parties recognize the right of the child to education and with a view to achieving this right progressively and on the basis of equal opportunity, the states shall, in particular: (a) make primary education compulsory and available free to all; (b) encourage the development of different forms of secondary education, including general and vocational education, make them available and accessible to every child and take appropriate measures such as the introduction of free education and offering financial assistance in case of need; (c) make higher education accessible to all on the basis of capacity by every appropriate means; (d) make educational and vocational information and guidance available and accessible to all children; (e) take measure to encourage regular attendance at schools and reduction of dropout rates.

The Convention calls for further consideration on making education free and accessible for all at least at a basic level. Though a large number of countries committed to improving the
disparities as Cole (1989) dug out, many more inequality emerged such in the socioeconomic and regional spheres. However, the global improved social services and industrialized economy had widened the gap between the privileged and the unprivileged. The socioeconomic gaps among the UN member countries were considerably large. Thus the assistance is much needed for the underdeveloped and the least-developed countries. With initiations from key UN agencies namely UNESCO, UNICEF, UNDP, and the World Bank in response to the global change led to a largest historical worldwide gathering to jointly make a promise at World Conference on Education for All, in 1990 (WCEFA) to bring about this fundamental right to education to a reality by the year 2000.

After five days of intense discussion during the 1990 WCEFA, 1,500 participants from 155 countries and 160 intergovernmental and nongovernmental organizations as well as the media adopted two texts: World Declaration on EFA (WDEFA) and a Framework for Action to Meet Basic Learning Needs. Hence, the WDEFA in Article 1 stated:

Every person – child, youth and adult – shall be able to benefit from educational opportunities designed to meet their basic learning needs. These needs comprise both essential learning tools (such as literacy, oral expression, numeracy, and problem solving) and the basic learning content (such as knowledge, skills, values, and attitudes) required by human beings to be able to survive, to develop their full capacities, to live and work in dignity, to participate fully in development, to improve the quality of their lives, to make informed decisions, and to continue learning. The scope of basic learning needs and how they should be met varies with individual countries and cultures, and inevitably, changes with the passage of time.

The goal of EFA was anchored in education as a fundamental human right and the understanding that education is important for personal and social improvement. The developing world’s common effort during the 1990s was to eradicate illiteracy and to universalize, at least, primary education by the turn of the century (Dy, 2002a).

Basic social structures, capable human resources, sufficient funds, and political motivation will determine the success in the stride of access to meeting basic learning needs in each society. Empirical research on the conditions of schooling in least-developed countries suggested that public expenditures on education were still considerably low, the quality of schools and effectiveness of learning had tended to be ignored, and the conditions of the schools in many developing countries were so poor (Mehrotra, 1998; Postlethwaite, 1998).

After a decade of collective efforts, a second largest gathering took place in Dakar, Senegal. The 2000 Dakar World Education Forum (WEF) with all the 1990 Jomtien WCEFA participants conceded failing to universalize basic education; and in many developing countries though primary enrolment rates heightened, the dropout rates increased considerably within the primary level. Several other countries, even came close to attain the goal of EFA,
had a concern about the quality and relevance of their education provision. At the Dakar Meeting, all the participants made another attempt to provide quality education for all the world’s children by 2015. Sperling (2001) raised a concern whether the Dakar pledge would join the Jomtien compact in the teeming graveyard of overly ambitious developmental goals.

Identifying ‘Basic Education’ and its ‘Quality’

From a perspective of national development, state intervention is required to shape human resources. Capable manpower enables smooth developmental process stemming from high quality educational provision. Equitable access to quality schooling must be determined by the state and demanded that the parent’s wealth or social standing does not negatively influence the child’s educational opportunity. Basic education of good quality claims that one receives, at least, an adequately minimum quality of schooling (Tooley, 2000).

It is generally agreed among the 1990 Jomtien WCEFA participants that ‘basic education’ covers early childhood education, primary education, non-formal education and it may reach to lower secondary or upper secondary or even higher depending upon the socioeconomic demands and policies of the individual state or society. The most important principle of EFA is to include the disadvantaged children in getting at least the basics of education. As far as the literal definition is concerned, whatever kind of schooling that leads to achieving ‘literacy and numeracy skills’ may be included as ‘basic education’. Interestingly, basic education in many developing Asia tended to be practically meant as basic ability to read and write as a starting point for further learning (UNESCO, 1998).

The current general understanding and definition of basic education in Cambodia as well as in some other Asian countries is measured as nine years of schooling in the formal system as the basic level of education. Thus, Cambodian basic education in this framework refers to primary and lower secondary education which was constitutionally defined as nine years of schooling. Completion of basic education of good quality will enable individuals to comprehend and compose basic texts, understand and work with numbers, and apply essential life skills (MoEYS, 1999).

Concerning the quality of educational provision, UNESCO (2002a) as well as Chapman and Adams (2002) pointed out that the meaning of education quality was hard to define. The 2002 UNESCO EFA Global Monitoring Report continues to explain:

Quality is a multi-faceted concept. It encompasses how learning is organized and managed, what the content of learning is, what level of learning is achieved, what it leads to in terms of outcomes, and what goes on in the learning environment. For example, if parents do not believe that what their children learn is relevant to life, they will not send their children to school even if the opportunity exists (UNESCO, 2002a, p.80).
This can be drawn in a way that the quality of schooling, in general, cannot be judged by looking at school facilities, availability of instructional materials, and qualifications of teachers. Chapman and Adams (2002) suggest:

Examined within context, education quality apparently may refer to ‘inputs’ (numbers of teachers, amount of teacher training, number of textbooks), ‘processes’ (amount of direct instructional time, extent of active learning), ‘outputs’ (test scores, graduation rates), and ‘outcomes’ (performance in subsequent employment) (p.2).

Likewise, UNESCO (2002a) with a conceptually defined as interchangeable term of ‘outputs’ and ‘outcomes’, suggests a framework for assessing education quality by examining ‘inputs’ (what are available at school, student characteristics, and household/community characteristics), ‘process’ (school climate and teaching/learning), and ‘outcomes’ (achievement, attainment, and standards).

Given the complexity of education quality assessment, Ginsburg and Schuber (2001) advised that:

Researchers should observe one or more aspects of ‘inputs’, ‘processes’, ‘contents’ (knowledge, skills, and attitudes being transmitted through the curriculum), ‘outputs’ (relatively short-term consequences, such as students’ cognitive achievement, completion rates, certification, skills, attitudes, and values), and/or ‘outcomes’ (longer term consequences, such as school leavers’ employment, earnings, civic participation, and other attitudes, values and behaviors) (p.4).

Though, Ginsburg and Schubert have added an examination on ‘contents’, they give an opinion on contextual flexibility of the researcher on ‘quality of education’. This gives me an idea for this study that I will examine some relevant characteristics within the input-process-output framework as guided by UNESCO (2002a).

The Central Themes of the Study

The conditions of basic education in many of the developing countries are poor in terms of school facilities, qualifications of teachers, and quality of learning (Graham-brown, 1991; Lockheed & Verspoor, 1991; Nath, Sylva, & Grimes, 1999; Postlethwaite, 1998). These developing nations including Cambodia currently view education as a means to national development and improvement of their peoples’ socioeconomic conditions. The existing area of immense concern in education is quality. The concern about the education system fails to
offer literacy, numeracy and life skills at a minimally acceptable standard. In Cambodia, some recent studies indicate that toward achieving universal basic education requires well-made policies, willpower, mechanisms, and sufficient funds (Dy, 2003; Dy & Ninomiya, 2003).

Several studies highlight one of the main reasons for dropping out of school is that the local communities, especially parents, consider the schooling system fails to meet their expectations and actual needs in their respective locality (Dy, 2001; MoEYS, UNDP, and UNESCO, 2000). Asian Development Bank (1996, p.7) warned many developing nations that “expanding quantity should be coupled with strengthening the quality of the schooling provided, otherwise, without carefully planned programs, quantitative gains could result in qualitative losses”.

This study therefore focuses on basic education or EFA development in Cambodia by describing the trends, issues, and envisaged problems within the nine-year formal basic education system and in the relations between policies and practices. The foremost concerns are the implications of basic education quality improvement measures in Cambodia. Major determinants of quality as identified by UNESCO as inputs, process, and outputs are employed and discussed to assess basic education quality in Cambodia.

Emerging worldwide hypothesis that ‘improved school environment and quality educational provision enhance more schooling participation’ is attested in this work, which is largely based on empirical fieldwork interview with key educational actors in Cambodia. The interview was conducted in October-November, 2003 with central and provincial government officials, international consultants, and school principals. Additionally, the study centers on related literature and the author’s own master’s thesis and recent scholarly published articles. Based on its findings, this study attempts to envision whether Cambodia is on track to achieving its EFA targets by 2015.

Several evidence has proven that the major effort that Cambodia made during the 1990s was to expand access to primary education nationwide (Ayres, 2000; Duggan, 1996; Dy, 2004; Dy & Ninomiya, 2003). Therefore, this study attempts to examine Cambodia’s current efforts to enhance opportunities for its quality basic education; and also seek to understand whether quality improvement enables quantitative expansion. This study will contribute to meeting this need by responding to some major questions: What has been done to improve the opportunity for basic schooling in Cambodia? How key educational administrators in Cambodia make sense of ‘basic education’ and ‘Education for All’? How do they define ‘problem’ and ‘quality’ in the basic education level? What are the factors affecting the enhancement of EFA in Cambodia?

This booklet is composed of five main sections.

- First, it examines some historical settings and the political, socioeconomic and cultural conditions of Cambodia. This section also includes the current Cambodia’s education system and characteristics of basic education.
• Second, it looks at basic schooling development in Cambodia from some historical perspectives. This section traces the policies for ‘modern’ education expansion and examines socioeconomic and political changes made by various regimes during the post French colonial era.

• Third, the study describes and analyzes the current targets and policies for basic schooling expansion and educational quality improvement measures made by the contemporary regime toward achieving basic education for all by 2015.

• Finally, it summarizes the global trends and issues in the provision of equitable access to basic education of an acceptable quality. The study concluded with some reflections on what should be done to improve basic education in Cambodia and toward the targets as set for 2015.
Chapter 2

Understanding Cambodia: History, Culture, Society, Economy, Politics, and Education System

The essential core of education for Cambodia and all its citizens though for the most part, equivalent to the other nation-states, but has its significant reasons. Situations in Cambodia over the last few decades determine the flux of policies for educational development. Hence, some descriptions and analyses of interrelated aspects of education are proven important in this study. Cambodia’s socio-cultural aspects are complex and particularly different from other developing countries in the form that the country’s leadership between 1975 and 1979 of the Khmer Rouge regime rejected international assistance and intervention and attempted to build a utopian society. Hence, this chapter aims to convince the audience that in order to gain deeper understanding on Cambodian basic education developmental phenomena and its quality improvement efforts – some examinations on its history, traditional contemporary culture, socioeconomic aspect and politics are important to be included in this trace.

The Historical Setting

Recent history of Cambodia has been clouded with more than its fair share of tragedy. Civil conflict and political turmoil, which were seemingly orchestrated by foreign powers over the past two decades, have caused incalculable destruction of human and natural resources, socio-cultural structures, infrastructures, and a vast poverty among its currently estimated 13 million people. Postcolonial Cambodia, during the 1950s and the 1960s, was celebrated as one of the most prosperous states in Southeast Asia – was eventually plunged into the Vietnam War in the first half of the 1970s; and more dangerously fallen into a socio-cultural eradication and elimination of the Western ideology during the second half of the 1970s.

Historians (such as Chandler, 1991; Ros, 1997) clarifies that Cambodians or Khmers were amongst the first inhabitants in Asia dated to several thousands of years before Christ. Scholars believe that these people may have been Austro-Asiatic in origin and related to the ancestors of the groups who now inhabit in Southeast Asia and many of the islands of the Pacific Ocean. They made tools from iron and bronze, and had navigational skills. Mon-Khmers, who arrived at a later date, probably intermarried with them. The Khmer who now populate Cambodia may have migrated from southeastern China to the Indochinese
Peninsula before the first century A.D. They are believed to have arrived before their present Vietnamese, Thai, and Lao neighbors (Basham, 1974; Cady, 1964; Steinberg, 1959).

Archaeological evidence indicates that Cambodia has a long history dating to several thousands of years. In their archeological findings Stark and Allen (1998) described:

The results of two recent seasons of archeological fieldwork at Angkor Borei, an inland center associated with the complex, early, pre-Khmer polity the Chinese described as “Funan” from the first through the sixth centuries A.D., now suggest that the area was occupied many centuries before Funan was first described, and continued after references to Funan ceased in the historical record (p.169).

Other historical scholars continued to explain that by the first century A.D., the inhabitants had developed relatively stable, organized societies, which had far exceeded the primitive stage in culture and technical skills. The most advanced groups lived along the coastal lines and in the lower Mekong River valley and delta regions, where they cultivated rice, fished and domesticated animals (Cady, 1964; Chandler, 1991, 1998; Stark & Allen, 1998).

The land of Cambodia before the ninth century was called Suvarnabhumi (the land of gold) by early Indian traders, Funan by Chinese historians, and Nokor Phnom (the mountain country) in Khmer language. In pre-historical times (before the Indian arrival), scholars (Chandler, 1991, 1998; Jacobsen, 2003; Ros, 1997; Steinberg, 1959) claimed that, at least, the last leader of Cambodia was a woman.

The country was articulated to be first invaded by a Brahman prince and his naval fighters from India. The local land protectors were defeated in the clash; and then the female chieftain was made wife by the prince. Subsequently, the Indian ideas of kingship and trade were adopted in this oldest mainland Southeast Asia. This earliest Indianized kingdom became the most civilized state in the region. Basham (1974) asserted:

From the second to the sixth centuries A.D., Funan [Nokor Phnom] was the paramount power not only in mainland Southeast Asia but also in the archipelago. It seems to have included the southern and central part of the Indochinese Peninsula as well as practically the whole of the Malay Peninsula except for the southernmost part, and would therefore have dominated the Gulf of Siam [Thailand] and presumably also the western Indonesian waters. The importance of Funan as a sea-faring and trading nation is attested by finds made at Oc-Eo, situated in what is today southern Vietnam, not far from Rach Gia, which must have been one of its main ports. Signs have been found here of trade not only with India and China, but also with Persia and even Greece and Rome, thus corroborating Chinese accounts of a Roman mission to eastern Asia in the second century A.D. (p.89).
Its rich natural resources such as gold, bronze, and silk materials enabled the Funan’s people to engage both economically and culturally with other powerful states. This amplified competition or rivalry among provinces in the kingdom. Conflicts materialized among royal princes who controlled various territories. Several aspects, such as external powers’ interventions, poor administrative infrastructures, and increasing disparities among several areas of this extensive kingdom directed to a collapse (Basham, 1974). Several territories of the kingdom claimed independence. The central power of the Funan kingdom remained and was later known as Angkor kingdom in the ninth century.

Figure 1: Historical map of Cambodia and its neighboring countries

Source: Chandler (1991, p.78)

Strengthening local economy through improved agricultural production was the key policy for rebuilding the state after the civil strife. The policies of the Kingdom of Angkor aimed at strengthening political power through reforms in bureaucratic structures, improving irrigation system, and building roads and social infrastructures. Its success was even much further than the Funan period (Basham, 1974). During the period, 802-1431 A.D. many historians noted that Cambodia’s political and economic powers rose to reach its zenith. The
Great Empire of the Khmers was described by Steinberg (1959) as follows:

This was the time of greatness; the period modern leaders refer to when rallying their people. At its peak the empire extended from the Annam chain to the Gulf of Siam. The buildings at Angkor Wat, erected at this time, have become a national symbol, a sketch of them being a prominent feature of the national flag. The kings of this period are hailed today in political speeches. Outstanding among these kings in modern Cambodian veneration are Jayavarman II and Jayavarman VII (p.10).

While the Khmer Empire gradually absorbed nearly all mainland Southeast Asia and determined this area’s political and cultural development, emerging small states (Thailand, Burma, and Vietnam) which were rooted in Southern China, weakened this great kingdom; and forced the Angkor supremacy to collapse in 1432 (Chandler, 1991, 1998). After incursion by Thai forces, Angkor was abandoned and the capital was moved in the region of the confluence of the Tunle Sap River and the Mekong – first at Chaktomuk, Phnom Penh, then at Lungvek and Udong and as a French protectorate, moved back to Phnom Penh at Chaktomuk (Basham, 1974). The political and artistic energy of the Khmer seems to have disappeared after the fall of Angkor.

Frequent invasions, occupations and border encroachments done by the Thais and the Vietnamese during the post-Angkor period (15th – 19th centuries) causing Cambodia an inestimable loss of its inherited property and extensive territories. The Khmer people though bearing pride of their magnificent past lost their superior spirit and only struggled to exist. Basham (1974, p.109) noted “the survival of the Khmers as a national entity is only due to the intervention of the French in the nineteenth century”. The collapse of the Angkor supremacy downsized Cambodia into the current 181,035 square kilometers.

Figure 2: The current map of Cambodia
Contemporary Cambodia borders with Laos to the Northeast, Vietnam to the East, Thailand and the Gulf of Thailand (which is part of the South China Sea) to the Northwest and the West. Cambodia became a French protectorate in 1863 and gained full independence from France in 1954 and became a member of the United Nations in the same year.

The Franco-Cambodian treaty of 1863 gave France exclusive control of Cambodian foreign affairs and the right to defend Cambodia against external and internal enemies. A French resident-general was installed in the Cambodian capital. Prevalent political, economic, and social powers were arranged for the French, but even more powers were demanded. With their cannon trained on the royal palace, the French often granted with what they wanted (Chandler, 1998). Over ninety years under the French colonial power, Cambodia was exploited commercially and culturally (Steinberg, 1959).

After 1887 Cambodia became part of an Indochinese Union which included Tonkin, Annam, Cochin China (these three countries now make up Vietnam), and Laos. Then, French public administrative system was set up and the powers of the local officials were reduced. Scholars noted that among the French colonies in Indochina, Cambodia was not a favorite of the French power for the French had mentioned in their report that Cambodia was difficult to manage. In the early 1900s, Cambodia was peaceful, prosperous, and powerless (Steinberg, 1959).

Almost two decades during the postcolonial era, Cambodia’s politics was dominated by the power of Prince Sihanouk – who abdicated his throne which he had held since 1941 – governed Cambodia single-handedly – as Prime Minister, Father of the National Independence, and Chief of State. His government policy, based on the concept of Angkor Empire, was to rebuild Cambodia into an advanced nation-state in Southeast Asia. Under his leadership from 1955 to 1970, Cambodia was peaceful, prosperous, and powerful. Major Sihanouk’s government policies were attested by Chandler (1991) as follows:

Cambodia had emerged more or less unscathed from the First Indochina War and the departure of the French. Its steady exports of rice, rubber, and pepper earned enough money overseas to pay for government programs, and the budget was enhanced by foreign aid from a wide range of Communist, neutral, and anti-Communist countries. In 1955, Sihanouk had chosen a neutral position in the cold war that was then raging between the United States and its allies on the one hand and the Soviet Union and its allies on the other. The Prince saw no value in Cambodia taking sides (p.119).

The Sihanouk regime’s foreign policy on balancing the world powers became shaky when it refused the US aid in 1963 and then the US suspected the regime for favoring the Communists and backed a coup d'état against Sihanouk in March 1970. It was the first time that the regime
of the early 1970s abandoned monarchy which had played its part in Cambodian politics for thousands of years. The new regime led by Sihanouk’s most trusted senior general Lon Nol declared Cambodia a Khmer Republic.

The Lon Nol regime was at first popular among intellectuals and students. It declared its move against the Communist North Vietnam which had done a secret pack with Sihanouk to allow Cambodian soil as military bases for the North to conquer the South Vietnam. The regime not only failed to improve Cambodia’s situations but directed to involve in Indochina’s war and civil conflicts. Corruptions and poor leadership led this regime to collapse in 1975 (Chandler, 1991).

Many peasants and intellectuals who lost hope in the corrupt Lon Nol’s regime (1970-75) fled to join the jungle fighters with hope to liberate Cambodia from the flame of Indochina’s war, corruption, and political turmoil. The victory over the Lon Nol’s regime was much welcome by many Cambodians but the leaders of this new regime revolutionized Cambodia far more than expected. Chandler (1998) described the new regime policy as follows:

The Communist regime that controlled Cambodia between April 1975 and January 1979 was known as Democratic Kampuchea. The revolution it sponsored swept through the country like a forest fire or a typhoon, and its spokesmen claimed that “over two thousand years of Cambodian history” had ended. So had money, markets, formal education, Buddhism, books, private property, diverse clothing styles, and freedom of movement. No Cambodian government had ever tried to change so many things so rapidly; none had been so relentlessly oriented toward the future or so biased in favor of the poor (p.209).

For almost four years under the revolutionary regime of the Khmer Rouge which many people claimed to have had adopted the China’s Maoist Cultural Revolution, it has been estimated that approximately two million people lost their lives. A conflict within the leadership of this murderous regime occurred in the late 1970s and some fled to seek Vietnamese intervention like some of their leaders did during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

Vietnamese political and military intervention with support of many Eastern socialist-bloc nations came in January 1979 and eventually turned to be an occupation. Under the banner ‘volunteer Vietnamese army liberates Cambodian people from the genocidal regime of Pol Pot’ stimulated wide support from the Khmer people and the sweep moved faster than expected. A new government was installed and Marx-Lenin socialism was used to lead this troubled nation to Vietnamese-Soviet style of Communism. The occupation ended in 1989 due to strong pressures and diplomatic and economic sanctions of many liberal and Western nations as well as the United Nations.

A peace accord was signed at the International Conference on Cambodia in Paris in October 1991 by all the four warring factions (for further elaboration see Chandler, 1998).
move from violence to negotiation for national reconciliation with the arrangements by some powerful world leaders led to a general election supervised and organized by the UN in July 1993 even with one of the factions, the infamous Khmer Rouge had boycotted the election. The Khmer Rouge machinery and forces remained and controlled perhaps a fifth of the territory of Cambodia, spreading along the inhospitable north and northwest, where they concluded profitable deals with Thai entrepreneurs to exploit Cambodia’s natural resources such as timber and gem, and once in a while attacked the new government outposts (Chandler, 1998). The Khmer people have a trauma of invading neighbors (Vietnam and Thailand) and they are sensitive of any matters regarding these two more powerful nations to the East and the West.

The Khmer Culture and Civilization

Culture is the arts and other expressions of human’s intellectual achievement viewed as a group. A nation is identified by its culture. Culture may change its size or fade when passing through time and environment or other influential factors. It is unlikely to find pure culture of any particular nation existing in this era of hi-tech and globalizing society. The means such as language and media have been playing their part in changing or shaping the culture. A concern about losing national identity in the era of globalization is growing among scholars and world leaders.

The trend in taking and giving or an exchange of cultures among two or more groups is inevitable for co-existence or integration of individuals. It is common that ancient and modern civilizations of larger powers have taken their turns to influence other smaller and less powerful nations. The impact of these civilizations though some are negative or short-term and the other are positive or long-term, they must have changed the actual core of the receiving cultures.

Obviously, the culture of leadership and administrative system in Cambodia has been strongly influenced for many centuries first by the ‘ancient’ Indian civilization and lastly by the ‘modern’ French society. Concomitantly, as a people in Southeast Asia the Khmer social culture and economics were relatively influenced by Chinese ways of life. Migrations and intermarriages largely of the Indians and the Chinese between the third and fourteenth centuries emerged at least three categories: the administrative leaderships (the individuals who were most likely to be influenced by Indian civilizing system), the business holders (the individuals who were largely influenced by the Chinese civilization) and the peasants (mostly the local Khmers who retained pride of their first-inhabitant ancestors). It has been observed that the Khmer culture experienced its subsequently ups-and-downs events after the collapse of the Angkor supremacy in 1432.
Prior to the influx of the foreign cultures, the Mon-Khmer gradually developed their land and community by cultivating rice and raising animals. Their socioeconomic status was shown by the size of their rice fields and their houses and numbers of the cattle they possessed. Their community became more organized and extended along the coastal and waterway areas. David Chandler, a distinguished Western historical researcher specializing in Cambodia highlighted:

> Increased rice production freed some people to engage in other work, such as elaborate boat building, house decoration, bronze manufacture, and making arrangements for feasting. Others were freed to be soldiers, and a few became priests and rulers. These men soon became the most honored people in society. Often they demonstrated their power by the size of their followers and the amount of their wealth (Chandler, 1991, p.42).

Several scholars based their arguments on some archeological findings and comparing the Khmer and Indian customary behaviors, assumed that the pre-historical Khmer ethnic group had a relatively sophisticated culture (Britannica, 2001; Jacobsen, 2003; Keng, 2004). These early inhabitants of the present-day Cambodia believed that the souls of their ancestral figures who had previously owned the land, the water, and the forest still lived with them. They revered and abided their fantastic predecessors’ ideology and achievement. They even believed that their ancestral souls could help them or witnessed all their acts. For example, when they fell sick, they prayed to their ancestral souls for recovery; when had problems that they could not solve, they asked the souls of their outstanding figures in their locality for help; and when they swore, they swore themselves in the souls of their figures and they acknowledged them for all what they gained.

One may argue that the pre-classical Cambodian polities were dominated by women for the course in the most renowned Cambodian legend “Preah Thorng Neang Niak” in which described a prince presumably from India sailed eastward and when arrived at Korkthlaok Island (the earliest land of Cambodia) faced with an army led by Neang Niak and fought to defend her territory. She was defeated and made wife of the Prince Preah Thorng.

The Indian structural and political system was progressively integrated into the early Khmer culture. The creation of Funan Kingdom or Nokor Phnom in the third century A.D. is obviously an evidence for absorbing of Indian ideas of polity and trade. During this period, Chandler (1991) described:

> By the third century A.D., Indian influence in the form of writing was already widespread in Funan [pre-Angkor period] … Cambodians encountered Indians and responded to them by absorbing some of their
ideas, blending others with their own, and sharing technological skills. The process of Indianization continued for several centuries in Cambodia. Those most affected by it were members of the elite, who gave themselves Indian names, composed poetry in Indian languages and followed the spiritual guidance of Indian priests (p.45).

This Indian civilization was first absorbed by the elite and then blended with the local culture. The real Khmer culture came to be most cared by the local people living in rural or remote areas.

Indian and Chinese cultural elements such as language scripts, religions, and polities mounted in Southeast Asia during the fifth and the eighth centuries which saw several emerging small states and extensive business dealings and wars among them. The Khmer language script was believed to be created during this period and Hinduism was much accepted by the Khmer leadership (Basham, 1974).

A wise amalgamation of foreign civilizations and the local culture with greater improvement of economic power, the Khmer managed to establish their own civilization which was widely spread and influenced much of the mainland Southeast Asia during the ninth and the fifteenth centuries. The Khmer produced a great number of doctrines and arts of all social and economic structures unfortunately all these achievements were robbed, burned down, and taken by invaders to be their own and the Khmer later generations were lost and uneducated after the fall of Angkor in the mid fifteenth century.

Cambodians have a maxim that “if the culture is dim, inevitably the nation dies.” This has raised a number of concerns about the loss of the Cambodian culture over the last few centuries after the fall of Angkor which has been justified as the time when the Khmer culture was glorified and the nation was extensively unified. During the French colonial period, an attempt to Romanize Khmer language script was turned down by many religious elite and nationalists hence the French culture and language were much impacted only a small number of ‘modern’ elite and their leadership.

There are negative and positive aspects of the Khmer tradition. From a present-day perspective, women/girls are, commonly, not encouraged to travel far to work or seek formal education. Their full independence is not yet granted though they reach the age of eighteen. Traditionally, the young females are in hands of their parents and when they become grown-ups they will be handed over to their husbands. In the family, the youngest daughter inherits all the remaining property or family’s possessions. The sons are usually sent out to have some sort of education and skills for leading their respective own families and bring glory to the family by attending Buddhist temple education and back to serve the family and community. The parents devote themselves for increasing property for their children after they get married and they will decide to live with the youngest child since the child is the one who inherits most or the remaining large amount of their assets. This trend suggests that the
youngest daughter is the one who is supposed to take care of her elderly parents when she is married and schooling beyond literacy level is deemed unnecessary for her.

**The Contemporary Socio-Economic Aspects**

Approximately 90 percent of the currently estimated 14 million population of Cambodia are ethnic Khmer and the rest are about 30 ethnic minority groups living in upland areas, the Cham (Islamic Khmer), Vietnamese, Chinese, etc. Roughly 15 percent of the total population lives in urban areas; and the average size of household is as high as 5.2. Estimated 67 percent of the population aged 15 years and above are basically literate (MoEYS, 2000). As regards socioeconomic involvement, National EFA Assessment Group (1999) noted:

Cambodia’s economy is predominantly agrarian, with agriculture employing about 75.3 percent of the labor force. Agricultural practices are basically traditional employing labor intensive methods. Industry (principally mining and manufacturing) employs only about 3.1 percent of the population. The tertiary service sector comprises hotels, trade, transport, education, health, tourism, etc. and accounts for the remaining 21.6 percent of the labor force. About 52 percent of the labor forces in the rural areas are women. The difficulties they face in accomplishing agricultural work have left arable lands vacant as they abandon their farms migrating to the urban areas in search of alternative means of livelihood (p.3).

Like other developing Asia, Cambodian economy relies heavily on agricultural sector and over 80 percent of the population inhabit in rural areas and make their living by cultivating rice, growing fruit-trees and vegetables, making palm-sugar, and fishing. Since independence, rice and fish have been major sources of food to feed the local people and export. Growing small-sized industry and service sectors since the last few decades has urged many Cambodian families to pay more attention to their education and economic betterment. However, the national socioeconomic report during 1995-2000 stated that only 33 percent of the 12 year-old children completed their primary education.

As Cambodia receives natural and geographical concession, the monsoon crop and vegetable peasants are socioeconomically better than the rice and sugar-palm makers. People who live along the Mekong River, which stretches across the country from the north to the south offers great source for fish and crops harvesting. Those residents in the low and fertile land are more in better condition than those living in the mountainous and remote to the water mainstream areas.

Rural poverty is a formidable barrier to schooling. The opportunity costs of education
are too high for many rural households. Roughly 83 percent of the children aged 5-14 years live in rural areas. An estimated 16 percent of the children aged 5-17 are involved in labor and 9 out of 10 are working in agriculture. Additionally, one of every three working children dropped out of school or non-formal training programs in order to supplement their household income or to work for pay\(^1\). Most rural women’s earnings come from agriculture. They work on an average of 10 hours everyday of the weak making less than one American dollar a day. Cambodia has one of the world’s highest percentage of woman-headed households, it is safe to assume that the children of these women are pressed into sibling care, housework, and farming (Dy, 2002b).

Estimated 36 percent of the population lives below the poverty line making less than a US dollar a day. The gap between the rich and the poor has widened since the introduction of free-market economy and the inflow of aid to during the early 1990s. Cambodia is less affected by natural disasters but illegal logging and poor management of natural resources in recent years caused flooding and drought which negatively affected the poor people’s economy in rural areas. The amount of fish in the Tonle Sap Great Lake and the Mekong River has terribly receded. A number of landless people have increased to 15-20 percent of the total population\(^2\). People migration from the country to the city for better opportunity as well as the number of the poor cross the borders to seek employment in neighboring countries surprisingly elevated.

### The Education System and the Characteristics of Basic Education

Following the period of rehabilitation and reconstruction in the 1980s, education system has been gradually developed from pre-school to post secondary education levels and offered a variety of vocational and technical training programs. The system began with an optional three-year pre-school education then followed by necessary six-year primary and three-year lower-secondary schooling. The official age for entry into grade 1 is 6 years old. The first 9 years of schooling has been officially and constitutionally considered ‘formal basic education’ since 1993. Article 68 of the Constitution hence stresses that “the State shall provide free primary and secondary education to all citizens in public schools. The citizens shall receive education for at least nine years”.

Currently, Cambodia’s school year starts in the third week of September, interrupted with a two-week break in April, and then continues until the end of June. The academic year is generally divided into two semesters: September to January and February to June. There are also non-formal education programs, which aim to supplement the formal one, for adults and out-of-school youth. Students who successfully complete nine years of formal basic education can either continue to upper secondary education or take primary vocational training course in
the following three years on examination basis. There are very few primary and secondary educational institutions offered by the private sector.

Post-secondary education is composed of technical and vocational colleges from some two to three years in length of study. There are currently four years of full-time study for most undergraduate courses, except some institutions are still adopting a five-to-seven-year basis, such as pharmacy, dentistry, and medicine programs. Postgraduate studies, mainly Master’s degree programs, have just been started in some private and public institutions. The government’s priority objective is to create equal opportunities for school-age children of all parts of the country and all ethnic groups to attend schools so that they will have the chance to complete at least primary education and towards receiving the full nine years of basic education.

Table 1: The general structure of education system in Cambodia

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Levels of Study</th>
<th>Pre-School</th>
<th>Primary Education</th>
<th>Lower Secondary Education</th>
<th>Upper Secondary Education</th>
<th>Higher Education</th>
<th>Post-Graduate Education</th>
<th>Average Age</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>High</td>
<td>Early Childhood Education</td>
<td>Primary Education</td>
<td>Lower Secondary Education</td>
<td>Upper Secondary Education</td>
<td>Higher Education</td>
<td>Post-Graduate Education</td>
<td>Average Age</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medium</td>
<td>Pre-School</td>
<td>Primary Education</td>
<td>Lower Secondary Education</td>
<td>Upper Secondary Education</td>
<td>Higher Education</td>
<td>Post-Graduate Education</td>
<td>Average Age</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
The main objective of the Cambodian education system is to develop pedagogic, cognitive, mental, and physical abilities of the learners. It aims at developing among its citizens a sense of self-confidence, self-reliance, responsibility, solidarity, national unity, patriotism, and culture of peace. This requires the public school to significantly shape the children to become good citizens, to live together peacefully, to be able to live up to their responsibilities towards their families’ happiness and to contribute to promoting social welfare (MoEYS, 1999).

The organizational structure of the education system can be perceived to have adopted elements of a centrally planned public administrative structure. At the central level, tasks are divided among general departments and specializing departments. In various domains of management, decisions are made on the basis of consent and assignment (Dy, 2002b).

As lack of communication means at the horizontal line of authority, education administrators at the grass-root level are obliged to make decisions on many things without referring to higher levels. Consequently, the implementation of the ministry's guidelines or instructions by each administrative unit varies according to geographical or specific conditions of each locality (MoEYS, 1999).

Administratively, the educational system consists of four levels, or horizontal lines of authority, consisting of the ministry at central level, the provincial/municipal level and the district or precinct level, and the schools. In order for the schools to cooperatively develop their own capacity and effectiveness of reform, a system of clustering schools was adopted during the late 1990s. A school cluster is a group of schools located near each other that can provide mutual technical and materials assistance to make the teaching-learning process more effective (MoEYS, 1998, 1999).

Educational planning is a major component useful to educational administrators at all levels to evaluate the results of their work and to make their decisions more effectively. The process of planning requires accurate information on the current situation of each unit or system and involves many steps, including data collection, analysis, diagnosis and identification of priority activities to be subsequently carried out. At the present, the Department of Planning runs an Education Management Information System (EMIS) Center. Its mission is to collect data from all schools across the country for processing, analyzing and then compiling into statistics and indicators yearbooks for distribution to all levels of educational administrators and available for scholars and research organizations (MoEYS, 1999).

Political and socioeconomic changes have led Cambodia to successive reforms of the country's education system. Before 1975, the country adopted a French-based education system that required 13 years of education (6+4+2+1) with four or five major examinations. After 1979, the Ministry of Education – followed the Vietnamese guidelines implemented a
10 year-socialist-styled education system (4+3+3), but later expanded it to an 11-year education system (5+3+3) in 1986 prior to reaching the current system of twelve years.³

In response to the political change and socioeconomic improvement, the school curriculum was reformed, new textbooks were developed, and new teaching skills were provided to teachers to prepare ground for the introduction of a 12-year education system (6+3+3) in the 1996-97 school year. The new system has increased the number of learning hours for every grade in primary cycle.

According to a survey jointly launched in March 1999 by the Department of Planning and a World Bank project, the new curriculum should apply 1,140 periods of learning that is equal to 855 teacher-pupil contact hours. The teaching and learning hours stipulated by MoEYS are 950 periods of learning hours or 633 teacher-pupil contact hours but in practice only 825 periods of learning hours or 533 teacher-pupil contact hours are offered.⁴

‘Basic education’ is constitutionally defined in 1993 as nine years of formal schooling, comprising of primary and lower secondary education. The term derives from the 1990 WCEFA and aims at ‘meeting basic learning needs’ – the knowledge, skills, attitudes, and values necessary for people to survive, to improve the quality of life and to continue learning. Although basic schooling is ‘officially stated’ free of charge in public institutions, practically all schools required students to pay some maintenance contributions pending 2001⁵. In the Basic Education Social Sector Plan 1996-2000, the government anticipated that nine years of schooling would become compulsory in the future.

The official school age at primary level is from 6 to 11 years of age. The pupils are promoted from one grade to another after basically passing average scores in the end-of-the-year examinations. Pupils who fail to obtain the required scores can repeat only twice during the primary cycle. The official school age of lower secondary level is from 12 to 14 years of age. Pupils are allowed to repeat their year only once at this level. They are promoted to the next grade after fulfilling some basic requirements and pass the end-of-year examinations. ⁶
This chapter traces and analyzes educational strategy and policy development from 1950 to the period before the 1990 WCEFA with a special concern on basic education strategies and policies. This period is critically significant for the history of formal and mass ‘modern’ schooling system in Cambodia. It covers the very last few years during the French colonial era, Prince Sihanouk regime (1953-1970), Lon Nol regime (1970-75), Pol Pot or infamous regime of the Khmer Rouge (1975-79), and Heng Samrin regime (1979-1989). It probes the regimes' educational strategies and policies for their citizens in line with the socioeconomic factors and their political trends. Their inputs, methods, and outputs are discussed as to explain their commitments to building or changing Cambodia.

Enhancing Opportunities for Basic Education during the 1950s and the 1960s

Postcolonial Cambodia’s education system was administratively and academically derived from the French colonial education system introduced to Indochina during the early 1910s. During the colonial era, educational achievement (such as primary and secondary education certificates) in Cambodia was equivalent to education in France. Deighton (1971) noted:

Cambodia’s education [during the 1950s-1960s] framework is based primarily on the regulations established by the French governor general for all Indochina in 1917. Under the 1917 plan Cambodia was provided with an educational system similar to that of France, with a six-year primary school cycle followed by four years of advanced primary schooling and finally three years of secondary study (p.578).

Primary schooling was composed of two levels: elementary and complementary. National budget for education was increased to 25 percent over 1950 intended for staffing, material production, and school construction. Several of the government attempts were to modernize as many as possible the traditional temple schools.

The ‘modernized’ temple schools were mainly located in rural areas. Set of courses was varied between rural and urban primary schools owing to ‘practically different’ needs. The syllabuses of the rural schools were stressed on rice cultivation, crop improvement,
handicrafts, bodily sanitation, and food hygiene. Interestingly, urban schoolchildren enjoyed more general knowledge since they were prepared for secondary education, higher education or technical schools. French was only the language of instruction for urban schools (since most of the teachers were from France) but in rural schools Khmer was also allowed to use (Yukanthor, 1951).

In the last few years before the French left Cambodia, the colonial government, with recommendations from UNESCO, grudgingly introduced compulsory education for children aged 6 to 13 years. Events during these years have shown that the effort to provide compulsory, free primary education was too hasty (Dy, 2004). In the report presented at the UNESCO’s 14th International Conference on Public Education, Princess Ping Peang Yukanthor stated:

The principle of compulsory education can thus not be fully applied – until the government is in a position to fulfill its essential duties through the possession of sufficient number of teachers able, not only to instruct, but also to educate, and of adequate funds to meet all necessary expenditures (Yukanthor, 1951, p.1).

Furthermore, Cambodian education was without universal curriculum. Urban schools were able to offer more subjects in sciences and technology than the rural ones, which combined to focus on local traditional culture and more social subjects.

More efforts during the early 1950s were to combat vast illiteracy among adults in rural areas. Teaching method was also planned to improve for more activities for children in class. The government policy prioritized on primary school building, teacher training, and increasing opportunities for secondary education. There was also an attempt to reform curriculum but it was not possible for some constraints in political and economic conditions (Ministry of National Education, Youth, and Fine Arts, 1953).

Postcolonial education under Prince Sihanouk regime continued the strategies previously outlined by the colonial experts. His policies for education after gaining independence were to attain the goal of compulsory primary education for all and to increase, at all levels of educational opportunities from primary to university institutions (Dy, 2004).

The Prince’s efforts were to build a prosperous nation-state through educational development. New principles of educational development in the 1950s, with the recommendations from UNESCO, were introduced and some were fully implemented such as increasing more learning opportunities for boys and girls and fighting illiteracy among adults in rural areas. However, the achievement was far to satisfaction. Statistically, there were only 10 percent of female adult were basically literate in 1958 (Pung, 1959).

The government’s strategies were to request more contributions from the public to
build schools. As government’s schools were aimed to emphasize more on Khmer language and culture together with the language of instruction was gradually developed countrywide into Khmer. Independent schools (approved and inspected by the government) emerged. Most of them located in urban areas for the children of the elite, and many others were financed and run by Chinese and Vietnamese communities (Yukanthor, 1955).

The term ‘basic education’, which aimed at the level of primary education, was first used in the annual government report to UNESCO in 1957. The report signified that the UNESCO’s recommendation to integrate audio-visual materials into the existing teaching methods at fundamental education level was not possible at that time (Ministry of National Education, 1956-57).

Regardless of inadequate quality in basic education system, several scholars (Bit, 1991; Deighton, 1971; Dunnett, 1993) noted that the Prince Sihanouk regime, compared to the French era, had made significant progress in increasing accessibility at all levels of education. Deighton (1971) statistically described:

> By the late 1960s, more than one million children enrolled in primary education as compared with about 0.6 million in 1960 and 0.13 million in 1950. From 1950 to 1965 the number of females enrolled at the primary level grew from 9 percent to 39 percent. The number of teachers and schools has expanded commensurately from 1950 to 1964. Although primary enrolment rate increased, the illiteracy rate was estimated 50 percent in 1953 for a population of 3.7 million and at 55 percent for a population of 6.2 million in 1966 (p.579).

Reflecting its attention and commitment to formal education in building a modern and peaceful state, the regime even increased its national budget for education to over twenty percent of the national expenditure by the late 1950s and subsequent years.

However, other scholars such as Ayres (1999, 2000), Chandler (1991, 1998), Duggan (1996), and the two current senior education officials interviewed for this study commented that the regime had failed to universalize basic education and enhance employment for high school and university graduates. Thus, Duggan (1996) criticized the regime as followed:

> The education system provided by Sihanouk was biased towards the nation’s large cities. Rural Cambodia did not benefit from the selective expansion strategies employed by the Prince [Sihanouk] and [the regime] handsomely built universities did not assist rural children and their family's poverty (p. 364).

Moreover, (Meas, 1974) criticized the Sihanouk regime for making limited reform into teaching methodology and curriculum, added to the low quality in educational delivery.

Despite criticisms of the regime for not having wisely enhanced nationwide literacy-oriented education or increasing quality-schooling opportunity for all, the regime marked a great recovery of Cambodia in the past few hundred years of its history. Dunnett (1993) claimed that during the 1960s, Cambodia had one of the highest literacy rates and most
progressive education systems in Southeast Asia.

Further indications of the Prince Sihanouk regime were in some well-known Khmer accounts as written during the 1950s and 1960s\(^1\), in which revealed the struggles of young men and their families for education and employment. The belief that enhanced education would bring the benefit of higher employment in the government sector was raised in these works, which were also subsequently reflected in school curriculum. The social values of further education of the individual leading to better future were closely associated with the creation of more higher education institutions in the more populous cities. However, the failure to give top priority to basic education during the 1960s led to the crisis in education system (for further discussion, see Ayres, 2000).

**Educational Crisis and Decline: 1970-1975**

Following the over fifteen years of peace and prosperity which Cambodia enjoyed under the Sihanouk regime, General Lon Nol backed by the United States, seized control in a diplomatic coup d'état in March 1970 and declared the creation of the Khmer Republic. This incident may have been caused by the Prince’s foreign policy, which was interpreted as ‘practically’ supporting Communist Vietnam and angering the United States during the Vietnam War. It was the first time that Cambodia abolished its chronological monarchy. Not only was there little constructive reform during this period, but rather the country was driven to civil conflict as Communism strengthened to its hold in the East and fighting in rural areas spread in the early 1970s, causing barriers to schooling opportunities. In turmoil, the regime completely collapsed in April 1975 and socioeconomic achievements of the previous regime soon vanished.

The nationwide instability and political turmoil led the Lon Nol regime to reduce funding on education resulting in many school closures in some rural areas. More and more teachers and secondary school students fled to join the Khmer Rouge movement in the jungles. Simultaneously, frequent student and teacher demonstrations occurred in Phnom Penh and some principal cities. By early 1972, the US bombardment, which aimed at slowing the spread of communism from the East, resulted in heavy human capital losses and a serious damage to the education system and infrastructure (Duggan, 1996).

The Ministry of National Education under the Khmer Republic faced with huge challenges in dealing with a decline of funding and a loss of its resources during this civil war. The regime’s opponent in both in the parliament and the jungles became a threat to the leadership by which its US support progressively weakened. The Khmer Rouge’s ideology, which was receiving strong support from Prince Sihanouk – who had been joining the Khmer Rouge to topple Lon Nol – spread and drew additional support from many people especially
the rural peasants. These people fled their home en mass to unite the revolt movement (Chandler, 1998).

The Khmer Republic, in its early years, planned to universalize primary education with some sorts of administrative and curriculum reforms to curb declining quality and participation. Its priorities were (1) to build more primary schools, (2) to train and retrain more teachers with new teaching methodology, (3) to orient the system toward a judicious adaptation to new economic, social, and cultural requirements (Meas, 1974). Within its reform initiatives there was also an attempt to insert some principles of Western ideas to protect Cambodia from the Communism of the Easter-bloc countries. Unfortunately, these policies could not be implemented.

**Schooling Abolition: 1975-1979**

Cambodia was eventually plunged into a complete darkness during the regime of Democratic Kampuchea, or the infamous Khmer Rouge, locally known as the Pol Pot regime which came into power on 17<sup>th</sup> April, 1975. The regime distorted Cambodia into a revolutionary Communism. Pol Pot’s ‘great leap’ revolutionary organization further ravaged Cambodia through the mass destruction of individual property, schooling system, and social culture by forcing the entire population either into the army camps or onto collective farms (Ayres, 1999; Chandler, 1998; Dunnett, 1993).

The regime of the 1975-79 ceased Cambodia off from nearly all communication with the outside world, the Khmer Rouge’s organization (*Angkar*) evacuated Phnom Penh and all other urban centers, and city dwellers were sent to the countryside where they were forced to work in agricultural cooperatives under cruel supervision. Many people suspected of being associated with the previous regime were killed, as were students, teachers, engineers, doctors, and other educated people (Clayton, 1998). Additionally, Chandler (2000) described the launching of its rule as followed:

> Without explaining their rationale, the Khmer Rouge forcibly emptied Cambodia’s towns and cities, abolished money, schools, private property, law courts, and markets, forbade religious practices, and set almost everybody to work in the countryside growing food. We now know that these decisions were made by the hidden, all powerful Communist Party of Kampuchea as part of its plan to preside over a radical Marxist-Leninist revolution (preface, p.1).

> Their decisions were inflicted not only to affect the socio-cultural infrastructures, but Cambodia also lost almost three-quarters of its educated population under the regime when
teachers, students, professionals, and intellectuals were killed or escaped into exile (ADB, 1996; Ayres, 1997; Prasertsri, 1996). It has been estimated that almost two million of the pre-war Cambodian population of around seven million were killed or died through suffering in that genocidal regime (Sloper, 1999).

Duggan (1996) noted that under the Pol Pot regime, literacy education beyond the lowest grade was abolished and formal schooling of the Western kind was eradicated. People were classified into cooperatives in relation to sex and age group. Some basic reading and writing were introduced, albeit in an unstructured way with no national curriculum, to children in some working collectives of about two to three hours every ten days\(^2\). During the early years of this regime, basic education was deemed unnecessary since almost all citizens were working in factories and farms (for further discussion, see Chandler, 1991, 1998; Clayton, 1998; Duggan, 1996).

The Khmer Rouge, at the beginning of its rule, had made its way to establish a unique national curriculum, in which equally combined learning and practice stemming from its new communist ideology. Ministry of Education and Culture was established to show to the outside world that the regime had strong interest in creating new systems for its government. However, a crisis in its leadership emerged in 1977 when the most powerful leaders, namely, Pol Pot, Noun Chea, Eang Sary, and Khieu Samphan, began to purge what they called ‘traitors or enemies of their revolution’ within its Angkar. Then, many of their cabinet members were captured and taken to prison (Chandler, 2000).

Education sector under the Khmer Rouge hence was destined to be receiving less priority since the calamity within the leadership. Ayres (1999) argued:

> Many schools established in 1975 and 1976, had run for only a few months, with the priorities of the local leadership concentrated elsewhere – building dams and dykes or growing rice. With the escalation of the Vietnamese conflict, village schools elsewhere were closed. Concentrating on flushing out its internal enemies, and defending the country against the external threat from Vietnam, the regime, its seemed, could no longer afford to devote precious resources to the cause of education. The decision, in all probability, was not a direction from the Center. Instead, its seems to have been a pragmatic reaction by local leaders to the Center’s demand for unattainable rice harvests and human resources, with local leadership throughout the country perceiving the need to put ‘all hands on deck’ (p.216).

**Educational Rehabilitation and Reconstruction: 1979-1989**

People’s Republic of Kampuchea (PRK) or Heng Samrin regime (1979-89) began to rebuild the country from the ‘year zero’. This regime, which was supported by communist Vietnam and other socialist-bloc nations, ruled Cambodia after the fall of the Khmer Rouge. The
regime’s top priority between 1979 and 1981 was to reinstall educational institutions. Generous support from UNICEF and International Red Cross together with strong determination to restructure Cambodia by the PRK, saw about 6,000 educational institutions were rebuilt and thousands of teachers were trained within a very short period (Dunnett, 1993).

According to a senior education official who had been involved in basic education system and teacher training since 1979, the regime’s policy on enhancing education was as followed:

1979-1981 was a period of restructuring and rehabilitating of both infrastructure and human resources. By restructuring and rehabilitation I refer to collecting school-aged children and putting them into schools despite in the poor condition. Classes were even conducted in makeshift, open-air classrooms or under trees. We appealed to all those surviving teachers and literate people to teach the illiterates. We used various slogans such as ‘going to teach and going to school is nation-loving’ and so on. There were no official licenses or any high requirements for taking the teaching job. We just tried to open school and literacy classes, regardless of their quality.

The rebirth of education in Cambodia in 1979 represents a historically unique experience from that of any other nations. In the early 1980s, all levels of schools (from kindergarten to higher education) were reopened and total enrolment was almost one million (Dy, 2002a). Many teachers were better trained and quality gradually enhanced. Enrolment in primary education in 1989, increased to 1.3 million, and in lower secondary to 0.24 million, compared with only 0.9 million and 4,800 in 1980 (MoEYS, 1999). However, it is worth noting that in any primary school, about 30 percent of the children had no father, 10 percent had no mother, and between 5 and 10 percent were orphans (Postlethwaite, 1988).

The key players in reforming and restructuring education system during the Heng Samrin regime were the Vietnamese technical advisors. Their tasks were to equip young Cambodians with Vietnamese Communist ideology and reeducate the literate adults with politics of Marx-Lenin Communism. Those who could speak Vietnamese language had an advantage to employment in government sector. The curriculum was heavily contended the solidarity and appreciation of the Vietnamese government and army stationed in Cambodia during this period. Vietnamese and Russian were the only foreign language inserted in the secondary school curriculum.

Thomas Clayton, one of the world outstanding scholars on Cambodia’s education, did an empirical analysis of this ten-year period, and he described the period as “the Vietnamese occupation of Cambodia”. He further elaborated:

The Vietnamese developed Cambodia’s education system as a conduit for hegemonic
ideas about socialist political and economic organization at the regional and international levels…the shape of Vietnamese hegemony reflected an internationalist, rather than a direct and exclusive colonial purpose. Cambodians both resisted and accommodated Vietnamese leadership and ideas during the occupation; while most accepted hegemony pragmatically, some collaborated or converted, and others demonstrated opposition through everyday or quietly subversive-politically progressive acts (Clayton, 2000, p.165).

Conclusion

Social and political factors of the last four decades from the 1950s to the 1980s determined the flux of progress, crisis and recovery of the schooling systems. The former extensive Khmer Angkor Empire, Cambodia suffered massive socio-cultural destruction, political turmoil, genocide, international isolation, and socioeconomic crisis during civil conflicts of the 1970s and 1980s. Political and economic problems within the above two decades are not isolated from the educational structure, which was also seriously damaged during the civil conflicts.

Shifting from limited or no access for girls to formal education within the traditional school system to the French schooling system in the mid-twentieth century was a positive step towards universal basic education. However, although primary education was set compulsory in the 1950s and 1960s, there was no presence of mechanisms for handling the implementation of the policy. Therefore, roughly 50 percent of the adult population aged 15 years old and over was liberated from illiteracy by the government literacy campaign in the late 1950s. Among this adult population some were only literate in French. Literacy in Khmer was suspicious since many schools especially in urban areas adopted French as medium of instruction.

During the two postcolonial periods the government’s expenditures rose to roughly twenty percent on education sector in efforts to modernizing education system. The efforts made an increasing numbers of schools, teacher-training programs, and flourishing higher educational institutions in the 1960s. However, the innovative teaching method and curriculum reforms were slowly processed. Several scholars (such as Ayres, 1999; Duggan, 1996, 1997) interpreted the quality of education (provided by the Sihanouk regime) was relatively poor; and many high school or university graduates faced difficulty in finding employment.

Though priority was shifted to expand opportunities for secondary and higher education in the 1960s, a failing to balance its weight on other service and economic sectors caused negative impact of formal schooling. The regime of the early 1970s reviewed the policy of the 1960s and drafted plans for universalize primary education with more emphasis.
on Khmer language and culture, but the turmoil during that time, none of the plans was implemented. Besides, the regime even failed to maintain the previous régime’s achievements.
Chapter 4

Quantitative Expansion or Quality Improvement?

Over the last few years Cambodian government and its developmental partners have achieved impressive gains in primary education enrolments and educational infrastructure, yet lingering low retention rates within the nine-year basic education level is a growing concern among stakeholders over insufficient numbers of trained teachers and decent-quality schools, a shortage of learning and teaching materials, educational contents, and a lack of timely interventions in emerging educational problems from the central government. This chapter attempts to examine Cambodia’s commitments to achieving basic education for all and describe and analyze the current government’s policies and strategies for basic education quality improvement and performance. This piece centers largely on chronological document analysis, related literature, and perspectives of key central government officials, international consultants, provincial education directors, and school principals in Cambodia.

The Condition of Basic Schooling during the 1990s

Following the two decades of extreme political, social and economic upheaval, a peace accord was signed in Paris, in 1991, by all the Cambodian warring factions considering national reconciliation with the assistance of international community to put war to an end. Since then this war-torn country was reopen to the world and called for help to reconstruct its overall sociopolitical and economic structures.

Cambodia, after attending the 1990 Jomtien WCEFA, organized its own EFA conference in 1991 aiming to diffuse the concept of EFA; share experiences with other international participants; and seek out ways and resources to implement this global EFA model. The 1991 national conference, with a vast participation from numerous public concerning bodies, UN agencies, foreign government representatives, and NGOs, came up with a number of basic education developmental goals for the 1990s and pledged to accomplish by the year 2000 (Dy & Ninomiya, 2003; Prasertsri, 1996).

As a result of the UN-sponsored election, Cambodia’s constitution was adopted by the Constitutional Assembly in September 1993. Obviously, a great deal of initiatives and recommendations from the 1991 EFA Conference and the 1990 WCEFA were inserted in Article 68 of the constitution which stated: “The State shall provide free primary and
secondary education to all citizens in public schools. Citizens shall receive education for at least nine years”.

A good deal of the country’s inputs during the early 1990s was on capacity building of the administrative staff, teacher training, equalizing access to primary education, and rebuilding educational infrastructures (Prasertsri, 1996). The first few years after putting a new government in place there was a significant progress in basic education enrolment and the government’s funding increase (see the table 2). Improvements in education especially basic education are evident throughout the country. National education budget has been gradually increased, education system and curriculum have been reformed, more schools have been built, and more students have enrolled in all levels of education (Ayres, 2000; Dy & Ninomiya, 2003).

Among the key targets, namely, eradicating illiteracy among adult population by 1995 – and putting all school-aged children in school by the turn of the century – were far to attain. The reasons are simply understood that the country had just been recovering from the devastation of war and were still facing social insecurity, widespread poverty, a shortage of government funding, inadequate teaching and learning facilities, and a high percentage of untrained teachers (who were employed in between 1979 and 1983)².

Among their attempts to enhance the public administrative reform, market-oriented policies, Cambodia’s leaders view education as a means to improve their peoples’ socioeconomic status. Hence, the government’s objectives during the late 1990s were to (i) enhance the quality of teaching and learning; (ii) increase accessibility to basic education and ensure equity in education services; and (iii) raise effectiveness in planning and management (MoEYS, 1996-97).

A sequence of political conflicts and civil wars during the past three decades crippled developmental process in this poor nation’s education in which mostly affected education opportunities of children living in rural and remote areas. In 1998-99, there were progressive gains in a total of 5,156 primary, 355 lower-secondary, and 132 upper-secondary schools. However, 50 percent of the total number of primary schools did not have complete range of grades (1-6) for the primary cycle. This is even much worse for children who lived far away from schools with the complete range of grades found it difficult to continue learning and some of them inevitably became dropouts (Dy, 2002a; MoEYS, 2000).

A number of efforts were made to narrow the gaps of accessibility among urban, rural, and remote areas. This was reflected at the 1991 national conference, hence set up two main objectives (i) to help 100 percent of the school-age children in the cities, towns, and rural areas of low-lying provinces go to school by 1995 and (ii) to enable all school-age children in remote and mountainous areas to go to school by the year 2000 (State of Cambodia, 1991). Consequently, all the above objectives were not able to fulfill (see the table 2 below). The ill-designed education system, incapable management staff, political uncertainty, and
economic depression have all worked a negative effect on educational achievement (McNamara, 1999). This may be the case of a continued large gap among the policy, its implication, and resource management (Dy, 2001).

Table 2: Selected basic education targets and indicators

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<tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Net grades 1-6 enrolment of 90%</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Net grades 7-9 enrolment of 85%</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender equity in grades 1-6</td>
<td>44.8</td>
<td>45.1</td>
<td>45.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>45% of female enrolment in grades 7-9</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>34.8</td>
<td>34.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grades 1-6 repetition to below 10%</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>26.3</td>
<td>24.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>85% of first graders to complete grade 6</td>
<td>28.8</td>
<td>....</td>
<td>32.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education budget to 15% of national budget</td>
<td>11.8</td>
<td>8.1</td>
<td>8.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education expenditure 2.5% of gross domestic product (GDP)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.89</td>
<td>.94</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sources: MoEYS (1996-9); MoEYS: www.moeys.gov.kh

In the late 1990s, public administrative reform was in progress and Cambodia declared open to all international cooperation. The country joined the Association of South-East Asian Nations (ASEAN) in April 1999. Few months later Hun Sen, Head of the Royal Government described Cambodia’s situation at the 54th Session of the United Nations General Assembly as follows:

Just in the past year, Cambodia has finally turned a corner of history, putting firmly behind the darkness of its recent past history and emerging into a new dawn of its future. Cambodia is now a fully integrated country without rebels or separatists and without internal strife or conflict for the first time in many decades. The black chapter of strife, violence, turbulence and turmoil is finally closed.

Quantity versus Quality

Insufficient numbers of educational institutions and trained teachers resulted in low retention rates and a failure to attain the goals of EFA in Cambodia (Dy, 2004; Prasertsri, 1996). National Education Statistics and Indicators for the academic year 1998-99 showed (a) 59 percent of urban children, 82 percent of rural children, and 97 percent of the remote children failed to attain lower secondary education; (b) an average of 14.5 percent were unable to survive a full six-year primary education; and (c) the gross enrolment ratio in primary school was 89.7 percent, but downed to 23 percent in lower secondary, and further downed to 8.7
percent in upper secondary education (see figure 3).

Several measures appeared to be taken to reduce the barriers to basic education implementations: (a) the 1993 EFA planning seminar, to revise the policies, strategies and the action plans, (b) the 1994 education investment framework, and (c) the 1995 basic education investment plan. However, the plans were not fully implemented as for the lack of funding, political will, and mechanisms (Dy & Ninomiya, 2003; McNamara, 1999).

Demands for formal basic schooling was increasing due to the population growth during the 1990s but the educational budget was subsequently reduced (see the table 2). This observable fact raised a concern about the issue of quality of educational delivery and the role that basic education was supposed to play. The school-age population increased considerably in the 1998-99 school year. Net enrolment rates in primary education for the whole country were 78 percent. In other words, 22 percent of the population aged 6-11 remained out of school. The increased number of dropout rates within early years of the primary education level turned into higher illiteracy rates. The situation was even more critical in remote provinces as the net enrolment rates were still lower than 50 percent. The transition rates from primary to lower secondary education were only 74 percent (MoEYS, 1996-9).

Dy (2002b) noted that the school did not comply with the central policy and the school allowed teachers to charge money for in-school private tutoring and to collect contributions from the pupils. Those who could not afford to pay inevitably dropped out. Most children, though given the opportunity, were placed in large classes of around 70 in some primary school. Almost one-third of the teachers were still untrained. Their salaries were only about US$25 per month which necessitated them holding a second job\(^3\).

Figure 3: Distribution of school-aged population and gross enrolment ratio

As Buchert (1995) observed that the reform of the education system shifted to a predominant concern among international agencies with global poverty reduction, in the
context of the implementation of EFA. Interestingly, Cambodia, when the backing powers of the communist-bloc nations halted following the collapse of the Soviet Union, found itself lost in the middle of nowhere while seeking socioeconomic development in 1990. Then, the 1990 UDEFA’s framework for universal primary education drew mounting interest from many government policymakers at the highest level in a prospect for economic recovery and rebuilding the nation-state through human resource development. Cambodia, though failed to attain its EFA goals, made a considerable improvement in primary education enrolment by the year 2000 (see figure 3).

Children who live far away from school with the complete grange of grades find it difficult to continue learning and many inevitably become dropouts (Dy, 2001). A senior education official expressed a concern in an interview that “we don’t have enough schools for basic education; that is why we didn’t have a hundred percent enrolment rate…many school-aged children failed to enroll even though the schooling is free”. Although the policies were well designed, the lack of high-quality operating cost assessment that what some experts pronounced as “excessively ambitious policies” remain issues to be addressed. Strategic plans require sufficient budget and staffing management. The current national EFA coordinator identifies three main factors why basic education targets were not attainable during the 1990s: the absence of mechanisms, insufficient funding to put plans in actions, and on-going social insecurity especially in remote areas.

Strengthening Quality Improvement Measures

The targets set by a great number of world education leaders at the 1990 WCEFA that all poor children would have access to quality primary education within a decade, were not met. Therefore, at the 2000 Dakar WEF, they reasserted their commitments to providing quality basic education for all by 2015. Their approach of improved quality would draw more schooling participation, is stimulated by a growing body of research showing that investment in education – particularly for girls – in the world’s least developed nations produces impressive health benefits and high economic returns (Sperling, 2001).

The existing area of immense concern in developing world is quality of educational provision. The concern about the education system fails to offer literacy and numeracy skills at a minimally acceptable standard. Cambodia’s EFA 2000 Assessment Report confirms that access to quality basic education was limited. This underscores the lack of national policies and strategies as well as appropriate interventions from the government and assistance from external developmental agencies. Cambodia’s efforts to universalize basic education were largely unsuccessful due to inappropriate measures, sensibly crumbling political willpower, and insufficient funds (Dy, 2003; Dy & Ninomiya, 2003).
A number of research highlight one of the main reasons for dropping out of school in Cambodia is that the local community, especially parents and pupils, consider the schooling system fails to meet their expectations and actual needs in their respective locality (Dy, 2002; Dy, 2004; Keng, 2004; Prasertsri, 1996; Velasco, 2004). The issues of quality and relevance have become a rising alarm in the first decade of the twenty-first century. Victor Ordonez, Director of the UNESCO Principal Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific, remarked at the 2000 Asia Pacific Conference on EFA Assessment that:

Paying attention to quality enhances quantity; providing trained and motivated teachers, adequate learning materials, and most of all curricular content that meets the needs and aspirations of the local communities is the best way to guarantee expanded and sustained school attendance.

Due to increasing admission rates in many developing nations, the most effective approach should be to maintain the enrolled pupils pending at least a completion of their basic schooling. Furthermore, Asian Development Bank (1996, p.7) warned many developing nations that “expanding quantity should be coupled with strengthening the quality of the schooling provided, otherwise, without carefully planned programs, quantitative gains could result in qualitative losses”.

Having learnt from the experience of the 1990s, Cambodian government and its education developmental partners pinpointed some quality determinants such as teacher qualifications, teaching and learning materials, curriculum contents, teaching methods, examinations, school facilities, and school management (Smith, 2000).

Cambodia’s contextual framework of ‘quality improvement’ derived from the government’s immediate strategic plans as of Education Strategic Plan (ESP) and Education Sector Support Program (ESSP). A recent Priority Action Program (PAP) was adopted to ease some constraints for the poor children and slow learners to better achievement in their examination and participation. A total eradication of school contribution fees was applied nationwide in 2001 and the budget for school maintenance has been covered with the PAP budget.

A pilot plan called Education Quality Improvement Project (EQIP) was established and implemented for the period of from 1999 to 2003 by Cambodian government with loan of the World Bank to cover 23 percent of the primary school population in Cambodia. The main objective of this project was to decentralize the planning and management responsibility in the school and community levels. Local school communities were empowered to identify their own needs and the project staff reviewed their proposals and offered grant accordingly. The project offered a series to training for both school administrators and teachers in the school
clusters. The emphases were on teacher development, teaching and learning production and supply, improving school condition and environment, and libraries.\(^8\)

Thus, as outlined earlier what have been planned and done in Cambodia with regards quality improvement were based on upgrading teaching performance and school commitment to pupil learning so as to reduce minimally the repetition and dropout rates. There is a significant improvement in primary education enrolment and more students continue to secondary education than before. However, the pupil-teacher ratio is still high though number of teachers and schools has increased respectively (see table 3 below).

Table 3: Some selected statistics and indicators of Cambodian primary education

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1999-00</th>
<th>2000-01</th>
<th>2001-02</th>
<th>2002-03</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number of teachers</td>
<td>43,751</td>
<td>45,152</td>
<td>47,654</td>
<td>48,433</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of schools</td>
<td>5,274</td>
<td>5,468</td>
<td>5,741</td>
<td>5,915</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pupil-teacher ratio</td>
<td>50.6</td>
<td>53.3</td>
<td>56.8</td>
<td>56.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gross admission rate</td>
<td>123.6</td>
<td>154.1</td>
<td>188.9</td>
<td>143.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Net admission rate</td>
<td>71.4</td>
<td>76.4</td>
<td>80.6</td>
<td>78.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Net enrolment ratio</td>
<td>85.5</td>
<td>83.8</td>
<td>87.0</td>
<td>88.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Repetition rate</td>
<td>22.3</td>
<td>13.1</td>
<td>10.2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transition rate</td>
<td>76.7</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>82.6</td>
<td>83.2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


All the interviewees in this study perceived that there have been growing public and policy attention to basic education system since the millennium. ‘Education for All and All for Education’ viewpoint has been generally understood. The senior government officials identified many of the Cambodian government’s measures (broadly known as PAP, ESP, and ESSP) for attaining the goal of universal quality primary education by 2010 and towards achieving basic education for all by 2015 have been implemented, to date, considerably successful.

The Condition of Basic Education in the early 2000s

Analysis on collected working papers and institutional reports indicated that the government investment in education has significantly increased its budget from 14 percent in 2000 to around 18 percent in 2002 and 2003. This national fund increase was in response to the growing numbers of school-age children and additional teacher employment. Approximately 95 percent of the budget goes to salaries of the educational staff.\(^9\) School conditions are still considerably poor. Presently, a large number of primary schools are disadvantaged and
incomplete range of grades; and over 53 percent of primary schools are without latrines and clean water. Still a large number of teachers are not adequately trained (Department of Planning, 1999-2003).

Almost all respondents view quality of current basic education as poor in terms of teaching, insufficient learning materials and extrinsic motivations of students and teachers with regard to school environment and classroom conditions. Over 80 percent of schools are in rural areas. Well-trained teachers have refused to working in these deprived areas for they noticed that they would not sufficiently be supported financially. Most qualified teachers are found in urban areas rather than the rural ones.

Their pitiable salaries (with an average of 30 US$) have driven them to have additional part-time job(s). Inevitably, they have limited time for their lesson planning. Thus, teachers are performing their jobs uninterestedly. An education director of a province bordering with Thailand explained:

I was so surprised that few days ago, three members of an extended family with five members who have been serving as teachers for many years submitted a joint letter requesting suspension of their jobs mentioning their family now meets financial problem and they have to find jobs in neighboring Thailand as construction workers. Not only our staff, but some of the pupils in schools close to the border dropped out without completing primary education in search for possible employments as several border-crossing checkpoints were open in my province.10

National Education Statistics: 2002-2003 illustrate (1) primary net enrolment ratio is 90 percent but only 19 percent of the children aged 12-14 enrolled in lower secondary schools; (2) the transition rate from primary to lower secondary levels is 83 percent, however only 59 percent completed lower secondary education; and (3) almost 20 percent of pupils enrolled in their first grade of primary education have dropped out of school. It has been observed over the last five years that the repetition rate has been declining in primary education but the dropout rate rose significantly (see table 3).

According to a senior education official, over 90 percent of schools have received basic education textbooks; and the textbook content is revised every five years. A number of schools are frequently affected by natural disasters. Many other rural and remote areas are still badly in needs of secondary schools. School-based document analysis reveals that instructional hours are roughly around 500 per annum, because the pupils have class only in the morning or afternoon basis. A large number of teachers are not sufficiently trained with new teaching methodology widely known as learner-center approach.

Regarding the quality of teaching, one of the provincial education directors describes:
If we talk about quality of education in Cambodia, I would say it is low. We are short of teachers with sufficient training or having high knowledge of the subjects they are supposed to teach. When we recruited teachers several years ago, we took them on an emergency basis and now they remain in the school system. Though some of them have been trained and others are continually trained, their low salaries and poor living conditions have a negative impact on their task performance.\(^\text{11}\)

Other provincial directors and the three school principals that I interviewed also expressed a concern about teaching quality stemming from the low salaries and fading professionalism of the teachers.

“Quality of learning and teaching is in the hands of individual school principal and their leadership,” stated the senior government officials and a provincial education leader – “that is why, we have conducted a series of training for them.” On the other hand, the foreign education consultants who have been working closely with the senior education officials observed that the quality of education in Cambodia counts on the teaching content, improved school environment, and the characteristics, qualifications, and living condition of teachers.

Level of training that the teachers receive does not matter much but their motivation does affect or enhance the quality of teaching and learning. A government’s EQIP was implemented in three provinces with special focus on producing and enhancing the use of teaching and learning materials, building friendly school environment, and providing in-service training for teachers. The project also trained school principals and administrators to be able to plan their school budgets and strengthen their management skills.

What was lacking such as mechanism and participation in basic education system that Dy & Ninomiya (2003) had found during the 1990s, have been enforced in the EFA Plan for 2001-2005. The basic education concept and mechanism have taken roots into district, commune and school levels over the last few years. One of the provincial education directors in a remote province conceded lack of knowledge of the government EFA policies made during the 1990s as noted:

EFA conceptual framework and universal basic education target came to my clear understanding only over the last few years, I heard some people at the central level mentioned that in our annual meetings but I was afraid to ask for further explanations. What should I say about quality of basic education in my province? A majority of primary schools here have placed over 50 pupils a class since we lack classrooms and teachers; many of the teachers are not sufficiently trained; and they are poorly motivated since their salaries are not decent and frequently overdue. You may guess.\(^\text{12}\)

Not only teachers but also the school principals and district education officers and even some provincial education leaders have limited understanding of the central guidelines of policies and strategies for basic education quality improvement. It has been observed that a series of training on capacity building for administrative staff including school principals were not so
effective for the dramatic changes in political and social environment over the last decade.

Conclusion

Expanding access to basic education will have a beneficial impact on individuals and society only if the education is of good quality. Cambodian efforts to improve equitable access coupling with the enhancement of basic education quality have been on top agenda of the government’s executive discussions, but have never been fully implemented for many reasons. The most noticeable reasons are the shortage of local fund and effective staff.

The major achievement of the Cambodian government was in having completed EFA policy formulation and establishment of a nine-year basic education system with strategic plans and policies toward achieving the goal of basic education for all by 2015. The government admitted failure to universalize basic education – and the issue of equitable access and quality of basic education is still far from reaching the targets.

Only just over the last few years that a large number of Cambodian government officials have fully understood that effective basic education requires numeric and literacy skills, prevocational training, and building a foundation for further learning opportunity. Contemporary approach toward achieving the EFA goal by 2015 is to enhance educational efficiency, increase the government’s share of developmental fund, develop local community and parental participation, and strengthen administrative and school systems. Basically, the study assumes that Cambodia is now attempting to balance quantitative expansion and qualitative improvement.

Given that economy and technology expressly grows along with the market demands for educated and capable workforce, quality education at all levels must be strengthened accordingly. As for coping up with the cases of increased dropout rates in primary education and low enrolment rates in secondary education – the basic education system should be accompanied by the quantitative expansion of secondary education and qualitative improvement of primary education. Having well-designed curriculum, schooling facilities, and trained teachers cannot guarantee producing high quality education if the socioeconomic status of teachers and the school leadership are neglected.
Chapter 5

Summary and Conclusions

This study focuses on the UNESCO’s conceptual framework of basic education for all. It emphasizes trends, issues, and envisaged problems within formal education systems and in the relations between policies and practices. The foremost concerns are the implications of EFA quality improvement measures in Cambodia. Emerging concept that improved school environment and educational provision enhance more schooling participation is attested here. Is Cambodia able to improve its education system and quality of its schools towards achieving the global goal of EFA by 2015?

Disparities of educational opportunities exist in gender, social class, and region – but quality of educational provision is deemed to be more diverse within schools and classrooms. Universalizing quality of education is the most difficult task for educational policymakers and administrators. Hence, establishing a minimum quality standard for schools and classrooms to meet basic needs in one’s respective society may be fair enough leading to achieve this complex goal. In respect of UDHR, basic education is prerequisite for the state to establish its mechanism to ensure that its citizens are equally treated with at least access to their basic schooling.

The changing concepts of basic education from basic literacy to primary education, and to primary plus lower secondary education in the mid 1990s saw the expansion of learning opportunities for better lifestyle and socioeconomic amelioration in contemporary Cambodia. The experiments of the 1950s and 1960s were largely unsuccessful because modern educational contents and outcomes could not meet the actual needs of the society at that time. In other words, many Cambodians feared that the modernity would lead to the demise of their traditional culture inherited from their proud Angkorean ancestors. However, present-day Cambodians consider reforms in education during the 1990s as positive measures towards socioeconomic development and improving freedom of lives.

Several studies (Cummings, 2004; Mehrotra, 1998; Sperling, 2001) convince that the fundamental rationale for EFA is the idea that the educated person lives a fuller and longer life and that educated societies are healthier, more stable, free, and prosperous. Examining the case of many developing countries during the 1990s, Cummings (2004) found that improved access to basic education led to a decline in infant mortality and an increase in per capita income. Equally importantly, developing countries implemented the EFA model during the 1990s for national development and poverty reduction programs (UNESCO, 1998).
The year 2000 Global EFA Assessment affirmed that improved basic social services enable the attainment of basic education for all. It has also been found in many developing countries only with stable political environment and security are more successful or getting close to achieve the EFA goals. However, the growing world population and increasing demands for quality workforce that the education system must provide in this era of globalization – have come to a challenge for many developing nations to embrace quality improvement measures rather than quantitative improvement. Their best approach is to establish policies and strategies to enhance equitable access to quality basic education as promised by 2015 (Power, 2000; Sperling, 2001).

In response to this phenomenon, Chapman and Adams (2002) argued that effective approaches could be developed at all administrative and decision levels for the purposes of maintaining or improving education quality. Strategies might need to vary by particular social and economic context and by the developmental level of the targeted education institutions. Such conditions did not eliminate the possibility of useful national policies related to quality; they did, however, stress the crucial significance of grassroots-based analysis.

Policies and strategies for improving schooling participation may have to concern with both national goals and the individual needs. When formal education is irregularly distributed and is based on inequitable selection practices, it may perpetuate and legitimize social and wealth divisions in society. Further, formal schooling, along with modern media and aspects of global culture, appears to draw children and youth away from their cultural origins and traditional familial custom. Parents from some communities, when faced with school fees and school-leaver unemployment, withdraw their children from school to help them seek alternative paths to their future (Adams, 2002b).

In Cambodia, the meaning and purposes of basic education and the patterns of development of education system have been influenced by history and by recent economic and cultural changes. Growing consideration since the 1950s that further education that one gains would empower individual member in society has given As the twenty-first century turns in with mounting challenges in socioeconomic and cultural advancement for globalization, nation-states become more competitive and interdependent.

The shifting concept of basic education from basic literacy to primary education, and to primary plus lower secondary education in the mid 1990s saw the expansion of learning opportunities for better lifestyle and socioeconomic amelioration in contemporary Cambodia. The experiments of the 1950s and 1960s were largely unsuccessful because modern educational contents and outcomes could not meet the actual needs of the society at that time. In other words, many Cambodians feared that the modernity would lead to the demise of their traditional culture inherited from their proud Angkorian ancestors. Nevertheless, present-day Cambodians consider the education reforms during the 1990s as positive measures towards socioeconomic development and improving freedom of lives. More interestingly,
contemporary Khmer society has gradually come to believe that basic education is equally important for boys and girls. Thus, challenges ahead for Cambodia are to make basic schooling accessible for all.

This is not sufficient for Cambodian basic education level that what the student achieved does not meet the basic needs in their respective society. Many of the problems are such as found in equality of access to quality, gender disparities, and a vast poverty of the people. This has proven insufficient measures of the government and policies on funding, improvement of learning outcomes, teaching quality improvement, and so forth. The quality basic education found to be deficient, especially in rural and remote areas that consume nearly 80 percent of the children to be served.

Accordingly, more feasibility of impact of external agencies may mount in long-term efforts of the government of Cambodia to universalize basic education through enhancement of funding and attention to basic education. In other words, various efforts of UN agencies and other international organizations on providing consultations and recommendations to policymaking and goal shaping, have led to building human resources and stimulate international aid donors – have built foundation for policy formulation and practical and fundamental approaches for schooling improvement in this era of change. These efforts together with increasing political willpower could take the above foundation for granted and construct better frameworks for action.

The government’s willpower and its determined personnel though with limited local resources are also capable to, at least getting close to the goals of basic education for all. Hence, the main objectives of the Cambodian government, in the early 2000s with recommendations from UNESCO and other developmental partners, attempt to mobilize all existing resources, delegate decision-making to the district and commune levels of its administrative system; and improve school environment and management. Their attempts depend on local stable political environment and donor countries. Positive attitudes of the senior government officials and foreign consultants, the improvement of public participation and the continual increase of government funding on education and social sectors will, at least, lead Cambodia close to achieving basic education for all at acceptable quality in the emerging global standard.

Provision of increased education opportunities for all Cambodian children will be relatively costly and will test the seriousness of commitment of both the government and its developmental partners to quality basic education. To assess recent move that Cambodia has made to perceive the quality primary education and lower secondary education may be too matured. However, shared efforts between the government and external bodies have brought Cambodia close to achieve primary education for all Cambodian citizens according the national government statistical indicators.

Their renewed efforts have put most of the government’s priority programs in action
since Cambodia improved its resources and renewed its willpower with better mechanisms in the early 2000s. Education budgets have been increased to almost 16 percents for 2001 and up to 18 percent for 2002. Seeing better initiations from the government, the loan and donor agencies such as ADB and the World Bank have also increased their shares in order to help Cambodia achieve its basic education for all as planned by 2015. Cambodia might be able to attain its goal of basic education for all if it improves the school management, teachers’ living condition, and establishes comprehensive basic education schools.
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End Notes

Chapter 2
1. Interview with the project coordinator of ILO/IPEC Cambodia in 2001
3. Interview with a senior government official in November 2002
4. Interview with a primary school principal in Kandal Province, November 2003
5. Interview with a senior education official in November 2002
6. Interview with a senior education official in November 2003

Chapter 3
1. Khmer well-known novels: Nou Hach’s *Phka Sroaporn* (The Flower Past its Bloom), Nhok Thaem’s *Kolap Pailin* (Rose of Pailin), and Rim Kin’s *Sophaat*.
2. My personal memory when live and worked during the KR regime (1975-79)
3. Interview with senior education official in charge of EFA, in November 2002

Chapter 4
1. Interview with a senior education official in 2001 who attended the WCEFA and organized the National EFA Conference in 1991
2. Interview with a senior education official in charge of EFA in 2001
3. Interview with a provincial education director in 2001
4. Interview with senior government officials in 2003
5. Interview with the current EFA coordinator in 2003
6. Interview with provincial office deputy director of Kandal Province in 2003
7. Education provided by public school is free of charge but practically for almost all schools have requested contribution from parents (guardians) when their children enroll at the beginning of every academic year. School contribution fee is used for school maintenance and some unexpected needs.
8. Interviews with EQIP project manager and a WB consultant in 2003
9. Interview with senior government officials in 2003
10. Interview with deputy directors of provincial education offices in Banteay Meanchhay and Battambang in 2003
11. Interview with provincial education deputy director in Kandal Province in 2003
12. Interview with a deputy education director in Banteay Meanchhay in 2003
References


Basic education gross enrolment ratio
